

# THE BLACK LENS

SEPTEMBER 2025 - VOL. 10 - ISSUE NO. 9

## RISE, REFOCUS, REGENERATE: BACK TO SCHOOL

### A DREAM DEFERRED, NOW FULFILLED



COURTESY PHOTOS

The Fairchild Honor Guard presents the American flag to Sandra Freeman, granddaughter of the late Isham A. Mitchell.

#### Honoring Buffalo Soldier Isham A. Mitchell

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

For nearly a century, Private Isham A. Mitchell lay in Greenwood Cemetery without a headstone. The Buffalo Soldier, who served in the 25th Infantry from 1907 to 1913, was buried in Spokane 91 years ago, but his final resting place went unmarked after his widow's pleas for assistance were denied.

That changed on July 26, when his granddaughter, Sandra Freeman, stood before a newly placed headstone at Greenwood. Surrounded by family, community members, and the Spokane Chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club, Freeman fulfilled a dream deferred – not only for her grandfather, but for the



A headstone posthumously awarded to Isham A. Mitchell.

See **SOLDIER, 9**



COURTESY

Dr. Melissa Mace is the first executive director of Spokane NAACP.

### A NEW CHAPTER

*Dr. Melissa Mace becomes first executive director of Spokane NAACP*

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

The Spokane branch of the NAACP has marked a historic milestone with the appointment of Dr. Melissa Mace as its first-ever Executive Director. For Mace, a social worker, community leader, and military dependent who grew up in Medical Lake, the role is more than a title – it is the fulfillment of family legacy, professional dedication, and a deep commitment to community building.

Mace's roots in the Spokane area run deep. Her father's service in the U.S. Air Force brought the family to Fairchild Air Force Base when she was a child. Living both on and off base, she experienced a blend of military life and small-town Spokane upbringing, attending schools in Spokane and Medical Lake before graduating and pursuing higher education at Eastern Washington University. There, she earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in social work before building a respected private practice, Discovery Counseling Group, now in its 16th year. In 2022, she completed her Doctor of Social Work with a dissertation exploring the experiences of Black women in leadership across the diaspora.

That research, combined with her professional and personal journey, shapes her vision for what leadership and solidarity can look like in Spokane. As Mace puts it, "I

See **MACE, 13**

## It's a family reunion! Block partying for health's sake

### Anna Franklin and the vision of Maji Rising

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS



Anna Franklin

When Anna Franklin speaks about health equity, she doesn't just cite statistics – she tells stories of lived experience, ancestral resilience, and the healing that comes from reclaiming cultural practices. As the founder of Maji Rising, Franklin is building a movement that blends healthcare access with cultural care, weaving joy, trust, and justice into every layer of community wellness.

"I have been in healthcare for over 33 years," Franklin says. "And in the last five to six years, I have really had a role within the healthcare organization that I work for that's focused in on health equity. One theme that I consistently see is that the Black community – our community – has some of the poorest outcomes in hypertension control, depression screening with follow up, cancer screening, diabetes con-

IF YOU GO

**Maji Rising Health Block Party, A Celebration of Wellness and Community**

**WHAT:** This October, Maji Rising will host its first Health Block Party – a two-day community celebration blending healthcare access, cultural traditions, and joyful connection.

**WHEN:** Oct. 11-12

**WHERE:** RAZE Early Learning and Development Center, 6519 N. Lidgerwood, Spokane

**THE EVENT WILL FEATURE:** Free Health Services – Dental exams with fluoride varnishes, primary care check-ins, digestive health screenings, behavioral health support, and massage therapy. Hands-On Learning – Phlebotomy arms, suture kits, and STEM activities to spark interest in health careers. Kid-Friendly Stations – A teddy bear clinic, storytelling, and even a Black tooth fairy experience to make wellness fun and familiar. Community Joy – Local food vendors, music by live DJ and plenty of space to gather, dance and reconnect.

trol. And no matter what interventions we would make, it just wasn't shifting the tide enough." That frustration, and a nudge from her husband, sparked a radical step: create something new. He challenged her to make her own.

"And that's what we did. We developed Maji Rising – not in criticism of the larger organizations, but to supplement and act as more of a liaison between our community and the larger healthcare organizations."

**Water as Life, Culture as Care**

Maji, meaning water in Swahili, became the symbol for the nonprofit.

"Maji means water in Swahili, and water is life. Water has healed us, but it's also destroyed us. When you think about our journey coming from Africa to the United States, water both sustained us and devastated us. We chose the name Maji Rising because we wanted it to symbolize the renewal, the flow, and most importantly, the collective power of our community coming together so that we are able to rise above

See **MAJI RISING, 9**



RISE, REFOCUS, REGENERATE:  
BACK TO SCHOOL

BL

NEWS

BLACKLENS.NEWS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Texas Legislature approves final redistricting map, weakening Black vote

After leaving the state to prevent a vote from proceeding to approve the redistricting map, more than 50 Texas Democrats returned to the state capital, Austin, restoring quorum. The fleeing Democrats did succeed in preventing vote from going forward and causing the first special session to come to a close. While absent, the lawmakers were fined \$500 per day in addition to arrest threats from Gov. Greg Abbott, which across state lines, were unenforceable.

Abbott called a second session, which the Democrats attended, where, among other items, redistricting and flood relief efforts were discussed. Democrats say the new districts reduce the strength of Black and Hispanic votes. Texas Republicans denied Democrats the chance for a filibuster after eight hours of debate, leading to the final vote and passage of the bill.

Texas’ mid-decade congressional map concentrates Black and Latino voters in fewer districts and disrupts how their communities are represented, experts told Axios.

Democrats vowed to challenge the bill in court after Abbott adopts the new map. California Gov. Gavin Newsom called for a state special election to adopt a new map to turn five Republican seats to the Democrats, which, in theory, would counter the five seats gained by Republicans in Texas. President Donald Trump is pushing other GOP-majority states, like Missouri, Indiana and Ohio, to update their congressional districts to flip seats for the 2026 midterm election. States typically redraw congressional districts every decade after the U.S. Census, when seats are reapportioned nationwide to reflect population changes.

Trump takes control of D.C. police; Guard arrives, worrying Black parents

President Donald Trump announced Aug. 11 that he was taking over Washington, D.C.’s Metropolitan Police Department and deploying National Guard members after claiming the city had “roving mobs of wild youth,” creating unsafe conditions. His claims counter statistics from the same department he claimed control of – violent crime was down by 35% in 2024 compared to 2023.

The administration tried replacing police Chief Pamela A. Smith but retracted the effort after the city sued the Trump administration. Under federal law, the president can direct D.C.’s police force for up to 30 days, after which a joint resolution from both the House and Senate are needed. The 30 days ends Sept. 10.

The deployment of federal agents and National Guard troops has caused some Black parents to return to the days of “the talk” about policing they had hoped was no longer needed to keep children safe, the New York Times reported.

On Aug. 22, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered National Guard troops in D.C. to begin carrying firearms during its patrols. As of Aug. 24, more than 2,200 National Guardsmen are in D.C., 1,300 of them from the state National guards of West Virginia, South Carolina, Ohio, Mississippi, Louisiana and Tennessee according to CNN.

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COMICS AND LEISURE

Sandy Williams is the forever foundation of The Black Lens

FROM THE EDITOR

By April Eberhardt  
BLACK LENS NEWS EDITOR

The Black Lens will always rest on the forever foundation laid by Sandy Williams. Her legacy is the centerpiece of this paper, and her vision remains the guide as we move forward. Sandy ran this invention as a sole proprietor from her own home, fearless in her endeavor to create a press that spoke to the community, named the social and political narratives that impacted Black people, and lifted the value of our stories.

Now, a team is learning what it takes to do what one woman once did single-handedly. We are working with intention under a new model, developing structure, and bringing new hands to the fold – growing the seed that Sandy had already begun to expand prior to her untimely passing. And in this process, we do not take her ground-work for granted. Every step we take is made with respect and gratitude in an effort to carry the vision

Get Involved with The Black Lens

If you are curious, want to contribute a story that amplifies Black voices, or have questions, please reach out:

◆ April Eberhardt, Editor – april@blacklensnews.com

◆ Alethea Dumas, Board Chair – alethea@blacklensnews.com

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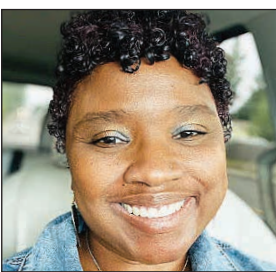
forward.

This is, in every sense, an evolving effort that comes with its challenges. We are driving and fine tuning the engine at the same time, a lot of the time. But what resounds from Sandy’s sweat equity in The Black Lens is this truth: community power is critical, and cohesion is the lever.

And so, we continue to move – forward with care, forward with courage, and forward with the understanding that this paper is more than just ink on pages. It is a mirror, a megaphone, and a memory bank for our people. It is a space where our lives are documented, our voices amplified and our

contributions are credited. It is being handled with care and overseen by Black people invested in the Spokane community and Black culture. With Sandy’s imprint, we inherit both responsibility and hope. As we carry The Black Lens ahead, we do so not by replacing what she built, but by extending it – keeping the light of her work burning while ensuring it shines even further.

Because The Black Lens is a work in progress, there is a constant learning curve. The operations of keeping the paper moving forward are multifaceted, with many moving pieces. We are deeply grateful for community members who



By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



understand this vision and who support it through donations, time, and talent as contributors.

Most importantly, the stories of the Black community are being told in The Black Lens, where our voices and perspectives are given agency. For those curious about the nonprofit model, please refer back to the September 2024 article written by Rick Williams, brother of Sandy Williams, which explains the transition and structure in greater detail: blacklensnews.com/stories/2024/sep/01/from-the-board-the-future-of-the-black-lens-depend/

We always welcome your submissions, your questions about our nonprofit and production process, and your ideas for how to support The Black Lens. This remains a collective learning process, and our board continues to invest their time and energy to ensure that everything we do reflects and embraces the needs of our community.

September is for Sandy

IN HER WORDS

By Lisa Gardner  
THE BLACK LENS

I remember the first time I learned that Sandy’s birthday was the day before mine and I thought to myself, “That explains it!” Not that anyone needs a reason to be drawn to Sandy’s vibe, but to me, it was a special connection with her unexplainable spirit. On the surface, I could say, “Oh, it’s a Virgo thing!” But Sandy was truly out of this world.

I don’t mean in a celestial or astronomical sense, but in that she genuinely felt heaven-sent. I wouldn’t claim I am heaven-sent myself, but when I say a kindred spirit, I mean we shared a love for the community – a love for Spokane. Most importantly, we both loved celebrating Black culture.

Sandy and I grew up in the Spokane area and understood what it was like to be the only brown face in predominantly white spaces. We knew what it was like to relegate

our cultural celebrations to church basements or a corner of a park once a year. We knew the challenge of constantly explaining why supporting Black culture in Spokane was essential. We understood the ongoing struggle of advocating for our culture amid a mostly dominant narrative culture and elected officials here about why civil rights and social justice matter. The foremost celebrated Spokane activist, Sandy, for years pushed for the advancement of our community relentlessly and without ceasing in the face of constant resistance. Sandy’s audaciousness was the allure that drew people in and is what I miss deeply.

When Sandy decided that there needed to be more awareness about Sickle Cell disease—a genetic blood disorder that I was born with, and asked me to write an article and be involved, I thought to myself, “This is the most gracious and intentional thing anyone has ever done about this disease.” Using her Black Lens platform and Carl

Maxey Center to bring awareness to a disease that primarily impacts Black Americans wasn’t only on



DAN PELLE/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Spokane’s first African-American newspaper, The Black Lens, was published by the late Sandy Williams.

brand for Sandy’s love of all things Black; it was her way of saying to me and those who suffer, “I see you!”

Losing Sandy that dreadful day in September 2022 was a blow to the heart and soul that reverberated throughout the community. It was like someone knocked the wind out of me when I heard the news. September is the month Sandy was given life, and September is the month her life transcended from earth.

September has always been a time for me to pause – once to honor Sickle Cell Awareness and to celebrate my own life. But now, September carries a deeper meaning. It is when I reflect on the life and legacy of Sandy Williams. September is for Sandy.

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.**



Lens delivered **directly to your mailbox**, simply **scan the QR code to complete the payment and delivery process**. This step ensures you’re connected to the stories that matter most to our community.

**Your subscription is more than just a subscription – it’s**

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 ensures you’re connected to the stories that matter most to our community.

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

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  
April Eberhardt, Rick Williams, Luc Jasmin III, Alethea Sharea Dumas,  
Michael Bethely, KJ January and Shamerica Nakamura

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About The Black Lens

CC

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

WHAT’S ON THE BALLOT IN NOVEMBER?

Spokane-area ballot measures – a voter guide

From Black Lens staff reports

1. Aquifer Protection Renewal and Fees

**Cost:** Up to \$1.25/month per household for water use and \$1.25/month per household for sewage disposal  
**Purpose:** Protect and improve the Spokane Valley–Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer (water supply), reduce pollution, upgrade sewage and stormwater

systems, and monitor water quality  
**Duration:** Up to 20 years  
**What this means for you:** A small monthly fee to help keep the region’s drinking water safe and clean.  
**2. Public Safety Sales Tax Increase**  
**Cost:** Sales tax increase of 0.1% (one penny per \$10 spent)  
**Purpose:** Fund public safety, includ-

ing hiring more police officers, maintaining operations, staffing retention, and covering related costs  
**Duration:** Ongoing, no set end date  
**What this means for you:** A small increase in sales tax when you shop, with the money going directly to law enforcement and public safety services in Spokane Valley.  
**3. Fire District 13 Emergency**

**Medical Services Levy**  
**Cost:** Property tax of 50 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value  
**Purpose:** Continue funding emergency medical services for residents in Fire District 13  
**Duration:** Six years (starting in 2026)  
**What this means for you:** Property owners will pay a modest tax to ensure ambulance and emergency medical services remain available in their community.  
**Legislative and county candidates can be found at:** [sos.wa.gov](https://sos.wa.gov)

IN BRIEF

Council votes to expand protections against ICE agents; support public dollars for public benefit

From Black Lens staff reports

Council votes to expand protections against ICE agents

During Monday night’s Legislative Session, the Spokane City Council voted to approve the “Safe and Welcome in Spokane” ordinance, which expands protections against warrantless searches by immigration enforcement in designated nonpublic areas. These areas include public rights of way that are not generally accessible to the public or where access is temporarily restricted, such as during a permitted special event requiring explicit authorization. This initiative directly addresses safety concerns raised by residents and employees regarding security, accessibility and the protection of city assets, according to a news release from the city.

“In passing the ‘Safe and Welcome in Spokane’ ordinance, we reaffirm our commitment to creating a community where everyone feels safe and respected,” said Council Member Paul Dillon. “This measure not only protects the rights of our residents but also ensures that non-public areas remain accessible without the fear of unwarranted immigration enforcement. It’s about standing together as a city and fostering an environment of trust and safety for all, and most importantly, reinforces that in Spokane, we all belong.”

Council votes to support public dollars for public benefit

During Monday’s Legislative Session, the City Council voted to support ordinance 36723 titled “Public Dollars for Public Benefit,” which creates a community workforce agreement and prioritizes hiring to

promote training and career opportunities for individuals in the construction trades. It also establishes priorities for hiring residents in economically distressed areas and directs the city’s Finance Department to execute a project labor agreement for public works projects estimated to cost \$5 million or more, according to a news release from the city.  
“This ordinance is a major move toward not just developing our infrastructure but also strengthening our workforce,” said Council Member Paul Dillon, co-sponsor of this ordinance. “By focusing on local residents and investing in training, we’re preparing our community for long-term success.”

Through this ordinance, the council encourages the Spokane Park Board, the Spokane Library Board and the Spokane Public School Board to adopt the community workforce agreement and priority hire program. Community Workforce Agreements and Project Labor Agreements are known to prevent waste, maximize public benefits and ensure equity while delivering measurable advantages to workers, communities, and taxpayers.

“The labor movement has been at the forefront of fighting for better wages and working conditions for workers. I’m proud to co-sponsor this ordinance encouraging priority hiring practices for contractors to provide quality pay and benefits and making sure our public dollars benefit our local economy first and foremost,” said Council Member Zack Zappone, co-sponsor of the ordinance. “Dollars from these public works projects will provide Spokanites with living wages that reinvest in our local economy.”

SPOKANE CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT BETSY WILKERSON TO BE HONORED

Black Lens staff reports

Spokane City Council President Betsy Wilkerson will be recognized with the Shining Executive Superstar Award by the Washington African American Achievement Awards, which celebrates leaders, advocates and innovators whose influence reaches far beyond their professional achievements.

This award is a signa-

ture tribute to Black excellence, honoring those who embody resilience, service, and transformative leadership across the state.  
This year’s theme, “Shining Executive Super Stars,” spotlights individuals who not only rise in their careers but also mentor, advocate and open doors for others.  
See more online at [seattlemedium.com](https://seattlemedium.com).



Spokane City Council President Betsy Wilkerson

Stage Left Theater presents modern, experimental retelling of Julius Caesar

From Black Lens staff reports

This fall, Stage Left Theater invites audiences behind bars for a bold reimaging of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, directed by Chelsea DuVall. Set in a contemporary female penitentiary, this modern and experimental production explores the complex dynamics of fate, free will, and

betrayal in a world where trust is a luxury and power is everything. Performances run Sept. 12-28 with evening shows 7 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and 2 p.m. matinees on Sundays at 108 W. Third Ave. Tickets for the theater, ran by Black artistic director Dahveed Bullis, run for \$30 and are available online at our [show/juliuscaesaratstageleft](https://show/juliuscaesaratstageleft).

3rd District Legislative Rep. Natasha Hill host to mobile town hall at Shadle library

Rep. Natasha Hill, of the 3rd District, is host to a mobile town hall from 4-6 p.m. Sept. 19 at the Shadle Park Library (2111 W. Wellesley Ave.) in Spokane. It’s a chance

for folks to engage in conversation about housing, transit, climate, “or anything you care about,” Hill’s staff wrote in a news release.

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Saturday, September 27th  
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Details



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CULTURE

BIPOC Youth Nature Camp ‘a dream come true’

FROM THE WATER’S EDGE

By Dr. Robert L. “Bob” Bartlett  
THE BLACK LENS

In August, I shared a story about a recent fly-fishing trip with my good friend Dan and the conversation we had while sitting near the water’s edge. Our conversation took the usual twist and turns like the river we were sitting next to. We eventually settled on a subject that is near and dear to the two of us: today’s youth and the future of wild scenic places like the one we were in. We are lovers of wild places and wild trout today because of those who took the time to take us outdoors as youth.

In July I was fortunate to be one of four Ubuntu Fly Anglers who organized a BIPOC Youth Nature Camp held at the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center. If you don’t know who we are you can check us out at [Ubuntuflyanglers.com](https://ubuntuflyanglers.com). The camp was a “dream come true.” We had a handful of youth from across the city for six days straight. The goals of the camp were simple: put as many people of color who love being outdoors in front of the campers; get the campers outdoors; introduce them to some local tribal history; introduce them to the Spokane Riverkeeper staff; introduce them to fly-fishing and, of course, take them fishing. Each morning started with time in the classroom and ended with a field trip or activity.

Thanks to members of the Ubuntu Fly Anglers team who traveled from far and wide to help lead the camp. Fly casting instructor and co-founder of Ubuntu Carl Crawford came from L.A. Fly-fishing Hall of Fame inductee and fly-fishing educator Joyce Shepherd came from South Carolina, and professional fly-fishing guide and business owner Lael Johnson came from the West Side of the state.

A huge amount of thanks to local friends who gladly accepted our invitation to stop by MLK to share their stories and wisdom with the campers. Friends like Jonathan Teeters from Empire Health and the national organization of Hunters of Color; David Whiting from the board of directors of The



COURTESY PHOTOS

Students and organizers of the BIPOC Youth Nature Camp, from left to right front row are Dezyre Williams, Titus Palmer, Zahara Caldwell, Londyn Martin and Zamyra Taylor. Back row are Dr. Bob Bartlett, Cpt. Lael Johnson, Joyce Shepherd and Carl Crawford.



Lands Council; Erin Lipsker from District 81 and a member of the Ubuntu Fly Anglers team; Margot Hill-Ferguson, the director of American Indian Studies at EWU and Spokane Tribal member; and April Eberhart the editor of this paper. Three members of the Spokane Riverkeeper staff also came by and spent a morning with us – Waterkeeper Jule Schultz; Water Protector Katlyn Scot; and River Cleanup and Outreach Lead Liv

Kindl. Classroom time was followed by field trips. Monday, we travel to the Turnbull Wildlife Refuge near Cheney where we met with a USFWS person who took us on a short hike in the Refuge and afterwards gave us a tour of their Wildlife Educational building. Tuesday, we traveled south of Spokane to Spangle then to the Hanging Tree Monument. There we met Spokane Tribal member Ricky

Sherwood Jr. who told the story of what happened there in 1858 to Yakama Sub-Chief Qualchan and other warriors.

There was a Fly Fishing 101 course Thursday morning and then we practiced casting in the gym with specially designed rods meant to teach timing. Friday was spent casting real 9-foot-long fly rods with yarn on the end of the line instead of a fly. Casting a nearly weightless object and placing it where you want it is not as easy as it looks! It was incredibly heartwarming to see the young ones learn the basics and do it well.

On Saturday we traveled to Clear Lake west of the town of Medical Lake for some fishing. My fishing buddy Dan helped us gain access to the military resort on the lake. He, along with the other camp leads helped a few campers actually catch their first fish on the fly. We returned to the MLK Center for a catered dinner. Each camper was then given a certificate of completion by the program leads.

Thanks again, to the Empire



Health Foundation and the North East Community Center ZONE for providing the necessary funding so that we could offer this camp totally free. Thanks to them, each camper received a camp t-shirt, their own binder and a copy of black nature photographer Dudley Edmonson’s latest book *People the Planet Needs Now*. The book tells the individual stories of others across the country who look like us, who are working to protect their neighborhoods from toxic waste dumping, and protecting our natural world. Thanks to the Black Lens for publishing our story and for promoting the camp. Also, a special thanks to Heather Hodson-Neufield with iFish-iBelong for all of her behind the scenes work and providing a cozy home for two of our camp leads.

We owe a great deal of thanks to the parents who signed their youth up and faithfully delivered and picked them up each day—it starts with you! And, a huge, heartfelt thanks to the tireless efforts of MLK Executive Director Freda Gandy, her assistant Kamryn Richardson and the entire staff of the center.

Community engagement is one of the most valued mission pillars of the Ubuntu Fly Anglers Network. We are dedicated to embracing, educating and supporting the current and next generation of fly anglers and environmental activists who look like us. What a pleasure it was! This was the first but not the last of what we plan to be an annual event in Spokane. Dreams do come true!

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

FINDING PEACE IN THE WATER

The fly fishing journey of Joyce Shepherd

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

When Joyce Shepherd steps onto a riverbank, she carries with her more than just a fly rod. She carries decades of wisdom, a commitment to healing, and a passion for sharing the serenity of nature with others.

Born in Snow Hill, North Carolina, where her family farmed tobacco, Shepherd didn’t grow up fishing. “I always wanted to fish,” she recalls, “but I was a girl, and they wouldn’t take me.” At 35, she finally picked up a rod – and never looked back. Now 75, she has built a life centered around the water, casting not only for fish but for peace, healing, and community.

Teaching the Art of Casting

Shepherd specializes in casting, the skill of sending a delicate fly across the water to entice a fish. “Casting is about precision,” she explains. “If there’s a fish way over there, you’ve got to get your line right to it. We use flies – artificial bugs that imitate the real ones fish eat.”

But for Shepherd, teaching casting goes beyond technique. It’s a therapeutic tool, especially for the veterans she works with through Project Healing Waters and for cancer survivors through Casting Carolinas.

“Fly fishing takes people out of the headspace they’re in,” Shepherd says. “Veterans with PTSD have to focus on tying tiny, intricate flies, or on the rhythm of casting. It builds motor memory and calms their minds. For cancer patients, it takes their thoughts away from fear and back into the present moment. It brings peace.”

Shepherd has seen firsthand the transformative power of water and community. She remembers a veteran who once admitted in full transparency, “I used to go home and beat my wife. Now I go home and tie flies.” Another, struggling with suicidal thoughts, was saved by a simple phone call inviting him to go fishing.

For women with cancer, Shepherd and her colleagues provide free weekend retreats. “From the moment they arrive, we make sure they don’t carry the load alone – not even their luggage. It teaches them that help is there, that they don’t have to do everything by themselves.”

Determined to open doors for others, Shepherd co-founded Women on the Fly in North Carolina, a group that now boasts over 200 members. “It’s very important for



APRIL EBERHARDT/THE BLACK LENS

Joyce Shepherd, left, poses at an Ubuntu Fly Fishing event.

me to show young women that they can do this,” she says. “We’ve built a sisterhood. We fish together, learn from each other, and support one another.”

Ask Shepherd what fishing gives her personally, and she’ll answer in one word: peace. “Water is very healing,” she says. “The minerals, the rhythm, the connection – it calms you. Even horses are put in streams to heal their legs. There’s something timeless about it.”

That belief in nature’s healing power drives her message to younger generations. In an age of screens and fast food, Shepherd urges young people to “try something new, get outside, and grow something – even if it’s just in a pot on the porch. Learn where your food comes from. Reconnect with nature before it’s too late.”

In 2018, Shepherd was inducted into the Fly Fishing Museum of the Southern Appalachians Hall of Fame in Bryson City, North Carolina. The honor reflects not only her decades of casting but also her dedication to teaching, healing, and building community.

Despite being the only Black woman in the fly fishing circles she entered decades ago, Shepherd remembers being embraced and protected. “Fishermen are good people,” she reflects. “I never had an issue. They welcomed me.”

From farm fields in North Carolina to rivers across the Carolinas, from veterans and cancer survivors to hundreds of women picking up rods for the first time, Joyce Shepherd has cast wide nets of influence and healing.

Her story reminds us of the many ways healing can be found outside of traditional spaces. “Nature is essential to our human existence,” Shepherd says. “We just have to remember to breathe, to connect, and to let it bring us peace.”

Reflections of environmental camp with the Ubuntu Flyers

By Titus Palmer and Dezyre Williams  
THE BLACK LENS

This week with the Ubuntu Fly Anglers was one of the best weeks ever! I learned so many new things, and I even picked up a brand new hobby, fly fishing.

One really cool fact I learned is that the Spokane Indians used to call white men upside-down faces because they were bald on top and had big beards. But I also learned some serious stuff, too, like how important it is to be patient when fishing. You can’t just throw your line in and expect a fish right away. It takes time and practice, but that’s what makes it fun.

Another thing I learned is that nature is kind of like therapy. When you’re mad or feeling down, just going outside for a walk or sitting quietly can really help you calm down. I didn’t know how peaceful it could be until I was out there near the water, just listening to the wind.

On the topic of nature, did you know dirt can be pollution? If fish breathe in dirty water, even the tiniest amount, it can make them sick or even kill them. That made me want to take better care of nature. One of my favorite fun facts was that wild hot dogs are actually called cattails and you can eat the brown part. The best part of the week was going fishing, especially since it was my first time. If I could go back any day, I’d go back to Turnbull Wild-



COURTESY

Carl Crawford shows Dezyre how to hold his fish.

life Refuge in Cheney. I really liked seeing the birds and learning how to properly cast a fly fishing rod. The instructors were helpful and made it fun to learn. –Titus Palmer

This week with the Ubuntu Fly Anglers, we came together and learned so many cool things that I will always remember. One of the most important things I learned was how to hold a fish the right way by its tail and under its belly. You also have to get your hands wet first so you don’t hurt the fish’s slime. Now that I know how to hold a fish, I can teach other people too.

I also learned how to hold a fly fishing rod and how to be patient. You can’t just throw your line in and expect a fish to bite right away. You have to be calm and not goof around, or the fish will outsmart you. The instructors really helped me. They went out of their way to teach me



COURTESY

Cpt. Lael Johnson helps Titus and Dezyre with casting.

how to cast safely and not hurt my friends or myself.

Everyone even said I was good at practicing, which made me feel proud. Fishing is harder than it looks, but it’s also really fun. I thought it would be boring, but now I like fly fishing. It’s peaceful, it helps me relax, and it’s something I want to keep doing.

I’m really grateful that I got to learn this new hobby. We also learned about nature and how to take care of it. Even a little bit of dirt or garbage can pollute the water and hurt the fish. I want to keep the water clean so the fish stay safe.

We even learned fun facts like how the Spokane Indians called white men upside-down people because they were bald with beards.

And did you know king salmon can weigh up to 100 pounds? There are so many types of salmon, I can’t even name them all. –Dezyre Williams



BUSINESS

Forgotten foundations: Who built these campuses?

IN HIS WORDS

By Edmond W. Davis  
THE BLACK LENS

Let’s connect NIL to the deeper economic history of American education. More than 300 U.S. colleges and universities were established before 1865 – including every Ivy League school. Mostly all of these campuses were built, maintained and agriculturally enriched by enslaved African Americans, indentured servants and exploited laborers. Yet for over a century after the 13th Amendment, the descendants of these builders were barred from attending the very institutions they built. That systemic exclusion gave rise to HBCUs like Cheyney University (1837) and Lincoln University (1854) – founded out of necessity, not privilege. Today’s NIL

opportunities represent delayed economic justice. Rolling them back only continues the cycle of Black labor without Black profit.

Trump’s Track Record: A Pattern of Economic Regression

Trump’s push to limit NIL fits into a larger trend from his time in office: policies that undermined vulnerable populations while enriching the already wealthy. Federal Student Aid – Low-income students – Borrower protections rolled back Title X – Women’s Health – Funding cuts to family planning clinics – ACA enrollment – Working families – Outreach budgets slashed by 90% SNAP (Food Stamps) – Low-income Americans – 700,000+ nearly disqualified HBCU Funding – Delayed and inconsistent support – Veterans Affairs – Veterans – Oversight weakened via privatization Title IX & Military Policy – LGBTQ+ students and service

members – Trans protections rolled back  
Meanwhile:  
• The 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act slashed the corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%.  
• Estate taxes were raised, protecting inherited wealth  
• Capital gains loopholes remained untouched.  
• PPP loans disproportionately benefited big firms and celebrities. All while college athletes – who bring in revenue but live on stipends – were told to be “grateful for a scholarship.”

NIL = Voice + Value

This is more than a financial debate—it’s about voice, value, and visibility. Through NIL, student-athletes are gaining real-world tools:  
•How to build a personal brand.  
•How to read and negotiate contracts.  
•How to practice elementary economics and financial literacy

•How to launch businesses.  
•How to think like entrepreneurs by age 18.  
These are skills that outlast any athletic season. For many, NIL is their first brush with economic empowerment and autonomy. A cap on NIL earnings wouldn’t just hurt athletes now – it would limit their financial education and leadership potential for life.

This Isn’t Just About Sports – It’s About Fairness

This isn’t about technical rules. It’s about equity. It’s about asking:  
•Who gets to profit from their own labor?  
•Who do we trust with success at a young age?  
•Who is allowed to build wealth without apology?  
If NIL is only preserved for athletes with elite branding, institutional backing, or generational wealth, then we’ve repackaged

privilege as reform. NIL – despite its flaws – is one of the few tools that offers a real, scalable opportunity to student-athletes across the board. Trump’s executive order would erase that progress. And it’s not just bad policy – it’s morally short-sighted. “When we say justice, we mean food, housing, health, income, and respect.” – Angela Davis  
NIL may not fix everything. But it’s a powerful, practical piece of the puzzle – and one we can’t afford to lose. Edmond W. Davis is an award-winning university/college professor, international journalist, social historian, a globally recognized Tuskegee Airman 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.

Knowledge opens doors

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

For many families across Washington state, the dream of homeownership has often felt just out of reach. Rising housing costs, intense bidding wars, and limited access to resources have created barriers, particularly for middle-class families who may not qualify for traditional assistance programs. But for Brishawna Macklin and her husband, the Covenant Homeownership Program offered both hope and opportunity. The Covenant Homeownership Program has become a point of access for many families, aiming to repair the legacy of discrimination that once excluded Black families from homeownership. For Macklin, learning about the program came through a personal connection. “My husband’s aunt mentioned the covenant program and shared that she was currently doing it and we should just try to see if we would qualify and if we’re willing to move out to Pierce County then we should try to do that work,” she recalled. After applying, the couple qualified and began their search. The journey wasn’t without challenges. In 2023, the Macklins felt ready to

buy, but medical expenses for their eldest son delayed their plans. By 2024, they were back on track and committed to the process – even if it meant touring nearly 80 open houses. “I would tell everyone to just honestly keep an open mind because unless you are pretty well off, they’re likely getting the perfect house just isn’t exactly likely,” Macklin explained. “We gave ourselves grace and stayed firm on our budget. If it was meant for us, it was going to be for us.” That patience paid off. The couple ultimately purchased a three-bedroom home close to their sons’ school and within their financial limits. The Macklins, like many others in America, reflect a reality faced by many – even with stable employment and good jobs, the goal of homeownership remains out of reach for countless families without the support of programs that help bridge the gap. In an increasingly aggressive housing market, many are left stuck between renting and buying in a landscape where opportunity gaps are both real and deeply felt. Too often, doing all the “right” things – working hard, building careers, and saving carefully – still does not guarantee access to wealth-building

How to learn more about the Covenant Homeownership Program

Visit the Washington state Housing Commission’s webpage to learn more about the Covenant Homeownership Program. On July 27, updates to the program went into effect, amending the Covenant Homeownership Act:  
1. **Increasing the eligibility income limit** so more families qualify.  
2. **Allowing loan forgiveness** for homebuyers below the income threshold who remain in their homes for at least five years. Forgiveness will apply to eligible Covenant homebuyers, even if they purchased their home before July 27. If potential homebuyers don’t qualify for the program, the Commission also offers down payment assistance loans for anyone using a Commission home loan. The average assistance is \$10,000 or more.  
• **Contact a Commission-trained loan officer** via the website.  
• **Or call the Washington State Homeownership Hotline** at (877) 894-4663 to be connected to support, guidance and financial resources tailored to your location, income and specific needs.

opportunities like homeownership. What is underscored is a widening class divide, where the milestone of owning a home remains elusive despite families’ best efforts, and where the realities of capitalism often fail to serve the whole. The program’s requirements involve verifying ancestral ties to Washington,

something Macklin and her husband carefully navigated. “Exactly yeah as long as one person in a relationship has roots here we are you’re good to go,” she said, noting that documentation like birth and death certificates are needed to prove eligibility. For them, it was her husband’s maternal lineage that helped qualify their family



COURTESY

The Macklins benefited from the Covenant Homeownership Program.

for assistance. Beyond the purchase, homeownership represents something far deeper: stability, legacy, and the chance to build generational wealth. Macklin reflected on her childhood in apartments and contrasted it with her children’s new reality. “We want to give them that yard, that space, and the permanence of knowing this is their forever home,” she said. The homebuying journey also provided a template for Macklin’s sons to see and learn firsthand how planning and intentional research can turn a family goal into reality – whether it was painting their own rooms or understanding why their parents were determined to move beyond apartment living. The impact of the Cov-

enant Program didn’t stop with the keys to a new home. Inspired by the process, Macklin and her realtor are now working toward launching a nonprofit to educate other families about homeownership. She believes trust and relatability are crucial in spreading the word. She aims to become a trusted messenger and educator in this process of connecting people to new information and opportunity. For Macklin and her family, the Covenant Homeownership Program is more than financial assistance – it’s a lifeline to stability, equity, and the chance to create a lasting legacy for generations to come. “This isn’t just for wealthy families – it’s for middle-class people with kids and responsibilities, too.”

BLACK THOUGHT: DIVERSE IDEOLOGIES ON ECONOMICS

Building Black wealth: The legacy of Dr. Claud Anderson’s ‘PowerNomics’ explained

PART 1

By Edmond W. Davis  
THE BLACK LENS

Dr. Claud Anderson’s “PowerNomics” opens with a simple but profound truth: **building wealth is not the same as earning money.** Money, without ownership, is a fleeting tool. A paycheck feeds you today; wealth feeds your grandchildren. Wealth survives layoffs, recessions, pandemics, and political shifts because it is anchored in assets, institutions, and control. The harsh reality is that in 1865, Black Americans owned half of one percent of the nation’s wealth – and in 2025, that number is virtually unchanged. This stagnation is not accidental. It is the outcome of a centuries-long system of deliberate economic exclusion, enforced by policy, law, and violence. PowerNomics is not just an economic theory. It is a national blueprint for self-sufficiency, rooted in the history of how wealth is built and protected. Anderson lays out five socio-cultural layers that explain why Black wealth remains stagnant – and how to reverse it.

The Permanent Underclass

Anderson warns that Black Americans are being positioned as a permanent underclass. This is not simply about wages – it is about exclusion from ownership,



Anderson

industry control, and capital access. New immigrant groups often surpass Black Americans economically, aided by incentives never extended to the descendants of enslaved Africans.

The Exceptional Identity

Anderson draws a clear line between “Native Black Americans” – descendants of enslaved Africans in the U.S. – and Black immigrants. While solidarity matters, erasing this identity under generic labels like “minority” weakens the specific case for restitution owed to those whose labor built this country for free.

Immigrant Advantage vs. Black Disadvantage

Many immigrant-owned businesses flourish inside Black neighborhoods, extracting wealth without reinvesting. This is not about personal bias – it is about systemic economics. U.S. immigration policies have historically given others a head start, while Black entrepreneurs fight discriminatory lending and zoning practices.

The Black Wall Street Legacy

From Tulsa’s Greenwood District to Durham’s Hayti, early 20th-century Black business hubs thrived through disciplined group

economics. Their destruction – via race massacres, hostile legislation, and urban renewal projects – was calculated, not coincidental.

The Half of 1% Crisis

Owning less than 1% of a nation’s wealth after 400 years is not a statistic; it is an indictment. White wealth multiplies through inheritance, trust funds, and tax shelters, while Black wealth is drained by predatory lending, gentrification, and intergenerational poverty.

The Five Floors to Wealth-Building

**Community:** Cooperative buying clubs and investment pools to secure land and businesses.  
**Politics:** Support candidates who deliver tangible results for Black communities.  
**Courts/Police:** Fund protections for Black-owned property.  
**Media:** Build Black-owned outlets to control economic narratives.  
**Education:** Teach entrepreneurship and financial literacy from middle school onward. Dr. Anderson’s warning is urgent: the greatest threat is not just the trap – it is the silence of those who claim to lead. If we understand the design, we can engineer our escape.

(To be continued in Part II: “A people without leadership are a people without direction.”)

WHY THOMAS SOWELL DESERVES THE MEDAL OF FREEDOM AWARD

By Dr. Goldy Brown III  
FORMER PROFESSOR AT WHITWORTH UNIVERSITY



Sowell

Thomas Sowell is a renowned economist, social theorist, and author whose work has profoundly influenced many individuals interested in economic policy, social issues and personal development. His unique approach to analyzing complex topics with clarity, evidence and intellectual honesty makes him an inspiring figure for those dedicated to understanding the world around them. One of the primary reasons I am inspired by Thomas Sowell is his unwavering commitment to intellectual integrity. Despite widespread opinions or popular beliefs, Sowell emphasizes the importance of examining facts and data objectively. His ability to challenge conventional wisdom and present well-reasoned counterarguments encourages critical thinking – a trait vital for personal growth and societal progress. Furthermore, Sowell’s emphasis on personal responsibility and the importance of individual effort resonates deeply. He advocates that individuals can shape their destinies through hard work and prudent decision-making, rather than relying solely on government intervention or external factors. This perspective fosters a sense of empowerment and motivates people to take ownership of their lives. In addition, Sowell’s insights

into economic principles and social issues illuminate the unintended consequences of policies and actions. His analyses often demonstrate that well-intentioned programs can produce adverse effects if not carefully considered. This nuanced understanding inspires me to approach problems with a thoughtful and analytical mindset, valuing solutions that are effective and sustainable. Finally, Sowell’s humility and accessibility in communicating complex ideas inspire respect and admiration. His ability to distill complicated topics into understandable language makes his work accessible to a broad audience, encouraging lifelong learning and curiosity. In conclusion, Thomas Sowell inspires me because of his dedication to truth, personal responsibility and intellectual honesty. His work challenges me to think critically, act responsibly and continually seek knowledge. His example reminds us that informed and thoughtful individuals can contribute meaningfully to society and make positive changes in their own lives. Please join me and other leaders in persuading Donald Trump to honor Thomas Sowell with the Presidential Medal of Freedom Award: Medal of Freedom Award Recommendation Form.



EDUCATION

How to communicate, activate with your district

Each September, we show up with new backpacks and the hope that this year will be better. But what if we didn't leave that hope hanging? What if, instead of waiting for something to go wrong, parents and students entered the year prepared with the tools, language and confidence to advocate for themselves and their children? This year, we're not just showing up with school supplies. We're showing up with questions.

For too long, students and families have been left to navigate a school system they didn't design, one that too often ignores them when they speak up and responds to harm with silence, or worse, punishment.

So let's talk strategy and get ahead of the moment before any issues arise. Before the bullying starts, a teacher dismisses a need, or a disciplinary slip appears. Send an email to your child's teacher/counselor. Let them know your child's name, their pronouns and any accommodations they might need, and ask a few thoughtful questions about classroom rules or discipline policies.

Let them know you're present and you're paying attention. You don't need to wait until there's a fire to show up.

Once the relationship is open, stay curious. Ask direct questions that give you insight into how



By Birdie Bachman  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



the school operates. Ask about support services, understand how complaints are processed, and ask to review your child's records (yes, you can do that). Don't wait for the school to offer this information, ask for it. Too often, we're told, "That's just how it is," but your child's education should never be handled without you. And if something goes wrong (ie: name-calling, exclusion, suspension, or silence when your child asks for help), speak up clearly. Describe what happened, how it affected your child and what you'd like to happen next. Are you asking for a meeting or written explanation? A review of your child's IEP? Be specific. Always ask for what your child needs with clarity and confidence.

And then save everything. Keep a folder. Save

emails, take screenshots, and write down what was said, when, and by whom. In Washington, you have the legal right to request student and public records including emails and disciplinary logs. If your school stalls or denies you access, submit your request in writing and keep a copy. Documentation makes it harder for them to ignore you.

Understanding the system can feel overwhelming, but it's one of the best ways to build power. School districts are governed by policy and procedure. That means they must follow certain rules and when they don't, you have leverage.

That's why the Spokane NAACP created the Manual to Address Educational Discrimination. It's written in everyday language and breaks down everything from FERPA and public records to filing a harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) complaint. It's designed to help families like yours speak up. This school year, let's do more than hope for better. Let's demand what is fair and necessary.

So when we say, "Dear School District..."

We mean: *We're here. We're informed. We've got questions. And we're not backing down.*

Birdie Bachman is an intern for the Spokane NAACP Education Committee.

FREE YOUR MIND

The new war on Black history

We live in a moment where knowledge is a monumental component of life, and for Black Americans, knowledge remains at the forefront of freedom. It was illegal for enslaved people to read or learn in a traditional sense; such acts were forbidden and often met with frightening consequences. Resistance to slavery was often preceded by knowledge or awareness that helped individuals recognize slavery as an unnatural condition. Any form of knowing became a tool of revolutionary action against oppression.

Freedom begins in the mind, which is why controlling knowledge remains central to white supremacist agendas. Today, under the leadership of the president of the United States, there is a coordinated attack on culture. It began with dismantling diversity and inclusion programs and cutting funding for cultural centers and initiatives. This attack now extends more visibly into education, affecting universities and museums that aim to teach the public about the past.

The president has famously targeted Smithsonian Institutions, seeking to remove anything deemed "woke"; quite frankly, he is attacking Black history and culture and anything that does not uphold America as great. For



By Anna Sophia Flood  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



the record, slavery was horrifying. Every aspect of it was terrible, and I do not believe anyone today can fully comprehend the terror inflicted on Black life during slavery and the years that followed emancipation. The National Museum of African American History and Culture offers a rich historical overview of Black life in America, beginning with the transatlantic slave trade, continuing through the Jim Crow era, and highlighting the development of Black culture and resistance. While several museums across the country have pursued similar projects, this is the first at a national level. It is now under scrutiny for its representation of history, and because many museums rely on government funding, the attack on the Smithsonian may be the

first of many. Universities and colleges across the country are also cutting funding for, or completely removing, humanities and arts programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. This crisis began with declining student enrollment and has now escalated into the complete removal of programs projected over the next five years. While a number of higher educational institutions are reemphasizing their commitment to the humanities and the arts, these calculated moves demonstrate the importance of utilizing various methods of education to combat any silencing of the past.

As a humanities scholar, I am committed to uncovering the ways Black fiction prompts new perspectives on life in America. Black writers have crafted stories that convey life, history, and culture, humanizing and giving breath to the realities of Black life. This targeted attack on the humanities and arts seeks to erase access to history and its expressive responses. It is crucial that we know what happened here. It is imperative that we teach what happened here. It is vital that we engage with what was written and created in response to what happened here.

Anna Sophia Flood is a M.A./Ph.D candidate.

PEDIATRIC PERSPECTIVES PART 2

Dr. Morton gives tips to help families prepare for school year

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

In the second installment of Pediatric Perspectives, Dr. Tanisha Morton continues her conversation on preparing children for the new school year – this time focusing on mindful media use and the importance of mental health. She offers both practical guidance and candid reflections on how families can navigate screens, social pressures, and emotional wellbeing in 2025.

Mindful Media

In today's world, where "everything's on a screen," Dr. Morton urges parents and caregivers to take a mindful approach to technology use. She acknowledges that in 2025, screens are embedded in nearly every aspect of daily life – school, socialization, and entertainment – but emphasizes the importance of balance and intentional use.

"On screen, life isn't real life right? As human beings, we need to be social, right? It's not necessarily on a screen, but with another human around you." Dr. Morton emphasizes that children need real-life social practice – picking up on tone of voice, read body language, and understand the dynamics of a room – skills that can't be developed through screens alone.

The guiding principle with regard to social media, says Dr. Morton, is moderation. She suggests that about two hours of social or recreational screen time per day is reasonable, provided that it is balanced with offline activities. "So a balance could be like an hour for an hour. You want two hours on the screen. What are you going to do off of it for two hours? That's a good compromise, right?"

She also highlights the



role of parents in setting boundaries, particularly when it comes to cell phones and social media. Dr. Morton is clear: "I don't believe in giving a cell phone with no restrictions, no limitations, and going off into the world, right? Because it's not about that 14-year-old in front of me. It's about everything else, the other influencers that can influence that 14-year-old."

When it comes to schools, Dr. Morton believes the issue is not the phones themselves, but the structures around them. Policies must be clear, consistent, and realistic.

Mental health

For Dr. Morton, conversations around mental health must start early and remain ongoing. She stresses the importance of helping children identify and name their emotions – sadness, anger, nervousness, fear – and then providing tools for how to express them appropriately.

She explains, "These are emotions, and it's healthy to feel all these emotions, right? These make you who you are, and please feel them. Feel all of them." Dr. Morton explained that while all emotions are valid, it's important to understand the appropriate ways to express each one. Guidance, she noted, often comes down to teaching children the difference between this response versus that one – for example, choosing words to express

anger rather than throwing a chair or lashing out physically.

Bullying, both in-person and online, remains one of the most pressing mental health issues for young people. Dr. Morton noted that in today's culture, acting out has become normalized and even glorified, particularly in the realm of social media. Behaviors that once might have been discouraged are now rewarded with clicks, views, and likes, creating an environment where young people often believe that any attention – good, bad or indifferent – is better than no attention at all.

She also underscores the role of parents – not just in monitoring devices, but in modeling behaviors and maintaining strong connections with both children and schools. Dr. Morton stressed the importance of parents building strong connections with teachers from the very beginning of the school year. She explained that if parents don't step in, adults at school can make decisions without parental input. To prevent this, parents must be active advocates – whether that means establishing early communication through email or, better yet, showing up in person so teachers can put a face to the name.

Dr. Morton shares that positively invested parents are their child's best advocate. She also reminds us that parenting in today's world requires balance, presence, and intentionality. By setting healthy guardrails around media, naming and normalizing emotions, and keeping open communication with schools, families can foster resilience in children. As she emphasizes, it's not about eliminating challenges altogether but equipping young people with the tools to handle them well.

START STRONG

Why early study habits set stage for successful year

The first few weeks of the school year are more than just a time for new notebooks and fresh pencils – they're the foundation for how the rest of the year will unfold. Establishing strong study habits early helps students create a structure that supports learning, reduces stress, and boosts academic performance.

The Brain's Learning Process

The human brain learns best through repetition and consistency. When we encounter new information, it's first stored in short-term memory, which is like a temporary notepad. To truly understand and recall it later, the information must be transferred to long-term memory – a process called consolidation. This happens more effectively when study sessions are spaced out over time rather than crammed into one sitting, a principle known as "distributed practice." Early in the school year, setting aside regular times for review trains the brain to expect and retain new knowledge.

Neuroscientists also point out that the brain strengthens connections between neurons each time we revisit material, making recall faster and more reliable. By starting these habits right away, students can take advantage of the brain's natural ability to "wire" itself for success.

Nutrition: Fuel for Focus

A well-fed brain is a focused brain. Nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids (found in fish, nuts, and seeds) help build healthy brain cells, while complex carbohydrates (like whole grains) provide a steady supply of glucose, the brain's main energy source. Deficiencies in key vitamins and



By Dr. Sharah Zaab  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



minerals, such as iron and B vitamins, can impair concentration and memory. Skipping breakfast or relying on high-sugar snacks can lead to quick bursts of energy followed by mental fatigue, making it harder to absorb and retain new concepts.

The Role of Sleep in Learning

Sleep is not just a rest period – it's when the brain does some of its most important work. During deep and REM sleep, the brain consolidates memories, processes the day's lessons, and strengthens problem-solving skills. Students who get consistent, high-quality sleep are more alert, better at focusing, and quicker at retrieving information. In contrast, chronic sleep deprivation can impair judgment, slow reaction times, and weaken the ability to remember what was studied.

College Study Habits: Preparing for Independence

The leap from high school to college often brings more freedom – and more responsibility. Without daily reminders from teachers or parents, college students must create their own schedules and maintain discipline. Successful college study

habits include:

**Active note-taking:** Summarizing material in your own words during lectures boosts comprehension and retention.

**The "study before and after" approach:** Reviewing notes briefly before class and again within 24 hours strengthens memory.

**Breaking large tasks into smaller goals:** This prevents procrastination and makes assignments feel more manageable.

**Strategic study spaces:** Finding a distraction-free location, whether it's the library, a quiet café, or a dedicated dorm desk, helps the brain associate that space with focus.

**Self-testing:** Using flashcards, practice quizzes, or explaining material out loud strengthens recall for exams.

For college students, nutrition and sleep remain just as critical. All-night study marathons may feel productive, but they often weaken retention and problem-solving ability. Consistent routines, balanced meals, and short, focused study blocks outperform cramming every time.

Putting It All Together

Students – whether in elementary school or a university lecture hall – who combine consistent study habits with balanced nutrition and adequate sleep give themselves the best possible advantage. Parents, mentors, and professors can help by encouraging set study times, healthy meals, and rest routines that support brain function.

Starting strong doesn't just prepare students for the first test of the year – it builds a foundation for lifelong learning and academic resilience.



EARLY FOUNDATIONS

A journey of choice, faith and perseverance: Pastor Earon Davis

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

Early Foundations: A Father's Ultimatum

For Pastor Earon L. Davis Jr., life has always hinged on choices. Some were thrust upon him; others he forged for himself. The first came the day after he graduated from Cheney High School in 1996.

*"My dad came to me in a way that he had never come to me and he said, you have two choices. You can go to school and stay in the house, or you can get a job and move out. Those were my only two choices."*

Though he chose education, Davis admits his first attempt at Spokane Falls Community College (SFCC) was unfocused. Popular in high school – homecoming king, an athlete – he hadn't yet found his grounding. The result: he drifted academically and left without a clear direction.

Finding Synergy and Belonging at Morehouse

His path soon carried him through Moody Bible Institute and into Morehouse College in Atlanta. The shift was transformational.

*"When I got off the plane, everybody was Black – the lunch people, the janitor, the police officers, the presidents. That was new for me."*

At Morehouse, Davis discovered the power of belonging among Black intellectuals. "We had some of the most fierce, nondisrespectful debates at the dinner table that we ever had in the classroom. Hearing my brothers' stories from St. Louis, New York, or the South – it made me sharper. It gave me confidence."



COURTESY OF HANA MCDOWELL  
Pastor Earon Davis

One phrase became a cornerstone: *"Morehouse doesn't make you – you make Morehouse."* The institution was historic and inspiring, but Davis realized it was his choices, discipline, and openness to discovery that would shape his future.

Parenting, Coaching and Patience

Davis' journey as a student also informs his ideas on parenting. He emphasizes the delicate balance of firmness and patience, especially when children are navigating adulthood.

"You want to allow your children to thrive. One thing I learned is you have to let them fall – but also keep them informed. You're still the CEO of your house, but at that age you've got to coach them."

For Davis, coaching means placing children in positions to succeed, while still allowing them the autonomy to make choices – even mistakes. It is a philosophy rooted in his father's firm ultimatum but softened by his own experiences of trial, error, and resilience.

**Lessons from Pastor Davis**

**Choice is everything.** "You want to be successful in life or not. It really comes down to that."

**Discovery is part of the formula.** Success is not linear—each stage of discovery sharpens direction.

**Representation matters.** "Being at Morehouse gave me a different drive because I was seeing brothers and sisters succeeding."

**Parent with patience and firmness.** Guide, coach, and inform – but allow children to learn through experience.

**Resilience is the key.** His injury and return to SFCC proved that setbacks can become springboards.

**Faith and service sustain.** His ministry reflects the belief that true leadership is rooted in serving others.

ther's firm ultimatum but softened by his own experiences of trial, error, and resilience.

Returning Home: Injury and Recalibration

After graduation and years of ministry in Indiana and Kentucky – including a groundbreaking appointment as the first Black pastor of a historically white church – Davis returned to Spokane. He took a job with a shredding company, but an injury on the job left him unable to work for eight years.

The setback forced him to re-evaluate. Through vocational counseling, he made the decision to return to SFCC – this time as a different student, one with clarity, maturity, and purpose.

**Leadership at SFCC: A Full-Circle Moment**

His return to Spokane Falls marked a profound transformation.

*"I came back a different student. I wanted to connect with people, to branch out, to make a difference."*

This time, he excelled. Davis became president of Beta Gam-

ma Kappa, participated in Phi Theta Kappa, joined the Black Student Union, IT club and international club, and earned a spot on the president's list every quarter while completing his degree in information technology and cybersecurity.

In his June graduation speech at the Mosaic Center graduation ceremony, he distilled his story into a single truth:

*"You have a choice to make. You want to be successful in life or not. It really comes down to that. If you want to be successful, you have to complete something. You have to finish the rigor."*

For Davis, it was more than a message to his classmates – it was the culmination of his own journey. What began as a lost first attempt at SFCC had come full circle, ending with leadership, achievement, and clarity of purpose.

**Discovery as a Formula for Success**

Looking back, Davis identifies discovery as a critical part of the formula for success. As a teenager at SFCC fresh out of high school, he was still searching for identity and direction.

At Morehouse, he discovered the power of community and intellect. Returning to SFCC decades later, he discovered the importance of focus, maturity, and service.

"Life is about choices," he said, "but discovery is part of the process. You won't always know who you are or where you're going at first—but if you stay open, each stage of discovery teaches you something that prepares you for the next."

**Saving Grace Ministries: Faith in Action**

Today, Davis is the pastor and founder of Saving Grace Ministries in Spokane, which meets weekly at The Hive. There, he emphasizes service, discipleship and community engagement. Members regularly volunteer at local shelters, provide meals, and donate to organizations like St. Jude's Children's Hospital.

His vision is rooted in the lessons of his journey: leadership, perseverance, discovery, and faith. "Whatever you do—do it so well that even if you leave, you've left a mark. You've made yourself the standard by how you carried yourself in character, service, and leadership."

**A Life of Resilience and Purpose**

From SFCC to Moody, from the affirming village of Morehouse to the pulpits of Indiana, and back home to Spokane, Pastor Davis' life has been defined by resilience, discovery, and recalibration. His story is a testament that setbacks can become setups, and that purpose often emerges most clearly in seasons of struggle.

"I'm living proof – you can do anything you want to do," he said. "It all goes back to choice."

HEALING WOUNDS  
A message for Black daughters navigating absent fatherhood

The absence or emotional distance of Black fathers has left a lasting imprint on the lives of many daughters. Rooted in historical inequities and compounded by personal and societal struggles, this reality shapes identity, relationships, and mental wellness in profound ways. Yet within these stories are also narratives of resilience, self-love, and empowerment. Focusing on solutions, historical context, the psychological effects, and the ongoing pathways to healing – while lifting up the strength of Black daughters who continue to navigate – the question becomes how to redefine and rise above these challenges, the impetus for building purpose and turning absence into empowerment.

The phrase "the phone works both ways," often uttered by fathers who are physically or emotionally absent, carries a particular sting for Black daughters. It encapsulates a sense of abandonment, responsibility unfairly placed on the child, and a denial of the father's primary role in nurturing the parent-child relationship. This experience is not unique but rather a shared pain point for many Black women, deeply rooted in historical and societal factors that have disproportionately affected Black families.

The legacy of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and systemic racism has significantly impacted Black family structures. Mass incarceration, economic disparities, and discriminatory housing policies have all contributed to higher rates of father absence in Black communities. While these factors provide context, they do not excuse individual actions, nor do they define the potential for healing and growth. The impact of father absence on Black daughters is multifaceted. Studies have shown correlations between father absence and increased rates of

depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem in women. The absence of a father figure can also affect a daughter's romantic relationships, leading to patterns of seeking validation or fearing abandonment. This is not to suggest a deterministic outcome but rather to acknowledge the potential challenges that may arise.

Black women have historically displayed remarkable resilience in the face of adversity. Figures like Maya Angelou, bell hooks, and Michelle Obama have spoken candidly about the complexities of family relationships and the importance of self-love and empowerment. Their stories offer inspiration and a reminder that overcoming challenges is possible. Organizations like the National Urban League and mentoring programs specifically designed for young Black girls provide crucial support systems and resources. These initiatives focus on fostering self-esteem, leadership skills and healthy relationships.

It is crucial to acknowledge that not all experiences with absent fathers are the same. Some daughters may have maintained positive relationships with their fathers despite physical distance, while others may have experienced emotional neglect or abuse. Understanding the nuances of each individual's experience is essential for healing. For Black daughters grappling with the pain of father absence, several pathways to healing are available. Therapy can provide a safe space to explore emotions, process trauma, and develop healthy coping mechanisms. Connecting with other women who have shared similar experiences can create a sense of community and validation. Journaling, creative expression, and engaging in self-care practices can also be powerful tools for emotional healing.

Reframing the narrative



By Anyla McDonald  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



is another important step. It involves challenging the notion that a woman's worth is tied to her relationship with her father. Recognizing one's strengths, talents, and inherent value is essential for building self-esteem and resilience. Forgiving a father, while not always possible or necessary, can be a liberating act. Forgiveness does not condone harmful behavior but rather releases the daughter from the burden of anger and resentment. It is a personal choice that should be made with careful consideration.

Moving forward, it is essential to address the systemic issues that contribute to father absence in Black communities. Investing in educational opportunities, job training programs, and affordable housing can help strengthen families and create more equitable outcomes. Promoting responsible fatherhood initiatives and providing support for incarcerated fathers can also make a positive impact. Furthermore, open and honest conversations about the complexities of Black family dynamics are crucial for fostering understanding and empathy. Black men must be held accountable for their roles as fathers, while also acknowledging the systemic challenges they face.

In conclusion, the message for Black daughters who have navigated the pain of absent or emotionally distant fathers is one of resilience, self-love, and empowerment. While the wounds may run deep, healing is possible. By acknowledging the historical context, seeking support, reframing the narrative, and

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YOUTH CONNECTION

Power of mental healing – even when it takes too long



By Daniella Musesambili  
THE BLACK LENS  
CONTRIBUTOR



Healing is not a straight path – it’s a winding road with detours, potholes, and sudden drops that make you feel like you’ll never get to the other side. Mental healing especially takes time because it deals with wounds no one can see, but you feel deeply every day.

We live in a world that rewards quick results. We want our scars to fade overnight, our anxiety to vanish after a few deep breaths, and our sadness

to dissolve with a single motivational quote. But mental wounds are not like surface cuts. They are like roots buried deep in the soil of our being – tangled with our memories, our fears, and our sense of self. Untangling them takes patience, compassion and consistency.

The truth is, healing will frustrate you. You will think you’ve made progress, and then something will trigger you, and you’ll feel like you’re back at the

beginning. But you’re not. You’ve simply hit another layer of the wound, and each layer you face is a victory.

The power of mental healing lies not just in the final breakthrough, but in the small, invisible victories:

The day you decide to get out of bed when your mind tells you to stay under the covers.

The moment you stop apologizing for having needs.

The time you allow yourself to cry without guilt.

The night you sleep peacefully after months of restless thoughts.

Every small step is proof that your mind is stronger than your pain.

The length of the journey doesn’t make it any less powerful. In fact, slow healing often runs deeper. It teaches you patience. It teaches you to love yourself in all your broken phases. It teaches you that

worth isn’t measured by speed but by endurance.

So even if you’ve been healing for years – don’t give up. Healing is not a race. You’re not falling behind; you’re building a foundation that will carry you for the rest of your life. And when the day comes that you realize the memories don’t hurt as much, that the weight is lighter, that your mind feels safer – you will see that the long road was worth every step.

RESILIENCE AT WHAT COST?

The overlooked need for psychological safety

Mental health issues are an unfortunate part of life that many students struggle with during their time in the educational system. Like all people, students struggle with mental health for a number of reasons. However, with school and all the stressors it brings, it should be a place that doesn’t add to their mental health problems. It should be a safe space where they can get an education and opportunities.

There are many factors that play into students’ performances at school. One of the biggest and non-negotiable factors is psychological safety. Students of color face unique barriers that can hinder their education in ways that aren’t acknowledged enough. While their counterparts worry about academics, activities, sports, and home life, students of color must also worry about navigating racist environments and social alienation tied to their identities.

For BIPOC students, more often than not, school is a stressor that contributes to struggling with mental health because schools are simply not psychological

cally safe for students of color. They have to face discrimination, bigotry, and alienation from their peers – and sometimes even from staff – all while going through the struggles of being children, figuring out who they are, and finding themselves. Rarely does a week go by without students hearing “jokes” about their hair, their cultures, their backgrounds, or their skin – the parts of their identity that tend to raise an eyebrow. How can a student be expected to focus on academics and activities while navigating an environment where they do not feel safe?

The psychological battles and racism these students face hinder their ability to focus and participate in school, often leading to acting out, mistrust of staff, administration, and peers. It wears on their moral and scholastic ability.

In the rare cases where something is said to interrupt this behavior, students’ concerns are minimized, and perpetrators are often given latitude by being labeled as “troubled” people in need of sympathy. Meanwhile, many BIPOC students are not even



By Nikita Habimana  
THE BLACK LENS  
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given the dignity of being seen and heard for what they are – targets. This leads to conditioned silence, born out of the fear that nothing will be done, which results in further alienation. Instead of recognizing when students are struggling, their pain and fear of speaking up are taken advantage of and rebranded as “resilience.” This plays a big role in the adultification of Black children – expecting them to be understanding, mature, and sympathetic toward their perpetrators when, in reality, they are still children. That is not okay. Rather than awarding students of color with labels of maturity and understanding, we need to hold people accountable for their actions and words, especially when it comes to discrimination.

If more students, parents, teachers, and staff were held accountable, we could see a reduction in discriminatory language and actions. The more we let people get away with hate and operate in ignorance, the more we will see it repeated. We need to create systems in schools that hold people accountable and prioritize restorative justice practices.

Racism, discrimination, and bigotry are systemic issues. To change these broken systems, we need to create restorative systems that prioritize respectful communities to replace this culture of bias. Addressing one incident does not resolve a systemic problem.

Students shouldn’t have to worry about which one of their classmates is going to make insensitive racial “jokes” and hide behind the excuse of not knowing better. They shouldn’t have to worry about which student is going to touch their hair without permission, or about having to tiptoe around conversations about their identity and culture in fear of alienation.

As we go into this new school year, we need to prioritize psychological safety for students of all backgrounds, cultures, genders and races so they can feel safe and comfortable in their identities.



COURTESY OF CLOUD MUSESAMBILI  
Anime art by Cloud Musesambili

Black art matters

I remember reading stories and listening to conversations about music being used to express Black culture. But what about poetry? Or art? All three are vital to our culture, but art is something that I did not even know was important until I took part in the Black Voices event last year. We cover music and poetry at our schools, mostly during Black History Month. But it seems like Black art is all but nonexistent there. It is another way we can share our stories with the world, yet we barely hear about it in our communities. So, let us break this down, and give our art the recognition it deserves.

Before the abolition of slavery, African Americans did not have access to conventional art materials or a platform. Most artists at the time were from England, doing portraits of the rich and powerful. Supplies like paint, canvas, and willing buyers were unavailable to them at the time. Nonetheless, they found different means of expressing themselves. They used scrap metal to make sculptures, carved figures of wood, sowed quilts, and made pottery. Our ancestors created great works of art, even though it was one of the worst times in our history.

Even then, we were still viewed as a people who could only look at art, not create it. Following the freedom of African Americans, we were free to put out our voices and have a chance at being heard. As time passed, more Black artists from various parts of the country started to gain recognition and the tools they needed to succeed.

Fast forward to the early 1900’s, the Harlem Renaissance was taking flight: Langston Hughes, Josephine Baker, and the Cotton Club were some of many cultural



By Sian Armstrong  
THE BLACK LENS  
CONTRIBUTOR



inspirations that sprouted up during that time. However, the most highly regarded artist of this era was Aaron Douglas. Known as the “Father of Black American Art,” Aaron’s most recognizable work is “Aspects of Negro Life,” a collection of four murals displaying the African American life. They are currently housed in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library. The work of Aaron and others, along with the Civil Rights Movement, sparked a new generation of Black artists.

Now, in the 21st century, Black art can now be found in stores, online, or on murals in our cities. Our art is inspired by the hardships and experiences that we have endured, individually or collectively. We have so many local Black artists like Bob Lloyd, Olivia Evans, Art Jacobs, who are affecting us with their voices. We can relate to each other through our art; the statues of our failures, or the paintings of our fears. Our art unites us: music, poetry, and paintings are all simply different forms of the same thing. They are different forms of expression that we have used to show each other, and the world, who we are and what we can do. Let us go out into the world and keep showing them our truth.

Reflecting on Transformations Camp with SWAG

By Mya Jefferson  
THE BLACK LENS

This summer, SWAG (Strong Women Achieving Greatness) held its annual Transformation Camp, with this year’s theme: “I Am Empowered.” It was my first year as a mentor, which put me in a leadership role and gave me a chance to build on the impact of the camp’s message. More than that, this was the workshop that resonated with me most out of all the ones Mrs. Stacy has led.

On the first day, we explored what empowerment means – power, confidence, and the voice we all have, even if we need to find it. We learned about the foundations of empowerment and the different ways it shows up in our lives. We focused on self-awareness and confidence, and the importance of believing in and understanding ourselves. Challenges can shake our confidence, but we worked through ways to rebuild. One discussion centered on why people try to fit in. That conversation hit home for me, because I’ve often tried to downplay myself or

change to fit certain spaces. I realized I’ve allowed people to treat me poorly because I lacked the confidence and voice to stand up for myself. I wasn’t empowered then, but I am now. Last year’s theme, “I Know My Worth,” helped me see what I love about myself, and this year built on that. Together, we shared what makes us different, our strengths and the things we’re proud of. By the end of the day, we all left feeling empowered.

Day 2 focused on social awareness and positive engagement. We each chose three acts of kindness to complete before the week ended and discussed what we see and feel in our schools, communities and neighborhoods – and how we can take action. Conversations naturally branched out into other topics, like anxiety and depression. Mrs. Stacy reminded us that at the root, it often comes down to fear – fear of failing, being alone, or not being enough. That resonated, since even showing up at camp was scary for some of us. We also talked about friendships, insecurities, and competition among girls, and even debated



COURTESY  
Mya Jefferson at Transformations Camp Powered by SWAG (Strong Women Achieving Greatness).

whether it’s easier to be friends with boys or girls.

Day 3 was about educational empowerment and financial literacy. We debated how schools would function if run by students, but ultimately agreed with Mrs. Stacy’s point: that school teaches critical thinking and skills we need, even if it feels rigid at times. Later, guest speakers from Numerica Credit Union taught us about budgeting and financial empowerment.

Day 4 centered on mental health and physical well-being. We circled back to fear, but also explored stress, signs of being overwhelmed, and strategies to cope. We discussed how to lift our moods and relieve stress,

then put it into practice with physical activity – including a walk to City Hall.

On the final day, we tested everything we had learned with rock climbing. Many of us, including me, were afraid. But with encouragement, I climbed 40 feet to the top. That moment felt like proof that empowerment is real when you face your fears.

Leaving camp, I carried with me a deeper understanding of empowerment and the many ways to practice it. Every year, just when I think there’s nothing more to learn, Mrs. Stacy shows us there’s always room to grow – and she continues to teach us life lessons that I’ll carry into the future.



FROM THE FRONT PAGE



COURTESY PHOTOS

The Spokane chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club and other partnering chapters from the West Side of the state joined forces to honor Isham A. Mitchell with a head stone during memorial on July 26.

Carrying the legacy forward

Historian of Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club Garrett ‘GMoney’ Daggett discusses legacy

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

When Garrett Daggett first joined the Spokane Chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club in 2021, he wasn’t just looking for community – he was looking for purpose. “I joined the club because I loved the mission,” Daggett explained. The Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club exists to honor the original Buffalo Soldiers – Black Americans who served in the U.S. Army beginning in 1866 – by educating others about their history and continuing their spirit of service. “We pay homage by riding our iron horses, serving our community, and educating others on the rich history of the Buffalo Soldiers.” The Spokane chapter, founded in 2004 as the first in Washington state, is more than a motorcycle club. Members are involved in community service: providing Thanksgiving meals, supporting children and families during the holidays, and raising scholarship funds for local students pursuing higher education. Currently, Curtis “G Dub Ya” Bowe is this president of the Spokane chapter. For Daggett, the educational mission is just as important as the community service. “Our schools are not



The Spokane chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club and other partnering chapters from the West Side of the state joined forces to honor Isham A. Mitchell with a head stone during memorial on July 26.

teaching Black history the way that they should be,” he said. “I went through high school and college and never knew about the Buffalo Soldiers until I did my own research. That’s what really drew me to this club—what they do for history, and what they do for community.” The club also reminds Spokane of its own overlooked history. Daggett noted that Buffalo Soldiers were the very first garrison stationed at Fort George Wright in 1898, yet this fact rarely appears in local narratives. “We stand on the

shoulders of great people who walked before us,” he said. “It’s important to know our history, because those who don’t know it are destined to repeat it.” Through his role as club historian, Daggett is committed to ensuring stories like Isham A. Mitchell’s are remembered, not forgotten. His passion reflects the broader mission of the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club: to honor the past, serve the present, and preserve the legacy of Black American contributions for the future.

MAJI RISING

Continued from 1

the barriers that we have historically experienced, that we are currently experiencing, and that we will continue to experience. But how do we rise above those barriers? That’s what Maji Rising is about.” For Franklin, the essence of Maji Rising is not giving people power but reminding them of what already lives inside them. “We always talk about how we’re empowering individuals. But that’s wrong – because we’re assuming that they didn’t have power in the first place. And we do. Every single one of us has power. The question is: how do we activate it?”

Healing in Familiar Spaces

This October, Maji Rising will host its first major event – a two-day health block party designed to look less like a clinic and more like a family reunion. Dental exams, cancer screenings, behavioral health services, massages, and primary care screenings will be offered alongside music, food vendors, STEM activities, a Black tooth fairy, and a teddy bear clinic for kids. “We called it a block party because that’s in our culture. Our block parties are not just a gathering of people, it’s a safe space. We’re gonna go to the block and we’re gonna get this, we’re gonna get that, I got this problem ... it was more like – it’s a safe space, it’s a celebration, it’s where we know we belong.” Franklin emphasizes that Maji Rising will not reproduce the rigid, intimidating dynamics of modern, Western health care.

“We’re not doing this where we’re sitting behind a table. We are in front of our table and we are interacting. We’re dancing and we’re eating. We’re breaking down fear and white coats with joy and cultural authenticity.”

Stories, Trust and the Long Game

The unique approach to exploring health care at the pop-up block party is intentionally designed to create a sense of fa-

Through Water, Through Life: Honoring Death as Part of Healing

For Anna Franklin, health is not only about how we live, but also about how we honor the end of life. She recalls a moment while working in the ICU that shaped her understanding of care beyond medicine:

“There was one time I was working in the ICU, and an individual passed away. And I felt that spirit. The healthcare team just sat there in silence to honor that journey, that passage.”

Franklin believes that normalizing conversations about death is a vital part of community wellness. She points to the role of death doulas, who accompany individuals through their final moments to ensure no one dies alone, as an example of the compassion missing from many medical systems.

These practices, she explains, are rooted in cultural traditions that long predate Western healthcare. Franklin reflected that, for earlier generations, elders were most often cared for at home by their families and it was the community itself that carried the responsibility of providing care.

For Franklin, death is not just an ending but part of the continuum of care, memory, and legacy. By creating space for those conversations, Maji Rising affirms that health equity must embrace the whole cycle of life – with dignity, cultural authenticity, and love.

miliarity and comfort – normalizing conversations about our general wellness so that unspoken fears don’t keep us quiet or “buttoned up.” “We have to listen to each other,” she says. “Not to make someone else’s diagnosis yours, but to learn from our collective experiences. That’s how we build confidence to walk in and advocate for ourselves.”

Beyond the Block Party

While the October event is the launch, Franklin and her board have a bigger plan. In partnership with Take Up the Cause (featured in the November 2024 Black Lens), Maji Rising is developing Beloved Kijiji (“beloved village” in Swahili) – a housing and healthcare community inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s vision of the beloved community. “Our goal is to create a community that provides 72 units of wraparound housing with healthcare centered in the middle of it. If you have food inequities, housing inequities, transportation inequities, childcare needs – we’re building a community to address those drivers of health. Safe housing is fundamental

to health.” Franklin believes this project will embody the same principles as the block party: justice, access, and cultural authenticity. Franklin describes her work as being firmly grounded in justice, access, and cultural authenticity. For her, it’s essential that leadership and decision-making come from within the very communities where people live, breathe, pray, work, and play.

Community as Kin

Franklin ties her vision back to the deep traditions of Black family reunions, gatherings that emerged after emancipation when families tried to reconnect after being separated by slavery. “Community is kin. It always has been. The family reunion is not just about blood, because it couldn’t be – our families were fractured and sold apart. It’s about reconnection. And that’s what this is, too.” Her vision is clear: joy as medicine, cultural care as healthcare, and power as something already within us, waiting to be activated. Learn more about Maji Rising online at [www.majirising.org](http://www.majirising.org).

SOLDIER

Continued from 1

generations of family who carried his memory without the honor he deserved. She shared this journey in her remarks before the crowd in attendance.

A Purpose in Spokane

“When I moved back to Spokane, I knew I had a purpose,” Freeman told those gathered. “And the purpose was to bring my family to life and for others to learn about the path that they left for me.” The ceremony began with military honors from the VFW Post 51 and the Fairchild AFB Honor Guard. Pastor Walter Kendricks delivered the invocation, followed by the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club, Spokane Chapter who stood alongside and supported Freeman’s family to mark the long-overdue tribute.

The Box in the Garage

Her journey started last year while preparing for a Black history event at Liberty Park. Going through old boxes in her garage, Freeman uncovered her grandfather’s 118-year-old discharge papers. “When I saw 25th Infantry, I was like, oh boy. I got a Buffalo Soldier in my family,” she recalled. She also found a letter her grandmother, Maddie,



COURTESY PHOTOS

A display honoring Isham A. Mitchell at Greenwood Cemetery on July 26.

wrote to the War Department asking for burial assistance. “She couldn’t afford her husband’s burial, so she sent this letter and got denied. So she sent it again and put down more of the things that my grandfather had accomplished. And again, she got denied for help. So that’s why my grandfather didn’t have a headstone.”

The Photograph That Changed Everything

Later, Freeman found a photograph that became the turning point. It showed her grandmother Maddie with her baby son beside a grave marker. “I just looked at it and I thought, oh, they’re at a park. I didn’t know where they were, so I went past it, and then about five minutes later it dawned on me. They’re at the cemetery and they’re looking at

exactly the grave that I’m trying to find.” The photo, lined up with the surrounding trees and stones, confirmed where Isham Mitchell had been buried. “I was floored when I found this picture. So I feel that I was meant to have this headstone installed.”

The Buffalo Soldiers Step In

Determined to act, Freeman approached the Spokane Chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club during a community event. From there, the club took the lead. Member Curtis researched the process, tracked down information on Mitchell, filed the paperwork, and guided the family through the federal approval process for a government-issued headstone. “When Curtis called me and said, it is here, we were

holding our breath,” Freeman said. “Because it was such a huge, huge thing for us. We came out here and there it was. It was hard to believe that it was finally installed.”

Restoring Honor

At the graveside, Freeman presented certificates from the United States government recognizing Isham Mitchell’s service. One was given to her brother, Fred, along with a commemorative patch designed by the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club bearing Mitchell’s name and service years. Another was presented to the club itself, in gratitude for their tireless work. “For 91 years, my grandfather lay here without a marker,” Freeman told the audience. “Now his service and sacrifice will never be forgotten.”



Retired Lt. Col. Fred Freeman, grandson of the late Isham A. Mitchell, attends Mitchell’s memorial at Greenwood Cemetery on July 26.

Preservation and Legacy

Freeman’s discovery and the Buffalo Soldiers’ advocacy echo other efforts to preserve Spokane’s hidden Black history. Just this spring, The Black Lens genealogy column by Patricia Bayonne-Johnson highlighted Malbert Cooper, another Buffalo Soldier buried at Greenwood Cemetery. Like Mitchell, Cooper’s story reminds us how many lives of service remain unrecognized without family and community efforts to preserve their memory. For Freeman, this work is both personal and col-

lective. “I know my grandfather is right here with us,” she said. “And so is my grandmother Maddie, my mom Francis, and my uncle. This has been a long time coming.” Her words carried a message beyond her family: “Nothing is more important than preserving our family records and stories. They are our inheritance – and our responsibility.” On that summer afternoon, through the devotion of a granddaughter and the persistence of the Spokane Buffalo Soldiers, a dream deferred was finally fulfilled.



WELLNESS

We come from somewhere

Genealogy and Black mental wellness

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

While interviewing Miss Patricia Bayonne-Johnson – genealogist, historian, and one of our beloved columnists at The Black Lens – I was struck by the image that watched over us: The Funeral Procession by Ellis Wilson. Hanging prominently on her wall, the painting served as more than decor; it was a powerful cerebral symbol of Black family, Black tradition, and Black experience. Its presence reminded me how art, like memory, carries us through generations.

Our conversation centered on heritage, lineage, and the enduring connection to family – how these threads shape not just who we are, but how we understand ourselves as part of something larger. As Miss Pat spoke, her words unearthed a deeper conversation: the internalized toll of disrupted narratives, the mental wellness of a people who have endured erasure, and the healing that becomes possible when we choose to remember.

The Funeral Procession, once immortalized in the Huxtables’ living room on The Cosby Show, evoked a sense of familiarity. There, as on Miss Pat’s wall, it stood as a visual sermon – a reminder of reverence, of community, of the sacred responsibility we carry to those who came before us. It was a quiet but unwavering statement: that honoring the past is inseparable from shaping the future.

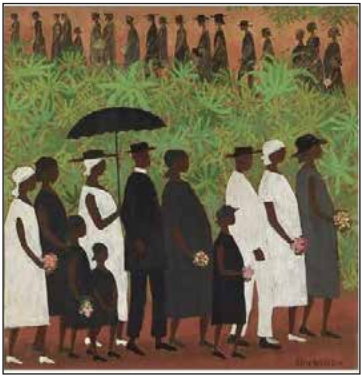
At that moment, I understood more clearly why Miss Pat has devoted herself to tracing family trees. To know who we are requires more than self-reflection – it demands that we look back, recover what was lost, and pass forward a sense of rootedness. Healing, especially for Black families, cannot happen in isolation. It must happen collectively – with reverence, with remembrance, and with resolve.

Mental health is not separate from our story – it is braided into our kinship ties, generational cycles, and the truths we carry or forget about where we began.

For Patricia Bayonne-Johnson, researching family history isn’t just about names and dates – it’s about restoration. As a genealogist, educator, and descendant of people enslaved by the Jesuits, she has spent decades uncovering her ancestral lineage and empowering others to do the same. She believes genealogy is a healing practice – one that allows Black people to stitch together a fragmented past and reconnect with a sense of self that history tried to erase.

Bayonne-Johnson’s passion deepened after she retired from a long career as a biology teacher. “I was kind of messing around with it after my dad died... but I really couldn’t devote that much time to it because I was a teacher,” she shared. Retirement opened the door to immerse herself in formal research. “One of the first things I did was take a class with the National Genealogical Society... I wrote my final paper about my great-grandfather – the one where my name, Bayonne, comes from.”

That name, and the story behind it, marked the beginning of her journey to reconstruct a legacy often lost to slavery and systemic erasure. “Slavery separated our roots... Cultural identities were stripped away, and individuals



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS  
“Funeral Procession” is the name of a painting by Ellis Wilson on display as part of the Aaron Douglas Collection at the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University in New Orleans, La.

were forced to adopt new names, religions, and customs,” she said. “But people have the power to reclaim their histories – and that’s what we do in genealogy. There’s strength in recovery.”

Bayonne-Johnson’s research led to a groundbreaking revelation: she is a descendant of someone enslaved by the Jesuits. Her blog post on this history, published in 2011, went largely unnoticed until 2015 – when it became a catalyst for others trying to trace similar lineages. “Had I not written that blog, they wouldn’t have known how to get started,” she noted. “No one else had put a blog up about Jesuit history – about these people who had been enslaved.”

That recovery – of names, places, and forgotten kin – is deeply connected to mental wellness, especially for Black Americans navigating inherited trauma and identity confusion. “For me, it kind of anchored me,” she explained. “It gave me a good feeling about myself. I can’t imagine now how I really felt when I didn’t know this information.”

Knowing that her great-grandfather was a free man of color, not enslaved, altered her self-perception entirely. “It meant a lot to me,” she said. “It also brought our families together. We would have a reunion, do research, and bring it forth – it brought us together.”

That sense of belonging, she emphasized, is not a luxury – it’s a human necessity. “Belonging is something all human beings want and need,” she said. “Having a sense of connection throughout time helps make us feel whole.”

She recalled how, when she first received DNA test results pointing to Nigerian ancestry, one of her aunts pushed back. “She said, ‘We didn’t come from Africa.’” That denial, Bayonne-Johnson believes, is rooted in shame. “It was embarrassing to think you came from a slave. It’s like, you didn’t have control of your life – and you did nothing about it.”

That shame is not accidental – it is the result of centuries of dehumanization, historical distortion, and internalized trauma. Being African first is veiled in unfamiliarity for many, not legacy. For countless Black Americans, the starting point of cultural identity is shaped by enslavement, not heritage. After centuries of exploitation and systemic violence, the African origin story has been distorted and propagandized, making it difficult to feel pride in a past that was stripped away. The psychology of being told your beginning is synonymous with bondage creates a quiet, enduring dissonance. Or even having the awareness that there were Black people on American soil before Columbus is an unspoken truth that never made it into Westernized interpretations

of history – a truth explored in They Came Before Columbus: The African Presence in Ancient America by Ivan Van Sertima. Yet it is precisely from this displacement that a powerful new sense of self and kin can emerge – one rooted not only in survival, but in reclamation. The act of tracing lineage, speaking names, and embracing ancestral memory becomes a counter-narrative, one that restores dignity and reshapes how we see ourselves.

Shame, fragmentation, and historical neglect all weigh heavily on the Black psyche. “There’s no healing without acknowledgment,” she asserted. “That’s the first step.” Bayonne-Johnson emphasizes that you have to be brave enough to face the chains in your bloodline to begin recovering the fuller truth of who you are. And with that acknowledgment comes a call to action: “Learn your history. Trace them. There’s power in that.”

Despite missing oral history in her own family, she found truth in research. “My paternal great-grandfather wasn’t enslaved – he was free. That was one of the best things I had ever heard,” she said. “Because we assume we were all enslaved.”

Even the act of naming carries generational meaning. “In my family, my grandfather’s name was Nace, short for Ignatius. He named his son that, and then it carried on to a third. And now, babies are being born with that name. We’re passing it on.”

This continuity – through names, stories, and community – is a form of quiet resistance. “Even internally, with all our trauma, we found ways to keep our light going – even without knowing,” she said.

For Bayonne-Johnson, Black Americans are not without roots. “We might not know exactly where we come from, but we come from somewhere. We survived. That means we’re resilient.” She encourages others to go on the journey. “Do the testing. Buy the books. Visit Africa. Learn who you are and where you’re from.”

She reminds us that mental wellness isn’t just about coping with the present – it’s about understanding the past. Our healing depends on connecting the dots between who we are and where we come from. When we trace the patterns in our family stories – of separation, survival, silence, and strength – we begin to mend what was broken. Genealogy becomes more than a historical exercise; it becomes a pathway to wholeness.

“We come from somewhere,” she says – and knowing that, deeply and truthfully, is where the healing begins. Ultimately, she says, “If we don’t tell our stories, someone else will. And when they write it – it’s not true.”



PATRICIA BAYONNE-JOHNSON/THE BLACK LENS  
Patricia Bayonne-Johnson, in green shirt, walks toward the Rosedown Plantation in West Feliciana Parish, La.

Black genealogy

Finding ancestors in Audubon’s happy land

By Patricia Bayonne-Johnson  
THE BLACK LENS

After touring Wakefield, we visited Rosedown Plantation, built by Sarah Turnbull Stirling’s brother, Daniel Turnbull, and his wife, Martha Barrow Turnbull. (The Barrows purchased my Jesuit-enslaved ancestors.) Known for its gardens, Rosedown is one of the most documented and well-preserved plantations. The Louisiana Office of State Parks bought it in 2000, and it is now open to the public.

Rosedown was beautifully decorated, and for the second time, I saw a large fringed fabric rectangle hanging from the ceiling above the dining room table. It was a punkah, I was told, also called a shoo-fly. Imagine little Black boys or grown men pulling strings to generate a breeze that kept diners cool and insects away. There were benefits to the work; fanners could eavesdrop on conversations, hearing who might be auctioned next and learning about the slaves who revolted or escaped. The Wakefield Plantation had two punkahs, but pictures were not allowed.

The day after I visited Wakefield Plantation, I went to St. Mary’s Church and Burial Ground with my cousin Sam Johnson. The plantation was on Highway 61, with Mulberry Hill Road running along its north side. It was visible from the highway and Mulberry Hill Road! Still, I never saw it during my childhood visits to my father’s brother, Sullivan Johnson, his wife Anna, and their children, who lived up Mulberry Hill Road in Wakefield.

The last time I saw St. Mary’s Church was at Grandma Carrie Bayonne’s funeral in October 1959. We drove up Mulberry Hill Road for about a block, then turned right onto St. Mary’s Road and reached the church. At the end of the road, there was a small, charming white church in the woods, built in 1880. In 1966, the church was rebuilt as a simple brick structure. I was very disappointed and forgot to ask Sam what happened to the original St. Mary’s. The original foundation remains on the property next to the brick building. Many family

members are buried in an unfenced area across from the church – Grandma Carrie and one of her sisters, her son Sullivan Johnson, his wife Anna, her parents, and numerous relatives with the surnames Sterling, Morgan, Taylor, Johnson, and Dunbar.

Wakefield is a small, rural, unincorporated community in West Feliciana Parish. We called it the “country” because it lacked many amenities of a big city like New Orleans – no paved roads, no gas, electricity, or plumbing, no toilets, and so on. When I started this series on Wakefield Plantation, I had an epiphany: Wakefield, where my Grandma Carrie, other ancestors, and collateral relatives were born, was part of the Wakefield Plantation! My family was enslaved and lived on the Wakefield for about a hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation!

Sixty-three thousand acres. Decades of slavery. Hundreds of enslaved people. Yet, on that day, the guides and the owner of Wakefield Plantation knew nothing about the people who built its wealth. I went home and immediately reached out to Joli. My question for her was, “Are there slave burial grounds on the Wakefield property?” Joli responded:

My husband, Dr. Eugene Berry, and I bought the Wakefield Plantation in 1988 and are the first owners who are not Stirling descendants. We lack firsthand knowledge of important historical details.

We purchased only 50 acres, the rest of the original 63,000 acres after many divisions and losses over the years.

No slave quarters, production buildings (such as a sugar mill, cotton gin, grist mill, or granary), or original kitchen have survived to the present day.

St. Mary’s Church and Burial Ground was a gift from a Stirling descendant in 1880. (I didn’t know this when I visited the Wakefield Plantation)

When Lewis and Sarah Turnbull Stirling purchased the Wakefield Plantation, it covered 62, 000 acres. It is not only possible but likely that slaves who died were buried somewhere on that large estate.

I walked across the land where my ancestors lived, worked, and were buried. Despite my fears, I was warmly welcomed and invited to become a guide and share the story of my ancestors at the Wakefield during the next Audubon Pilgrimage. I wish I had accepted the invitation.

**UPDATE:** Johanna “Joli” Wamble Berry died on April 14, 2019.

In spring 2024, Golden Gate Audubon Society, Berkeley, California, changed its name to Golden Gate Bird Alliance because John James Audubon enslaved people, was a racist, and snatched bodies from native burial sites. This is so Berkeley!

KAZUKO WELLNESS' HOME: A THREE-PART SERIES



By jasmine linane-booe  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



Breathe in. Breathe out. Begin. This is the final piece of a three-part series where we 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 third part of our exploration of Home, I invite us to look at what it means to be at home with the bodies we experience life through. With deep reverence for the land, in connection to our communities, may we tenderly and courageously pull ourselves in with kindness, curiosity, and grace.

As we round the corner into another breathtaking autumn may we let the land be a role model.

With the days growing shorter, may we move slower to honor the shift from outward focus to inward reflection – the final harvest of the season. Reap, pick, and gather the lessons, the wisdom, the experiences, and the gratitude. In our harvest, witness levity – a letting go of that which has completed its cycle as we prepare to preserve energy for winter. The land calls us to soften into our own bodies – into our own homes. Each piece in this series will offer invitations for reflection and reclamation. May we rebel through connection and love.

Part Three: At Home Within

We speak often of listening to the body – as if it’s easy. As

if it isn’t something that’s been trained out of us. The body carries joy, strength, and wonder and also grief, tension, and history – from our lifetime and beyond. It can be a place we celebrate and honor, commodify and avoid. Some days it feels like a trusted friend, a miracle to behold. Other days it feels like a stranger, an enemy, a vault locked tight with secrets unknown to even our own consciousness.

To be at home within the body is not to love every sensation or appearance, but to remember that this body is the only home we are guaranteed from our first breath to our last. It is the place where every experience lands, where every story begins. It is the gift, the bridge, the connection between

our consciousness and all that is, was, and will be. This body is the lens through which we experience this life.

But – from the moment we are told to “stop crying”, “finish your plate”, “sit still”, the world programs us to be suspicious of our bodies – to judge them, reshape them, ignore them, push them past their limits. We learn to listen to other people’s opinions and instructions more than our own inner knowing. Over time, it is more “natural” to check out than check in.

But homecoming is possible. When we turn toward our bodies with curiosity and trust instead of criticism and doubt,



WELLNESS / CAREGIVER STORIES

The drive that changed everything

Faith Washington on caring for an independent father

By April Eberhardt  
THE BLACK LENS

“He was going to drive all the way from Indiana to Spokane. Half-paralyzed, in a maroon Mercury that looked like a tank. I told him, ‘Daddy, I don’t think that’s a good idea.’ But you couldn’t tell him anything.” –Faith Washington.

About 18 years ago, when Faith Washington’s father, William Farrington – now a 92-year-old Korean War veteran – announced that he was driving cross-country from Indiana to Spokane, she knew there was nothing she could have said to deter him. He was definitely not going to catch an airplane. He’d had a stroke and could not live alone, so he decided to move himself to Spokane to live with his oldest child.

She still remembers the anxiety of that drive across the country.

“I said, ‘You have to get a cell phone so we can keep in touch with you.’ So he bought a flip phone. He was driving, and I would keep very close contact with him, calling numerous times during the day.”

But when he got into Montana, she couldn’t get a hold of him; he wasn’t answering the phone.

“I finally told my husband, ‘I can’t get a hold of my dad.’”

So, she called the Montana State Patrol.

“Have you seen this little old Black man, half paralyzed on one side, driving through?”

It turned out he had simply lost signal while making his way through the mountains. By the time she finally reached him, he was nearing the Montana – Idaho border. The sound of his voice brought her both relief and exasperation – proof that he was safe, but also that his strong will had carried him through yet again.

That bold trip marked the beginning of a new chapter for them both: the transition from father and daughter to caregiver and companion, a journey that would redefine family in new and unexpected ways.

A Father Who Won’t Be Told

Farrington’s tenacity and stubbornness are just a composite

of his personality; he was an only child who learned early to be independent. Settling in Spokane was an adjustment. He disliked the snow removal compared to Indiana, the higher cost of coffee, and eventually the assisted living facility he reluctantly moved into after a fall. “His independence was threatened at every turn,” Washington explains. “He drove until he was 90, and even after, he wanted his car started every day so it wouldn’t sit idle.”

Handing over the keys was difficult, but so was watching him resist help with daily tasks. There is a delicate balance between support and autonomy.

“Because he’s hard of hearing, I would sometimes answer the doctor’s questions for him,” Washington says. “One day he stopped me and said, ‘Talk to me. I’m the patient.’ That was a wake-up call.”

Routine, Awareness and the Struggle With Change

If there is one thing Farrington insists upon, it is knowing exactly what to expect. Any disruption to his routine – whether it’s a new aide coming to help him bathe, or a change in who manages his care – can send him into a frenzy of frustration. Washington explains that for her father, awareness and preparation are not just preferences; they are essential to maintaining his sense of control. “He doesn’t like surprises,” she says. “If someone new shows up without warning, he feels blindsided. And that can spiral quickly into distrust, agitation, or refusal of help altogether.”

Washington has learned that the key is consistency and communication – explaining each step, preparing him for what’s next, and ensuring he feels part of every decision. “When he knows what to expect, he’s calm. But when routines are broken, it reminds him of what he’s lost.”

The difficulty of those moments weighs heavily on both of them.

Carrying On a Cultural Tradition

As we talked during the interview about the unspoken rule of caring for your kin, she remem-



COURTESY

Faith Washington and her father, William Farrington, who made a cross-country trip to move to Spokane.

Caregiver tax credit would help hardworking families



Every day more than 820,000 Washingtonians perform a great labor of love: caring for older parents,

spouses, and other loved ones so they can remain at home – where they want to be.

Caring for a family member or close friend is one of the most important roles we are likely to play in our lifetime. However, hardworking family caregivers often spend their own money and may risk their jobs to help their loved ones. In fact, caregivers spend an average of more than \$7,200 a year of their own money – making it harder for them to afford groceries and pay bills. Many have had to cut down their work hours or quit their jobs because of caregiving responsibilities.

That’s why AARP is urging Congress to pass the Credit for Caring Act. The federal tax credit of up to \$5,000 a year would put money back in the pockets of eligible family caregivers and help defray the costs of caring for a spouse or other loved one with long-term needs.

Washington state needs family caregivers, and they need a tax credit. Find out more at [www.aarp.org/caregiverswa](http://www.aarp.org/caregiverswa).

bers her great-grandfather. “My great-grandfather lived in the back room of my grandmother’s house after a stroke. Nobody ever talked about it. He ate his meals there, slept there, and was cared for until the day he died – on Christmas morning. It was just understood,” she recalls.

Washington emphasizes that children need to see that we don’t throw people away in their elder years.

“It’s part of the cycle – they cared for us, and now we care for them. That’s how we honor family.”

Humor in the Hard Moments

Caregiving is rarely straightforward, and Washington finds

humor in the tension. She tells stories of taking her father to a nail salon after he stopped seeing a podiatrist. “He was so particular – ‘don’t soak my feet, just trim the nails.’ When I tipped the woman, he was outraged. ‘Five dollars?!’ I told him, ‘Daddy, she touched your feet!’”

Even assisted living has surprised her. Once reluctant to socialize, Farrington has taken up bingo, earning the nickname “Bingo Bill.” His prize? Candy bars he proudly stashes in his refrigerator.

Lessons in Care and Planning

Washington knows the work of caregiving extends beyond the day-to-day. “Get the paper-



Farrington

work done,” she advises. “Wills, power of attorney, military documents, medical directives. Don’t wait. Someday is not a day of the week.”

Families should have honest conversations with their elders: Do you want a funeral or a memorial? Burial or cremation? What kind of medical care do you want at the end of life?

A nurse by profession, Washington understands the nuances of medical treatment when nearing the end of life. One important document is the POLST – Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment. Unlike an advance directive, which names a decision-maker and outlines general wishes, a POLST is a signed medical order that appears in a patient’s chart. It gives clear instructions to doctors and emergency responders about what kind of treatment your loved one does or does not want.

She explains that a POLST can specify whether someone wants full resuscitation with CPR and defibrillation, limited intervention such as oxygen or IV fluids, or only comfort measures like repositioning, medication for pain, or easing breathing. For many families, this form answers critical questions in moments of crisis: Should 911 be called for aggressive intervention, or should the focus be on keeping the person comfortable at home?

Having these decisions documented ensures that your loved one’s wishes are respected and that family members aren’t left scrambling or uncertain during an already painful time.

Closing Old Gaps

For Washington, this season of life is an unexpected return. “When my parents divorced, I longed to be with my dad. Decades later, here I am – helping him, learning from him, laughing with him. I can’t argue with him; I have to let him lead, even when I know better.”

In William Farrington’s independence and stubborn will, she sees a gift. “He may never say it, but I know he trusts me,” she says. “That drive from Indiana to Spokane was his way of saying, ‘I choose you.’ It’s funny how the Lord does things. I always wanted to be with my dad, and now, fifty years later, I am. I thank God for that.”

Mental health vs. mental illness

Cultural inclusion in suicide prevention

IN HIS WORDS

Understanding the Distinction

Mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, influencing how individuals think, feel, and act. In contrast, mental illness refers to diagnosable conditions such as depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder. Recognizing this distinction is crucial for effective intervention and support.

Suicide: A Growing Concern

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported over 49,000 suicide deaths in the United States in 2022, equating to approximately one every 11 minutes. Certain communities experience disproportionately higher rates:

- Native and Indigenous communities: Suicide rates more than double the national average.
- Black youth: Suicide rates have increased by nearly 40% over the past two decades.
- Latino and Asian American communities: Face barriers including stigma, language, and limited access to culturally competent care.

The Importance of Cultural Inclusion

Culturally inclusive approaches in suicide prevention are essential. Understanding and respecting cultural backgrounds can enhance trust and efficacy in mental health interventions. As one local advocate noted, “Cultural competence in care is not just beneficial; it’s necessary for effective support.”

Self-Care Strategies

Individuals can adopt various self-care practices to support mental well-being:

- Stay connected: Build and maintain strong relationships.
- Engage in physical activity: Regular exercise can reduce stress and improve mood.
- Practice mindfulness: Techniques such



By Demetrius Palmer  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



as meditation or journaling can promote emotional regulation.

- Limit social media exposure: Reducing time on social platforms can decrease feelings of inadequacy and anxiety.
- Seek help early: Reaching out for support at the onset of mental health challenges can prevent escalation.

Local Resources

For those seeking support, several resources are available:

- Spokane Teen Text Line: Call or text (844) 814-8336 (9 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Friday) for free, confidential support for teens aged 13-17. Peer specialists provide guidance and connect youth to professional resources. Visit [www.spokaneteentext.org](http://www.spokaneteentext.org).
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988 anytime, 24/7.
- The Trevor Project: Support for LGBTQIA2S+ youth: (866) 488-7386, text START to 678-678.
- Crisis Text Line: Text HEAL to 741-741, 24/7 support.
- Teen Link: Call 866-TEENLINK (866-833-6546) (6-10 p.m.) or chat online (6-9:30 p.m.).

Addressing suicide requires a multifaceted approach that includes cultural inclusion, community support, and accessible resources. By fostering an environment where individuals feel understood and supported, communities can work toward reducing suicide rates and promoting mental well-being for all.

KAZUKO

Continued from 10

we begin to listen – to witness that the body speaks its own language and you too are fluent in this way of communicating. A sudden yawn might be a call for rest. A racing heart could be fear, excitement, or both. A lump in the throat might be the grief we’ve been holding back for months. A tightening of the belly warns of danger or misalignment. The body speaks in sensation and rhythm, in cycles and seasons.

And like the land, the body moves through changes. Times of expansion, contraction, blossoming, and rest. Some seasons ask for stretching and growth. Others invite us to curl inward, to protect, to nourish, to restore. The more we practice listening and responding to the subtle but profound ways the body talks to us, the less loud it needs to be to catch our attention. When we learn to honor these shifts instead of resisting them, the body begins to feel safer, softer, more like home.

This homecoming is not a single moment. It is a lifelong practice of tending, of noticing without judgment, of offering kindness even when we don’t fully understand. It is a remembering: This body is mine. I live here. I belong here.

Invitation to Practice: Coming Home to Your Body

Notice

Pause once today to feel into your body without trying to change anything. What sensations are here right now – warmth, tension, tingling, heaviness, ease? Simply notice, without labeling them as good or bad.

Speak softly

When you notice discomfort or self-criticism, offer your body a sentence of care. “I’m listening.” “You’re safe now.” “Thank you for

carrying me.”

Follow the seasons

Ask yourself: What season is my body in right now – a time of growth, of harvest, of rest, of renewal? How can I live in harmony with this season instead of forcing another?

Offer rest or movement

Give your body one thing it’s asking for today – a stretch, a nap, a deep breath, a glass of water, intense movement or a gentle walk.

Reflect

Journal or voice note: When do I feel most at home in my body? When do I feel furthest away? What might help me close that distance? *If feeling into the body feels unsafe or perhaps feels too scary to do alone, please reach out to a somatic practitioner or a mental health professional for support. It is your birthright to be at home in your body.*

Closing Wishes

May you witness the earth’s pull through the soles of your feet.  
May water absorb the heaviness and gift levity.  
May the wind remind you of breath  
filling you with hope and releasing you from doubt.  
May your inner fire be stoked with a spark to burn bright  
trusting that the char will nourish new growth.  
May the goodness of our hearts be the first to touch.  
May the magnificence of your wholeness  
be felt, be seen, be honored  
by me, by you, by us.  
May you be at home.

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SHADES OF MOTHERHOOD NETWORK

BREAKING THE SILENCE

DEEP ROOTS, STRONG WOMEN

Victims of domestic violence and sexual assault endure far more than physical harm. They live with words that cut deeper than bruises – words meant to break the spirit. “This is your fault.” “No one else will ever love you.” “You’re worthless.” “If you leave me, I’ll hurt you and the kids.” “That never happened – you’re imagining things.”

These phrases spoken about far too often are heard in our community. They are not just cruel insults, they are calculated tools of control, repeated until survivors begin to doubt themselves, lose their confidence, and feel trapped with nowhere to turn.

Have you heard of MiA? **MiA - Mujeres in Action**, founded in 2018, is

the region’s first nonprofit dedicated to providing culturally responsive services to Latine survivors of domestic and sexual violence. From counseling to housing and advocacy, MiA has been a lifeline for families who are too often overlooked.

Recently, I had the privilege of attending MiA’s four-day training to become a facilitator in domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy. It was nothing short of transformative. I walked away with a deeper understanding of the challenges survivors face and the tools to help lift their voices. That training reinforced something I already knew in my heart: this work is urgent, and our community must step up.

**The Disproportion-**

**ate Burden on Women of Color ...** As a woman of color myself, I cannot ignore the statistics. Women of color experience domestic violence and sexual assault at disproportionately high rates compared to white women. But the numbers only tell part of the story.

Behind them are systems of racism, sexism and economic inequality that make it harder for women of color to seek safety or trust institutions meant to protect them. Black women are too often dismissed as “strong” or “angry,” which leads to their pain being minimized. Indigenous women face some of the highest rates of sexual violence, often with little legal recourse. Immigrant women may fear deportation, encounter language barriers, or face cultural stigma that keeps them silent.

This is why culturally responsive, trauma-informed care is not just important, it is essential. Survivors need more than services. They need to know that when they speak, they will be believed, respected, and understood.

**Why Community Matters ...** Healing from trauma requires more than shelter or legal aid. Survivors need safe spaces where they can share their truth without judgment. They need mental health support that recognizes cultural differences and generational trauma. They need neighbors, churches, schools, and grassroots organizations to step in where larger systems often fall short.

I believe that prevention also begins in the community. We must teach young people about healthy relationships, respect, and con-



By Stephy Nobles-Beans  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



sent. We must hold abusers accountable while creating paths toward change. And we must recognize that men, too, are part of this story – 1 in 6 men experience sexual assault. Their voices matter in this fight for healing and justice.

**A Personal Call to Action ...** For me, supporting survivors is not optional – it is personal. It is part of building compassionate

and equitable communities where everyone is safe and valued.

**At the Shades of Motherhood Network**, I serve as a Family Navigator, we are committed to making sure survivors have access to the resources they need. We believe in building networks not only for Maternal Health Care and Mental Health Crisis, but challenging harmful stereotypes, and empowering survivors to reclaim their voices and their lives.

Not only in Spokane – but every community – has the power to create spaces of true healing. But it starts with us: listening, believing, and standing with survivors.

For more information, visit [www.theshadesofmotherhoodnetwork.org](http://www.theshadesofmotherhoodnetwork.org).

Remember, “You are not what happened to you. You are strength, resilience, and the light that rises from the shadows. Your story is not broken – it is still being written with courage and hope.”

ROOTS AND WINGS

Parenting with purpose

As August approaches, many families start preparing themselves for the upcoming school year. For African American families, this period has special significance, calling for a sincere focus on the emotional well-being of each child. The transition from the carefree summer period to the more structured environment of school can trigger a mixed bag of emotions in students. It is important for parents and caregivers alike to join hands in their efforts to ease their children through the transition with understanding, empathy, and preparatory steps.



By Leola Rouse  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



**Understanding the Affective Landscape**

The beginning of a new school year often brings forth a complicated mix of feelings, including excitement, expectation, nervousness, and, for some, fear. For African-American kids, these emotional reactions can be compounded by unique challenges, including academic pressures, social relations, and the prospect of facing prejudice in school settings. Becoming aware of these intricacies is a vital first step in making a positive difference in their lives.

It’s necessary for parents to communicate to children that the presence of both excitement and worry is a normal experience. Creating an environment where children feel safe to express their feelings can help normalize these feelings. In validating their experiences, we are creating a strong foundation for emotional growth, similar to wrapping them in a warm and nurturing blanket that says, “I am here with you in all stages of your journey.”

Formulating Security and Stability Protocols

Creating a consistent routine is a strong ally in this adjustment. Routines give a sense of predictability and safety, even as the new school year is introducing change. Parents need to sit down and make a daily routine that has regular bedtimes, family meals together, and homework times. These constants can make children feel safe and grounded while they are dealing with the stress of adjusting to a new school year.

In African-American families, cultural elements can easily be integrated into everyday life, such as storytelling and family discussions about heritage. For instance, sharing stories about ancestors or discussing cultural traditions can reinforce identity and pride, subsequently fostering a very strong sense of community. Not only do these strengthen

family bonds, but they also develop a deep understanding of one’s heritage and traditions, subsequently increasing emotional resilience.

**The Importance of Clear Communication**

Open communication is critical during this period of adjustment. Parents need to set aside time for meaningful daily conversations where children feel genuinely heard and understood. Such intimate interactions allow parents to gently guide their children in developing attributes of courage and resilience.

Encouraging children to set small, attainable goals is an effective way to boost their self-esteem. Families can celebrate each achievement, no matter how minor, which helps to bolster their children’s sense of competence.

Furthermore, discussing the accomplishments of African-American figures can motivate children and provide relatable examples of success. By sharing the inspiring stories of individuals such as Rosa Parks, Langston Hughes, or local leaders like Stephanie and Courtney from The Shades Of Motherhood, parents can instill a sense of hope and possibility, demonstrating that their children too can overcome challenges and achieve greatness.

Interaction with the Educational Community

Staying engaged with the school community is an important part of supporting children during this change. Parents must make it a priority to attend school functions, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences to stay aware of their child’s school environment and social relationships.

Developing a relationship with teachers can provide insight into how to reinforce children’s learning and emotional development. Parents can also develop relationships with other parents to create a network of support. From creating study groups and carpools to simply providing tips and advice,

the support of other parents can be a great source of encouragement and solidarity. By developing a relationship with other parents, families can develop a positive community of support that benefits all children.

**Prioritizing Emotional Well-being**

As we begin this journey together, parents must understand that they are the foundation and source of resilience for their child. Your unwavering support and guidance can empower them to meet new beginnings with confidence and hope. Let us cherish this opportunity to support not just their academic growth but also their emotional well-being.

The practice of mindfulness can be easily integrated into everyday life and can greatly improve emotional resilience. Simple methods such as deep breathing, meditation, or gratitude diaries can be taught by parents to kids. Asking kids to think about what they are thankful for can divert their attention away from worry and towards appreciation, thereby making them feel positive.

**An Urgent Appeal to All Caregivers**

Looking forward to the new school year, it is our responsibility as parents and guardians to join hands in creating an environment that will support the emotional and academic thriving of our children. By upholding our cultural heritage and promoting emotional resilience, we can ensure that our children are well-equipped to face the challenges ahead.

The start of another school year involves more than just an academic change; it is a profound chance for personal growth, social engagement, and empowerment. By developing a setting defined by love, support, and open communication, we can create a supportive environment in which our children feel like special individuals, who can achieve their goals. Together, let us rise to the challenge, promoting support for one another as we guide our children through this crucial phase of their lives. Together, we can enable the growth of the resilience that they need in order to succeed academically and thrive in their future pursuits. By investing in their emotional well being now, we are laying the groundwork for their success in the years to come.

*Leola Rouse has a bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education and a*

The silencing of voice

By Anyla McDonald  
THE BLACK LENS

Too often, Black grandchildren grow up hearing silencing phrases at the dinner table or being told to hold their tongues in moments when their voices mattered. These small but consistent acts carry weight, shaping how young people see themselves and how freely they communicate within their own families. The question we must ask is what happens when a generation is taught to quiet its truth – and how we can begin strengthening those voices to build healthier, more authentic intergenerational connections.

Within many Black families, expressions of individuality, confidence, and emotional vulnerability can be met with phrases intended to humble or correct. Statements such as “You think you all that and a bag of chips,” “Stop acting fast,” and “Stop being so sensitive,” coupled with backhanded compliments and the sharing of personal information without consent, can create a stifling environment for Black grandchildren. These actions can directly affect the throat chakra, the energy center associated with communication, self-expression, and truth. When this chakra is blocked, individuals may struggle to articulate their thoughts, feel unheard, or suppress their authentic selves to avoid judgment or conflict.

The impact of these silencing behaviors is multifaceted. Firstly, they can erode self-esteem. When a child’s confidence is consistently met with dismissive remarks, they may internalize the message their worth is contingent on minimizing their achievements or suppressing their personality. This can lead to a lack of self-assurance in various aspects of life, from academic pursuits to interpersonal relationships. Secondly, these behaviors can hinder the development of healthy communication



skills. If grandchildren are discouraged from expressing their emotions, they may learn to avoid confrontation or withdraw from conversations. This can create a cycle of miscommunication and resentment. Thirdly, the sharing of personal information without consent violates trust. When private matters are broadcast, it can leave grandchildren feeling exposed, vulnerable and betrayed. This can damage their sense of security and make them hesitant to confide in family members in the future.

Scholars and activists have addressed the importance of reclaiming one’s voice, particularly within marginalized communities. bell hooks, for example, emphasized the power of speaking one’s truth as a form of resistance. Her work encourages individuals to challenge oppressive systems by demanding to be heard. Similarly, Brené Brown’s research on vulnerability highlights the importance of sharing one’s story as a pathway to connection and belonging.

Unshackling the throat chakra requires a conscious effort to challenge the silencing patterns within the family. Grandchildren can begin by recognizing the impact of these behaviors on their well-being and identifying specific instances where their voices have been suppressed. They can then practice asserting needs and boundaries, even in the face of resistance. This may involve setting limits on what information they are willing to share, expressing feelings directly and respectfully, and refusing to engage in conversations that are disrespectful.

Furthermore, open communication is crucial for

fostering healthier intergenerational relationships. While it can be challenging, grandchildren can attempt to engage elders in conversations about the impact of their words. This should be approached with empathy, while clearly articulating the need for respectful communication. It is important to acknowledge these patterns may be deeply ingrained and rooted in historical trauma, but that change is possible with effort and a commitment to creating a supportive environment.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of mental health and emotional well-being within the Black community. This has led to increased resources and support for individuals seeking to heal from trauma. Black grandchildren can benefit from engaging in therapy, joining support groups or seeking guidance from mentors who can provide validation, encouragement and strategies for navigating difficult family dynamics. Moreover, practicing self-care activities such as meditation, journaling and creative expression can help to cultivate self-awareness, build resilience and unlock the throat chakra.

Looking ahead, it is essential to continue challenging the cultural norms and beliefs that perpetuate silencing behaviors within Black families. This requires ongoing dialogue, education, and a commitment to fostering empathy and understanding across generations. By creating spaces where Black grandchildren feel safe to express themselves authentically, we can empower them to reclaim their voices, build strong self-esteem, and contribute their unique talents and perspectives to the world. The unblocking of the throat chakra not only benefits individuals, but also strengthens families and communities by promoting healthier communication, deeper connections, and a greater sense of belonging.

Mental Wellness Exhibit at  
Diverse Roots in Northtown Mall

Tuesdays/Thursdays 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Through September

CONTRIBUTOR MEET & GREET:

SEPT. 6<sup>TH</sup> 12 P.M. to 2 P.M.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SHADES OF  
MOTHERHOOD NETWORK

CONTACT: EDITOR APRIL EBERHARDT  
APRIL@BLACKLENSNEWS.COM



IN MEMORIAM / FROM THE FRONT PAGE

# REST IN POWER

*in Memoriam*



**VIVIAN AYERS ALLEN**  
(AUG. 18, 2025)

A Pulitzer-nominated poet, Vivian Ayers Allen nearly predicted the future in her self-published book, "Hawk," that with the advent of flight, humankind would eventually use the same ingenuity to travel through space. Her first poetry book, "Spoke of Dharma," earned her a Pulitzer Prize nomination. In 2024, NASA held a ceremony recognizing Ayers Allen as one of the Hidden Figures of the Apollo 11 mission as it renamed a building on its Houston campus the "Dorothy Vaughan Center in Honor of Women of Apollo."



**LUIS SHARPE**  
(AUG. 13, 2025)

Luis Sharpe came onto the NFL scene in 1982 after being the first-round pick for the St. Louis Cardinals. After the team moved to Arizona, he became a fan- and media-favorite according to the Arizona Cardinals. He stayed with the team all 13 seasons of his career before retiring in 1994. The athlete struggled with addiction after leaving football, landing in jail several times. Sharpe moved to Michigan from Arizona in 2015 and went on to treated patients at a Detroit sobriety clinic.



**MARLENE WARFIELD**  
(APRIL 6, 2025)

In her breakout role in Broadway's "The Great White Hope," Marlene Warfield gave a powerful performance that earned her Theater World and Clarence Derwent prizes. A film by the same name led Warfield to Hollywood. She is best known for her character, Laureen Hobbs, in the film "Network." Warfield grew up in Brooklyn where she took ballet lessons as a kid and first began acting in a high school.



**DWIGHT MUHAMMAD QAWI**  
(JULY 26, 2025)

Dwight Muhammad Qawi began his boxing career in prison, but used it as a tool to redeem himself. Qawi began fighting professionally, skipping the amateur phase and winning the mid-light heavyweight belt in 1982. After earning the nickname "The Canadian Buzzsaw," an homage to his hometown, Qawi rose up a weight class and won the WBO cruiserweight title. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2004.



**RAHAMAN ALI**  
(AUG. 1, 2025)

As Muhammad Ali's brother, Rahaman Ali was his biggest supporter. Rahaman gave up boxing to support Muhammad however he could. Rahaman won his first professional fight the same night Muhammad became the world heavyweight champion. In 2014, he released a book titled "That's Muhammad Ali's Brother My Life on the Undercard," an autobiography about the Ali family and his role in Muhammad's career.

MACE

Continued from 1

want us to live in our greatness. I want us to see that we are great no matter what we do. You can be a doctor. You could not be a doctor. You could be the best dental hygienist in the history of the world ... you can do and be whatever." Her commitment is to cultivate a culture where all forms of Black excellence are recognized and celebrated with intention.

As she steps into this new leadership role, Mace carries both the lessons of her professional path and the traditions instilled by her family. Her grandparents and great-aunts, who endured segregation and the struggles of Black life in Indiana, shared stories that continue to shape her worldview. "My grandma talked about her history and her growing up all the time," she recalled. "She was secretary of her chapter in Indiana, and I'm like, oh my gosh, how exciting. I get to be a part of our family tradition of change and being change makers."

Her vision for the Spokane branch centers on both honoring this legacy and forging new paths of collaboration and solidarity. "I want us to dive into our history and understand where the disconnect happened, reclaim it, and move forward. And any way that I can be a part of that change, I'm here for it," Mace explained.

At the same time, she is keenly aware that the work of an Executive Director requires more than inspiration; it requires execution. She brings experience in organizational leadership, program development, and mental health practice – skills that position her to build systems of accountability, sustainability, and growth for the branch. "I am nothing without those who walk beside me and assist me to build and develop things," she emphasized. "I have a fantastic, I love to build and develop, but I am nothing if I don't have a good team."

The significance of Mace's appointment is shared by Lisa

Gardner, a Spokane native who also walks in her grandmother's legacy of service as the current president of the Spokane branch. Gardner spoke with pride about this next chapter:

"I am thrilled about this major milestone for our organization as we welcome our first Executive Director. This important addition to the NAACP will enable us to expand our efforts and increase our impact in the community.

The decision to hire an Executive Director reflects our commitment to advancing our mission of promoting social justice, civil rights, and equality for everyone. Under the leadership of Dr. Melissa Mace, we are confident that we will enhance our programs, broaden our outreach, and rally our community to address the urgent issues that impact us all.

I invite everyone in our community to join us in welcoming Dr. Mace and to stay involved as we begin this exciting journey toward a brighter future."

Together, Mace and Gardner represent both the generational legacy and forward vision of the NAACP in Spokane. Mace hopes to lead the branch into a new era of visibility and impact, reconnecting the NAACP with Spokane's Black community and strengthening ties across the broader region. "I hope that people see the NAACP as a place of service. A place that always shows up for them, a place that they feel heard, seen and supported," she said.

For Mace, the opportunity is both personal and historic. "I was so utterly grateful for the opportunity," she reflected. "I hope I honor those who came before me every day in the work that I choose and the work that I'm going to do. And I hope that I lay the foundation for generations to come."

With her blend of personal history, professional expertise, and strategic vision, Dr. Melissa Mace is set to usher the Spokane NAACP into a new chapter – one rooted in legacy, service, and a bold commitment to community transformation.

Forever 'Roger's Little Sister'



Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images  
Fred "Rerun" Berry, left, Haywood Nelson, Danielle "Dee" Spencer and Ernest Thomas from the TV show "What's Happening!!" on the set circa 1979 in Los Angeles.

Remarkable journey of Dr. Danielle 'Dee' Spencer (1965-2025)

By Edmond W. Davis  
THE BLACK LENS

As news broke on Aug. 11 that Danielle Spencer – beloved as Dee Thomas on "What's Happening!!" – had passed away at age 60, the world mourned not just an actress, but a woman of unwavering spirit and surprising depth.

Danielle was always known as Roger's little sister, the precocious Dee with the unforgettable catchphrase, "Ooooh, I'm gonna tell Mama!" Her quick wit and memorable presence made her a standout on the popular ABC sitcom (1976-79), and even a decade later, fans welcomed her return in the sequel What's Happening Now!! (1985-88). Yet to her, that role was only the beginning.

Behind the scenes, destiny intertwined ambition and resilience. In 1977, Danielle and her stepfather were involved in a catastrophic car accident; she was left in a three-week coma, spending months in physical recovery, while tragically losing her stepfather. That trauma shaped her



Spencer

earned her veterinary degree at Tuskegee University, becoming Dr. Danielle Spencer in 1996.

She practiced medicine for animals for over 25 years, first in California and later in Richmond, Virginia, where she also brought pet-care insight to local television news audiences.

Her creative spirit endured. In 2011, she published "Through the Fire: Journal of a Child Star," a memoir recalling her early fame, her accident, and the strength required to endure. The book renewed interest in her life story and led to interviews on programs like "The Wendy Williams Show" and TV One's "Life After."

Danielle faced adversity yet again. Diagnosed with breast cancer in 2014, she underwent

destiny.

Rather than retreat, Danielle charted a new course – toward veterinary medicine. After time at University of California-Davis, she earned her veterinary degree at Tuskegee University, becoming Dr. Danielle Spencer in 1996.

She practiced medicine for animals for over 25 years, first in California and later in Richmond, Virginia, where she also brought pet-care insight to local television news audiences.

Her creative spirit endured. In 2011, she published "Through the Fire: Journal of a Child Star," a memoir recalling her early fame, her accident, and the strength required to endure. The book renewed interest in her life story and led to interviews on programs like "The Wendy Williams Show" and TV One's "Life After."

Danielle faced adversity yet again. Diagnosed with breast cancer in 2014, she underwent

a double mastectomy. Later, she confronted spinal stenosis and even emergency brain surgery in 2018. Through it all, her former co-star Haywood Nelson called her a "brilliant, loving, positive, pragmatic warrior."

Recognition followed her courage. In 2014, she became the only former child actor included in the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture For all her trials – on-screen and real – she remained a steadfast animal-rights advocate, a healer, a survivor.

But forever, she will be "Roger's little sister." That endearing role anchored her in popular culture and in our hearts. Yet to those who knew her life's arc – from sitcom set to veterinary clinic – Danielle led a journey defined by transformation, resilience, and compassion.

On this day, we say goodbye not only to a child star, but to Dr. Danielle Spencer: actress, author, veterinarian and courageous human. We remember "Dee" with laughter, tears and enduring admiration.







LEISURE

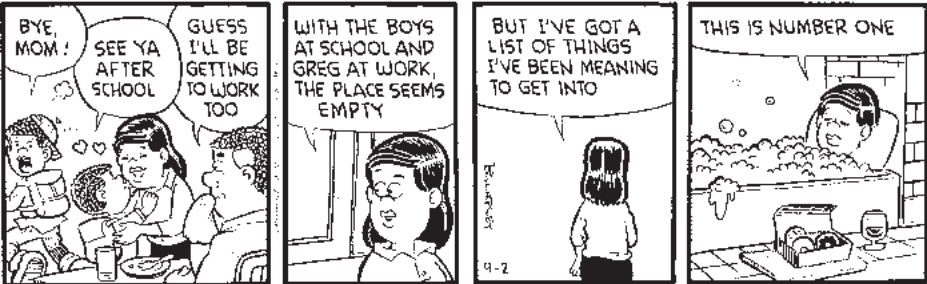
COMICS & QUOTE OF THE MONTH

CURTIS • BY RAY BILLINGSLEY

SEPT. 1



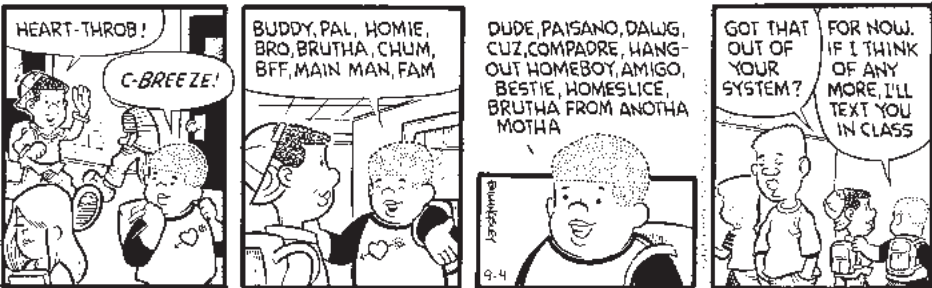
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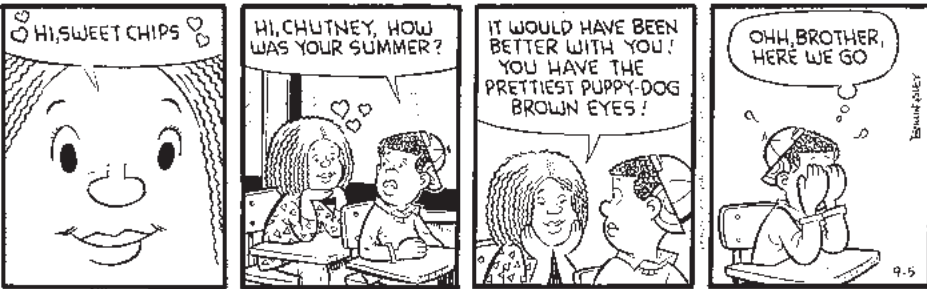
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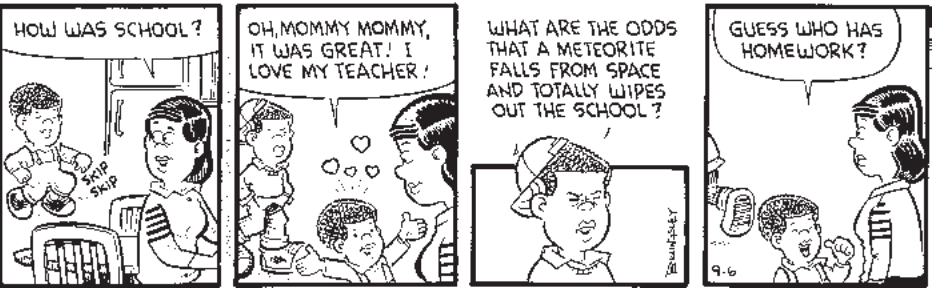
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CRABGRASS • BY TAUHID BONDIA

SEPT. 1



SEPT. 2



SEPT. 3



SEPT. 4



SEPT. 5

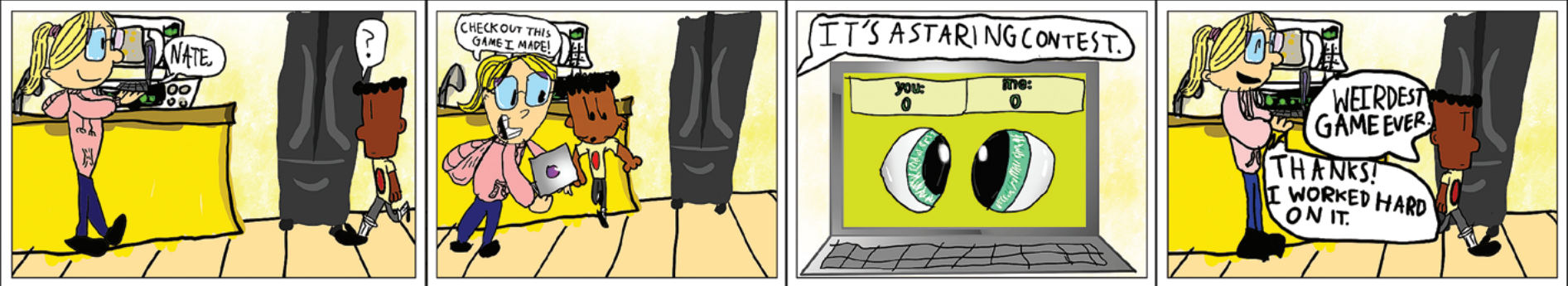


SEPT. 6



PETS

A KID'S COMIC • BY MJ BETHELY





BLACK POETS SOCIETY

GIFTED

By Immanuel Love  
AIRWAY HEIGHTS CORRECTIONS CENTER BLACK PRISONERS CAUCUS

**Gifted: Glowing, Individual, Favored, Through, Eternal, Divinity Legends: Leaving, Everyone, Great, Examples, Nobody, Deserves**

God did, so here we are. Broken chains are an afterthought.  
We were born kings and queens. A hiccup in history wouldn't have us relinquish our sense of being. NEVER!! Black excellence – we remember our gifted legends, in which we still feel their presence: Thurgood Marshall, Frederick Douglass, Maya Angelou, Nelson Mandela. Gifted legends who stood for a cause, who refused to ever let up. We honor you as we embody our truth.  
We honor Harriet Tubman. When I arrive at heaven's gate, how I long to hold your face. Looking into your eyes, I will cry with immense admiration, as you endured a

hatred that powered the way that saved so many men and women from slavery. Your courage remains embossed in history as a lesson that we're all vessels for the unforgettable, monumental. How you made the land turn using lanterns–beacons of freedom orchestrated by a Black queen. It gives me chills just to speak of you.  
We honor Martin Luther King. Your marches became the woven fabric of freedom. A broken nation needed a blanket that swaddled the notion of hope as you projected a dream when peace couldn't even be conceived. We shall overcome, having planted seeds with your speech. Obama showed just how far your gardening would reach.  
Friend, inspiration, martyr. In wonderment of how your presence today could take everyone that much further, we will continue to share the message of love with tact and

respect – honoring you all as giants we will never forget.  
Before we honor this next brother, I find it necessary to proclaim a personal confession to illustrate his greatness: I will never, ever, ever – I mean ever – wear a 49ers jersey unless it's stitched with Kaepernick across the back of it.  
Modern-day movement, bold soldier. Rumored to have disrespected our flag and our soldiers – a convenient narrative imperative to dethrone a prince on a mission to bring peace to our streets. Swept under the rug by the powers that be, but you'll forever remain a gifted legend to me. You stood for a cause when it cost you your passion. Your reputation was smeared so badly your career isn't something you could ever come back to.  
It's instances like this in which I use our history to try to solve today's mysteries, like: how can we be free from slavery but not

discrimination? Because implicit bias sneaks its way around the proclamation. I'm craving change, so I love every day. I'm not bound by a device because I'm led by a GOD who teaches me to love what's inside.  
So I love you because you're worth it. See, when I'm loving you, then I'm serving my purpose. I'll lead my family with the knowledge Martin handed me. I learned love conquers all – those who are the hardest to love are the ones that need it the most. So be patient. Only hurt people hurt people. So rather than vengeance, I'm reppin' kindness and temperance. Tolerance and mending will flow from every appendage to ensure our ancestors' legacy lives forever in remembrance.  
I pray our ancestors look upon us with pride, confident that their cause, their sacrifice, will never die. We lift every voice to proclaim that our life will not end with your grave. NAH! You live on through every victory, through every smile. We lift you in celebration. We thank God that He made you.  
In the words of Nelson Mandela: We were born to make manifest the glory of GOD that's within us. It's not just in some of us. It's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, as we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.



GRACE BETWEEN US (FOR MAMA D)

Mama D is iron wrapped in lace, a quiet storm with a sacred grace. Strong hands that built a legacy, now reach in trust and turn to me.  
  
She once held worlds within her palms, raised generations with her calm. A backbone strong, a spirit kind, a brilliant, sharp, enduring mind. She says, “I’m fine,” and stands up tall, still proud, though time may gently call. But I know the weight she will not name, the quiet ache, the stubborn flame.



By Alethea Dumas  
THE BLACK LENS BOARD CHAIR



The world forgets what elders give, how deeply they still long to live. It dares to dim what's shining still but Mama D, she always will. She is no burden. She's the light. The morning sun, the star at night. The history in her every word deserves to always be seen and heard.  
  
And me ... I walk this path beside, with open hands and softened pride. I want to help, not take control, to offer strength, not take her role. Some days I guide, some days I learn, some days I simply wait my turn. Because care, when done with love and grace, leaves dignity in its rightful place.

Mama D gave me all I know, taught me to rise, taught me to grow. And now I give that care back true not out of duty, but love earned through.  
  
This journey, hard and beautiful, is not about what's practical. It's soul work, sacred, deeply blessed to walk with her and give her rest. She still belongs. She always will. Her voice, her fire, her spirit still. And I will stand, both proud and free a Black woman, made whole by Mama D.

Spiritual Spouse

Dear me, and dear my  
To my most precious, celebrated celestial in the sky.  
So greatly appreciated for the wonderful words that you constructed!!  
This world of ours is a function  
Avoiding the conjunction  
Killing philosophy built standards  
To Whom's concern we have known?  
Letting holidays for homicides still exist makes me feel remiss  
When true pain knows every

shade of truth.  
Where is the proof?  
The youth?  
The commercial community connection,  
Feels more like a huge distraction deflection.  
No heed for misinformation or misdirection  
When you live a roundabout lifestyle, is it even worthwhile?  
What's human without AI technology style  
How much longer before we lose our dial  
Log away the last few



By AJ the Wordsmith  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



thoughts on human oppression  
But start with your inner child to find out who's really wild

70X7

490 times  
Forgive and Forget  
The hurt the pain the wrongful and the shame but who am I to blame just look at what I overcame-  
490 times  
My minds on a thought deficit  
No closure, no apologies just theologies on your wrongdoings and your actions all for their laughs and satisfactions  
But I'm wrong if I say I'm about that action



By Donalda Brantley  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



490 times  
Tell me again what was it?

How you “never did that” or how it was “never your intention” but did I fail to mention that the air still holds the tension?  
490 times  
It replayed in my head.  
490 times  
You bit the hand that kept you fed  
But 490 times  
He told me what was to be said  
70x7  
Forgive Time and time again  
490 times  
your worries you'll forget

EVEN IF IT TAKES YEARS

There's a peculiar sense of urgency in my soul.  
It rests in my insecurities, gently nestled between my black thoughts and masculine pride.  
  
It hurts deep. Under no other condition, I am ruined.  
  
On the best day I am halted but on the worst I am hunted. I'm valued as one who values another who doesn't value anything. I learn like a teacher who is out of practice and I practice like I'm anticipating a losing season.  
  
But still this tiny sense of urgency reminds me. Reminds me that I may not have but I can still want. I may not want as I did as a child but I still deserve fun. I may be at the end of my time but at least I still have it. I have to use it. I need to.  
  
I can't live this bold black life without



By Daniella Musesambili  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



anything to show for it but anxiety and debt.  
  
Men. Black men. Sit your pride down and take a walk. Your birthday is coming up and we'd hate for you to miss it.

BACK TO SCHOOL

By Anyla McDonald  
THE BLACK LENS  
  
As summer fades and days grow short, A new adventure, a fresh report. Back to school, where dreams ignite, Knowledge awaits, in books so bright. Step through the door, embrace the day, With open hearts, let worries sway. Every pencil drawn, each word we write, Shapes our future, like stars in the night. Parents stand strong, your love the key, Guide their steps, help them to see. In every struggle, in every trial,

A lesson learned is worth each mile. Encourage them to reach for the skies, To question, to wonder, to be truly wise. With every homework, with every quest, Support their journey; give them your best. So here we gather, a community whole, With respect and kindness, we nurture the soul. Together we rise, through laughter and tears, In this school of life, we conquer our fears. Back to school, let's make it clear, Those dreams become real when we persevere. With courage and love, we set the tone, In learning's embrace, we're never alone.



By Jä Corbett-Sparks  
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



There's a peculiar sense of urgency in my soul

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I have to use it. I need to.  
  
I can't live this bold black life without anything to show for it but anxiety and debt.  
  
Men. Black men. Sit your pride down and take a walk. Your birthday is coming up and we'd hate for you to miss it.