

THE BLACK LENS

OCTOBER 2025 - VOL. 10 - ISSUE NO. 10

10 years later ... When you look like me, you're only 'good enough' until they say you're not



By Ephraim Watkins
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR

By Ephraim Watkins
FOR THE BLACK LENS

A decade ago, I wrote for The Black Lens as an 11-year-old African American student. Even at that age, I had already seen too much—racism, hatred, and, for lack of a better word, a kind of purified evil. My adolescence was burdened with struggles that no child should face in a nation that claims its Constitution protects us all equally. Ten years later, not much has changed. The overt death threats and playground slurs of my childhood have been replaced with something more insidious: subtle racism. Like a lion stalking

a gazelle, it lurks just outside the forefront, waiting to remind those who look like me that our “place” in this country is conditional. Since that first article, I’ve accomplished much. I became the first Black male ASB President at Gonzaga Preparatory. I received the Chase Youth Award for Judges’ Choice. I graduated high school Summa Cum Laude and earned the Act Six Scholarship to attend Whitworth University. I started two years on the football team, won a conference championship in 2023, and was named Whitworth’s Humanitarian of the Year that same year. Even as recently as Aug. 8 I received the Provost honors for

carrying a GPA of 3.75 or above in college. And yet, none of those accomplishments could shield me from the reality that—to many of my peers and professors—I was still “the exception.” They marveled: “You’re so articulate.” “You’re much nicer than I thought.” Compliments, on the surface, but rooted in surprise that a Black man could embody intelligence, grace, or kindness. My size and athletic ability did not protect me from being cornered into situations where I had to beg for help from white counterparts who rarely offered it. My intelligence could not protect me from

betrayal, dishonesty, and silence from a community I had poured my heart into. In America, when you are Black, you are only valued as long as you are performing. If I sacked the quarterback, aced the exam, or stood as a pillar in my community, then I was “worthy.” To be average was to be criminal. To be good was to be less than. To be great was merely to be seen as “equal” to my white classmates. On campus, I was a quota. Professors openly admitted, “Join our department—we need more Black students like you.” My worth was

See **WATKINS, 13**

DRESSMAKER NINA CHERIE ON COURAGE, CRAFT AND LIVING WITH NO REGRETS

Give someone a fish and they'll eat for a day; teach someone to fish and they will keep eating

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

Walk into Nina Cherie Couture in downtown Spokane and you'll feel two things at once: elegance and grit. Owner, designer, and dressmaker Nina Cherie built her business the old-school way—by apprenticing, failing forward, and saying yes to challenges before she felt “ready.” Her story is a masterclass in believing in yourself, taking chances, learning from mistakes, and seeking out the people who will sharpen your skills. Nina taught herself to sew young, then leveled up by apprenticing with a master tailor and completing intensive training at New York’s Fashion Institute of Technology. Along the way, a single decision—to take on a bridal gown she’d never made before—changed everything. “I was up for the challenge, and I did



COURTESY
Nina Cherie is the owner and namesake of Nina Cherie Couture in downtown Spokane.

See **CHERIE, 9**

Nissi Shalome brings Sugar Kane to life

Black joy, resistance and representation in Broadway's show 'Some Like It Hot'

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

In a vibrant reimagining of the classic “Some Like It Hot” – a story once popularized by Marilyn Monroe – actor Nissi Shalome brings character Sugar Kane to life through a mixture of personal familiarity with Black joy and Black resistance. For Shalome, embodying this iconic character has become her most fulfilling role yet, celebrating resilience, artistry, and the transformative power of representation on stage. She found herself in Sugar Kane. “I have been performing my whole life, but I’ve been in the business for about 10 years,” Shalome shares. “Sugar Kane specifically is my favorite role that I’ve done because it is the epitome of the musical theater ingénue – beautiful, kind, with stunning songs and a beautiful journey. She’s a Black woman chasing her dreams and finding herself while she’s doing it. You quite literally couldn’t ask for better.” As a featured ensemble member and understudy, Shalome lives inside a character whose presence is already an act of defiance. “Sugar Kane is written in our production to be a Black woman,” she explains. “So that’s already resistance. She’s taking up space that originally was not meant for her to take up.” Many underestimate the importance of an ensemble, but Shalome sees it as the heartbeat of the show. “Depending on who you ask, people assume that the ensemble is just extra bodies to fill the stage,” she says. “But that’s not the case for us. Because the show is about a traveling all-female band in the 1930s, the female ensemble is that band. You’ll see the ensemble in this show just as much as you see the leads because we’re literally all in it together.” This collective energy amplifies

COURTESY

Nissi Shalome plays Sugar Kane in “Some Like It Hot.”

See **SHALOME, 11**

THROUGH HIS OWN LENS

Jauvan Mbarushimana uses art to tell the story of grief, healing and kinship

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

“I’ve wanted to do it for as long as I can remember. I really like observing people, and I want to put other people’s stories into my own—just on the biggest screen. Something about it really calls me and speaks to me. It makes me feel the happiest when I’m creating or watching something.” Jauvan Mbarushimana, a 2025 graduate of North Central High School, speaks about film with the quiet conviction of someone who has already found his calling. “I don’t think you

can teach somebody how to direct. It comes from them, but college can give me access and tools in the art world,” he says. In the coming year, Jauvan will attend Parsons School of Design in New York, majoring in photography as a pathway to his ultimate dream—film directing. Jauvan’s family story is one of survival and reinvention. His parents lived through the 1994 Rwandan genocide, escaping to refugee camps before resettling in Spokane. “We did lose a lot of people in Rwanda,”

See **LENS, 9**

Why Does Art Matter?

“Art gives us a language beyond words and every young person deserves the chance to speak it.” – Spokane Artist, Tracy Poindexter-Canton

“Art has always been my sanctuary and a space to translate emotions, stories, and identity into something tangible,” Poindexter-Canton said. “I believe every young person deserves that same outlet, because when youth are given access to art, they discover new ways to see themselves, their communities, and the possibilities ahead. Art isn’t just creative expression; it’s a lifeline that nurtures resilience, imagination, and hope.”



COURTESY
“wilted flowers” by Jauvan Mbarushimana



Tracy Poindexter-Canton was reaccepted onto the Washington State Arts Commission’s Public Artist Roster for the 2025-29 cycle. She has art acquisitions across Washington state. Some local public works include The Little Magic Fly-brarylending Library at the Carl Maxey Center and mixed media pieces at the Liberty Park Library in East Central Spokane. Visit tracypoindexter-canton.com to learn more.

BL

NEWS

BLACKLENS.NEWS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Black voters worry what predistricting means for power of their voice

KANSAS CITY, MO. – After Texas began a redistricting push, which typically occurs every decade following the U.S. census, other states began considering the idea too. Missouri Republicans voted to create a gerrymandered map, which targets the state’s 5th Congressional District held by Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, D-Kansas City, would give Republicans an advantage in seven of eight districts in the state.

According to reporting from the Associated Press, the current district includes a considerable amount of Kansas City’s Black population, which the map would divide into separate districts. Residents in the 5th District say race was a driving force behind the map’s creation. Bishop Donna Simon of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, told the AP she believes the redistricting is an attempt to disenfranchise people of color, those who are poor, and immigrants.

Grassroots orgs celebrate recovering of New Orleans’ Black teaching workforce

NEW ORLEANS – Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans hard, not just physically, but also socially. The devastation from the storm led the school board to lay off more than 4,000 educators and the state of Louisiana to take control of New Orleans’ schools, all of which were transferred to charter organizations. Students lost more than just teachers. A study found Black student who had a teacher of the same race by third grade were 13% more likely to graduate high school and 19% more likely to enroll in higher education.

In 2013, a charter school system known as InspireNola was founded and in 2025 says 83% of its teachers are Black or brown and that the school Black student population sees a 100% graduation rate. As a response to the firings of teachers after the storm, nonprofit Black Education for New Orleans was formed by Black New Oleanians who sought to more Black influence in the schools. The organization offers a fellowship program which boasts a 96% retention rate since its creation in 2023. The percentage of Black teachers in the city’s schools still hasn’t reached the pre-Katrina level of 70% but has risen 7 percentage points to 56%.

Autopsy of Delta State student found hanging from tree released

JACKSON, MISS. – The autopsy of Demartravion “Trey” Reed by the Mississippi State Medical Examiner’s Office concluded his cause of death to be hanging by method of suicide. Reed was found the morning of Sept. 15 hanging from a tree on the Delta State University campus, according to university police. Authorities ruled the death a suicide and suspected no foul play.

Reed’s death happened about 30 miles from the sites associated with the lynching of Emmett Till and struck a chord with civil rights leaders and groups, who called for transparency in the investigation.

Police said that toxicology results are still being processed and may take up to four weeks to complete and that the investigation is being handled by the FBI and U.S. Attorney’s Office.

INDEX

NEWS AND POLITICS 2

ARTS AND CULTURE..... 4

BUSINESS AND FINANCE 5

EDUCATION..... 6

YOUTH CONNECTION..... 8

WELLNESS 10

REST IN POWER 13

EVENTS AND LISTINGS..... 14

COMICS AND LEISURE 15



By Shamerica Nakamura
BLACK LENS BOARD



Banned Words List (72+)

abortion
accessibility
accessible
activism
activists
advocacy
advocate
advocates
affirmative action
affirmative action programs
affirming care
affordable home
affordable housing
agricultural water
agrivoltaics
air pollution
all-inclusive
allyship
alternative energy
anti-racism
antiracist
asexual
assigned at birth
assigned female at birth
assigned male at birth
at risk
autism
aviation fuel
barrier
barriers
belong
bias
DEI
DEIA
DEIAB
DEIJ
diesel
dietary guidelines /
ultraprocessed foods
disabilities
disability
disabled
disadvantaged
discriminated
discrimination
discriminatory
discussion of federal
policies
disparity
diverse
diverse backgrounds
diverse communities
diverse community
diverse group
diverse groups
diversified
diversify
diversifying
diversity
diversity and inclusion
diversity in the workplace
diversity, equity, and

clean fuel
clean power
clean water
climate
climate accountability
climate change
climate consulting
climate crisis
climate model
climate models
climate resilience
climate risk
climate science
climate smart agriculture
climate smart forestry
climate variability
climate-change
climatesmart
commercial sex worker
community
community diversity
community equity
confirmation bias
contaminants of
environmental concern
continuum
Covid-19
critical race theory
cultural competence
cultural differences
cultural heritage
cultural relevance
cultural sensitivity
culturally appropriate
culturally responsive
definition
DEI
DEIA
DEIAB
DEIJ
diesel
dietary guidelines /
ultraprocessed foods
disabilities
disability
disabled
disadvantaged
discriminated
discrimination
discriminatory
discussion of federal
policies
disparity
diverse
diverse backgrounds
diverse communities
diverse community
diverse group
diverse groups
diversified
diversify
diversifying
diversity
diversity and inclusion
diversity in the workplace
diversity, equity, and

inclusion
diversity/equity efforts
EEJ
EJ
elderly
electric vehicle
energy conversion
enhance the diversity
enhancing diversity
entitlement
environmental justice
environmental quality
equal opportunity
equality
equitable
equitableness
equity
ethanol
ethnicity
evidence-based
excluded
exclusion
expression
female
females
feminism
fetus
field drainage
fluoride
fostering inclusivity
fuel cell
gay
GBV
gender
gender-based
gender-based violence
gender diversity
gender dysphoria
gender expression
gender identity
gender ideology
gender nonconformity
gender transition
gender affirming care
gendered
gender
geothermal
GHG emission
GHG modeling
GHG monitoring
global warming
green
green infrastructure
greenhouse gas emission
groundwater pollution
Gulf of Mexico
HSNI / bird flu
hate
hate speech
health disparity
health equity
Hispanic
Hispanic minority
historically
housing affordability
housing efficiency

hydrogen vehicle
identity
ideology
immigrants
implicit bias
implicit biases
inclusion
inclusive
inclusive leadership
inclusiveness
inclusivity
increase diversity
increase the diversity
indigenous
indigenous community
/ people
inequalities
inequality
inequitable
inequities
injustice
institutional
integration
intersectional
intersectionality
intersex
issues concerning pending
legislation
Justice40
key groups
key people
key populations
Latinx
lesbian
LGBT
LGBTQ
low-emission vehicle
low-income housing
male-dominated
marginalize
marginalized
marijuana
measles
membrane filtration
men who have sex with
men
mental health
methane emissions
microplastics
migrant
minorities
minority
minority serving institution
most risk
MSI
MSM
multicultural
Mx
Native American
NCI budget
net-zero
non-binary
nonbinary
noncitizen
non-conforming
nonpoint source pollution

nuclear energy
nuclear power
obesity
opioids
oppression
oppressive
orientation
pansexual
PCB
peanut allergies
people + uterus
people of color
people-centered care
person-centered
person-centered care
PFAS
PFOA
photovoltaic
polarization
political
pollution
pollution abatement
pollution remediation
prefabricated housing
pregnant people
pregnant person
pregnant persons
prejudice
privilege
privileges
promote
promote diversity
promoting diversity
pronoun
pronouns
prostitute
pyrolysis
QT
queer
race
race and ethnicity
racial
racial diversity
racial identity
racial inequality
racial justice
racially
racism
runoff
rural water
safe drinking water
science-based
sediment remediation
segregation
self-assessed
sense of belonging
sex
sexual preferences
sexuality
social justice
social vulnerability
socio cultural
socio economic
sociocultural
socioeconomic status
soil pollution

solar energy
solar power
special populations
stem cell or fetal tissue
research
stereotype
stereotypes
subsidized housing
sustainable construction
systemic
they/them
tile drainage
topics of federal
investigations
topics that have received
recent attention from
Congress
topics that have received
widespread or critical
media attention
trans
transsexual
transsexualism
transsexuals
transgender
transgender military
personnel
transgender people
transitional housing
trauma
traumatic
tribal
two-spirit
unconscious bias
under-appreciated
under-represented
under-served
underprivileged
underrepresentation
underrepresented
underserved
understudied
undervalued
vaccines
victim
victims
vulnerable
vulnerable populations
water collection
water conservation
water distribution
water efficiency
water management
water pollution
water quality
water storage
water treatment
white privilege
wind power
woman
women
women and
underrepresented
women in leadership

INVEST IN
COMMUNITY
JOURNALISM BY
SUBSCRIBING
DIRECTLY TO
THE BLACK LENS
TODAY.

YOUR \$96
SUBSCRIPTION
SUPPORTS:

FUNDING MONTHLY
PRODUCTION/DISTRIBUTION

BUILDING & SUSTAINING OUR
NONPROFIT MODEL

HONORING THE LEGACY OF
SANDY WILLIAMS & GOOD
TROUBLE

INVESTING IN YOUTH
EMPOWERMENT & COMMUNITY
PROGRAMMING

THE BLACK LENS IS A REGISTERED 501(C)(3) ORGANIZATION. PLEASE CONSULT YOUR
TAX ADVISOR FOR GUIDANCE ON DEDUCTIBILITY.

NEWS AND POLITICS

Spokane NAACP hosts candidate forums with four Municipal Court Judge candidates

Black Lens staff reports

On Sept. 25, the Spokane Branch of the NAACP hosted the first of two candidate forums. This forum facilitated dialogue with four Spokane Municipal Court Judge candidates running for Positions 2 and 3. The following summary highlights their responses to key questions, offering voters insight to support informed decision-making in November. The next candidate forum will be held on October 15 and will feature the candidates running for Spokane City Hall.

**Sarah Freedman
(Position 3 - Challenger)
Opening Statement**

Sarah Freedman, a trial attorney with nearly a decade of courtroom experience, is running for Position 3. Originally from New York and trained at Seattle University School of Law, she has worked as both a prosecutor and defense attorney, including public defense conflict cases. Freedman emphasizes empathy, accountability, and reform in court practice.

Addressing Implicit Bias

Freedman acknowledges her lack of judicial experience but draws from her observations of judges statewide. She proposes using recesses as a tool when bias may interfere, considering recusal mid-case if necessary, and signing affidavits of prejudice to protect fairness.

Challenges Facing Municipal Court

She points to misallocation of resources, citing overuse of commissioner dockets and probation for individuals who don't meet high-needs thresholds. Freedman warns of increased strain due to state-mandated limits on public defender caseloads, without matching funding for more attorneys.

Community Engagement and Equal Access

As a small business owner, Freedman also provides pro bono and "low bono" legal services, particularly in protection order cases. She highlights her neurodivergence (severe ADHD) as shaping her heightened awareness of fairness and inclusion, and her connection with clients from queer, trans, and neurodivergent communities.

Rehabilitation vs. Punishment

She supports expanding ther-

apeutic courts, particularly by incorporating trauma-informed treatments like Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) with practitioners who share cultural or lived experiences with defendants.

Legal Financial Obligations (LFOs)

Freedman observes that Spokane's municipal court already avoids excessive fines compared to other jurisdictions. She supports close review of fines, questions DUI recoupment costs, and values consistent tracking of infractions to prevent unfair defaults.

Reforms and Innovations

She advocates a victim-centered approach in criminal protection orders. Specifically, Freedman would ask victims if they have a safety plan and if they know how to seek a civil protection order, while providing information sheets on available services.

Mary Logan (Position 2 - Incumbent)

Opening Statement

Judge Mary Logan, seeking re-election to Position 2, has served on the bench for 16 years. She emphasizes impartiality, access to justice, and programs that reduce recidivism without over-reliance on incarceration. Logan was rated "exceptionally well qualified" by the Spokane County Bar Association.

Addressing Implicit Bias

Logan stresses awareness and self-reflection. She recalls adjusting her response to an aggressive victim after recognizing her bias, underscoring the importance of pausing, listening, and reassessing.

Challenges Facing Municipal Court

She argues the main issue is perception: municipal court is often sidelined as "lesser" than other branches of city government. This limits its visibility and resources. She calls for recognition of the court as an essential, independent branch.

Community Engagement and Equal Access

Logan cites long-standing service on statewide diversity and therapeutic court committees. She emphasizes procedural fairness—ensuring all defendants feel heard and respected, which she believes reduces re-traumatization and increases acceptance of outcomes.

Rehabilitation vs. Punishment

Logan co-founded Spokane's

therapeutic courts, including the Veterans Enhanced Treatment Court and Community Court. She advocates rehabilitative approaches that wrap treatment around defendants while maintaining accountability.

Legal Financial Obligations (LFOs)

Logan emphasizes compliance with Supreme Court guidance requiring ability-to-pay assessments. She highlights the court's participation in clinics such as WarrantFest, offering accessible venues for individuals to resolve warrants and LFOs without fear of arrest.

Reforms and Innovations

She points to Community Court as a model of innovation, with its partnerships with over 100 service providers and recent expansions into medically assisted treatment. Logan would also support restoring Saturday court to improve accessibility.

Gloria Ochoa-Bruck (Position 3 - Incumbent)

Opening Statement

Judge Gloria Ochoa-Bruck, seeking re-election to Position 3, is the first person of color to serve on Spokane's municipal bench. The daughter of farmworkers and former undocumented immigrants, she stresses balanced justice—rehabilitation through services and restorative practices combined with compassionate accountability.

Addressing Implicit Bias

Ochoa-Bruck stresses education and self-reflection. She cites a personal example of discovering bias in her rulings toward women in certain cases, which led her to adjust her approach to ensure equity.

Challenges Facing Municipal Court

She underscores the importance of preserving the probation department and enhanced probation programs, which provide risk-needs assessments and supportive case management for high-risk individuals. Funding shortfalls threaten these critical services.

Community Engagement and Equal Access

With 25 years in criminal justice, Ochoa-Bruck has served as Spokane's multicultural affairs director, volunteered widely, and held board positions with Empire Health Foundation, Providence Mission Board, and Partners



SPOKESMAN-REVIEW PHOTO ARCHIVES

The Spokane Public Safety Building.

with Families and Children. She has also presided in tribal courts, bringing awareness of the disproportionate impacts on Native and Black communities.

Rehabilitation vs. Punishment

She strongly supports therapeutic and restorative justice courts. Ochoa-Bruck emphasizes evidence-based practices, citing DUI court's 6% recidivism rate as proof of their effectiveness. She advocates expanding access despite funding constraints.

Legal Financial Obligations (LFOs)

Ochoa-Bruck notes that courts cannot impose LFOs on indigent defendants. She highlights the hidden costs of childcare, transportation, and lost wages and supports staggered dockets to reduce those burdens.

Reforms and Innovations

She has piloted partnerships with nonprofits like Volunteers of America to provide wraparound services for youth, and she advocates expanding such public-private collaborations to fill resource gaps.

Lynden P. Smithson (Position 2 - Challenger)

Opening Statement

Lynden P. Smithson, a longtime Spokane attorney and former city attorney, is running for Position 2. His career includes defense, civil rights, and nearly two decades as a prosecutor, where he created the domestic violence unit. Smithson wants to restore confidence in Community Court and address downtown public safety.

Addressing Implicit Bias

Smithson calls for data-driven accountability. Judges must review incarceration and probation statistics regularly to identify dis-

proportionate impacts and implement bias training when needed.

Challenges Facing Municipal Court

He highlights shrinking budgets and predicts difficult decisions ahead. Smithson calls for partnerships with nonprofits to maintain services as city funding decreases.

Community Engagement and Equal Access

Smithson serves on the Spokane Regional Domestic Violence Coalition board, hearing directly from victims. He also supports flexible court scheduling, including evening dockets, to accommodate work and childcare obligations.

Rehabilitation vs. Punishment

He contrasts superior court's punitive model with municipal court's rehabilitative purpose. Smithson, a former mental health prosecutor, cites reduced recidivism in therapeutic courts and emphasizes compassion, structure, and accountability.

Legal Financial Obligations (LFOs)

Smithson stresses that Spokane's municipal court has avoided creating a "debtor's prison," often waiving fees and restoring licenses even before fines are fully paid. He praises the court's proactive role in statewide reform.

Reforms and Innovations

Smithson proposes adding navigators to Community Court to guide defendants through treatment and services, modeled after supports in mental health court. He emphasizes the need for creativity, since city budgets cannot fully fund these roles.

The NAACP will host a town hall featuring candidates for City Council seats at 6 p.m. Oct. 15 at the downtown Central Library.



GETTY IMAGES

VOTE! WHO CAN VOTE AND WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Black Lens staff reports



Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 4.

To register to vote in the state of Washington, you must be:

- A citizen of the United States
- A resident of Washington state
- At least 18 years old
- If you are 16 or 17, you can sign up as a Future Voter and be automatically registered to vote when you qualify
- Not disqualified from voting due to a court order

- Not currently serving a sentence of total confinement in prison under the jurisdiction of the department of corrections for a Washington felony conviction

RESOURCES

Find the Washington State Voters Guide online at <http://bit.ly/46HP9Ce>
Read the League of Women Voters' 2024 Guide to Elected Officials at my.lwv.org.
Or scan the accompanying QR codes.

Dog whistles of domestic terror

IN HIS WORDS

By Edmond W. Davis
FOR THE BLACK LENS

Disclaimer: "Dear White Men: Why Are You So Angry?" was a controversial op-ed article filled with truth and facts about the symptoms of these mass shootings. I wrote just four mass shootings ago—all carried out by white males. Out of 600-plus editors, publishers, and media stations in the United States, only two would publish it. Today, I return to this conversation with even greater urgency.

Media's Silence: A Dereliction of Duty

It is painfully obvious that mainstream media outlets are tiptoeing around this subject—or avoiding it altogether. That omission borders on a dereliction of duty by major markets whose mission should be to seek truth, hold power accountable, and present unflinching narratives. When reporters refuse to name what is plain to see, or when commentators frame mass shootings only as isolated "incidents," they fail the public.

We must demand deeper narrative, honest naming, and recognition of patterns too consistent to be coincidence.

White Male Shooter Syndrome

What I call "White Male Shooter Syndrome" is more than a tragic cycle—it is the outward symptom of America's internal cancer: domestic terror that is predominantly white, male, and ideological. The evidence is overwhelming: the greatest threat to national security today is not foreign terror but home-grown violent extremism.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, FBI, U.S. Secret Service, and NSA have confirmed this repeatedly. This is not speculation; it is a docu-

mented fact.

A Pseudo Solution

Every time a mass shooting by a white male occurs, public safety and media must treat it as domestic terrorism.

The first question asked should not be:

- "Was he mentally ill?"
- "Was this a security lapse?"
- Instead, they must be:
- "What ideologies, networks, and symbols preceded this act?"
- "What insignias, social media content, or affiliations were already visible?"

Counterintelligence? We need coordinated domestic-extremism units, not afterthoughts. Vehicle decals, online propaganda, military insignias, "patriot" rhetoric—these are red flags that law enforcement and journalists must analyze with the same urgency we once reserved for foreign threats.

**Why This Narrative Matters
Home-grown terrorists dominate the threat landscape**

A Senate Homeland Security Committee report confirmed that domestic terror is overwhelmingly tied to white supremacist and anti-government extremism.

A CSIS analysis of U.S. terrorist plots from 1994-2020 found that right-wing extremist attacks made up the majority. The FBI-DHS Domestic Terrorism Strategic Report 2023 highlights domestic violent extremists as the nation's most pressing threat.

Mass shooters are disproportionately white

A ScienceDirect study found white shooters are overrepresented in high-fatality incidents.

The Oxford Criminology Review showed that over 52% of mass shooters are white.

The Columbia Mass Murder Database revealed that in school settings,

two-thirds of perpetrators were Caucasian, and all were male.

The dog whistles are consistent

Confederate flags. MAGA hats. 1776 banners. "Don't Tread on Me" logos. Nazi literature. Blue-and-white "thin line" flags. "Patriot" decals and military memorabilia. These are not random props. They are the iconography of white rage—the visual dog whistles of domestic terror.

Media silence is not benign

By refusing to call out these symbols, the media sanitizes terror. They allow the shooters to be framed as "lone wolves" or "troubled youth" obscuring the very networks and ideologies that radicalize them.

What the Response Must Look Like

Demand accountability: Media must name white supremacist ideology where evidence exists.

Build frameworks: Fund counter-extremism programs with the same seriousness as foreign terrorism.

Educate first responders: Train local police, educators, and journalists to spot ideological red flags early.

Enforce disclosure: Require transparency—what flags were seen, what affiliations tracked, what rhetoric ignored.

Final Thought

Not all white men are shooters. But the pattern is undeniable: More than 60% of U.S. mass shootings are committed by white males, many bearing the same symbols and ideological affiliations. This is the age of White Rage, and "White Male Shooter Syndrome" is its deadliest symptom.

If journalists, producers, and publishers refuse to name this reality, they are not truth-tellers but guardians of silence. This is not "radical left propaganda." It is about saving lives.

The land of the free and the home of the brave requires brave media, too.

ARTS AND CULTURE

The politics of disruption

Quorum breaks, gerrymandering and democratic participation in Texas

ANYLA’S TAKE

In the intricate dance of American democracy, procedural tactics can often take center stage, influencing the outcome of legislative battles and shaping the political landscape. Two such tactics, the breaking of quorum and gerrymandering, have been prominently employed in Texas, highlighting the deep partisan divisions and the ongoing struggle for political power.

In recent years, Texas Democrats have twice employed the strategy of breaking quorum to obstruct legislation they deemed harmful. In 2021, Democratic members of the Texas House of Representatives fled the state to prevent a vote on a controversial voting bill that they argued would disproportionately disenfranchise minority voters. By denying the House the necessary number of members present to conduct business, they effectively stalled the bill’s progress. While this tactic garnered national attention and temporarily blocked the legislation, it also drew criticism from Republicans who accused the Democrats of shirking their responsibilities and undermining the democratic process.

Conversely, Texas Republicans have been accused of manipulating district boundaries through gerrymandering to consolidate their political power. Following the 2020 census, the Republican-controlled Texas legislature redrew congressional and state legislative districts. Critics contend that the new maps were designed to pack Democratic voters into fewer districts, thereby diminishing their overall influence and ensuring Republican dominance in other areas. This practice, known as gerrymandering, has been challenged in



By Anyla McDonald
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



court, with plaintiffs arguing that the maps violate the Voting Rights Act by diluting the voting power of minority communities.

Both quorum breaks and gerrymandering raise fundamental questions about the fairness and legitimacy of the democratic process. While breaking quorum can be seen as a desperate measure to protect minority rights and prevent the passage of harmful legislation, it also risks alienating moderate voters and undermining the principle of majority rule. Similarly, while gerrymandering may be a legal tactic, it can distort the will of the voters and create an uneven playing field, making it more difficult for opposing parties to compete effectively. The use of these tactics in Texas underscores the intense partisan polarization that characterizes contemporary American politics. As the state’s demographics continue to shift and its population becomes more diverse, the battle for political power is likely to intensify. Finding ways to bridge the partisan divide, promote fair and transparent elections, and ensure that all voices are heard will be crucial to preserving the health of democracy in Texas and beyond.

‘Personal to Political’ opens at Gonzaga’s Jundt Art Museum

Black Lens staff reports

Gonzaga University’s Jundt Art Museum opens its main fall exhibition, “Personal to Political: Celebrating the African American Artists of Paulson Fontaine Press. The traveling show—organized by the Bedford Gallery at the Leshner Center for the Arts (Walnut Creek, California)—runs through Dec. 20 and is free to the public.

Museum director and curator Paul Manoguerra said in a Gonzaga news release that the exhibition showcases contemporary African American artists who have produced printworks at Paulson Fontaine Press in Berkeley. Many of the artists are not traditional printmakers; working closely with master printers, they translate their ideas through techniques such as etching, aquatint, and chine collé, often incorporating collage elements and textiles.

Highlights, according to the release, include:

- David Huffman’s motif of basketball pyramids—reimagined on-site at Gonzaga as a large-scale installation built from approximately 650 rubber basketballs (base grid 12×12 = 144 balls). Huffman’s work plays with symbols of Black culture and references to ancient Egypt.
- Prints inspired by the quilters of Gee’s Bend, Alabama, translating celebrated



COURTESY

“Steppin Through the Night (2021)” by American artist Woody De Othello, a color soft ground etching with aquatint.

quilt aesthetics into works on paper.

- Pieces by artists whose subjects range from the deeply personal to the overtly political, spanning abstraction and narrative.

The Jundt Art Gallery is open 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Saturday. It is closed Sundays. Admission is free.

A LETTER TO MY CHILD

By Sarah Fain
THE BLACK LENS

By Sarah Fain, inspired by the incarcerated men of Washington state, on behalf of husband, Anthony Fain.

Dear child, I need you to know that even though we are apart, the words I write today come straight from my heart. There is no distance when it comes to the love I feel, and there is no instance where I don’t wish to hold you near. I know I’ve been gone, and please don’t think it’s because you’ve done something wrong. These bars I sit behind are from my own doing. It comes from a life that I pray you never think of pursuing. These chains that bind me, the obstacles we face—they steal from us both day after day. Forgive me, my love, for the tears you’ve shed, for the lonely nights, and the fear in your head. Please know that my heart, though for it may roam, it’s with you always. It’s where you call home. I hope you’ll forgive me

for the years that were lost, for the pain that I caused, for the wrong side of the coin that my stupidity tossed. Sorry for the missed birthdays. I apologize for all the missed first days. I envision the day I get to say: the judge has made a decision. No more overthinking in my head. It’s real. I get to tuck you in bed. One day, my dear, I’ll walk through the door. And I’ll hold you again and I’ll ask for no more. Until that moment, just know this is true: every part of my soul is sorry for you. My child, I made a promise to you that when I get out, I’m going to make it right. You and me together, we are going to shine bright.



COURTESY OF AURA MAGAZINE

Aura Magazine’s Y2K denim shoot.

NYABOL LUAL ON BEAUTY, DIVERSITY AND THE AURA MAGAZINE Y2K DENIM SHOOT

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

This August, Nyabol Lual joined a Y2K-inspired denim photo shoot for Aura Magazine. The shoot was led by Shaira Gustillo, the 22-year-old CEO of Aura Magazine and a Spokane native, who invited Lual to be part of the project to highlight “beauty, diversity, and real presence.”

The free group shoot went beyond fashion. Each participant reflected on what it means to be a Black woman and shared

personal experiences. “It wasn’t just about taking pictures and looking pretty,” Lual explained. “It was also us representing, you know, who we are.”

When asked what beauty diversity means to her, Lual said:

“I feel like beauty diversity can mean a lot of things, but I think is when you can look at so many people who are all different, shade, um, different ethnicity, all the backgrounds, different ages, different color, and still be able to appreciate the beauty in each and

every one of us.” Surrounded by a supportive group of women—many she had just met—Lual described the atmosphere as empowering and uplifting. “I felt awesome. Like I felt empowered. I felt pretty and I felt like there was some great support,” she said. “Everyone got along pretty well. It was a great environment.”

Gustillo continues to spotlight diverse stories and identities through inclusive photo shoots, celebrating the many shades of beauty and strength.

Janet Jackson closes out Las Vegas residency with iconic live show

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

Janet Jackson wrapped up her Las Vegas residency at the Resorts World Theatre on September 20, delivering a career-spanning show that celebrated her decades-long influence in music and culture.

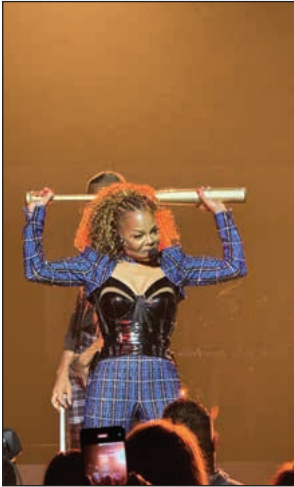
At 59, Jackson proved she has enduring artistry, commanding the stage with razor-sharp choreography, elaborate staging—including an elevator that lifted her to a balcony—and a wardrobe that made a statement of its own. Sequins. Catsuits. Trench coats. Janet’s style is bold and undisputed.

Fans relived their youth as she powered through classics like Control, Miss You Much, Escapade, Black Cat, and That’s the Way Love Goes. A powerful performance of Scream paid homage to

her brother Michael Jackson, drawing one of the night’s loudest ovations. For many in the audience, especially Generation X, the evening was a walk down memory lane, synchronizing our memories to the soundtrack of younger days.

Between sets, video displays featured a butterfly motif, while fireworks punctuated her show-stopping rendition of Rhythm Nation. Jackson also took time to thank her fans, noting that Las Vegas was the same city where her career first took flight, and expressing gratitude for their loyalty across decades.

From her early TV roles as Penny on Good Times and Cleo on Fame to her enduring presence as “Miss Jackson if you’re nasty,” the closing night of her residency confirmed both her reach into the



past and her relevance in the present. Janet proved she is still that girl – the consummate professional and the blueprint of live performance excellence – setting the standard with precision, creativity, as she left a final reminder that the world needs more love at the close of the show.



PHOTOS BY APRIL EBERHARDT/THE BLACK LENS

Janet Jackson takes the stage as part of her Las Vegas residency.

BUSINESS

THE PLUCKY DUCK

Soap, sustainability and self-sufficiency in Spokane

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

When you walk into the Plucky Duck in Spokane's Kendall Yards you are stepping into a colorful, eco-friendly upcycling hub. Glass jars gleam on shelves, rubber ducks wink from display tables, and the scent of essential oils permeates through the air. At the center of it all is owner Cristina Aranda, a former librarian whose passion for learning, community and the planet inspired her to create a shop that's equal parts soap studio, zero-waste refillery, and environmental classroom.

Aranda once managed a nine-county library system in Utah, but a move to Spokane with her husband and an educational endeavor inspired by a streak of activism and sense of collective connection sparked a career pivot.

"I wanted to keep serving the community, but in a way where I could call the shots and pivot and evolve as the community needs me to," she explains. "The Plucky Duck lets me do that, just with soap instead of books."

The shop invites people of all ages to craft their own custom bars of soap during hands-on workshops. Alongside the soap tables is a zero-waste refillery, offering refillable household staples like multipurpose cleaner, dish soap, and Castile soap—plastic-free and low-waste.

"The environment is dying," Aranda says bluntly. "Being an environmentalist for me is actually a very selfish act after watching many a documentary and reading about how plastic and the trash is actually harming our sea life, is harming our own health."

She adds with jest when asked why she has made this her passion project, "Because I like eating seafood. I want the fish to be healthy. So I'm going to be plastic free as much as possible because it pollutes the ocean and it doesn't allow for me to have the salmon that I like to eat."

While her marketing budget is "zero," Aranda hopes to continue to

build rapport in Spokane. Repeat customers return with empty bottles to refill, and she partners with the nonprofit Zero Waste Spokane to reach more residents seeking sustainable options.

Growing Up Green-Imperfectly

A Miami native and self-described "true millennial, kind of a little bit Gen Xer," Aranda grew up with the eco-messages of Captain Planet and Sesame Street.

"I've always tried to be conscious about the footprint that I leave on the environment. But have I been perfect? No," she admits. "When I was a single mom raising my two kids, it's overwhelming...sometimes I can't." She recalls balancing life, school, and rearing children, noting that keeping the kitchen tidy sometimes meant relying on paper plates and plastic utensils just to make it through the week. Her advice for young environmentalists is practical and doable:

Start Small: "Every time you go to a fast food place or every time you go get a drink, either bring your own reusable cup or tell them, 'You know what? I'm okay with popping the lid. You can hold on to that plastic straw.'"

Reuse and Upcycle: Carry a reusable bag, or turn junk mail into homemade notebooks and "junk journals."

Control What You Can: Focus on small, achievable changes and build from there.

Environmentalism as Liberation

When asked to connect environmentalism with liberation, Aranda lights up.

"I consider being an environmentalist is also akin to being as self-sufficient as possible," she says. "The number one way you're going to be free from anything that oppresses you is by not relying on it. So self-sufficiency is how we're going to dismantle oppression."

This philosophy guides The Plucky Duck, where classes empower visitors



Cristina Aranda stands outside her business, The Plucky Duck.

Learn More About The Plucky Duck

Address: 707 N. Cedar St., Suite 4, Spokane (Kendall Yards)
Hours: Wed–Thu 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Fri–Sat 10 a.m.–7 p.m.
Private Lessons are available
Website: thepluckyduck.net
Phone: 385-323-0830
Instagram: @theplucky_duck

to make their own soap and other essentials. "It's about teaching people to be intentional about what you put on your body," she adds.

True to its playful name—Aranda laughs that Lucky Duck was taken, so she went with Plucky to convey "whimsy and determination"—the shop is welcoming and accessible. She even runs a pop-up thrift corner stocked with estate-sale finds saved from the landfill. Families can book workshops at thepluckyduck.net, and if cost is a barrier, Aranda will work with them to en-

sure everyone can participate.

Looking ahead, she dreams of evolving The Plucky Duck into a nonprofit foundation that offers free arts and science programs for children, homeschoolers, and families in need.

"I want to show that this space fills a real need in Spokane," she says. "Eventually, I'd love it to become a neighborhood arts center."

The Plucky Duck is more than a soap shop—it's a hub of creativity, sustainability, and community care. With a librarian's love for



Cristina Aranda makes soap inside her shop, The Plucky Duck.

education and an activist's little pluck can go a long way toward a cleaner, freer world.

Roland Martin's unfiltered interview with Lanny Smith of Actively Black

Actively Black founder: Black America MUST support Black-owned fashion companies

Black Lens staff reports

On a recent episode of Roland Martin Unfiltered, Roland sat down with Lanny Smith, founder of Actively Black, to unpack the double standard facing Black-owned businesses in the fashion industry.

The conversation was sparked by Ralph Lauren's new collections—one celebrating the legacy of Morehouse and Spelman Colleges, and another inspired by the history of Black vacationers in Martha's Vineyard. While many applauded the recognition of Black culture, Roland and Smith raised critical questions: Who really benefits? With Ralph Lauren's \$7 billion annual revenue, its pledge of \$2 million to HBCUs over five years amounts to little more than a token gesture.

Smith contrasted this with the scrutiny Actively Black faces. When his athleisure brand prices a shirt at \$60, customers often complain about the cost—yet the same buyers spend hundreds of dollars on Nike or Ralph Lauren without hesitation. He pointed out that Black-owned businesses are routinely measured against billion-dollar corporations with decades of infrastructure, but are rarely given the time, support, or patience to grow in the same way.

Actively Black is intentionally dif-



YOUTUBE

ferent. Smith has kept the supply chain rooted in the Black community, sourcing premium cotton from Black farmers to sustain livelihoods "from dirt to shirt."

For Smith, the brand is about more than clothing. It's about reprogramming how Black consumers view value, status, and culture. Luxury, he argued, isn't found in a label. It comes from the culture that drives trends globally—and Black communities have always been that creative engine.

The takeaway from the interview was clear: If Black America spends \$30 billion annually on apparel, those dollars should circulate back into Black communities through brands like Actively Black—companies that not only celebrate culture, but sustain it.

Learn more about Actively Black at activelyblack.com.

Raze's grand opening wasn't the finish line – it was the starting line

Black Lens staff reports

Kerra Bower, CEO of Raze Development Center, reflects on the grand opening of Raze Early Learning Development Center:

"It means that the work could start. All the stuff prior to the grand opening was like the pre-work, the pre-design, all of the things that you have to do to pave the way for the work that we're actually going to be doing. So the grand opening was the start of the actual work, the start of the hard work that's to come. I think my favorite part was the tours and being able to show the community what we've been working on, and seeing people tear up as they walked through the halls. Somebody in the community told me, 'Here, we have to leave Spokane to be surrounded by this. And you just brought home Spokane.' That meant so much to me, because it hurts me to hear Black people say they don't feel like this is home. This place is safety for me, and to hear my people say, 'This is starting to feel more like



COURTESY

The ribbon-cutting ceremony outside Raze Early Learning Development Center.

home,' and to know I was able to play a part in that, I thought it was really amazing." – Kerra Bower, Raze Early Learning Development Center

EDUCATION

SHOW UP AND SPEAK OUT

What you’re entitled to and what to expect at school board meetings



By Birdie Bachman
SPOKANE NAACP
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
INTERIM



While classrooms are where students spend most of our time, many of the decisions that shape our learning experience happen far from school hallways. Decisions form inside boardrooms, behind district emails, and during evening meetings where most families don’t even know exist.

Yet, these are the spaces where policies are written, complaints are evaluated, and silence can be mistaken for agreement. If we aren’t present, decisions will be made for us and our children without being made with us.

Attending a school board meeting or filing a public records request might sound intimidating, but both are powerful and legal tools for families, students and community members.

Every public school district in Washington is required to hold regular board meetings. These

meetings are open to the public, often live streamed online, and typically include a chance for community members to offer public comment.

That’s your moment.

Whether you’re speaking about an unfair discipline policy, a lack of culturally responsive curriculum, or asking about how school safety is being handled, your voice gets entered into the official record.

If you’ve never been to a board meeting before, it’s okay to begin by listening. Look around and take note of who’s sitting at the table. Are there student representatives? Is there racial diversity on the board? Do they give speakers the time and respect they deserve? Even if you don’t say a word at your first meeting, your presence still matters.

Now, let’s talk records. You may not know this, but in Wash-

ington State, school districts are legally obligated to provide public access to most internal documents such as emails between school officials, discipline data and incident reports.

You can request this information at any time. This is called a Public Records Request, and yes, it applies to you whether you’re a parent, a student, or a concerned community member. If the school is dragging its feet or withholding information you believe you’re entitled to, you have a legal right to push back.

Requests should always be made in writing. Be specific about what you’re looking for and keep copies of everything. Districts are required to acknowledge your request within 5 business days. If they don’t? That’s a red flag and a signal to seek support.

Remember, what happens behind closed doors often stays

there unless someone asks the right questions. Record requests allow you to bring those conversations into the light.

If standing at a microphone still feels too big, consider this: Just by showing up, you’re shifting the dynamic. Requesting records holds the system accountable and asking questions out loud reminds them someone is watching.

Whether you’re a seasoned advocate or someone stepping into this space for the first time, know that your presence and persistence matter. This is how we build pressure for policy that reflects the realities of all students, not just the ones the district is used to hearing from.

School board meetings aren’t just for insiders. They’re for the people.

And public records? They belong to us.

October is National Book Month

Books have the power to change lives, and for African American children and teens, the right story can be both a mirror of their own experiences and a window into new possibilities.

October marks “National Book Month,” a time to celebrate the power of reading and the stories that shape our lives. Books can be both mirrors and windows: they reflect our own experiences while opening new perspectives on the wider world. For African American children and teens, reading stories that feature characters who look like them, face similar challenges, and celebrate their culture is an important way to build confidence, foster pride and encourage lifelong learning.

National Book Month offers families, educators, and communities the chance to highlight works that have stood the test of time as well as newer titles that continue to inspire. The goal is not only to develop strong literacy skills, but also to nurture imagination and strengthen identity.

One classic that continues to resonate is “Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry” by Mildred D. Taylor. First published in 1976, this novel tells the story of the Logan family in 1930s Mississippi as they struggle to maintain dignity and independence in the face of racism and injustice. For young readers, it is both a gripping family saga and a history lesson that brings the past to life.

Equally powerful is “Bud, Not Buddy” by Christopher Paul Curtis, which won the Newbery Medal and the Coretta Scott King Award. The story follows a 10-year-old boy during the Great Depression on a journey to find his father. With humor, heart, and resilience, it shows children that perseverance can carry them through the toughest times.

Picture books are just as important for younger children. “Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut” by Derrick Barnes and illustrated by Gordon C.



By Dr. Sharah Zaab
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



James celebrates the pride found in a simple haircut, while “Hair Love” by Matthew A. Cherry highlights natural beauty and family

a gripping story about choices and cycles of violence in a single, unforgettable elevator ride.

Historical fiction also gives teens meaningful insight. “Copper Sun” by Sharon Draper tells the story of a young girl kidnapped from Africa and sold into slavery, offering a painful yet powerful reminder of resilience. Draper’s “Tears of a Tiger” continues to resonate with high school readers, addressing grief, friendship, and healing.

Nonfiction titles for young adults, such as “Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You” by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi, help readers unpack the history of race in America in an accessible way. Meanwhile, memoirs like “Born a Crime” by Trevor Noah (Young Readers Edition) mix humor and history while exploring identity and resilience.

As communities celebrate National Book Month, parents and educators can take time to read aloud, visit libraries, and encourage children and teens to share their reflections. The joy of books lies not only in turning the pages, but in discovering voices that inspire us to think, grow, and dream.

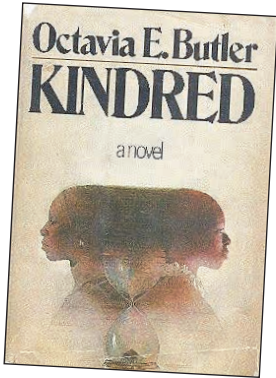
Frederick Douglass once wrote, “Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.” His words remind us that literacy is not only a skill, but a pathway to empowerment, freedom, and a brighter future for every generation.

And as Toni Morrison wisely said, “If there’s a book that you want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.” Her reminder empowers young readers to not only embrace stories but to create their own, ensuring that new voices will continue to shape the world of literature.



Black literary icons: OCTAVIA BUTLER

Octavia Butler stands as one of the most trailblazing figures in Black science fiction. Few authors have shaped the genre as profoundly as she did, and her legacy continues to reverberate. She won multiple national awards, among them the Hugo Award for Best Short Story, the Nebula Award for Best Novelette, and the Nebula Award for Best Novel. She is also a recipient of the MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Grant and an inductee into both the Science Fiction Hall of Fame and the National Women’s Hall of Fame. Her body of work includes twelve novels, five short stories, four novelettes, and a number of essays. She also left behind several incomplete works, which are documented—along with other manuscripts, letters, and photographs—at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. The world lost Butler too soon, but her voice lives on, continuing to



shape how we see ourselves and our world.

I want to take a moment to meditate on one of my favorite books of all time, “Kindred (1979).” Butler’s groundbreaking and seminal work continues to resonate with readers today—so much so that it was adapted into a graphic novel in 2017 by Damian Duffy and John Jennings. The novel tells the story of Dana Franklin, who is mysteriously summoned to the antebellum past by her white ancestor Rufus Weylin, whom she must repeatedly save. Without revealing too much detail—because I strongly recommend reading the novel in both forms (!)—Dana finds herself torn as she not only witnesses but endures, and at times even enables, acts of violence that exact a heavy toll on her mind, body, and spirit. For readers, the novel offers a character and a speculative experience in a deeply relatable way: we can



By Anna Sophia Flood
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



see ourselves in Dana, a figure of the present, as we journey with her into the past.

This book resonates profoundly with our current moment. Even though Dana’s “present” is in the 1970s, readers today can still relate to her. She has studied and is aware of slavery, yet being pulled back into it signals that something remains unsettled. Every day, we are reminded of how far we have come as a nation, and yet the impact of slavery reveals itself in various systems and encounters. Butler crafted a narrative where past and present collide, urging us to confront the “past that is not past” in order to reclaim power from it. This text is strikingly powerful, deeply emotional, and offers a method of engaging with the peculiar history of slavery outside the limits of traditional history books. It is certainly worth the read, and Butler will always be worth the investment.

Assessment reimaged
Measuring learning beyond the test

By Dr. Shantara Smith
THE BLACK LENS



By Dr. Shantara Smith
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



In today’s educational landscape, the legitimacy of standardized testing is being questioned more than ever. With many colleges no longer requiring SAT scores for admission, educators and parents alike are asking: Is standardized testing becoming outdated? And if so, how else can we measure student learning in meaningful, equitable, and engaging ways?

Standardized tests have long been the dominant method of assessment, but they often fail to capture the range of a student’s abilities, creativity and growth. They emphasize memorization and test-taking over critical thinking, collaboration and real-world application. As education evolves, so too must our methods of assessment.

Multimedia Expression

One powerful alternative is project-based learning, which allows students to explore topics deeply and demonstrate understanding through hands-on, creative work. With the rise of digital media and social platforms, students are increasingly comfortable expressing themselves through video, audio, and visual formats.

Imagine students reenacting historical battles, performing spoken word poetry to explain a science concept, writing rhymes about math principles, or creating dioramas to illustrate the solar system. These multimedia projects allow students to demonstrate their understanding in dynamic and personalized ways. They also encourage cross-disciplinary thinking, blending art, language, and technology with core academic subjects.

By encouraging students to create presentations, posters, podcasts or videos, educators can tap into student interests and keep them meaningfully engaged. These nontraditional assessments reveal deeper levels of comprehension and allow students to take pride in their work.

Teaching Students to Solve Real-World Problems

As we reimagine assessment, we must rethink the skills we want students to develop. Students need to be taught how to think, not just what to think. They must learn to approach challenges with curiosity, creativity and resilience.

Assessments should focus on problem-solving, innovation and real-world application. For example, instead of answering multiple-choice questions about environmental science, students could design a sustainable community model. Instead of memorizing formulas, they could apply math to budget a school event or analyze data from a local issue.

These types of assessments encourage students to think critically, collaborate with peers and explore multiple

Collaborative Learning

Group projects with clearly defined roles offer another valuable assessment method. Working collaboratively allows students to learn from one another while developing essential social skills, leadership abilities, and friendships. These experiences deepen academic understanding and prepare students for real-world teamwork.

In a group setting, students can take on roles such as researcher, designer, presenter or editor. This structure ensures accountability while allowing each student to contribute according to their strengths.

What Parents Can Do

Parents can encourage their children to express their preferences when it comes to demonstrating learning. If your child thrives in creative or hands-on environments, help them communicate that to their teacher in an appropriate manner. Many educators are open to adapting when they understand a student’s strengths and needs.

Parents can support project-based learning at home by helping students brainstorm ideas, gather materials or practice presentations. When families are involved, students feel more confident and motivated to succeed.

Rethinking What Success Looks Like

Ultimately, reimagining assessment means rethinking what success looks like in the classroom. It’s not just about getting the right answer—it’s about understanding the concept, applying it and communicating it effectively. It’s about fostering curiosity, creativity and resilience.

Alternative assessments can be inclusive, allowing students with different strengths and backgrounds to shine. They can be more culturally responsive, giving students opportunities to connect learning to their experiences and communities.

By embracing diverse methods of assessment, we can create learning environments that are more engaging, equitable and reflective of the real world.

HAPPENING AROUND TOWN

Body & Soul Health Fair brings resources to East Central

Black Lens staff reports

On Saturday, Sept. 20, the second-annual Body & Soul Health Fair took place at the MLK Jr. Community Center in Spokane's East Central Neighborhood. The event was organized by historically Black fraternities and sororities in collaboration with WSU, EWU, Whitworth University, and a network of community partners.

The free fair focused on improving healthcare access for underserved residents, offering physical and mental health screenings, resource tables, Naloxone distribution, and QPR suicide prevention training supported by the Spokane Regional Health District. Attendees also received practical giveaways such as blood pressure cuffs, thermometers, and first-aid kits, along with free food and drinks.

Planning centered on reaching families and individuals who often face barriers to care, with an anticipated turnout of at least 100 community members. The initiative demonstrated the collective impact of the Divine Nine, local universities, and partner organizations working together to promote wellness and equity in Spokane.



A representative from Excelsior Wellness attends the Body & Soul Health Fair in East Central.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DR. JEANNE BAYNES



Women representatives from historically Black Greek letter organizations helped sponsor and organize the Body and Soul Health Fair.

Representatives of the Washington State University College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences attend the health fair.

Soul Food and Sips kicks off with flavor and vision



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUNKISSED PHOTOS

Mrs. Donna's Jamaican Food Truck serves up food to people attending the Soul Food and Sips event in the East Central Neighborhood.

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

The inaugural Soul Food and Sips event brought together Spokane's Black community for an afternoon of food, culture, and connection in downtown Spokane. Co-planned by Julie Serquinia and organized through EEG (Educate, Entertain, and Get Stuff Done), the festival highlighted African American, Haitian, Jamaican, and African cuisines alongside local vendors and entertainment.

Serquinia said the goal was to celebrate the richness of the Black diaspora while also planting the seeds for long-term community impact. "We wanted to bring together different aspects of the African American and Black community. This first year was a kickoff downtown, but our vision is to build an



People congregate at Soul Food and Sips.

annual block party in East Central's Fifth Avenue corridor."

While some chefs and food traditions weren't fully represented this year due to licensing barriers, EEG sees that as part of the bigger mission: helping aspiring cultural chefs and entrepreneurs get the credentials needed to participate in Spokane's festival economy. "We'd like to start a business incubator to

show people how to get their paperwork in order so they can make good money at these events," Serquinia explained.

Beyond food and fellowship, Soul Food and Sips is part of EEG's broader effort to establish an Inland Northwest African American Museum. Fundraisers—including a sit-down Black History dinner, Soul Food and Sips 2, and even a Black rodeo—are planned to



Newscaster Brandon Jones takes the mic at Soul Food and Sips.

build momentum toward that vision.

"The East Central neighborhood was once the core of Spokane's Black community," Serquinia said. "Revitalization should happen by us, for us. Events like this show our biggest superpower—our knowledge of self and the power to come together."



WSU BSU BRINGS THE VIBES

Black Lens staff reports

VIBES is a student-led conference created to motivate and empower high school students to pursue higher education. Organized by the Black Student Union at Washington State University, VIBES centers the experiences, leadership, and voices of Black students across Washington and beyond, and is open to anyone who is interested in pursuing higher education.

Through mentorship,

connection, and cultural empowerment, VIBES helps students see the value of higher education—not just as a goal, but as a powerful foundation for community leadership and personal growth.

This weekend-long experience is designed to show that you belong in higher education, that your voice matters, and that your goals are within reach.

Register here: vibes.wsu.edu/register



Call for Spoken River submissions

Black Lens staff reports

The Spokane Riverkeeper is seeking original writing or art about the Spokane River to feature at Spoken River, as part of its annual celebration and fundraising event.

Selected artists and writers will be invited to perform their work at the fundraising event on Nov. 13, and will receive two complimentary tickets (a \$160-plus value).

The deadline for submissions has been extended to Oct. 7.

Learn more about the contest and submit your work at spokaneriverkeeper.org/spoken-river.

YOUTH CONNECTION COMMUNITY OVER COMMODITY

It’s sad to see how we normalize excluding others. We often rush to assume that they might not be interested in whatever we are doing, but in most cases that’s not true. I have noticed a huge number of kids my age sitting alone, scrolling endlessly on their phones. Subconsciously, we assume they are probably busy with something, but the real truth is that they aren’t. Technology is now being used as a tool to escape loneliness, which makes me uneasy.

This means that we are failing

to be fully aware of our surroundings. We focus so much on ourselves and our small circles, assuming everyone else is doing the same. We idolize people who act for themselves or for their organizations and choose to sideline the majority. Why? That’s a question I cannot personally answer.

People who serve may intend to help the majority, but what good is that if we are not personable with them? We often get the idea of helping wrong. Instead of showing true sympathy,

our actions can display pity, and when others notice that—as they eventually will—it can lead to bitterness. They may see those “acts of kindness” not as genuine but as pity or even mockery.

We should focus on strengthening relationships and forming new ones because, deep down, most people value connection more than material things. Too often we get this wrong. We should pursue connection, not seek to make ourselves feel better by giving. Getting out of our comfort zones is something we

all need to normalize as a step toward promoting inclusivity.

Ditch ignorance and selfishness, and adopt awareness. Don’t be the person who acts like everything is okay, who lives in their head most of the time. Stop assuming and start asking. A lot is going on around us, and we are missing opportunities to truly know people. We cannot make any difference if we don’t recognize the problems. Open your eyes a little wider and notice the important details you’ve been missing or choosing to ignore.



By Anesu Whacha
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



BUSTING BLACK AMERICAN STEREOTYPES

One of the most common stereotypes I’ve encountered is the portrayal of the “aggressive Black woman.” I’ve felt this not only through microaggressions from people of different races but within my own community, where colorism plays a role. Because of my lighter skin tone, I’ve dealt with conversations of people assuming I’m quieter or less aggressive compared to darker-skinned girls, which reveals how stereotypes can shift depending on complexion.

These stereotypes can influence relationships. Some Black men will voice a preference for women of other races, often repeating the misconception that Black women are “too aggressive.” What is often overlooked is the distinction between being aggressive and being expressive, assertive, or confident in oneself. When Black women speak up or carry themselves with assurance, those qualities are too often twisted into labels like confrontational or masculine. My personal experiences reflect the larger issue that stereotypes don’t just appear on their own—they’re constantly spread and reinforced, both within and outside the community, especially through media and misrepresentation.

Media Representation and Misrepresentation

TV and film often recycle the same narrow portrayals of Black people. For example, the comedy *The Blackening* exploits the N-word, depicts Black characters as loud, and repeatedly associates them with drugs and guns—harmful exaggerations that feed old stereotypes.

While mainstream media frequently limits how Black people are represented, social media has created space to challenge those narratives. On platforms like TikTok and Instagram, countless Black graduates, professionals, activists, and influencers highlight their achievements and showcase their creativity. Their presence directly disproves the stereotype that Black people are less intelligent or less educated.



By Mya Jefferson
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



systemic racism. Enslaved people were deliberately portrayed as less intelligent or overly aggressive so oppression would appear “natural” and justified. These myths carried into the Jim Crow era, where laws and media reinforced them. Over time, they became embedded in culture—from shows to film—shaping how Black identity was perceived.

Knowing this history makes it clear that stereotypes were never truths but tools of control and dehumanization. Once we understand this, it becomes easier to challenge stereotypes and highlight stories that show the real diversity and humanity within Black communities. This challenge doesn’t just happen in history books or on social media—it happens in our everyday lives.

In my family and community, there are wide differences in skin tone and speech, but those differences don’t define our worth or identity. The color of our skin holds no weight in who we are. Still, because we are constantly faced with stereotypes and prejudice, we often feel the need to work harder. That determination has made many of us some of the most resilient and intelligent people you will meet.

Society often labels Black people as “loud” or “ghetto,” yet when you look at the facts, recurring patterns

To really understand why these stereotypes exist, we must look back at their roots. False ideas about Black people can be traced to slavery, colonization, and

of crime and entitlement are more often tied to those with privilege who believe they are above the law—not the Black community. Pointing out these contradictions is part of breaking the cycle.

Knowledge is one of the most powerful tools we have. Leading conversations and educating others can make people aware of the biases they may not even realize they carry. Awareness is the first step toward change, but it can’t stop there. Activism pushes further, rewriting the narrative and forcing people out of ignorance. Because sometimes, breaking harmful cycles requires more than just a gentle conversation—it requires action.

These are some of the most harmful and persistent stereotypes that deserve to be confronted and dismantled:

- “**Angry/Aggressive Black Woman**” – Misinterprets assertiveness as hostility.
- “**Absent Black Father**” – Ignores data showing many Black fathers are highly involved in their children’s lives.
- “**Criminal or Gang-Associated**” – Unfairly links Black men and youth to violence and crime.
- “**Uneducated or Unintelligent**” – Erases the achievements and educational successes of Black communities.
- “**Welfare-Dependent/Lazy**” – Falsely suggests a lack of work ethic while ignoring systemic economic barriers.
- “**Oversexualized Black Woman or Man**” – Reduces individuals to harmful caricatures rooted in slavery-era propaganda.
- “**Athlete/Entertainer Only**” – Limits Black success to sports or entertainment, overlooking excellence in every field.
- “**Light Skin vs. Dark Skin Hierarchy**” – Perpetuates colorism and division within the community.

Challenging these stereotypes requires honest dialogue, education, and a commitment to celebrating the full humanity and diversity of Black experiences.

BUSTING AFRICAN STEREOTYPES

Africa Is Not a Country

Let’s be honest: We’ve all heard people say some surprising—and often stereotypical—things about Africa. I’ve even seen videos where people are asked, “What’s the poorest country in the world?” and they answer, Africa.

Africa is not a country. Period. It’s a vast continent made up of 54 nations, each with its own unique cultures, histories, and languages. Within those countries are countless tribes and communities with distinct foods, clothing, music, and dances. While there are similarities, no single story defines Africa. We are not one culture—we are many.

Africa Is Not Poor

The dictionary defines poor as “lacking sufficient money to live at a standard considered comfortable or normal in a society.” People often speak about Africa as though poverty defines the entire continent.

Yes, some regions face economic struggles, but to label all of Africa as poor is simply false. Every country in the world, including the wealthiest, has areas of poverty. Africa’s long, complex history holds both hardship and resilience, and across the continent people continue to live, build, and thrive. If you don’t know a place, it’s better to learn—or stay quiet—than to spread misconceptions.



By Janet Tumusifu
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



“Do You Speak African?”

Here’s another one: Do you speak African?

African is not a language. The question itself reveals how small people think Africa is.

Too often, I’m asked if I lived with lions or in mud houses. These assumptions show a deep misunderstanding of Africa’s size, diversity, and sophistication.

Even world maps often distort the continent’s true scale. The African Union has supported campaigns to correct these misrepresentations. Still, Africans everywhere feel the weight of having their stories told for them—often inaccurately—rather than being heard firsthand. It’s exhausting to sit silently while others speak over your truth.

African Proverb: “The bitter truth is better than a sweet falsehood.”

YOUTH ADVOCACY SUMMIT

THE EVENT: Join us in person or online at this year’s event co-designed with students as we train students, families, and community members by offering a host of new skills, tools and information, such as these workshops from 2024:

- Getting Started with Advocacy
- Learning from Conflict and Intersectionality
- Recognizing Your Power in the Washington Legislative Session
- Involving Youth in the Research Process
- Writing and Delivering a Persuasive Piece
- Racial Healing Circles



To keep this day accessible for all, there is no attendance fee. Your sponsorship will help us cover stipends for speakers, lunch for attendees, and all associated hard costs of the event.

NOVEMBER 1, 2025
9:30 AM – 3:30 PM
Globe Room at Cataldo Hall
Gonzaga University
502 E. Boone Ave.
Spokane, WA 99258

Nothing About Us Without Us: Using your voice to get into some good trouble

By Kenji Linane-Booey
THE BLACK LENS

The Youth Advocacy Summit is an event that focuses on the importance and power of youth voices in advocacy in today’s world, especially around education.

Over the last year we have seen attacks at the local and federal level on public education, economic challenges, and growing disillusionment with our

systems. There has never been a more crucial time for young people to come together to learn from and support one another. We want students and community members to leave the event with a deeper understanding of issues facing public education, learn how to navigate and exercise the advocacy ecosystem in Washington state and feel energized to engage in some “good trouble.”

THE LIMITS OF KINDNESS: WHEN SEL MASKS RACIAL AVOIDANCE

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is one of the most popular tools in education today. Promoted as a way to build emotional intelligence, empathy, and communication skills in the classroom, SEL programs like CharacterStrong and Second Step are being widely adopted in schools across the country. These curricula emphasize values like kindness, respect, and inclusion.

But when these programs are implemented without an honest, direct conversation about race and power, “kindness” can become a cover. A shield. A distraction. In too many classrooms, SEL is not a bridge to justice – it’s a bypass.

In majority-white districts and schools, SEL is often marketed as “unifying” and “safe.” But that safety often comes at the cost of truth. These programs tend to avoid naming racism, white supremacy, or the systems that continue to harm Black and Brown students. Instead, they emphasize “positive behavior,” “relationship building,” and “emotional control” – coded language that encourages conformity rather than critical thinking or resistance.

In these contexts, SEL can easily become a tool for tone-policing students of color. A Black student expressing justified anger about discrimination may be told to “stay calm” or “be respectful.” Meanwhile, the deeper issue is ignored.

When Kindness Is Weaponized:
“Just be kind.”
“We’re all human.”
“It won’t happen again.”



By Z'Hanie Weaver
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



Many Black students know what it feels like to speak out and be told they’re being “too emotional,” “too aggressive” or “too negative.” Their pain is reframed as a problem to manage rather than a reality to confront. The language of SEL is used to gaslight.

Without applying a socio-cultural lens to students’ lived experiences, acts of bias and bigotry risk being met with tolerance or silent acceptance and it reassures white students and staff that equity work is about being nice, not about disrupting problematic situations rooted in racism, bigotry, and prejudice.

SEL that negates these realities adds insult to injury, operating on the false assumption that kindness alone – without transparency or a genuine willingness to understand

– is enough. This default perspective comes from a lens untested by certain ugly and harmful human experiences, common for some and non-existent for others. These are experiences we have too often been conditioned to bypass or sweep under the rug.

If SEL is to serve all students – especially Black students – it must be rooted in anti-racism. This means naming racism when it happens. It means equipping students with the tools to call out injustice, not just manage their emotions in its wake. It means teaching adults to listen and respond, not dismiss and deflect.

True SEL includes emotional intelligence, yes. But also cultural awareness. Cultural competence. Restorative justice. Critical consciousness. And the understanding that feelings do not exist in a vacuum – they are shaped by power, privilege, and personal experience.

Classrooms should be where students are empowered to speak the truth and hold systems accountable. That’s the kind of emotional learning that changes lives and restrictive systems.

We don’t need less kindness – we need kindness with teeth and grit. Kindness that doesn’t crumble at hard truths. Kindness that sides with the hurt, not the comfortable. Kindness that makes room for righteous anger and insists on repair.

Because if our version of kindness requires silence, submission or the erasure of identity, then it’s not kindness at all. It’s control.



FROM THE FRONT PAGE

CHERIE

Continued from 1

it. I made some mistakes, but it was the push. I accomplished it; she loved her dress in the end, and it made me think I could do this.”

That mix of courage and humility threads through her journey. She didn’t wait for an invitation to learn; she made one. “I put an ad on Craigslist and said I was just looking to learn. He had me watch him, and I would copy things; he corrected me by showing me. I’m a visual learner, so I learned precision and the value of making a garment look like you bought it, not

homemade.” From there, she moved into technical design—translating creative sketches into garments that fit, function, and scale—working with brands like Michael Kors.

But progress is never a straight seam. Nina openly shares a painful miss—ruining a commission for an NFL player’s mother—that nearly made her quit. What kept her going was an inner certainty and the willingness to keep learning. “I think what’s for you will always find you. If you want to give up but still feel a fire when you see someone doing the thing you want to do, it means it’s still there. The bumps are meant to challenge you.”

That determination was shaped years earlier, when Nina volunteered in nursing homes as a teenager. Sitting with elders, she heard the weight of regret repeated again and again. “I talked to so many older people who said, ‘I wish I could go back and do this or that.’ Hearing those regrets made me say, I don’t want to be like this. I have to do it.” For Nina, that perspective hardened into a vow: she would live without regret, take risks, and push past fear.

Representation matters to Nina, and so does range. In a city where Black residents make up a small percentage of the population, her client list spans cultures and backgrounds. For her,

excellence is universal—and it’s also a platform. She is deliberate about mentoring, opening doors, and naming her worth in an industry that too often asks makers to shrink. Entrepreneurship, she adds, requires both heart and strategy: study your market, specialize in what inspires you, and deliver at a standard that commands the price.

That ethos extends beyond fashion. Nina’s vision includes building a bridge between African Americans and the continent—she purchased land in Ghana with plans for an oceanside retreat that welcomes Black travelers “home.” It’s a living lesson in taking chances and refusing regret: start

where you are, follow the tug, and surround yourself with people who believe bigger for you.

Her advice to young creators is refreshingly practical: get technical. Pattern making is engineering; couture is math plus taste. Don’t chase the glamour without the grind. Apprenticeships, technical colleges, job shadowing—these are accelerators if you assert yourself as a learner. And remember that confidence grows from competence: every precise hem, every corrected draft, every re-done seam is a brick in your foundation.

Nina’s legacy goal is as crisp as a freshly pressed bodice: don’t let anything or anyone hold you back.

It’s not about being fearless; it’s about doing it anyway, if you are scared, choosing growth, and refusing to be defined by a single mistake. It’s also about the responsibility to pass knowledge on. This echoes the adage that can keep the connective tissue of a thriving community strong: Give someone a fish and they’ll eat for a day, teach them how to fish and they’ll eat forever.

In Nina Cherie’s world, faith meets follow-through. You take the shot, you apprentice yourself to the craft, and you keep showing up—stitch by stitch—until your work speaks for you. Then you use that voice to make room for the next one in line.



COURTESY

“evil men lay dormant here” by Jauvan Mbarushimana

January 1st Tumor

By Jauvan Mbarushimana

The tumor has grown so big that the frame can’t capture it.

Disease stretched out to leak out every orifice and pore. Palm lines stretch across generations and closed eye lids. Truth in visions they call a dream. It wasn’t a dream to me. Time to start preparing for loss.

The first time it happened I walked until my feet shaped into the tarmac and bricks I stood upon. Their quicksand and sinkholes couldn’t stop me. Fragments of glass shards and splinters from red grass flowed with my blood

stream.

A body full of rivers that
A body full of rivers that we tread through.
I watched her sleep that night given air
by their machines. I watched her etch and belch spiders and dust. I could only wash her dishes and sing a prayer with her.
O’ one above who am I to you.

A child soldier shoots at stars in the sky, one fragment fell down to hit my father’s angel wing in the foot.
Toes of mine and my brothers. Nose of my sister, pores of my mother. I

grand
mother. I won’t bury you in the river, I won’t let the dogs eat

your bones. In the garden you will go and all the flowers will grow and the sun will raise you to the clouds, winter will come and in spring we’ll start over again.
Over and over. Over and over. Over and over. Over and over. Over and over and over again. Shooting stars that never land.

That night we watched fireworks together. In silence. Cast in our corner of the shadow. Red blue white shimmered across my father’s face, and my brother wasn’t tall enough to peak through the window and get a glance. My country ‘tis of thee...

My grandmother slept in a room next to our corner. Up and down her chest raised as she held onto what she could of a life she was losing.

Were we all surrendering to a losing battle at that moment?
I don’t think so, I still feel a fire of everything that’s led me here. I’m thankful for my life and I hate that the bang of the fireworks on the day celebrating our forced land, reminds my father and grandmother of that spring...
Memory weathers everything. Memory weaves everything. I’ll never accept, so I forget.

LENS

Continued from 1

Jauvan shares. “But there were families here in Spokane we reconnected with...people I call cousin even though we aren’t related. It’s chosen family, but not even a choice. You just naturally find that relationship with someone who understands.”

This layered history fuels his art. “It’s important for us to tell our own narratives and show things through our own lens because it’s a form of communication—expressing yourself and others so people can understand the world and themselves better,” he explains.

In September, Jauvan debuted Buried in the Garden, an experimental documentary, at the Carl Maxey Center, presenting it alongside his photography and poetry. The film weaves archival footage with new images to explore how past and present echo each other—and confronts the absence of tangible memories. “We don’t have many photos or objects from when my dad was a kid,” Jauvan says. “When you try to figure out your family history, it’s strange to only see genocide foot-

age online. I wanted to contrast that with our life now—our love and refuge despite displacement.”

Jauvan began filming as his grandmother was diagnosed with a tumor, and much of the editing happened while his family navigated her illness. Facing the possibility of loss gave the project even deeper meaning. The creative process offered unexpected comfort. “Editing became my own way of grieving,” he reflects. “She survived, but the film helped me prepare for loss and connect more deeply to family.”

He also describes the film as a meditation on survival and connection: “It’s about our situation or feelings of displacement and colonization, but also immigration and finding love and refuge somewhere through this whole mess.”

“The best pieces of art stop the question of why we create,” he adds. “You might think art is pointless, but when you experience it, you know it just has to exist.”

And as he shares his work with a wider audience, Jauvan emphasizes the importance of staying connected: “Follow me on Instagram @amahoroo—that’s where I share

my photography, film updates, and new projects.”

Jauvan’s inspirations range from Spike Lee to experimental Caribbean filmmakers. What unites them is their commitment to telling Black stories that transcend borders. “There are cultural differences across the diaspora, but we share connections,” he says. “It’s important to see our similarities and differences to realize we’re not alone. That community makes us stronger and more unique.”

For Jauvan, art is essential. It connects him to family, culture, and a deeper understanding of humanity itself.

Jauvan’s exhibit remains on display at the Carl Maxey Center through October. Visitors can experience his photography, poetry, and Buried in the Garden, a work that embodies both personal healing and the collective memory of a people who endured unimaginable loss.

Follow Jauvan’s journey on Instagram at @amahoroo to witness how a young artist from Spokane, shaped by history and driven by vision, is already directing a narrative that is entirely his own.

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca
SPOKANE

October Is Domestic Violence Action Month

Join Us



**Honor Survivors.
Remember Lives Lost.
Help End Domestic
Violence.**

NAACP
Spokane Branch

SAVE THE DATE

Freedom
FUND GALA

NOV 15 2025

LocationSPOKANE CONVENTION
CENTER JR BALLROOM (300)

Time7:00 PM - 9:00PM

GALA



CAREGIVER STORIES

HOLDING GRANDMA’S HANDS

By Alethea Dumas and April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

The cycle of care is one of life’s most profound exchanges. As children, we are held, guided, and nurtured by our grandparents, and in time, many of us find ourselves returning that care—becoming the hands that steady them, the voices that advocate for them, and the companions who help them walk through life’s later chapters. This grandchild-to-grandparent connection is an inheritance of love. In Grandma’s Hands, April Eberhardt and Alethea Dumas share how caregiving for our elders deepens bonds across generations and shapes the way we understand family, empathy, and care.

ALETHEA DUMAS
Q: How has caring for a grandparent shaped your understanding of family responsibility and deepened your emotional connection across generations?

A: Nurturing is in my bones; however, I have learned that family responsibility isn’t about obligation, it’s an active expression of love. Spending time with my grandmother—hearing her stories, watching her shows with her, singing in the car, and holding her hand as we walked—strengthened my appreciation for the bonds that connect us across generations. I definitely recognize more deeply the wisdom and resilience elders carry, and



COURTESY

Alethea Dumas stands with the maternal generations of her family.

how much they sacrificed so we could stand where we are.

Q: In what ways do you feel a sense of duty or calling when it comes to supporting your grandparents, and how do cultural or family traditions influence that commitment?

A: I was taught from an early age that honoring our parents, grandparents, and guardians as they grow older is an act of respect and love. It’s part of our cultural fabric, a way of keeping our bonds strong, showing gratitude for the sacrifices made before us, and ensuring that no one is left to walk through life’s later seasons alone. Even though I’ve watched the value of family, the practice of caring for one another, and the nurturing of traditions fade in my own family over the years, I still hold tightly to those lessons. I apply them in the relationships I’ve been blessed with, including with my chosen family, keeping

alive the spirit of connection, care, and gratitude first instilled in me by my grandmother.

Q: Looking ahead, how do you think your experiences as a grandchild caregiver will inform how you give and receive care later in life, and what lessons about empathy and reciprocity stand out to you?

A: It’s shown me how empathy develops through small, consistent acts—listening, showing patience, offering comfort. My experiences will guide how I support loved ones in the future from a place of love, not obligation, and how I allow others to support me when I need it—with gentleness, curiosity, and understanding.

APRIL EBERHARDT
Q: Can you share your experience of caring for your grandmother and how it shaped your understanding of family and love?

A: I was in college when my grandmother first



COURTESY OF APRIL EBERHARDT

April Eberhardt holds the hand of her grandmother.

began to show strange behavior. She insisted that I get on one of her bank accounts, and at first none of us understood why. Her behavior grew more unusual—she mailed Christmas cards in the summer, mixed up birthdays, caught buses and forgot where she was going. She even hid food in dresser drawers, as if they were refrigerators, and tucked money away in strange places.

Being one of the younger family members, I felt a deep urgency: we had to keep her safe. But as the granddaughter, I ran up against the unspoken pecking order of who got to make decisions. When I finally spoke up, one of my aunts dismissed me as “a little girl”—and I had just graduated college.

Eventually my uncle stepped in as her primary caregiver. Though I moved away, I stayed closely connected with him, supporting from afar. I wasn’t her primary caregiver, but I did her hair, advocated for

Caregiving Conference

The 2025 Caregiver Conference will host Keynote Speaker. Dr. Aaron Blight.

Breakout workshops include:

- Dementia Strategies & Support – Tara Hill Matthews & Sean Jonz
- Caregiver Stress: What It Is and What You Can Do About It – Dr. Aaron Blight
- When Care Services Go Wrong: Advocating for a Loved One – Richard Danford

Other highlights include:

- Community Resource Fair with 25-plus vendors
- Free luncheon (12:15–1:00 p.m.)
- Door prizes throughout the day
- Optional 10-minute shoulder massages (small fee, sign-up at registration)



COURTESY OF APRIL EBERHARDT

April Eberhardt talks with her grandmother.

her when others wouldn’t, and cherished moments when her humor would unexpectedly surface. Over time she lost words, then recognition, and finally even those glimpses of her old self. The silence was heartbreaking.

When I got married and had children, I made sure my kids knew their Grandma Pink through visits, pictures, and videos, even though they didn’t grow up close to her. Living long-distance taught me that caregiving isn’t limited by proximity—it’s about staying connected, informed, and supportive.

My mom and grandmother died about fifteen

months apart. We buried my mother’s urn with my grandmother’s body, a symbolic closing of one era and the beginning of another for me as a woman.

Even when my grandmother no longer recognized me, her presence was still a refuge. After my mother died, I went straight from the airport to her nursing home. She could no longer speak, but I sat beside her and held her hands. She was my mother’s mother, but she was also like a mother to me. That moment reminded me that love doesn’t end with memory or speech.

I am she. She is me.

Carrying the torch: Generational care and the power of planning

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

When Denise McKinnon stepped into the role of long-distance caregiver for her 95-year-old mother, Dorothy Jean Jones, she was continuing a tradition she’d witnessed since childhood. The care she offered her mother was, in many ways, a reflection of what she had seen her own mother provide for her grandmother decades earlier—a full circle of duty and respect that spanned three generations. The difference in her own caregiver story was the distance between Oklahoma City, OK, and Spokane, WA. Mastering care for an ailing parent is already tough; doing it while living in another city only increases the challenge.

McKinnon vividly remembers how her grandmother once lived with Dorothy until the demands of aging made at-home care too difficult. She recalls, “My mother’s mother moved in with her toward the end. My mother grieved when she finally had to place her in a nursing home. That experience taught me how hard these choices are, no matter the generation.”

Beyond relatives, Denise found strength in the neighborhood network that has long defined Black family life. Lifelong friends in Oklahoma City surfaced trustworthy referrals and a reliable housekeeper. Most of all, her brother was a constant on-the-ground partner—running errands, handling upkeep, and sharing the load when choices became complex. His presence meant decisions were never made in a vacuum; they were discussed, debated, and balanced against what the family could realistically sustain.

“People were more than willing to help,” she explains. Neighbors offered referrals to in-home aides, and a childhood friend introduced McKinnon to a housekeeper who fit both their budget and needs. Denise reflects that the community’s moral compass has long inspired people to step in without hesitation, acting out of an innate sense of responsibility and love rather than waiting for permission or carefully laid plans. This deep-rooted ethic—neighbors as kin, friends as family—ensured Dorothy was never without watchful eyes and willing hands.

Even with strong support, choices were rarely simple. Denise describes the spiritual ballast that carried her through:

“The faith that she taught us and the faith that we live by—our Lord Jesus Christ as personal savior—kept me grounded. When things happened, I’d say, ‘Lord, how am I going to deal with this?’ It was natural for me to turn and pray. It wasn’t a breeze. I cried, I panicked, I wanted to do the right thing. And sometimes my brother and I didn’t agree on what to do—but sometimes choices were made for us by the simple fact of what we had.”



Dorothy Jean Jones, mother



Denise McKinnon, caregiver



the hidden complexities of elder care. The cost of in-home assistance is \$28 an hour in Oklahoma, McKinnon discovered. “I wish I had acted earlier,” she admits. “Make sure you know your parents’ financial status.” Dorothy’s decision to put her home in a trust and pre-purchase her burial plan eased many end-of-life tasks, sparing her children the stress of probate and sudden expenses. But the absence of long-term-care insurance meant that options like extended nursing or full-time in-home help were limited. “Investing in long-term care insurance can make a world of difference,” McKinnon advises, “because the costs add up faster than you can imagine.”

Practical planning eased the pressure. Dorothy’s foresight with the trust and burial arrangements spared the family probate hurdles and last-minute expenses. Yet the lack of long-term-care insurance narrowed options; hourly in-home support added up fast. McKinnon now urges families to have frank, early conversations: document finances and medical needs, explore long-term-care insurance, and involve younger generations so they are ready when the time comes.

Her story underscores the importance of early estate planning, candid discussions about finances and medical needs, and a willingness to involve younger generations. “Come together and make a plan long before your parents get sick,” she says. “Know who you can rely on and what resources are available.”

Denise McKinnon’s journey affirms a truth she has seen all her life: community, faith, and foresight sustain families. Through a legacy of mutual aid that reaches back generations, she turned a difficult season into a living testament. Generational care, she reminds us, is not just a personal responsibility—it is a collective act of trust.

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.

HELP YOUTH START A
LEGENDARY
SAVINGS JOURNEY!

NEXGEN
SAVINGS & CDs
FOR MEMBERS UNDER 18

EARN 5% APY ON THE FIRST \$1,000*



*Members under the age of 18 will only be allowed to have 1 NexGen Savings Account. When a member turns 18, at the next quarter cycle the NexGen Savings will be converted to a SCCU regular savings account. (ex: Mia turns 18 on December 20, 2025, she will earn the higher dividend on her first \$1,000 through the end of December 2025. On January 1, 2026, her entire balance will be converted to a SCCU regular savings account and earn that dividend rate).

 **SPOKANE CITY CREDIT UNION**
509-325-7228 sccu.net

Your savings federally insured to at least \$250,000 and backed by the full faith and credit of the United States Government
NCUA
National Credit Union Administration, a U.S. Government Agency

WELLNESS / FROM THE FRONT PAGE

FROM THE WATER'S EDGE

A PURPOSEFUL LIFE

Stepping into a remote, free-flowing mountain stream saved him. His life changed forever that day miles from the mean, inner-city streets that almost killed him. Alone with his own thoughts, a newly purchased fly rod in hand and the sounds of nature all around him, he stepped in. He found a different kind of peace at that moment. Scot was saved from a life of crime and self-destruction by water and fly-fishing.

I did not know the Scot of old. The man I met here in Spokane last year was living his best life. He was a devoted father and married to Christy, the love of his life. He was a passionate angler and professional fly-fishing guide and served on the board of directors for the Twin Cities Chapter of Trout Unlimited in his home state of Minnesota. Scot turned a first-time streamside experience a dozen years ago into a way of life. It soon became his purpose to share with others his love of fly-fishing and the transformative power of nature.

You know you have met

that special someone when as strangers, meeting face-to-face for the first time, they don't extend a hand for the traditional handshake or fist bump. Rather they open their arms wide and invite you in for a hug. While holding you there, they whisper a warm greeting like lost family. Scot was that kind of person.

I wrote about him a few months ago telling about the time he came to Spokane in October of last year. He loved rivers, fly-fishing and he was full of mischief. A small handful of us, black and brown fly anglers, became a close family during that visit. I say "was" because we are now planning a Celebration of Life for him. Scot was here in October, diagnosed in January and died Aug. 14 at 56.

One evening last year while a few of us were just hanging out over beer, wine and pizza he randomly wanted to talk about river bugs and how we should live purposeful lives like them. He reminded us of what, we, as fellow fly anglers already know, that riv-

er bugs don't live very long. Some live as long as three years on or near the bottom of rivers and streams where they go through their early stages of development. But once they swim or crawl to the surface and become adult versions of themselves, their clock is ticking. Their life as an adult is now reduced to only a couple of days at most. Imagine, he said, they must learn to fly, avoid being eaten by birds and fish, find a mate, lay their eggs and die. They live well, he said, never taking the life they are living for granted. We are left to wonder now if Scot somehow knew something was up.

Aggressive treatment began almost immediately but the cancer had already spread beyond his pancreas. In April I went back to Minneapolis for a visit. Scot greeted me with open arms and with a half-smile cautioned me not to hug him too tight. The conversation was awkward at first. I did not want to be the one to bring up the obvious. Fortunately for me, he did. The news was hard to hear. Quickly though the conver-



Robert "Bob" Bartlett
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



Scot, left, fly fishes with Joe and Bob Bartlett.

sation turned to fishing and his Ubuntu family. And a plan was hatched for us to fish together the next day.

Despite his constant battle with nausea and fatigue due to the chemo drugs and the cancer that was eating him alive, he wanted to take me to one of his favorite rivers and fish the day away. He noticed my reservation, then reminded me that a river and fly-fishing saved his life once and he had faith that it would do it again. Tomorrow will be about living well, he said, living with purpose and not dying.

A friend of his met us there and once we rigged up, we posed for a selfie with the Rush River in the background. Once he stepped into the water, it

was like a light switch in him had been turned on. He waded and cast his fly with accuracy, energy and confidence. He was home—he was where he was meant to be.

When I saw the text message on my phone from his wife Christy, I knew that the news would not be good and it wasn't. Scot had passed away the night before. She wanted me to know that he made her promise to call me right away so that I could let his Ubuntu family know. She also wanted me to know how much he loved being here last year and how much he loved each and every one of us. We meant the world to Scot, she said.

By the time this story appears in print we will have hosted a Celebration of Life for Scot on the banks of the Mississippi River at a spot he knew well. Members of his Ubuntu family and Scot's 12-year-old son Cooper will have

just floated and fished the river together. We will have gathered with friends and family, fresh off the river just as he would want us to do. It will be a time for storytelling, for laughs, for tears and for his favorite dinner of soul food.

Scot's life was cut short, or was it? Maybe, just like the river bugs he loved to talk about, he had done everything he was supposed to do. He lived and loved with purpose, he gave life, shared unbridled joy and was full of mischief. I believe his gifts to those who knew him are—find and live your purpose; and continue to tell the stories of those whose lives were forever saved by spending time in nature. The world has lost a very special human, one who was saved by a trout stream.

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

A PARTING PAUSE

KAZUKO WELLNESS

Breathe in.
Breathe out.
Begin.

This is my 13th article for The Black Lens, and with it, I am choosing to pause. Over the last year, I've written about rest, connection, community, and what it means to come home to ourselves. Writing here has been both a practice and a gift. An act of reflection and alchemization that I hope has met you somewhere in your own journey. To those who have read, shared, or carried even a single phrase with you: thank you. Your quiet companionship has meant more than I can say.

As I write this final piece, the state of the world feels heavy. Genocides continue. Violence and hatred grow from the root of fear. Political climates demand urgency and division. Many of us wake each morning to news that chips away at our sense of safety and belonging. It is easy, in such a world, to feel helpless, hardened, or to believe that the only way through is to keep pushing, producing, surviving.

And yet, I believe, I have to believe, that in these moments, living in alignment with our truest selves is an ultimate form of resistance. That finding harmony between rest and action, between softness and strength, is not a luxury but a necessity. That choosing to remain tender with ourselves and with others is, in fact, our greatest rebellion in a world that profits from our numbness, mistrust, and fragmentation.

Rest has been distorted into privilege, something

only "earned" once productivity has been proven. Stillness is treated as indulgence. But if we look to the Earth, to the trees, the soil, the seasons, we remember: rest was always meant to be our birthright. Winter comes without apology. The land slows down. Renewal is not questioned; it is trusted. Our bodies, too, were designed for rhythm, for cycles of expansion and contraction, effort and ease.

And yet, in our current systems, the opportunity to rest safely has been coerced into privilege. For too many, the urgency of survival leaves no room to pause. The right to soften, to feel safe in stillness, has been stripped away by oppression, racism, poverty, and violence. If we find ourselves among those with the possibility to rest, even briefly, even imperfectly, can we receive it fully, as the radical birthright it was always meant to be? And can we, in our wake, our rejuvenation, our clarity, fight for a world where everyone has access to that same safety, that same softness?

My deepest prayer is that we continue to rebuild a culture of belonging where rest is reclaimed as an expectation of wholeness, where softness is not mistaken for weakness, and where connection triumphs over fear.

For me, this is a pause in writing here, a step back to focus on the places where I can live this work in closer conversation and connection. But before I go, I want to leave you with these parting wishes:



By jasmine
linane-booeey
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR

In a world that demands we go fast, may you go slow. In a world that thrives on disconnection, may you nurture community and connection where you can. In a world that roots itself in fear, may you return again and again to love. In a world that convinces us we always need more to be enough, may you witness that you are already whole, you are already home.

May you breathe deeply, love fiercely, and soften bravely. May you find refuge in your own body, your own communities, and this Earth that longs for our harmony.

Breathe in.
Breathe out.
Begin.

Jasmine Linane-Booey of Kazuko Wellness is a Well-being Educator and Collective Harmony Facilitator weaving yoga, reiki, breathwork and earth-rooted practices. Her work centers embodiment, justice and collective care. Contact: hello@kazukowellness.com | www.kazukowellness.com

BLACK GENEALOGY
October is Family History Month

'The 1619 Project: Born on the Water' by Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renee Watson, Illustrated by Nikkolas Smith

The story starts in an elementary classroom, where a teacher introduces what seems to be a simple project: "Who are you?" Students are asked to trace their family histories and create a flag representing their ancestral homeland. For many children, these tasks are straightforward—they can trace their families back many generations, confidently identifying countries and their cultures.

But for one young African American girl, the assignment reveals a painful truth that many Black genealogists understand well: tracing enslaved ancestors is challenging but not impossible. While her classmates draw flags of Italy, Ireland, and other countries where families migrated to the United States, she faces the genealogical barrier—the 1870 "brick wall"—that many descendants of enslaved people confront—a deliberate erasure that makes building traditional family trees nearly impossible.

Initially, the girl felt ashamed because she didn't know where her family's roots were. She wants to finish her assignment but gets stuck, only able to trace back three generations—her parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. She turns to her grandmother, who gathers the family. What unfolds is not just a list of dates and documents but something more powerful: the



By Patricia
Bayonne-Johnson
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR

passing down of shared memory, oral tradition, and ancestral knowledge that goes beyond what any official record can capture.

The girl learns that 400 years ago, in 1619, our ancestors were forcibly taken from their homeland and transported to a land that would become the United States. "They say our people were born on the water, but our people had a home, a place, a land before they were sold," said grandma. They were forced across the Middle Passage in the hull of the slave ship with many people from different villages. They became one people, a new people. "We were born on the water," she continues, "and we survived."

Grandma shares a deeper story, a more complete one—recognizing the full scope of the African American experience—from ancestral roots in Africa, through the Middle Passage, and resilience and contri-

butions that followed in America.

At the end of Grandma's story, the girl felt proud of what her ancestors had accomplished. She learned how her ancestor found a way when it seemed there was no way. The next day, the girl goes to school and proudly draws an American flag, saying, 'America is the country my ancestors built.' She was no longer ashamed because she now knows her story.

Nikkolas Smith's stunning illustrations bring the story to life, making complex historical ideas clear for young readers while respecting the seriousness of the subject. The book serves as a great conversation starter for Black families looking to discuss genealogy, family history, and identity with their children.

For our parents and grandparents in the Spokane community who are exploring their family histories, "Born on the Water" offers a framework for understanding why Black genealogical research looks different—and why that difference doesn't make our stories less complete or valuable.

"Born on the Water" is a children's book recommended for ages 7-10. It is written in verse and told in 12 vignettes. The children's book is an adaptation of "A New Origin Story: The 1619 Project," created by Nikole Hannah-Jones and The New York Times Magazine.

I donated a copy of "Born on the Water" to Sandy's Library at the Carl Maxey Center.

SHALOME

Continued from 1

underrepresented voices, giving the audience a panoramic view of excitement, struggle, and solidarity. "We get to quite literally support each other as we go through the journey of this story," she adds.

Shalome remembers her own artistic awakening when she first saw The Wiz in college: "I cried, I cried, I cried because it was so beautiful to see. If representation wasn't a thing – if I wasn't seeing Black women succeed in theater—I would not be doing what I'm doing right now."

She connects Sugar Kane's journey to the broader fight for inclusion. "We are making major strides in inclusivity, but we are also actively watching inclusivity be stripped away at the same time," she reflects. "Being able to tell the story that Sugar Kane is telling – she is fighting for a spot – and she finds her spot in our story. Her journey is about finding the confidence to love herself enough to know that she is worthy of having a spot. That is a lived experience that I, as a Black artist, live every single day."

While the show acknowledges struggles, Shalome is quick to highlight

that it isn't mired in pain. "There isn't a lot of pain in our show, which I love," she says. "People tend to focus on Black pain and Black tension. But there isn't enough Black joy being shown. I am thrilled to be in a production where many of the principal roles are Black people in positions of privilege and joy – having the strength to be exactly who they want to be, and to be met with love while doing so."

At its heart, Some Like It Hot is about our shared humanity. "That is the point of our production," Shalome says. "You are watching human beings experience very real things and navigate change. We

don't have to look alike or agree, but we do need to treat each other with love and respect – even in those differences, even when you don't understand. That's a direct quote from our show."

This message, she believes, resonates far beyond the footlights: "Conversations can only get anywhere if we are all coming from the same middle ground. I'll respect you. You'll respect me. Now we can hear each other."

When asked what she sees in her future as an actor, Shalome dreams of an iconic New York debut on Broadway; her sights are set on the upcoming

Dreamgirls revival in 2026. "I'm hoping, praying, trusting, and manifesting that show will be my Broadway debut." What character would she play? Her response is not Deena, Effie, or Lorell – though she unequivocally knows she has the chops to play any of them as an understudy for many different characters. Instead, she circles back to the power of the ensemble in telling multiple stories at once. "Honestly, I want to be in the ensemble and cover the Dreams."

Like Sugar Kane, telling the story of overcoming resonates with Shalome. "I love being an example of a Black woman experiencing

something that she's always wanted. You know, a Black woman standing in her beauty and grace and just being a kindhearted person that's experiencing life's woes, yeah – and how she can conquer them."

Nissi Shalome invites Spokane audiences to experience this reimagined classic with open hearts. It's a dazzling, tap-dancing spectacle with marvelously intricate choreography by Tony Award-winner Casey Nicholaw, featuring stunning Tony Award-winning costumes by Greg Barnes and an unforgettable score by Tony and Grammy Award-winning

SHADES OF MOTHERHOOD NETWORK

NAVIGATING MOM GUILT

A mother of five’s journey

ROOTS AND WINGS

By Leola Rouse
THE BLACK LENS

As a mother of five, my early years of parenting felt like a beautiful chaos—a symphony of giggles, tears, and hair-pulling moments that, despite their joy, often left me grappling with a heavy weight called mom guilt. With so many little hearts to nurture, it sometimes felt as though my time was stretched so thin that I couldn’t fully immerse myself in each moment. From racing between football practices to ballet recitals, I often found myself scrambling, caught in the daily whirlwind of motherhood while trying to create a warm and loving home.

Mom guilt is a universal experience that whispers doubt into the minds of countless mothers. It can hit suddenly, like a storm cloud, sometimes just a passing shower, other times looming large and dark. At its heart, this guilt springs from a feeling of inadequacy—a nagging belief that we are not enough. With every heartwarming photo of seemingly perfect families splashed across social media, it’s easy to succumb to the illusion that everyone else has it together while we are simply holding on by a thread.

The comparisons we draw can leave us feeling like we are chasing an ever-elusive ideal. One scroll through Instagram can present a parade of pristine homes and gourmet meals, igniting a sense of anxiety that settles deep within. This yearning for perfection can quickly spiral into chronic dissatisfaction, creating an undercurrent of stress that can sometimes feel insurmountable.

Navigating the exhilarating and exhausting roles of motherhood can often lead to feelings of shame and isolation, echoing in the quiet moments of self-reflection and late-night musings. Yet, amid this turmoil,



By Leola Rouse
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



there is a way forward—a journey that can transform mom guilt from a burdensome shadow into a guiding light.

Reframing Our Expectations

The first step in this journey is to reframe expectations. Each mother’s experience is as unique as her fingerprint. Recognizing that our journeys are personalized allows us to set realistic expectations that align with our own lives. A mother with one child has a different story to tell than one with five; the same holds true for working mothers versus those who stay at home. Letting go of the relentless pursuit of perfection opens the door to clarity and freedom, reminding us that we are enough—just as we are.

Building Our Circle of Support

Creating a nurturing support network is essential in this adventure called motherhood. It truly takes a village to raise a child, and the connections we forge can lift us up when we stumble. Take inventory of your community and seek out those who share your values and dreams. Together, you can lighten the load by sharing responsibilities that often feel overwhelming—school drop-offs, meal preparation, and even the sacred act of self-care.

Practicing Self-Compassion

In the midst of all this, it’s crucial to cultivate self-compassion. Remind

yourself that this is your first journey into motherhood. Embrace the imperfections and forgive yourself for the moments when you feel you’ve missed the mark. Treat yourself with kindness, speak positively, and offer yourself the grace that you would extend to a friend.

Prioritizing Self-Care

Remember that self-care is not a luxury; it is a necessity. You must fill your cup before you can pour into others. Whether it’s a solitary walk amidst nature, a soothing bubble bath with a glass of wine, or a comforting coffee date with a close friend, taking time for yourself replenishes your spirit and enhances your ability to nurture your family.

Setting Communication and Boundaries

Lastly, establish clear communication and boundaries around your parenting journey. Trim away the obligations and distractions that do not serve your family’s well-being. It is absolutely okay to say no to the things that drain your energy, allowing you to create a clear vision of love and support within your home.

Mom guilt is a real struggle, but it doesn’t have to define your experience as a mother. By reshaping our perspectives, forging supportive connections, nurturing ourselves, and communicating our needs, we can lighten the weight of guilt. Remember, you are doing your best, and it’s perfectly okay to have moments of struggle.

You are the roots and wings of your family, grounding your children while teaching them to soar into the world. Embrace this journey with an open heart, knowing that something beautiful will bloom from your nurturing hands—both today and in the years to come. Don’t overlook the delicate beauty in the small moments of motherhood; they are the treasures that will stay with you forever.

DEEP ROOTS, STRONG WOMEN

Black excellence milestone

Honoring the legacy of Fannie Lou Hamer

By Stephy Nobles-Beans
THE BLACK LENS

October is a month where we pause to celebrate Black Excellence—a time to reflect on the achievements, sacrifices, and milestones of Black Americans whose lives have paved the way for justice and freedom. The Shades of Motherhood Network would like to celebrate an icon, Fannie Lou Hamer, a grassroots civil rights activist, voting rights champion, and fierce advocate for women’s reproductive justice. Her story is one of courage, resilience, and unwavering devotion to freedom for all.

Born in 1917 in Montgomery County, Mississippi, Hamer was the youngest of 20 children in a sharecropping family. Like so many Black families in the Jim Crow South, the Hamers faced systemic racism, economic oppression, and limited opportunities. Despite these hardships, Fannie Lou developed a tenacious spirit and a heart for advocacy that would later define her life’s work.

Hamer married Perry “Pap” Hamer in 1944, and the couple longed for children. However, in 1961, during what was supposed to be a routine surgery to remove a uterine fibroid, Hamer was subjected to a forced hysterectomy without her consent. A white doctor performed the procedure while she was under anesthesia—a common practice at the time in Mississippi, notoriously known as a “Mississippi appendectomy.”

This horrific violation left Hamer unable to bear biological children. She and her husband later adopted four children, but the forced sterilization remained a life-altering wound. Rather than silencing her, this injustice became fuel for her fire. Hamer transformed her pain into power, emerging as a bold voice not only for civil rights but also for reproductive justice.

Hamer’s activism began in earnest in 1962 after attending a meeting led



By Stephy Nobles-Beans
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Determined to exercise her constitutional right to vote, she volunteered to register despite the violent voter suppression Black Mississippians faced. Her attempt to register cost her her job, her home, and nearly her life—she was brutally beaten in jail for her activism.

But Hamer refused to be silenced. With her now-famous words, “I am sick and tired of being sick and tired,” she gave voice to the frustration of generations. She co-founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in 1964, challenging the all-white Mississippi delegation at the Democratic National Convention. Her televised testimony before the credentials committee exposed the brutal realities of racism in the South and remains one of the most powerful speeches in American history.

While Hamer’s work in voting rights is widely remembered, her advocacy for reproductive justice is just as vital to her legacy. She spoke openly about her forced hysterectomy, drawing attention to the widespread practice of sterilization abuse targeting Black women and poor women across the South.

At a time when few dared to speak publicly about reproductive rights, Hamer used her platform to condemn medical racism and demand autonomy over Black women’s bodies. She understood that true freedom includ-



ed not only the right to vote but also the right to decide whether and how to bear children. Her bravery laid groundwork for today’s reproductive justice movement, which centers the voices of women of color.

Fannie Lou Hamer’s legacy is one of resilience and unwavering dedication to justice. As a wife, a mother through adoption, and a leader, she stood firmly in her belief that ordinary people could bring extraordinary change. Her story reminds us that the fight for equality is multifaceted—encompassing political, economic, and bodily freedom.

At The Shades of Motherhood Network, we honor Fannie Lou Hamer not only as a civil rights leader but also as a pioneer for Black maternal health and reproductive rights. Her courage reminds us that women of color are resilient, powerful, and necessary voices in the struggle for justice. Her advocacy compels us to continue fighting against systemic injustices that still impact maternal outcomes today.

We remain committed to reducing disparities in Black maternal health, supporting the systems that influence maternal care, and being a voice for the voiceless. As Fannie Lou Hamer showed us, speaking truth to power is the first step in changing lives.

Her legacy lives on—in every ballot cast, in every woman who demands reproductive justice, and in every community that rises to demand equity.

For more information about *The Shades of Motherhood Network*, visit theshadesofmotherhood-network.org.

Building healthier communities together

NAACP Spokane’s commitment to mental health equity

By Elysee Kazadi
THE BLACK LENS

As Mental Illness Awareness Week approaches (Oct. 5-11), we should be reminded that it is not just an individual concern but also one of the communities that demands our collective attention and action. The NAACP Spokane Health Committee recognizes this truth; that’s why we participated in the “Healthy Body & Soul” Health & Wellness Event on September 20th at the Martin Luther King Jr. Center. The event was a vision of community wellness that acknowledges how deeply interconnected our mental health truly is.

The NAACP has a resolution that addresses the mental and behavioral health care needs of Black communities. The stark reality of mental health disparities in America cannot be ignored. While Black Americans report mental illness at rates nearly identical to white Americans—21% compared to 23.9% access to care tells a vastly different story. Only

39% of Black people receive mental health services compared to 52% of white Americans, a gap that reflects systemic barriers including provider shortages, cultural incompetence, and institutional racism. These numbers aren’t abstract statistics; they represent real people in our Spokane community our neighbors, family members, colleagues, and friends who deserve equitable access to mental health care. The NAACP’s national commitment to addressing these disparities through comprehensive legislation like the Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act provides a framework, but real change happens when communities like ours take action locally.

Here in Spokane, we find ourselves in a unique position, where our city is embracing progressive approaches to mental health and striving to emphasize community support, collaborative care, and accessibility. Local organizations work tirelessly to reduce stigma through education and outreach,



while innovative treatment centers incorporate new technologies and culturally responsive care models. However, even within this progressive landscape, we must recognize that innovation without equity falls short of justice. The same barriers affecting Black Americans nationally, including the fact that only 2% of psychiatrists and 4% of psychologists are Black, persist in our local health-care system. This is why our Health Committee’s mission becomes crucial: to bridge the gap between Spokane’s mental health resources and our community’s specific needs, and to advocate for culturally competent care that understands the intersection of racism and mental wellness.

The power of collective desire for community health extends beyond individual healing to encompass our shared prosperity and well-being. When we commit to mental health equity (yes, you read that right, we use the E word)

as a community, we create ripple effects that strengthen every part of our social fabric. Children in mentally healthy households are more likely to succeed academically and break cycles of intergenerational trauma. Communities with strong mental health support experience fewer crises and fewer visits to emergency departments, which is especially important given that Black adults currently visit emergency departments for mental health care at twice the national average. Economic prosperity follows mental wellness, as people with access to mental health support contribute more effectively to workforce productivity and community growth. Most importantly, when people have the mental health support they need, they are better able to participate in civic life, community building, and mutual aid, helping neighborhoods truly thrive.

This understanding transforms our September

“When we commit to mental health equity (yes, you read that right, we use the E word) as a community, we create ripple effects that strengthen every part of our social fabric.”

20th event from a single day of health screenings into a stepping stone toward lasting community change. We invite every Spokane resident to join us in this collective effort, recognizing that building a mentally healthy community requires all of us, whether we’re accessing services, volunteering, advocating for policy changes, or having honest conversations about mental health with our families and friends.

The vision we are working toward is for the NAACP’s national advocacy of comprehensive, culturally tailored mental health care to become a reality here in the Inland Northwest. When commu-

nities thrive mentally and emotionally, we all benefit from the strength, creativity, and resilience that come with true wellness. Our participation in the September 20th “Healthy Body & Soul” event at the Martin Luther King Jr. Center was just one example of our important work, and we invite every Spokane resident to join us on this journey as partners in building an equitable, mentally healthy community that serves everyone.

For more information about *NAACP Spokane’s Health Committee* or to get involved in our mental health advocacy efforts, contact Kazadi.elysee.m@gmail.com

IN MEMORIAM / FROM THE FRONT PAGE

REST IN POWER
in Memoriam



ROLLING RAY
(SEPT. 3, 2025)

Rolling Ray rose to fame in 2018 after his appearance on “Catfish: Trolls” and reached virality after being featured on “Divorce Court.” Ray coined the popular phrase “purr” and helped produce a dating show for the Zeus Network. Ray had a spinal condition that required the use of a wheelchair and used his platform to advocate for people with disabilities.



GEORGE RAVELING
(SEPT. 1, 2025)

Former Washington State basketball coach George Raveling had an outsized impact on basketball not just in the state, but the nation. Raveling led the Cougars to two NCAA tournaments and would later become on of the university’s winningest coaches. Nationally, he is credited with pushing Michael Jordan to join the Chicago Bulls and sign a landmark deal with Nike, creating the now-famous Air Jordan shoes.



JOSEPH A. MCNEIL SR.
(SEPT. 4, 2025)

Before becoming a United State Air Force major general, Joseph A. McNeil Sr. was one of four teenagers who helped spark the 1960s sit-in movement, and consequently the 1964 Civil Rights Act. McNeil said after taking a bus to university, he wanted something to eat but was denied service. That experience led him, with three other students, to organize a sit-in at a Greensboro, North Carolina Woolworth’s on Feb. 1, 1960.



REGGIE CARROLL
(AUG. 20, 2025)

Comedian and actor, Reggie Carroll combined his two talents in a 2023 comedy special referencing his nickname, “The Knockout Kings of Comedy.” The Baltimore-native comedian first starred in the TV series “The Parkers,” where he first began working with Mo’Nique, who he would later tour with.



HOWIE TEE
(AUG. 2, 2025)

Howard Thompson, better known as Hitman Howie Tee to his fans, was highly-revered producer in the hip-hop genre during its early days. He gained attention after working on U.T.F.O.’s single “Roxanne, Roxanne” and went on to produce a single with Color Me Badd that beat Michael Jackson on the Billboard Top 100.



ROBBIE PARLDO
(JULY 17, 2025)

Along with two friends from high school, Robbie Parldo formed the group “City High” in 1999, and the band released their first and only album in 2001, “What Would You Do?” A single titled after the album reached No. 8 on the Billboard Hot 100. Parldo’s brother said despite his tough appearance, he would remember Parldo as a “sweet, goofy kid.”

IN MEMORIAM: JAN. 15, 1934-SEPT. 9, 2025
Edgar Allen McCoy

Black Lens staff reports

In the afternoon of Sept. 9, 2025, our husband, brother, father, and grandfather accepted the invitation to live with God.

He was welcomed by his parents, Douglas and Ellen McCoy; siblings Blanche, Edie, and Effie; brothers George and James; nephew George Jr.; and other relatives and friends.

He was born Jan. 15, 1934, in Brooklyn, N.Y., and is a graduate of the New York State Institution of Applied Arts and Sciences, earning an AA degree as a Dental Technician.

He proudly joined the United States Air Force, serving as the Supervisor of the Dental Clinic in Guam and the Philippines before retiring in 1989 at George Air Force Base in Victorville, California.

During the holidays in 1955, he met the love of his life, Mary Jane Haley, and convinced her to marry. They moved to California and were married on Aug. 31, 1957. They resided in California until moving to Spokane, Washington, in 1992. They recently celebrated their 68th anniversary!

Ed enjoyed playing bid whist, listening to jazz, and watching sports—especially basketball and football—and was delighted when his teams won.

His favorite activity was making barbecue for the family. He took great joy in participating in the annual St. David’s Steak and Bake as a sponsor. As a servant of the community, he enjoyed the following activities:

Serving as an Anthropos for the National Sorority Phi Delta Kappa, Inc., National and Regional Scholarship Chair

Connecting Link “Honey Do” with the Spokane Chapter of The Links, Inc.

Co-sponsor of the 100 Black Men Chapter in the Inland Empire of Southern California

Ed is survived by his loving wife of 68 years, Mary Jane McCoy; daughters Kim Pate (Clay) and Shelley Beavers; four grandchildren, Dar-



rell (Erica), Darren, Daiytion II, and Kari; five great-grands, LaShay (Nofo), Andrew, Shante, Kolton, and Nayomie; and one great-great-grandson, Nyjah. Ed is also survived by his sister, Ethelyn “Sissy” Best of Queens, New York. He leaves to cherish his memory numerous nieces, nephews, and several beloved cousins. Ed will be remembered and missed by many who thought of him as a father figure, fondly calling him Papa McCoy or Uncle Ed.

If you wish, in lieu of flowers, donations will be accepted in Ed’s name to the American Diabetes Association, the National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa Perpetual Scholarship Foundation (c/o Yvonne Ben, 2717 Riverbend Drive, Violet, LA 70092), or to a charity of your choice in his name.

The family extends their sincere appreciation to Rev. Kimmie Meinecke; the nurses and clergy of Spokane Hospice; St. David’s Prayer Group; The Must Pray Prayer Line; Esther Kelley; Deborah Cano; members of The Spokane Links, Inc.; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority; the National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, Inc.; as well as all other friends and relatives for their support and kindness.

Black liberation activist
Assata Shakur dies at 78

From wire reports

Assata Shakur, a Black liberation activist who was given political asylum in Cuba after her 1979 escape from a U.S. prison where she had been serving a life sentence for killing a police officer, died Sept. 25.

Shakur died in Havana due to “health conditions and advanced age,” Cuba’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement. Shakur’s daughter, Kakuya Shakur, confirmed her mother’s death in a Facebook post.

Officials in New Jersey, where Shakur had been arrested, convicted and imprisoned, said she was 78, the Associated Press reported.

A member of Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army, Shakur’s case had been emblematic of the relations between the U.S. and Cuba.

American authorities, including President Donald Trump, demanded her return.

The FBI put Shakur on its list of “most wanted terrorists,” but, in the minds of her supporters she was pursued for crimes she didn’t commit or that were justified, the AP reported.

On May 2, 1973, Shakur and two others were pulled over by New Jersey State Police troopers because the car they were driving had a broken taillight. A gunfight ensued and one of the troopers, Werner Foerster, was killed and another was wounded. One of Shakur’s companions was also killed.

The New York City native fled but was eventually apprehended. She was found guilty of murder, armed robbery and other crimes in 1977 and was sentenced to life in prison, the AP report-



ed. Shakur was charged with additional bank robberies and in the nonfatal shootings of two other officers, the AP reported, but most of those charges were dismissed or resulted in her acquittal.

Shakur’s prison stint was short-lived. In November 1979, members of the Black Liberation Army, posing as visitors, stormed the Clinton Correctional Facility for women, took two guards hostage and commandeered a prison van to break her out, the AP wrote. Shakur disappeared before eventually emerging in 1984 in Cuba, where Fidel Castro granted her asylum.

Shakur has also been widely described as rapper Tupac Shakur’s godmother.

WATKINS

Continued from 1

measured not by who I was, but by what I looked like and what I could do for others.

So what can we do, my brothers and sisters, against this subtle yet destructive racism? We can educate ourselves. We can refuse to be boxed into narrow roles. We can claim options beyond athletic scholarships and institutions that exploit our

talent without loving us. We can broadcast our struggles so others know they are not alone. We can stand together, strong and unyielding, against injustice.

We can no longer wait for our white counterparts to do what they should have done long ago. No! We must decide for ourselves when we are “good enough.” We must become the voice of change, the architects of a more just future, and the paintbrush that colors a brighter picture

for the next generation.

The great Florynce Kennedy once said: “You’ve got to rattle your cage door. You’ve got to let them know that you’re in there, and that you want out. Make noise. Cause trouble. You may not win right away, but you’ll sure have a lot more fun.”

I plan—Lord willing—to keep rattling that cage door until freedom and equality swing wide open. I hope you’re with me, brothers and sisters.

SHALOME

Continued from 11

composers Marc Shaiman and Scott Whitman. Through her portrayal of

Sugar Kane, she embodies the power of representation, the necessity of resistance, and the boundless joy of taking up space in a world that once tried to deny it. She teases to rev up antic-

ipation for the upcoming show: “If you think you know what Some Like It Hot is about, you don’t.”

Some Like It Hot ran at the First Interstate Arts Center from Sept. 23-27.

BLACK BUSINESS DIRECTORY

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

4AM Vintage – Vintage clothing store owned by Christian Jones. (832) 652-4580 or coo-jones4am@gmail.com. 1009 N. Washington St., Suite A, Spokane, 99201. Instagram: 4am.spokane.

A Do Good Cleaning Service LLC – Janitorial service by Daryl Givens Jr. (509) 714-8113 or dgizle21@gmail.com.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Betty Jean's BBQ – Restaurant owned by Omar Jones. (509) 828-5931 or bettyjeansbbq@yahoo.com. 2926 E. 29th Ave., Spokane, 99223. Online at [www.bettyjeansbbq.com](#), Instagram: [Betty_jeans_bbq](#) and Facebook: [Bettyjeansbbq](#).

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

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

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

Bummy Boss Clip's & Beauty Supply – NorthTown mall hair care. (509) 315-8963 or visit bummybossclips.appointeedd.com.

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

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

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

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

Compassionate Catering LLC – Catering services. (509) 934-1106 or compassionatecatering2023@gmail.com. 1014 N. Pines Road, #120, Spokane Valley, 99216.

Dennis Mitchell Empowerment Seminars – Education services by Dennis Mitchell. (509) 981-0646 or dennisspeaks@gmail.com. 9116 E. Sprague Ave., Suite 66, Spokane Valley, 99206.

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

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

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

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

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

Fantasy Kleaning LLC – Commercial Janitorial Service by Nathaniel Harris. (509) 890-0819 or fantasykleaning@gmail.com.

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

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

I Hear You Sis LLC – Nutrition/health coaching by Prosparetti Coleman. (509) 995-7044 or ihearyousis1@gmail.com. Online at [www.ihearyousis.com](#), TikTok: [tiktok.com/@i.hearyou.sis](#).

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

JSandoval Real Estate – Real Estate Broker Jacquelynn Sandoval. (509) 460-8197 or JSandoval@windermere.com. 1620 E. Indiana Ave., Suite 1250, Spokane Valley, 99216. Instagram: [instagram.com/therealestateauntie/](#).

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

Lacquered and Luxe – Nail salon owned by Lisa-Mae Brown. (509) 993-7938 or brownlisa-mae@yahoo.com. 33 E. Lincoln Road, Suite 205, Spokane.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moore's Boarding Home – Residential care by Betsy Wilkerson. (509) 747-1745 or betsy@mooresassistedliving.com. 1803 W. Pacific Ave., Spokane, 99201.

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

Natasha L. Hill, P.S. – Lawyer

Natasha Hill. (509) 350-2817, (509) 357-1757 or natasha@nlhlawoffices.com. Patsy Clark Mansion, 2208 W. Second Ave., Spokane 99201.

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

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

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

NW Martial Arts Club – Call (509) 599-4760 or email tsdmas-terj@yahoo.com. 3508 N. Nevada St., Spokane, 99205.

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

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

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

Providential Solutions – Counseling and coaching by Charina Carothers, LICSW. (509) 795-0150 or info@psurnotalone.com. Richard Allen Court, Spokane, 99202.

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

Queen of Sheba – Restaurant owned by Almaz Ainuu. (509) 328-3958 or info@queenofsheba.com. 2621 W. Mallon Ave., Suite 426, Spokane, 99201.

Quick and Classy Auto Customs – Mechanic Jamar Dickerson. (509) 315-5090, (509) 795-6065 or 2gn2tytoon@gmail.com. 3627 E. Broadway Ave., Spokane.

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

RJ's So Southern BBQ & Catering – Food business owned by Reggie Perkins. Contact rjs.so.southern@gmail.com or (615) 715-4310.

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

Smooov Cutz Barber Shop – Barber shop owned by Jason “Smooov” Watson. (509) 703-7949 or jsmoov923@gmail.com. Two locations at 13817 E. Sprague Ave., Spokane Valley, 99216, and 14700 E. Indiana Ave., Spokane Valley, 99216.

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

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

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

WrightWay Beauty Supply – (509) 703-7772 (call/text), wrightsbeautysupply@outlook.com or visit [www.wrightwaybeautysupply.com](#). 2103 N. Division St., Spokane, 99207.

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

AREA BLACK CHURCHES AND MINISTRIES

Holy Temple Church of God in Christ – Pastor Wayne B. Washington. 806 W. Indiana Ave, Spokane, 99205. Sunday School is 9:45 a.m. Worship Service is 11 a.m.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NAACP MEETINGS

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

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

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

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

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

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

EVENTS TO WATCH FOR

THROUGH DEC. 20: PERSONAL TO POLITICAL: CELEBRATING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS OF PAULSON FONTAINE PRESS – Featuring about 40 prints and other assorted works by contemporary African American creators, this traveling exhibition focuses on the visualization of personal narrative and political issues by these artists. The prints in this exhibition were produced at Paulson Fontaine Press in Berkeley, California, an artistic hub in the San Francisco Bay Area for over 25 years. The exhibition includes 21st century art by Radcliffe Bailey, Lonnie Holley, David Huffman, Kerry James Marshall, and Martin Puryear, among others. Meanwhile, the abstract patterning of Alabama’s Gee’s Bend quilters has likewise been transformed into colorful prints. The exhibition includes Huffman’s pyramidal sculpture composed of 650 rubber basketballs. Through Dec. 20 at the Jundt Art

Museum on Gonzaga University’s campus. 10 a.m.–4 p.m. Monday through Saturday. 200 E. Desmet Ave. Free visitor parking. (509) 313-6843.

OCT. 22: BLACK LITURGIES FOR STAYING HUMAN PRESENTS “A COMMUNITY PRACTICE: FEAR & DOUBT” – This community gathering invites nonviolent, intersectional and interfaith meditation and reflection practice. The theme for this month will be Fear & Doubt. The program adapts Cole Arthur Riley’s “Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human” into a type of spiritual “liturgy” that draws quotes and insights from Black intellectuals, ancestors, authors and mentors. It also features some short passages and reflections from the book itself. Professor Rossing from Gonzaga University will be facilitating this gathering. 5:30-6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 22. Liberty Park Library, 402 S. Pittsburg St., Spokane. Free. (509) 444-5300.

Black Lens pickup and distribution: Get on our list!

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

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

THE BLACK LENS

In remembrance

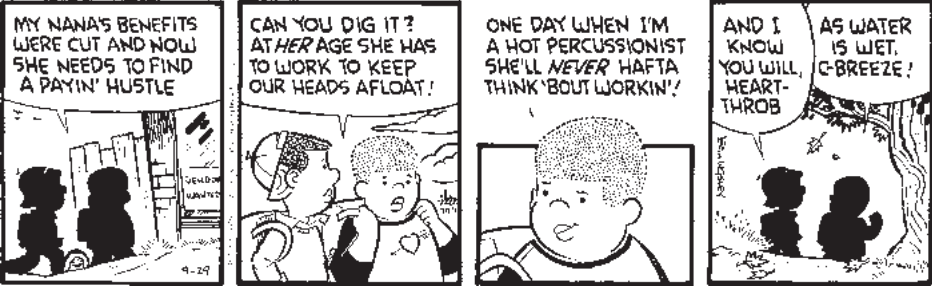
We are offering free obituary services. Email [info@blacklensnews.com](#) with "Obituary" and your loved one's name in the subject line. Please limit obituaries to 400 words or less. A photo of the loved one is encouraged, but not required. We may lightly edit the obituary for brevity and clarity, but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

LEISURE

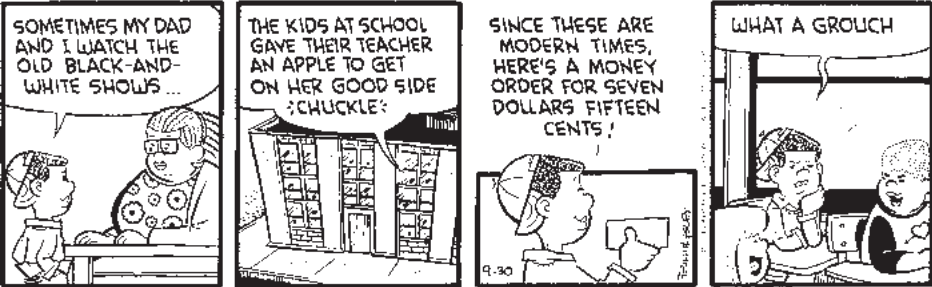
COMICS & QUOTE OF THE MONTH

CURTIS • BY RAY BILLINGSLEY

SEPT. 29



SEPT. 30



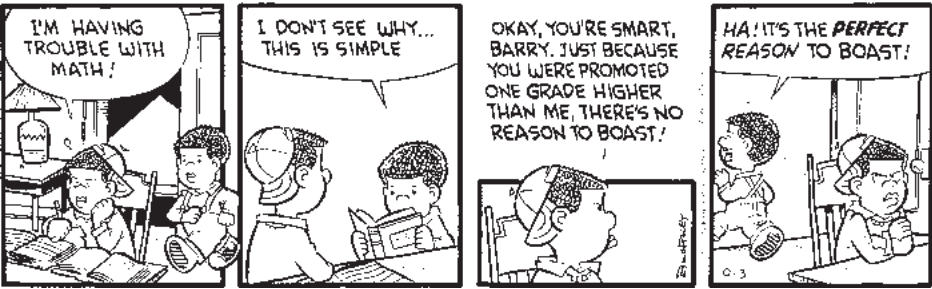
OCT. 1



OCT. 2



OCT. 3



OCT. 4



CRABGRASS • BY TAUHID BONDIA

SEPT. 29



SEPT. 30



OCT. 1



OCT. 2



OCT. 3



OCT. 4



PETS

A KID'S COMIC • BY MJ BETHELY



BLACK POETS SOCIETY



By Jā Corbett-Sparks
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR

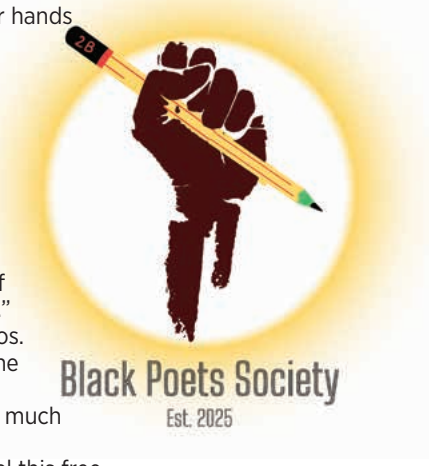


NEW GROWTH

I decided to grow my hair for my birthday last year. There is no symbolism in that at all and as much as I want to, I'm not going to mislead you this time. I focused on how much I lost and I figured it was time for recovery. They don't tell you that the same discipline to rebuild feels like similar to just cutting it all. But off I went, running to my mother:

“Mommy I want for nothing but this gift you gave me at birth. Im sorry I've let strangers play in my hair. I'm sorry I let the stress take the importance away. I'm sorry I settled in looking my worst, when you've instilled your best in me.” Her face softened by my sincerity, Her eyes widened like I've kept cornrows in for a decade and I've finally asked for her to comb it all loose.

8 months later and I see her hands shake when she reaches to detangle my hair. Gently I place my hand on hers. “I’ve got it, Mom. You can trust me. I will wash every first Sunday. I won’t be out long enough for the sun to damage anymore. Please allow me to show off this gift that I got from you.” Everyday I look at the photos. I stare at myself as I do in the mirror. How could I be free with so much missing? I hope my children don’t feel this free... because it’s uncomfortable.



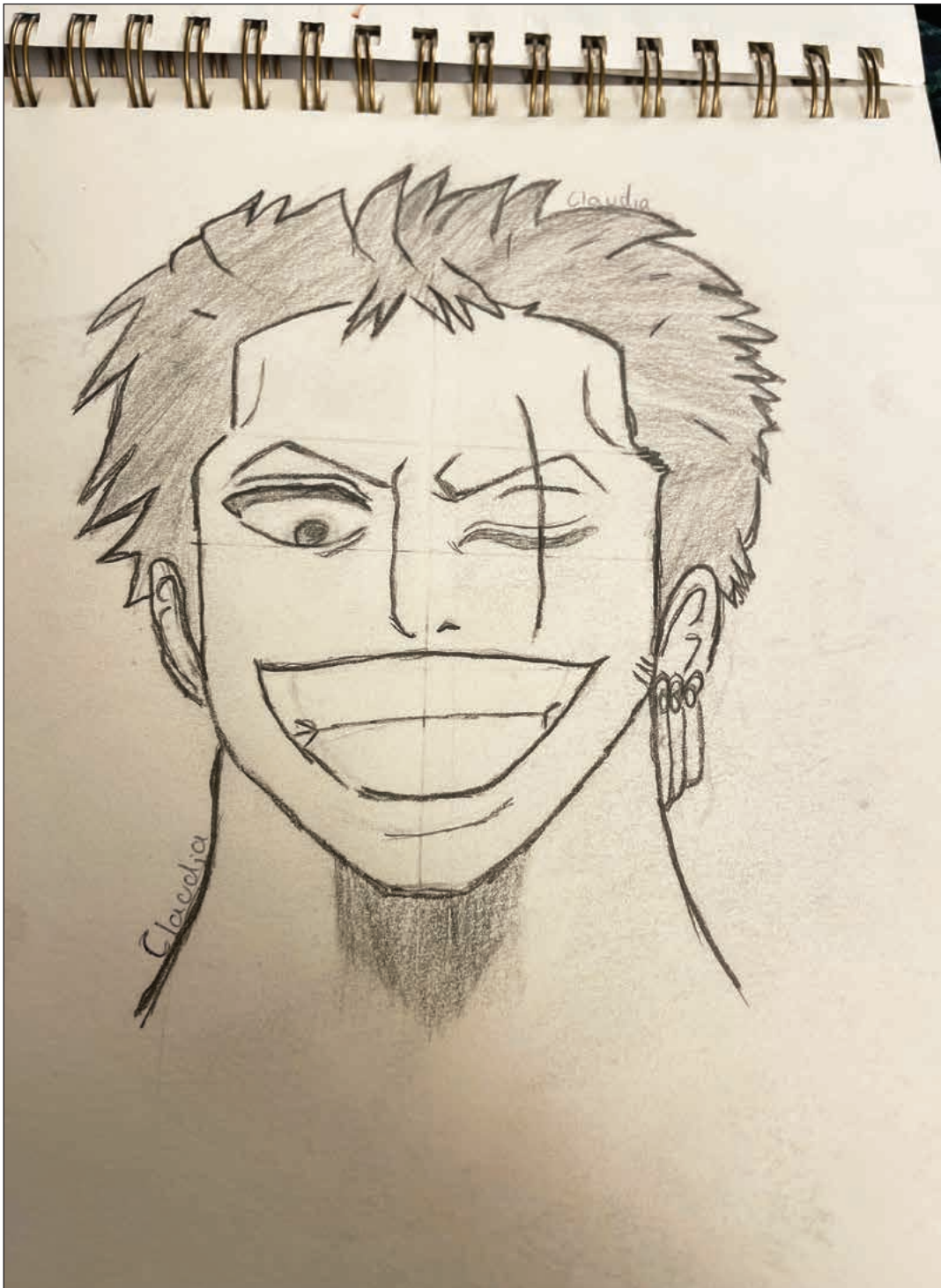
Greetings from Hell

By AJ the Wordsmith
The Black Lens

Greetings from hell
Aj The wordsmith
Wanted to start by saying hi hey yo 🌈. Not quite sure how to put into words the amount of respect 🍌 and appreciation I've rallied, but each day it grows, shoulders looking like atlas, flowers 🌸 of flow
(.mini rap poem >xD)
I give to you with spiritual mental glow
Every day I'm remind that time is felt
I'm Not alone because you and me got BIG DREAMS!!!
I refuse to let anyone see this as some Fincial scheme
but now that another day is gone
Just know it isn't wrong
To think 🤔 this isn't off the dome for show
I'm so grateful 🥰!!!!!!



ART TO INSPIRE



Original anime art by Claudia Musesambili

COURTESY OF CLAUDIA MUSESAMBILI

The Act of Acceptance

To stand before the mirror's face,
And see not flaws, but light and grace.
To hold the past, yet not be bound,
To plant your feet on solid ground.
To hear a voice unlike your own,
And let it speak, let it be known.
To take a hand, though strange it seems,
And walk together, building dreams.
To open doors once closed so tight,
And let love in, let in the light.
To know that pain will fade in time,
That every hill is ours to climb.
To see the scars and not feel shame,
To let go of the need to blame.
To understand that every tear
Has shaped the path that led us here.
Acceptance is a choice we make,
A bridge we build, a step we take.
Not just in others, but within
A place where healing can begin.
It's in the arms that pull you near,
The words that calm a whispered fear.
It's in the space where judgment



By Daniella Musesambili
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



ends,
Where foes may turn to lifelong friends.
For we are more than what we've been,
And change begins deep from within.
When love outweighs the fear we hold,
Acceptance makes the broken whole.

Performative Action



By Donalda Brantley
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



“Out of a mountain of despair, a stone of hope”
Are the words that Martin Luther king jr wrote.
I wear this cross around my neck but never a rope
All these people look at me and think of me as a joke
They still have the mindset of the past
their mind is set like old folks. I keep my head low and voice lower just as I was told.
Don't speak unless spoken to or else the belt would unfold.
Well I started speaking more and then they told me I was “bold”
Brave like the land of the “free” but abide by their rules before they push you overseas
Overnight activities to booster

our longevity but failures to look within only bolster the negativity
You post on your Instagram and maybe your Facebook too
But side eye the black women that you lose to.
Their eyes were watching and We seen em too.
It's hard to face reality
When you realize you're a part of the mentality
You Preach and praise overnight but in the morning you're out of sight
Putting up your white picket fences never wanting to actually fight
You're tired you just want to rest
We get it
You're wishy washy
You're just like the rest

IN A WORLD OF SHADES

By Taysia Jackson
THE BLACK LENS

In a world of shades,
let's pause and reflect,
On a privilege that some may not detect.
White privilege,
a concept oft unseen,
Yet shapes the lives of those in between.

It's not about guilt or pointing blame,
But understanding the rules of life's game.
Born into a world where doors open wide,
Opportunities abound on this privileged side.
A privilege that's inherited,
not earned,
A head start in life, we must discern.
Acknowledging the advantages we receive,

Empathy and compassion, we must believe.
It's not about diminishing one's own worth,
But recognizing the advantages from birth.
To listen, learn, and amplify the voice,
Of those whose struggles are not by choice.
To dismantle systems that perpetuate,
Inequities based on color and fate.
To use our privilege to uplift,
not suppress,

Creating a world that's truly fair and blessed.
So let's educate and challenge the norm,
Break down barriers,
and reform.
Together we can build a future so bright,
Where privilege is shared,
and all have the right.
For understanding is where change begins,
Let's embrace this journey,
let love always win.
No longer blind to the privilege we hold,
Let's stand as allies,
brave and bold.