

THE BLACK LENS

SEPTEMBER 2024 - VOL. 9 - ISSUE NO. 8

COMMUNITY POWER

MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK

What seems like a heavy lift or extra duty may actually be the cultivation of community power: collectively supporting each other with time, energy, information and resources. Hard work up front creates shared power later on so that, eventually, many hands make light work. This is how we play the long game to sustain our network; this is how we build coalitions with each other. Many of us have our regular jobs and then we work in the background to build strong bonds that further empower interconnectivity for greater impact and upward mobility for all of us. The following events are examples of way our community uplifted one another and can continue to do so in the month of September.

Introducing Spokane's future doctors

By Shalena Armstrong, President of The Links, Incorporated, Spokane Chapter

During the week of July 29, members of the Spokane Chapter of the Links, Incorporated collaborated to bring the Dr. Me! program to youth at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center. Dr. Me! is a Science, Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) program designed by The Links, Incorporated to expose African American children in grades K-5 to careers in the health care and medical fields. Students were provided

with white lab coats, stethoscopes and a doctor's "tool kit" complete with culturally diverse Band-Aids and hand sanitizer. An adaptation of the white coat ceremony new medical students go through was conducted to jumpstart the program and get the students stimulated and engaged in the program. As part of the ceremony, they recited the "Dr. Me Oath" that states, in part, "I promise to use this as a learning opportunity to be exposed to the fun and excitement of being Dr. Me." The students were addressed as "doctor" during the



COURTESY

Students apply paper organs in an activity during Link's Dr. Me program.

See **POWER, 10**



COURTESY PHOTOS

Virla Spencer was named one of the 2024 "Believe in Women" honorees in July by the WNBA's Seattle Storm for her work in the Spokane community.

VIRLA SPENCER ANSWERS THE CALL TO SERVICE

Way to Justice CEO, co-founder honored by WNBA for work in community

By Alethea Dumas
THE BLACK LENS

Virla Spencer is living proof that service can pave the way to a better life. She's a real advocate serving with a heart of service while building community relationships through compassion and trust. No matter what situation or circumstances someone is in, Virla meets people where they are with kindness, offering a hand up not a hand out. Through her work at the Way to Justice, she is leaving a legacy by living a life of purpose that is bigger than herself. She's become a beacon of hope for women and families all over Washington State.

Q. What inspired you to start this nonprofit organization The Way to Justice, and how has your vision evolved since its inception?

A. I worked for a nonprofit organization for many years and it was coming to a close, that chapter in my life was about to be over, but I wasn't done serving the community. So I thought "I can just start my own nonprofit." I didn't know how, or when, I just knew I wanted to start my own nonprofit, a nonprofit that has the power to dismantle and disrupt systems



Virla Spencer, family and friends pose in July outside a Seattle Storm game where she was honored.

that have oppressed, whether it be the education system, housing, employment, the criminal justice system, medical facilities, and whatever other institutions and places. I wanted the organization to be something where we can create change.

Q. What were some of the initial challenges you faced when starting the organization, and how did you overcome them?

A. I think the biggest challenge

I faced is being an African American woman doing this work. When I worked for a different organization it was almost like I was grandfathered in and barrier free. Once this nonprofit got going and people have seen that there is different leadership, specifically Black and Brown leadership, I think that caused some hesitancy about being able to do the work.

Q. How would you de-

See **SPENCER, 10**

BACK-TO-SCHOOL TIPS FOR PARENTS

With all the focus on kids going back to school, the fact that parents too need to get back into the routine of school is often overlooked. What does it take to be a successful parent while avoiding the painful reentry process?



By Katia Jasmin
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



The most pressing issue is the need for everyone to adjust to the school schedule routine. It's important that both you and your child adjust bedtimes and wake-up times a couple of weeks before school starts. This can be challenging for parents, as it might be

the first time in months your house has been quiet after 9 p.m. I remember how difficult it was for my family to switch from our summer relaxation mode back to the school grind, and I've done this TWICE now with a 5-year-old and 20-year-old.

Creating a positive mindset about school is crucial for both you and your child. This can be tough when facing the

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MORE ON BACK TO SCHOOL

YOUTH CONNECTION

Recent graduates look back on importance of education. **PAGES 6-7**



Artist's gallery wall elevates Black beauty

Muralist Brittany Trambitas uses art as refusal to be silenced

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

Brittany Trambitas was born and raised in Hillyard. As a salon owner, creating beauty and elevating the aesthetic of women is one of her main inspirations. Four years ago, she contributed to the Black Lives Matter mural in downtown Spokane (she designed the "A" in "MATTER"). Trambitas was approached to submit a bid and samples for one of Spokane's latest art projects. You can see her latest creation in the Saranac Commons alleyway down-



Trambitas

town; it will be there for the next two years. In partnership with five local artists, an idea was initiated this summer to create a "living art alley" to stimulate curiosity while increasing foot traffic. This manifested into something that passers-by can stop to admire as they frequent the Saranac and Community Buildings. In her art,

See **MURAL, 10**



The language of music

It never gets old; not for me. Fifteen seasons, 15 Beethoven's 9th Symphony Concerts with the Spokane Symphony. It is on the short list of annual concerts in Spokane that are guaranteed to sell out. People, not only in Spokane, but in cities all over the world, come out on New Year's Eve to hear Beethoven 9.

The interesting part is, the fourth movement, which is the earworm that brings everyone out in droves

is sung entirely in German, and usually, the only German speaker in the room is the illustrious Ekhart Preu, immediate past conductor of the Spokane Symphony.

So, why do we, my fellow choristers, Symphony members, and concert goers alike keep coming back year after year to play, sing and enjoy concerts where the language is not English? What common bond brings us back together, concert

after concert?

We, as symphony and opera performers are all fluent readers and interpreters of the language of music. Our conductors are there to facilitate and clear up any discrepancies in our comprehension so that we interpret as a united ensemble. As such, we have the common mission and vision of bringing the stories



By Esther Kelley
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



See **MUSIC, 10**

NEWS

FROM THE BOARD

The future of The Black Lens depends on new, nonprofit model

Dear Black Lens Readers,
As we published the eighth issue of the relaunched Black Lens and celebrate Sandy's heavenly birthday this month, I wanted to give you an update on the operations of the paper.

First let me say, "Thank You!" for continuing to support the publication of The Black Lens. Sandy started this paper to celebrate, educate and connect our community. We are working hard to continue making a paper she and each of you will be proud of. I also want to thank a few of the people who have made the publication of the new Black Lens possible: Rob Curley, Natasha Hill, Scott de Rozic, Robert Lloyd, Lindsey Treffry. Additionally, much appreciation goes to the current Board of Directors: Renika Williams, Luc Jasmin, Alethea Dumas and Michael Bethely. Along with myself as board chair, we are proud to have increased the publication of The Black Lens from a few thousand copies to roughly 60,000 by including it in The Spokesman-Review on the first Sunday of each month. We have created a program to develop current and future contributors to the paper, so that we have a pipeline of new and di-



By Rick Williams
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



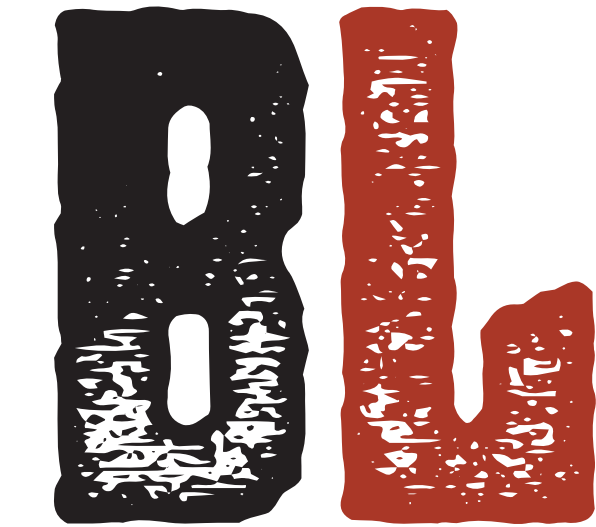
verse voices telling their personal stories and the stories of our community for years to come. And, we have not forgotten how we started and continue to provide hard copies of the Black Lens for pick up at our community gathering spots. In the months ahead, you will hear more about our plans to support the continued development of The Black Lens and a new nonprofit organization called comma that has been developed to provide the publication, back office and administrative support

needed by local papers like The Black Lens. While Sandy was a force of nature and managed every aspect of the paper herself, we quickly realized that we needed a new model going forward. Comma is that model. The goal of comma is to free local newspapers to focus on developing and creating content to meet the needs of their community. By partnering with comma, The Black Lens can focus on what it does best – engaging the community and elevating underrepresented voices.

The board and I are excited about the future of The Black Lens. We want you to know that the paper is governed by its own Board of Directors and as always retains fully editorial authority and autonomy over the content that appears in the paper.

We are in the process of planning an open house at our new office in the Schoenberg Center on the Gonzaga University campus. Keep an eye out for the announcement on our website or social media platforms, and please take the opportunity to drop by and say hello.

Rick Williams, Board Chair
The Black Lens News



BLACKLENS.NEWS

Union programs provide safe space for BIPOC educators

The Black Lens

James Alexander is a school community/behavior intervention specialist who has been in education for nearly 25 years, with an education background in developmental and applied psychology. He currently serves on the Board of Directors for Washington Education Association. This year, two programs that support educators of color will be available through the union Spokane Education Association: Nakia Academy and Cami Institute. Each of these programs provide learning that will help Black educators lead in coaching and mentorship while providing common ground and a safe space to unpack some of the unique challenges faced as professionals in public education.

"Nakia is this community that was created, so that people of color in the education field have a community that they can go and talk to about the issues that arise being in education." Alexander understands how low (or no) representation in schools among staff of color can feel awkward, uncomfortable and even strained. He acknowledges, "as people of color, if we seem to make waves, there's always this backlash that takes place by just having conversations in the communities. So, then they get targeted and deemed as a problem person in the building."

Not uncommon, reflects Alexander, is when Black people take a stance on matters, there is an undercurrent of rejection that can play out, and unwanted consequences become warning signs for people to be quiet or go along with the program to avoid conflict.

"There are so many people who have been somehow just moved to another building, you know, without choice in the matter because they may have said something or brought something to attention," he said.

Among the things focused on in Nakia Academy is helping BIPOC educators navigate the tricky professional terrain by processing through strategies that support advocacy. This in turn, helps them become coaches for others experiencing sim-



Alexander

ilar things. "One of the things that's super important is not about just looking externally at what goes on; I've seen that (the program) makes you look internally first."

Prejudice and bias, how we respond to them, in the essence of becoming stronger educators, is paramount.

Nakia gives people a space to talk, often releasing some of the negative experiences. This inspires a sense of catharsis and bravery to address matters they are often expected to suppress.

"It's a support system," Alexander said.

The need for safe spaces can be a morale booster for educators of color who placate their own feelings in the name of professional survival. That is the value of Nakia Academy. Completing Nakia Academy certifies staff as highly qualified OSPI Beginning Education Support Team (BEST) mentors.

Cami Institute is a similar program geared toward different employee categories that work within the school system, particularly education support specialists, or ESPs.

"This is a course where you have a lot of different people," he said. "And it brings everybody in the same room on equal ground that says, OK, we don't care about your title here."

Like Nakia, Cami examines the weight of bias and frames it in the context of how to become an effective mentor and coach.

"The genuine side of education is how you show up in the classroom," Alexander said.

Cami helps professionals understand situational awareness. Alexander shared it's, in part, a self-reflective journey that empowers staff to use their voice by building skills, vocabulary and strategies to work through professional relationships.

Nakia Academy and Cami Institute can help retain BIPOC staff in education by recognizing challenges within the professional culture of public education. To learn more, Alexander can be reached at: james.alexander@washingtonea.org.

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

The Racial and Social Justice Specialist is a new position that became active over the last two years at YWCA in Spokane.

Serving in this role is Jazmin Duran. In September, YWCA will spearhead the Racial Justice Challenge, an initiative that aims to encourage conversations on race that are often avoided, but that are nonetheless important and crucial. Duran shares that Dr. Eddie Moore, Jr. and Debby Irving are creators of the original 21-day challenge that has inspired YWCAs across the nation. This is YWCA Spokane's fourth year creating the Racial Justice Challenge. Understanding implicit bias and how it shapes one's attitudes, decisionmaking and interactions is key in this challenge. Duran understands that in general, if an issue is not affecting us, it is easy to avoid.

"This challenge invites people to dedicate five minutes of their day to read about something that is either completely new to them or that they have very little knowledge about," Duran said.

This provides exposure to what may be unfamiliar to some, a first step in developing understanding. As far as discomfort goes, there is the expectation that these daily challenges may cause tension or defensiveness. Duran pushes those participating to ask themselves why they feel this way, as a part of processing through the challenge.

Contending with hard truths is not something that comes easy. The ones telling it can be viewed as trouble-makers, often leading to racial battle

fatigue in those who dare to speak boldly about racism, while those who are less familiar may prefer a "racism-lite" version of conversation, if such a thing exists. Duran asserts that "being able to listen to the voices of these marginalized communities is very important."

"They are the ones that experience it firsthand, the ones that witness it the most often," Duran said.

When that feeling of burnout and alienation creeps in, mental exhaustion is inevitable.

"That's where connecting within your own community, or even other minority communities (is important). Together we're louder in a way. And it is really important to be able to voice what our issues are that we come across because we've been told to not complain, right? We've been told to kind of keep it quiet. It hasn't helped at all," Duran said. "So we need to voice what our important issues are in our everyday lives and make our own space."

Often, the conversation around racism can manifest feelings of guilt and shame. Avoidance and even denial become much easier (and often preferred) ways of authentically addressing concerns.

"There's this kind of thought that I heard somebody say; you know, would you rather feel embarrassed that you are sitting on the sidelines doing nothing about it, or would you rather feel embarrassed but be able to work through it," Duran said.

In order to forge a new way of understanding and interacting with each other, there has to be an

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

ensure that journalism's protected First Amendment rights continue to be an essential part of our nation's democracy.

Though much of the content created by The Black Lens may appear in regional publications, newspapers or news websites, those organizations have no rights, authority or influence over the content created by this publication. The Black Lens' publications are only responsible to boards of directors for The Black Lens and the comma community journalism lab. Though other publications, including The Spokesman-Review, may assist in distribution, The Black Lens is not a publication of any of its third-party distribution partners.

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THE BLACK LENS

Serving Spokane's Black community since 2015

IN MEMORY OF SANDRA WILLIAMS
FOUNDING EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

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NEWS

STAY READY SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO GET READY: ROBERTA GREENE REFLECTS ON POLITICAL CAREER

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

“If you’re not at the table, the menu will change, and your table setting will be moved to another spot. You have to be there.”

Roberta Greene was the first Black woman to be elected to the Spokane City Council in the mid-1990s, and she knows exactly how important it is to be civically engaged.

Greene has a long-term relationship with Spokane. Arriving in 1986, she says that moving from North Carolina was one of the most difficult things her family has ever done.

“We had an opportunity to purchase a business here in Spokane, so our family made the decision to move here,” Greene said. “It’s one of the hardest decisions we ever made, if you want to know the truth, because we were coming to a place that was so drastically different from what we were accustomed to. We were leaving our relatives behind. We moved here knowing just the three of us.”

It was Greene, her husband and her son. Spokane was an entirely different playing field.

As local business owners, and as new faces in a city where they were not of the majority demographic, the Greenes had to strategize on how to build community. Charlotte, North Carolina, was vastly different from Spokane, culturally. In addition to being transplants in the Pacific Northwest, they were charged with leading a team of employees as business owners and had to earn the trust of local customers. In business, typically people buy and sell from people they know, reflects Greene.

“And here we were moving into this town. We had about 60-65 employees. The prior owners didn’t tell them that we were coming. Not only did they not tell them we were coming, but (also) that we were Black,” Greene said. “So that was a double shock. We decided that I would be involved as much as possible in the community. And that meant being a part of many, many, many committees.”

This was the move that helped make the Greene name recognizable. She remembers getting the call that lit the spark for her to run for office.

“Somebody called me out of the blue one day, a prominent member of the Spokane community those years ago, and just asked if I would be interested in running,



Roberta Greene, left, holds hands with community member Evelyn Conart while waiting for 1996 election results broadcast on TV at the Ridpath Hotel. Clair Boston keeps close tabs, at center.



Feeling comfortable with her lead over David Bray, City Council candidate Roberta Greene gives her son Steve Greene a kiss at the Ridpath Hotel in 1999.



Roberta Greene was the first Black woman to be elected to the Spokane City Council.



Roberta Greene in the 1990s, when she was on the Spokane City Council.

And I said, ‘no’ and we talked a bit and then hung up.”

When she told her husband Nate about the conversation (starting with “you’ll never believe what just happened!”), he took it a step further and asked her why she wouldn’t.

“And that was the beginning of our decision; that was the beginning of the run. I think that’s sometimes all it takes,” she said. “It’s finding that person whose nerve you can touch and say, ‘Why won’t you do this? This is for the good of the community.’”

Greene won city-wide elections in 1995 and 1999. From 1996 to 2003, she was an elected member of the Spokane City Council.

When asked why civic engagement is so important, Greene says, “I go back to the phrase, ‘all politics is local’ and so that means that if you are not there on the local level, if you’re not involved, if your voice isn’t being heard, then you will be placed into the woodwork, onto the sidelines and ignored eventually. So, if you don’t protect what you have, if you don’t fight for more that is fair for your population, then you will be ignored.”

Being involved in the community and understanding the needs reinforced diligence in Greene, and these relationships were necessary in making sure that people were not overlooked.

“If we don’t have represen-

You Should Run

Leadership Spokane is proud to offer You Should Run to the Spokane community – a first-of-its-kind nonpartisan program, providing training on the mechanics of running for office.

Hosted by former City Councilwoman Karen Stratton, the six-week training program involves subject matter experts from various backgrounds. No current political races, candidates or initiatives will be discussed.

You Should Run will welcome anyone wishing to learn how to run for office and inspire individuals to become more engaged in the electoral processes.

To learn more and register, visit leadershipspokane.org.

The program runs 5:30-8 p.m. Tuesdays from Sept. 24-Oct. 29 at the Hive A in East Central. Dinner at each session is included. Registration is \$150.

tation, then we will indeed be looked at as just a part of the wall-papering,” she said.

There is strength, stresses Greene, in solidarity.

What advice does Greene give to someone who is considering running for an elected position? “Talk to those of us who’ve done it. Understand that fear is insidious and creeping, but it can be handled. Just be strong in your core, be grounded in who you are and what you represent and then get a core of people around you who will support you and tell you the truth.”

Greene said she has never been a shrinking violet, but being in an elected position helped her gain confidence.

“You have to know who you are, and you have to speak up for your positions,” Greene said. “We

can’t stay where we are, we have to grow within ourselves.”

This current election cycle is giving its fair share of unexpected turns, with important issues looming over the ballot box. Greene, recalling firsthand the sacrifices made to vote in the South during the Civil Rights Movement, doesn’t take it for granted.

“Always vote as if your life depends on it, because it does,” Greene said. “There are so many who would love to restrict access for people of color. They’re just afraid of it; fear causes people to do really weird things. You’ve got to stay ready, so you don’t have to get ready.”

Lastly, Greene said, “Once you’re elected, you need to make sure that you’re not going to have that placard that says, ‘I was the first and I will not be the last.’”

SICKLE ‘SUPACELL’: WHAT IT’S LIKE TO LIVE WITH THE DISEASE, AND HOW TO HELP THOSE WHO HAVE IT

By Lisa Gardner
THE BLACK LENS

In June, Netflix premiered the U.K.-based series “Supacell.” The series revolves around a group of ordinary people who suddenly develop superpowers. As they grapple with the impact of their powers on their daily lives, one man must bring them together. In their journey, the viewers discover a common connection: They are descendants of relatives with sickle cell disease. While the characters have not made the whole connection of their common trait, it leaves the viewers engaged, intrigued, and vested in the storyline. The series debuted at number 1 and was picked up for a second season.

Sickle cell disease (SCD) is a group of inherited blood disorders that affect hemoglobin, the protein that carries oxygen in red blood cells. In SCD, hemoglobin is abnormal, which damages the red blood cells and prevents them from carrying oxygen throughout the body. The red blood cells become hard, sticky, and shaped like a “C” or sickle, which can block blood flow and cause pain and other complications. Sickle cell disease primarily affects people of African, Mediterranean or Caribbean origins. As of May, the CDC estimates that about 100,000 people in the United States have sickle cell disease, with more than 90% of those affected being non-Hispanic, Black or African American.

As a person living with Sickle cell disease, I have



NETFLIX

“Supacell” premiered on Netflix in June.

experienced numerous hospitalizations, spent hours in emergency rooms and urgent care, participated in medical trials, tried “experimental” medications, received blood transfusions, and refrained from engaging in activities like sports and outdoor activities to avoid triggering a sickle cell crisis.

Watching a show like “Supacell” is a source of joy for me as the characters resemble me, come from families with the same ailment, and possess superpowers. I often wish I could turn my pain into a superpower. The characters in the show can freeze time, run at the speed of light, exhibit superhuman strength, and move things telepathically. I am in complete awe of the show and the creator’s genius, Rapman, for shedding light on a disease that is often overlooked, under-resourced, and neglected in areas with a significant Black and African descendant population.

Living with this disease in Spokane all my life has been challenging. Unfortunately, doctors have been unwilling to conduct

thorough research and instead treat me as a burden. They have focused on “maintaining” my health instead of exploring the possibilities of a healthy lifestyle. I am forced to serve as my own advocate, my own nutritionist, and my own health and wellness coach due to the lack of support in the medical community here in Spokane for those with Sickle Cell Disease.

Healthy blood is crucial for those living with sickle cell disease. On average, Sickle Cell patients receive three to five blood transfusions per year; therefore, donating blood is the most effective way to help them. Efforts to find blood matches, particularly from donors of African descent, are challenging.

In 2020, Sandy Williams asked me to write an article for The Black Lens, shedding light on sickle cell disease and sharing my experience of having a primarily Black disease in a mainly white city. Sandy then collaborated with the Red Cross to organize a blood drive for Sickle Cell Disease patients. The blood drive primarily fo-



Blood Drive Sandy's Sickle Cell Blood Drive

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center
500 S Stone St
Spokane, WA

Monday, September 23, 2024
12:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.



To donate

If you plan to donate during the blood drive, we ask that you register in advance to help with staffing and supplies. Please call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or visit RedCrossBlood.org and enter “RedCrossSpokane” to schedule an appointment.

those living with Sickle Cell disease.

- Donate to the Sickle Cell Disease Association
- Encourage and Support them in healthy choices and healthy lifestyles
- Be present during their complex crisis; often, sickle cell patients suffer in silence

• Advocate for them in the healthcare system and social work system

- Learn and educate yourself about sickle cell disease
- Get genetic testing for Sickle Cell trait
- Watch “Supacell” on Netflix and support the show in its groundbreaking success.

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

DEEP ROOTS, STRONG WOMEN:

MATERNAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS



By Stephy Nobles-Beans
Shades of Motherhood Network

breastfeeding mother from the 80's. Breastfeeding offers numerous benefits for both mother and child, including improved health outcomes and emotional bonding. It is known to provide optimal nutrition and protection against various health issues, such as infections, obesity, and chronic conditions. However, the rates and experiences of breastfeeding can differ significantly among racial and ethnic groups. For Black mothers in the U.S., breastfeeding presents unique opportunities while also facing challenges shaped by historical, social, and economic factors. History tells us that breastfeeding in the Black maternal experience is a personal choice deeply woven into a broader socio-cultural context.

Black women have faced significant barriers to breastfeeding, dating back to historical trauma, when enslaved Black women were often forced to nurse their owners' children, causing disruption in

traditional breastfeeding practices within their own families. Wet nurses, as they were called, consequently deprived their own children of maternal care and nurture. What this started was a cycle of health deprivation and further reinforced the exploitation of Black bodies and medical experimentation, used to advance the welfare of others while being forsaken the right of tending to the health needs of themselves and their families. To eat and to be able to feed your own child is a human instinct.

The betrayal and unethical treatment of Black people has led to a deep-seated mistrust of medical advice and practices. This strained relationship between Black people and the medical profession has been transferred through generations; the cultural trauma and lack of availability to tend to her own children has left Black mothers at a disadvantage through generations. Working for survival often meant that Black mother's did not have the luxury of time with their children. Sacrificing one's body to survive has also been a learned behavior over generations. Breastfeeding within the Black maternal experience has often played second fiddle due to maladaptive behaviors that stem from colonization.

Economic disparities and constraints and lack of medical advocacy can impact a mother's ability to breastfeed, especially when returning to work shortly after childbirth is necessary. Access to lactation consultants, breastfeeding friendly workplaces, implicit bias, and limited community support can hinder breastfeeding efforts. Additional issues are the lack of healthcare and inadequate ac-

cess and prenatal education, impacting breastfeeding initiation and duration.

Representation matters in spreading the message on the value of breastfeeding. When Black women are depicted in breastfeeding promotion campaigns, they tell a story that has not been familiar to many; that breastfeeding is a natural and feasible option for Black moms. This can also help normalize the experience in the Black community. This gives us hope to change the narrative. There are many resources for support and organizations aimed to support Black mothers in their breastfeeding journey. Compiling this information helps get the word out to new moms that it is our right and a part of our humanity to feed our children. Black Breastfeeding Week (BBFW) is an annual observance from August 25th through 31st, which celebrates Black breastfeeding, raises awareness, and provides resources. Visit their website at Blackbreastfeedingweek.org for more information. Expectant and new mother's can learn more through the following resources:

The United States Breastfeeding Committee (USBC) provides advocacy and resources for breastfeeding support. You can explore their site at usbreastfeedig.org

Sista Sista Network focuses on supporting Black women with breastfeeding resources and community support. Learn more at sistasistanetwork.org.

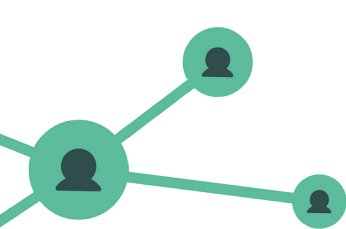
Lastly, we have Shades of Motherhood Network, which helps women of color reclaim breastfeeding as a cultural and health practice with their amazing doulas. They help address the barriers

that Black mothers face such as lack of support, healthcare access, and cultural barriers. They also collaborate with Kat from Wicked Roots, a local practicing herbalist and Full-Spectrum Doula for BIPOC moms.

Know this: breastfeeding is a vital aspect of maternal and infant health with profound benefits. It is a rite of passage that was not accessible without significant disruptions presented through cultural traumas enacted upon our foremothers. For Black mothers, this journey is influenced by systemic factors, but support and resources are available to help overcome these challenges. By acknowledging the unique experiences of Black mothers and providing targeted support, we can work towards equitable breastfeeding practices and improved health outcomes for all families.

For those of you who choose not to breastfeed, we know that it is a deeply personal decision, and it's important to remember that your worth as a mother is not determined by how you feed your baby, but by the love, care, care, and support you provide. As a Black woman, you are navigating multifaceted challenges and expectations, but it's essential to trust yourself and make the choice that is best for you and your baby.

So, to all you Black breastfeeding mothers, keep going with confidence and pride with your journey, it is a special time between you and your child, a time that we didn't always have the privilege of dedicating to ourselves and our babies. Embrace the beauty of this bond building opportunity. Go ahead girl, feed that baby, don't worry about a thang!



BLACK GENEALOGY

WHO ARE WE? *Embark on a Journey of Self-Discovery by Exploring Your Heritage with Black Genealogy and History. Understanding our heritage is not just a matter of curiosity; it is a fundamental part of our identity.*

ORAL HISTORY

“When an old man (old woman) dies, a library burns to the ground.”

- African Proverb

Many genealogists failed to interview the oldest member of their family and only remembered they did not after the relative died. I am guilty, but my sister passed on the stories she heard while caring for our maternal grandmother every Saturday. My grandmother was 99 years and two weeks old when she died. She had a good memory and recalled much of her past until a few weeks before she passed. Getting secondhand information from my sister was not the best, but it was better than nothing.

Oral history, the practice of passing stories from generation to generation, is an African tradition in most African American families. In Africa, the storyteller is known as a griot. The Griot is a living history book, stated Tony Burroughs, the genealogist and author of Black Roots. He memorizes the history of his village. When you are interviewing older people, you become the family griot.

Talk to your parents and older relatives. Record their stories and take notes, even if you are recording. The recordings are memories of your elders' voices and sources of information. Our elders are cherished resources of history and wisdom.

HOME SOURCES

Gather as many documents as possible about your family members to add data to your tree. Start with the family members you know best: you, your parents, your spouse, your children, your siblings, your four grandparents, and your eight great-grandparents. Your home is an archive holding many records. Search attics, basements, drawers, trunks, bookcases, file cabinets, etc. Your home has many valuable sources of genealogical documents: the bible; certificates of births, marriages, deaths, and divorce; photographs; military papers; scrapbooks; wills; deeds, letters, diaries; obituaries; newspaper clippings; land, etc. If you lack vital records (birth certificates, marriage licenses, death certificates, and divorce records), check with your relatives before ordering copies.

Ask your relatives if they have

any documents to share.

ORGANIZING YOUR RESEARCH

One of the genealogist's biggest challenges is organizing the papers and digital files collected about the family. Some charts available on the Internet can assist in organizing the family data, including names, dates, and oral history:

A family tree, also called a pedigree chart, shows ancestry, descent, family members, and their relationships with each other. On the National Genealogical Society (NGS) website, www.ngsgenealogy.org/free-resources/charts, one can find two Family Trees, Basic and Standard, and a Family Group Sheet. You create a free subscription to access the charts and the instructions for completing them. The charts are “fillable,” and can be downloaded as a PDF; information can be typed into the chart and saved to your computer. Your chart can be updated anytime. Click on “Welcome to NGS Free Genealogy Course. Many free resources are awaiting you. They are just a click away.

Family Group Sheet is a form for all the couples on your family tree. Complete a form where you are the child on your parents' form and another where you and your spouse are the parents. A Family Group sheet should be completed for every couple on your family tree. Free forms are available on the NGS, Ancestry, and Family Search websites. Locate other genealogical forms by googling “Free genealogical forms.”

Research Log assists you in keeping track of the research you have done and prevents you from duplicating your research. Free forms are available on Ancestry and Family Search websites. Of course, you can Google “Free Genealogical Forms” and find numerous forms.

There are many forms to assist you in organizing your research: research calendars, record checklists (roster of sources), questions for oral history interviews, source documentation forms, correspondence logs, etc. These forms can be found on the websites mentioned and on the internet. Google is your friend!

Be sure to cite your sources. From the National Genealogical Society, “If you didn't document it, you didn't do it.”



By Patricia Bayonne-Johnson
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



“History is not the past; it is the present. We carry our history with us; we are our history.”

- James Baldwin,
I Am Not Your Negro

SETTING GOALS

Have you ever received a check in the mail and wondered where it came from? That is precisely what happened to me after my father's death on August 4, 1994. I was intrigued by the small checks I began receiving and set out to discover the source. This quest led me to my great-grandfather, Jules Bayonne. Long story short, in 1870, Jules Bayonne and a friend purchased 71 arpents (two-thirds of an acre) of land in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana.

In the 1980s, oil and gas were discovered on the Parlange Plantation, and the land that Jules Bayonne and Francois Frances owned was part of the oil and gas pool. The checks my siblings and I had were royalties for my father's pool share and were signed by Walter Parlange. The checks motivated me to research Jules Bayonne, my paternal great-grandfather, and my first genealogy project:

Who was Walter Parlange, and why is his name on the checks?

Why are we receiving the checks?

Where was Jules Bayonne born, and who are his parents?

Was Jules enslaved?

My goal was to find the answers to those questions.

Define your research goals. What do you want to know? Since enslaved people could not read or write, stories were passed down orally. Have there been stories passed down in your family?

CELEBRATING OUR ROOTS:

THE MAASAI PEOPLE

IN DIASPORA



By Charity Resian
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR

As semi-nomadic pastoralists the Maasai keep and move their herds of cattle, goats, and sheep across vast areas in search of grazing pastures and water resources. A lifestyle adversely affected by the devastating impacts of climate change, land disputes and pressures of globalization in recent years. Regardless, while livestock remains central, many Maasai's have diversified into businesses that align with their cultural practices, such as eco-tourism, farming, women making and selling traditional crafts and unique beadwork as a source of income.

In Africa and neighboring communities, the Maasai are known to be noble, peaceful, people of impressive physical appearance and character. However, the Maasai culture is threatened by assimilation and the dynamic trends that have engulfed many other cultures in the Africa. Maa, their language, is credited with holding this culture together. (The Swahili have a saying “He that has no culture is a slave”).

While the Maasai culture is admired and celebrated globally, this patriarchal community is faced by a few challenges. High levels of illiteracy, prevalence of harmful traditional practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and early

child marriages. Formal education has for long eluded the Maasai primarily due to their nomadic lifestyle. Education is the great

equalizer and critical in the world today. It is a means of overcoming poverty, increasing income, improving nutrition and health, and overall improving the quality of life, all of which the Maasai have fallen short of.

Maasai men and women have been deprived of an opportunity to engage in the decision-making processes, and the inability to take up leadership positions of governance as other tribes have been privileged due to having access to education.

We are here to change that!

The Maa Diaspora Conference and festival was held in Spokane, Washington between 1st- the 4th of August 2024 at Mirabeau Park Hotel & Convention Center, USA. About 500 members of the Maasai community from the diaspora traveling, studying, working or living abroad converged in Spokane, Washington to celebrate their Maasai roots and to seek ways to shape the future of their community.

About the Author: I am Charity Resian, a Maasai woman, journalist, humanitarian/Anti FGM Activist. I hold a Master of Arts (MA) in International Humanitarian Action (NOHA) from Uppsala University, Sweden, and a Bachelor degree in Communication and Media studies. I am a woman rights, social activist, passionate about community, social justice, race, philanthropy, media and culture. My passion emanates from my personal lived experiences growing up in rural Kenya and living in different countries as a Black woman.

CAREERS

THE BONUS QUESTION: CALCEA JOHNSON

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

Calcea Johnson is starting her sophomore year at Louisiana State University’s Ogden Honors College. She aspires to be an environmental engineer. As many college students deliberate over what career they will pursue, Johnson is laser focused on her plan; it is intricately tied to the community she knows well. In 2005, when the levees broke in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, unparalleled flooding ravaged homes, crippling communities and displacing families. But a different environmental crisis has commanded Johnson’s attention: urban heat islands.

In many inner cities, reduced natural landscapes, urban material properties that absorb and emit more heat, urban geometry that lend to the sizing and spacing of structures and their capacity to block natural wind flow, heat generated from human activities, and weather and geography are all compounding factors that lead to disproportionately higher temperatures in communities where sprawling architecture has replaced elements of a natural habitat. As a result, human behavior is impacted significantly in spaces where there is more concrete and metal.

This blueprint is standard in low socio-economic areas across the U.S. Black communities, already under-resourced, must contend with the domino effect of urban heat islands. Johnson wants to fix this.

“I want to be able to help the New Orleans community,” Johnson said. “That’s kind of what got me into environmental engineering. I just feel like it is my responsibility to try and help. I definitely want to be able to reach back and help the community that helped to raise me. There are studies showing that when you add greenery and trees and grass space, it makes it a lot cooler. And actually, when you’re hotter, it makes you angrier and more prone to crime and things like that.”

At the 115th NAACP National Convention that took place in July, Johnson and her high school classmate, Ne’Kiya Jackson, were honored at the Women in NAACP (WIN) Brunch. One of the goals of WIN is to “address within the framework of the NAACP, civil rights issues affecting women and children and shall carry out other civil and cultural activities...” In their senior year of high school, Johnson and Jackson did something that had not been done.

“We created new proofs of the Pythagorean theorem using trigonometry ... it all started with a math contest,” Johnson explains.

The pair were the only students to complete the bonus question. This led them on a journey they never saw coming. In the aftermath of solving $a^2+b^2=c^2$ with noncircular thinking, the scholars were invited to present their findings at the American Mathematical Society conference hosted at Georgia Tech. Somewhat in disbelief, Johnson recalled.

“And so, we were like, OK, if you think that it’s something that is worth doing, then sure, we’ll see what happens,” she said.

So, the duo transformed their rough drafts of scratch paper into a full-on presentation that they shared at the conference. “We really had no anticipation of it going anywhere because we were like, ‘We’re high school students



Spokane Branch NAACP Education Committee Chair April Eberhardt & Financial Secretary Fay Baptiste stand with Calcea Johnson (in blue) and Ne’Kiya Jackson at the NAACP WIN Brunch during the 115th National Convention.

... we’re too young for people to think this is something.’ So, we just were doing it to see what was going to happen.”

Doing that bonus question created an entire snowball effect, garnering nationwide attention. On CBS in May of this year, “60 Minutes” covered their story. It is also reported that NBA legend Charles Barkley, captivated by the academic excellence shown by these two young women, will donate \$1 million to St. Mary’s Academy, their former high school.

How long did it take them to figure out this new proof?

“It took months for us to initially even come up with any kind of proof,” Johnson said. “At first, in the beginning, it was a harder learning curve than it was once we started getting the proofs going. It was really tough, but we just kind of stuck with it. And there was no guarantee; it was just like a shot in the dark. I don’t like to start things that I don’t finish, or at least make a good effort to try and complete, so I figured, ‘OK, well, I signed up for this.’”

When it came to presenting their project as the only two Black high school students among mathematicians from various fields, Johnson said that she experienced imposter’s syndrome.

“It was really nerve-wracking at first, but once I started, I realized that I know what I’m talking about, and I know my work,” Johnson said. “This is just me showing what I’ve been doing this whole time. It’s nothing that I don’t know. So, I just went with what I knew.”

Johnson attests to coming out of this experience with confidence she will continue to remember in new challenges. As an introvert, she reflects on her inner strength.

“I belong here because, you know, I did the work,” she said. “I’m here for a reason, being able to think about that to dispel the imposter syndrome that may come up is helpful for me.”

This experience, she reflects, has become a measuring stick, reassuring her that she can overcome hard things.

In their acceptance speech, Johnson expressed her profound sentiments about the importance of representation in education and the significance of reaching back. She attributes much of her motivation to her grandmother and mother. Exposure to the Girl Scouts and field trips to NASA spurred her love for STEM. She recounts what her grandmother told her: Education is something that no one could take from her. Her family held her to high standards. Her mother’s journey through college gave her a template to follow.

But when it comes to the village, Johnson gets candid: “I’ve just seen (that) when people get famous, especially in our community, it’s just kind of like, OK, well, ‘I got my piece and that’s all that really matters’ and it shouldn’t be like that because in order for us to win as a collective, we all have to pull each other up. No one got there by themselves. I know I sure didn’t get anywhere in life all by myself. It was definitely a community effort and other people helping me. So, I feel like it’s only fair for you to reach back and pull up the community who helped you.”

Through her lived experience, Johnson aims to be a community cycle breaker. Through STEM and empathy, she understands how to be the change she wants to see in the world.

LEARN MORE
ABOUT URBAN
HEAT ISLANDS
HERE



25 YEARS OF PHYSICS:
A JOURNEY THROUGH
ACADEMIA, RESEARCH,
AND INNOVATION



By Dr. Sharah Zaab
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



My love for scientific phenomena began in my earliest years, sparked by a natural curiosity about the world around me. As a child, I was captivated by the wonders of nature: the way light danced on water, the changing patterns of the seasons, and the mysteries of the night sky.

These simple yet profound observations ignited a passion for understanding how the universe works, laying the foundation for what would become a lifelong journey in science.

This journey formally began in high school, where I first encountered the wonders of physics in the classroom. My interest deepened as I attended the University of Pittsburgh for my undergraduate studies, where I was given the opportunity to participate in a high-energy physics research program. This experience allowed me to engage in complex experiments that further fueled my passion for discovery. It was in these research labs that I realized the power of physics to answer complex questions and solve real-world problems. My love for physics continued to flourish as I pursued graduate studies at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Here, I conducted advanced research in both microelectronics materials and rechargeable battery cathodes. This work not only pushed the boundaries of current technology but also contributed to the growing body of knowledge in materials science. The rigorous academic

environment at these institutions challenged me to develop the skills necessary to succeed as a physicist and to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of these critical fields.

Over the past 25 years, my career has taken me through various roles in academia and research, each offering unique opportunities to contribute to the field of physics. As an academic, I have had the privilege of teaching the next generation of physicists, sharing my passion for the subject, and mentoring students as they embark on their own journeys in science. In the research arena, I have been fortunate to work on projects that have advanced our understanding of fundamental physical principles and their applications. After years of contributing to academia, I made the decision to leave and become a patent examiner. In this new role, I had the opportunity to apply my expertise in physics to the evaluation of new technologies and innovations. This transition allowed me to contribute to the protection and promotion of intellectual property, ensuring that groundbreaking ideas are recognized and rewarded. Looking back on my career, I am grateful for the experiences and opportunities that have shaped my journey. From the early inspiration sparked in childhood to the nurturing environment of HBCUs, and the challenges and rewards of research and academia, my career as a physicist has been a fulfilling and enriching experience. As I continue to explore the frontiers of science, I remain committed to the pursuit of knowledge and the advancement of the field of physics.

Dr. Sharah Zaab holds a Ph.D. from Howard University, an M.S. from Clark Atlanta University, a B.S. from the University of Pittsburgh. She worked for nine years as the Physics Lab Coordinator, Instructor, and Mentor at Spelman College and three years as a junior patent examiner at the USPTO.

NAACP YOUTH COUNCIL
TAKES ROOT



By Z’hanie Weaver
NAACP YOUTH COUNCIL



lines, the local races directly impact our day-to-day lives.

From school board decisions to city council policies, local leaders shape the future of our neighborhoods, our schools, and our opportunities. Local elections determine who will represent our voices in significant decisions affecting housing, education, public safety, and economic development. In a city like Spokane, where systemic challenges still impact communities of color, every vote counts. Participating in local elections ensures that our collective concerns are heard and gives leaders who truly understand our community power.

Fannie Lou Hamer, a sharecropper from Mississippi, became a leader in the civil rights movement. After being fired from her job and evicted from her home for attempting to register to vote, she became a vocal advocate for voting rights. A famous quote of hers, “I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired,” encapsulates the frustration of many African Americans who were disenfranchised.

While she may have said that in the 1960s, can you argue that you don’t feel remotely the same in 2024? Lack of adequate representation is a leading cause of anger and horrible policies that impact the larger populations of a city. Not having fully addressed the needs of these communities, perpetuates inequality and fosters a sense of suppression among those who feel their voices are unheard. For African Americans, inadequate representation is both a symptom and a cause of systemic inequality.

Historically, voter suppression tactics such as literacy tests, poll taxes, and gerrymandering were designed to limit the political power of Black Americans. While many of these barriers have been legally dismantled, their legacy persists in more subtle forms, like voter ID laws and the purging of voter rolls, which disproportionately affect African American voters.

Without voting for who you want as representation in political offices, these issues often go unaddressed, further hurting Black communities.

Elected officials who do not come

from or fully understand marginalized communities may fail to prioritize or even recognize issues that disproportionately affect those communities. For example, policies around criminal justice reform, healthcare access, and economic inequality often do not adequately address the unique challenges faced by African Americans and other people of color. This disconnect can lead to policies that perpetuate existing disparities rather than improve them.

When large segments of the population are not properly represented, the government cannot truly function as a government “by the people, for the people.” To address this, it is crucial to increase political engagement and representation among communities. Encouraging and supporting candidates from diverse backgrounds, ensuring equitable access to voting, and advocating for fair redistricting practices are all essential steps toward creating a more inclusive and representative political system.

Spokane continues to grow and change, like any other city, and voices need to be part of that transformation. Whether advocating for equitable education, pushing for affordable housing, or supporting small Black-owned businesses such as Fresh Soul, Black Label Brewing Company, etc, local elected officials play crucial roles. Voting is a way the majority of our community can hold them accountable and ensure they are in the best interests of all Spokane residents, especially marginalized communities.

Our youth are the future, and their voices are just as important in shaping the direction of our community. NAACP Spokane Youth Council meetings are a platform where young people can engage in civic life, learn about leadership, and make their voices heard. These meetings are more than just gatherings– they’re opportunities for our youth to step into roles of responsibility and start making a difference now.

In September, we are hosting a meet-and-greet event to bring together members of the community, local leaders, and our youth. This will be an opportunity to share ideas and discuss how we can continue to advocate for positive change starting in our city.

Your vote is your voice. By educating yourself and participating in local elections, attending Youth Council meetings, and connecting with others at events like our September meet-and-greet, you will be taking an active role in shaping the future of Spokane.

Having our concerns addressed and our community represented correctly. Every vote counts, and together, we can ensure that Spokane works for every voice.

Fannie Lou Hamer said, “When I liberate myself, I liberate others. If you don’t speak out ain’t nobody going to speak out for you.”

BACK TO SCHOOL

SWIMMING FOR OUR LIVES



By Jamie Stacy
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR

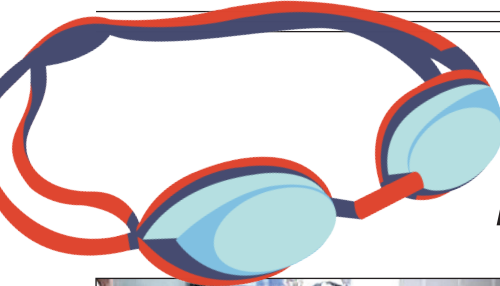


Across the water they came. Waters that drew them away from all things familiar. Fear of the inhumane cruelty to come caused some to escape into a watery grave. But those who did not die resolved to live no matter what. The water spewed these brave souls onto new land. Receding, as if to apologize for bringing them to this ill fated place. The water became their enemy, the barrier between life and freedom. Summer time is often filled with the laughter and joy of people enjoying water activities. Open water spaces, such as rivers and lakes, grant opportunities for people to have fun while taking a break from the summer heat. The window to enjoy outdoor water activities is limited due to the weather in the Pacific Northwest. Public pools are open to families who cannot afford the luxury of a private pool. However, public swimming facilities did not always have an environment where everyone felt like they belonged. Public pools are paid for by the tax dollars of American citizens. The Jim Crow Era brought about the perpetuation

of lies and laws that kept Black people from accessing water and pools for recreational purposes. Between 1920 and 1940, cities across the country opened thousands of public swimming pools that denied or limited access to Black American citizens. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 granted them the same access to swimming pools as Whites. Unfortunately, by that point, Black people had internalized the falsehood that they couldn't swim. The constant harassment and discrimination in aquatic spaces made it even more uncomfortable for Black Americans. Swimming is an essential life skill that everyone should acquire. This belief prompted the NAACP Spokane Branch Healthcare Committee Chair, Quinton Baker, to seek out partners who held the same conviction and sought to bring about change. American Red Cross, YMCA, Providence Health, Slingshot, educators at Rogers High School, and members of the NAACP worked together to fund and bring a new opportunity to students at John R. Rogers High School to gain swimming skills and earn lifeguard certification. Black children and youth are more likely to drown in public pools. Quinton Baker proposed the Red Cross Lifeguard program with this disparity in mind. The program targeted 10 participants of color, ages 15 years or older. On April 12th, educators and partners met with participants to discuss the expectations and hope that this program brings to their community. Selected participants would engage in lifeguard course prerequisites that included:

Swimming a continuous 300 yards (6 laps down and back) - may use front crawl/freestyle or breaststroke technique: swimming on back or side not permitted.
Swim 20 yards, dive down 7-10 feet and retrieve a 10-pound brick, return to the surface and swim with the brick back to the starting point within 1 minute and 40 seconds.
2 minutes of continuous treading water using legs only.
Participants completing the program would receive a 2-year certification in American Red Cross Lifeguarding, First Aid, CPR/AED, and Administering Emergency Oxygen (time permitting), and a 1-year Bloodborne Pathogen.
Partners of the program equipped participants with swimsuits, goggles, swim caps, and towels. The YMCA extended a membership to its facilities to participants and their families for 2 months. Throughout the month of May, participants engaged in lifeguard training and worked on swimming skills.
The 2024 Red Cross Lifeguard program was a success! Quinton, community partners, and educators hope to make this an annual program for students of color to obtain the skills needed to swim and become lifeguards.
Representation matters where it matters.
When it comes to jumping in the pool, having Black trained lifeguards help Black people to feel psychologically safe. Believing the lie that Black people can't swim only perpetuates an unhealthy narrative in communities of color. Organi-

zations, like NAACP and YMCA, are diligently working to combat this unhealthy narrative by encouraging Black people to get swim lessons for themselves and their children. It is never too late to learn this fundamental life skill. We are swimming for our lives!
In 1831, Tice Davids swam to freedom from slavery across the Ohio River.
Black people can swim. In fact, Simone Ashley Manuel is a Black American woman who is a gold medal Olympic freestyle swimmer. She is an ambassador for the Make A Splash organization, working to bring awareness to essential aquatic education in underserved communities.
The history of Black Americans is peppered with disenfranchisement. We came to this land with skills that were weaponized against us. We've internalized the lies that have given birth to apprehension of our competence and abilities. Some have said that we, Black Americans, were born on the water.
It was on the water where we found the courage to rise above oppressive thoughts. It was on the water where we found the strength to survive another day in the most inhumane conditions. It was on the water where we promised ourselves to live and not die.
Let the water no longer be our enemy; stealing our joy and robbing us of our freedom. Let its waves bring renewed hope and confidence in who we are. Let the water be a place where we not only live, but where we thrive.
*"Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea."*



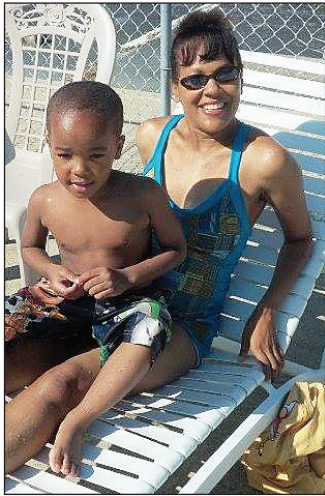
DIARY OF A SWIM MOM



By Dr. Shantara Smith
THE BLACK LENS

When my middle son Gabriel (Gabe) was five years old, we took him to a state park in Pennsylvania. Despite a lifeguard being present and Gabe being within arm's reach, he sank to the bottom of the pool. Before I could reach down to get him, my mother, who was nowhere in sight previously, shot in like a light to the bottom of the pool and pulled Gabe up before he could drown. Today, Gabe is a 19-year-old D1 college swimmer.
When my three sons were toddlers, I was in grad school for a PhD and was constantly busy. My mother stepped up to put my sons in swim lessons to keep them safe. Nana, as they called her, would give me updates on how they were doing. "Gabe and Jordan passed their deep-water test today, Shanty, but Brock didn't, we have to work on his skills!"
There were two YMCAs near us, one offered group classes and the other individual lessons; my mother took my sons to both. "Advanced from flying fish to shark class today!", she'd say proudly!
In 2015 my mother got sick with Uterine High-Grade Sarcoma. It was also the year I finished grad school. I took over as the swim parent and realized that in my absence, my mother and the YMCA staff had taken my 3 sons from sinking to the bottom of the pool to swimming across the entire pool at any depth; the freestyle, breaststroke, and backstroke looked good, but butterfly was still yet to be learned. Years later, butterfly would eventually be the stroke that would break a 20-year record for Gabe, take Brock to Eastern Zones, and get Jordan onto a

college swim team!
After the boys graduated from swim lessons they were excited for the YMCA swim team. They learned about flip turns, times, and racing rules.
Between the ages of 9-13 Brock qualified for Districts, Junior Olympics, and Eastern Zones. Gabe broke over 10 records between the ages of 10-14 years in our county and Jordan qualified for States relays.
After the YMCA years, we continued with summer league swimming, high school swimming and club swimming. It took up most days afterschool for practice and most weekends for swim meets, it was a lifestyle.
Over the years, besides being competitors, the boys also became employed as lifeguards and were professionally licensed as Junior Coaches of children ages 5-12. Gabe and Jordan stuck with the sport through college and Jordan remains employed as a lifeguard to this day.
Scholarships, college swim team roommates, training trips to Florida beaches, friendships and swim meets in multiple states are all reasons the boys love swimming. They have traveled (or plan to travel) to New York, Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, Minnesota, Indiana, and Illinois for swim meets and made like-minded friends from all over the country as a result. It has given them discipline, athleticism, employment, and a skill to prevent them from ever sinking to the bottom of the pool again. In my mother's memory, we thank her for her time and commitment to family and aquatics. The boys are often thanked by members of the community for helping to exemplify excellence and diversity in the sport. We're proud to be a swim-family.



WORKS IN PROGRESS



COURTESY

The YWCA Transformations Camp focused on self-worth and self-care for youth.

By Mya Jefferson
THE BLACK LENS YOUTH CONTRIBUTOR

In July and August, the Transformations Camp was hosted at the YWCA and led by Jaime Stacy was a weeklong empowerment camp focusing on self-worth, self-care, self-monitoring/regulation, self-instruction, and goal-setting skills. There were two separate sessions this year. Mrs. Jaime assigned us peer mentors, placing us in groups with other young women who gave encouraging advice and showed great leadership. Everyone at the camp was able to connect easily and create relationships with others while bettering their relationship with themselves. The things we learned were beneficial to our mental health and contributed to our overall well-being.
This camp came for me at the perfect time, being someone with very low self-esteem and self-worth. It was able to push me further out of my shell and help with my perspective of myself as well as the perspective people may have of me. There couldn't have been a better person to lead the camp. Jaime Stacy is easy to look up to and empowering. She was able to teach us, to be vulnerable, and every conversation was meaningful. Some of the things we learned, starting with goal-setting skills helped us to not start too big and to set small goals. We learned that, as good as it is to have big goals, they have to be realistic. We also learned how to self-monitor and regulate our behavior and reactions. We got to see different methods on how to do this by learning about how our senses

impact us. Aromatherapy, fidgeting, actively moving, and listening to music were a few ways we saw that helped, and most of us would say it calms us the most. Self-instruction is simply teaching ourselves. We also learned about self-care which contributes to our physical, spiritual, and mental well-being. Self-care varies from person to person but it is meant for you to put yourself first as a form of wellness. It caters to your health and happiness. Self-care is a combination of emotional, physical, environmental, spiritual, recreational, and social factors or even a lifestyle.
Finally, we explored self-worth, and how we see our own value. Society's standards are high and unrealistic. People are degrading and there is a trend of toxicity where we are continuously dragging each other down. It's important to have self-respect and to have confidence in yourself. I know who I am as a person and how I view myself. Every action and step you take should be taken with purpose. The message of Transformations Camp that I cannot let go of is to walk in your confidence and self-worth and embrace opportunities given to you, to know the difference between confidence and cockiness and speak with intent. We've heard plenty of times that you should treat people how you want to be treated, but as repetitive as it is, we should never forget that every life is important and valuable. The YWCA Transformations Camp helped with my self-discovery and was reaffirming. Outside of everything we learned, the girls who attended had plenty of fun and enjoyed every activity.

BACK TO SCHOOL

YOUTH CONNECTION: WOMAN

By Auda Muneza
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



lack of educational opportunities was a constant source of frustration. It was tough because I wanted to learn and grow, but I was denied this basic right. But now, I have a chance at the NewTech Skill Center; it has many opportunities. This place can significantly help me with my dream of becoming a nurse. My supportive mother has played a significant role in my journey.

Navigating the twists and turns of my high school years, there have been two guiding lights that have illuminated my path: the transformative education provided by New-Tech Skill Center and the unwavering inspiration I draw from my amazing mom. These two influences have not only shaped my dreams but also fueled my determination to pursue a fulfilling career in nursing. Reflecting on my journey so far, I am compelled to recognize the profound impact of NewTech Skill Center and my mom on my growth as a student and aspiring nurse.

NewTech Skill Center offers a unique learning environment that fosters experiential learning and hands-on training. Through the innovative simulation labs and interactive classrooms, students are immersed in realistic healthcare scenarios, enabling them to develop critical thinking skills and clinical judgment essential for nursing practice. For instance, during my time at the Skill Center, I had the opportunity to participate in a simulated emergency room scenario, where I had to triage patients and make quick decisions under pressure. This experience not only enhanced my understanding of emergency nursing but also sharpened my critical thinking and decision-making skills. The emphasis on practical application complements theoretical learning, bridging the gap between classroom instruction and real-world patient care settings.

One of the most significant advantages of the NewTech Skill Center is its opportunity for exposure to diverse clinical settings. Through partnerships with healthcare facilities and community organizations, students like me can access a wide range of clinical placements, including hospitals, long-term care facilities, and community health centers. This exposure broadens students' perspectives and allows me to gain hands-on experience in various healthcare settings, preparing me for the complexities of modern nursing practice. For instance, during my clinical placement at a local hospital, I had the opportunity to work with a diverse patient population, including children, adults, and the elderly. This experience not only deepened my understanding of the unique healthcare needs of dif-

As I journeyed through middle and high school, I faced many difficulties. One of the most complex parts was living in Zambia, Africa. Even though I was born there, I was treated like a stranger and not allowed to go to school. The cultural and societal barriers I encountered were immense, and the



ferent age groups but also reinforced my commitment to providing patient-centered care and advocating for the well-being of others, even in the most challenging circumstances.

Drawing inspiration from my mother, the most influential figure in my life, has profoundly shaped my nursing career aspirations and personal outlook. Despite facing adversity and experiencing hurt from others, my mother consistently demonstrates unwavering compassion and resilience, serving as a beacon of strength and empathy. Her unwavering support and love have been instrumental in shaping my character and fueling my aspirations.

My mother's ability to see the good in all people, even those who have caused her pain, is a testament to her remarkable character and unwavering optimism. Her capacity for forgiveness and understanding has inspired me and instilled in me a deep sense of empathy and compassion for others. These qualities are fundamental to nursing practice.

Witnessing my mother's resilience in the face of adversity has taught me invaluable lessons about the power of empathy and kindness in healing. Her example has reinforced my commitment to providing patient-centered care and advocating for the well-being of others, even in the most challenging circumstances.

As a high school student, I have become passionate about the Step Team, an intricate form of dance with its

rhythmic footwork and synchronized movements. Step became more than just a dance; it became my lifeline. It brought me joy and helped me integrate into the community. Through Step, I found a sense of belonging and forged meaningful connections that transcended cultural barriers. It became a source of empowerment, allowing me to reclaim my identity and assert my presence in a world that often tried to diminish it. This has not only enriched my personal life, it has also influenced my nursing career. The discipline, teamwork, and resilience I've learned from Step are qualities that I believe are essential for a successful nursing career.

Additionally, Step is about making a difference. It has become a platform through which I can uplift others and advocate for change. I mentored younger students, supported programs promoting diversity, and lent my voice to causes close to my heart. In my role as a stepper, I assumed the responsibility to champion diversity, celebrate the achievement of Black young girls, and actively advocate for equal opportunities and human rights. I found myself aligning with organizations dedicated to empowering marginalized communities, channeling my experiences into avenues of support and change. For instance, I organized a Step performance to raise funds for a local healthcare clinic, demonstrating the power of Step as a tool for social change.

When it comes to empowering young people, the principles of Step can be precious. Step is all about peace and unity and comes with principles that include being brave, having faith, being creative, self-determination, responsible, and working with a purpose they are like guiding stars that light the way towards personal growth and empowerment—being brave means having the courage to face challenges head-on and Step outside of your comfort zone. Faith in yourself and your abilities helps you overcome self-doubt and believe in your potential. Being creative allows you to think creatively and find innovative solutions. Self-determination empowers you to make choices based on your values and aspirations. Taking responsibility for your actions and doing the necessary work leads to personal growth and success. Finally, working with a purpose gives meaning and fulfillment to your endeavors. By embracing these principles, you can unlock your true potential and create a life filled with purpose and empowerment.

As I embark on the next chapter of my journey, I am grateful for the invaluable lessons and experiences provided by NewTech Skill Center, the unwavering support and inspiration of my mother, and the empowering force of Step. These three pillars have not only shaped my dreams and aspirations but have also instilled in me a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation. Armed with these guiding lights, I am confident in my ability to make a meaningful difference in nursing and beyond, and I am committed to using my experiences and opportunities to inspire others and advocate for positive change.

MOON CYCLE



By Dante Crawford
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



You know the moon has many phases; each one different than the last. Throughout all the changes it still takes its form, shining bright in a dark sky above the world amongst all the stars. My journey has led me to admire the moon in a new light. Ever since I was young, I've been very ambitious and craved to be self-sufficient.

At the age of eight years old, I've grown to know how cruel the world actually can be; Earle Stem Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois was the start of it all. Being one of the few Black students amongst all the white ones, I've had my life threatened, been bullied and chased just because of the color of my skin. Some days I would run home crying, trying to escape the fear of being beaten to death, or shot with all the gang violence in the neighborhood. It was truly hell on earth. All I had was my grandparents; my mother was deceased, and my father was the cause of it, something I witnessed when I was only one and half years of age. Even with the passing of my mother, I experienced adversity in places where I just wanted to be loved and protected. Hearing the doubt, being taken advantage of, and experiencing harm created a bittersweet drive in me to do better. These experiences taught me toughness and how I should treat the people I care about, because now I know what not to do. For that I am thankful, despite the hardships I have endured. For most of my life, money struggles have been common and expected, just trying to keep a roof over our heads. I don't want that for myself and for my legacy, and I refuse to be in this position ever again. So, I work hard to make sure that I won't have to go through this for the rest of my life. Graduating high school was a priority, and now going to college will enable me to take my future by wheel and drive it all the way.

Although my family support was not the best, there have been counselors and teachers who have helped change the course of my life and have shown up in extraordinary ways to support me. I consider these people my family

and I can truly say I love them and care about them so much that if they ever need me, I will be here for them no matter what. My boss from my first job in Spokane showed me so much by not giving up on me. These people I consider my community; they have done so much to lift me up and to become who I am today, and I can't thank them enough. I will honor them by giving back to my people. I want to help people who have gone through losing their parents by making the world a safe place for them. I want to start my own foster home in the future. I want to help all those kids find the love and care that they are missing. I will start with college and study forensic science and law enforcement so that I can provide evidence that will bring criminals to justice. This will bring me a step closer to being a forensic pathologist.

To all the people younger than me, the advice I want to pass down to you is: "if you're not going to do it, it'll never get done." Don't wait for someone to hand you the answers, you have to find it yourself sometimes. That doesn't mean you have to do it by yourself, but you have to be the one to initiate; people who want to see you succeed will help you along the way. If you can't do that it's OK to start small. Think of something you really want and come up with three different ways to get it. Trust me it will take you far, there is usually more than one right answer.

The one year I spent in Spokane changed my whole outlook on life and my family. I was able to make a lot more friends and I got to see people who are like me. I experienced things that I never thought I would've otherwise, such as being put on the front page of the school district website or being given a chance to be a representative on the school board. I've gotten to be a part of huge events and fundraisers and social/cultural movements for both the Black community and the LGBTQIA+ community too. Again, thank you to all of those who have helped me through it all, I've found a home and community there in Spokane.

To all the educators out there, as a graduate, I would like to say know that all your students come from different backgrounds and are all at different levels. Helping your students or even doing something as simple as bringing donuts for your class can change their whole day. Take some time to get to know your students, even the ones who are always smiling because sometimes they're hurting the most. Be mindful of what you say and crack a joke sometimes, even if it's bad, students don't want to be in a class if the teacher doesn't even want to be there.

I will be attending Central Washington University. Going to the campus for the first time sent chills down my spine, because I knew that this was the start of me changing my future. I can do all the things I've dreamed about starting here. I can't explain how happy and ecstatic seeing it all made me but now that I've gotten to this point, I'm going to get my bachelor's degree, study French, and seek out internships to gain professional connections. The thing that is going to keep me grounded is focusing on my mental and physical health. How am I going to progress if I don't take care of myself?

This is my moon cycle. Even if there are some days I don't feel as full or motivated, that's ok because I can always change and become the full moon in the sky. Even the dark parts of the moon find a way to shine.



TAKING FLIGHT

By Mariaconsolata Kamau
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



What encouraged me to pursue aviation as a career is inspiration from my neighbor. When I got done with high school, my plan was to start a program to become a flight attendant. My neighbor encouraged me to go on a discovery flight at Felts field in Spokane. I had an amazing time, and the instructor commented on my performance. That fueled me with excitement, joy, and a sense of dedication. I gained ambition and confidence after that flight. After taking that discovery flight, I waited until winter was over and called the school with a plan to start acquiring my private pilot's license. Once I got into Northwest Flight Service, I flew every day with a great instructor. On May 1, 2023, I went on my first solo flight. I was by myself, filled with fear and excitement; those feelings were battling each other inside me. Yet there was a sense of calmness that overtook me. Three months later, on July 12, 2023, I passed my check ride and earned my private pilot license. My family and neighbor were so proud, and I believed I could accomplish anything I set my mind to.

A month later I decided to apply to Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. This school is heavily aviation

focused and all the students have the same goals I set for myself; being around this kind of crowd pushes you and that's the kind of environment I needed. Moreover, I could fly all year round in Arizona and not halt my training during the winter months. The biggest challenges I've faced are financial, higher education is expensive, self-doubt at times, and having poor instructors. Financially, I knew choosing this career would be a lot but, in the end, when I finish and accomplish my goals, the financial aspect would not be a burden. The self-doubt came from comparing myself to other aviators and their progress. I learned that people learn differently, and comparison would only make me look backwards. I had to advocate for myself when I was having conflicts with instructors and that has led me to ground my confidence and have clear expectations from those I learn from.

In 5 years, I want to be flying planes for one of the commercial airlines, hopefully American Airlines. I want to look back at all the challenges I have overcome and know that I'm strong; I want to illuminate that onto others, especially young adults. I would want them to embrace their journey with confidence, even when the path seems uncertain. Trust your abilities and your persistence will lead you to great things. Allow yourself to be vulnerable and accept help. Create that community for yourself and for others.

CONTRIBUTOR SPOTLIGHT

MEET EMMARAE MCLENDON:
CONTRIBUTOR FOR
THE BLACK LENS



Instagram: I have been posting reviews to Instagram for nearly 10 years. I love showcasing new and seasoned authors, and expanding my reading horizons. I participate in many bookish events throughout the year and even help host some. I work with some publishers in reviewing mostly newly released books or every now and then yet to be released books. On my instagram you will see a lot of creative passion. I am also a small business owner working on revamping my brand with a collection of hand-made products I want to offer to my customers. Creativity is welcomed and empowered in this space.

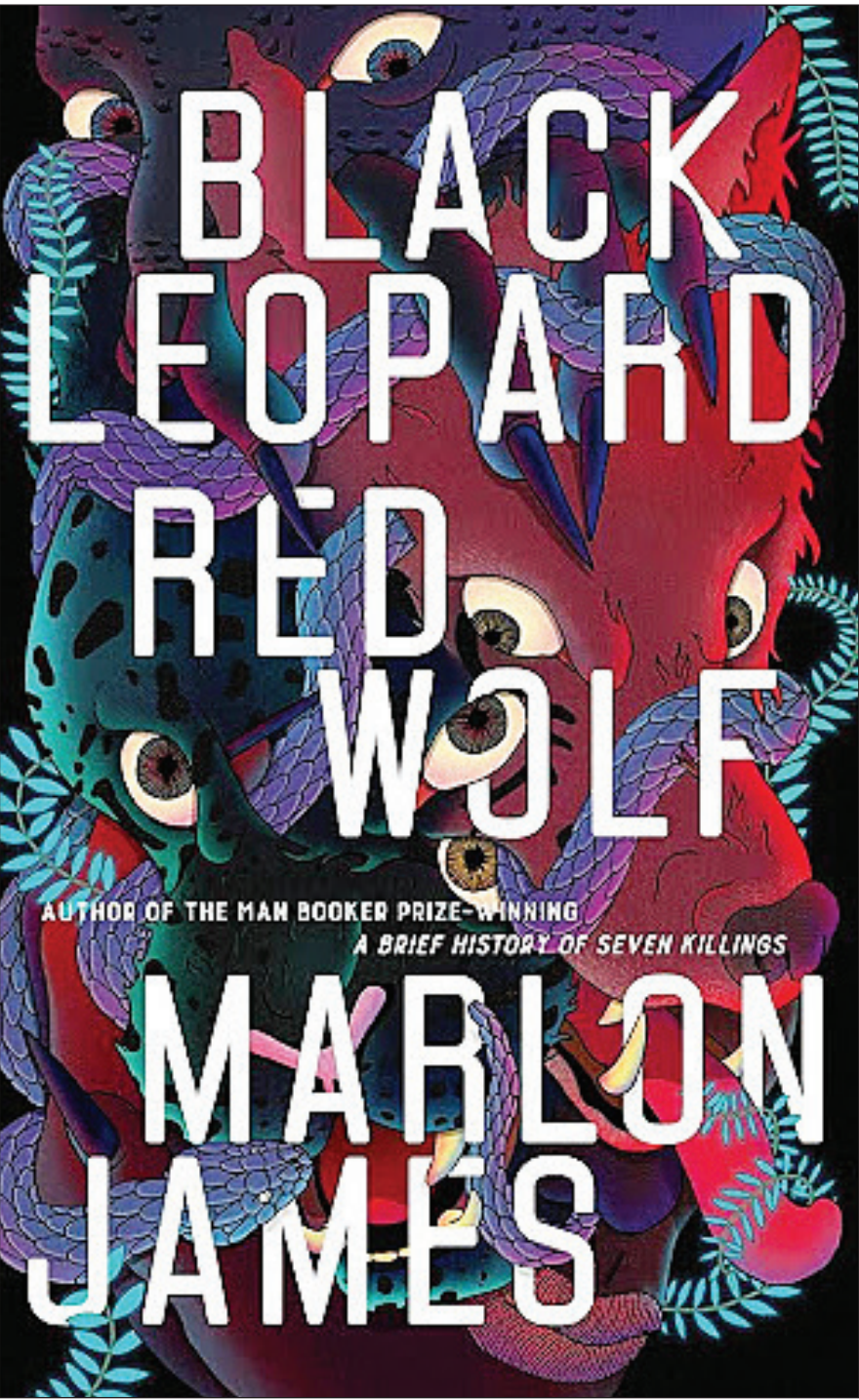
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Twitch: I would definitely call myself a “cozy gamer” – you’re not gonna see me out here playing intense games like Elden Ring, or Overwatch. Instead I enjoy a slower cozy vibe such as Palia, or Bookwalker: Thief of Tales, or The Night in the Woods. I also host reading sprints/coworking streams. During these streams I set a timer for 35-45 min, myself and my viewers sit and read or work on whatever we have to work on in our lives. When the timer is up we come back to the chat to discuss our progress or random things. My goal is to always spread joy and make my viewers feel safe, welcome, and empowered.

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DUE TO A PRODUCTION ERROR IN AUGUST, THESE BOOK REVIEWS WERE NOT PRINTED PROPERLY. HERE THEY ARE IN FULL.

MY FAVORITE BOOK
I NEVER RECOMMEND



By Emmarae
McLendon
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



with your friend and spend the time convincing them to read the book you now LOVE so you can discuss it later! Ah - what a joyous moment!

So – why on Earth do I have a favorite book I never recommend??

Well, because my favorite book is ... a lot...

Black Leopard Red Wolf by Marlon James. Maybe you’ve heard of it, maybe you’ve seen its incredible cover art at the bookstore or somewhere on the bookish internets. Maybe you’ve heard it be called “The Black Game of Thrones” *deep sigh* ... Publishing companies really love to compare Black stories to famous white authors stories. Goodness forbid we have our own creativity and stories. But oh no everything is “Black Harry Potter” “The Black Star Wars” “The Black Twilight.”

Anyway – I’m here to tell you it is NOT the “Black Game of Thrones,” in fact I believe that to be very disrespectful to the book. Black Leopard Red Wolf is a literary fiction masterpiece...in my opinion.

This story is a trickster story (my favorite type of story!), a mystery, and an exploration of African myth, as well as the author’s own wild imagination.

Picture this: A boy is lost. The boy obviously needs to be found. So a team of people are hired to find the boy. Tracker, the main character, has a special ability of an incredible sense of smell. He can hunt down cheating husbands, thieves, even smells emotions dripping off people (love, lust, fear). Tracker always works alone but something about this mystery boy has him working with a group of people. An interesting cast of characters with their own abilities and motivations.

The magnificence of this story, for me, is that you as the reader are stuck in Tracker’s perspective. You have to trust everything he tells you and everything he shows you. You also grow

impatient and confused about who this boy is and why these kingdoms are concerned for his whereabouts and it feels that while Tracker is giving you his account ... something isn’t right. Something is being hidden from you but what? And why?

Black Leopard Red Wolf is vile, horrid, nightmarish, visceral, but it’s written in a way stylistically that made me so curious and want more. I felt more intrigued with this book because as more time went by and I reread the book I noticed more intricate details that made the story feel richer, darker, more mysterious. To say I was not disturbed by some parts would be wildly incorrect. There were so many moments where I could not believe what I was reading, could not believe that someone decided to sit down and write this absolutely vile scene. But there were more instances that painted this story as a whole in a bigger way than I could have imagined.

My favorite book has a second book. And THAT is actually my favorite book. My favorite book, Moon Witch Spider King is the Moon Witch Sogolon’s perspective. See, she was also part of the group that set out to find the boy. But her story starts not when she is an old woman on the hunt for this boy but when she’s a child? ... Does this story really have to go back that

far? Oh yes, because this story is much older than I ever thought possible.

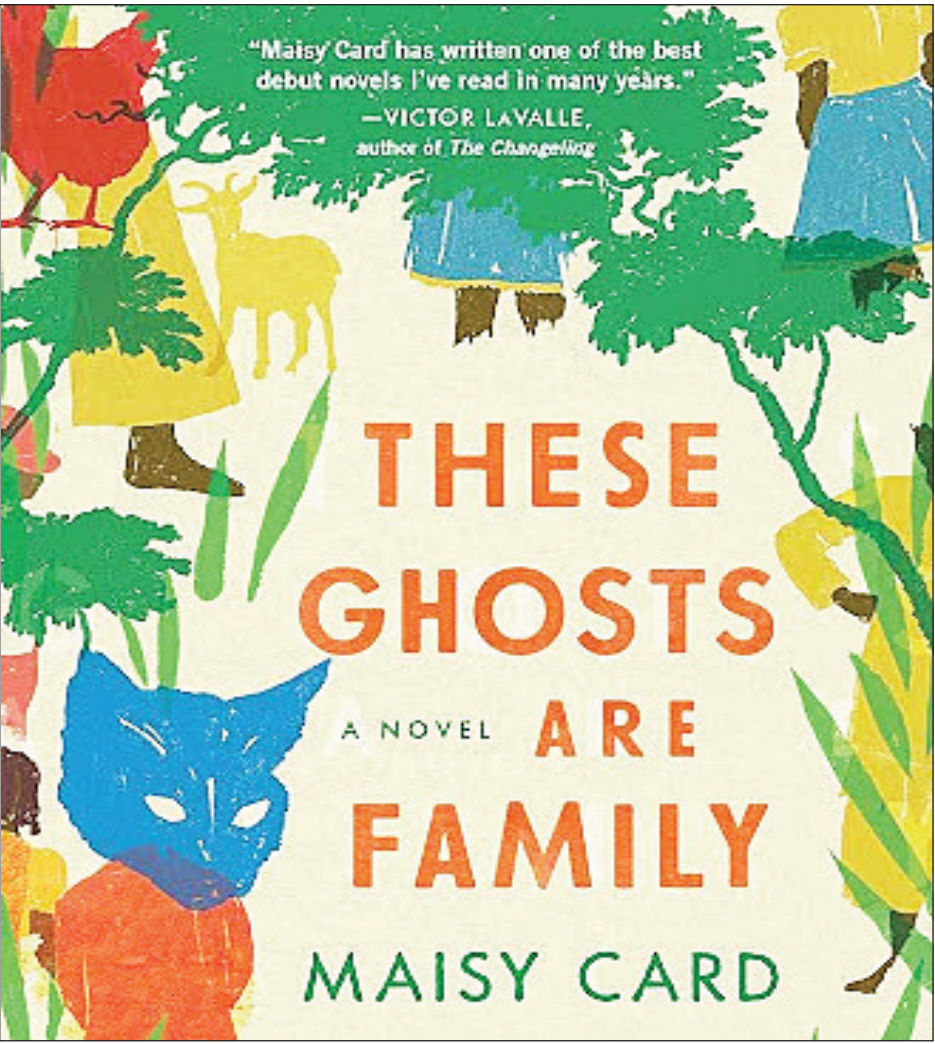
The Moon Witch has a lot to say and to show but she needs you to understand the full scope of what has been happening. She needs you to see that things are bigger than you, me, and Tracker. So to do that we need to understand her. We need to know how she came to be the Moon Witch and the true power she holds, and where that power comes

from. And maybe ... just maybe ... grow to trust her?

But who can you trust in a trickster story?

My favorite book I never recommend. Because if I recommend it I’ll spend too much time explaining why it is eye opening, why it bends and strips my imagination, why it makes me question every story, why it makes me compare everything else to it, why I promise I’m not crazy ... I just love literature, and trust no one.

THESE GHOSTS ARE
FAMILY BY MAISY CARD



By Emmarae McLendon
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



“These Ghosts Are Family” by Maisy Card (2020) we observe Stanford Solomon, a Jamaican man who makes the decision in his old age to tell his health aide about who he truly is. You see, he is actually Abel Paisley and he faked his own death in the 70s, stole his friend’s identity, and left Jamaica leaving his family behind. Now, why is he telling his health aide you ask? Well ... because she is actually his first born daughter! *gasp* He is about to meet her for the first time! *gasp!* And this is about to be her first day as his health aide! *gasp!!* (What a first day at work...)

This story is such a rollercoaster of emotions because you get every character’s perspective of how Abel’s choices affected them – including himself, his children, and grandchildren. Due to Card’s incredible writing she shows deeply generational trauma that seeps through the family. We even see characters from Abel’s ancestors in colonial Jamaica.

This book had me heavily annotating all throughout! I highlighted, underlined, scribbled, and even added post-it notes, so I could fully express my thoughts and emotions. I felt hopeful, sad, horrified, seen, and hidden. I felt such a range of

This is truly one of the greatest debut novels I’ve ever read, and then immediately reread.

In the striking debut novel

emotions that when I finished reading it I actually read it again the following month! I was motivated to do such a quick reread because I was truly baffled at how well the characters were written. After reading the last page, I felt like I truly understood the characters and why they made the decisions they made. I held immense empathy for some and felt very frustrated with others.

There is a quote toward the end of the book that brought me to tears (as a lot of moments did in this book). I’ll leave out some spoilery context, but a character is thinking that “maybe if he knew which country his ancestors came from, he’d know which gods to pray to; maybe the spirits of his long-dead family could find him now and save [them].”

No matter what religion you practice it can’t be denied how hard hitting this quote is. This is something that has always lurked in my mind accompanied by the feeling of knowing certain traditions or prayers are lost forever. I highlighted this sentence and shed a tear at how powerful of a statement. Moments of my own life where I thought something similar came to mind which made my cry even more. (Notably thinking of all the times I’ve been asked “But where are you reallyyyy from? Like where are your ancestors actually from?”)

“These Ghost Are Family” by Maisy Card is an incredible read and one that will stick with you months after reading, perhaps you’ll even do a reread immediately like me.

“ WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO YOU?



Because it's about giving back to the community. It's all about the community.

This is not me. This is all God. This year it's the biggest it's ever been. To God be the glory.”

Michael Brown

POWER

Continued from 1

program, furthering the role playing and embedding the idea that being a doctor in the future is possible for them. During the three-day workshop, different body systems were discussed and experiments/activities that related to each system were conducted. The systems covered by the program were skeletal, nervous, respiratory, digestive, circulatory and muscular. Kids were put into groups where they outlined the body of a group member then placed cut outs of the vital organs on the outline. They also got to see how the circulatory system works using bottles and straws to demonstrate how the heart pumps blood through the body. Crepe paper was used to demonstrate the complexity of the digestive system.

A retired nursing professional and an EWU dental hygiene senior were able to join the students and talk about their jobs in the health care profession. Their visits helped make health care careers realistic and attainable. The week ended with the

students receiving a certificate of completion and goodie bag. One of the students left the program proclaiming that he was ready to complete his PhD and become a doctor. He might have the titles a little off, but his anticipation and enthusiasm toward career readiness was firmly planted. Students were able to time travel into the future to become doctors via aspirational thinking.

The Spokane Chapter of The Links, Incorporated hopes to conduct future workshops of Dr. Me! to youth throughout the Spokane area.

Giving Back

By the Black Lens News

Since 2010, Michael Brown has planned and facilitated a community wide celebration at Underhill Park, in the East Central Community, to uplift area youth and families while supplying them resources. This year surpassed prior years with record attendance. In partnership with The Way to Justice, the Spokane Eastside Reunion Association gives away shoes and backpacks each August to gear up for the new school year.

MUSIC

Continued from 1

found in the music we present to life before our audience, uplifting and educating them in the process.

How did I come to be a part of such groups performing on such platforms with some of the highest quality musicians from all over the world? The esteemed late astronaut, Michael P. Anderson said, “Whatever you are going to be in life, you are preparing for it now.” “Luck”, Oprah Winfrey says, “is preparation meeting opportunity.” I don't believe in luck. I believe in the provision of God and His will for everything and everyone. In any case, these platforms are prepared places for prepared people.

My journey started in humble surroundings in the East Central neighborhood, as a little girl from a musical family. My late father played the church organ. My mother sang in the choir and was already raising my four musical oldest siblings with discipline and work ethic that gives impetus to talent. Then, my parents met, married, and continued to build their legacy in my two brothers and me. I have always wanted to be the best I could be for my Lord, my family,

and for myself. This is the drive that took me to Gonzaga University, through the music education program, to teach in schools, public and private, where no other staff looked like me. I didn't care. I wanted to share music with young people as it had been shared with and had blessed me.

I am the only Black woman in the Spokane Symphony organization. The same is true for Inland Northwest Opera when it is active. I keep preparing and challenging myself to audition and perform, in cooperation with my voice teacher, Ms. Nancy Klingman, with whom I have been singing since 2011. Last year, Nancy and I rose to the challenge of putting on a vocal recital, the excerpts from which we sent to opera companies all over the Pacific Northwest. From this came my latest opportunity and greatest challenge yet. I auditioned into the 2024-25 Puget Sound Concert Opera Studio Artist Program. Here again, I am the only Black woman, and the only person from Spokane. I know I represent our Black community when and wherever I perform. Representation is not just important; it's life changing. This is what motivates me to practice all I can, even on my lunch break. I am determined to make us proud.

SCHOOL

Continued from 1

unknown, especially if you have anxieties about teachers, friends, and the experience of kids going to school in a mostly white school district. Discuss these issues with your child (make it age-appropriate) before they go to school so that they feel empowered to deal with some of the challenges that may arise. Having open discussions ensures they feel comfortable communicating with you if they experience anxiety now or in the future. This will go a long way in easing your own anxiety and fostering a positive mindset. One approach is to role-play scenarios your child might face and discuss appropriate responses.

Summer is often spent with little time dedicated to organizing and preparing for the upcoming rush of activity and needs. Just like when you clean your home office, your child will need to organize their study space and gather school supplies and clothing. Let your child lead the way when it comes to items that reflect their cultural heritage, such as t-shirts featuring Black artists or books by Black authors. This not only helps them feel prepared but also proud of their identity.

When school starts, be in-

volved and communicate; meet the teachers, and attend open houses and conferences. This will ease your mind about what is happening at school. Ask the teachers about the curriculum and how it reflects diverse perspectives. If you encounter any issues of racial bias, be sure to address them with school officials. It can also be helpful to connect with other Black parents to share experiences and strategies for advocating for your children.

Stay healthy! This goes for both you and your child. Plan meals that encourage good nutrition to power your minds and bodies. Be physically active, as it not only keeps you in shape but also helps ease anxiety and depression for both adults and children. Consider joining or forming a group for regular physical activities that involve both parents and kids, fostering a sense of community and mutual support.

Additional Resources: Books, “Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain” by Zaretta Hammond and “The Skin I'm In” by Sharon G. Flake; Organizations, the National Association of African American Parents & Youth and the National Black Child Development Institute; Websites, Colorin Colorado (for bilingual resources), EmbraceRace (for racial literacy).

NEWS



COURTESY

Brittany Trambitas likes to emphasize Black hair styles in her mural work.

MURAL

Continued from 1

Trambitas uses Black culture as her muse: music, hair, women – these things are all interwoven into her blueprints. The Black aesthetic, she shares, is examined, celebrated and uplifted.

“When I submitted my design, the point was to appreciate Black American culture and the ways that Black Americans have contributed to American culture,” she said.

On her gallery wall, Trambitas says that there is a portion that will focus on Black hair. She says she wanted to not only emphasize the attraction of Black hairstyles, but she wanted to capture the freedom to express these bold styles.

“So you'll see one of my pieces will have a very large afro in it because, you know, our hair is important,” she said.

Her mural is a space that caters to Black identity and she encourages people to come down, stand in front, and take a selfie.

When considering the significance of art and culture to Black people, Trambitas shares while there are artists who paint for people to have something to look at, she sees art as a refusal to be silenced.

“I think sometimes not having the words or not being able to express ourselves with words in certain spaces, that's where art has been monumental for us, and historically, since we know that our history is usually blotted out, whether that be by not telling accurate history or trying to erase history, I think that artwork has shown up as a way to tell our story,” she said.

When asked about her personal art journey, Trambitas remembers the Barbie coloring books of her youth.

“Even when I was super

young, I always wanted to draw, and I always wanted to color,” she said. “I would be coloring all of the white Barbies brown, you know, because I didn't have these art mediums; I was not represented, I didn't see myself in it, so I had to make myself within these mediums. That's where it clicked; find a way to see myself in even the most basic of artwork where I couldn't find myself.”

Trambitas said she thinks this memory influences her penchant for painting Black women.

“I am very, very fond of not just the female form, but the capabilities of us as women,” she said.

For up-and-coming artists, she says that it is OK to create art that allows you to see yourself.

“I think a lot of the time we can get caught up in trying to draw and paint for the gaze of other people,” she said. “Be selfish about your artistry.”

SPENCER

Continued from 1

scribe the mission and vision of your organization?

A. Well, the mission is simply advocacy and access. Those are the most important things that folks need to have. They need to have access to all things. The vision goes far beyond Spokane, it goes worldwide to be able to help change people's lives.

Q. How do you ensure that the organization stays true to its mission while adapting to changing circumstances?

A. I think first you always have to stay rooted and grounded in where you came from. You have to look at why the organization was even created in the first place. You can't drift away from the mission nor the values and principles of it. Everyday there will be challenges and changes that happen because things are always evolving. I always go back to my why. The organization was created intentionally to make sure that we were fighting against the things in our community that we need to change.

Q. What recent accomplishments or milestones are you particularly proud of?

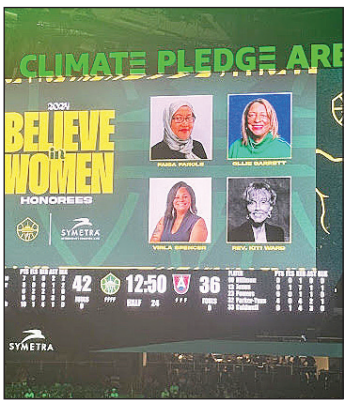
A. I think the milestones that I am most proud of is one, the way that I am able to build relationships with other communities; two, for me I wanted the organization to be world wide, international, if you will say. We have been able to expand into Pierce county, doing some work in King county. The final accomplishment is that I am proud to be in a position where the organization is in its fourth year and still standing.

Q. How can the community support your nonprofit?

A. Well the first thing that comes to mind is the financial component. There is always funds needed when you are running a nonprofit to be able to sustain it. The other is volunteering for us, in-kind donations with hours is always a good thing. Lastly, come by the office, have a cup of coffee and build relationships with us. It won't cost you anything.

Q. You recently were named one of the 2024 “Believe in Women” honorees back in July by WNBA's Seattle Storm for the work you do and the difference you make in the community. How does it feel to be honored by the Seattle Storm for their Believe in Women night?

A. For me I had to process it because I'm so used to doing the work and not being recognized. I don't do this work for the recognition. So I had to internally



COURTESY

Way to Justice CEO and owner Virla Spencer was named one of the 2024 “Believe in Women” honorees in July by the WNBA's Seattle Storm at Climate Pledge Arena for her work in the Spokane community.

process what was happening and it took me a couple of days to be able to realize what this honor meant. After doing some research on what the “Believe in Women” was all about, I felt honored.

Q. This year's theme was about amplifying the contributions of Black women, leaders of color, and organizations serving Black communities. How important is it to amplify and celebrate the contributions of Black women?

A. For a long time Black women have gone without being recognized. Black women have never served with the intent to be recognized, but I think that because Black women have carried so much and continue to do so, it is important for us to be acknowledged, honored and celebrated. It just doesn't happen too often, so when those moments come I think we need to embrace them.

Q. What motivates you to be such a force for positive change?

A. I have experienced a lot of hurt, harm, and losses in my lifetime. One day I woke up and said no more! No more for the sake of me, for the sake of my children, for the sake of the folks that I serve, no more! In doing this work all I care about is serving. My motivation to get up every morning is to see who I'm able to serve for the next day.

Q. Spokane Eastside Reunion Association (SERA) just hosted their annual Community Celebration event last month at Underhill Park in Spokane's East Central neighborhood. How and why did the Way to Justice get involved with this event?

A. Community Celebration has always been an event put on by Michael Brown through his nonprofit SERA. A couple years ago he approached me with the concept of partnering with

SERA to be able to grow this thing. For us, we felt like this event was about celebrating the basketball players and the camp they had successfully completed. We wanted to be able to add an element of resources for a need being that this event is held in a historically Black neighborhood at Underhill Park. I was thinking “what can we do to get people to show up and see what the community has to offer?” We decided to add a component of backpacks, school supplies and shoes.

Q. What challenges has your organization faced in the planning, preparation, and execution of the event?

A. This is our second year participating in this event, and every year we learn something new and what didn't work the year before. There were a few challenges this year, crowd control was one, but mainly the challenge is finding sponsors that will sponsor this event so that we are not having to cover the entire cost of the event.

Q. How has the community responded to this event so far?

A. They are excited that there are resources available to meet their needs. They come out and have fun! We had a Nom Nom Slurpee truck at the event giving free Slurpees, we had bouncy houses, face painting, raffles, prizes, hot dogs, chips, waters, and all of it was free. So for families to be able to come to an event and not need to bring a dollar is always something that is exciting.

Q. After being a part of the event for two years now, do you plan on continuing your contribution annually? If so, how do you plan to sustain and build momentum around this event?

A. I believe that once something is started you can't just cut it off. For me it has shown that there is a greater need in this Spokane community. I have every intention of continuing to partner with S.E.R.A. Michael Brown has done a phenomenal job with the basketball program and creating a summer program that is fun and provides relief to families. In order for this event to keep going, sponsorships and donations will be a vital part of it.

Q. What is the easiest way for people to support this event and the work that SERA and the Way to Justice is doing?

A. Go to our website www.thewaytojustice.com, there is a donation tab through paypal to make a donation there. You can also send a check to our P.O. Box 7503 Spokane, WA 99207.

Go to SERA's website www.spokaneeastsidereunionassociation.com to donate and support their work as well.

ARTS AND INSPIRATION

BE CAUTIOUS OF THE ONE STORY

By Bob Lloyd
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR

The exhibit *Imagining Ancestors* by Pok Chi Lau, a photographer and documentary artist, though not an anthropologist, has been showcased at various venues in Spokane, with and without presentations. It inspires people to tell their own stories. Lau has been following his people's travels to more than 40 different countries, learning about his people as he went.

Imagining Ancestors features large diptychs of the Batamariba people of Togo, Africa, holding images of slaves brought to the Americas and the Caribbean, paired with pictures of commodities that accompanied them to the countries of their enslavers. The photographs are vibrant, detailed, and depict the contrast between modern and traditional life, including the unique architecture and facial identity marks.

Pok Chi Lau's presentations reached diverse audiences including the Martin Luther King Center where Lau spoke to youth aged 15-17, emphasizing the importance of storytelling and documenting one's own history.

At the Hamilton Studio hundreds of people came to hear music and his photographs provided a background ambiance, allowing for a subconscious effect. Also at the studio were a group of African American youth interested in commercial media but who were also exposed to documentary photography and fine art.

At Spokane's downtown Central Library Lau reached an entirely different audience, including the homeless, tourists, and local workers. This display included intimate portraits of descendants of Chinese immigrants and Afro-Cubans, and highlighted their mixed heritage. Hanging from the ceiling was an eighteen foot long textile printed with cut off hands and fingers representing the maiming of rubber workers who failed to meet rubber production quotas under King Leopold II.

In the many presentations the work should have been put in context of visiting a museum or historical reenactment. One of the sites that Lau photographed, Koutammatou, the land of the Batamariba in Togo, Africa, is a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization World Heritage Site. UNESCO seeks to encourage the identification, protection, and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity.

Be aware of one story. It is not always what you see, often it is what you've seen that determines what's there. When you look at Pok Chi Lau's images you see something with your eyes that may challenge the images and stories that have already been imprinted in your memories.

Pok Chi Lau is telling his story and we have to tell our story. You cannot wait until you are ready. If you do, you never will start. Take your cell phones and start telling your story now. No one can do it better than you; and you will learn so much.

For more about Koutammatou visit whc.unesco.org/en/list/1140. There are 1,223 World Heritage sites in 168 countries, including sites in Washington State. For the complete list of links to information about these sites visit whc.unesco.org/en/list/.

To see more of Pok Chi Lau's work visit his page at 4comculture.com.



Above: Photographer Pok Chi Lau has had work on display at many venues across Spokane, including the Central Library, where he presented “*Imagining Ancestors*” and spoke to interested gallery viewers in August.

At left: The crocodile skull in this exhibit represents the maiming of workers who failed to meet production quotas.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF POK CHI LAU

AFRICAN CULTURE MEETS ASIAN CULTURE: ROOTS THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY



Photographer Pok Chi Lau speaks to youth at the Martin Luther King Community Center in Spokane.

By Emmanuel Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR

When Mr. Pok Chi Lau came to the Dr. Martin Luther King Community Center, he showed us pictures and talked about Black people in different parts of the world who were also mixed with Chinese ancestry. He showed us photographs and talked about how it is important to remember

our ancestors, the things they did and went through. We learned about the languages spoken and food. As we looked through the pictures, he talked about the roots of where we come from, how it can be deeper than we realized, and one thing he talked about was how African descendants and Chinese people were dispersed through the Caribbean together. This caused the merging of cultures and a unique identity. In the pictures, we saw a variety of faces that were the combination of this fusion of cultures.

Pok Chi reminded us that our story as Black

people is important, it is not the same, and that we should share and educate people about the stories of our ancestors. He also talked about how family is important because of how far you can trace back and he stressed that keeping a family dynamic and a family tree is important. Pok Chi shared about the many places he has been, the experiences he's had through photography, including West Africa. As a young Black American I thought his presentation was truly interesting. He opened my eyes to a new perspective and added more to my brain to deeply think about.

HEALTH AND SPIRITUALITY

WELLNESS FROM THE WATERS' EDGE

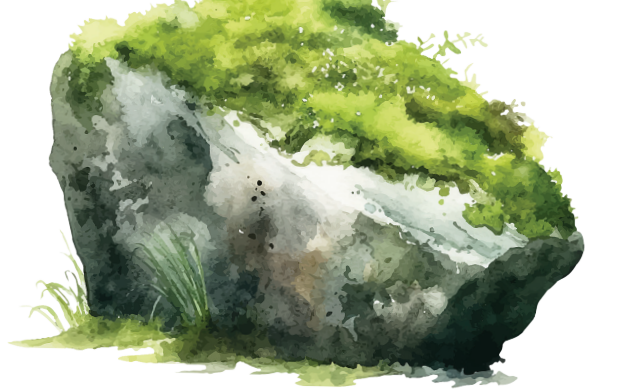
By Dr. Robert L. "Bob" Bartlett
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



ness begins with being able to imagine life differently and feeling empowered to do something about it.

Try this—imagine yourself wading a river in rural eastern Washington in pursuit of wild fish and solitude, or camping near a remote lake with Black friends and family. Imagine yourself employed by the National Park Service, or perhaps employed as an outdoor guide and outfitter. We are rarely in those professions or spaces because they are often not safe or welcoming. It's hard to imagine being “us” in them. We feel safer in places

and in professions where we are seen, that are familiar, even if they are short lived and



It's hard to become what you do not see. For some of us it's hard to imagine living in a safe neighborhood with well-lit sidewalks and streets, safe green spaces to relax in, with connecting nature trails, a public pool and shade trees. For the less fortunate the journey to well-

environmentally unhealthy. You might recall the racist incident in New York City's Central Park in 2020 between Christian Cooper, a Black bird watcher, and Amy Cooper (no relation), a white dogwalker that made the national news? Christian later wrote about the incident and his experiences of being a Black birder in his book, Better Living Through Birding: Notes from a Black Man in the Natural World. Even in the heart of one of the largest cities in the US, it's hard being Black in green spaces.

I have often been asked to explain why there are so many of us in the NBA, WNBA, the NFL, on certain track and field teams, and top winners of road races. Remember what Spokane looks like during Bloomsday and Hoopfest?

One explanation for our overrepresentation in certain sports is, in part, a biological one, that Black folks are genetically hardwired to be athletes. We can't help it. Like rhythm, we are perceived to have “air in our bones” and the right combination of fast and slow twitch muscles. Africans do seem to own the marathon distance.

I remember living in Pullman in the early 80s while at WSU and being out for a family drive down the canyon to the Lower Granite Dam for a picnic only to see African Olympian Henry Rono running up the steep grade. Not only was he striding with apparent ease, he was smiling and waving at those of us passing him going in the opposite direction.

Although there is some truth to the biological argument, I would argue that it is easier to imagine our Black selves as athletes than it is as a Ranger in Yellowstone National Park, or leading a group of bird watchers for the Audubon Society. Although these choices and outdoor professions are obtainable, the path to them and the professional survival rate are imagined differently. It's easier to imagine pushing our young bodies to their physical limit surrounded by teammates and coaches who look like us than it is seeing ourselves as a lone, Black, “wild lifer.”

We are socialized to choose sports. In the poor-

est neighborhoods, we often find lit outdoor basketball courts with chain nets or posted open gym signs and courts crowded with young Black aspiring athletes wanting to “be like Mike”. For much of our young lives we hone our athletic skills while having plenty of Black heroes to look up to. Coaches begin to take an interest in our athletic aspirations. We likely know of a Black athlete from our neighborhood or school that made it big. “If they can make it, so can I” creeps into our consciousness.

It will be to our peril if we continue to inspire and encourage one profession, lifestyle or pastime over the other. We need to be intentional in educating and empowering current and future fishers, hunters, outdoor pleasure seekers, and naturalists who look like us. What appears unimaginable involving our integration into our natural world will require a heavy dose of encouragement from Black parents, Black and white teachers, Black outdoor trail blazers and activists. We are out there!



Dr. Bartlett is a retired educator. He retired from Gonzaga University in 2007 and Eastern Washington University in 2020.

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH CELEBRATES FIVE DECADES OF PASTORAL SERVICE



On Saturday, Aug. 11, Calvary Baptist Church celebrated 50 years of pastoral service of the Rev. Dr. C.W. Andrews, Sr., and First Lady Doris Andrews to the Spokane community. The couple's youngest daughter, the Rev. Lyn Andrews-Watkins, gave the spoken word during the 10 a.m. service and eldest son, the Rev. Dr. Chester W. Andrews Jr., gave the spoken word during the 3 p.m. service.

COMMUNITY POWER: CROWN MINISTRIES SUPPORTS AND UPLIFTS WOMEN

By April Eberhardt
BLACK LENS NEWS EDITOR



recently hosted a fellowship luncheon for the women of Bethel. Crown Ministries prioritizes overcoming domestic violence and uplifting women. Watson shares more about its purpose.

“We have swept domestic violence under the rug for a long time in many of the churches, because there's been this taboo that if we talk about it, it brings shame in the community. But we have to talk about it to begin healing and helping women get through it; not just being there when they're in the hospital from being abused. I also do teachings about sex trafficking awareness, molestation, and divorce re-

covery. We have to branch out; we have to help our community. That is what the church's purpose is.”

An important part of building community, Watson asserts, is taking time to come together and getting to know each other. Two years ago, she wanted to create a space to get to know the women in the congregation and vice versa. “I did a ‘come have lunch with First Lady’ event and basically was bringing the women of Bethel together ... So it's my way of saying to the women here that I love them. I appreciate what they do. I see what they do behind the scenes. And it's just coming together and fellowshiping.”

When asked about the power of community in relation to the church, First Lady Watson said, “The bridge is church. The people are the church, right? And the bridge is us. The Word of God tells us we are to be helpers, one to another, right? Not everything in the church is inside the building.”



First Lady Debbie Watson worships and ministers through dance to “The Lord’s Song” by Maranda Curtis.

COURTESY

IN MEMORIAM

REMEMBERING SANDY:
GOOD TROUBLE



By Betsy Wikerson
SPOKANE CITY COUNCIL
PRESIDENT



I am reminded of her laughter and that twinkle in her eyes when she was up to some good trouble. Would she have ever thought that I would be Council President? Would she like how the second phase of the Carl Maxey Center building turned out? Would she be pleased with the progress we have made? There are so many questions left unanswered. And how could I forget her Patricia, a force in her own right. What joy she brought into Sandys' life. Talk about someone who could mix it up and dance. How Patricia loved to dance!

Many of you know that we were called "Martin and Malcolm." At first, I blew that label off. But as we did our community work and the work of the Carl Maxey Center, it was true that Sandy would come in HOT! She would be ready to burn the place down, followed by me and my moderate approach. We were a great team because, in the end, most were ready to listen and support. Since her passing, I realized how much I miss her support and how she challenged me. There are places I go now that I wish I had Sandy to have my back and her voice. Really, I just miss my friend, the kind of friend you want through thick

Has it only been two years since my friend Sandy was called home? Some days seem like a lifetime ago.

As I reflect,

and thin.

I remember the last event we were at together was Juneteenth of 2022. What a day that was, and the spirit of celebration and collaboration was in the air. The picture of Sandy, Freda, and I was like, WOW, look out, Spokane, three black women on a mission! That day, we were partying and planning great things for East Central, and then, on September 4, we got the news that tragedy had struck. Like many of you, I didn't want to accept it, so I held out hope for her survival, but the Good Lord had called our sister home. Paralysis had hit me like a sucker punch; such a loss as this paralyzed me. After her passing, I didn't stop to grieve because there was work to be done, so I put it aside. I felt the best way to honor our friendship was to carry on the work we had started together then and now.

Writing my reflections has made me open the door to my own grief. I have been so thankful for our shared experiences, the laughter and disappointments, the joy and pride in creating something from nothing and being a trailblazer.

Many will remember the Carl Maxey Center as her legacy, which is true, but to me, Sandy Williams' real legacy is the people she touched that we will never know and the seeds of change she planted.

Finally, Sandy and I shared the same birthday, September 13, so Happy Birthday, Sandy! Know that when I celebrate, I will also think of you fondly. Maybe I will wear an orange flannel like your favorite jacket! Rest in Power, my friend.



IN MEMORIAM:
BERNARD JONES



Oct. 19, 1932 — Oct. 10, 2020

Bernard Eugene Jones' journey finally came to an end on Monday, October 10, 2020, when Our Heavenly Father called him from labor to rest.

Bernard was born Oct. 19, 1932, in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, to the late David Sheridan and Florence A. Jones. He received his formal education through the school system in Uniontown, Pennsylvania. After graduating from Uniontown High School, he entered the United States Air Force. After serving active duty for twenty-three years, he retired in 1976 as a Technical Sergeant. He then joined the Civil Air Patrol and retired as a Lt. Colonel in September 2002 after twenty-four years of continuous service. He was loved by many, respected, and admired by his colleagues.

With great pride, honor, and merited achievements with a true desire to advance and excel, Bernard received his Bachelor of General Studies degree in

1977 from Chaminade College, Honolulu, HI, and a Master of Social Work degree in 1985 from Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA.

Bernard was a faithful servant working as Calvary's Church Van Driver, helping with the Custodians, Church Storehouse, and anything else he was asked to do. In his later years, biking trails became a love; his wish for every church to have a bike to ride. He was dedicated to sharing and helping anyone who asked.

Sometimes life for Bernard was not always easy, but through all of the trials and tribulations, he knew his life was important and his faith and belief in God never wavered.

Bernard leaves to cherish fond memories, his son Berton; two sisters, Florence Jones (Aurora, CO), Emma Jones (Concord, CA); one niece Amy Lewis (Concord, CA); one nephew Glen Snipe (Mableton, GA); and a host of devoted friends and acquaintances.

REST IN POWER
in Memoriam



WALLY AMOS
(AUGUST 13, 2024)

The founder of Famous Amos cookies and a pioneer in the food industry. Amos was also an advocate for literacy and authored several books throughout his life. He passed away at the age of 88 after battling dementia.



MAURICE WILLIAMS
(AUGUST 12, 2024)

A celebrated R&B singer best known for the hit song "Stay," which was famously featured in the movie Dirty Dancing. Williams was 86 years old.



GAIL LUMET BUCKLEY
(JULY 28, 2024)

daughter of Lena Horne, Buckley was an author and journalist who documented Black life. Her work has appeared in places like The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times and Vogue.



ERICA ASH
(JULY 29, 2024)

Best known for her roles on Survivor's Remorse and MADtv, Ash passed away on July 29 at the age of 46 after a courageous battle with cancer.



DUKE FAKIR
(JULY 27, 2024)

Born Abdul Kareem Fakir, Duke was known as the founding member of the legendary quartet the Four Tops. He was the group's last surviving member.



BEAT KING
(AUGUST 15, 2024)

Known for his infectious beats and dynamic presence in the hip-hop scene, his music was characterized by its energy and raw authenticity, left an indelible mark on Southern rap, and he will be remembered for his contributions to the genre.

IN MEMORIAM:
BERDER JONES



July 8, 1934 — July 31, 2024

On Wednesday, July 31, 2024, Berder Lee Mason Jones' journey had finally come to an end. Our Heavenly Father called Berder from her labor, to receive her just reward.

Berder was born July 8, 1934, in Marion Junction, Alabama. She is the last of three children born to the late John Henry and Naomi Mason. She received her education through the school system in Atoka, Tennessee, where she grew up. It was here that she met her siblings, Marie, Shalvie, and Jessie Mason, all proceeded her in death.

She met and married Bernard Jones on January 2, 1957, and from this union, they were blessed by God with a child they

richly loved, Berder's only son Berton. They were stationed at Fairchild AFB in Base, then moved to Spokane, WA in 1973. She later joined Calvary Baptist Church in Spokane where she was dedicated and became a member of the church family. Berder was a faithful and tireless member and involved herself in various roles: Chair, Women's Missionary, Trustee Board, Culinary Supervisor, and worked in the kitchen for 25 years. She took on these tasks with great joy. Over the years, as needed, she was always asked to step in and use her common sense to benefit the church and to assist in any way she could.

Berder worked for the Washington State Work Tank Board and later at Safeco/Country Western Insurance as a File Clerk. After taking care of injured dogs, big and small, she and her husband joined the Chapter of the Washington State Bicyclists and were instrumental in bringing the Chapter into a strong force. They were well respected throughout Washington State as they received various awards for their participation and service. Berder and Bernard joined themselves in making the Bibles and Booklets for our local prison and distribution of the Salvation Army and Calvary Baptist Church. She worked as a cook for the church and helped with all the programs. With a great desire to serve, Berder continued to work in the kitchen and was a member of Calvary's Jail Ministry. She was the one that kept our family moving along.

Berder will be missed and leaves to cherish fond memories and forever keep her in their hearts: her devoted and loving son, Berton; sister-in-law, Florence Jones (Aurora, CO); nieces Amy Lewis (Concord, CA); one niece Shalvie Lewis (Concord, CA); one nephew Glen Snipe (Mableton, GA); and a host of devoted relatives and friends.

Berder was happily gathered in her eternal resting place by her loving parents, John Henry, and Naomi Mason; her brother Isaac Mason, and her sister Ester Snipe, along with her sister's son Darrell. But the greatest joy was when her love, Bernard Eugene Jones, reunited with her.

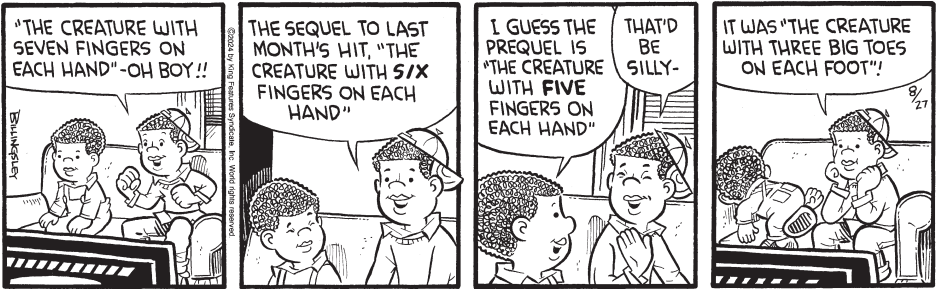
LEISURE
COMICS

CURTIS • BY RAY BILLINGSLEY

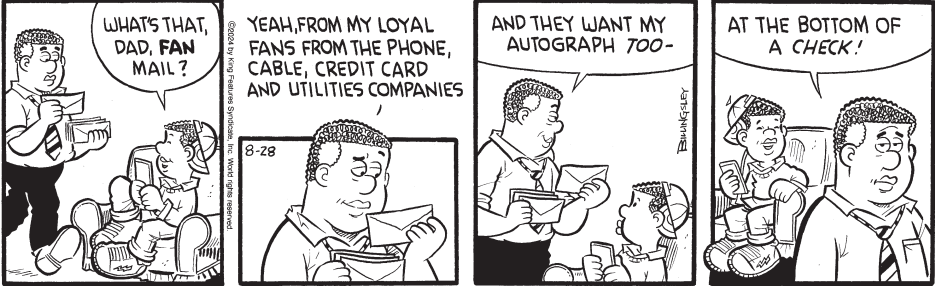
AUGUST 26



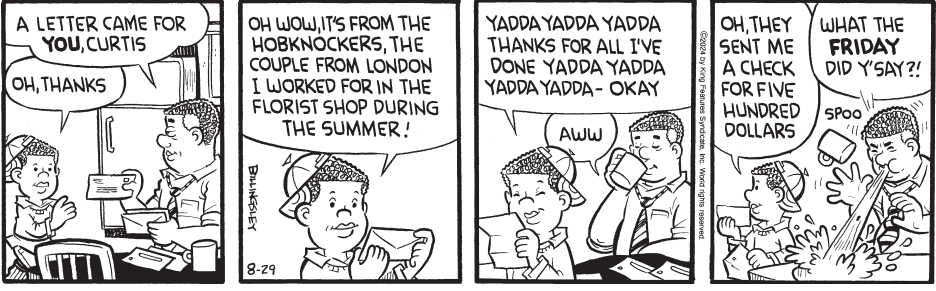
AUGUST 27



AUGUST 28



AUGUST 29



AUGUST 30

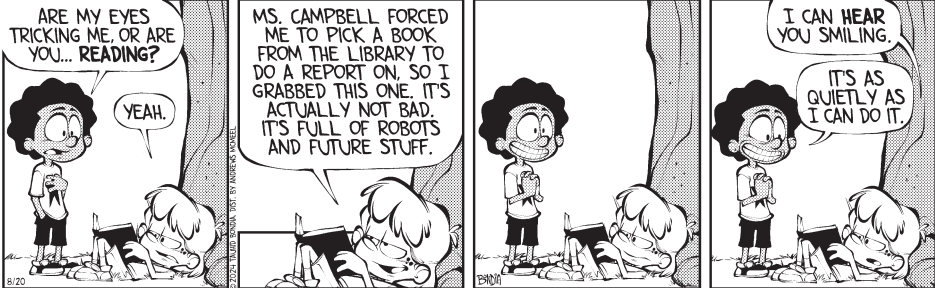


AUGUST 31

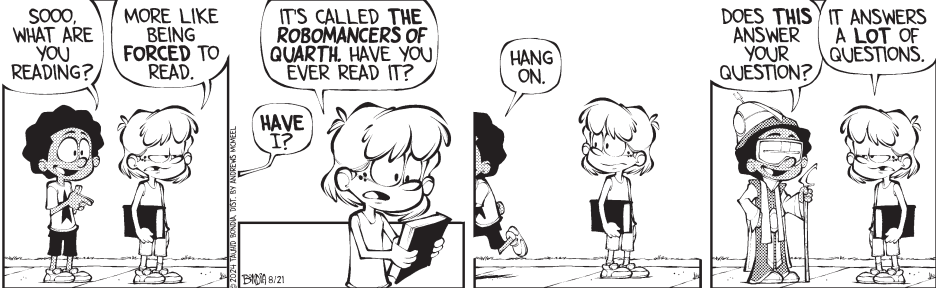


CRABGRASS • BY TAUHID BONDIA

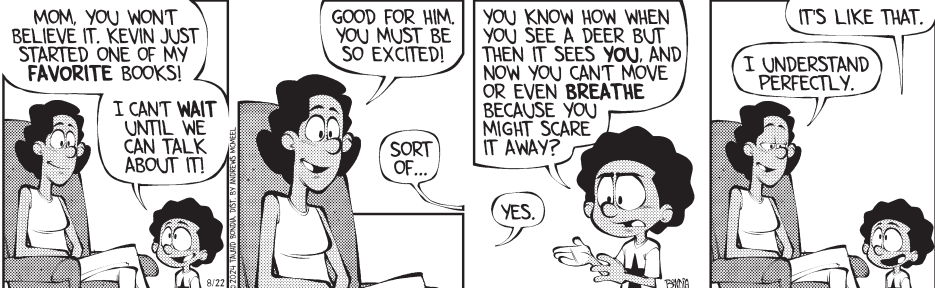
AUGUST 20



AUGUST 21



AUGUST 22



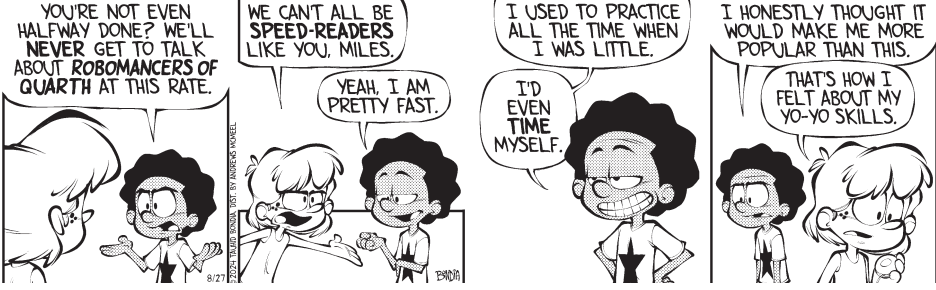
AUGUST 23



AUGUST 26



AUGUST 27



BACK TO SCHOOL

WORD SEARCH

E E D G L Z F B F A M O Z V T G L O N A
S K E Y S T U D Y L D S Y F T N I H D S
T I S R U L E R W W B M R O V A W Q B Y
E D K M S P M C R C K B C C A K W V A L
K H L C M S Z U G M J D T L C C I Y C L
J G A Q T P Y E A O S T E A C H E R K A
T R B B I M C S Z O O P F I B A J G P B
D J N G L E O K A R G A T H G L W T A U
R D A K N H G X O S O T J X R K Y B C S
K L U I L J S K N S I H A O A B A Q K Z
N B Z L G E K O R A K Y C B D O P T D V
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P E N C I L O B B C E U Y C S R E Q A M
S W H G N G B E T L I V U N M D F L T H
A F K C W I A T P B D N T U Y J K W D C
W E X E N F A O D T K I Y L L R J Y U Q
F L P Y F L Y N S M E D B F A J I W J Q
P G X B A V P F V M Z J B L B E B M I P
M L H O M E W O R K F H L S G V L M B C
H U E R A S E R I P A P B Q T L Q U C C

Back to School is here! What's your favorite part of going back to school? Find it hidden in the jumble of letters below!

Chalkboard
Books
Lunchbox
Study
Ruler
Eraser
Syllabus
Grades
Notebook
Pencil
Teacher

Classroom
Homework
Backpack
Desk



*ANSWERS ON PAGE 16

LEISURE

2024 PARIS OLYMPIC GAMES RECAP



Kids Corner

MAZE TIME

START

END

MAZE

WORD SEARCH

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

H	E	D	G	L	Z	E	B	F	A	M	O	Z	V	T	G	L	O	N	A				
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B	A	B	A	J	G	P	B	A	B	A	J	G	P	B	A	B	A	J	G	P			
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P	E	N	C	I	D	O	B	B	C	E	I	V	U	N	M	D	R	E	F	L	T	H	
S	M	W	G	N	G	H	M	C	B	T	L	I	V	U	N	M	D	R	E	F	L	T	H
M	E	X	E	N	F	A	O	D	T	K	I	Y	T	L	R	J	U	O	O	O	O	O	O
F	L	P	Y	F	L	X	N	S	M	E	D	B	F	A	J	I	M	J	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q
P	G	X	B	A	V	P	F	V	M	Z	J	B	T	B	E	B	M	I	P	P	P	P	P
M	I	H	O	M	E	W	O	R	K	F	H	T	S	G	V	I	M	B	C	C	C	C	C
H	U	E	R	A	S	E	R	I	P	A	P	B	Q	T	L	Q	U	C	C	C	C	C	C

BLACK ATHLETES WON A TOTAL OF 37 MEDALS ACROSS VARIOUS SPORTS AT THE 2024 PARIS OLYMPICS.

FEMALE BLACK OLYMPIANS CONTRIBUTED TO NEARLY 60% OF THE TOTAL MEDALS WON BY BLACK ATHLETES, WITH STANDOUTS LIKE SIMONE BILES AND SYDNEY MCLAUGHLIN-LEVRONE LEADING THE WAY.

THERE WERE ALSO CONTROVERSIES, SUCH AS JORDAN CHILES' BRONZE MEDAL BEING STRIPPED DUE TO A TECHNICALITY, WHICH SPARKED DISCUSSIONS ABOUT FAIRNESS IN JUDGING AND RACISM IN SPORTS.

BLACK OLYMPIANS REPRESENTED MORE THAN 30 COUNTRIES, REFLECTING THE GLOBAL REACH AND IMPACT OF THESE ATHLETES ON THE OLYMPIC STAGE.

4 WORLD RECORDS AND 5 OLYMPIC RECORDS WERE SET BY BLACK OLYMPIANS DURING THE GAMES, HIGHLIGHTING THEIR EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCES.

JULIEN ALFRED AND THEA LAFOND MADE HISTORY BY WINNING THEIR COUNTRIES' (SAINT LUCIA AND DOMINICA, RESPECTIVELY) FIRST-EVER OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALS.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, BLACK OLYMPIANS WON 5 MEDALS IN SWIMMING EVENTS, A SPORT WHERE THEY HAVE HISTORICALLY BEEN UNDERREPRESENTED.