

# THE BLACK LENS

AUGUST 2025 - VOL. 10 - ISSUE NO. 8

## FROM THE MARGIN TO THE CENTER

### JEWEL OF THE NORTH

Two Black entrepreneurs carve out space for ownership, community and legacy in Spokane

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

Tucked into a historic home in Spokane's Browne's Addition, Jewel of the North is more than a neighborhood gastropub – it's a declaration. A declaration of Black ownership, creative freedom, and staying power.

Co-owned by Brooks Thomas and A.J. Hansen, the restaurant

opened in May 2025 with a mission rooted in community and vision. Even the name reflects their intent: honoring the legacy of one of Spokane's oldest neighborhoods while signaling something rare and valuable in the Northwest – something distinctly their own.

Thomas, originally from Augusta, Georgia, moved to Spokane in 2000. His first job at D'Lish's



COURTESY

AJ Hansen on the left and Brooks Thomas on the right in front of Jewel of the North.

Hamburgers shaped his early view of entrepreneurship. Hansen, who came from Salt Lake City in 2018, met Thomas while

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build something of their own. Their journey wasn't born in See **JEWEL, 8**

### SPOKANE'S OWN MONA LAKE JONES

Healing with words, affirming Black identity

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Mona Lake Jones got her start as a renowned poet at the urging of Essence magazine in 1990. But truly, it was the nurture of Calvary Baptist Church and the Black Spokane community she grew up in during the 1940s and 1950s that gave her the sense of value, confidence, and cultural grounding we now hear in her warm, expressive delivery of poetic verse. Her words are like a balm – soft, wise

and affirming – a salve to the soul of Black identity.

On June 27, at the second annual Our Stories event at the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, Jones offered grace and affirmation during the poetry hour, a radiant moment of multigenerational connection. Now 85 years old, she stands as the Seattle and King County Poet Laureate and is often called “the Maya Angelou of the Pacific Northwest.”

When asked what it was like

See **JONES, 13**



Jacob Ruffin stands outside his BoxFit gym in North Spokane.

### Building more than boxers

Jacob Ruffin on purpose, motivation and discipline

By April Eberhardt  
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Before he became the owner of one of Spokane's most dynamic boxing gyms, Jacob Ruffin spent nearly a decade substitute teaching and coaching before leaning fully into his passion for training.

“I started boxing at 19,” Ruffin says. “My dad and uncles all boxed, and even though my mom didn't want us to have anything to do with it, it was in me. As soon as I left home, I said, ‘I can do what I want.’ And I went straight to the gym.”

That decision launched Ruffin into an amateur and professional boxing career and laid the foundation for a different kind of fight – one to help others. “I started out with an amateur boxing career back in 2000, 2001 – something like that,” he recalls. “Had several amateur fights, then decided to go pro. I didn't have a great career, but it was a career nonetheless.”

While earning his degree in

health and fitness education at Eastern Washington University – where he graduated in 2006 – Ruffin juggled substitute teaching, football coaching, and personal training, all while pursuing his dream in the ring. He spent nearly a decade working in Spokane-area schools before deciding to focus fully on fitness. “Since I was already in that field – wanted to be a teacher, wanted to be a coach – and then I was participating in boxing, I actually just transitioned from doing the school to just running a gym.”

Since taking ownership of BoxFit in 2021, Ruffin has grown it into a safe haven for aspiring fighters, everyday people seeking fitness, and youth in need of structure, discipline, and release. “Our business is all about fitness and activity,” he explains. “But more than that, we teach people how to better deal with life. Wanting to quit? Not feeling like you can do one more rep? Guess what – life doesn't let you quit. Neither do



#### More Information

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Ruffin's love for the sport is rooted in admiration for boxing legend Shane Mosley, who became his favorite fighter just as he was starting his own career. “I followed his career pretty closely and loved what he did,” he says. That admiration came full circle in 2023 when Ruffin

See **BOXERS, 8**



APRIL EBERHARDT/THE BLACK LENS

Mona Lake Jones speaks at the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture's Our Stories event in June.

### Everyday Mentors event at Liberty Park offered games for kids, adults alike

By Black Lens staff reports

On July 19, the Spokane community gathered at Liberty Park to celebrate the kickoff of Everyday Mentors, a grassroots initiative founded by Lee Lewis. The event featured a lively mix of activities designed to engage youth and families – from a slam dunk contest and three-point shootout to raffle prizes, a live DJ, and booths for various community organizations.

This was more than just fun – it marked the launch of a bridge built on core values of mentorship, empowerment, resilience, integrity, community, growth mindset,

and service.

Founder Lee Lewis, featured in the February issue of The Black Lens, shares his vision on everydaymentors.org: “Imagine a future where every young man, regardless of background or circumstance, is equipped with the resilience, confidence, and skills to lead a purpose-driven life.”

The event drew a wide array of attendees – mothers, sons, daughters, uncles, and neighbors – all united by a shared belief in connection and community support.

SEE MORE PICTURES OF THE EVENT ON PAGE 8



BREWCITY FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY

Everyday Mentors founder Lee Lewis speaks into the mic during a community event at Liberty Park. Malachi Isaiah Ford stands, at right.



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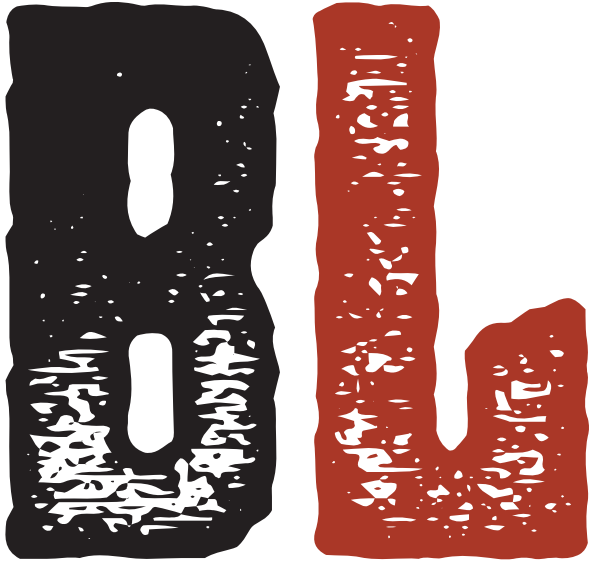


BREWCITY FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY

Everyday Mentors founder Lee Lewis speaks into the mic during a community event at Liberty Park. Malachi Isalah Ford stands, at right.



FROM THE MARGIN TO THE CENTER



NEWS

BLACKLENS.NEWS

NEWS IN BRIEF

1.4M of poorest renters risk losing homes with Trump's proposed HUD time limit

**WOODINVILLE, WASH.** – Havalah Hopkins rarely says no to the chain restaurant catering gigs that send her out to Seattle-area events – from church potlucks to office lunches and graduation parties.

The delivery fees and tips she earns on top of \$18 an hour mean it's better than minimum-wage shift work, even though it's not consistent. It helps her afford the government-subsidized apartment she and her 14-year-old autistic son have lived in for three years, though it's still tough to make ends meet.

"It's a cycle of feeling defeated and depleted, no matter how much energy and effort and tenacity you have towards surviving," Hopkins said in an article published by msn.com.

Still, the 33-year-old single mother is grateful she has stable housing – experts estimate just 1 in 4 low-income households eligible for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development rental assistance get the benefits. And now Hopkins is at risk of losing her home, as federal officials move to restrict HUD policy.

Amid a worsening national affordable housing and homelessness crisis, President Donald Trump's administration is determined to reshape HUD's expansive role providing stable housing for low-income people, which has been at the heart of its mission for generations. The proposed changes include a two-year limit on the federal government's signature rental assistance programs.

Trump tells Texas GOP to redraw state congressional map to keep House majority

**WASHINGTON** – President Donald Trump said July 22 he is pushing Texas Republicans to redraw the state's congressional maps to create more House seats favorable to his party, part of a broader effort to help the GOP retain control of the chamber in next year's midterm elections according to an article published by the Associated Press.

The president's directive signals part of the strategy Trump is likely to take to avoid a repeat of his first term, when Democrats flipped the House just two years into his presidency. It comes shortly before the GOP-controlled Texas Legislature is scheduled to begin a special session next week during which it will consider new congressional maps to further marginalize Democrats in the state.

Asked as he departed the White House for Pittsburgh about the possibility of adding GOP-friendly districts around the country, Trump responded, "Texas will be the biggest one. And that'll be five," reported the AP.

Trump had a call with the Texas' Republican delegation and told them the Legislature would pursue five new winnable seats through redistricting, according to a person familiar the call who was not authorized to discuss it.

Minority Women Enterprise program shuts down due to new anti-DEI law

As Tennessee makes official cuts to its DEI programming and funding, one program that broke gender gaps in Memphis will shut down, according to an article published by Black Enterprise.

As of this month, the Minority Women Enterprise program in Memphis has stopped operations. The program was a success, making Memphis the only city in the nation where women business owners outnumbered their male counterparts, reported Black Enterprise.

According to WMC Memphis, the closure is a result of a new state law that eliminated all DEI initiatives. The Dismantling DEI Departments Act went into effect July 1.

Before its shutdown, the program offered support and resources for this growing sector of entrepreneurs.

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NEWS

FROM THE BOARD

RECLAIMING OUR NARRATIVE – THE POWER OF BLACK MEDIA

Your story can help someone else while they're going through their story. Your voice can encourage someone else while they're trying to find their voice. Your experience can prepare someone else while they're gearing up to face their own.

Our stories have always mattered. From the griots of West Africa who passed down the stories of our ancestors, to the journalists, filmmakers, and poets of today, we have carried forward the responsibility of story-telling. Black media has never been just about reporting the news – it has been about protecting, preserving, and proclaiming our voice.

For too long, others have tried to narrate our stories for us, leaving out or devaluing the complexities of our struggle, the brilliance of our achievements, and the depth of our humanity. But Black media needs to...has to, push back, refusing to let our voices be silenced or twisted to fit someone else's lens. We



By Michael Bethely  
THE BLACK LENS  
BOARD MEMBER



must reclaim our stories, and in doing so, we will reclaim our legacies!

Our legacy is a powerful one. Generations before us fought for platforms where we could speak our truths without apology. They understood that a free Black press was not a luxury but a lifeline. It was – and still is – a shield against erasure and a megaphone for justice. It reminds us of who we are, where we come from, and where we are headed.

Every word we print,

**More Information**

If you have questions or would like to pitch an article or idea, please contact the editor of The Black Lens, April Eberhardt, at [april@blacklensnews.com](mailto:april@blacklensnews.com) or (360) 320-6449. Whether it's a topic suggestion, a community interview, or a human interest story within the Black community that you'd like to see covered, we welcome your input. If you have a piece of writing you'd like to submit for review, don't hesitate to reach out. We look forward to hearing from you.

every story we share, every video we make, or podcast we create. There is a thread woven into the vast tapestry of our collective experience. We do this work because we believe in us. We believe in our communities. We believe in our readers – those who pick up these pages looking for affirmation, connection, and hope. Your support and engagement breathe life into this mission, reminding us that our voice carries weight, that our legacy is worth preserving, and that our future deserves protection. Even if it's trying to be erased. So let us continue to reclaim our narrative, to

tell it boldly, honestly, and beautifully. Let us celebrate the everyday Black excellence happening in our neighborhoods, the resilience that shows up in our churches, our schools, our living rooms. Let us document our pain, yes – but also our joy, our laughter, and our triumphs.

To every reader who takes the time to turn these pages: thank you. You are not just an audience; you are a vital part of this legacy. Together, we hold up a mirror to our world, and we declare that our stories matter – yesterday, today, and for generations yet to come.

Washington attorney general leads lawsuits against Trump administration

Washington Attorney General Nick Brown is leading a coalition of 20 states in suing the Trump administration for unlawfully terminating the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program – a vital, bipartisan initiative that helps communities prepare for natural disasters.

For three decades, BRIC has funded critical pre-disaster mitigation projects like floodwalls, evacuation shelters, and infrastructure upgrades. The abrupt shutdown has jeopardized nearly 2,000 projects nationwide, including 27 in Washington totaling \$182 million – most of which support small towns and rural communities.

"This illegal cut endangers the communities most vulnerable to natural disasters," he said. "I will hold the Trump administration accountable for abandoning their safety."

The lawsuit argues FEMA's termination of the program violates congressional authority, federal law, and the Constitution. The coalition is seeking a court order to



MITCHELL ROLAND/  
THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

**Washington Attorney General Nick Brown speaks to reporters outside of the United States Courthouse in Seattle following a hearing on Feb. 28.**

stop the diversion of BRIC funds and reinstate the program.

AG joins suit to block bans on social services

Brown also joined a coalition of 20 other attorneys general in filing a lawsuit to stop the federal gov-

ernment from enforcing new rules that limit access to critical health, education, and social service programs based on immigration status.

The lawsuit challenges a sudden reversal in federal policy, issued early last month by multiple agencies, which requires immigration verification for services funded by programs like Head Start, Title X family planning, adult education, and community mental health centers. Critics say the changes could disrupt essential services for both documented and undocumented residents – including U.S. citizens who lack formal documentation.

"These notices are plainly intended to damage vital support systems and intimidate vulnerable people," Brown said, adding that the directives are unworkable and harmful to entire communities.

The coalition argues the rules were enacted without proper legal procedures and violate the U.S. Constitution by imposing funding conditions without state consent. The lawsuit asks the court to block the rules and restore long-standing federal practices.

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

The Black Lens is now accepting subscriptions!

The Black Lens staff reports

Over the last year, The Black Lens has been working diligently to transition into a sustainable nonprofit model – one that allows us to deepen our commitment to independent, Black-centered journalism rooted in Spokane's local community, while also intersecting with the larger Black community across the U.S.

We thank you for your patience as we've worked to develop this new iteration of the paper. Many have inquired about when subscriptions would be turned on, and we're happy to say: **we are now ready.**

This has been a careful, intentional process, and we're excited to take this next step with you.



To begin receiving The Black Lens delivered **directly to your mailbox**, simply **scan the QR code to complete the payment and delivery process.** This step en-

sures you're connected to the stories that matter most to our community.

**Your subscription is more than just a subscription – it's an investment in community storytelling.**

The amount is tax-deductible and directly supports the monthly production of the paper, as well as ongoing development efforts under The Black Lens' nonprofit model. By subscribing, you're helping sustain The Black Lens as a grassroots media resource, empowering the community to lead in telling our own stories.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Your support makes the mission possible.

With appreciation,  
The Black Lens Team  
[www.blacklensnews.com](http://www.blacklensnews.com)

THE BLACK LENS

Serving Spokane's Black community since 2015

IN MEMORY OF SANDRA WILLIAMS  
FOUNDING EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

THE BLACK LENS EDITOR & BOARD MEMBERS

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Michael Bethely, KJ January and Shamerica Nakamura

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About The Black Lens

The Black Lens is a nonprofit news organization funded through foundations, major donors, subscribers, sponsors and the community it serves. The stories, photos, graphics and columns created by The Black Lens are owned by the community it serves, and can be republished by other organizations for free under a Creative Commons license.

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The Black Lens newspaper is published daily online and monthly in print by Comma, a nonprofit community journalism lab. For information on Comma, or to make a donation, visit [www.blacklensnews.com/donate](http://www.blacklensnews.com/donate).

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.





NEWS / POLITICS

Local NAACP hosts Restorative Communities celebration

By From the NAACP Building Restorative Communities Leadership Team

A birthday celebration took place on July 17 at the Spokane Branch of the NAACP General Meeting, which we'd like to share with you, even though the cupcakes are already gone. Building Restorative Communities began with the vision of Kurtis Robinson and Rick Matters through the Criminal Justice Committee, and specifically through their simmering frustration at the countless ways the legal system dehumanizes and harms – rather than rehabilitates or transforms – people, specifically poor people and especially Black and Brown people. It's been said that our society responds to wrongdoing by



harming people in order to teach them that harming is wrong. Rick and Kurtis set out to pursue the alternative approach of restorative practices by expanding the conversation. Rick Matters gathered committed people like Kurtis, President Lisa Gardner, Inga Laurent, Jonathan Teeters and Julie Schaffer. After nearly a year of listening and envisioning, Building Restorative Communities was born. This initiative is not simply a strategy for incorporating restorative alternatives into a punitive legal system, but offers a “new” way derived from ancient roots to interact with ourselves

and one another. It represents a profoundly different way for organizations and systems to communicate and function. Restorative Justice is not only a different approach to relationships and an alternative for organization and systems, but is a different lifestyle. Restorative Practices originated in Indigenous societies around the world, including those in Africa. Even though specific practices vary in today's Indigenous cultures, the core principles are remarkably consistent. They honor the dignity of each person, maintain everyone's agency, and share power equally. They seek to bring individuals back into the community by restoring harms and healing hurts. They emphasize the accountability of each individual,

and in some cases familial and community accountability as well, and they hold sacred the wellbeing of the community. Their three Rs are Relationships, Responsibility and Respect. The vision of Spokane's NAACP Building Restorative Communities is, “to build more restorative communities by educating ourselves about the roots, principles, and values of Restorative Justice, and by creating spaces to put these into practice.” Over the past year we held over 30 free events where we provided both teaching and experience in restorative circle practices. We built relationships with individual leaders and with organizations, such as Everyday Mentors, Locked In Fathers' Alliance, YWCA, and Spokane Community College. We gave away

over 200 copies of two books, as well as offered seven online book study groups. Importantly, we raised nine wonderful ambassadors to support and further equip them to join us in spreading this work more broadly. We invite you to become restorative in words and actions to teach others and to build authentic communities, however small. Our long-term goal includes offering restorative alternatives to the legal system, but more importantly we seek to enrich lives and to prevent harm by incorporating restorative practices into our lives, neighborhoods and schools. Follow the Spokane NAACP, and join Building Restorative Communities Facebook and Instagram, or sign up for our newsletter at [brcspokane@gmail.com](mailto:brcspokane@gmail.com).

REFLECTIONS FROM THE ROGERS CIVIL RIGHTS TOUR



Rogers High School parents, staff and students stand in front of the childhood home of Dr. King on the historical Auburn Avenue in Atlanta.

By Black Lens staff reports

In June, students from Rogers High School embarked on a powerful, week-long Civil Rights Tour through the American South. Their journey included visits to the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park and museum, and Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta, The Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and 16th Street Baptist Church in Alabama. These sacred sites of memory, resistance, and transformation offered more than history lessons—they sparked reflection, emotion, and a deepened sense of responsibility. In a time when the teaching of Black history is being challenged or restricted in many parts of the country, experiential learning is more vital than ever. Civil Rights education is not just about the past – it equips young people to recognize injustice, stand in truth and carry forward unfinished work of equity and liberation. While textbooks can outline dates and legislation, real-world experience allows students to walk the paths of ancestors, touch the soil of struggle, and hear the echoes of voices that still speak today. What follows are personal reflections from the students themselves.

**What Will You Remember?**  
**Emmanuel**  
“It really felt connected to the history because it was more hands-on and right in front of me. One quote from Harriet Tubman that stuck with me – after seeing what the slaves went through – was her saying it was hell.”

**Toby**  
“I believe that I will forever remember the museum with the jars of dirt on the wall, from the places where they were lynched.” (At the Legacy Museum, founded by Bryan Stevenson, there were jars of different shades of brown – meant to represent the bodies and ashes of those who were lynched in the Deep South – placed on shelves to convey the magnitude and dehumanization of racial terror through the display of jars holding brown ashes. Learn more at [legacysites.eji.org/about](http://legacysites.eji.org/about).)  
**Meredith**  
“When we went to that small museum where the young lady toured us – she was the head researcher – and then the owner came through and said, ‘Before you judge anybody, just look at them and see that they're human.’”  
**Amari**  
“One thing I'll remember forever is learning that there were actually five girls in the church that was bombed, not four. I had always thought there were only four.”  
**Ella**  
“I learned that everyone is connected through history. My culture has a deeper story – one that wasn't meant to be told. What the government and school systems left out came to life in the art, sculptures, and museums. I'll always remember the friendships I made, the knowledge I gained about Black history, and even the bug bites! But overall, I'll remember how easy it was to connect with everyone and how much I grew.”  
**Kinton**  
“Birmingham bombings.”  
**How Will This Shape Your Future?**  
**Emmanuel**  
“It makes me feel like it only takes

like-minded and educated people to stand up for what's right. You have to recognize problems, bring awareness, and attack them in the most effective way. Like different leaders – Malcolm X, MLK, John Lewis – they saw problems and acted. It's about seeing something and doing something.”  
**Toby**  
“I feel like this will cause me to be more forgiving of things. I'd say I'd go to more protests, but I already go to all of them.”  
**Meredith**  
“I think it will influence me to see people more positively and realistically. Everyone goes through good times and hard times – it doesn't matter who they are. We've all been through something.”  
**A Thank You to the Supporters**  
**Emmanuel**  
“I want to thank you and my mom for making this trip possible [for me]. I want to thank Mrs. Dione for being our tour guide, for paying for food, and just being generous and genuine. The trip was not only fun but very informative. It opened my eyes to my history and gave me the hands-on experience I needed. I feel like this trip will help me in how I understand history and how I interact with others when it comes to race or racism. Mrs. Dione did a great job breaking down each place and showing us where to eat. She did a great job – job well done.”  
**Meredith**  
“I'd like to thank everyone who contributed to the Civil Rights Tour. It completely changed my view of history, the world, politics – everything. It really educated me the way I hoped it would. I'm less ignorant now, and more aware. I see the world in a better, more informed way. I'm so, so thankful.”



American novelist and editor Toni Morrison.

Toni Morrison's 10 steps toward FASCISM

This is an excerpt from Toni Morrison's speech delivered at Howard University on March 2, 1995.

- “... Let us be reminded that before there is a final solution, there must be a first solution, a second one, even a third. The move toward a final solution is not a jump. It takes one step, then another, then another. Something, perhaps, like this:
- (1) Construct an internal enemy, as both focus and diversion.
  - (2) Isolate and demonize that enemy by unleashing and protecting the utterance of overt and coded name-calling and verbal abuse. Employ ad hominem attacks as legitimate charges against that enemy.
  - (3) Enlist and create sources and distributors of information who are willing to reinforce the demonizing process because it is profitable, because it grants power and because it works.
  - (4) Palisade all art forms; monitor, discredit or expel those that challenge or destabilize processes of demonization and deification.
  - (5) Subvert and malign all representatives of and sympathizers with this constructed enemy.
  - (6) Solicit, from among the enemy, collaborators who agree with and can sanitize the dispossession process.
  - (7) Pathologize the enemy in scholarly and popular mediums; recycle, for example, scientific racism and the myths of racial superiority in order to naturalize the pathology.
  - (8) Criminalize the

enemy. Then prepare, budget for and rationalize the building of holding arenas for the enemy – especially its males and absolutely its children.  
(9) Reward mindlessness and apathy with monumentalized entertainments and with little pleasures, tiny seductions, a few minutes on television, a few lines in the press, a little pseudo-success, the illusion of power and influence, a little fun, a little style, a little consequence.  
(10) Maintain, at all costs, silence.  
In 1995 racism may wear a new dress, buy a new pair of boots, but neither it nor its succubus twin fascism is new or can make anything new. It can only reproduce the environment that supports its own health: fear, denial and an atmosphere in which its victims have lost the will to fight.  
The forces interested in fascist solutions to national problems are not to be found in one political party or another, or in one or another wing of any single political party. Democrats have no unsullied history of egalitarianism. Nor are liberals free of domination agendas. Republicans may have housed abolitionists and white supremacists. Conservative, moderate, liberal; right, left, hard left, far right; religious, secular, socialist – we must not be blindsided by these Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola labels because the genius of fascism is that any political structure can become a suitable home. Fascism talks ideology, but it is really just marketing – marketing for power.”

The face of immigration

**IN HIS WORDS**  
Stories about Black Americans and Black Immigrants, such as Haitians, often create division instead of unity in America. Instead of seeing our shared history of struggle, we're often set against each other. Now, more than ever, it's important for the Black American community to support Haitian Refugees and other Black Immigrants facing targeted and racist deportation threats. The situation in Haiti has become dire; rising

gang violence and political problems are forcing many to flee. Unfortunately, Haitian asylum seekers have frequently been treated poorly when seeking refuge, especially during the Trump administration. This administration has relentlessly targeted immigrants from Black and Brown countries. Haitian Immigrants now look to the Black American community for support. Our fight against systemic racism, economic hardship, and xenophobia is shared, and by coming together, we make our voices stronger

and resist the forces trying to keep us apart and impose their supremacist will. With the help of Allies and Black Americans, Haitians are experiencing mixed emotions following the extension of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. While many feel a sense of relief that they can stay in the U.S. without the threat of immediate deportation, uncertainty still looms over their future. Community advocates have highlighted ongoing pressures, including the



By Luc Jasmin  
THE BLACK LENS BOARD MEMBER



fear of deportation even for those who are naturalized citizens. The recent TPS extension follows a federal judge's ruling that

the Trump administration overstepped its authority by attempting to end the TPS program. Haiti's journey to becoming the first Black Republic in the world also serves as a historic reminder of the resilience of Black people. Founded in 1804 following a successful slave revolt against colonial rule, Haiti stands as a symbol of freedom and empowerment. Despite its historical significance, Haiti has faced challenges over the years, including exploitation and neglect by the international community. Today, the struggles of Black Immigrants and Black Americans are closely connected to this

legacy. The TPS extension only offers a reprieve and also highlights the need for broader support and solidarity within the black community. In a divided society, there is an urgent need for Black Americans to welcome Haitian Immigrants and Black Immigrants. Our strength comes from being united and Black Americans understand how to navigate and fight injustice in this country due to its specific historical oppression. Reach out to organizations like Creole Resources to figure out how to support Black immigrants! Let's fight the good fight and stick together!



HAPPENING AROUND TOWN

Stage Left Theater's 'Pass Over' to represent the U.S. at international theatre festival in Monaco

Black Lens staff reports

Stage Left Theater is proud to announce that its national award-winning production of "Pass Over" by Antoinette Nwandu has been invited to represent the United States of America at the Mondial du Théâtre, a world-renowned international theatre festival taking place Aug. 20-27 in Monaco. Directed by Malcolm Pelles and starring Spokane's Dahveed Bullis, Matt Slater and Dan Anderson, "Pass Over" received national acclaim

for its searing portrayal of systemic racism, brotherhood and survival, according to a Stage Left news release. This invitation places Spokane's 60-seat black box theater on the world stage alongside artists from over 15 countries. Joining the cast on this historic journey are Stage Left team members James Landsiedel, Holland Jones and Joy Simmons. "For a small, 60-seat theater in Spokane to be selected to represent the United States on a global stage is nothing

short of extraordinary," Bullis wrote in the release. "We're honored to bring international attention to our city and to share a story that speaks to both our local community and the world. Spokane is not just a place where good art tours – it's a place where great art begins. If this were a sports team heading to the world championships, the entire city would be behind it. We invite our community to rally with that same spirit and pride as we represent Spokane to the world." Through a series of



"Pass Over" actors Matt Slater and Dahveed Bullis rehearse at Stage Left Theater in downtown Spokane. "Pass Over" is going international in August.

community fundraisers, Stage Left has secured the funding to send a seven-person delegation to Monaco. Fundraising efforts are ongoing, and supporters are encouraged to contribute by donating at stagelefttheater.org.



Luc Jasmin, Michael Brown and Chauncey Jones attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Underhill Sports Court in Spokane Valley.

Why revitalization matters in marginalized communities

Underhill sport court renovation celebrated

By April Eberhardt  
BLACK LENS NEWS

Revitalization in marginalized communities is not just about beautification – it's about restoring dignity, equity and opportunity where systemic neglect and disinvestment have left lasting scars. For neighborhoods like Spokane's East Central, which was fractured by Interstate 90 in the 1960s and devastated by redlining, reinvestment is long overdue. Revitalization affirms that communities matter. When basketball courts are resurfaced, youth programs are funded, and safe, vibrant spaces are created, it sends a powerful message: your future is worth investing in. These spaces foster wellness, reduce crime, nurture connection, and help young people thrive. But more than anything, they show that equity means acknowledging harm and actively working to reverse it. On July 3, Spokane's East Central community celebrated such a step forward. The City's Parks and Recreation Department unveiled significant improvements to Underhill Park, including newly resurfaced basketball courts and the addition of pickleball courts. The project, made possible through broad community collaboration, marks a hopeful new chapter for a historically Black and underserved neighborhood. Garrett Jones, Director of Spokane Parks and Recreation, opened the ceremony by acknowledging the years-long effort and many partners who brought the vision to life. Spokane Park Board member Bob Anderson followed, highlighting the collaboration that made the project possible – including funding from the City, a Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office grant, Spokane Hoopfest Association, Dick's Sporting Goods, and NOLI. He also acknowledged vital support from the Spokane Eastside Reunion Association (SERA), East Central Neighborhood Council, Spokane Pickleball Club, general contractor Cameron Reilly Construction, and Sports Court Surfacing. City Council President Betsy Wilkerson knows this community well, it is here that set the path for her into city leadership

decades later. She moved to East Central in 1965, when her family settled on the corner of 4th and Altamont. She attended Edison Elementary, once located where the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center stands today. Though she left for college, she later returned to the same neighborhood to raise her family, highlighting the strong cultural ties and a deep sense of history that East Central holds, marking why reinvestment is so important. Families who have called this place home for generations deserve the same resources and opportunities as any other neighborhood in this city. Wilkerson shared, "We talk a lot about Liberty Park, but this is the other park in my life ... This investment is important for multiple reasons. First and foremost, the park functions as a key community space – something we can clearly see this morning. In a location that is often overlooked, this neighborhood is central. By offering modern facilities, we're creating opportunities for residents to stay active, connected, and to foster a true sense of community." A highlight of the event was the unveiling of a plaque honoring Michael Brown, a 65-year East Central resident and founder of the SERA. Brown's SERA Summer Camp has served generations of Spokane's youth, including 65 children this summer alone. The plaque, mounted on the fence surrounding the basketball courts, features one of Brown's favorite quotes by G.K. Chesterton: "People didn't love Rome because Rome was great. Rome was great because people loved her. And the East Side and Underhill Park are our Rome." Brown also shared his philosophy on service: "I love my community. And when we give without expecting anything in return, we truly understand what it means to serve." He closed with gratitude to local sponsors, the City, and longtime supporters, adding, "When people come together, that's the beginning. When people stay together, that's progress. But when we work together – that's success." As revitalization efforts continue across Spokane's East Side, Underhill Park stands as a symbol of what's possible when collaboration, love of place, and intentional equity come together. It's more than a renovation – it's a restoration of community pride, youth potential, and neighborhood belonging.

HONORING HERITAGE

Second annual 'Our Stories' event celebrates Spokane's Black legacy

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

On June 27, the second annual Our Stories: Black Families in Spokane event was held at the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, furthering a powerful community-led movement to preserve, share, and celebrate the rich legacy of Spokane's Black residents. The event was organized by Julie Serquinia, Rob Worstell, Marsha Rooney, and Linda Strong, who each played a vital role in curating a space for intergenerational storytelling, cultural reflection, and historical preservation. Serquinia, daughter of Jerrelene Williamson – author of African American Stories in Spokane – helped continue her mother's legacy by inviting the community to reflect on the people, families, and spaces that shaped Spokane's Black history. She shares: "I consider Spokane to be a very special city. Because the Black population is dispersed throughout the greater Spokane area, it can be easy to overlook our numbers. Events like Our Stories, the Genesis Awards, the annual Juneteenth picnic, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and many others are significant as they remind us of the power of coming together in community and solidarity to celebrate our shared history. These gatherings further solidify our presence here and reaffirm that we have always been a part of this community. My goal is to establish a museum and event space dedicated to the African American community in the Inland Northwest, providing a permanent location to collect, archive, and share our stories." Among the presenters was Ephraim Watkins, grandson of the late Rev. Happy Watkins, who shared heartfelt reflections on his family's deep-rooted ties to the city. James and Jerrelene Williamson spoke about the Breckenridge family legacy, while Todd Thompson and Joe Barrow highlighted the story of the Barrow family. Tracy Poindexter-Canton and Susan Poindexter presented the history of the Burnette family, one of Spokane's earliest Black settlers. Sandra Freeman also shared her family's contributions to the city's cultural and civic life. The program featured powerful poetry performances, including by Seattle Poet Laureate and Spokane native Mona Lake Jones, showcasing how Black art has long served as a vehicle for



Historian Jerrelene Williams, center, at the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture for the Our Stories event.

resistance, healing and cultural continuity. A moving tribute was also paid to The Lion's Den, a once-vibrant Spokane venue that served as a local counterpart to Harlem's Cotton Club. Its roots trace back to the 1920s, when a Black man from Tennessee named Ernest J. "E.J." Brown arrived in Spokane as a chauffeur. With the support of his wife Theo and a modest investment from his former employer, Brown helped build an enclave of Black culture and nightlife in the region. It began with the Sawdust Trail, a café in Spokane Valley known for its Southern fried chicken, barbecue ribs, and Theo's lemon meringue pies – flavors Spokane had never tasted before. In 1929, they launched The Pirate's Den, a 350-seat nightclub lit with neon signs that invited patrons to "Dine" and "Dance." By 1936, it became Club Harlem, a venue that echoed the glamour and soul of New York's famed Cotton Club. While the club primarily served white patrons during the week, Sunday and Monday nights were reserved for Spokane's Black community – nights filled with music, elegance, laugh-



Our Stories attendees pose outside the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture.

ter, and freedom. Club Harlem was more than entertainment; it was a sanctuary in a segregated city, a stage for local brilliance, and a cultural cornerstone. Even after a fire destroyed the club in 1951, its legacy endured – helping to send six of the Browns' seven children to college. Our Stories is part of a broader, ongoing effort to document and uplift Spokane's Black history – not just to honor the past but to strengthen connection, belonging, and pride across generations. As this year's event reminded attendees, wherever we are, we make a way.



BUSINESS / CULTURE

Make college athletes struggle again: Part 1

Trump’s NIL rollback is a step backward

By Edmond W. Davis  
OP-ED FREELANCE WRITER

In the wealthiest country on Earth – where nearly 24 million Americans are millionaires and 902 billionaires call the U.S. home – college athletes, not the ultra-wealthy in America (nearly 30% of the world’s billionaires, investopedia. CNBC reports that America’s millionaire population grew by 379,000 for a total of 23.8 million, the most of any country, according to a new study by UBS. With the idea of a fiscal cap by Trump, the U.S.’s 500,000 collegiate student-athletes face a looming financial restriction.

Current U.S. President Donald J. Trump has floated an executive order that would cap Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) earnings, citing concerns about fairness, amateurism, and preserving the “spirit” of college athletics.

But behind the politics lies something more troubling: a targeted rollback of hard-earned progress for student-athletes, espe-

cially those from under-resourced communities, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and non-traditional recruiting pipelines.

NIL didn’t break the system – it cracked open a long-sealed door. Now that door is at risk of being slammed shut. There are more millionaire college athletes than ever before. Last October, there were just 10 college student-athletes whose NIL earnings exceeded \$1 million, according to On3’s NIL deal tracker on Market Watch. That number grew to 24 during last season’s 2024 March Madness basketball tournament, and now sits at 34.

NIL: The Latest Battlefield for Economic Opportunity

The NCAA has profited for decades off the unpaid labor of student-athletes, particularly in football and men’s basketball, which account for the majority of its billions in revenue. In 2022 alone, the NCAA reported over \$1.3 billion in revenue. Student-athletes saw none of it. (ESPN)

The 2021 NIL reform changed that. It finally granted college athletes the right to earn income from their name, image, and likeness – something every other student on campus could

already do.

While the NIL system is still evolving, it’s one of the most significant steps toward equity in college sports in decades.

Trump’s proposal would:

- Reinstate the pre-2021 system of zero compensation

- Strip athletes of financial self-determination
- Penalize working-class students who depend on NIL deals for basic needs

Let’s be clear: NIL earnings aren’t just for flashy cars or viral TikToks. For most student-athletes, they cover rent, groceries, tuition gaps, transportation, and help fund small businesses. NIL is not about celebrity – it’s about sustainability.

NIL Disparities Are Real – But Progress Is Still Progress

Yes, there are gaps in NIL equity. White female athletes – especially in sports like gymnastics and volleyball – lead in NIL earnings, driven by strong social media presence and marketability, according to data from Opendorse and On3. Progress has also been made at the bench in 2025 as a federal Judge in California, Claudia Wilken, as noted by the Wall Street Journal, U.S. District Court rules in favor of a 2.8 billion NIL settlement as it was legally cemented that college athletes can get paid by the

colleges, thanks to Judge Wilken who approved this landmark deal. The Trump executive order could be in a position to nullify this historic progress in college sports. This move significantly reduces student-athletes’ chances of becoming financially emancipated. By limiting their ability to profit from their name, image, and likeness (NIL), Trump’s executive order funnels them back into a system of dependency. For those who don’t go pro or graduate, the implied fallback is a low-wage factory job, not financial flexibility. Ultimately, this policy doesn’t protect athletes; it protects billionaires. It strips financial independence from young athletes while safeguarding the same institutions and elites that have long profited from their unpaid labor.

Meanwhile:

- Football and men’s basketball players, predominantly Black and from working-class families, generate the most visibility but are underrepresented in endorsement dollars
- HBCU athletes earn less than 2% of total NIL funds

- Universities with massive donor bases and national media access dominate the NIL economy

Does this mean the system is broken? No – it means we need more investment and access, not

less opportunity. NIL today is what DEI programs were for academia: a first, imperfect step toward equity. Ironically, white women have disproportionately benefited from both DEI and NIL compared to Black and Brown athletes.

Flawed equity is still better than none. While flawed equity is better than no equity at all, the ongoing debate around NIL (Name, Image, and Likeness) deals reveals a persistent imbalance rooted in race and resources. For HBCUs – where over 75% of the student population is African American – the barriers are not just structural but historical. NIL opportunities have rarely flowed freely to these institutions unless your coach’s name is “Prime Time.” Before Trump’s threatened executive order, the NIL space already came with a caveat: if you’re a Black student-athlete with dreams of monetizing your talent, you’re more likely to succeed in the Big Ten, SEC, or other Power Five conferences than at a Jackson State or Grambling. This mirrors the pattern set in the 1960s, when desegregation – while morally and legally necessary – led to a migration of elite Black athletes from HBCUs to PWIs, gutting the athletic and financial engines of Black institutions and communities. NIL, like the Civil Rights

Act before it, opened the door – but it also created a new kind of exodus that continues to siphon talent, visibility, and funding away from Black colleges and the ecosystems that support them.

Next month, Part 2 of this article will examine the historical roots of economic injustice in higher education under the subtitle “Forgotten Foundations: Who Built These Campuses?” It will trace how more than 300 U.S. colleges –including every Ivy League school –were constructed and sustained by the unpaid labor of enslaved Africans and exploited workers, while their descendants were systematically excluded from attending them. This second installment will unpack how restricting NIL is not just a policy misstep – it’s a continuation of the long history of Black labor without Black profit.

*Edmond W. Davis is an award-winning university/college professor, international journalist, social historian, a globally recognized Tuskegee Airmen scholar, and the executive director of the National HBCU Black Wall Street Career Fest. He is the author of several books and a lifelong advocate for student achievement, educational equity, and emotional wellness.*

UNDERSTANDING HISTORY IS A DEEPLY HUMAN ENDEAVOR

Kyler Winston-Kendricks is a Gen Z champion of preserving Black stories

By April Eberhardt  
BLACK LENS NEWS

At just 20 years old, Kyler Winston-Kendricks is making her mark as a cultural curator and historian-in-training at one of Atlanta’s most storied institutions. As the Resident Intern Historian and Gallery Manager at the APEX Museum, she stands at the intersection of history, heritage, and hope – channeling her passion for storytelling into a mission to preserve the narratives too often left behind.

Kyler, a student at Georgia State University majoring in Africana Studies, didn’t begin her college journey with history in mind. Initially a general history major, she loved the subject and the research but felt a gravitational pull to learn what was not being taught. Then a professor encouraged her to switch majors.

“She told me I knew more about Black history as a freshman than some of the grad students,” Kyler recalls. That moment of affirmation shifted her academic path – and her purpose. “Africana Studies was a deeper path – one that called me to explore and preserve the stories of our people.”

Her introduction to APEX came during her freshman year when she cold-called the museum in search of an internship. “I came in that same day and started working,” she says. “I pretty much do it all – curating exhibits, running the gift shop, giving tours. My goal is to make sure people learn their history, no matter who they are.” She also credits Dan Moore Jr., the son of APEX Museum founder, as one of her mentors.

Founded in 1978 by filmmaker Dan Moore Sr., the APEX Museum – short for the African-American Panoramic Experience – sits quietly along the historic Auburn Avenue corridor. Its collection stretches from ancient African civilizations and

the Middle Passage to Civil Rights icons and Black inventors. It’s a space where history isn’t confined to textbooks but lives in the voices of its docents and the eyes of its visitors.

“APEX covers it all,” Kyler explains. “It doesn’t just stop at slavery. It shows how our history was interrupted – and how we’re reclaiming it. We were kings, queens, scholars, inventors – and we still are.”

As we talked about the Black American experience, she reflected on the transatlantic slave trade as a deeply human story – one that should resonate with everyone, regardless of background.

She is particularly drawn to lesser-known facts, such as the presence of Malian sailors in the Americas before Columbus. “There’s evidence of African explorers arriving in 1311. Columbus even wrote about seeing people with dark skin and woolly hair. We were here already,” she says.

Raised in a family that took road trips through the South and visited museums often, Kyler was exposed to historical storytelling early on. She wants students to grow up learning the full breadth of Black history. “In school, I never learned anything like what we cover at the museum. I had to find it on my own. The untold stories are more interesting than what the books give us.”

That sense of connection motivates her work. She emphasized again that if Black communities don’t take the lead in documenting and sharing their own narratives, those stories risk being forgotten or removed from the annals of time.

She values that the APEX Museum operates outside the constraints of conventional frameworks and dominant narratives, allowing it to present history in a more authentic and unfiltered way. The museum offers a rare freedom to tell stories from a perspective often overlooked



COURTESY

Kyler Winston-Kendricks at the APEX Museum.

– one that challenges, deepens, and reclaims the historical record.

Despite recent political efforts to silence or erase Black history through anti-DEI legislation, Kyler has witnessed an uptick in visitors to the museum – maybe even more than ever before.

She doesn’t take for granted that there are others – across backgrounds and generations—who want to learn Black diasporan history. For her, it is deeply meaningful to witness how much people care – especially when visitors are emotionally impacted by what they learn. Seeing their desire for truth affirms the importance of her work.

She recalls a moment when a woman broke down crying during one of her tours at the slave ship exhibit. “I don’t even remember exactly what I said – it’s second nature now – but something touched her soul,” Kyler says. “That’s when I knew this work mattered.”

Beyond the museum walls, Kyler is passionate about encouraging others—especially young people – to engage in historical preservation. She dabbles in genealogy, and her family has tagged her as their historian. She emphasizes the importance of simply being present with elders and listening. “If young people could just sit with their grandparents, even for two minutes—ask them questions, record them – it would make a difference. That’s how you preserve history.”

Kyler recently gave a class presentation ex-

ploring how history repeats itself, focusing on voter suppression during the Civil Rights era and its modern-day parallels. Drawing on figures like W.E.B. Du Bois, she emphasized that preserving and understanding history is critical to breaking harmful cycles. Without that awareness, she warned, “we’ll keep going in circles.”

She continues: “If we can take accountability for some of the missteps of the past, then we can grow from that.”

Looking ahead, Kyler has big dreams. “I want to teach people all over the world. Spain, Australia – wherever I’m needed,” she says. “I love what I do. APEX has opened so many doors for me. One day, I want to open my own museum.”

Her message is clear: history is not just about the past – it’s a tool for shaping the future.

She exhorts today’s generation once more: “Interview your elders, record their stories – even a quick TikTok can be powerful. Archive it in your files or the cloud.” Kyler reinforces that it doesn’t take much – just intention.

“Pretty much just make sure you learn your history,” she says.

She invites everyone to visit the APEX Museum – where she’s present year-round – because the journey of learning our history never truly ends.

*Learn more about the APEX Museum by visiting [www.apexmuseum.org](http://www.apexmuseum.org) or follow them on Instagram @theapexmuseum.*

Black culture is Black excellence

IN HIS WORDS

By Anthony Fain  
BLACK LENS NEWS

Black culture is Black excellence.

For years, I’ve wrestled with the question: What is Black culture? Is it the same as Black excellence – or merely different in name? Is there even such a thing as Black culture?

As a Black man growing up in America, I’ve asked others these same questions. Some offer thoughtful answers. Most pause, unsure of how to respond. And yet, when you ask people from other ethnic backgrounds about their culture, they often light up with pride. They speak with clarity, recalling traditions, foods, dances, languages, and beliefs passed down through generations.

But for African Americans, the story is different.

The trauma of slavery – inflicted at the highest levels and sustained over centuries – systematically stripped our ancestors of their language, customs, and spiritual practices. That cultural erasure wasn’t accidental; it was intentional. It was designed to break spirits and erase identity. And from this forced void, something remarkable began to take shape. Black culture, as we know it today, was born right here on American soil. After being stripped of everything they once knew, our ancestors began to create something entirely new. Over time, they became African Americans – simply Black – and from that pain emerged strength, creativity, and perseverance. A culture was forged in fire, yet still radiant and beautiful.

Black culture is the result of survival. It is the product of resilience in a land where the odds have been stacked against us. It’s what we built in the face of dehumanization, criminalization and marginalization. We created communities, music, fashion, language, art and social movements – all while told we didn’t belong, weren’t enough or didn’t matter.

That’s what makes Black culture not just valid, but extraordinary.

In the face of unimaginable hardship, we didn’t just survive – we thrived. We carved out joy, style, rhythm, and soul against a backdrop of struggle. We made something out of nothing, again and again.

Black culture is, in many ways, the blueprint for popular culture. From jazz, blues, and hip hop to fashion, slang, and dance, our influence is everywhere. And let’s be clear: this is no accident. Black culture

resonates because it is real. It is authentic, raw, and deeply human. It is born from pain, yes – but also from joy, love, faith, resistance, and an unshakable belief in tomorrow.

When I speak of Black culture, I am also speaking of Black excellence. They are not separate – they are intertwined.

Excellence is what happens when we rise above every barrier placed in front of us. It’s found in our

academics, artistry, athleticism, entrepreneurship, and activism. It shines in every field where Black people thrive – not because we were handed opportunities, but because we worked twice as hard for half as much.

This country has tried to suppress our progress at every turn. Systems were built to exclude us. Laws were passed to keep us down. Narratives were spun to demonize us. Still, we rose. And not only did we rise – we set trends, broke barriers, and redefined what leadership and brilliance look like.

We became the heartbeat of a nation that once denied us a seat at the table.

There is nothing more American than the story of the Black man and woman. We are the face of struggle, yes – but also of strength, triumph, and transformation. We are proof that beauty can emerge from brokenness and that hope can rise from hardship. That is the essence of Black culture.

So when I ask what Black culture is, I realize now – it’s everything. It’s pain and power. Rhythm and resistance. Fashion and faith. Protest and poetry. Hip hop and healing.

It is excellence – Black excellence.

Think of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who led with love and unshakable conviction in the face of hate. Think of Maya Angelou, who turned pain into poetry. Think of Serena Williams, who defied every stereotype on the court. Think of Michael Jordan, who globalized a sport. Or Malcolm X, whose self-determination empowered generations.

These are not just icons. They are living proof of what Black excellence looks like in action.

And beyond the famous names are countless others who never had the chance to let their light shine. This culture – created not by choice, but by necessity – has become a force that shapes not only America, but the world.

And in doing so, it affirms something I believe with every fiber of my being:

*Fain is president of the Black Prisoners Caucus at Airway Heights Correctional Center.*





EDUCATION

DR. TANISHA MORTON SHARES TIPS TO HELP FAMILIES PREPARE FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR

PEDIATRIC PERSPECTIVE PART 1

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

As part of a two-part series to help families prepare for the school year, The Black Lens spoke with pediatrician Dr. Tanisha Morton about simple, impactful ways to support children's well-being during the transition from summer to school. From resetting sleep schedules to fueling young bodies with nutritious meals, Morton emphasizes that preparation is key to academic success and emotional well-being.

Start With Sleep

"Sleep is everything," Morton says. "It impacts your emotional regulation, your ability to concentrate, and how you move through the world." She explains that when children don't get enough rest, it shows up in their mood, attention span, and patience. "You're short, irritable, unfocused, and emotionally off-balance. That's not just bad for school – it's bad for everyday life."

Morton recommends starting sleep adjustments two to four weeks before the first day of school. If bedtime has crept to 11 p.m., start dialing it back by 30-minute increments each night until reaching the ideal bedtime.

For teens, she offers the 3-2-1-0 rule as a structured wind-down approach:

3 hours before bed: No caffeine.

2 hours before bed: Stop academic work.

1 hour before bed: Turn off screens.

0 times to hit the snooze button in the morning: Get up right away to reset your clock.

She also encourages families to adopt calming bedtime routines—like warm baths or tea – and, if needed, use melatonin appropriately to reset disrupted sleep cycles. Dosage matters, she says: 1-2 mg for younger kids, up to 5 mg for middle schoolers, and 5-10 mg for adolescents. "But routine always comes first," she emphasizes. "If you're doing all the right things and still can't sleep, then we look at supplements."

Ditch the Energy Drinks

With sleep deprivation common among teens, many turn to energy drinks for a boost – something Morton strongly warns against. "The amount of caffeine and sugar in those drinks is alarming," she says. "They spike your heart rate and blood pressure, then cause a crash – and that crash disrupts sleep even more."

Prolonged use can create dependence, leading to headaches and fatigue when the caffeine is removed. "It's a short-term fix that causes long-term problems," she warns.

Eat With Intention

Summer often means

unstructured eating – grazing, skipping meals, and late-night snacks. But back-to-school schedules demand structure. Morton stresses the importance of eating at regular times, especially breakfast. "You don't need a five-course meal, but you do need fuel," she says.

Skipping breakfast can lead to a lack of focus in morning classes and overeating at lunch. It also creates long fasting periods that throw off energy levels and blood sugar balance.

"If a hot breakfast isn't realistic, go for grab-and-go options like a protein shake, granola bar, or yogurt," Morton suggests. "Anything with protein will help stabilize your energy and carry you through the world."

She reminds families that blood sugar regulation isn't just a concern for those with diabetes. "It matters for everyone," she says. "If you have sugar spikes and crashes, it impacts how your body functions – your focus, your mood, everything."

Know Your Numbers

Sleep and nutrition go hand in hand, but both depend on understanding what your child actually needs:

• Elementary students need 10-13 hours of sleep per night.

• Tweens need about 9-10 hours.

• Teenagers should get 8-10 hours.

Morton acknowledges that it may seem like a lot, especially for busy teens, but these numbers have remained consistent for decades. "We think we need less sleep now because we want to do more, but our bodies haven't changed. They still need rest."

Routine Changes: Get Ready

In addition to setting a proper sleep schedule, preparing for routine changes is another key part of gearing up for the school year. The shift from relaxed summer days to structured school schedules and extra-curricular activities can be jarring, so planning ahead helps ease that transition. Morton offers a comprehensive roadmap to ensure students are emotionally, physically, and practically prepared. From supply checklists and study spaces to health requirements and situational awareness, she provides valuable advice to support student success and family peace of mind. She shares the following tips.

School Supplies

Depending on the school, students may receive supply checklists that include items like notebooks, pencils, and folders. Morton encourages parents to review what's needed and not just focus on what's cute



– but what's functional. That includes backpacks. "Backpacks are not meant to be fashion statements – they're tools," she says. Improper wear (like carrying a heavy bag on one shoulder) can lead to back strain and joint issues.

Setting up a designated study space is another key step in back-to-school prep. "If your child's desk has become a summer gaming station, it's time to transform it back," Morton advises. Remove distractions, clean up leftover supplies from last year, and create a workspace that cues the brain for focus. Environment matters – visually and mentally. "The way you set a room helps set the tone for learning," she says.

Parents also need to plan for before- and after-school care. School schedules rarely align perfectly with parent work hours, so identifying trusted care providers or programs in advance is essential. "Do you know where your child is after school?" Morton echoes a classic public service announcement from the 90s. Communication, accountability, and knowing the adults in your child's environment are critical for safety and peace of mind.

She also emphasizes teaching children situational awareness. "Who your child is around can change the trajectory of their life," she says. From unsafe situations to peer pressure in social settings, children need guidance on making smart choices. "It's not about stalking your child – it's about knowing they're safe," she adds.

Don't forget the physicals. Whether your child plays sports or participates in gym class, schedule their sports physical ahead of time. Morton encourages parents to disclose full family health histories, as conditions like heart issues can be hereditary and sometimes require further screening. Avoid last-minute rushes by completing these early.

Back-to-school also means ensuring immunizations are up to date. Key vaccines include MMR, polio, and Tdap for younger students, and meningitis boosters for adolescents. "Check with your school to know what's required," Morton advises. Starting early helps avoid delays or missed days due to incomplete records.

If your child has asthma, allergies, or other chronic conditions, make sure schools have up-to-date action plans and medication administration

forms on file. "Schools can't give your child medicine without permission," Morton notes. That includes everything from EpiPens to Tylenol. Also be sure these health plans travel with the child on field trips.

Behavioral health plans are equally important. For students with ADHD, anxiety, or autism, IEPs and 504 plans can provide classroom accommodations and support. Morton stresses that these plans must be collaborative. "The school and parents must work together. You know your child best, and you have a voice at the

table," she says. IEPs typically focus on academic or developmental support, while 504 plans focus on behavioral or environmental accommodations.

Even for short-term needs like concussions or surgeries, communication is key. While these may not require long-term plans, informing the school helps staff support your child safely. Whether it's a return-to-play protocol or temporary classroom adjustments, early communication ensures everyone is prepared.

The transition from summer to school doesn't have to be jarring. With

a few simple changes – earlier bedtimes, mindful meals, and limited caffeine – families can ease into the school year with healthier habits and stronger routines. Preparation goes beyond pencils and paper.

"Your environment, your schedule, your support systems – they all matter," she reminds us. "Let's prepare our children in every way we can."

Join us for Part 2 of Pediatric Perspectives in September where Morton will discuss Mindful Media and Mental Wellness.



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Analeisa Mason



EDUCATION

Supreme Court greenlights dismantling of DOE

From staff and wire reports

The Trump administration can push forward with its plan to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education after the Supreme Court on Monday lifted a lower court ruling that had paused mass layoffs and temporarily halted President Trump's executive order calling for the agency's closure.

In an unsigned order, the Court allowed the administration to resume laying off nearly 1,400 employees, reinstating its March directive aimed at returning education responsibilities to the states.

"The United States Supreme Court has handed a Major Victory to Parents and Students across the Country," President Donald Trump posted on Truth Social, praising the decision and declaring that the process to "return the functions of the Department

of Education back to the States" could now begin.

Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, who previously called her "final mission" the elimination of the department, referred to the ruling as a "significant win." She argued the decision confirms the president's authority over federal staffing and agency operations. Layoffs that had been on hold are now set to resume, with many employees expected to be terminated by August 1.

While a full dissolution of the Department of Education—created by Congress in 1979—would require a legislative act and likely a supermajority in the Senate, McMahon confirmed the administration will continue transferring functions to other federal agencies, such as HHS, DOJ, and Treasury.

Supporters of the agency, edu-

cation equity advocates, and civil rights leaders have expressed deep concern over the Supreme Court's decision, warning of far-reaching consequences for students, families, and educators across the nation.

Potential Consequences of Dismantling the DOE  
1. Loss of Support for Low-Income Students

The department administers Title I, an \$18 billion program that supports schools serving low-income students. Dismantling could convert these funds into block grants, risking state-level diversion.

Impact: Up to 2.8 million students affected; 180,000 educator jobs at risk.

According to Judith Browne Dianis (Advancement Project), eliminating Title I would "exacerbate

the gap between the haves and have-nots."

2. Risk to Services for Students with Disabilities

The department oversees IDEA, providing \$15 billion in grants for special education serving 7.5 million students.

Trump has proposed transferring IDEA programs to HHS, which advocates argue lacks educational expertise.

The Arc warned this would revert progress on inclusion: "Students with disabilities don't belong in a medical model... they belong in classrooms."

3. Disruption of the Student Loan System

The Department currently manages \$1.6 trillion in student loans for 43 million Americans through Federal Student Aid and the FAFSA system.

Trump's plan moves loan ad-

ministration to the Small Business Administration (SBA).

Experts call this "a recipe for chaos," citing SBA's lack of capacity to manage educational finance programs.

4. Erosion of Civil Rights Enforcement

The Department's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) investigates discrimination in schools based on race, gender, disability, and more.

McMahon has closed 7 of 12 regional OCR offices and dismissed thousands of complaints.

LGBTQ+ students, students of color, and those with disabilities are expected to be hardest hit.

Gaylynn Burroughs, National Women's Law Center: "Without enough staff and resources, students will face more barriers to educational opportunity... The damage will be felt for generations."

To use AI or not?: That is the question

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming nearly every aspect of modern life—including how we teach and learn. In K-12 classrooms across the nation, AI is being introduced to enhance instruction, personalize learning, and improve student outcomes. While the benefits are exciting, educators and parents are also raising important questions about the long-term impact of AI on students' critical thinking skills and overall development.

On the positive side, AI-powered tools are helping to make education more inclusive and tailored. Adaptive learning platforms such as DreamBox, Khan Academy, and Century Tech analyze students' progress in real time and adjust the difficulty of lessons accordingly. This allows students to work at their own pace, helping struggling learners catch up and advanced students push forward. AI also supports teachers by automating administrative tasks like grading, giving them more time to focus on lesson planning and student engagement.

For students with disabilities or learning differences, AI can be a game changer. Text-to-speech and speech-to-text software, visual aids, and predictive text tools allow these learners to access curriculum in new ways. As AI technology continues to evolve, it has the potential to close achievement gaps and create more equitable learning environments.

However, not all impacts are positive. One of the growing concerns is how AI might affect the development of critical thinking skills—an essential ability for success in school and life. Critical thinking involves analyzing information, questioning assumptions, forming reasoned arguments, and solving complex problems. If students rely too heavily on AI-generated answers and solutions, they may miss out on opportunities to build these skills independently.

"We risk raising a generation of students who expect instant answers without the intellectual struggle that deep learning requires," says Dr. Karen Maldonado, an educational psychologist. "While AI can be a helpful tutor, it must not replace the thinking process itself."

To address these concerns, educators and parents can take active roles in reinforcing critical thinking both in and out of the classroom. For example, teachers can design open-ended projects and encourage classroom debates, which require students to evaluate evidence, consider multiple perspectives, and defend their conclusions. Assignments that ask "why" and "how" rather than just "what" can also stimulate deeper thinking.

Parents, too, play a vital role. They can foster critical thinking by engaging children in everyday problem-solving. Asking questions like, "What would happen if we did it differently?" or "Why do you think that happened?" encourages kids to think beyond surface-level answers. Reading and discussing books, exploring current events together, and even analyzing TV shows or games can all be opportunities for reflective dialogue.

Educators are also finding ways to use AI responsibly. Some schools are integrating AI into the curriculum in a way that encourages critical engagement rather than passive consumption. For instance, students might use AI to research a topic, then evaluate the reliability of sources or write counterarguments to AI-generated essays.

Ultimately, the role of AI in K-12 education will depend on how thoughtfully it is implemented. With careful guidance, it can enrich learning while still preserving the fundamental goal of education: teaching students how to think, not just what to know.



By Dr. Sharah Zaab  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



MARY JANE MCCOY HONORED WITH DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS

Educator, community servant celebrates legacy of educational leadership

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

Longtime educator and community servant Dr. Mary Jane McCoy was recently honored with a Doctor of Humane Letters, celebrating a lifetime of leadership, service, and advocacy in education. The distinction was conferred on May 17 by California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB)—the very institution where McCoy earned her undergraduate degree as a member of its first graduating class in 1967, making her one of the first Black women to graduate from the university.

McCoy was born in West Chester, Pa., and raised in Brooklyn, N.Y. A pioneering figure in both the military and education sectors, she worked in the early U.S. missile program at Norton AFB during the 1960s, holding top secret clearance during the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Her distinguished career in education spanned classroom teaching, administration, and leadership in desegregation efforts within the San Bernardino School District. She later earned a master's degree and administrative credential from Pepperdine University.

After relocating to Spokane in the 1990s, she continued her service through the "One Spokane" program and was appointed to a state commission by Governor Christine Gregoire to advocate for displaced students. She is the namesake of a scholarship supporting students facing financial hardship, and her numerous recognitions include an NAACP Certificate of Life Membership and inclusion in Who's Who Among American Women.

She and her husband, Ed-



COURTESY PHOTO

Mary Jane McCoy speaks as she hears her doctor of humane letters.

gar McCoy, have been married for 68 years and are the proud parents of two daughters, with five generations of family to their name.

She cites receiving the doctorate as a deeply fulfilling moment in her life's journey.

Reflecting on her time as a college student during the era of integration, McCoy shared the challenges of being a 32-year-old Black woman in a shifting academic landscape.

"I remember one professor teaching about the Korean War," she said. "I had lived through it—I was married during that time. He was still in high school then, so I corrected him in class. He didn't like that."

When final grades came in, she noticed she had been given a C, while a classmate she

studied with — who had nearly identical answers — received an A.

"We both went to the college president and showed our papers," she recalled. "The president told the professor, 'Either give them both a C or both an A. But it has to be the same.' He changed the grade. I got the A."

In addition to her bachelor's degree in history from CSUSB, McCoy earned two master's degrees from Pepperdine University—one in education and the other in administration—while raising a family and breaking through racial barriers in higher education.

Her favorite part of being an educator?

"Seeing the expression on a child's face when they finally understand. I always told

them, 'Once you learn something, nobody can take it away from you.'"

McCoy also remains deeply rooted in service through her lifelong involvement in organizations like The National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, Incorporated; The Links, Incorporated; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated; and the NAACP. She shared that whenever she sees a need, she naturally steps up to help—it's part of who she is.

Her message to the next generation:

"Join something. Be of service. And don't quit—because if you don't quit, you win."

Now approaching her 91st birthday in August, Dr. Mary Jane McCoy's journey stands as a testament to perseverance, purpose, and Black excellence.

Equity in online learning: Bridging the digital divide

The rapid growth of online learning has transformed education by offering flexibility, personalized learning, and global access to knowledge. Students can now learn at their own pace, revisit materials, and connect with educators and peers from anywhere. However, this shift has also exposed—and sometimes worsened—existing disparities in access and equity. Ensuring that all learners, regardless of socioeconomic status, location, or ability, can benefit from online education remains a critical challenge.

A key concept in this discussion is the difference between equality and equity. Equality means giving every student the same resources, while equity recognizes that students have different needs. In online learning, equity involves tailoring support so that every learner has a fair chance to succeed. This could mean providing assistive technology, language support, or internet access to those who need it most.

One of the biggest barriers to equity is the digital divide. Many students, especially in rural or low-income areas, lack reliable internet or appropriate devices. Some families share a single device among multiple children, making consistent participation difficult. Even when technology is available, not all students—or educators—have the digital skills to use it effectively. Without proper training, the benefits of online learning can be lost.

Accessibility is another concern. Many platforms don't meet accessibility standards, making it hard for students with visual, auditory, or cognitive impairments to engage fully. Language and



By Dr. Shantara Smith  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



cultural differences can also make content less relatable or harder to understand, especially if it isn't inclusive or localized.

Fortunately, online education has evolved to include more support personnel than in the past. Today's virtual schools often employ not only teachers but also guidance

counselors, principals, academic advisors, and marketing or outreach teams. These professionals help students with course planning, emotional support, and navigating enrollment. This broader network helps ensure students and families don't feel isolated and can access the help they need.

To address ongoing challenges, a multifaceted approach is essential. Infrastructure investment is key—governments and institutions must expand broadband access and provide devices to underserved communities. Online platforms should follow universal design principles to ensure accessibility for all learners, including features like screen reader compatibility and captioned videos.

Curriculum developers should also create culturally responsive content that

reflects diverse perspectives. When students see themselves represented in the material, they're more likely to feel engaged and valued. Teachers need ongoing training in digital tools and pedagogy to support diverse learners effectively. This includes learning how to manage virtual classrooms, facilitate discussions, and identify students who may be struggling.

Community partnerships can also play a vital role. Libraries, community centers, and nonprofits can provide students with access to technology, quiet study spaces, and academic support. Schools can also use data analytics to identify students at risk of falling behind and offer timely, targeted interventions.

Flexibility is another important aspect of equity. Families have different schedules and responsibilities. Some students may need to take classes early in the morning to accommodate sports or other activities, while others may need to log in during evenings or weekends due to work or parenting duties. Equity means allowing for flexible learning schedules that meet students where they are. Traditional school hours don't work for every lifestyle, and online learning has the potential to adapt in ways that in-person schooling cannot.

Ultimately, equity and access in online learning are not just about technology—they are about justice, inclusion, and opportunity. As digital education continues to evolve, we must design systems that uplift every learner, regardless of their background. Only then can we truly harness the transformative power of online learning and ensure that no student is left behind.



# FROM THE FRONT PAGE

## JEWEL

Continued from 1

a boardroom but forged in the trenches – serving, cooking, mixing drinks, and watching others run businesses. But it wasn't just about food. It was about redefining the narrative they'd both grown up with. We reflected on the familiar message many in the Black community grew up hearing – the “good job with benefits” synopsis. While that guidance was rooted in survival and stability, and helped push the Black community to the middle class, it often leaves little space for creativity or the pursuit of ownership. Jewel of the North is their response – a new blueprint for Black ambition grounded in faith, risk, and strategic vision. Having decision-making power and autonomy, they

each say, is the best part of it all. “The freedom to build something from the ground up has been the most rewarding part.” “Now we get to call the shots,” Hansen says. “It's our music, our menu, our vibe. And when things go wrong, it's on us. But when they go right? That's ours too.” Brooks adds, “People come in and say, ‘This is my first time on this side of town.’ That tells me we're shifting something.” “We're not knocking stability,” Brooks says. “But we want to show there's more than one path. And that path might lead to legacy, not just a paycheck.” Creating a culture of exploration within the Black community empowers young people to pursue new paths, take risks, and build rather than simply participate.

“Let them dream,” Hansen urges. This pair's journey into entrepreneurship is about challenging that script and proving there's another way forward. The two started their LLC in January, signed the lease for the building in February, and opened by May. Their progress was fast, but far from easy. Navigating permits, building a team, and managing operations required long hours, flexibility, and a lot of faith. They are transparent about the challenges. From staffing to managing the logistics of business ownership – it's a constant learning curve. “Navigating permits, managing operations, and finding staff came with stress, sacrifice, and sleepless nights.” “There were arguments, tears, stress – but also joy,” Hansen says. But they emphasize resil-

ience: “You've got to train your stress muscle,” says Hansen. “It's not easy – but it's worth it.” Their advice to aspiring entrepreneurs is grounded in both realism and encouragement: commit to your vision. Build your community. Be willing to work through fear. This is the work of purpose and legacy. Support from Spokane's Black community made a critical difference. Pastor Amos Atkinson, the Small Business Resource Network (SBRN) Program Specialist at the Carl Maxey Center, helped guide them through the startup process – connecting them with resources, support, and the professionals who helped create their employee handbook. Atkinson's work emphasizes the importance of ownership and provides foundational support for aspiring entrepreneurs looking to launch LLCs

or navigate city systems. Thomas and Hansen's experience underscores how trusted networks within Spokane's Black community can generate ripple effects – one connection leading to another, building something sustainable. Inside the gastropub, the atmosphere mirrors that mission. With a full-service bar, curated playlists, and cozy outdoor seating, Jewel of the North feels like a familiar front porch gathering – laid back, welcoming, and rooted in care. “We're not trying to reinvent the food scene,” Thomas explains. “We just want to offer good food, good energy, and a space that feels like home.” Representation matters – and for them, visibility in Spokane's business landscape is non-negotiable. Their presence challenges assumptions about what's possible here. To those

who think Spokane isn't a place for Black excellence, Thomas insists: give it time. “We're building, and we're not going anywhere.” Looking ahead, the two envision growth, spin-offs, and mentorship. This isn't a one-time venture – it's the start of something bigger. They hope to create generational wealth not only for themselves but for others coming behind them. “This is just our foot in the door,” says Brooks. “The sky's the limit. We're trying to create generational wealth – not just for us, but for the people coming behind us.” And as Jewel of the North continues to draw customers, collaborators, and community members alike, its founders remain committed to the simple truth that started it all: You don't need everything to be perfect. You just need to start.

## BOXERS

Continued from 1

had the opportunity to spar with Mosley during a visit to Spokane – an experience he describes as unforgettable. He recalls how down-to-earth Mosley was – not using his fame to elevate himself, but showing up with a genuine willingness to engage with the community and be part of the action. The gym has trained national champions and welcomed UFC fighters like Juliana Peña and Michael Chiesa, but Ruffin's heart remains with those who come in not to fight professionally – but to fight through life. “A lot of our members are just looking to get in shape, manage stress, or find confidence. When people are frustrated, they come in here and bang on a heavy bag instead of acting out. That's real therapy for some of us.” As an entrepreneur, Ruffin knows that visibility matters, drawing from

his own upbringing in Tacoma where 30–40% of his teachers were Black. Having Black coaches and educators throughout his school years made a lasting impact. It was the familiarity that fostered connection and confidence – something he strives to model for young people in his own gym today. That connection, he says, builds confidence and shows them what's possible. Entrepreneurship wasn't Ruffin's original plan, but it became his calling. “I had no business background – just instinct and a circle of peers I could learn from. I read, I watch, I ask questions. But the biggest thing is discipline. Motivation fades. Discipline keeps you going.” He approaches entrepreneurship through a lens of personal development and self-discipline. To stay grounded, Ruffin follows a daily routine of citing daily iterations of gratitude and inspirational content to set the tone for the day. Even with 60-hour weeks, learning how to balance bookkeeping, and

managing training schedules, Ruffin wouldn't trade it. Instead he leans in. “To me, entrepreneurship means I'm in control of my future. I'm building something for my family, for my community, and for the next generation.” From hosting Hard Sparring events that bring boxing legends like Shane Mosley and James Toney to Spokane, to mentoring troubled youth who walk into the gym searching for more than just a workout, Ruffin expresses that you have to have purpose. “If you don't feel like you're working toward something, that's where the anxiety and depression creep in. Purpose gives you direction. And I want this gym to be a place where people find that – for themselves.” For him, ownership means autonomy, responsibility, and investing fully in a future he's shaping for himself and his family. “If I wasn't getting paid to do it, I'd be doing it anyway,” he says. “That's how much I love it.”

## EVERYDAY MENTORS, CONTINUED:



BREWCITY FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTOS


Everyday Mentors' Liberty Park event include a slam-dunk contest and a three-point shootout. Above, Prestyn Martin grabs a ball to play.



Brandon Fisher makes a shot at the Everyday Mentors event.




Amera Jones moves quickly on the Liberty Park basketball court.

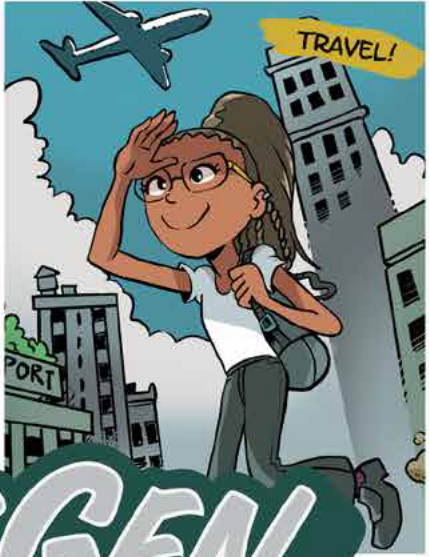


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# Running Start is a good jumpstart to the rest of your education or career

I was in elementary school when I first heard about Running Start, an opportunity to go to college while also finishing high school. It sounded amazing back then, and when the time came to consider it, I was eager to take a small step into the future I'd always envisioned for myself.

Running Start is a dual enrollment program that lets you attend both high school and college – like SCC, SFCC or EWU – at the same time. You can split your classes between both or go full-time at the college, either online or in person. Some students finish with their associate's degree by graduation, while others just get a head start on college credits. College runs on a three-quarter system compared to high school's two semesters, and Running Start pays for up to three college classes per quarter, excluding summer quarter, which covers two paid classes.

Since I want to eventually get my master's degree, Running Start felt like a perfect way to fast-track that goal. Plus, the colleges offered classes my high school didn't – like Intercultural Communication, Health & Wellness, or even something as simple as yoga.

One thing that scares a lot of students away is the idea of missing out on their high school experience. When I was deciding, I thought free college was worth giving that up, but it was still a hard transition. I wanted to be around my friends, go to school events, play sports, and do everything I used to, but the workload from college made it difficult. I had to start holding myself accountable and making choices about what really mattered. Eventually, I let go of certain things and shifted more fully to the college experience, joining clubs like BSU and LASO that my high school didn't have.

College classes come with a mix of students – older adults, other Running Start kids, and everyone in between. It was tough at first to connect with people who were so different, but clubs and engaging with my professors helped me adjust. I ended up enjoying being at the college more than at my high school. My high school is predominantly white and not very inclusive, so being a part of the BSU at SCC was huge for me. Even classes like Intercultural Communication gave me a wider range of diversity and insight. We shared and learned customs and experiences from different cultures, and it was something I really enjoyed.

Besides the diversity, college helped me grow in ways high school never did. I built better habits and dropped bad ones. I learned time management, accountability, adaptability, communication, leadership, and more in just one year than I did in three years of high school. I was surrounded by ambitious people chasing goals, having real conversations that I had never experienced in my high school environment.

Running Start also helps financially. College is expensive, and starting with two free years is a huge jumpstart. But it came with sacrifices, too. I had to give up some of my sports and a portion of my community work. I stepped down from



By Mya Jefferson  
WEST VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL



my council positions, missed programs I had signed up for, and struggled to balance school with practices. I ended up missing a lot of volleyball and decided not to play basketball so I wouldn't burn out. I managed for the team instead, but even that became hard to commit to fully. I still made time for things like prom and homecoming, but it was hard letting go of the day-to-day high school life. I isolated myself a bit from my old friends and from the school in general.

If I could go back, I wish someone had told me how important it is to let go of what's not helping you grow. I tried to do everything at once, but that led to burnout. I held on to people and routines that didn't support me, and that made the transition harder than it needed to be.

If you're thinking about Running Start, my biggest advice is: stay involved, don't procrastinate, and go to every class. College grades depend on actual work, and your attendance is part of that grade – unlike in high school. You can't afford to miss lectures or quizzes. Keep both your high school and college counselors updated. They're the best support when it comes to managing credits and graduation requirements. Use office hours, read your syllabus, and have a plan. Organization is everything.

Anyone can succeed in Running Start if they're prepared and self-motivated. It gives you freedom, but that freedom requires responsibility. I didn't have all the traits to make me compatible with Running Start going in, but the process helped me grow into someone who could handle it.

If you're looking for your full high school experience, Running Start probably isn't for you. But if you're ready to explore college early, you have to be willing to shift your priorities. Running Start helped me gain so much confidence, independence, and clarity about who I am and what I want.

That's why I've decided not to continue it for my senior year. I'm going back so I can fully enjoy my last year, and because I want to take everything I've learned and experienced and use it to make an impact at my school. I can give more of my time to the things that matter to me that I wouldn't have been able to while doing Running Start – like starting a BSU at my high school, playing sports, being present with friends, continuing my community work, and preparing for college. I'm finishing my senior year in a way that feels right for me.

If you're thinking about Running Start, don't be afraid to take the leap. It challenged me in ways I didn't expect, but it gave me everything I didn't know I needed.

## YOUTH CONNECTION

# A GOD THAT NEVER FAILS

God's timing is the best timing.

I am who I am because of what I went through.

Why should I doubt when he always comes through?

Keeping faith is becoming very hard in this world we live in. Life seems stagnant, and nothing seems to be going right, and I totally understand. It is hard to hold onto God's promise when all we see are our losses and our pain but one thing for sure is that the Lord I serve always comes through and he is never late. I came from a very tough place where I had no other choice but to hope and trust in Jesus Christ. I often felt left behind because all my friends seemed to have everything all figured out when I at times had no idea how I was going to come back from school.

The sad thing about my situation was that some of my friends thought everything was going great for me, the only people who truly knew how my family was struggling financially were quite a few and most of those people could barely help. With all this going



By Anesu Whacha  
SHADLE PARK HIGH SCHOOL



on the best we could do as a family was pray and we prayed hard. I would often feel like God could not hear our cries of help and that he could not see our tears because why were we suffering?

There is this saying that says that "EVERY SETBACK IS A SETUP FOR A COMEBACK" and my life is a true testimony of that. Every single time I have felt like I have been falling behind and not progressing in life God has always shocked me with something way better than what I had been expecting.

An example of that is my family relocating to the United States. No one ever thought that this could happen, but Jehovah does not think and operate like us mere humans. Another thing about God is that he does not do things in stages because he is God. When he led us to the United States, he did not leave us, and his word clearly states in Deuteronomy 31:8 that "it is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

It can be scary when you move to a place you have never heard of and know no one there but if God says go, he has a plan. The Lord was on our side, and he still is. Moving to Spokane was a life changer for me and my family but one thing we did not do and will never do is get too comfortable. We know what situation we came from back home and that motivates all of us to stay on top of everything.

I am proud to say that my sisters and I are all honor students and that we are all involved in the com-

munity and participate in extra-curricular activities. Everything we do has a purpose, and thanks to God I am going to be serving as Shadle Park's 2025-26 ASB President and the First Miss Juneteenth Spokane whilst my sister is going to be serving at the Class of 2027 Vice-President, these achievements are theoretically impossible knowing that we have only been at the school for a year but all things are possible with God. The Lord Our God did not only bring us out of the depths of financial hardships, but he also stayed with us and continues to work within us.

As humans we are weak, and we possess no strength so we should put our hope in Jesus Christ and let him use his Strength in us for if God is for us who can be against us? (Romans 8:31). I have tried doing things my way but trust me I have always went back crying to God and as the loving and forgiving father he is, he welcomes me back. I am unashamed to say that Jesus Christ is my only Lord and Savior.

God bless you all and Glory to God.



Artwork by Black Lens contributor Claudia Musesambili.

# CHECK ON YOUR STRONG FRIENDS

By Mufaro Whacha  
SHADLE PARK HIGH SCHOOL

As a teenager, I know I've only had a small taste of life. But even in my few years, I've learned something powerful: people will often see you not as you are, but as the version of you they want to see. A preacher at church gave a sermon about this months ago, but it really struck me just recently.

People tend to label you as good, bad, or what they consider "normal." They overlook your flaws or ignore your strengths just to shape an image that fits their expectations. What's unsettling is that this often comes from the people closest to you – your own family.

To anyone who's lost friends or family members to "strangers," it might be because that stranger saw something in them that you didn't. And to those who have found comfort in strangers – it's not your fault. Sometimes you feel more connected to someone new because they make you feel understood. And that's okay.

It's also not your fault if your joyful, lively friend is secretly battling anxiety or if you didn't notice. Or if your always-joking sibling is quietly struggling with thoughts of ending it all but won't open up – because they're scared that doing so might break you, too. They're trapped between two realities: the version you see and the one they live through silently.

We often don't realize how hard it is for someone to open up when we've



By Mufaro Whacha  
SHADLE PARK HIGH SCHOOL



already set expectations about who they should be. I've caught myself doing both – seeing the real side of someone and sometimes choosing to ignore it just to keep the peace in the relationship.

But we can do better. We should try to support each other more, especially through platforms like social media where so many people silently cry for help. We need to spread awareness and create safe spaces for those who feel unseen. I'll never forget the girl I once thought was the happiest person I knew. She ended her life last year because she didn't feel mentally safe. That memory stays with me.

It's not always easy to see through someone's pain, but it would make a big difference if older generations shared wisdom and tools to help younger people cope with mental distress. We all face it at some point in our lives. The more we understand one another, the more healing we can bring.

# The difference between being African and being African American

The terms African and African American may sound similar, but they carry distinct identities, histories, and experiences. While both are connected by shared ancestry and the African continent, the way this connection is lived, remembered, and expressed can be very different.

## Cultural Roots and Heritage

Africans are people born and raised on the African continent. They grow up deeply immersed in their specific cultural traditions, languages, and customs. Whether it's through food, music, religion, or family dynamics, African identity is rooted in a strong sense of community and homeland. Africans know where their grandparents are buried, the stories of their ancestors, and the meaning of their ethnic names.

African Americans, on the other hand, are descendants of enslaved Africans brought to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade. As a result, many African Americans have lost direct ties to their ancestral homelands. Their culture has evolved uniquely – blending African traditions with the painful legacy of slavery, segregation, and resilience in America. Their history is marked by struggle, triumph, and a continuous search for identity in a country that often marginalized them.

## The Experience of Identity

Being African often comes with pride in one's country, tribe, or region. But when Africans move to America, they may face stereotypes, discrimination, or even tension with African Americans who feel that Africans view them unfairly.

African Americans, meanwhile, have a different journey. Their blackness is central to



By Jenny Musesambili  
SHADLE PARK HIGH SCHOOL



their identity in America, often defined by resistance to oppression, pride in the civil rights movement, and deep cultural contributions in music, art, and politics. Some African Americans may feel a longing to connect with Africa, but lack the resources or knowledge to do so. Others may struggle with being seen as "less African" by those who immigrated more recently.

## Shared Challenges, Different Contexts

Despite the differences, Africans and African Americans face common challenges: racism, discrimination, and cultural misunderstanding. However, the way these challenges are experienced can differ. African Americans often carry the generational trauma of slavery and systemic racism in America, while Africans might be navigating a new cultural landscape after immigration.

## Moving Toward Unity

Instead of seeing these identities as separate, there is power in embracing the shared roots and recognizing the beauty in both stories. Understanding the difference helps build respect. Unity comes from listening to each other, learning from each other, and standing together in pride.



WELLNESS

BLACK GENEALOGY

Finding ancestors in Audubon’s Happy Land

By Patricia Bayonne-Johnson  
THE BLACK LENS

The 42nd Annual Audubon Pilgrimage was held from March 15-17, 2013, celebrating John James Audubon’s time in West Feliciana Parish. Six plantations opened their doors to visitors, five of which were connected to the Stirling family: Wakefield, Catalpa, Beechwood, Oakley, and Rosedown. We planned to attend the pilgrimage on March 15, 2013, the first day.

Fast forward to March 15, 2013. It took about 90 minutes to drive from New Orleans to the West Feliciana Historical Society Museum in St. Francisville, Louisiana, to buy tickets for the plantation tours. We started with Wakefield Plantation, where my paternal ancestors had been enslaved.

The Wakefield Plantation is located at Hwy 61 and Mulberry Hill Road. From the highway, we veered right onto a road leading to the plantation. When the antebellum home appeared, we were captivated by its appearance. It has only one story! The branches of the oak trees formed an arch above the road, blocking the view of the roof. In 2012, we hadn’t driven far enough to see the entire house. I later discovered that the roof was lifted to remove the second story, then lowered back onto the remains of the first. The second-sto-



The Wakefield Plantation in Louisiana.

ry hall created a central dormer, and windows were added to both the front and back. The heirs divided the second story into two separate houses. Sadly, both of the partitioned houses later burned down.

After parking the rental car, we walked to the house where we were greeted by a guide on the verandah. She shared the history of Wakefield and explained the rules for entering the house. No photos were allowed, whether with or

without flash. The guide also mentioned that her great-grandmother was born on the plantation. I thought, “So was mine.” She didn’t mention the enslaved people who lived on the plantation. I made a mental note to talk to her after the tour.

We entered the vestibule and saw a stunning Madagascar mahogany staircase; the guide explained that the handrails and banister were hand-carved by enslaved artisans. This was

the first time the enslaved people were mentioned, and it would be the last.

Every room had a guide who gave a brief overview of the furnishings and their history. After hearing two presentations, I realized the guides weren’t planning to discuss the enslaved people on that plantation. The parlor was next. Before the guide could speak, I asked her to identify the picture on the wall. It was Lewis Stirling, the slaveholder; I recog-

nized Stirling from my research and just wanted confirmation. I shared my family’s story, who had been enslaved at Wakefield. She was very interested and said they knew nothing about the slaves. She gave me her address and phone number and invited me to be her guest so I could continue my research. Then she told me to tell her husband, who was in the dining room, the same things I told her. I did, and he also invited me to stay



By Patricia Bayonne-Johnson  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



with them while I researched my ancestors.

I was on a roll. The slaveholder’s bedroom was next. When I entered the room, I told the guide that my ancestors had been enslaved at Wakefield. She said, “Let’s go find the owner; she should hear this.” We found Jolie Berry, and I repeated my story about my ancestors for the third time. Jolie also said she knew nothing about the enslaved people. She gave me her email address and asked me to send her the information about my ancestors.

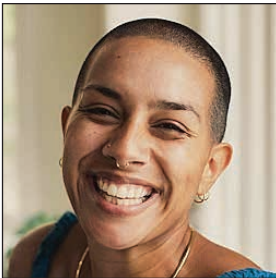
This is a plantation, people. How could they not know that enslaved people did all the work on Wakefield Plantation?

I had one question the guides couldn’t answer: Are there slave burial grounds on the Wakefield Plantation? No one knew, so I emailed Jolie and asked her the same thing. Her response was shocking.

Stay tuned for the final article about visiting the plantation where my ancestors had been enslaved.

COURTESY

HOME: A THREE-PART SERIES



By Jasmine Linane booeey  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



Breathe in. Breathe out. Begin.

In this three-part series, I invite us to explore the construct of Home and collectively redefine not only what it is, but how we take action to create the homes we need. In this second part of our exploration of Home, I invite us to look at what it

means to be at home with each other. To question how we build spaces of mutual belonging and vulnerably wonder what stands in the way.

Summer is a season of dreaming, blossoming, harvesting, and abundance. May we acknowledge our wants and needs, affirm their possibility, and manifest them into being. Each piece in this series will offer invitations for reflection and reclamation. The ongoing attacks on love and connection may be out of our control, but the ways in which we find home within and around us are not. May we rebel through connection and love.

**Part Two: At Home with Each Other**

In a post-COVID world (and I’d argue, pre-COVID as well), we, the collective, are suffering from deep isolation and loneliness while simultaneously talking about the need for community. If we are all lonely and all craving community,

why then does creating true sustainable communities feel like an elusive mirage? Maybe you’ve wondered, as I have: Is it always this way, or is it just right now? Is it me? Or is it the world that’s been constructed around us that makes it so hard to be together?

Somewhere along the line, we forgot that community is more than a friend circle, an occasional weekend brunch, or a shared group chat. Community isn’t just who we laugh with on good days but who we can also cry in front of, who we can disappoint and still be held, and who knows when we’re not okay even before we say it.

I recently heard someone say that if we can’t express when we’re struggling with money, health, grief, or just feeling undone, then we’re not really in community. If we hide our emptiness, our community can’t help fill it. So instead of admitting we can’t afford to bring the sausages to the BBQ, we make an excuse, we stay

home, we lie to cover the raw truth.

What was once a tender truth shared to support each other, “I’m tired, I’m broke, I’m sad, I’m in need,” too often shrivels into gossip currency. Whether through curated social media or quiet whispers within family and circles, we keep score instead of leaning in with compassion.

And so, we drift. Further and further apart.

Until it feels unsafe or weird to ask our neighbor for a cup of sugar, or until we no longer care to know the name of the cashier who rings us up each grocery store visit.

But it doesn’t have to stay that way. Small, tender acts of reaching out can soften the distance.

Maybe the first step is noticing what we long for and daring to name it. Because what we name, we can nurture. What we admit we need, we invite others to help us grow.

May we find the courage

Invitation to Practice: Noticing Need & Offering Reach

Notice

Pause and breathe. Bring to mind the people you call community – family, friends, neighbors, colleagues. Who among them feels safe enough to share your truth? Who do you trust with your struggles?

Tell the truth

The next time someone asks, “How are you?” resist the impulse to say “fine” Try answering with one small real thing. Notice what happens.

Reach out

Think of someone who might be retreating into their own cave of isolation. Send a text. Drop off tea. Invite them for a walk. Send a postcard. Let your care be a bridge.

Reflect

Journal or voice note: What does real community look like to me? Am I creating and maintaining it or is there something in the way? If so, what is it that may keep me from asking for help or telling the truth? How might I practice community differently?

to share our emptiness, so it might be filled not with judgment, but with care. May we rebuild our homes within each other, one honest moment at a time.

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By Bob Bartlett  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



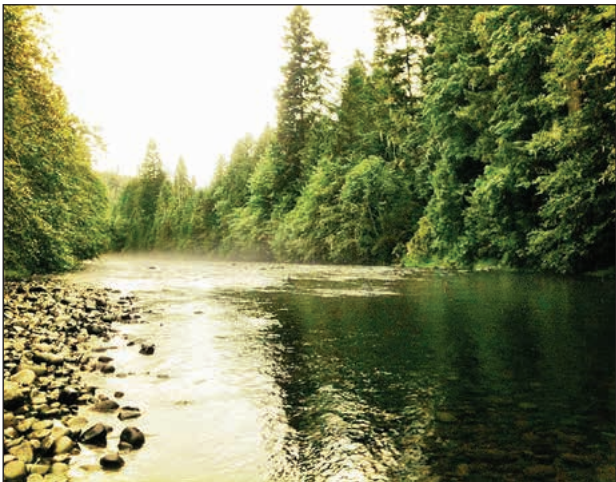
We sat in the shade of a patch of 90-foot-tall conifer trees on green folding chairs just off the river’s edge. Dan and I were at the end of a morning of chasing cutthroat trout with fly rods miles upriver in the Idaho Panhandle. It was a stretch of water we were most familiar with having fished it for over three decades. The water was cool and crystal clear but lower than we had ever seen it for this time of year – a sign of not enough winter snow pack, a warmer than usual spring, and climate change.

We had found a few

fish, some were hooked in the lip and landed, and some not. We are both much older than when we first traveled these parts. We don’t fish it nearly as hard as we once did. We are much more conscious of how fragile the two of us are and how fragile the ecosystem has become.

Earlier that morning we had pulled off the main road and parked at a familiar spot. Next to the truck was a recently used campfire full of charred tin cans, empty brass shell casings from a rifle or handgun, and trash. We marveled at how thoughtless some users of this country are. It will never make sense why some travel here and leave their urban trash behind. It’s harder to find peaceful, unspoiled spots these days.

There was a slight breeze as we sat relaxing in the shade of the conifers. It’s our friendship, mutual love of nature, rivers and fly fishing that draws us here and not Idaho’s politics. We both try to boycott the state we were sitting in. Some of our friends question why we even come here



COURTESY

A familiar spot upriver in the Idaho Panhandle is dotted with 90-foot-tall conifer trees.

– two liberal Democrats, one white and one Black, from Eastern Washington. For us it’s simple. Being in places like this feeds our soul. It is a sacred healing experience and place. Nothing we do here is ever forced or rushed.

This is not just a story about two old fly-fishing buddies sitting in the shade. It is about the experiences and the conversations we have when doing it. As always, our sharing shifts as we sit next to the river, en-

joying even the smell of it. We tried to name the birds we heard. We talked about how surprised we were to see two adult pairs of merganser ducks with at least 20 younger ones floating and feeding their way downstream.

We talked about the bears, the moose, the cougar and the one grey wolf we spotted up river a few years ago. We talked about our grown children that we raised together and taught to camp and fly fish and of course we talk about our wives and

the friends we share in common. Lately politics and the state of the country creeps into our conversations; it never fails to bring out our deepest fears. We circle back to our shared concerns for places like this and lesser spoiled ones we know. Our conversations always shift to the future.

We remind ourselves that moments like this might never have happened if someone hadn’t taken the time to take us hiking, camping and fishing. We talked about how important it is that the current younger generation be exposed to places like this and hopefully develop a similar passion for spending time outdoors. Our now grown children still love to camp and fish and they are now taking their children. We know that this is the gift that keeps on giving. Being here is a privilege that Dan and I don’t take lightly.

Our concerns shift to the countless other young people– especially Black and Brown ones – who are not raised the way we were or how we raised our children. What about

those who believe these experiences and places are out of reach – who feel that the outdoors is not safe or welcoming?

In July a major outdoor educational event occurred here in Spokane. The BIPOC Youth Summer Nature Camp – another dream come true of mine – was held July 28-Aug. 2. Some young folks from across the city spent six days together at the MLK Jr. Center learning about the great outdoors, going on daily field trips and being introduced to fly fishing. With any luck a few might have caught their first fish. Even more importantly, a few might find themselves falling in love with what they learned and have their lives changed forever. At least one or two just might find themselves sitting on folding chairs in the shade of these same conifers after a morning of chasing cutthroat trout that still live there.

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



ROOTS AND WINGS

Nurturing our children through separation

By Leola Rouse  
THE BLACK LENS

How do we give our children roots and wings? This is a provocative question, especially within the context of parental separation. As families struggle with the difficulties inherent in co parenting, it is essential to give children a strong foundation during this difficult time.

When parents choose to go their separate ways, the challenge lies in ensuring that children continue to feel secure and supported. It is essential that we create an environment that supports their emotional well-being and encourages resilience. By putting our children first, we can ensure that they have both the roots of stability and the wings of independence, allowing them to thrive during life's changes.

In the modern world, co-parenting has become an essential aspect of family life. Co-parenting entails two parents who do not share the same household but collaborate in bringing up their child in a loving and caring atmosphere. Co-parenting might be hard, but effective cooperation can have a positive impact on the development and emotional stability of a child.

The foundation of effective co-parenting lies in both parents' commitment to putting their child's needs first. This

includes the equal sharing of parenting duties, joint decision-making, and creating viable channels of communication. Unfortunately, poor co-parenting habits can have long-lasting negative effects on children, leading to confusion and emotional distress. Therefore, the paramount consideration in any co-parenting plan should be what objectively serves the interests of the child, not what is necessarily best for the parents.

Mothers and fathers who are able to agree on child rearing and reinforce each other's parental efforts provide a setting in which children can flourish. Following a breakup, it might be challenging to figure out this new relationship, but with time and work, it is feasible to develop a positive co-parenting relationship – even



By Leola Rouse  
THE BLACK LENS  
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amid discord. How this discord is handled is very important; it can either establish or destroy the child's feeling of security.

Successful co-parenting involves respecting the other's need for privacy and recognizing that each parent will have his or her own parenting style. Each parent is entitled to relate to the child in the way that feels comfortable and useful, and both should acknowledge the good qualities that brought you together with your partner in the first place – those qualities still exist and can enhance your child's life.

Keeping routines and schedules consistent can offer children the stability that they so desperately crave at this time of transition. Children commonly struggle with sadness and confusion when their parents divorce, and it's vital to make it clear to them that they are not responsible for the divorce. They need to feel safe in the knowledge that both parents love and care for them very much.

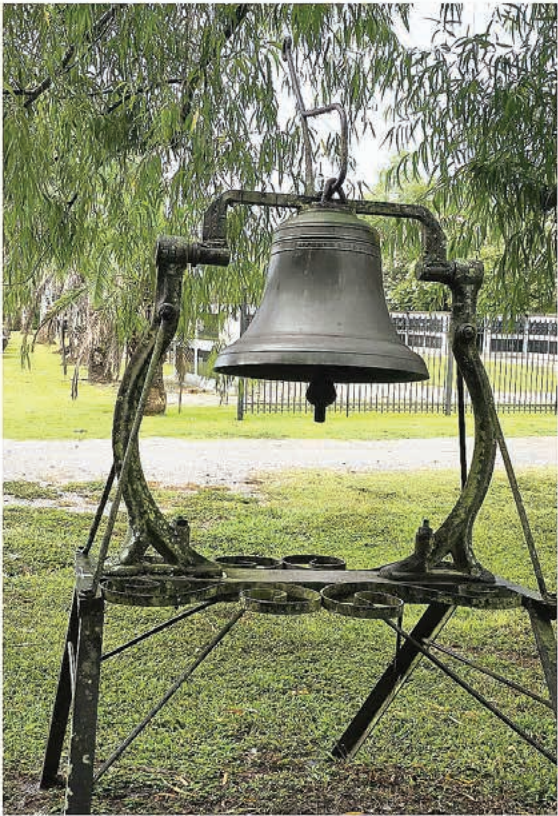
When explaining the reasons for the separation, parents should show a united front to the child and give only enough information to clarify the situation without inundating them with adult information. Stability is paramount: kids must know whom they will live with and when they will see the other parent. It's essential to convey these changes carefully and slowly, giving children time to process and transi-

tion without feeling ambushed.

Validate your child's feelings of missing the other parent and foster their love for both parents. Don't place your child in a situation to take sides, and let them know that it's absolutely fine to love both parents, even though we are not together. Children must never be played as bargaining chips in conflict, nor should they ever be made to carry messages or spy on their other parent.

As adults manage their emotional reactions to separation, it is essential to acknowledge that children are not prepared to cope with the complexities of adult emotions. They require compassion and emotional guidance, rather than being subjected to the weight of adult disputes. It is vital to cultivate connections with empathetic adults outside the immediate family context – extended relatives, friends, and reliable professionals can provide critical support throughout this period of change. Finally, co-parenting is really about building a loving home for your child. It's about providing them with roots to feel safe while simultaneously providing them with wings to discover their new world. Parenting can be messy, but when parents put their child first, they clear the path for a healthier, brighter tomorrow. Your child is not a pawn in your battle; they are a delicate soul who is worthy of love and nurture. Let us all work toward developing an environment where our children can thrive, no matter what.

SHADES OF MOTHERHOOD NETWORK



A bell sits on the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana.

LEGACY, LOVE AND LIBERATION

DEEP ROOTS, STRONG WOMEN

**Shades of Motherhood**

At the Shades of Motherhood Network, we carry more than programs and peer support – we carry stories. We carry the weight of history, the tenderness of healing and the power of legacy. This month, we traveled to the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana, a site unlike any other in America. The Whitney is not a plantation tour about grand houses and wealthy families – it is a memorial dedicated to the lives of the enslaved, with a focus on their humanity, struggles and their enduring spirits.

**Ann and Her Son**

Among the stories that touched us most was that

of Ann and her son – a mother forced to endure the unthinkable. Ann's enslaver sold her child, tearing him from her arms. Despite her pleas, her cries were ignored. Her child was taken from her, lost to the brutal economy of slavery. The grief of Ann is a grief carried by countless Black mothers through generations – whether by the auction block, systemic racism in healthcare, or violence in our streets.

Ann's story is a mirror reflecting not just historical trauma but also the unyielding love of Black motherhood. Her legacy is a call to action for us: to fight for maternal justice, to protect Black families, and

to ensure no mother is left to suffer in silence.

The Angel Holding the Child: A Symbol of Remembrance

As we walked the grounds of the Whitney Plantation, we came upon a statue that stopped us in our tracks: an angel gently cradling a Black child in her arms. This sculpture is not just art – it is sacred. It represents the thousands of enslaved children who died before they ever had a chance to live freely. Many of their names are etched into the walls of the memorial, a haunting and beautiful reminder that their lives mattered.

For us, the angel holding the child is a symbol of collective grief and love. It



Statues at the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana.

PHOTOS COURTESY

More Information

Join Us. Remember. Resist. Rebuild.  
Learn more about our programs and advocacy at [www.theshadesofmotherhoodnetwork.org](http://www.theshadesofmotherhoodnetwork.org).

It is our duty to carry stories forward, to protect the next generation, and to ensure no mother's love is ever disregarded again.

Carrying Legacy Forward

Our visit to the Whitney Plantation is not just about the past – it's about building the future. At the Shades of Motherhood Network, we are committed to rewriting the narrative of Black motherhood. We are creating spaces of safety, joy and power for Black mothers and families to thrive.

We walked those grounds with heavy hearts but open hands, ready to carry the stories of Ann, her son, and all the children embraced by the angel. Their legacy lives in every doula we train, every mother we support, and every community we empower.

represents all the children lost – whether by slavery, by systemic neglect, or by the maternal health crisis that continues to disproportionately impact Black families today. But it also represents care, transcendence, and ancestral protection. The angel says to us: We are still watching over you. We are still holding you.

Why This Story Matters Today

Visiting the Whitney Plantation reinforced our belief that healing work is legacy work. We cannot change the past, but we can honor it. We can stop the

cycle of erasure and begin a new chapter – one rooted in truth, justice, and compassion.

When we remember Ann, her son, and the angel holding the child, we are reminded:

- Motherhood is sacred, even in oppression.
- Despite the systems that sought to destroy it, the bond between mother and child cannot be erased.
- Grief is generational, but so is healing.
- By acknowledging the pain, we make room for restoration and joy.
- Legacy is our responsibility.

IN HER WORDS

THE ART OF US

On June 19, 1865, freedom finally reached the last enslaved Black people in Galveston Texas, more than two years after the Emancipation Proclamation. That day, now known as Juneteenth, became a living celebration of liberation, resilience, and black joy.

This year in Spokane, Juneteenth 2025 unfolded as a week of remembrance and celebration. Each event added its own thread to a growing local tradition. Amid these celebrations and new gathering emerged, “The Art Of Us,” an evening created to celebrate Black artistry, joy and

connection.

“The Art Of Us” was a celebration of tradition deeply rooted in Black communities: Gathering in joy and resistance, grounded in the legacy of our ancestors who found ways to celebrate despite oppression.

The evening opened with a communal dance class, followed by a showcase of local performers who shared their gifts of song, dance, spoken word and comedy. Guests explored artist tables purchasing pieces directly from local artists, and shared what joy meant to them on the



By Prosperetti Coleman  
THE BLACK LENS  
CONTRIBUTOR



“Black Joy Is” – a wall filled with handwritten reflections and affirmations. From the shared laughter to the powerful performances the night invited the soul of Juneteenth celebrating freedom, resilience

and creativity that thrives within our community. As the evening closed with a soul train line, dancing, and smiles all around, it was a reminder of the joy and connection that happens when we come together.

The Shades Of Motherhood played a pivotal role in bringing “The Art Of Us” to life. As a Spokane based nonprofit, The Shades Of Motherhood provides culturally rooted maternal health support care and peer programs that center black mothers and families. Beyond their direct services the organization invests in events that nurture belonging, leadership and generational healing.

Their Sponsorship of “The Art Of Us” reflected their belief that cultural celebration and community care are deeply inter-

twined. As the Executive Director Stephanie Courtney shared:

“It's about extending a legacy, to pick up where others left off, mend and heal what we can and break harmful cycles through community. We have to ask, how can we bring about real movement in people's lives? One of the biggest pieces is the exchange of currency. Whether money or support, that allows leaders in Spokane to dream and activate their visions. Sponsorships mean nothing without genuine connection and partnership, whether short-term or long-term. True community work takes time: to know people, to learn about what they stand for, and to walk alongside them. When that happens, the community movement

begins to rise. Leaders mobilize, the next generation of leaders is affirmed, and confidence is built. As that confidence grows the community responds in kind, belonging becomes visible, and people come home to themselves and one another.”

For generations Black communities have expressed resilience through joy, art, creativity, using these gifts to share stories, honor history, and pass on strength. “The Art Of Us” embodied that spirit showing that freedom is remembered and actively lived when we gather, celebrate, and create together. Looking forward, events like this remind us that our culture, our voices, and our joy will continue to grow and flourish into the future as they always have.



CAREGIVER STORIES

WHEN LIFE TURNS OUT DIFFERENT FROM WHAT YOU HAVE IMAGINED

Duty and history of caregiving in the Black community

By April Eberhardt  
BLACK LENS NEWS

In many Black communities, caregiving has long been a collective act of compassion and necessity. Bernice Buchanan, a retired educator of 44 years and military spouse, reflects on her upbringing in Mississippi, where the entire neighborhood took part in caring for elders. “Everybody pitched in,” she recalls. Families coordinated efforts – one cooked, another cleaned, children helped with yard work. Without many nursing homes or financial resources available, Black families relied on each other and a deep-rooted cultural expectation: you do not abandon your kin.

“In my day, putting someone in a nursing home was like throwing them away,” Buchanan explains. “You did it because you had to, not because you wanted to. Otherwise, people whispered behind your back.” This cultural ethos not only provided care but preserved dignity. Even today, that expectation weighs heavily on those caring for aging family members.

Before stepping into her current role as a spousal caregiver, Buchanan had already experienced the demands of elder care firsthand. Years ago, she brought her mother up from Mississippi to live with her in Spokane, keeping her at home for nearly a year. It wasn’t until her mother’s doctor insisted that she required 24-hour care that Buchanan made the difficult decision to place her in a nursing facility – though even then, she visited two to three times a day. That experience taught her that sometimes the medical needs of a loved one can exceed what you’re able to provide on your own. It also laid the foundation for the resilience, compassion, and commitment she now brings to caring for her husband.

Living with a spouse with dementia

Today, Buchanan serves as the primary caregiver for her husband, Timothy Bernard Buchanan – an Air Force veteran of 20 years and a former pastor – who sustained a brain injury in 2017 and now lives with dementia. After nearly 55 years of marriage, she confronts a stark reality: “He looks the same, sounds the same – but he’s not the same.”

Caring for a spouse with dementia is a complicated and emotional journey. “It’s not a one-and-done adjustment. It’s constant. He might have clarity for 45 minutes, and then it’s gone,” she shares. From managing incontinence to decoding her husband’s nonverbal cues and “homemade” sign language, Buchanan has become both wife and full-time advocate, often serving as the sole voice in doctor visits and medical decisions.

Self-care, support groups and outside help

The role is physically and mentally exhausting. “Caregiving feels like doing three or four days’ work in one,” Buchanan ad-

mits. “You have to make space for yourself. Your mental and physical health must come first, or you can’t take care of anyone.”

She takes advantage of military resources, online classes, and caregiver support groups. A daily text from a support service offers encouragement and tips. A caregiver sometimes helps in the home – though her husband’s resistance to outside help can be an added challenge. “I have to make sure both the helper and my husband feel supported. That’s another job in itself.”

Family ties and unconditional love

Despite the emotional strain, Buchanan says love is her sustaining force. “If they treated you well when you were young, your love will override everything. Even when it’s hard, you just do what needs to be done.” Still, even in families, tensions can surface. In our conversation, she unpacks how it’s hard to accept the new version of a person and the type of care they now need while also balancing what we think is best for their comfort and the medical direction.

She urges others to build strong family relationships long before caregiving is needed. “Without that relationship foundation, the work becomes even harder,” she says. She continues reflecting that you’re not just caring for someone; you’re carrying a lifetime of shared history and expectations.

Lifestyle adjustments and the reality of aging

Caring for someone with dementia means constant adaptations. Buchanan talks about rearranging her home – installing handrails, redoing the porch, locking up toothpaste, photo albums, and shoes. “My memory isn’t what it used to be,” she says. “I make lists. I hide things from him, then forget where I hid them.” Buchanan chuckles that she is also aging and learning. How to navigate her own journey at the same as caring for her husband. In this season of his life, he often moves things around the house but no longer has the cognitive ability to remember where they belong or how to return them—creating a constant back and forth for Buchanan as she works to maintain order in their home.

Music interestingly remains a lifeline. As a Detroit native, Mr. Buchanan responds to hits from the Motown era: The Temptations and Four Tops. “He can’t remember my name, but he knows every lyric to those songs,” she says, chuckling. “Music wakes something up in him.” Doctors have affirmed this connection: movement and music delay cognitive decline and foster connection. The activity in her husband’s eyes, his medical team has shared with Buchanan, is a sign that his brain is still firing signals.

Within the strain of it all, this provides glimmers of grace. While the logical part of his brain no longer works the same, moments like these become precious reminders that the past isn’t so distant – and the present can still reach in and hold on.

Financial realities and the role of Social Security

When Buchanan and her husband retired, they had visions of



The Buchanans.

COURTESY



If they treated you well when you were young, your love will override everything.”

Bernice Buchanan

travel and leisure. Instead, their financial resources now support home care, medical needs, and a constantly shifting lifestyle. Social Security, after two full careers, for each of them, helps fill in the financial gaps left to supplement his care and necessary resources.

From Lactaid milk to pill crushers to incontinence products, expenses pile up fast. “Even when the VA helps, it’s never enough,” she says. “Caregiving is expensive. And if you want to leave the house or bring someone in for care, that’s more money.”

She emphasizes the importance of financial planning, particularly for younger generations. In addition to Social Security, she encourages today’s workers to start early – investing in TSPs, IRAs, or any account that offers steady growth. For her, Social Security helps balance stability without sacrificing essentials. It’s what keeps them afloat in the face of unpredictable challenges. After a lifetime of labor, Social Security provides the dignity of stability for many in their later years. This added measure of financial support can mean the difference between hardship and a life lived with peace, security, and access to proper care. This well-earned benefit – built over decades of hard work – that helps many like the Buchanans navigate life’s unexpected turns, especially when those turns become the new normal for retirees.

Final reflections

Caregiving isn’t just about logistics – it’s about love, Buchanan shares. “But it’s also a journey that

must be supported by a village, not just one person.” Whether through professional help, community resources, or the power of music and memory, she believes every caregiver needs a lifeline. “You’re living two lives – yours and theirs. And if you don’t have a foundation of love and community, it can break you.”

Bernice Buchanan emphasizes that caregiving, at its core, must be rooted in love and relationship. Without a prior foundation, caregiving can feel like a burden rather than a calling. In her words, “Build a relationship with your people now. You never know how important that can be later on in tough times.” The journey is unpredictable, deeply personal, and always evolving—but it is also an extension of the love that shaped us and a reminder of the care we once received.

This very sentiment is captured in the anecdote that she shares during our interview:

Whenever they go to the doctor and she asks her husband, “Who am I?” he cannot call her name to memory. But there is one thing he still knows with unwavering clarity: she is his.

Through the fog of confusion, he holds tight to the bond between them and answers with quiet certainty – “My wife.”

This story was made possible by funding support from AARP Washington. Learn more and get involved at [aarp.org/spokane](http://aarp.org/spokane).



Protecting Social Security’s legacy and future

By Marguerite Ro  
STATE DIRECTOR,  
AARP WASHINGTON

This year marks a powerful milestone: 90 years of Social Security. Since President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed it into law on Aug. 14, 1935, Social Security has been a cornerstone of economic security – ensuring Washingtonians can retire with dignity, supporting people with disabilities, and providing vital income after the loss of a loved one.

In nine decades, not a single payment has been missed. That’s not just reliability – it’s a testament to the strength and success of one of America’s most trusted institutions. We’ve all paid into it. We all depend on it. And we must all fight to protect it.

What Social Security means for Washington

Today, over 1.4 million Washingtonians rely on Social Security. For many, it’s the difference between stability and hardship – covering rent, groceries, prescriptions, and basic needs. Without it, nearly 314,000 residents would fall below the poverty line.

That is the case for 76-year-old West Seattle resident Sue Luke, who relies solely on her monthly Social Security payment to make ends meet. Her first order of business each month is to pay her rent, and then she orders groceries, cat litter, and other essential items that she has put off until the first of the month.

“Social Security means everything to me. Without it, I would really be up a deep creek,” Sue remarked. “If something happened to my payments, I would definitely have to find work, but honestly, physically, I’m just not up to it. I use a walker now, so I doubt anyone would want me.”

Social Security provides crucial financial protection for people with disabilities, children who lose a parent, and surviving spouses. And it’s earned – paid for with every paycheck, from your first job to your last.

The impact of Social Security ripples through our economy, generating nearly \$32 billion in annual economic activity across Washington – supporting local businesses, jobs and communities.

Protecting what we’ve earned

Despite its success, Social Security is under pressure. Across Washington and the nation, people face long wait times, understaffed offices, and confusing policy changes that make it harder for individuals to access benefits they have rightfully earned.

And while Social Security is not “going broke,” it does face a funding shortfall. The latest report from the Social Security Board of Trustees warns that by 2033, benefits could be cut by 20% if Congress fails to act. That’s unacceptable – Social Security must remain financially strong for today’s retirees and for generations to come.

Commemorating the 90th anniversary of Social Security

To mark the 90th anniversary, AARP Washington is hosting free, 90-minute Social Security clinics across the state, including an event in Spokane on August 14. Led by AARP’s national expert Jammie Lyell, the event will help you understand your benefits, discover money-saving strategies, and make informed decisions – whether you’re nearing retirement or helping a loved one.

The event is also a chance to share your story, connect with others, and take action to protect what you’ve earned. Learn more and get involved at [aarp.org/socialsecuritywa](http://aarp.org/socialsecuritywa).

Our money. Our future.

Social Security belongs to us. We paid for it. We depend on it. And AARP will never stop fighting to ensure it’s there when you need it – today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.

Mindset, mentality and change

ANYLA’S TAKE



By Anyla McDonald  
THE BLACK LENS  
CONTRIBUTOR



The historical context of Black Americans in the United States is marked by systemic oppression, economic disenfranchisement, and social marginalization. Despite these challenges, there exists a growing discourse around empowerment

and resilience within the Black community. This essay explores how Black Americans can navigate and transform the existing systems by stepping into roles of influence, thereby dismantling the victim mentality, scarcity mindset, and slave mentality that have historically hindered progress. By examining the psychological and social barriers that perpetuate these mindsets, as well as the strategies for overcoming them, this essay aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the pathways to systemic change.

Victim mentality

Victim mentality refers to a psychological state where individuals perceive themselves as victims of circumstances, often leading to a sense of helplessness and inaction. According to a study by Murray (2019), many African Americans experience a hypersensitivity to perceived discrimination,

which can foster a victim mentality that inhibits personal and collective progress (Murray, 2019). This mindset can be traced back to historical injustices, including slavery, segregation, and ongoing systemic racism, which have created a narrative of victimhood that is difficult to escape.

Scarcity mindset

The scarcity mindset is characterized by the belief that resources are limited, leading to competition and a focus on survival rather than growth. This mindset is particularly prevalent in communities that have faced economic disenfranchisement. A study published in Dazed by Sunny highlights how historical barriers to economic opportunity have fostered a scarcity mindset among African Americans, limiting their ability to pursue wealth-building opportunities (Always Sunny Magazine, 2024).

This mindset not only affects individual aspirations but also impacts community cohesion and collective progress.

Slave mentality

The concept of slave mentality refers to a psychological state where individuals internalize oppression, leading to a lack of agency and self-determination. This mentality can manifest in various ways, including self-doubt, fear of success, and a reluctance to challenge the status quo. The historical legacy of slavery has ingrained a sense of inferiority in many Black Americans, which can hinder their ability to envision and pursue a different future (Bell, 2023).

Political participation

Political engagement is crucial for systemic change. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Black Americans represented 13.4% of the U.S. popu-

lation in 2020, yet their political representation has historically lagged behind (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Increased participation in local, state, and national elections can lead to more equitable policies and representation. For instance, the election of Kamala Harris as the first Black and South Asian Vice President of the United States in 2020 marked a significant milestone in political representation for Black Americans (Harris, 2020).

The importance of engagement

To effect change, Black Americans must actively engage with the systems that govern their lives. This engagement can take various forms, including political participation, entrepreneurship, and community organizing. By stepping into roles of influence, Black Americans can challenge the narratives that perpetuate victimhood and scarcity.



IN MEMORIAM / FROM THE FRONT PAGE

REST IN POWER  
in Memoriam



DAVE PARKER  
(JUNE 28, 2025)

Better known as “the Cobra,” Baseball Hall of Famer Dave Parker took the Pittsburgh Pirates and Cincinnati Reds by storm in the 1970s and 80s as he spent nearly two decades dominating the field and the game. Parker finished his career with 339 home runs, over 2,700 hits, seven All-Star appearances and two World Series rings he earned in 79’ with the Pirates and 89’ with the Oakland A’s. When he wasn’t catching eyes with his baseball talents, Parker drew the attention of ears with his ability to quickly deliver memorable quotes and zingers to the media.



PETTIS NORMAN  
(JULY 7, 2025)

Pettis Norman began his professional football career as a tight end for the Dallas Cowboys, where on and off the field, he advocated for civil rights. Norman persuaded Coach Tom Landry to end segregated hotel room assignments, instead, rooms were assigned by name. After his 12-year football career, Norman rose to become the first Black executive at a bank in Dallas. Continuing his mission to improve equity and equality, he founded the Dallas Together Forum, using its focus to uplift and employ minority businesses.



MOSIE BURKS  
(JULY 7, 2025)

Mosie Burks was the lead, go-to soloist for the legendary Mississippi Mass Choir who sang gospel favorites including “They Got the World” and “I’m Not Tired Yet.” Burks dedicated most of her life helping to take care of her siblings as they faced the loss of her parents ultimately delaying her aspirations to higher education at Jackson State University and later Tougaloo College to study voice. Instead, Burks worked at a Telephone company and displayed her talents to Jackson Churches. Burks was recruited to the Mississippi Mass Choir in 1972 but didn’t join until 73’ where she built remembrance through her powerful voice, joyful performances and kind heart.



WILLIAM LACY CLAY SR.  
(JULY 17, 2025)

William Lacy Clay Sr. was a civil rights leader who served as Missouri’s first Black Congressman from 1969 to 2001 and co-founded the Congressional Black Caucus. During his political career, Clay organized and participated in the 1963 Jefferson Bank and Trust Co. demonstration. From 1991-95, he chaired the House Committee on the Post Office and Civil Service. Through his dedication to serve, Clay founded the William L. Clay Scholarship and Research Fund, awarding college scholarships to high-school seniors residing in Missouri’s First Congressional District.



YOUNG NOBLE  
(JULY 4, 2025)

Better known by his stage name Young Noble, Rufus Lee Cooper III was a prominent member of the hip hop group Outlawz. Noble moved from California to New Jersey at the age of eight where he was introduced to future Outlawz members Hussein Fatal And Yaki Kadafi. After moving back to California as a teenager, Hussein and Kadafi helped introduce Noble to artist Tupac Shakur who co-founded and personally selected Noble to join Outlawz. Noble made his way in the industry debuting his talents with the platinum-selling collaborative album Still I Rise.

A Tribute to Malcolm-Jamal Warner

By Black Lens News

As soon as the news broke of Malcolm-Jamal Warner’s untimely death, text messages started flooding in. None of us could believe it. We didn’t know him, but we identified with him. It’s like we lost our favorite cousin. We watched him grow from a squeaky-voiced teenager into a man with deep, deliberate declarations layered with truth and rhythm. His spoken word was soulful, as he sermonized both vulnerability and Black consciousness. He didn’t just perform – he ministered. Through interviews, podcasts, and poetry, he made space for reflection. Through every role he played, he helped us see ourselves.

Many of us first met him as Theo Huxtable, the only son in a middle-class household of five on “The Cosby Show” – a show that reflected Black narrative in the distinctions of parenthood, intergenerational bonds, children coming of age, and universally human experiences. We watched Theo navigate adolescence, school struggles, and sibling rivalries. He flirted with Denise’s friends. He grimaced at the sound of his math teacher’s name because she was so tough. His character showed us that dyslexia was real and that the road to academic success is mapped differently for everyone. Theo showed us that learning differently doesn’t limit our greatness – it reveals new paths to reach it. We came to understand the individuality and complexity that exist among siblings and the layers of patience and communication that come with parenting.

Generation X went from identifying with him as a teen to watching reruns as parents, seeing him – and now ourselves – through a different lens. We saw Theo and the other Hux-



GETTY IMAGES

Malcolm-Jamal Warner speaks onstage during the Beloved Community Awards at Hyatt Regency Atlanta on Jan. 14, 2023.

table youth in our own children. Like when he had to learn what the “real world” was really like in a simulation of adulthood with Monopoly money. Or when he pierced his ear. Or perhaps the room with strewn clothes everywhere in a mess of disorganized chaos that makes parents ask, “Why?” The moments we once witnessed as kids ourselves now resonated on a deeper level as we watched the naïveté become teachable moments in our own families.

The culture watched Warner transform from boy to man – no longer just Theo, but a skilled actor, griot, and musician who moved through different genres, including his roles as business-savvy Malcolm McGee on Malcolm and Eddie, or the no-nonsense Dr. AJ Austin on The Resident. He moved through Hollywood with dignity and evolved into the relatable guy on interviews – the one we all hope to encounter at the cookout. He stayed grounded. He stayed human. That authenticity and transparency were rare – and we felt it.

His voice was commentary on life, love, fatherhood, marriage, mental health, and race. Warner made us pause and think. He reminded us that Black men could be layered – joyful and burdened, artis-

tic and intellectual, public and deeply personal. He didn’t hide behind celebrity. He used his art to brighten dark places. He challenged us with his words, inspired us with his growth, and reminded us of what it means to live on purpose.

His passing is one of those moments that resonate like that “Good Times” episode when Florida Evans learned of her husband James’ death and cried out, “**Damn, damn, damn.**” We feel the shock as we try to reconcile the loss of a brother. We hear the same heavy, solemn reaction of Florida in our mind’s eye as the reality hits: we are on borrowed time.

Our deepest condolences go out to his immediate family. If he meant this much to those of us who never knew him personally, the pain they must feel – those who lived with him, loved him, and knew him best – is unimaginable.

When we lose someone who shaped how we see ourselves, it hits different. Warner was a window into who we are without stereotypes and propaganda. For that, so many of us are appreciative that he shared himself. Let us keep living truthfully, purposefully, and with love and learning, numbering our days with purpose. Warner channeled his

creativity, transforming art into a powerful bridge – connecting lived experiences, inner reflections, keen observations, and profound epiphanies. He left an indelible mark, as both a fictional character and as a Black man living intentionally.

These words that follow are from an excerpt of his poem/spoken word Asante Sana, a Swahili term that means “thank you very much” – and they capture some of what Malcolm-Jamal Warner has bequeathed us.

As we memorialize him, may his words empower us in our grief:

*We descendants of stolen legacies  
Children of ancestors who could not be broken  
Bearers of brilliance and ingenuity  
Birthers and builders  
Of a culture repeatedly robbed and ransacked  
To nourish the spiritually famined  
Like a Black woman’s bosom*

*We who have become a preexisting condition  
Simply because we preexist  
We who realize  
We are worthy  
We are the guardians  
We are the gardeners  
We are the soil  
We are the toil*

*We are the protectors of our seeds  
Who need to be protected  
Who need to see true love and black excellence reflected  
Not through fame and fortune  
But redirected through character and deed*

*And indeed  
You who stands on the front line  
Fighting to save the minds of our young  
I just need to salute you  
Because you are the revolution  
We don’t see on TV*

*And you are the revolution  
Asante Sana.*

JONES

Continued from 1

to grow up Black in Spokane, she describes an intimate and affirming community. “It was a loving and embracing environment – my mama, my daddy, my church, the Masons and Eastern Stars, the Wednesday Art Club. I was affirmed and felt valued.” That sense of belonging, she adds, gave her early pride in herself, but also a sharp contrast: “Outside of that community, it was treacherous waters. We were restricted in where we could live, what clubs we could join.” Jones is a 1957 graduate of Lewis and Clark High School, an environment much different from the nurture of this community from which she drew affirmation and rested in familiarity.

It was Calvary Baptist Church that served as her first stage and greatest mirror. “I said my first Easter poem at church and forgot two, three lines – but they said, ‘Go on, girl, you got it!’” Her father, also a poet, would give her poetry books each birthday and read aloud to her. That foundational affirmation shaped her love for words.

When she began writing, her joy in Blackness was often misunderstood outside her community. “I could tell that when I said something that brought folks joy about themselves and about me, I had a little something going.” That “little something” caught the ear of Susan Taylor, editor of Essence magazine; Jones made quite an impression – leading to her first published poem (at Taylor’s urging) and a decades-long literary journey that now includes five books.

In her work, the kitchen holds special symbolism – a hallowed space in many Black families, where stories are passed down or dance steps are shared, and emotional nourishment is served alongside food. “The kitchen is the

gathering place. Doesn’t matter how fancy your house is.” Jones asserts something so many Black people can relate to in the spaces of congregation in family homes—if you can give food for thought in your kitchen, you’re doing something right.

She also reflects on how children watch their elders and absorb far more than words. “They’re learning from us even when we’re not thinking we’re teaching. They’re watching how we resolve issues, how we treat others.” In her book, she writes, “Sometimes it frightens me to see myself in my children, because I know I haven’t always acted wisely.” Still, she believes our modeling can give young people the resilience they need to navigate the world.

When asked to compare the safety and validation she felt as a youth within the village that raised her to how today’s Black youth can feel safe and Black – amid racism, internalized inferiority, and convoluted messages about identity and cultural worth – Jones didn’t hesitate. She acknowledged the challenges of growing up in a media-saturated world full of harmful rhetoric about Black identity, but offered a clear vision for helping youth feel safe and unapologetically Black:

“The key is having an adult, a parent, or someone significant – a teacher, a mentor – who can undo the negative messages that kids are bombarded with. Somebody has to help with their resiliency. And I do find that our Black kids can be so resilient. But they have to have help. They have to learn that they are already winners because nobody can beat them at being themselves.”

It’s that kind of wisdom – spoken plainly, with heart – that makes Mona Lake Jones an elder of lasting significance. She’s proof that when Black children are loved, protected, and affirmed, they grow into storytellers, visionaries, and griots of grace.



# BLACK BUSINESS DIRECTORY

**3 Performance Institute** – Sports performance and physical therapy by Louis Hurd III. (509) 869-2344 or Louis@spokane3pi.com. 211 W. Second Ave., Spokane, 99205. Online at [spokane3pi.com](http://spokane3pi.com).

**4AM Vintage** – Vintage clothing store owned by Christian Jones. (832) 652-4580 or [coojones4am@gmail.com](mailto:coojones4am@gmail.com). 1009 N. Washington St., Suite A, Spokane, 99201. Instagram: [4am.spokane](https://www.instagram.com/4am.spokane).

**A Do Good Cleaning Service LLC** – Janitorial service by Daryl Givens Jr. (509) 714-8113 or [dgjzzle21@gmail.com](mailto:dgjzzle21@gmail.com).

**A Man & A Truck** – Junk removal by Demetrius Bell. (509) 319-8860, (509) 319-7126 or [amanandatruckspokane@gmail.com](mailto:amanandatruckspokane@gmail.com).

**A Truly Reliable Cleaning Services LLC** – Janitorial service by Tatiana Ross. (678) 974-6907 or [trulyreliablecleaning@gmail.com](mailto:trulyreliablecleaning@gmail.com).

**A Woman's Worth** – Woman Empowerment Group by Gaye Hallman. (509) 290-7687, (509) 385-7074 or [ghallman@aww.community](mailto:ghallman@aww.community). 59 E. Queen Ave., Suite 210, Spokane, 99206.

**Allie & Austin Accounting Services** – Bookkeeping by Dorothy Hood. (509) 242-3324 or [dhood@allieaustin.com](mailto:dhood@allieaustin.com). P.O. Box 142207 Spokane Valley, 99214.

**Allowing Change, LLC.** – Pre-Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Certified Life & Relationship Coach Brittney Richards (she/her). (509) 795-0376 or [allowingchangelc@gmail.com](mailto:allowingchangelc@gmail.com). 9 S. Washington St., Suite 420, Spokane, 99201.

**Andrews Care** – Assisted Living Facility for Adults with Disabilities owned by Ashley Andrews. (509) 939-7218 or [ashandrews@comcast.net](mailto:ashandrews@comcast.net). P.O. Box 1629, Veradale, Wash., 99037.

**BrewCity Flash Photography** – Photography services. (509) 862-9057 or email [alexanderlockett@icloud.com](mailto:alexanderlockett@icloud.com) On Instagram @BrewCityflash33 and Facebook as Leon Lockett.

**Spokane Beard Papa's** – Cream puff bakery owned by Marc Bryant. (509) 290-5128 or [spokanebeardpapas@gmail.com](mailto:spokanebeardpapas@gmail.com). 480 8 E. Sprague Ave., Suite 204. Spokane Valley, 99212.

**Beauchamp and Chase** – Luxury Soaps and Comfort Wear by Genesis Veronon. (509) 608-1511 or [beauchampandchase@gmail.com](mailto:beauchampandchase@gmail.com).

**Bethely Entertainment Group** – Owned by Michael Bethely. (509) 710-1338 or [mbethely@be2become.com](mailto:mbethely@be2become.com). P.O. Box 28931, Spokane, 99228.

**Betty Jean's BBQ** – Restaurant owned by Omar Jones. (509) 828-5931 or [bettyjeansbbq@yahoo.com](mailto:bettyjeansbbq@yahoo.com). 2926 E. 29th Ave., Spokane, 99223. Online at [www.bettyjeansbbq.com](http://www.bettyjeansbbq.com), Instagram: [Betty\\_jeans\\_bbq](https://www.instagram.com/Betty_jeans_bbq) and Facebook: [Bettyjeansbbq](https://www.facebook.com/Bettyjeansbbq).

**Black London's** – Barber-shop. 1618 W. Second Ave., 99201, and 904 E. Wellesley Ave., 99207. (509) 537-1188 and (509) 309-7155. On Facebook as Black London's.

**Brendan Blocker Realty Services** – Real Estate Agent Brendan Blocker. (509) 290-9645 or [brendan.blocker@gmail.com](mailto:brendan.blocker@gmail.com). 4407 N. Division St., Suite 200, Spokane, 99207. Online at [brendan.spokanearearealestate.com](http://brendan.spokanearearealestate.com) or Facebook: [Blocker Real Estate](https://www.facebook.com/BlockerRealEstate).

**Brittany Trambitas Hair Design** – Natural hair stylist Brittany Trambitas. (509) 768-3925 or [btrambitas1228@gmail.com](mailto:btrambitas1228@gmail.com). 802 E. 29th Ave., Suite 14, Spokane, 99203.

**Bummy Boss Clip's & Beauty Supply** – NorthTown mall hair care. (509) 315-8963 or visit [bummybossclips.apointeddd.com](https://www.bummybossclips.apointeddd.com).

**B & B Pro Video** – Video Production by DeShawn Bedford and Michael Bethely. (509) 818-0864 or [admin@bbpvideo.com](mailto:admin@bbpvideo.com). 1011 W. Railroad Alley, Suite 100, Spokane, 99201. Online at [bbpvideo.com](http://bbpvideo.com).

**Cascadia Public House** – Restaurant owned by Jordan Smith. (509) 321-7051 or [info@cascadiapublichouse.com](mailto:info@cascadiapublichouse.com). 6314 N. Ash St., Spokane, 99208.

**Chicken-N-More** – Restaurant owned by Bob and Teresa Hemphill. (509) 838-5071 or [manysmiles@comcast.net](mailto:manysmiles@comcast.net). 414½ W. Sprague Ave., Spokane, 99201.

**Clear View** – Window cleaning by Limmie Smith. (509) 319-7526 or [fresh00274@icloud.com](mailto:fresh00274@icloud.com). 3011 E. Columbia Ave., Apt 3, Spokane, 99208.

**Compassionate Catering LLC** – Catering services. (509) 934-1106 or [compassioncatering2023@gmail.com](mailto:compassioncatering2023@gmail.com). 1014

N. Pines Road, #120, Spokane Valley, 99216.

**Dennis Mitchell Empowerment Seminars** – Education services by Dennis Mitchell. (509) 981-0646 or [dennis-speaks@gmail.com](mailto:dennis-speaks@gmail.com). 9116 E. Sprague Ave., Suite 66, Spokane Valley, 99206.

**DM & Owl** – Vending service by Deandre Meighan. (702) 954-2562 or [dm.owl247@gmail.com](mailto:dm.owl247@gmail.com).

**Discovery Counseling Group LLC** – Mental/Behavioral Health Counseling by Melissa Mace. (509) 413-1193 or [info@discovery-counseling.org](mailto:info@discovery-counseling.org). 1008 N. Washington St., Spokane, 99201.

**Ebony Hair Salon** – Salon owned by Pam Thornton. (509) 325-4089 or [ebhair3@yahoo.com](mailto:ebhair3@yahoo.com). 3125 N. Division St., Spokane, 99207.

**Ethan Mendoza-Pena Insurance Agency, LLC** – Insurance Agency owned by Ethan Mendoza-Pena, M.A. (509) 590-4726 or [emendoza@farmersagent.com](mailto:emendoza@farmersagent.com). 2010 N. Ruby St., Spokane, 99207.

**Exclusive Barber Shop** – Barber shop owned by Keno Branch. (509) 862-4723 or [branchingoutbiz@gmail.com](mailto:branchingoutbiz@gmail.com). 1423 N. Argonne Road, Spokane Valley, 99212.

**Fantasy Kleaning LLC** – Commercial Janitorial Service by Nathaniel Harris. (509) 890-0819 or [fantasy.kleaning@gmail.com](mailto:fantasy.kleaning@gmail.com).

**Fresh Soul** – Restaurant owned by Michael Brown. (509) 242-3377 or [spokanereunion@gmail.com](mailto:spokanereunion@gmail.com). 3029 E. Fifth Ave., Spokane, 99202. Online at [freshsoulrestaurant.com](http://freshsoulrestaurant.com).

**Gorilla Park Music** – Music production by Brandon Batts. (256) 642-6463 or [gorillapark2@gmail.com](mailto:gorillapark2@gmail.com).

**I Hear You Sis LLC** – Nutrition/health coaching by Prosparetti Coleman. (509) 995-7044 or [ihearyousis@gmail.com](mailto:ihearyousis@gmail.com). Online at [www.ihearyousis.com](http://www.ihearyousis.com), TikTok: [tiktok.com/@i.hear.you.sis](https://www.tiktok.com/@i.hear.you.sis).

**Inter-Tribal Beauty** – Master esthetician, Reiki practitioner and TV/film makeup artist Octavia Lewis. (509) 201-8664 or [octavia@intertribalbeauty.co](mailto:octavia@intertribalbeauty.co). 59 E. Queen Ave., Spokane, 99207. Online at [www.intertribalbeauty.com](http://www.intertribalbeauty.com), Instagram: [instagram.com/inter\\_tribal\\_beauty/](https://www.instagram.com/inter_tribal_beauty/).

**JSandoval Real Estate** – Real Estate Broker Jacquelynne Sandoval. (509) 460-8197 or [JSandoval@windermere.com](mailto:JSandoval@windermere.com). 1620 E. Indiana Ave., Suite 1250, Spokane Valley, 99216. Instagram: [instagram.com/the-realestateuntie/](https://www.instagram.com/the-realestateuntie/).

**Koala Koi Massage** – Massage therapy by Joy Robinson. (509) 900-8968 or [koalakoimassage@gmail.com](mailto:koalakoimassage@gmail.com). 1008 N. Washington St., Spokane, 99201.

**Lacquered and Luxe** – Nail salon owned by Lisa-Mae Brown. (509) 993-7938 or [brownlisamae@yahoo.com](mailto:brownlisamae@yahoo.com). 33 E. Lincoln Road, Suite 205, Spokane.

**Larry's Barber & Styling** – Barbershop owned by Larry Roseman Sr. and operated with Master Barber QC. (509) 869-3773 or [ljrbbarberman@aol.com](mailto:ljrbbarberman@aol.com). 3017 E. Fifth Ave., Spokane, 99202.

**League of Women for Community Action, Non-profit, dba Southeast Day Care Center** – Nonprofit Child Care Center owned by League of Women for Community Action and Sug Villella, day care director. (509) 535-4794 or [lwca.gmail@hotmail.com](mailto:lwca.gmail@hotmail.com). 2227 E. Hartson Ave., Spokane, 99202. Online at [www.southeastdaycare.org](http://www.southeastdaycare.org).

**Legacy Barbershop** – Barbershop owned by Dougie Fades. (509) 315-8312. 28 E. Sharp Ave., Spokane, 99202.

**Lilac City Legends Inc.** – Professional sports team owned by Michael Bethely. (509) 774-4704, [info@lilaccitylegends.com](mailto:info@lilaccitylegends.com) or [michael@lilaccitylegends.com](mailto:michael@lilaccitylegends.com). 631 S. Richard Allen Court, Suite 205, Spokane, 99202. Also at P.O. Box 28931, Spokane, 99228.

**Mary Kay** – Beauty Consultant Nicole Mills. (509) 666-4929, (252) 365-4971 or [MKwithNicole@gmail.com](mailto:MKwithNicole@gmail.com). Online at [mkwithnicole.wordpress.com](http://mkwithnicole.wordpress.com), Facebook: [facebook.com/MK-withNicoleM](https://www.facebook.com/MK-withNicoleM).

**Maxey Law Office** – Lawyer Bevan Maxey. (509) 326-0338 or [info@maxeylaw.com](mailto:info@maxeylaw.com). 1835 W. Broadway Ave., Spokane, 99201.

**Mo-Nu Hair City** – Wig retailer Jackie Douglas. (509) 443-3193 or [jazzyjackie9@yahoo.com](mailto:jazzyjackie9@yahoo.com). 4750 N. Division St., Spokane, 99207.

**Moore's Boarding Home** – Residential care by Betsy Wilkerson. (509) 747-1745 or [betsy@mooreassistedliving.com](mailto:betsy@mooreassistedliving.com). 1803

W. Pacific Ave., Spokane, 99201.

**MoVin Properties** – Property management by Latrice Williams. (509) 565-0325 or [movinproperties@gmail.com](mailto:movinproperties@gmail.com). 5723 N. Division St., Spokane.

**Natasha L. Hill, P.S.** – Lawyer Natasha Hill. (509) 350-2817, (509) 357-1757 or [natasha@nhlawoffices.com](mailto:nhlhawoffices.com). Patsy Clark Mansion, 2208 W. Second Ave., Spokane 99201.

**New Beginnings Hair & Beauty Salon** – Hair styling and braiding salon owned by Stephanie Tullos-Brady. (509) 475-3556 or [tullos\\_stephanie@yahoo.com](mailto:tullos_stephanie@yahoo.com). 3019 E. Fifth Ave., Spokane, 99202.

**New Developed Nations** – Level 1 & 2 Substance Use and Mental Health Outpatient Facility owned by Rickey “Deekon” Jones. (509) 964-1747 or [info@newdevelopednations.com](mailto:info@newdevelopednations.com). 3026 E. Fifth Ave. Spokane, 99202.

**Nina Cherie Couture** – Bridal boutique owned by Nina Nichols. (509) 240-1782 or [info@ninacherie.com](mailto:info@ninacherie.com). 827 W. First Ave., Suite 109, Spokane, 99201.

**Operation Healthy Family** – Dental and youth programs by Tommy Williams. (509) 720-4645 or [tommy@ohfspo-kane.org](mailto:tommy@ohfspo-kane.org). Good News Dental is located at 3009 S. Mount Vernon St. at (509) 443-4409. Emmanuel Fitness is located at 631 S. Richard Allen Court at (509) 822-7058.

**Parkview Early Learning Center** – Early Learning Center owned by Luc Jasmin. (509) 326-5610 or [parkviewelc@gmail.com](mailto:parkviewelc@gmail.com). 5122 N. Division St. Spokane, 99207.

**Pro Mobile Auto Detail LLC** – Auto detailer Antonio Holder. (509) 995-9950 or [antonio@spokanepromobile.com](mailto:antonio@spokanepromobile.com).

**Providential Solutions** – Counseling and coaching by Charina Carothers, LICSW. (509) 795-0150 or [info@psurnotal-one.com](mailto:info@psurnotal-one.com). Richard Allen Court, Spokane, 99202.

**Quality Blacktop & Striping** – Residential and commercial blacktop by Barrington Young Jr. (509) 251-6019 or [young.barrington@gmail.com](mailto:young.barrington@gmail.com). 5759 E. Broadway Ave., Spokane, 99212.

**Queen of Sheba** – Restaurant owned by Almaz Ainuu. (509) 328-3958 or [info@queenof-sheeba.com](mailto:info@queenof-sheeba.com). 2621 W. Mallon Ave., Suite 426, Spokane, 99201.

**Quick and Classy Auto Customs** – Mechanic Jamar Dickerson. (509) 315-5090, (509) 795-6065 or [2gn2tythoon@gmail.com](mailto:2gn2tythoon@gmail.com). 3627 E. Broadway Ave., Spokane.

**Raging Success Holistic Financial Solutions** – Rhonda Leonard-Horwith, in partnership with World Financial Group. Contact (818) 399-6295 or [rhonda@ragingsuccess.consulting](mailto:rhonda@ragingsuccess.consulting). 2818 N. Sullivan Rd, Suite 100, Spokane Valley, 99216.

**Share Farm Inc.** – Online farmers market and supply chain logistics company owned by Vincent Peak. (509) 995-8451 or [vince@share.farm](mailto:vince@share.farm).

**Smooov Cutz Barber Shop** – Barber shop owned by Jason “Smooov” Watson. (509) 703-7949 or [jsmooov923@gmail.com](mailto:jsmooov923@gmail.com). com. Two locations at 13817 E. Sprague Ave., Spokane Valley, 99216, and 14700 E. Indiana Ave., Spokane Valley, 99216.

**Spacehub Production** – Photography Studio owned by event photographer Eugene Muzinga. (509) 216-1072 or [spacehub@gmail.com](mailto:spacehub@gmail.com). 1023 W. Sixth Ave., Building 1, Spokane, 99204.

**Vision Properties** – Real estate firm owned by Latrice Williams. (509) 431-0773 or [transactions.thevision@gmail.com](mailto:transactions.thevision@gmail.com). 5723 N. Division St., Spokane.

**The Way to Justice** – Community law firm led and created by women of color. The Way to Justice is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization located in Eastern Washington. (509) 822-7514.

**WrightWay Beauty Supply** – (509) 703-7772 (call/text), [wrightbeautysupply@outlook.com](mailto:wrightbeautysupply@outlook.com) or visit [www.wrightway-beautysupply.com](http://www.wrightway-beautysupply.com). 2103 N. Division St., Spokane, 99207.

*Are you a Black business owner and you don't see your name or business in this directory? Contact [info@blacklensnews.com](mailto:info@blacklensnews.com) with your name, business, contact information, address or website, if available. Put “Black Business Directory entry” in the subject line. This listing was made with the help of the Black Business and Professional Alliance and the Carl Maxey Center. If you are part of the Maxey online directory but not seen here, The Black Lens needs your updated contact information in order to publish.*

# AREA BLACK CHURCHES AND MINISTRIES

**Holy Temple Church of God in Christ** – Auxiliary Bishop Ezra Kinlow. 806 W. Indiana Ave, Spokane, 99205. Sunday School is 9:45 a.m. Worship Service is 11 a.m.

**Bethel African Methodist Episcopal** – The Rev. Benjamin D. Watson, Sr. 645 S. Richard Allen Court, Spokane, 99202. Sunday School is 9:30 a.m. Sunday Service is 11 a.m.

**Calvary Baptist** – Interim Rev. Amos Atkinson. 203 E. Third Ave., Spokane, 99202. Sunday School is 9 a.m. Sunday Service is 10 a.m.

**Jasmin Ministries** – Church owned by Luc Fils Jasmin. Contact (509) 389-4539 or [eem.maranatha@gmail.com](mailto:eem.maranatha@gmail.com). 631 S. Richard Allen Court, Suite 211, Spokane, 99202.

**Morning Star Baptist** – The Rev. Walter Kendricks. 3909 W. Rowan Ave., Spokane, 99205. Sunday School is 9:30 a.m. Sunday Service is 10:45 a.m.

**New Hope Baptist** – The Rev. James Watkins. 9021 E. Boone Ave., Spokane Valley, 99212. Sunday Service is 10:45 a.m.

**Saving Grace Ministries** – The Rev. Earon Davis Jr. 3151 E. 27th Ave., Spokane, 99223. Sunday Service is 10 a.m.

**Word of Faith Christian Center** – The Rev. Otis Manning. 9212 E. Montgomery Ave., Suite 202, Spokane Valley, 99206. Sunday Service is 10 a.m. Info: [wordoffaith13@aol.com](mailto:wordoffaith13@aol.com) or (509) 919-4150.

**Jesus is the Answer** – Pastor Shon L. Davis. 1803 E. Desmet St. Spokane, 99202. Sunday Service is 10 a.m.

**Mount Zion Holiness Church** – Pastor Claudia “Tommy” Whitman and First Lady Karen Whitman. 2627 E. Fifth Ave., Spokane, 99202. Sunday Service is at 10 a.m.

**Mt. Olive Baptist Church** – The Rev. Patrick Hamm. 2026 E. Fourth Ave., Spokane, 99202. Sunday Service is 11 a.m. Wednesday Bible Study is 6 p.m.

**Refreshing Spring Church of God In Christ** – The Rev. Elder Timothy B. Buchanan. 1206 E. Broad St., Spokane, 99207. Info: (509) 482-7408.

**The Spokane Area Ministers Wives and Ministers Widows Fellowship** – Meets at 10:30 a.m. every first Saturday of the month (except June, July, August) at the Emmanuel Family Life Center, 631 S. Richard Allen Court. Questions? Contact President Faith Washington at [spokanemwmw@gmail.com](mailto:spokanemwmw@gmail.com).

# NAACP MEETINGS

To join, visit [naacpspokane.com/contact](http://naacpspokane.com/contact).

**GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETINGS:** Third Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.

**HEALTHCARE COMMITTEE:** Second Monday of each month at 5:15 p.m.

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE:** Second Wednesday via zoom at 7 p.m.

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE:** Fourth Tuesday at 6:30 p.m.

**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE:** First Tuesday at 5 p.m.

# EVENTS TO WATCH FOR

**AUG. 13: 30-MINUTE LEGAL CONSULTATION** –Need legal guidance but unsure where to start? The Carl Maxey Center's attorneys and legal professionals can provide advice and information tailored to help you navigate your case and to help you represent yourself effectively. The center is host to a 30-minute free legal consultation. Pre-register by emailing the center's legal team at [selfhelp@carlmaxeycenter.org](mailto:selfhelp@carlmaxeycenter.org). Take the first step toward understanding your options today. 2:30-4:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 13. Carl Maxey Center, 3114 E. Fifth Ave., Spokane. Note: The center's legal professional are attorney volunteers and will not represents you in court.

**AUG. 21: BLACK LITURGIES FOR STAYING HUMAN PRESENTS: “A COMMUNITY PRACTICE: ANCESTRAL MEMORY”** – This community gathering invites nonviolent, intersectional and interfaith meditation and reflection practice. The theme for this month will be Artistry. The program adapts Cole Arthur Riley's “Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human” into a type of spiritual “liturgy” that draws quotes and insights from Black intellectuals, ancestors, authors and

mentors. It also features some short passages and reflections from the book itself. Professor Rossing from Gonzaga University will be facilitating this gathering. 5:30-6:30 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 21. Liberty Park Library, 402 S. Pittsburg St., Spokane. Free.

**AUG. 23: THE MAXEY OPEN** – A premier golf tournament organized by Maxey Law Offices in support of the Carl Maxey Center – a community hub dedicated to equity, education and empowerment in Spokane. This event will feature a four-man scramble format, welcoming golfers of all skill levels for a day of friendly competition, community connection, and a shared commitment to positive change. Tee-off time at 9 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 23. Latah Creek Golf Course, 2210 E. Hangman Valley Road, Spokane Valley. Registration price: \$100 per player.

**AUG. 30: SOULFOOD AND SIPS** – Come vibe with us for a full day of flavor, fun, and community! There's delicious soul food, good music, tasty sips and uplifting culture. Whether you're coming for the food, the fellowship, or the feel-good energy, this is the place to be! Brought to you by EEG: Educate, Entertain & Get Stuff Done. 12-7 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 30. 200 N. Wall St., Spokane.

## Black Lens pickup and distribution: Get on our list!

For newspaper pickup and distribution, please contact [info@blacklensnews.org](mailto:info@blacklensnews.org). Pickup is at Carl Maxey or Schoenberg at Gonzaga on Fridays before Sunday publication. The Black Lens is published the first Sunday each month.

Have you lost a dear loved one, who was part of Spokane's Black community?

THE BLACK LENS

*In remembrance*

We are offering free obituary services. Email [info@blacklensnews.com](mailto:info@blacklensnews.com) with "Obituary" and your loved one's name in the subject line. Please limit obituaries to 400 words or less. A photo of the loved one is encouraged, but not required. We may lightly edit the obituary for brevity and clarity, but will otherwise leave it in its entirety.



LEISURE  
COMICS

CURTIS • BY RAY BILLINGSLEY

JULY 28

JULY 29

JULY 30

JULY 31

AUG. 1

AUG. 2

CRABGRASS • BY TAUHID BONDIA

JULY 28

JULY 29

JULY 30

JULY 31

AUG. 1

AUG. 2

PETS

A KID'S COMIC • BY MJ BETHELY



LEISURE

BLACK POETS SOCIETY: HAPPINESS+UNUSUAL

Imagine trees  
Imagine the breeze  
Imagine  
watching the river flow  
through your bare toes. Your  
breathing quickens, chest  
rising  
Falls under  
pressure  
Under pressure...your choices  
don't dictate you the way they  
once did.  
But  
You still.  
Keep calm....child the storm is  
far from over  
Keep calm....men the pain is  
still much closer  
My ladies I'm with you but...  
Just know your ways still confuse me like I'm back in middle  
school  
Sitting down at the lunch table  
Waiting for the bizarre combinations turned sweets turned



By Jā Corbett-Sparks  
THE BLACK LENS  
CONTRIBUTOR



symphonies to our ears like the school bell ring at the end  
of the day.  
But wait  
I'm grown now  
I have my own now  
I have to WANT to have my own now.  
After years of being in a team am I really on my own?  
Wow  
Yeah this a...  
this is a problem  
Such unusual matters had been deemed unconstitutional  
But.  
we all.  
have seen it ignored before.  
So why not now?  
Such words had been dubbed ignorant and inaccurate.  
But we LIVE to love a Lie  
So who gives a damn?  
I did at one point  
I DID at one point.  
I lived, I fought, I died in what I HID at one point.

Like they don't understand.  
Not I, Not They, Not You...  
Not Him, Not Her...  
Nor Dollar or Cent can't write the letter better.  
You can't speak soul into a skeleton, once we give flowers  
to the corpses.  
I understand it now.  
I've been bleeding a beautiful shade of black...  
...And no matter how much I carve my name in the  
mountain...  
it will remain untouched.  
I guess I'm unseen.  
I guess because I'm unsure.  
Unsure of what unfortunate circumstance led to the birds  
singing oh so early.  
Never forgetting the words of the dead.  
They make for interesting conversation.  
Telling each story, living each experience.  
Taking every loss, hitting every wall,  
Running too far from home...  
Doesn't it make you happy?

Culture Capitalism v.  
Corporate Community

By AJ the Wordsmith  
The Black Lens

When do we say “it’s new to me?”  
Corporate community has nothing to do  
With my ethical existential economic belief  
Your behavior warrants a big sigh  
Coming from a land known as:  
“Home of the thief”  
Where we steal your belief  
Our lands motto: “We have lost our way”  
This is a leaderless culture vulture society  
Spreading Diaspora Wars with spiritual propaganda anxiety  
Stealing the soul out of the land  
Watching others stake claim on territory  
That they never had a right to colonize!  
Let’s have a conversation about ICE,  
Sorry if I don’t particularly sound nice  
Especially when they deporting everyone  
Who knows something about spice!  
My advice? We better think twice  
Immigration being weaponized!?!  
Who immigrated here first !?!  
Doesn’t it hurt when you flirt with history  
Like where is the mystery?  
Did we murder her or just steal a child’s innocence?  
So focused on what is defined as human  
You’ve lost the very thing that defines  
Let me remind that we can refine  
Not just wants and needs  
But communities commonplace goals  
That evolves into universal wealth  
That everyone can value from!  
Like? >”Whose Fight Is This?”<  
Humans so focused on the division of diversity  
And not the Dividers  
Or how we can be kinder!  
We are all prey!  
If not predators  
Being hunted by our own agendas  
No need for oration  
Your information is dismissive  
Devoid of any evidence whatsoever to support your claim  
On why your ANCESTORS were allowed to choose who to blame  
Had the necessary nerve to say “stay in your lane”  
As if we would forgive and forget  
NEVER!



AJ the Wordsmith and Mona Lake speak after a poetry reading as a part of the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture’s Our Stories event.

GOT BARS? A VERSE  
ITCHING TO GET OUT?

Say it loud, with your whole chest.  
Welcome to the Black Poet’s Society,  
our new segment in The Black Lens.  
Carved out for truth-tellers and  
creatives. This is your page.

Let the power of poetry lead you.

Graphic by Jā Corbett-Sparks



We Hold Thunder Quietly

We hold thunder quietly  
In bones that remember the  
lash,  
In hands taught to build  
kingdoms  
From scraps they said were  
trash.  
We smile in rooms that echo  
With names we’ve never  
owned,  
Speak soft in spaces hostile  
To the rhythm of our tone.  
We’re told,  
“Be strong. Be grateful. Be still.”  
But how do you rest  
On a battlefield?  
When your tears  
Aren’t seen as rain but  
weakness,  
When your rage  
Is met with fear not tenderness,  
When therapy feels foreign  
And prayer becomes  
performance,  
We learn to bury the ache



By Daniella  
Musesambili  
THE BLACK LENS  
CONTRIBUTOR



Like ancestors hid their songs.  
But we are not broken.  
We are not crazy.  
We are tired.  
And tired is not a sin.  
So this is for the ones  
Who stay on the call all night,

Who breathe through panic  
And still show up to fight.  
This is for the quiet sobs,  
The shaky hands, the silent  
screams,  
For the child who learned too  
early  
To tuck away their dreams.  
You don't have to carry  
What's killing you to prove  
You're worthy of being seen,  
Worthy of being soothed.  
Healing is your right–  
Not a privilege, not a prize.  
So speak your truth,  
Unclench your fists,  
Let softness colonize  
The parts of you  
Still waiting to exhale.  
Because being Black  
And still breathing  
Is resistance.  
And choosing joy  
Is a radical act  
Of existence.

I Wrote This Poem  
in 20 Minutes



By Donalda Brantley  
THE BLACK LENS

I wrote this poem in 20  
minutes  
But my people have been  
writing our stories for  
centuries  
Words on a paper  
Just like buildings on a  
road  
My culture rich in history  
but personality switches  
from code to code  
Still this Indigenous blood  
I hold  
I stand on the land of  
which they stole  
Weather hot from the  
blazing sun  
Or cold from the freezing  
rain  
Whether it was hot or cold  
My people were told

Work, fight and, never fold  
My ancestors were Stolen  
and sold  
Still I stand here to share a  
few words  
Words of persistence  
The power that I hold is  
shown through my very  
existence  
From the way that I comb  
my hair  
To the stories that I share  
Even the clothing that I  
wear  
Because you see history  
has many layers  
They tried to wash away  
the stains  
But no bleach is good  
enough to cover our pains  
Pains of overcoming hate  
Pains of overcoming  
discrimination  
Because my people fought  
and built this country  
We are the creators of a  
nation  
So let us continue to put in  
the work  
There's no time left to be  
patient

Two Branches,  
One Tree



By Jenny Musesambili  
THE BLACK LENS

I come from lands where drums still  
speak,  
Where elders' wisdom flows deep  
each week.  
I danced barefoot on sacred ground,  
With every step, my roots were  
found.  
But I was born where freedom bled,  
Where chains were broken, tears  
were shed.  
I carry stories in my skin,  
Of battles lost, and hope within.  
You wear your name like royalty,  
I search for mine in history.  
You knew the land, the songs, the  
way–  
I learned to fight just to stay.  
Yet when I hear your language rise,  
My heart responds, though tongue  
denies.  
And when you see my power burn,  
You see the fire you helped me  
learn.  
So let us not build walls of pride,  
When blood and soul are still allied.  
Two branches, reaching endlessly–  
One struggle, one strength, one  
ancient tree.