

THE BLACK LENS

DECEMBER 2025 - VOL. 10 - ISSUE NO. 12

URGENCY OF NOW: A TIME THAT STANDS AND DEMANDS

PASTOR AMOS ATKINSON JR.: BUILDING BLACK WEALTH, ONE BUSINESS AT A TIME

2025 NAACP Community Champion Award Honoree

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

When Pastor Amos Atkinson Jr. arrived in Spokane in November 1997, he came for a state job and a

fresh assignment. What he didn't yet know was that he would become one of the region's most trusted catalysts for Black entrepreneurship—quietly helping scores of small businesses, LLCs,

MORE
Find more Freedom Fund award recipients inside.
PAGE 10

and nonprofits find their footing, their paperwork, and their purpose. Nearly three decades later, Atkinson's impact spans pulpits, board rooms, and kitchen-table business

plans. As senior pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, the oldest Black church in Washington state, and a longtime advocate through the Carl Maxey Center and other community spaces, Atkinson has become a go-to mentor for Black and Brown entrepreneurs across Spokane. He was hired to direct the Small Business

Resource Network. Many entrepreneurs in Spokane's Black community have gleaned from Atkinson's tutelage.

In recognition of that work, he has been named a 2025 NAACP Community Champion Award winner—an honor that reflects

See **ATKINSON, 10**



Atkinson

Spokane NAACP Freedom Fund was equally uniting and inspiring

Damola Adamolekun: Know your worth, believe in your potential

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

Ahead of this year's Freedom Fund Gala, I had the opportunity to sit down with Damola Adamolekun—a standout figure in the business world, the youngest CEO in Red Lobster's history, and the honored guest of the Spokane NAACP on Nov. 15.

What emerged from our conversation was not just a profile in success—but a thoughtful reflection on discipline, self-awareness and the long game of wealth and leadership.

Adamolekun frames much of his ascent through the lens of the Hero's Journey—a classic narrative arc in which the protagonist leaves the familiar, faces trials, gains wisdom, and returns transformed.

Born in Nigeria and migrating to America with his family, Adamolekun witnessed his father restart his medical career from scratch—re-earning his degree in the U.S. after already practicing as a doctor in Africa. That experience left a lasting impression of what sacrifice and perseverance truly look like.

It showed him that adversity isn't an obstacle—it's a call to grow into new seasons.

"You're not deleting past versions of yourself," he says. "You're adding new layers."

As a teen, Adamolekun



COURTESY

Youth Council Adviser Priya Mhlophe stands with other council members as she is awarded the 2025 NAACP President's Award at the NAACP Freedom Fund Gala.

Lisa Gardner, Jaime Stacey and Dr. Melissa Mace stand as Gardner accepts an award at the NAACP Freedom Fund Gala.



By Lisa Gardner
THE BLACK LENS

The 2026 Spokane NAACP Freedom Fund event was a memorable and inspiring occasion for the Spokane community. Widely celebrated as "Spokane Black Community's Biggest Night," it is essential for bringing people from all walks of life together to celebrate community, culture and achievement in vibrant unity.

From a president's perspective, the Freedom Fund gala is much more than an annual gathering—it is a significant moment to highlight the positive work happening across Spokane and to recognize these efforts in a room filled with

over 500 members, sponsors, elected officials, and aspiring youth. These diverse attendees help create an atmosphere of encouragement and pride that drives further progress.

This year's event honored five outstanding Community Champions: Amos Atkinson, Virla Spencer, Sherry Merritt, Anna Franklin and Kerra Bower. Each of these individuals has demonstrated exceptional dedication to service and leadership, making tangible differences in others' lives.

The Humanitarian Award was presented to Kitara Johnson-Jones in memory of

See **GARDNER, 12**

WHEN AN ELDER DIES, A LIBRARY BURNS

The living archive of Professor Terry Buffington

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

"A healthy community is an informed community, and my job is to promote, educate, and preserve Black American history [and our] contributions to this country." — Terry Buffington

Professor Terry Buffington carries Mississippi with her—through her archives, her teaching, and her unwavering devotion to telling the truth about Black America. A sixth-generation Mississippian, oral historian, anthropologist, and activist, Buffington

now lives in Pullman, Washington, where she serves as a humanities scholar at Washington State University.

She is also the president and founder of the Terry Buffington Foundation, home to the Terry Buffington Papers, a globally accessible digital archive housed at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill documenting the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement.

Her guiding philosophy is simple and profound: "When an old person dies, with us goes the library."

For Buffington, preserving

memory is not academic. It's a mandate.

Buffington's activism began young. Raised in the Jim Crow South, she was shaped by a community that moved in unity and collective purpose. She remembers the closeness of those early bonds and the way solidarity fortified them against fear.

"All of us went to church together. We were baptized in the same churches. Our parents knew each other. We moved as a group."

It was within that rooted, interwoven community that she

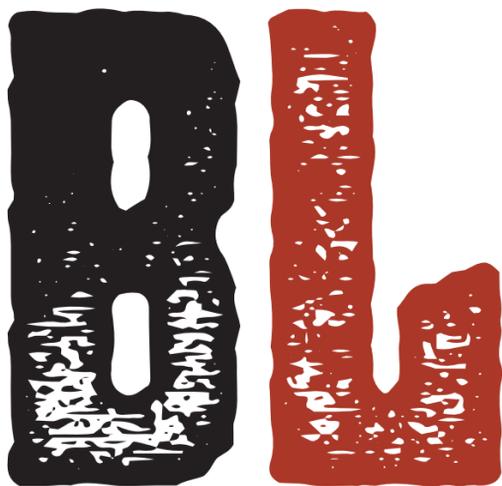
See **BUFFINGTON, 13**



COURTESY

Professor Terry Buffington, in blue dress, arrives with son Kwasi Buffington, at the NAACP Freedom Fund Gala in November.

URGENCY OF NOW



NEWS

BLACKLENS.NEWS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Mississippi Dems break Republicans' six-year state senate supermajority

Democrats in Mississippi have declared the state a "battleground state" after breaking the Republican supermajority in the Senate for the first time since 2019.

After a federal court ordered the state redraw its legislative maps under the Voting Rights Act, voters flipped two previously Republican seats in addition to once House seat. Of the 52 representatives, Republicans now hold 34 seats, one less than the 35 votes needed for a supermajority.

Mississippi Democratic Party Chairman Cheikh Taylor credited the flipped seats to the federal government's intervention in changing the legislative districts.

"Last night's victory proves that Mississippi is no longer a foregone conclusion—we are a battleground state," Mississippi Democratic Party Chairman Cheikh Taylor said in a statement to the Mississippi Free Press.

U.S. Coast Guard reclassifies swastikas, nooses as hate symbols

The U.S. Coast Guard on Nov. 20 released a statement prohibiting the display of nooses, swastikas or any "divisive or hate symbols and flags co-opted or adopted by hate-based groups."

The memo came after the Washington Post reported the Coast Guard, earlier in November, had a written policy set to take effect in December that described the symbols as "potentially divisive," a change from previous classifications. Widespread criticism followed the report, noting that the emblems have strong ties to racist and antisemitic groups.

The revised policy, issued Nov. 20, bars the display of divisive or hate symbols, while the earlier revision stopped short, instead noting Coast Guard members could take steps to cover them from public view, but that the rule didn't apply to private Coast Guard locations.

Proposal would let racial discrimination victims avoid forced arbitration

U.S. Reps. Hank Johnson, D-Ga., and Wesley Bell, D-Mo., and U.S. Sen Cory Booker, D-N.J., introduced legislation that would allow workers and consumers to skirt around arbitration clauses when it comes to cases involving racial discrimination.

Proponents argue arbitration favors corporations and companies while keeping claims from public view. Bell says such claims should be able to be heard in a public forum.

"People who face racial discrimination deserve their day in court. They shouldn't be pushed into a private process that was designed to protect corporations, not workers," Bell said in a statement.

From wire reports

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FROM THE EDITOR

Saying the quiet part out loud

As we close the year, one thing rises louder than ever: we are witnessing disguises become bold displays. It's happening in our politics, in our communities, in our institutions, and in the quiet moments when power is tested.

What used to be unsaid or veiled — the quiet part — is now a piercing distress signal. And rather than turn a blind eye, panic, or retreat, we must face it. Not just with concern and/or outrage, but with a plan. And equal boldness.

In a year marked by public spectacles, policy overhauls, and power plays, we've watched leaders say the things once buried in subtext. The quiet parts have been said out loud — and with it, have exposed the systems that rely on complicity and ambiguity to stay intact. That exposure, painful as it may be, is not a curse. It is a mirror.

The allegory in the movie *Wicked*: For Good offers a stark example.



By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS EDITOR



Privileged deuteragonist Glinda, donned in pristine and delicate pink, finally "choosing" to do good — but at the expense of the underdog protagonist, Elphaba, cursed by her green skin and cloaked in black; she had been left with no viable choice for survival, fallen prey to lies and exploitation. Even when intentions appear noble, systems of power are often managed by deceit, leaving

the vulnerable as sacrificial lambs. Justice advocates are disposable by those with choices that keep them safe, comfortable, and in power. Choosing good without choosing justice perpetuates the cycle of harm and reinforces duplicity.

But when you can see clearly, you must speak clearly.

Saying the quiet part out loud, for the underdog, means refusing to tiptoe around hard, ugly truths. It means acknowledging — plainly and unapologetically — what is not acceptable:

- It is not OK to go along to get along and tolerate dishonesty.
- It is not OK to "play in the peoples' faces" with empty words and performative gestures.
- It is not OK to punish or begrudge accountability.

It is not OK to compromise fairness in exchange for proximity to power.

Saying the quiet part out loud is a declaration. It is the struggle necessary for

progress. It's a rejection of the idea that politeness is more important than truth. It is risk. A disrupter of confusion. A spotlight on corruption. A refusal to let distortion of truth silence our voices.

Saying the quiet part out loud is the seed of justice. As the year ends, we must unpack it, analyze it, and get strategic. It is how we hold leaders accountable, how we protect our communities, and how we challenge the erosion of integrity. It is a moral imperative that says conscience and truth matter, even when it's inconvenient. Especially when it's inconvenient.

Unchecked power — whether in small rooms or global arenas — corrodes us all. That's why saying the quiet parts — that we have been conditioned to accept just to get by — must become a new posture. One of bold clarity and direct truth for the sake of real change, whether big or small.

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In November, The Black Lens completed a major technology upgrade, consolidating all donations and subscriptions into one unified platform: Partners of The Black Lens on Givebutter. This shift streamlines our processes and strengthens our long-term sustainability as an independent nonprofit news organization.

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

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The Black Lens is a not-for-profit, independent newspaper that focuses on all aspects of the Black community in Eastern Washington. The Black Lens editor reports to its own board of directors, which was set up under the guidance of the founders' family. As journalism calls for increased transparency, The Black Lens believes in being transparent about its work. The Black Lens is funded through foundations, donors, subscribers and the community. That funding pays for the work of the editors, reporters, photographers, designers, correspondents and columnists who produce The Black Lens newspaper, website and other platforms.

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

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CULTURE

TAKE A HARD LOOK

BLACK PRISONERS CAUCUS

By Anthony Fain
THE BLACK LENS

Is prison truly about justice, or is it just another form of modernized slavery?

As a society, we often claim that the prison system is about rehabilitation, accountability, and deterrence, but when you look closely that narrative crumbles. There is no rehabilitation in a system that criminalizes my Black skin. There is no fairness in a system where my culture itself is treated as criminal. And there is no true justice when punishment is determined not by the act committed, but by the color of the person who committed it.

Who decides what punishment is enough? Who gave the system the authority to say that justice must always end in a prison sentence? When you fight for equality, you begin to see that all forms of punishment start to look the same no matter who you are – but let's be clear: Black people are punished more harshly, sentenced more severely, and judged more cruelly than others for the very same crimes. That is not an accident. That is a design.

We are told that mass incarceration is a result of personal choices, that crime is self-inflicted and prison is simply the natural consequence. But I'm here to tell you that is not true. The system was never built to serve us equally. It was built to enslave us in new forms, to trap generations of Black youth before they are even

old enough to fully understand the world around them. Before their brains are even fully developed, children are funneled into a pipeline that leads directly from underfunded schools to overcrowded prisons.

Take a hard look at the sentences handed down to our youth. Teenagers – children – are being tried as adults and condemned to 50, 60, even 100 years behind bars. Think about that: a child who has barely learned who they are is told their life is over before it has truly begun. What does that say about the so-called rehabilitation we claim to value?

How can you rehabilitate someone when they haven't been habilitated? How can you rehabilitate someone when you deny them any chance of redemption? The prison system does not rehabilitate – it warehouses human beings. It profits from their confinement. It targets their disenfranchisement – those already living on the margins. And it preys most viciously on Black communities. Families are torn apart, futures are stolen, and entire neighborhoods are destabilized under the weight of incarceration.

And when we look at the statistics, the truth becomes impossible to deny: Black people are imprisoned at vastly higher rates than white people for the same offenses. That is not about crime. That is about control.

The system says it is about justice, but what justice is there in a system where punishment is de-



termined by zip codes, by school district, and by skin color? What justice exists when poverty is criminalized, when survival is treated as a crime, when the cycle of oppression is passed down from one generation to the next?

The present system in America does not need minor reforms – it needs to be rebuilt from the ground up. It must be restructured in a way that truly meets the needs of society, not just the demands of profits, punishment, and political power. It must shift from being a system that victimizes to one that heals; a system that does not strip people of their humanity but recognizes it; a system that invests in opportunity rather than incarceration, in education rather than the execution of futures.

Imagine a system where a mistake does not mean permanent exile from society. Imagine a system where accountability is met with resources, support, and a pathway back – not just a cell, a number, and a lifelong stigma. Imagine a system where young people are not discarded but mentored, where their potential is nurtured rather than destroyed.

We cannot keep accepting mass incarceration as normal. We cannot keep looking away while entire communities are enslaved

under the guise of justice. We cannot keep justifying a system that was designed to oppress and continues to do exactly that.

This is not just a Black issue. This is a human issue. Because when you criminalize one community, you endanger every community. When you devalue one group of people, you weaken the moral foundation of the entire society. And when you allow injustice to go unchecked, it spreads until no one is safe.

Prison, as it exists today, is not about safety. It is not about justice. It is not about rehabilitation. It is about control. It is about profit. And it is about continuing a legacy of slavery by another name.

So I ask again: take a hard look. Who benefits from this system? Who is destroyed by it? And what kind of society do we want to build – one that punishes endlessly or one that heals and restores; one that enslaves or one that liberates?

The answers are in front of us, but it will take courage to confront them, and even more courage to change them. Our prison system does not just need reform – it needs transformation. Because justice is not cages. Justice is not slavery in disguise. Justice is freedom. Justice is equality. Justice is humanity. Justice is for all.

And until we rebuild a system that reflects that truth, none of us can truly say justice lives in the land of the free.

Anthony Fain is the Black Prisoners Caucus president for the Airway Heights Corrections Center.

PULSE ON DEMOCRACY

Key Outcomes

Voter turnout in Spokane County was 39.71%, with 148,064 ballots cast out of 372,866 registered voters.

On the statewide ballot, Senate Joint Resolution 8201 – which permits investment of the state's long-term care funds in private company stocks – passed in Spokane County by a narrow margin: 51.47% approved vs. 48.50% rejected.

Spokane & Local Contests

In the Spokane City Council races:

District 1 (Northeast): Sarah Dixit defeated Jonathan Bingle with roughly 50.65% of the vote to 49.35%.

District 2 (South): Kate Telis won decisively over Alejandro Barrientos, 59.91% to 40.09%.

District 3 (Northwest): Zack Zappone was elected, beating Christopher Savage 54.25% to 45.75%.

In other major Spokane races:

For Municipal Court Judge – Position 2: Mary C. Logan won with 59.22% of the vote.

For Municipal Court Judge – Position 3: Gloria Ochoa-Bruck prevailed with a strong 74.93%.

Spokane-Area & Other Municipalities

In Spokane Valley City Council races, incumbents held onto seats; Mike Kelly was the only new council member elected.

Several smaller municipalities and school districts also recorded changes:

In the Central Valley School District, Allen Skidmore and Pam Orebaugh won District 2 and District 5 seats respectively.

In the Cheney School District, incumbents held their seats comfortably.

In other cities like Liberty Lake, Washington, Medical Lake, Washington, Millwood, Washington, and several small towns, mayoral and council seats saw mainly incumbent or uncontested victories.

Ballot Measures & Major Tax Proposals

On the statewide ballot, Senate Joint Resolution 8201 – which would allow investing the state's long-term care funds in private company stocks – passed in Spokane County. Vote was 51.48% yes to 48.52% no.

In Spokane Public Schools and Spokane Parks & Recreation's joint plan Together Spokane, voters approved both the \$240 million parks levy and the \$200 million school bond.

The parks levy passed with roughly 54.8% support.

The school bond showed about 60–61% support, above its 60% threshold.

Education & School-Board Results

In the SPS Board race, voters had on the ballot Spokane Public Schools Proposition 1 (the school bond). As noted, the bond passed with support over 60%.

In other districts around the county:

Mead School District elected Tim Woodworth to its School Board.

Central Valley School District saw at least one new board member – Allen Skidmore (District 2) – win a seat. Another Central Valley seat (District 5) went to Pam Orebaugh.

In smaller districts – including rural and suburban districts – results were mixed: some districts had levy or bond proposals; others only board-member contests.

IN HER WORDS

Disproportionality among races should be a starting point, not a finish line for policy and program implementation

By Goldy Brown III
THE BLACK LENS

Many community leaders have argued that when they see racial disparity, they see racism. However, the debate surrounding racial disproportionality—particularly in the context of social issues, policing, and criminal justice—can sometimes harm Black Americans in several important ways.

1. Stereotyping and Stigmatization

A strong emphasis on racial disproportionality can unintentionally reinforce stereotypes about Black Americans being more prone to criminality or negative behaviors. When statistical disparities are presented without sufficient context, they can perpetuate harmful generalizations, leading to discrimination and bias.

2. Neglect of Systemic Issues

Focusing solely on disproportionality may divert attention from deeper systemic factors that contribute to racial disparities, such as poverty, limited access to quality education, and the enduring effects of historical injustices. This narrow focus can hinder meaningful efforts to address the root causes of inequality.

3. Policy Misinterpretation

Policymakers may misread disproportionality data and respond with punitive rather than supportive measures. For example, increasing police presence in predominantly Black neighborhoods might be seen as a solution, even though the real need lies in community investment, education, and restorative justice initiatives.

4. Marginalization of Individual Experiences

When discussions rely too heavily on broad statistics, the personal experiences

of Black Americans can be overshadowed. Reducing individuals to numerical representations risks minimizing their unique voices and lived experiences in conversations about race and justice.

5. Strain on Community Relations

Public discourse framed around racial disproportionality can also strain intergroup relations. It may lead to social tension or resentment, particularly if data on racial differences in crime and policing are perceived as justifying discrimination or unequal treatment.

6. Psychological Impact

Constant exposure to racially charged narratives around crime and disparity can take a psychological toll on Black Americans. These narratives can foster feelings of disenfranchisement, anxiety, and frustration with how society perceives their communities.

As a society, proportionality should be viewed as the goal, not the starting assumption. In 2018, African Americans represented approximately 13 to 14 percent of the U.S. population and, for the first time in history, comprised the same percentage of the American middle class—a milestone worthy of national recognition. However, when developing policies to address racial academic achievement gaps, prison reform, or other areas of disproportionality, we must remain open to critical evaluation. Disparities should not automatically be attributed to racism; instead, they should serve as a starting point for deeper inquiry into both systemic and individual factors. Only through this balanced approach can we work toward equitable outcomes across racial groups in both positive and negative domains.

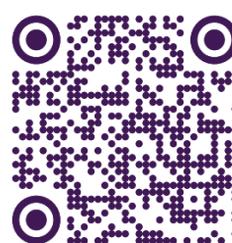
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NEWS AND POLITICS

LET'S REINVEST AND PLAN TOGETHER
FOR OUR EAST CENTRAL NEIGHBORS

CARL MAXEY CENTER CORNER

When Sandy Williams began looking for a building to house the Carl Maxey Center, she was intentional in picking a space along Fifth Avenue in Spokane's East Central Neighborhood. East Central is one of the largest neighborhoods in Spokane, and the 5th Avenue corridor has long been a gathering place, a vibrant heart of the community that has historically been amongst the most diverse in Spokane. Featuring historic churches, community-based organizations, and long-standing businesses, beloved by community members, but not without its own struggles.

Sandy was intentional about being part of the "heart," building solutions, and addressing the concerns of neighborhood residents and Black community members from within the neighborhood.

Many of the struggles



By Jyllisa Winkler
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



community members continue to face today can be attributed to historic policies, including redlining, racial covenants, and displacement due to the purchase of and destruction of homes for the completion of the I-90 highway in the 60's and again with the North South Corridor set to be completed in 2030. In 2023, the Carl Maxey

Center's 5th Avenue Forward initiative received a grant from the Community Connectors Program to join a cohort addressing community reconnection in 15 cities across the country with similar histories of disruption, underinvestment, and divisive infrastructure in communities of color.

Our community, luckily, has completed an important step, championed by Sandy. The passing of SB5853 creates a pathway for the redevelopment of surplus land purchased by WSDOT. To learn more about SB5853 and

what it means for East Central, visit the 5th Avenue Forward website at 5thavenueforward.org.

Over the summer, our work continued with a community-driven study of our local sidewalk infrastructure, connecting with East Central residents to share their experiences and top priorities via a quick survey and an open house co-hosted by CMC, the 5th Avenue Forward team, and the City of Spokane's ReFive planning project team.

Our goal is to be a resource that helps people know about and engage

with opportunities when they are available, and to inform their top priorities or concerns. If you work, live, play, or pray in the East Central Neighborhood, if your family once called East Central home, if you frequently visit businesses or organizations along 5th avenue, and especially if you are a resident of East Central – we need your voice to influence the plans and reinvestment coming to the neighborhood in the next decade. Some changes may take years to fulfill, which can be frustrating; after all, our

neighborhood deserves safety, well-being, and investment now, but if we never start the work, our children will be doing and saying the same. Your engagement now begins the investment in the next generations.

To learn more, visit the 5th Avenue Forward website at 5thavenueforward.org. Be sure to check out the "Get Connected" page, which lists upcoming events and engagement opportunities. Fill out the form at the bottom of the page to stay connected and to be part of the reinvestment.

CARL MAXEY
CENTER

GETTY IMAGES

Attendees listen as California Gov. Gavin Newsom speaks Nov. 8 at a rally in Houston, Texas. Gov. Newsom rallied with Democratic lawmakers just days after the passage of California's Proposition 50 to counter Gov. Greg Abbott and Texas Republicans' redistricting efforts. Later in the month, a three-judge federal panel ruled that Texas cannot use its newly drawn congressional map in the 2026 elections.

NAACP celebrates
major legal victory in
Texas redistricting case

The NAACP is celebrating a major win for voting rights after a three-judge federal panel ruled that Texas cannot use its newly drawn congressional map in the 2026 elections, a news release from the national association stated. The court found strong evidence that the map was an unconstitutional racial gerrymander.

This decision follows a lawsuit the NAACP filed in August 2025 alongside the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, arguing that Texas's mid-decade redistricting was intentionally designed to weaken Black voting power and strengthen white political control.

NAACP President and CEO Derrick Johnson issued the following statement: "The state of Texas is only 40 percent white, but white voters control more than 73 percent of the state's congressional seats. It's clear that Texas's mid-decade redistricting was racially motivated, aiming to reduce the number of members of Congress who represent Black communities. That is unconstitutional.

"We applaud today's ruling. This is a victory for the voters of Texas and for the fight to protect democracy nationwide. The fight against extremist efforts to manipulate redistricting is far from over – and we plan to stay engaged all the way. Democracy is at stake."

The ruling confirms what the NAACP has long argued, the release stated: Texas' map was a deliberate attempt to silence Black voters ahead of a critical election year.

The NAACP will continue pushing Texas to adopt a fair and lawful map that reflects the state's diversity and protects every voter's voice, the release continued. The organization also recently mobilized voters in California to pass Proposition 50, a measure that strengthens protections for Black and brown representation in Congress.

In addition to the Texas case, the NAACP is pursuing voting-rights litigation in Missouri and in counties nationwide to challenge racially motivated gerrymandering.

To learn more about the NAACP's voting-rights work, visit naacp.org.

About the NAACP

The NAACP advocates, agitates, and litigates for the civil rights of Black Americans. Our work is rooted in grassroots activism, built by generations of civil-rights pioneers, and carried forward by today's movement leaders. From classrooms and courtrooms to city halls and Congress, our nationwide membership fights to end race-based discrimination and secure political and social power for marginalized communities. We are committed to creating a world without racism, where Black people thrive in equitable and safe communities.

NOTE: The Legal Defense Fund, also called NAACP-LDF, was founded in 1940 as part of the NAACP, but now operates as a fully separate and independent organization.

LOCAL POLITICS IN BRIEF

Community expresses
concern over Islamophobic
statements; City Council
passes biennial budget

From staff reports

The Spokane Islamic Center, Muslims for Community Action and Support and the Jaffaria Community express deep concern regarding recent public statements made by Spokane Valley City Councilwoman Jessica Yeager, who publicly identified herself as a "proud Islamophobe" and declared Islam has "no place in Spokane Valley."

These comments, made by an elected official, are irresponsible, harmful, and unbecoming of the office she holds, a joint news release stated.

"Islamophobia is not a political position—it is discrimination," it continued. "When an elected leader engages in rhetoric that targets an entire religious community, it undermines the safety, dignity and belonging of Muslim residents. Spokane Valley is home to a diverse Muslim community that contributes to the region's civic life, economy, and culture."

"We live here, work here, raise families here, and are committed to building a safe and inclusive community for everyone."

The groups called on Councilwoman Yeager to issue a public apology and to acknowledge the harm caused by her statements.

"Leaders must be held to a standard that reflects respect, responsibility, and a commitment to the well-being of all constituents," the release said.

Spokane City
Council votes on
2025 city budget

The Spokane City Council voted 5-2 on the 2025-26 Mid-Biennial Modification Budget. They approved an amendment proposed by Council President Betsy Wilkerson and Council Member Paul Dillon, which emphasizes minimal staff cuts and allocates funds to the library, City Cable 5 and the public defender's office.

In a statement issued by Council President Wilkerson early Monday morning, she said, "I value the Brown Administration's partnership in this year's budget revision. My fellow Council Members and I have worked closely with the Mayor on the proposed changes. From my perspective, the council has made sacrifices, as have other city departments, and we are reallocating funds to essential initiatives that might otherwise be underfunded."

"I am grateful for the collaboration and compromise that went into this budget modification," said Council Member Paul Dillon added. "In a year that demanded hard and painful choices, this amendment supports the mutual goals of restoring libraries while minimizing cuts to labor. This budget takes a balanced approach, and I look forward to already beginning discussions on how to set us up for success in the next biennium."

In June 2024, the City Council switched from an annual budget process to a two-year biennial budget for the City of Spokane, which was effective Jan. 1, 2025. The council adopted its first biennial budget last year, and this ordinance is a mid-biennial adjustment provided for under state law. The modification amends the biennial budget effective Jan. 1, 2026, and includes necessary changes to revenue projections and expenditures for 2026, all of which are necessary for the city to meet its statutory obligation to provide a balanced budget.

WA wins lawsuit to
protect libraries,
museums,
programs

The Washington state Attorney General's Office on Nov. 21 won a lawsuit to protect four federal agencies that provide services and funding supporting public libraries and muse-

ums, workers, and minority-owned businesses nationwide. The U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island granted a motion for summary judgment brought by Attorney General Nick Brown and a coalition of 20 other attorneys general, a new release from the state AG's office said.

The court's order permanently blocks the Trump administration from eliminating these four agencies:

- The Institute of Museum and Library Services
- The Minority Business Development Agency
- The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service
- The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

"Today's victory means that Washingtonians will continue to benefit from the work these agencies do to support our libraries, protect workers' rights, and promote minority-owned businesses," Brown said in the release. "It also reaffirms that the President can't reverse the will of the people and their elected representatives with the stroke of a pen."

In March, the Trump administration issued an executive order that would dismantle federal agencies created by Congress that collectively provide hundreds of millions of dollars for programs in every state. In April, Brown joined the coalition in suing the Trump administration to stop the administration's elimination of IMLS, MBDA, and FMCS.

Brown and the coalition argued the executive order's elimination of all four agencies violates the Constitution and the Administrative Procedure Act by attempting to override Congress. In its decision on the motion for summary judgment, the District Court sided with Brown and the coalition.

BUSINESS

SOLEFUL STEPS: HOW EUGENE BURGESS IS CLEARING THE PATH FOR SPOKANE YOUTH

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

When Eugene Burgess talks about shoes, he's not talking about fashion—he's talking about dignity, access, and the belief that every young person deserves to step into their future without barriers tied to poverty. As the founder of Soleful Steps, a new nonprofit dedicated to providing quality footwear and essential resources to youth in need, Burgess is building an organization rooted in representation, access, and community uplift.

Born in New Jersey and raised as the middle child in a single-parent household, Burgess grew up knowing what it meant to go without. One pair of shoes had to survive the school year and every season of sport.



SOLEFUL STEPS

That experience shaped him. "I felt it was always important for me, as I got older, to have a goal for myself—to never be in this position as an adult," he says. "I want to be able to provide for myself, provide for my family, and then those around me."

Sports offered him both an outlet and a pathway. Football, basketball, and track became more than activities—they became systems of discipline and access that opened doors. "I've always said growing up that I'm going to utilize sports as my vehicle," Burgess explains. "But I realized that no matter how

talented I was in sports, I couldn't get there without my education." He learned early that athletic ability might open the door, but education—and character—kept it open.

After college, military service, and a career in Southern California, Burgess settled in Spokane, where he has coached high school sports for more than a decade. Through coaching, he saw firsthand how a lack of basic necessities—like appropriate shoes—affects young people. Kids withdraw. They hide. They sit out activities. Confidence begins at the bottom: with the ability to stand

comfortably and proudly among peers.

"There's no such thing as losing," he often tells the student-athletes he mentors. "Either you are winning or you are learning." That mindset is now the heartbeat of Soleful Steps. The organization received its nonprofit determination letter in February 2025 and is steadily building its foundation—developing inventory, strengthening partnerships with Spokane Public Schools and Parks and Recreation, connecting with community centers, and preparing for broad program outreach.

His long-term vision is



Burgess

bold. He sees Soleful Steps becoming a trusted, citywide resource that families, schools, and youth programs can rely on instantly—not just for footwear, but for clothing, coats, gloves, hats, and even food support. "I want to be that dependent in the community where, if families, community centers, or schools say a kid needs something, 30 minutes I'm there," he says. He imagines a responsive, barrier-free system of support where youth don't wait weeks for help—they receive it when they need it most.

For Burgess, representation is essential. Young people, especially Black

youth, need to see models of service, leadership, and generosity reflected back at them. Soleful Steps is not only about material goods; it is about identity, belonging, and the belief that every young person deserves to feel seen and supported. "What I want these kids to know," he says, "is that they are in control of their future, and learning—whether in school or in life—is the foundation that gets them there."

Soleful Steps may be new, but its mission is already clear: eliminate barriers, expand access, and surround young people with the community care that allows them to thrive. As Spokane continues to grow, Burgess hopes to strengthen collaboration across organizations, reduce silos, and build a city where youth have what they need to succeed.

Because when a young person receives what they need—without shame, delay, or judgment—they don't just walk toward their future.

They step into it with confidence.

Building Black wealth

The legacy of Dr. Claud Anderson's PowerNomics (Part 3)

By Edmond W. Davis
FOR THE BLACK LENS

"In a race-based capitalist society, it's not what you know — it's what you own."

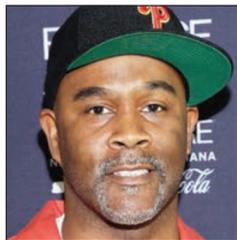
In a race-based capitalist society, it's not what you know — it's what you own. Dr. Claud Anderson makes this point crystal clear: knowledge without ownership is dependency. Ownership means control. And control means survival. If you don't own land, capital, businesses, or media platforms, you are at the mercy of those who do. For Black America, this reality has defined our economic condition for centuries. Anderson's framework of PowerNomics is not merely a critique — it is a blueprint for reversing that condition.

Socio-Cultural Layer 1: Race-Based Capitalism

The American economy has always been racialized. From its inception, it was engineered to preserve white wealth. Dr. Anderson reminds us that the U.S. Constitution itself functioned as an "affirmative action plan for whites." Property rights, voting laws, and inheritance structures were all designed to lock Black people out of wealth-building while enshrining white economic dominance. Fast forward to the 20th century and we see the same story: redlining, exclusion from Social Security in its earliest form, and racially biased lending practices. To pretend America is "color-blind" in its economic system is to ignore its DNA.

Socio-Cultural Layer 2: Education's Limits Without Economy

Education, while essential, is not enough on its own. Degrees without assets mean dependency on someone else's paycheck. Anderson critiques the overemphasis placed on education as the single solution to inequality. You can earn multiple degrees, but if your community doesn't own businesses, banks, or land, then the educated must go begging for jobs from others. In truth, education must be paired with economic infrastructure. Knowledge should be a tool that fuels ownership, not a substitute for it. Otherwise, as Anderson argues, education without an economy only reinforces the cycle of dependency.



By Edmond W. Davis
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



Socio-Cultural Layer 3: Media Ownership

Narratives shape economics. If you do not own your image, someone else will distort it for their gain. From minstrel shows to modern-day stereotypes in film, music, and news, Black Americans have historically been portrayed in ways that undermine economic agency. Anderson insists that owning media outlets — newspapers, radio, television, and now digital platforms — is as vital as owning factories. Controlling how our stories are told creates dignity, unity, and trust. Without it, even our economic wins can be erased or minimized in the public imagination.

Socio-Cultural Layer 4: Economic Ecosystems

The heart of PowerNomics lies in building economic ecosystems. These are systems where communities produce, distribute, and consume their own goods and services. Currently, the Black dollar circulates in the community for only six hours before leaving. Compare that to Jewish, Asian, or white communities, where the same dollar circulates 10 to 12 times before it exits. This short circulation is an economic hemorrhage. Building businesses that serve our own communities — grocery stores, banks, clinics, schools — ensures that dollars stay longer, multiplying their impact before leaving.

Socio-Cultural Layer 5: Black Labor, White Wealth

Anderson's earlier work, Black Labor, White Wealth, laid the foundation for understanding how this imbalance was created. For centuries, Black labor fueled white



Claud Anderson

prosperity — from cotton fields to industrial factories — while Black families were denied the opportunity to accumulate assets. Even today, industries like sports and entertainment profit disproportionately from Black talent, but the ownership structures remain overwhelmingly white. PowerNomics is about flipping that equation so that Black labor begins to build Black wealth.

Solutions: The Five Floors

Dr. Anderson's solutions can be summarized in what he calls the Five Floors of Power:

Community: Build local manufacturing, service enterprises, and cooperative ventures to recirculate dollars.

Politics: Push for Black land trusts, tax incentives, and exclusive development zones that give our entrepreneurs first access.

Courts/Police: Use the legal system to fight for reparations domestically while pressing claims internationally under human rights law.

Media: Expand ownership of Black digital platforms, streaming networks, radio stations, and print outlets to reclaim our narrative.

Education: Reframe education so that every level — from elementary to university — ties directly to entrepreneurship and wealth creation.

Final Closing

Dr. Claud Anderson gave us the blueprint. But blueprints mean nothing without builders. The question is not whether PowerNomics works — the question is whether we will work it. Each generation has a responsibility: to move beyond symbolic victories and claim structural ownership. We must treat wealth not as an abstract dream but as a mandate of survival. If America is truly a race-based capitalist society, then building Black wealth is not just an economic option — it is a cultural necessity, a political strategy, and a moral obligation.

Men of color in motion

Spotlighting the leaders shaping Spokane's future

By James Smith
THE BLACK LENS

Men of Color in Motion is a featured series dedicated to highlighting the men of color whose vision, work, and leadership are shaping Spokane's local economy. These are the business owners, innovators, entrepreneurs, and community builders who are redefining success on their own terms. Through this series, we explore their achievements, personal journeys, and the obstacles they navigate—set against the broader backdrop of persistent stereotypes and systemic challenges.

My goal is to bring visibility, nuance, and pride to stories that too often go untold. By presenting a fuller, more accurate picture of leadership in our community, I aim to honor the real impact these men make every day in business, mentorship, and community investment.

Why This Series Matters

Too often, narratives about men of color focus narrowly on struggle rather than success. Men of Color in Motion seeks to shift that lens—uplifting stories of excellence, perseverance, and innovation. These profiles reveal complex, multidimensional lives and highlight individuals who are not only contributing to Spokane's growth but laying foundations for future generations.

This work aligns deeply with our newspaper's mission: to amplify underrepresented voices, reflect the true diversity of our readership, and ensure our community sees itself fully and accurately represented. More than a series, this is an opportunity to inform, inspire, and remind Spokane that brilliance and leadership are thriving right here among us.

Q&A WITH JOSEPH PERSON

Q: Joseph, can you tell us how your journey with Men's Wearhouse began and what inspired you to enter this line of work?

Joseph Person: "I've done a plethora of things in my life, but to end up at Men's Wearhouse, selling clothing and working with the public—I guess you can say it's kind of my love. I like to work

with the public. My very first job was at Miller's Outpost in California, a Levi Outlet store. I also worked in college at a sporting goods store in Sacramento. So it's just something that goes pretty easy for me, being able to work with the community and connect through where I work."

Q: What part of the work intrigues you the most?

"Definitely the diversity of people I come in contact with—their stories. I meet them in crucial times: their best moments or sometimes their most depressing. They're getting married, graduating college. I get to speak with them, connect, and give a brief piece of my own story. That does something for me."

Q: What has motivated you to stay and grow within the company?

"I like the way the company is structured. I've been with them seven years. They try to be involved with diverse cultures and the community. After the pandemic, when they called me back, I was happy to return. The company restructured things, and I liked what they did. So coming back was a slam dunk. I could see myself moving up."

Q: Who or what shaped your early ambitions?

"As far as wanting to be my best self—that's my father, my grandfather, my mother. They instilled believing in yourself, hard work, perseverance, looking at the positive. Those are real life lessons."

Q: Was there a defining moment that redirected your path?

"Before Men's Wearhouse, I was a bounty hunter. I was on a fugitive recovery team for almost ten years. Even in that line of work—serving warrants—connecting with people and having compassion went a long way. That made me want to get into something where I could still connect with people, but in a different way."

Q: What challenges did you face early on?

"Most people's problems come from themselves. Things that looked like they might slow me down—I slowed myself down. I don't let stuff get in my way. It took me a couple of years to think like that. I don't have bad days anymore, maybe a challenging moment—but



COURTESY

Joseph Person is a key holder at Men's Wearhouse.

no bad days."

Q: As a man of color in management, what does representation mean to you?

"It means a lot. Young men of color come into the store and ask how I got this position. I wear a suit every day, and that gets respect automatically. But I want to connect with them—give them some light in five or ten minutes."

Q: How does the fashion and retail industry influence confidence for men of color?

"When a man puts on a suit that fits well, he immediately feels good. Most guys have never had something that actually fits. They didn't even want to be there at first, but by the time they leave, they say, 'Joseph, I think I want to come back.' It changes them."

Q: What role does mentorship play for you?

"Mentors are important, especially for young men. A lot of young men don't have anybody they even want to listen to. So when I get the chance, I embrace it. It's important."

Q: What advice would you give young Black and Brown men building confidence today?

"Surround yourself with people who are doing what you want to be doing. Get in those circles now. Set your goals high—real high. And know you have a spiritual walk. Most young people don't think they're a soul, but the soul drives everything."

Q: Finally, what can customers expect when they walk into your store?

"Top service. That's what sets us apart. I teach my team that. Online is our competitor, so our service has to be excellent. We're doing well, and they're building new stores. At Men's Wearhouse, you're going to get the best service."

ARTS AND INSPIRATION

SHOWING UP ANYWAY

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

When Broadway veteran Bobby Daye steps onto the Spokane stage as Harold Zidler in *Moulin Rouge*, audiences will witness more than a character. They will witness a masterclass in what it means to bring your full essence into any space you enter—creatively, boldly, and without shrinking.

Raised with an imaginative spirit, he jokes about being the baby of the family. There is just something particular about the youngest born. Daye wrote songs from a young age. And before theater became his profession, he pursued another passion—track and field at Clemson University. He ran track competitively while continuing to write music, nurturing a creative spark that refused to be sidelined.

Clemson gave him discipline, endurance, and the internal push that would eventually prepare him for the rigor of Broadway. But it was music that kept calling.

When he moved to New York, circa the 1980s, after college, he supported himself by playing and singing at a piano bar called Cheers on 41st Street—until the day a stranger walked in, heard him perform during happy hour, and asked if he'd ever auditioned for *Dreamgirls*.

That question changed everything.

He made his Broadway debut in *Dreamgirls* alongside some of the most influential Black performers in American theater. But one of the most powerful stories he

shared has nothing to do with fame—and everything to do with courage.

As a rookie actor in need of a headshot—and without time to get a professional one—he did something unforgettable: he drew his own portrait. And it worked.

That same belief in himself is what has sustained him through four decades of performing.

Daye sees art as a truth-telling force—one that holds a mirror up to society whether people want the reflection or not. In *Moulin Rouge*, he says that mirror is pointed directly at issues of class, power, longing, and the complicated ways people attempt to climb out of invisibility.

“The role of art is to put a mirror to our society and show the honesty in it. Sometimes there’s humor, sometimes there’s sadness, but our job as artists is to reflect and let people see themselves.”

This clarity anchors his portrayal of Harold Zidler—not as a caricature, but as a man trying desperately to hold on to something he loves. His performance is layered with the fullness of his own identity: Black, seasoned, deeply aware, and rooted.

Before Bobby Daye played major roles in national tours or wrote

music for TV and film, he was a young actor learning by watching masters—up close.

In the original *Dreamgirls* company, he wasn’t just surrounded by excellence; he was trained by it. Standing backstage and studying the work of Sheryl Lee Ralph, Loretta Devine, Cleavant Derricks, and others shaped his artistic DNA.

It wasn’t formal instruction—it was cultural instruction.

Representation in motion. Black brilliance embodied, not theorized.

He describes the experience as transformational—a launch pad for everything that came after.

“I was so fortunate. Being in that theater was like being at a university. I sat there and watched their work and tried to soak it in. That kind of representation pushes you—it shows you what’s possible.”

Seeing Black performers lead, originate roles, and own the stage didn’t just inspire him. It calibrated his standards. It taught him what was possible for him, too.

And that grounding still impacts how he performs, leads, and mentors today.

Daye remembers standing in Times Square as a

young actor, looking up at the Broadway billboards, and realizing not one featured a Black lead. He had friends in the ensembles, but visibility and leadership remained limited.

That moment shaped him—not into an imposter, but into someone determined to bring his whole self and voice to every role.

“The only thing I can bring is my authentic self—and that is going to be a Black man doing that. We know there’s a sway in our speech and a sway in our walk. Don’t run away from it. Embrace it.”

In *Moulin Rouge*, director Alex Timbers encouraged that authenticity, assembling one of the most diverse casts Daye has ever worked with. The result is a constellation of global culture and identity woven directly into the story’s orbit.

For Spokane’s theater audience—especially young people—Daye’s message is clear:

Your presence is enough.

Your identity is a strength.

Bring your essence into every room.

Great artistry doesn’t come from pretending—it comes from observing, Daye shares.

“One class in discipline

Theater veteran Bobby Daye brings truth, love and Black essence to traveling ‘Moulin Rouge’



COURTESY

Bobby Daye is part of the touring production of “Moulin Rouge,” now playing at the First Interstate Center for the Arts.

for us all is to just pay attention to life around you—that’s what you bring onto the stage. If it’s false, people will feel it.”

It’s advice that resonates deeply in spaces where people may often navigate their talents and skills in isolation. Daye reminds us that the raw material for authenticity comes from everyday life: joy, sorrow, work, community, rhythm, and the small truths we carry.

Art imitates life because it has to.

Now based in Los Angeles, Daye is co-founding a music company, writing for TV and film, and developing multiple Broadway productions—including a powerful story following three gen-

erations of Black women in Louisiana.

But for five days in November, Spokane got to witness his craft up close—a presence that honors tradition, pushes boundaries, tells the story of collective humanity while extending the legacy of the giants he learned from.

It is a full-circle moment for the one who was the baby of his family: a performer shaped by representation now becoming representation for someone else.

And that may be the most revolutionary art of all.

Moulin Rouge played at the First Interstate Center for the Arts from November 19-23.

Brothers in the spirit of giving

Black men uplifting their communities this holiday season

ANYLA'S TAKE

Every December, while the spotlight often shines on gift exchanges and holiday sales, countless Black men are quietly doing the real work of the season, giving back. From neighborhood barbers offering free cuts to children, to fathers organizing toy drives, to mentors ensuring no young brother goes without a coat, these men embody generosity that rarely makes headlines but deeply impacts lives.

Their giving isn’t performative. It’s personal. Many of these men remember being that child waiting for a blessing, the one who didn’t always have enough.

They give because they’ve been there. In cities across America, groups like 100 Black Men, Omega Psi Phi chapters, and local grassroots collectives host community dinners, wrap gifts, and distribute essentials to families in need.

This spirit of giving is deeply rooted in cultural tradition. Historically, the Black church, barbershop, and corner store were safe havens where men not only gathered but gave. They donated time, tools, and mentorship long before it was trendy to call it “community service.” That legacy continues today as men take ownership of

their neighborhoods, proving that strength isn’t about dominance, but about care.

Consider the father who spends Christmas Eve handing out toys instead of watching TV, or the retired worker who drives across town delivering food. These are the unsung heroes, men who embody love through action.

Representation matters here, too. In a society that too often portrays Black men as absent, angry, or apathetic, these brothers flip the narrative. Their compassion rewrites the story, showing that manhood and service are intertwined.

This December, let’s celebrate these men, the ones who quietly move mountains. The ones who



By Anyla McDonald
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



lift others as they climb. Their spirit is the real heart of the holiday: unshakable, generous, and rooted in community love.

ART AS ACTIVISM: OUR STORIES MUST BE TOLD

Black Lens staff reports

Spokane’s own Stage Left Theater recently took Antoinette Nwandu’s *Pass Over* to Monaco, sharing local artistry on an international stage. For artist Dahveed Bullis, this production has a four-year journey, and its unfiltered power continues to resonate worldwide. The play unpacks racialized trauma and examines how the lingering effects of systemic and structural racism shape Black communities.

Bullis chronicles the nuances of race in America in his *Substack* blog, “From Spokane to the World Stage: A Journey in Art, Grit, and Gratitude.”

Art as activism remains a compelling tool for understanding human experience, and this story — candid, gritty, and deeply American — challenges audiences to confront the complexity of race, safety, and identity in the United States.



KATHY PLONKA/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

“Pass Over” actors Dahveed Bullis, right and Matt Slater, left rehearse at Stage Left Theater in Spokane on May 24, 2022.

SPOKANE SYMPHONY

LALA LAND

— IN CONCERT —

CONDUCTED BY ESIN AYDINGOZ

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY 14
7:30PM

GET TICKETS

HURWITZ CONCERTS LIONSGATE

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SPOKANESYMPHONY.ORG

YOUTH CONNECTION

My experience at Seattle HBCU College Expo

By Anesu Whacha
THE BLACK LENS

Our trip to Seattle for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Expo was amazing. We rode the bus with other students from different Spokane Public Schools, and we took it as a chance to get to know each other.

I attended a mini-seminar on “Why I Should Attend an HBCU,” and we had students from Howard, Spelman and Morehouse who talked about the connections they had made by attending their respective schools. Even though they all came from different backgrounds, they carried themselves the same way—with respect and dignity. The ladies and gentlemen present had unique stories, but one thing that stood out to me was they all said they “learnt some things that they would not have learnt anywhere else,” and this made me even more curious about HBCUs.

Colleges like Paine College offered instant admission, and me and my sister were honored with both admission and \$80,000 worth of merit scholarships each. I talked to a Howard University representative for quite a while, and just before our conversation ended, she told me about their accelerated BS/MD six-year program, which I am interested in. I told her I was going to apply to get into the school, and that’s when she told me that day was the deadline for their Early Action admission. As soon as we got on the bus to come back to Spokane, I started working on my application to Howard University. Thankfully, I had everything drafted out, so the application was smooth. I submitted the application a couple of hours before the deadline. The most important thing at



By Anesu Whacha
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



the expo was the connections I made with students who had traveled from afar. It was not hard to make initial connections, and I was amazed by that. The positive energy everyone showed made the experience even more memorable. Everyone was curious, and that was our common ground. We all valued education and the learning experience in our own ways, but we were in it together. I got turned around a few times in the busy, active environment, but there was always someone willing to walk with me until I reached the right place.

Shoutout to Ms. Shamerica for organizing this special event. Also, big thanks to Mr. Alexander and all the adults present for making sure we were on track and we got what we needed—it means a lot to all of us. If I had not attended that event, I wouldn’t have the knowledge and understanding that I have about HBCUs today. With that being said, I recommend every student to at least check them out. It is worth it.

See more about the expo by going to the Converge Media Facebook Page.

Why is failure important to success?

Failure is not the end of the road; it is often the very beginning of success. When we stumble, make mistakes, or fall short of our goals, it can feel discouraging, but failure is actually a powerful teacher. Each setback offers us valuable lessons that success alone cannot. It shows us where we need to grow, what we can improve, and how strong we truly are.

Failure humbles us, but it also strengthens our spirit, reminding us that perfection is not required for greatness—persistence is. Many of the world’s most successful people faced countless failures before they achieved their dreams. They did not let their mistakes define them; instead, they used them as stepping stones.

Failure forces us to reflect, to adapt, and to try again with more wisdom than before. It shapes our character, builds resilience, and teaches us determination. Without failure, success would feel empty because we would not understand the ef-



By Stori Taylor
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



fort, patience, and perseverance it takes to get there.

Each failure is proof that we are trying—proof that we are brave enough to take risks and chase our dreams. Success is not a straight path; it is a journey filled with obstacles, doubts, and lessons. Failure is not a sign that we should give up, but a sign that we are getting closer, that

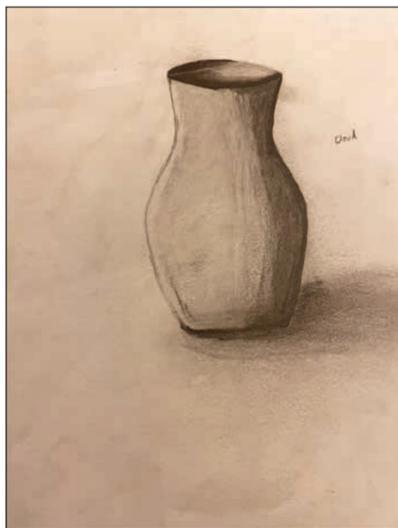
we are learning what does not work so we can discover what does.

When we embrace our failures instead of fearing them, we unlock our true potential. We learn to rise after every fall, to believe in ourselves even when things are difficult, and to keep going when others might stop.

So, the next time you fail, do not lose hope. Take a breath, gather your strength, and try again. Your failures do not make you weak; they make you wiser, stronger, and more capable of achieving greatness. Success is not about never falling; it is about rising every time you do. Failure is not the opposite of success; it is a vital part of it. That’s why failure is so important to success.

Every success has failure and mistakes, and with that, it shows how far you’ve come from your failures and mistakes. So, with that being said, don’t give up.

2 Chronicles 15:7 – “But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.”



Daniella Musesambili artwork at right and Cloud Musesambili artwork at left



NORTHWEST PASSAGES THE BLACK LENS

UPCOMING EVENT BENEFITING SPOKANE’S COMMUNITY JOURNALISM FUND

MONDAY, FEB. 10 | 7 P.M.

SPOKANE BLACK VOICES SYMPOSIUM

Submissions from Spokane-area high school students that explore the Black experience in all mediums to be presented.

THE THEME FOR THIS YEAR IS

‘POWERED BY COURAGE: SOMETIMES JUST SHOWING UP IS A REVOLUTIONARY ACT’

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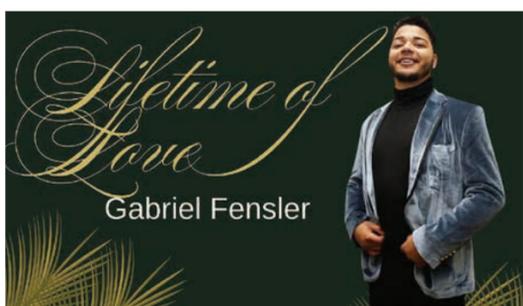
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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

NAACP FREEDOM FUND GALA AWARD WINNERS



Jason Courtney, Brooks Davis and AJ Hansen pose for the camera at the NAACP Freedom Fund Gala.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARA ALLISON AND JEFF BRUNCH
Pastor Patricia Ledlow gives invocation at the start of the NAACP Freedom Fund Gala.



Community members pose during the NAACP Freedom Fund Gala.



Dr. Mary Jane McCoy and Julie Pearson smile.



Terry Buffington, Dr. Jeanne Baynes, Betsy Williams and Bernice Buchanan attend the NAACP Freedom Fund Gala.

ATKINSON

Continued from 1

not just his service, but his philosophy: Black economic empowerment is spiritual work.

Raised in Compton, California, after being born in Houston, Texas, Atkinson grew up watching his father and grandfather run a family detail shop. From seventh grade through high school, he worked alongside them, making \$50 a week at first, then \$150 by the time he reached ninth and tenth grade. That experience planted something deeper than a work ethic; it planted a vision of ownership.

Later, as a field service coordinator for the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries and a community leader in Spokane's historic Black church, Atkinson saw a gap: plenty of talent and hustle, but not enough access, knowledge, or support to turn ideas into generational wealth.

He is blunt about what needs to change—starting in schools and in our mindset.

“We need to start teaching about how to become — instead of becoming consumers—how do we become owners of our own thing. See, we are good at becoming consumers in our communities. You know, we'll buy it, but we need to learn how to be owners instead of consumers.”

For Atkinson, economic empowerment is inseparable from self-determination. He challenges the idea that college is the only path, calling for more honest conversations about trades, entrepreneurship, and the realities of sustaining a business. He has helped young people enter electrical apprenticeships, supported caregivers turning passion into home care ventures, and walked countless first-time enterprise leaders through the basics of forming an LLC.

His workshops on business development and financial literacy—often held at the Carl Maxey Center—have drawn packed rooms. People come with ideas that were mere inklings they've been carrying for years. Atkinson meets them with candor and encouragement, helping them manifest that inkling into something greater.

He insists that the missing piece isn't just capital; it's knowledge about how money actually works.

“Our issue is we have to teach ourselves about money. We've never learned about money for real. It was survival. And if you look at it here in the twenty-first century, a lot of us still treat money as survival and not as an asset that can help us further.”

For him, generational wealth is not an abstract buzzword. It's his brother in Oklahoma, who came home from prison, learned the waste-oil business, and now owns multiple trucks, properties, and a block of houses—using that income to support his family and employ others. It's building trusts, buying property in places like Belize, and positioning the next generation so that they start from

stability, not scarcity.

Yet Atkinson is just as focused on collectivism and solidarity as he is on individual success. He challenges Spokane's Black community to shift from competition to collaboration, from suspicion to shared strategy.

“It should never be about competition. It should always be about, ‘Let's collaborate. How can I make us better? How can I mentor someone along the way that may want to do what I'm doing?’”

That ethic shows up in how he talks about other businesses—sending people to Black-owned restaurants like Jewel of the North, encouraging folks to visit new ventures like Kindred Public House and proudly naming the organizations he has supported, such as Locked In Fathers Alliance, Raze Early Learning Development Center.

For him, every new business is not just a storefront; it's a node in a larger network of survival, pride, and possibility.

He is equally clear that empowerment requires discipline. Inspiration, he says, is not enough.

“If you don't have any discipline, you won't be successful. And if you don't believe you have something worth selling, how are you going to make me believe it? How are you going to make me buy it if you don't believe what you're selling is worth me buying?”

That tough love shows up in the practical advice he gives: don't undercut your bids just to land a contract; know your target audience; review your mission and vision regularly; learn how to talk about your business in 30 seconds; and don't hire people who won't protect your brand.

As a pastor, he frames this work in spiritual terms: stewardship, responsibility, and the call to leave something behind. He often reminds people that knowledge hoarded dies with us—and that real leadership means training others to carry the torch.

Atkinson believes Spokane is at a “prime time” moment for Black business. There are now enough Black-owned enterprises here—contractors, caterers, pop-up clinics, clothing brands, coffee roasters—that, as he puts it, “you can probably find anybody in this community right now in business to do anything you gotta get done.”

The challenge now, he says, is making that ecosystem visible, connected, and sustainable: a Black Business Expo under one roof, a stronger culture of mentorship, and a community that spends its dollars with intention.

This is the work that has earned Pastor Amos Atkinson Jr. the title of a community champion, but if you ask him, he'll say the real reward is watching a new generation of Black entrepreneurs step into their power.

“I can't take any of this knowledge with me when I leave here,” he says. “So anything I'm giving away is just that—giving it away.”

And Spokane is richer for it.



Black Lens editor April Eberhardt poses with Red Lobster CEO Damola Adamolekun.

SEE MORE PHOTOS OF THE EVENT ON PAGE 12

SHADES OF MOTHERHOOD NETWORK / FROM THE FRONT PAGE

ROOTS AND WINGS

Navigating parenthood through personal trials with a thankful heart within the African American community

In the heart of our vibrant communities, the journey of parenthood can often feel like navigating a challenging landscape, particularly within the African American community. Increasingly, families are sharing their experiences of resilience, revealing how personal trials can shape their parenting journeys—each with a thread of thankfulness woven throughout their stories.

As a parent, I deeply understand this struggle. My journey has been profoundly affected by an unknown illness that caused my weight to drop to just 99 pounds, making it almost impossible to eat or hold down food for many months. While this physical struggle created significant barriers in my ability to engage with my children, particularly as they navigated their formative years in high school and middle school, I found moments of gratitude even in hardship. I was thankful for the support from family and friends who rallied around us during my toughest days, reminding me that I was not alone in this journey.

The experience of being ill was overwhelming and led me to feelings of inadequacy as I grappled with the realization that I could not be the fully present parent I wanted to be. However, in reflecting on my situation, I grew thankful for lessons learned through adversity—lessons about patience, resilience, and the importance of being present in ways that go beyond physical presence. My focus shifted to not just regaining my health but appreciating the small victories along the way and being as present as possible for my children during this challenging time.

Unfortunately, my experience is not unique. Many parents within our



By **Leola Rouse**
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



community face a wide range of personal trials, including personal illness or chronic health issues, mental health challenges such as anxiety or depression, and difficulties with child development or behavioral issues. Financial hardships, including job loss or unexpected expenses, can also create significant stress. Additionally, relationship struggles with a partner or spouse, the loss of a loved one, and the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities weigh heavily on many. Stress associated with caregiving for aging parents, parenting children with special needs, and navigating divorce or separation further complicate our journeys as parents.

Each of these challenges can weigh heavily, yet they also offer opportunities for growth and reflection. Alongside my health challenges, I have encountered financial trials that have created significant stress within our household. Yet, I have learned to cultivate a thankful heart amidst these struggles. Recognizing the importance of making do with the limited resources available has taught me the joy of creativity in parenting and finding happiness in simple moments—whether it's cooking a meal together or playing games at home.

These experiences reflect the broader realities faced by many African American parents. The pressures of societal expectations, economic disparities, and historical injustices all come into play, affecting our family dynamics. Yet, through shared stories and collective resilience, we can inspire one another and shape a legacy of strength that impacts future generations. We have much to be thankful for, including the lessons learned from our challenges and the opportunities to grow from them.

As we enter this season of Thanksgiving, it is vital to reflect on the spirit of gratitude for what we do have. Despite the trials and tribulations, we have an abundance of blessings—our successes, our growth, and the love of our families. I am continually learning and evolving as a parent, using the tools and resources available to refine my approach to parenthood, and that is truly something to celebrate.

Organizations within our community are stepping up to provide vital resources, workshops, and counseling that support parental development and mental health. These initiatives underscore the importance of self-care and mental wellness in our parenting journeys.

Navigating parenthood within the African American community involves both private struggles and the broader social dynamics that affect us all. Through shared experiences and collective resilience, we are not just surviving; we are thriving. In doing so, we are nurturing the roots and wings that allow our children to grow and flourish in a complex world. With thankful hearts, we embrace our journeys, knowing that even in the face of adversity, we are rich in love, learning, and growth.

AGING GRACEFULLY

The radiant journey of women of color over 70

DEEP ROOTS, STRONG WOMEN

By **Stephy Nobles-Beans**
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR

So, I turned 71 this past October. I found that there is something sacred and powerful about women of color who have crossed the threshold of 70. They carry within them generations of wisdom, resilience, and beauty that time cannot diminish. Aging gracefully for these women is not merely about maintaining appearances—it's about embracing the fullness of life with gratitude, faith, and joy. Their stories reflect a legacy of perseverance, faith, and deep love, especially in the cherished role of grandparenthood.

For women of color, the journey to 70 and beyond often comes with a unique blend of triumph and tenacity. Many have lived through seasons of struggle and change—civil rights movements, cultural shifts, raising families, and breaking barriers in spaces that were not always welcoming. Yet, they continue to rise, embodying grace that comes from experience and a quiet confidence that only time can teach. Their wrinkles tell stories of laughter, tears, and the wisdom of endurance. They've learned that beauty is not lost with age—it is refined by it.

Aging gracefully for these women is about more than health and vitality—it's about living intentionally and authentically. It's about embracing who they've become without apology. They have learned to listen to their bodies, nourish their spirits, and cultivate peace. Many find renewed joy in slowing down, in morning prayers, walks in nature, or sharing a cup of tea with a friend. They understand that grace isn't about perfection—it's about presence. It's about knowing that every season of life holds purpose, and that even in the twilight years, there is light to share.

One of the greatest joys many women over 70 such as myself, experience is the gift of grandparenthood. Being a grandmother, "Big Mama," "Nana," or even "Gigi," carries deep cultural significance in communities of color. It's a role that brings not only joy but also the sacred responsibility of passing on traditions, faith, and family values. Through stories, recipes, songs, and life lessons, grandmothers keep heritage alive. Their laughter fills rooms, their hugs bring healing, and their prayers cover generations.

In grandparenthood, they often find a second chance—to love freely, to nurture without the pressures of parenthood, and to see the fruit of their labor growing in the next generation. The bond between a grandmother and her grandchildren is one of life's sweetest rewards. It's a reminder that love doesn't age; it multiplies.

Living life to the fullest at 70 and be-



COURTESY

Stephy Nobles-Beans turned 71 in October.

yond means choosing joy every day. It means traveling when possible, laughing often, dancing even when no one is watching, and cherishing community. It's about knowing that life still has new chapters to write—whether through volunteering, mentoring young women, exploring creative passions, or deepening one's faith journey.

Women of color over 70 stand as pillars of wisdom and grace. They remind us that aging is not something to fear—it is something to celebrate. Each year is a testament to God's faithfulness and the resilience of the human spirit. They show us that true beauty lies in a heart that continues to love, a mind that continues to learn, and a spirit that continues to shine.

Lastly, being over 70 I have found deep joy and renewed purpose in giving back to my community. There's something incredibly fulfilling about knowing that the wisdom and experiences I've gathered over the years can now be poured into others. As the Family Navigator for The Shades of Motherhood Network, I am truly grateful for the many families I've had the honor of walking alongside. Each story, each connection, and each small victory reminds me that purpose doesn't retire with age—it simply revolves, and re-launches.

Serving in the roles allows me to be both a guide and a listener, helping families find their own strength while celebrating the beauty of motherhood in all its shades. It's a blessing to know that my journey—filled with faith, resilience, and love, continues to make a difference. Giving back has become my way of aging gracefully, with open hands and an open heart, knowing that as I pour into others, I am continually renewed.

For more information about *The Shades of Motherhood Network*, please visit our website: www.theshadesofmotherhoodnetwork.org

GARDNER

Continued from 1

Gabriel Fensler in recognition of Gabriel's Challenge, symbolizing compassion and grassroots advocacy at its best.

The President's Award, given for remarkable contributions as members of the Executive Committee of the NAACP and their tireless work, was awarded to April Eberhardt and Priya Mhlophe, both of whom have inspired many through their service and commitment to empowerment.

Promising future leaders were also recognized through the Michael P. Anderson Scholarship, awarded to Kamryn Richardson, and the Columbia Bank Scholarship, given to Gean Lucas Hernandez Torres. These scholarships honor academic excellence and dedication to community uplift, ensuring our values are passed to the next generation.

Beyond these recognitions, the Freedom Fund united the Black community under dazzling lights for a night filled with fashion, photography, music, laughter, and camaraderie. Moments of joy like these, when we gather to celebrate our achievements and uplift each other, create lasting memories and strengthen our bonds. It is encouraging to see our community recognized by our culture for its resilience and vibrance, as the NAACP has always intended. The NAACP also highlight-

ed key milestones from the past year during the event. One of the most notable was the creation of Spokane's first official NAACP Youth Council, a highly anticipated and valued addition to our branch. Led by Priya Mhlophe, thirty-two young people aged 16–25 came together to build a legacy of advocacy, service, and leadership for the future. Additionally, a historic announcement was made about hiring Spokane's very first Executive Director in the NAACP's 106-year history: Dr. Melissa Mace. Dr. Mace's leadership and dedication have already had a significant impact, playing a key role in planning and executing this year's successful Freedom Fund gala.

The event was further improved by our engaging keynote speaker, Damola Adamolekun, CEO of Red Lobster. His remarks and our discussion highlighted the importance of education, the lasting strength of community, and lessons learned on the journey to effective personal and professional leadership. Mr. Adamolekun's presence motivated many attendees, especially young people, by showing the significance of vision, perseverance, and giving back.

Overall, the 2026 Freedom Fund gala was a shining example of what Spokane's Black community can accomplish together—honoring meaningful contributions, motivating the next generation, and celebrating milestones, all rooted in hope and unity.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARA ALLISON AND JEFF BRUNCH

The jazz band Sessionz plays music at the NAACP Freedom Fund Gala.



Charity Resian
At right:
Stephaine
Courtney and
Kathy Trambitas.

At left: Stephy
Nobles-Beans
and Shon Davis
laugh.



IN MEMORIAM / FROM THE FRONT PAGE

REST IN POWER

in Memoriam



H. RAP BROWN
(NOV. 23, 2025)

Before converting to Islam and running a shop, Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin was best recognized for his role in the Black Power movement in the 1960s, calling for an alternative to the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement. After becoming chair of the Student National Coordinating Committee, Al-Amin gave speeches during a summer of riots, eventually being appointed minister of justice for the Black Panther Party.



JELLYBEAN JOHNSON
(NOV. 21, 2025)

Growing up in the namesake city of a genre he helped define, Jellybean Johnson, along with Prince, created the Minneapolis Sound. Johnson was self-taught on the drums and guitars, but a high school connection to Prince would lead him to be asked to join funk group The Time. The band released five Top 100 hits on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop charts throughout the '80s and early '90s.



SETTI WARREN
(NOV. 2, 2025)

Remembered as a “bridge builder,” Setti Warren once, while campaigning for mayor, knocked on nearly every door so constituents could get to know him. He won the election. Warren spent much of his career as a public servant, working under the Clinton administration and John Kerry’s presidential campaign. Most recently, Warren acted as director of the Harvard Kennedy School’s Institute of Politics.



LUCILLE O’NEAL
(OCT. 30, 2025)

Known as “Shaq’s mom” to many, Lucille O’Neal wrote a whole book to show people she was more than just Shaquille O’Neal’s mother. After raising four kids, Lucille got her bachelor’s and master’s degrees, then founded the Mothers of Professional Basketball Players, an organization that helps athletes and their families adjust to professional-level sports.



JIMMY CLIFF
(NOV. 24, 2025)

Jimmy Cliff is considered to have helped popularize reggae for U.S. audiences through his musical contributions but also his role in the 1972 Jamaican film “The Harder They Come.” He was just 18 at the time, but remembers wanting to shoot to be up there with “the Beattles and the Stones.” In the 1980s, he would collaborate with the Rolling Stones on their album, “Dirty Work’.



VIOLA FORD FLETCHER
(NOV. 24, 2025)

Viola Ford Fletcher was believed to be the oldest known survivor of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre; she was just 7 years-old at the time. Violence in the Greenwood District, known colloquially as the Black Wall Street, led to the deaths of over 300. Following the event, Fletcher led the effort for official recognition of the event and reparations due to those affected. The Oklahoma Supreme Court in 2024 dismissed the lawsuit.

BUFFINGTON

Continued from 1

joined SNCC as a teenager—marching, organizing, and stepping into the heart of Freedom Summer. She insists it wasn’t bravery that guided them; it was belonging, conviction, and an unspoken understanding of what was at stake.

“We weren’t being brave—we were doing what was right,” she says.

Buffington speaks of Ella Baker with deep reverence, describing her as one of the movement’s sharpest strategists. She sees Baker as the mother of the modern Civil Rights Movement and remembers how young Black men in Mississippi “opened the door for Dr. King to come into Black communities” at a time when fear made many adults hesitant.

Her foundation and her archive are an extension of that calling.

Buffington’s archive streams worldwide, giving students, researchers, and communities access to oral histories of Black Mississippians who shaped the Civil Rights Movement. She emphasizes that digital documentation is more than preservation—it is power.

“Digitizing history is not about nostalgia,” she says. “It’s about survival.”

For Buffington, digital tools are simply new vessels for an ancient Black tradition: storytelling as liberation.

At Washington State University, she teaches digital tradition and culture, oral tradition, activism, and interdisciplinary

Who Is Professor Terry Buffington?

- Sixth-generation Mississippian
- SNCC organizer, Freedom Summer veteran
- Anthropologist & oral historian
- Humanities scholar at WSU (Digital Technology & Culture)
- Founder & president of the Terry Buffington Foundation
- Creator of the global Terry Buffington Papers
- 2024–25 Washington Humanities Lifetime Achievement Award recipient

Her message to young people is clear: “Find your passion.”

How to Access the Terry Buffington Papers

The full digital collection is available globally through the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Wilson Library, Southern Historical Collection.

Visit finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/catalog/70107. This is one of the most comprehensive public archives of everyday Black Mississippians involved in the movement—an extraordinary resource for students, families, and teachers.

Black literature. Her classroom becomes a living museum—elders Zoom in to share firsthand testimony, students produce documentary films, and history breathes. Her curriculum has incorporated literary giants such as James Baldwin, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison. But she also challenges her students directly:

“If you haven’t studied history up to 1877, you can’t connect what’s happening now with what happened in my generation.”

Her curriculum is not just about learning—it’s about seeing, recognizing, and naming the patterns that persist.

Buffington sees the fractures in today’s youth—

fractures caused by curriculum erasure, broken transmission of generational wisdom, and digital overload that disconnects students from human guidance.

Her message to young people is clear: “Find your passion.”

She urges cultural curiosity as personal responsibility and reinforces that if you don’t stand for something, you’ll fall for anything.

She also warns that activism without strategy is dangerous. She teaches her students how to plan, how to think, how to analyze movements, and how to identify trustworthy leadership. And she grounds that lesson in lived reality: “When we went to jail,

we knew how we were going to get out.”

She tells the stories that schools won’t. And she reminds them that community—not institutions—must lead the work of teaching Black history:

“Being an activist is not always holding up a sign. There are so many other ways.”

Holding the Narrative

For decades, Buffington has brought culture-bearers into her classrooms and communities—folk singers, authors, artists, and SNCC veterans. In February, the Urban Bush Women, a world-renowned dance company with roots in movement-based storytelling, will appear for a powerful performance at the Kenworthy PAC in Moscow, ID on February 13.

Her life’s work has always been about preservation and access. First in Mississippi. Now in the Pacific Northwest.

“If we don’t tell our story, someone else will—and they will get it wrong.”

Her recent recognition—the 2025 Eastern Humanities Washington Award in the category of Lifetime Accomplishments in the Humanities—affirms what Black communities have long known: our stories are primary sources; we are truth tellers and truth keepers. Terry Buffington herself is an archive. A library. And she is still writing.

Visit the Terry Buffington Foundation online at terrybuffingtonfoundation.org.

DAMOLA

Continued from 1

didn’t just aim to win a \$10,000 scholarship at a debate competition—he used that moment to step into the world of investing. A self-described lover of strategy games, he saw early on how those mental tools could apply to building wealth. That decision—to invest, not spend—was foundational.

“Wealth is freedom,” he states plainly.

He saw it as a path to stability, opportunity, and the ability to open doors for others.

His time as a student-athlete—recruited to play football at Brown University—introduced him to an elite academic environment. There, he had to absorb lessons many of his contemporaries were born into. So he studied. He learned. And he began mastering the business of financial growth.

He’s candid about the early days: he started investing during a recession. It wasn’t glamorous. There was an immediate drawdown. But he learned quickly: fear can be useful—a compass to navigate risk without freezing. Adamolekun emphasizes that economic empowerment is a way forward for communities, and that knowledge is power. His advice to new investors is simple: don’t try to outsmart the stock market. There are experts who understand the intricacies of the market, but the average person

doesn’t need to be an expert. Start small. Be consistent. Think in terms of the long game—be patient and watch your money grow.

He believes deeply in curiosity, imagination, and discipline and exhorts that passion gets you out of bed, but discipline gets the work done.

It’s a lesson he learned as a student-athlete and carried into the boardroom. There are no quick fixes. He urges young people to build with time, sacrifice, and integrity.

As a Black CEO, Adamolekun understands the weight and visibility of his position. It’s not just about breaking ceilings—it’s about creating space where others feel seen and empowered. That visibility becomes a catalyst—it makes the dream feel real.

His first example of that? His father.

Adamolekun is clear: knowing your potential and your worth is essential to developing a winner’s mindset. Even if you’re the only one in the room, you have the right to be there. Curiosity challenges doubt. We do not have to shrink because we all have potential.

As the youngest CEO in Red Lobster’s history, what becomes immediately clear in Damola Adamolekun’s story is that success isn’t about sudden leaps. It’s about layers—adding, not erasing, the experiences that shape you.

“My legacy,” he says, “is the impact I have on other people.”

EDUCATION

TEACHING THE WHOLE STUDENT: HUMANIZING ONLINE EDUCATION

Gone are the days when education relied solely on rote memorization and the “sage on the stage” model, where teachers delivered lectures and students passively absorbed information. Today’s online learning environments are evolving to embrace a more holistic, student-centered approach—one that recognizes the importance of emotional well-being, personalized learning, and meaningful human connection.

The Shift Toward Holistic Learning

In modern online education, the focus is shifting from simply delivering content to nurturing the whole student. This means addressing not only academic needs but also social, emotional, and cognitive development. Holistic learning encourages students to engage with material in ways that reflect their unique strengths, interests, and challenges.

Online platforms now offer personalized assessments and adaptive lessons that cater to different

learning styles. Whether a student thrives through visual aids, interactive simulations, or written reflection, technology can help tailor the experience to meet those preferences. This customization empowers students to take ownership of their learning and feel more connected to the process.

The Role of Human Connection in Virtual Classrooms

Despite the digital nature of online education, human connection remains a vital component. Students benefit greatly from opportunities to interact with teachers, peers, and mentors in meaningful ways. Encouraging students to express concerns, ask for advice, or request specific topics to be covered fosters a sense of agency and belonging.

Teachers play a crucial role in humanizing online learning. By being approachable, responsive, and empathetic, educators can create a safe and supportive environment

where students feel seen and heard. Simple gestures—like personalized feedback, regular check-ins, and open communication channels—can make a significant difference in student engagement and success.

Strategies for Humanizing Online Education

To truly teach the whole student in a virtual setting, educators and institutions can adopt several key strategies:

Build Relationships: Start the semester with introductory activities that help students and teachers get to know each other. Use discussion boards, video introductions, or virtual meet-and-greets to foster community.

Offer Choice and Flexibility: Allow students to choose from different assignment formats or topics that interest them. Flexibility in deadlines and learning paths can reduce stress and increase motivation.

Use Interactive Tools: Incorporate tools

like breakout rooms, collaborative documents, and real-time polls to make learning more dynamic and participatory.

Provide Timely Feedback: Personalized feedback helps students understand their progress and feel valued. It also opens the door for deeper conversations about learning goals and challenges.

Encourage Reflection: Ask students to reflect on their learning experiences, emotions, and goals. Journaling, discussion prompts, or video diaries can help students connect more deeply with the material.

Empowering Students Through Voice and Choice

One of the most powerful ways to humanize online education is by giving students a voice in their learning. When students feel that their opinions matter and their needs are being met, they are more likely to engage and succeed. Encouraging students to advocate for themselves—whether

by requesting additional support, suggesting new topics, or sharing feedback—creates a collaborative learning environment.

This approach not only improves academic outcomes but also helps students develop essential life skills like communication, self-awareness, and resilience. For example, a student who struggles with time management might benefit from a flexible deadline policy, while another who thrives on group interaction might be encouraged to lead a virtual study session. These small adjustments can have a big impact on student confidence and performance.

The Educator’s Role in a Humanized Online Space

Educators are the heart of a humanized online classroom. Their ability to model empathy, patience, and curiosity sets the tone for the entire learning experience. Teachers who share their own learning journeys, acknowledge



By Dr. Shantara Smith
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



challenges, and celebrate student successes help build trust and authenticity.

Professional development also plays a role. Training in trauma-informed teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy, and digital engagement strategies equips educators to better support diverse learners in virtual settings.

Conclusion

Humanizing online education is about more than just using technology—it’s about using it thoughtfully to support the whole student. By fostering connection, personalization, and empathy, educators can create virtual classrooms that are not only effective but also deeply meaningful. In doing so, we prepare students not just for tests, but for life.



If Washington is serious about changing outcomes, it starts by examining these structures honestly. Who are they protecting?

Who are they harming? And how can families, educators and students push for environments where safety and inclusion are not competing priorities, but shared commitments?

Birdie Bachman, Spokane NAACP Education Committee intern

THE QUIET ROOMS

Inside Washington’s hidden discipline pipeline

In Washington, the word “exclusion” carries far more weight than most families and students realize. It sounds like something buried in board policy but exclusion is exactly what it sounds like: a student being removed from their learning environment. Suspension, expulsion and emergency removals are all tools schools can legally use. And for thousands of Washington students every year, those tools shape their entire educational experience.

Under state law (RCW 28A.600 and related WACs), schools are allowed to exclude students only when there’s a legitimate safety concern or after other strategies fail. The law is supposed to limit removals, not encourage them. But across districts in Spokane County, the reality is harder to navigate. What’s meant to be a last resort often becomes the first response.

Parents in various school districts in the region share similar stories of their child being removed from class with little to no explanation, vague language like “disruption,” or a claim that they were a “threat,” even when no actual threat occurred. For some families, especially Black, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, Latino and Mixed-Race households, discipline feels more like a maze than a safety measure.

What complicates things further is how discipline is documented. Exclusions must come with written notice, access to appeal, and a plan to re-engage the student but schools must attempt alternatives first including mediation, parent meetings and behavioral support. However, parents say removals often happen fast, without meaningful steps to keep students included. Personal experiences from my education in the Central Valley School District highlight the increase in instances of exclusion. Most times, my school administrators would try to justify their methods of punishment without

doing any digging into the issues they claim students were part of. This is where the architecture of exclusion becomes clear. Not just in one big moment, but in the hundreds of small decisions that lead to students being pushed out.

In one school district, for example, “emergency expulsion” is supposed to be used only when there’s an immediate, serious safety risk. Yet families report situations where the “emergency” lasted days before anyone even contacted them. In another school district, parents describe one-to-three-day classroom removals that aren’t labeled as suspensions, but still remove kids from learning. Many instances of students (even those as young as elementary age) sitting in isolated “quiet” rooms with limited instruction have occurred over the years.

These shadow practices, legal gray zones between discipline and exclusion, often prevent families from appealing or requesting support because if it’s “not technically a suspension,” districts may argue that the law doesn’t apply.

For students, especially Gen Z teens who are already navigating academic pressure, social media drama, and mental health challenges, being removed from class can disrupt learning, let alone being humiliating and disorienting. Imagine being labeled a “problem” before anyone asks what’s going on beneath the surface. Many times, students have these labels placed on them early in their Primary School years which follow them throughout their education.

For parents, information often feels like it’s being withheld. They’re left with questions like “Is this lawful?”, “why wasn’t I notified sooner?”, “what other options were available” and “why wasn’t this documented?”

But most importantly: Why is exclusion happening so easily?

Advocates including the Spokane NAACP Education Com-

NAACP
Spokane Branch



By Birdie Bachman
SPOKANE NAACP
EDUCATION COMMITTEE



mittee and local student-rights organizers argue that exclusionary discipline is built into a system that reinforces inequities rather than challenging them. They say districts have the policies to do so but too often bypass the spirit of the law.

The architecture of exclusion isn’t just about a suspension slip. It’s about who gets the benefit of patience and support, and who gets removed.

If Washington is serious about changing outcomes, it starts by examining these structures honestly. Who are they protecting? Who are they harming? And how can families, educators and students push for environments where safety and inclusion are not competing priorities, but shared commitments?

Exclusion may be legal, but that doesn’t make it inevitable.

This piece is part of a three-part series on accountability in discipline policies and exclusion laws in Washington State entitled “Hidden Removals: Inside Washington’s Racial Discipline Crisis.”

THE WEIGHT OF WINTER

Understanding, treating seasonal depression in Black communities

Each year, about 5 percent of U.S. adults roughly 16.5 million people experience seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a form of depression triggered by shorter, darker days. Another 10-20% face milder winter blues that still disrupt mood and daily rhythms. These numbers reveal an often-unspoken truth: despite the festive atmosphere, the holiday season can feel heavy for many.

SAD develops when reduced sunlight disrupts the body’s internal clock, affecting sleep, energy, and mood. Symptoms may include persistent sadness, fatigue, irritability, increased appetite, or difficulty concentrating. Because the holidays are filled with activity, these struggles often go unnoticed—both by those experiencing them and by the people around them. Recognizing the emotional impact of the season is a crucial first step toward protecting well-being.

Mindful rest remains one of the most effective tools for managing stress. Short, intentional pauses—breathing deeply, limiting screen time or simply stepping away from noise—can help reset the nervous system. These small breaks create mental space amid the rush.

Equally important is the practice of getting outside, even when temperatures drop. Exposure to natural light, fresh air and movement helps regulate mood and energy levels, especially during months when daylight is scarce. A brisk walk, a few minutes on a porch or standing near a bright window can make a difference. While cold weather often discourages outdoor activity, the benefits are significant: increased circulation, improved alertness and a boost in serotonin. Bundling up and spending even 10 minutes outdoors can shift the tone of an entire day.

Setting realistic expectations is another form of self-care. Cultural pressure to produce a flawless holiday—perfect meals, perfect décor, perfect gatherings—creates unnecessary stress. Choosing simplicity over perfection allows more



By Dr. Sharah Zaab
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



room for rest and authentic connection. Declining extra commitments or carving out quiet time isn’t selfish; it’s essential for balance.

Quality time with loved ones supports emotional health. Shared meals, meaningful conversations, and unrushed moments together counter feelings of isolation and strengthen resilience. These connections often matter more than any holiday task or tradition.

At the same time, self-care may also mean honoring the need for solitude. For some, the season brings reminders of grief, distance, or personal transition. Seeking support—whether from trusted friends, community groups, or professionals—is a sign of strength.

Acknowledging emotional needs during the holidays can prevent deeper distress. Preventive habits such as consistent sleep, exercise, light therapy, and time outdoors all help reduce the severity of seasonal depression. Beginning these routines early, before symptoms peak, can make them even more effective.

Ultimately, self-care during the holiday season is not an indulgence but a necessity. By acknowledging the emotional realities of winter, embracing mindful rest, stepping outside for natural light and nurturing meaningful relationships, we build a healthier and more grounded foundation for the season. In doing so, we make space to experience the joy, connection and warmth the holidays are meant to offer.

YOUTH CONNECTION SPECIAL FEATURE

RWANDA: WHERE TRUE WEALTH LIVES

University of Washington student and Youth Connection contributor Donalda Brantley reflects on her recent trip to Rwanda and the power of art. She shares what she witnessed throughout her travels and the lessons she learned:



By Donalda Brantley
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



A few other students and I had the opportunity to interview Ngabo during our last week of our study abroad journey. We sat down with him in his studio, a place that feels like home to him. Ngabo told us about the story behind opening Museum INGABO. He stated, “when you are painting, writing poetry, making short stories, sometimes you think it is about you but at the end of the day it becomes for others. That is the mission of an artist. We put our emotions on canvas, we put our emotions to pen and paper... its for the people.” Reminding us that creation goes beyond personal expression. It is a gift.

Isolation has become a space of comfortability. Society has become comfortable with “protecting peace” by prioritizing their own lives over those who are struggling. While we are tucked away in our warm beds scrolling on our phones with a full stomach, people around the globe, in our nation, and in your local communities are struggling. The world is spinning and we are just scrolling. It has become an inconvenience to be kind, to give to others, and to be humble.

As “woke” as we claim to be as a nation, we close our eyes to those who need us. What is the value of wealth and prosperity if, in our own communities, individuals struggle to find food, stability, and safety? In the United States alone, 4.2 million youth (ages 13-25) experience homelessness each year. We expect generations to save the world, yet we cannot even ensure they have a seat at the table. And when they do, too often, the table is empty.

Globally, the suffering of food insecurity and lack of housing continues. Similar to Rwanda in 1994, genocides are currently occurring in places like Sudan, Gaza, and numerous other regions, often receiving little to no media coverage and support.

As long as we occupy this world in a position of privilege, we are living poorly regardless of how many riches we own. We click, we scroll, the world keeps spinning without our support. God knows our flesh is sick. I pray you feel it in your soul to create something that creates

peace in your communities and the world.

I call on students, parents, the poor, wealthy, and all individuals to create or to support creators who are aiming to fight injustices in the world. Global conflict may seem like a hopeless issue too big to change on our own. That is a reality we contribute to when we sit back and do nothing. The change starts within.

Let your thoughts and prayers be heard. Changing ourselves creates societal wide awareness and motivates others which contributes to a greater change.

Stepping outside our personal comfort, engaging with art, and acknowledging what it reveals allows us to confront these realities. Art heightens our awareness, brings hidden struggles to the surface, and encourages us to act. Through creativity and collective recognition, we open pathways toward understanding and, ultimately, toward meaningful solutions. Although we struggle to find peace in our world, we must continue to work.

True justice is found with God. Let us use our God given gifts to uplift the world and find peace.

The Art of Togetherness

Art has long been a powerful force in resolving household, local, and even global conflicts. As a universal language with infinite interpretations, art speaks across boundaries of culture, experience, and perspective. Its openness allows people to understand the same piece in different ways.

Artist King Ngabo taps into this power by creating art that strengthens peace in Rwanda. Born in 1996, and just two years after the Rwanda genocide against the Tutsi, Ngabo uses his art to focus on stories of resilience, survival, and prosperity. He is connected to the Museum for Campaign Against Genocide and ART FOR MEMORIES, a dedicated platform that preserves memories of the



COURTESY PHOTOS

King NGABO’s “KAMWE (ONE) A hundred days of death A hundred days in one outfit.” “It is a powerful reminder that art has the ability to heal, inspire and educate. But also, a powerful reminder that art has the ability to divide, manipulate and mislead,” the artist writes.

1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi through art.

While studying abroad in Rwanda, I had the privilege of meeting Ngabo. Accompanied by students from the African Leadership University and the University of Washington, we were given a tour of Museum INGABO, Rwanda’s first private art museum. Students participated in learning about art and history, including attempting a traditional Rwandan dance led by dancer Indashyikirwapatrick.

As a world struggling with domestic and global conflict, genocide, hunger, and anxiety, we must seek effective ways outside of the current ineffective solutions we continue to rely on. To truly move forward, we must take action that reconnects us to one another, awakens empathy, and restores a shared sense of humanity. Ngabo shows us that art is one of the ways we can heal wounds.

The world today has been tainted by a message of radical individuality. In pushing independence to the extreme, we have drifted toward isolation—and in that isolation, we risk becoming creatures of cruelty. Yet throughout history, global education and art have stood as weapons against injustice and tools for human survival. True peace is something we can reach only together.

What we see stirs something within us, and what we touch echoes through our emotions. Through art, the external becomes internal. Art connects us—locally and globally. Let us learn from artists like Ngabo, whose work reminds us that art is not just expressive; it is powerful, unifying, and essential for healing our societies.



King NGABO, founder and director of Museum Ingabo, a contemporary African storytelling and art museum. The museum was founded Aug. 20, 2023, and is Rwanda’s first private art museum.



King NGABO’s “INZIRA Y’INZITANE (THE DIFFICULT PATH).” “This work is for the children who never asked to be in war zones, for the mothers who carry them and for the futures we still have the power to protect,” King NGABO wrote in an artist’s message.



King NGABO’s “A VIRUS IN OUR VILLAGE,” a new way of colonization of the African mindset.

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WELLNESS

BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES NEED OUR SUPPORT NOW MORE THAN EVER

FROM THE WATER'S EDGE

It matters where we spend our money. Mom turned 102 last month. Her previous birthdays have been really big affairs. This year she insisted we tone it down a bit. Given her insistence, we decided to stay home and keep it to just family with a few added friends. We also decided to let someone else cook it.

Mom loves fried oysters but her second favorites are catfish, fried chicken with greens. Years ago, I took her to Chicken-N-Mo for lunch. Owner Bob Hemphill was cooking that day so I introduced him to mom and we had a little visit at our booth. Since then, we have tried to go back as often as we could. As the years passed and mom's mobility began to fade it became harder to get her there. She now needs a walker and sometimes a wheelchair when going out. Bob's space is a little cramped and going downtown is one of my least favorite things to do.

Many folks don't consider Spokane to be much of a city, but I do. Over time I have studied the early Black history of this city and consider myself blessed to have a few Black friends, roughly my age, who were born and raised here.

They tell me that at one time Black folks had good reasons to go downtown. There were a few Black owned businesses and night spots in or near the heart of the city. There were other places where Black folks worked and Black bands entertained; however, places like the Spokane Club and the Davenport Hotel were not always welcomed. Spokane has come a long way since then, but Black owned businesses in the heart of the city have not.

I would make more of an effort to support Black owned businesses downtown if there were any. This is not just a Spokane thing. Many much larger cities with significant Black populations and



By the time Bob Hemphill opened Chicken-n-Mo in 1992, the downtown business core had been "booming" for decades, he said. "When I moved here in '76, you would see the greatness that this city had to offer," he told The Spokesman-Review in 2024. "There were so many jobs, it was just so unique, so much fun."

Black neighborhoods don't have many either.

I just finished reading a 2012 book written on the subject of the scarcity of Black-owned businesses titled, "Our Black Year: One family's quest to buy Black in a racially divided economy," written by Maggie Anderson. Maggie is CEO and cofounder, along with her husband John, of the Empowerment Experiment and the Empowerment Experiment Foundation. They are both very well-to-do Black professionals who live in an upscale, diverse neighborhood in Chicago. They decided to dedicate a full year to buying everything they could possibly buy—from soup to nuts—from Black owned businesses in and around the Windy City.

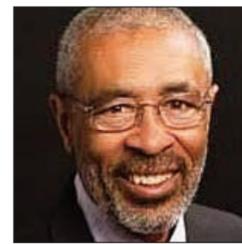
Maggie describes her disappointment that, even in one of America's Blackest cities and in the Blackest of neighborhoods in

that city, there are "food deserts." Food deserts are urban places or neighborhoods with few decent food or buying options. When she did find Black owned businesses, they were often in poor neighborhoods or in the least desirable parts of the city. Cities once had thriving Black owned grocery stores, banks, farmer's markets, restaurants and Black owned night clubs. Not today. According to Maggie, Black people are partially to blame. When we do have Black owned businesses, we don't necessarily support them. Many of us have moved up and out of the city and taken our money with us.

A Spokesman-Review article recently announced a new North Side area the "chicken lover's paradise." A number of chicken franchises have opened north of the Y, within close enough proximity to one another to create this "chicken paradise." A friend

of mine checked them out and marveled at each store's offerings. He was surprised to see so many Black folks were working in them. I suspect that none of the business are Black-owned. Their location, offerings and relative convenience—with plenty of free parking—are good news to the average consumer. Unfortunately, they are contributing to the death of downtown and specifically to the death of our only Black owned, mom and pop chicken/catfish business.

I drove downtown to personally place mom's birthday order from Chicken-N-Mo. I took the Division Street exit, then traveled north to Sprague and turned west. There was an empty parking spot at a meter on North Washington Street and I took it. As soon as I crossed the street, I encountered 10 to 15 folks standing or sitting on the sidewalk leading to Chicken-N-Mo. They weren't there for the



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



chicken. A few looked as if they had spent the night on that sidewalk. I cautiously made my way without incident, stepped inside the familiar space and walked straight to the counter. Bob happened to be there which was nice. We had a chance to visit as we always do and as always, he asked about my mother.

I placed the order and we arranged a time for me to pick it up a few days later. On Saturday afternoon I returned. While I was waiting at the counter the store phone rang. It was Bob calling to make share my order was ready—it was. I paid and left the restaurant with a huge smile of gratitude on my face. Spending my money there is about more than the food—it's about relationships.

By the time I made it back to I-90 to head home I wondered just how much longer the only Black-owned, mom-and-pop chicken/catfish establishment in the city of Spokane can last. Even though I have my issues with going downtown, I can't imagine Chicken-N-Mo not being there. Besides, I doubt seriously if any out-of-town chicken franchise owner anywhere would ask me about my mother.

It's also interesting to think about the role segregation played in the establishment and growth of Black-owned businesses in the heart of the city. Where we spend our hard-earned dollars is a value statement—it matters!

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

HONORING ANCESTORS THROUGH PRINCIPLE, PRACTICE

KWANZAA & GENEALOGY

Every Dec. 26 through Jan. 1, millions of Black families around the world light candles and reflect on seven principles that connect them to their African heritage and to each other. As someone who studies African American genealogy and writes about our community's history, I have come to see Kwanzaa not just as a cultural celebration but as a practice deeply connected to the work of uncovering and honoring our family stories.

Created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga after the Watts riots, Kwanzaa emerged during a crucial moment in Black history. While civil rights leaders fought for legal equality, cultural figures like Karenga saw another need: reclaiming African American identity and heritage. Kwanzaa, which takes its name from the Swahili phrase "matunda ya kwanza," meaning "first fruits," draws inspiration from various African harvest festivals to create something uniquely African American.

I grew up celebrating Christmas, like many Black families do. Kwanzaa isn't meant to replace religious holidays—it is a cultural celebration that many observe alongside existing traditions. I have celebrated Kwanzaa, but not the full seven days, and what struck me most was its intentionality. It prompts us to gather and reflect on who we are and where we come from.

The Seven Principles: A Framework for Understanding Our Past

At the core of Kwanzaa are the Nguzo Saba, seven principles celebrated over seven days. For those of us involved in genealogical research, these principles provide a meaningful framework for understanding why our work is important.

Umoja (Unity) encourages us to maintain unity within our families. When we examine our roots, we are symbolically seeking unity—connecting with our ancestors, understanding how families were torn apart by slavery, and how they reunite during Reconstruction.

Kujichagulia (Self-determination) means defining and naming ourselves. For centuries, our ancestors were labeled by enslavers, categorized by racist systems, and denied the right to tell their own stories.

Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility) embodies the communal spirit of both African heritage and genealogical research. We support one another in overcoming obstacles. We share DNA matches and collaborate on identifying people in old photographs.

Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) promotes supporting Black-owned



By Patricia Bayonne-Johnson
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



history.

Kuumba (Creativity) requires us to use our talents to improve our community. Genealogists are always creative, finding records in unexpected places and using DNA to craft compelling stories from fragments of evidence. We are innovative in how we preserve history and share it with younger generations.

Imani (Faith) asks us to trust in our people and our struggles. Genealogical research requires a strong faith that records exist, that stories can be found, and that our ancestors' lives are worth remembering.

The Kinara: A Symbol of Ancestral Connection

One of the symbols of Kwanzaa is the kinara, the candleholder that holds seven candles—three red (symbolizing struggle), three green (symbolizing hope), and one black (symbolizing the people). The kinara represents our ancestors, the original stalk from which we all grew. The black candle is placed in the middle, with the red candles on the left and the green candles on the right. On the first night of Kwanzaa, the black candle is lit, followed by the red candle the next night, then the green candle, and so on, alternating until all the candles are lit. One of the principles that African Americans should live by is discussed.

This metaphor resonates deeply with genealogical work. Our family trees are kinaras. Each ancestor is a light that illuminates our understanding of who we are. The black candle in the center, symbolizing unity, is lit on the first night, reminding us that we are one people with a shared history.

The other basic symbols of Kwanzaa are: The maza, the fruits and vegetables that symbolize the roots of celebration in a harvest ceremony. Okra, black-eyed peas, yams, and watermelons represent the Af-

businesses and strengthening economic power within our community. This also involves genealogy—supporting Black genealogists, subscribing to Black historical societies, and donating to archives that preserve African American records.

Nia (Purpose): Every enslaved ancestor we recognize by name is a person brought back into

frican diaspora. Pumpkins, squashes, sweet potatoes, and pineapples represent the New World.

The mkeka, the mat, holds the display together.

The muhindi, an ear of corn for each child in the family.

The kikombe cha umoja, the communal cup, symbolizes the unity of all peoples of African descent. Since COVID, drinking from the communal cup is no longer common. A cup for everyone may be provided.

The Zawadi are simple gifts that relate to education and cultural values. Books written by and about Black people make excellent gifts.

Food is an important part of Kwanzaa, and there is no fixed menu. It can be a potluck where everyone brings a dish from their birthplace, the country their ancestors came from, or places they've visited. Dishes from the diaspora, like those from Brazil, the Caribbean, Jamaica, and Africa, can also be included in the celebration.

The day after Christmas marks the start of Kwanzaa celebrations. The Kwanzaa table is set up, and the house is decorated. At sunset, family and friends gather around the table, dressed in African attire, and light a candle for Umoja.

Bringing It Together

Whether or not you celebrate Kwanzaa traditionally—with seven candles, discussions of principles, and community gatherings—it aligns perfectly with the work of genealogy and family history. Both inspire us to:

- Remember and honor those who came before
- Understand ourselves as part of a larger community
- Recognize that our individual stories are connected to collective history
- Take responsibility for preserving and passing on what we learn
- Believe that Black lives, past and present, have inherent worth and dignity

As we begin this season of reflection and celebration, I invite our readers to consider Kwanzaa's principles in relation to their family history work. Every name you research, every document you preserve, and every story you share with younger family members embodies these principles.

The good ancestor

Building your family crest

By Angela Jones
THE BLACK LENS

As a child, I really disliked the family tree activity because I didn't know much about my family history beyond my grandparents. As I've moved through life, I began to appreciate the importance of knowing my roots and ensuring generations to come had a sense of family pride. We had worked hard as a family to pull ourselves out of abject poverty and we're proud of what we have accomplished. I wanted to make sure we memorialized who and what we stand for in a country that often tries to erase Black history.

So, a decade ago, I did what many of you have done and opened an account on Ancestry.com where it's been fascinating to find connections. In 2024, I took it a step further and designed and launched a family crest. I didn't do it on my own though. I asked my family elders what was important to them and designed the crest with their wishes in mind.

Here is the key to what each piece of the crest symbolizes for my family:

J = Jones; my grandfather's last name
L = Lowery; my grandmother's maiden name

Book = represents the Bible and education
Fire = represents passion
Cross (part of shield) = represents our faith
Lion's mane = royalty
Latin phrase = loving, determined family

We also have a merchandise site so people can purchase gear for family reunions or wear family pride whenever they feel moved. The hope is we can have enough revenue to support family reunions and a scholarship for family members who want to go to school.

I didn't invent the crest and I'm sharing in hopes that other families may be moved to capture what symbolizes what's important to them! So, feel free to copy the idea. Someone 100 years from now will thank you!

Crowns Up!
More on Angela Jones, JD can be found at www.angelajonesjd.com.



BLACK BUSINESS DIRECTORY

3 Performance Institute –

Sports performance and physical therapy by Louis Hurd III. (509) 869-2344 or Louis@spokane3pi.com. 211 W. Second Ave., Spokane, 99205. Online at spokane3pi.com.

4AM Vintage –

Vintage clothing store owned by Christian Jones. (832) 652-4580 or coojones4am@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 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 Ormar 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 Clips & Beauty Supply –

NorthTown mall hair care. (509) 315-8963 or visit bummybossclips.appointedd.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/@ihearyousis.

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/thearealestateauntie/.

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 lrjbarberman@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@lilacitylegends.com or michael@lilacitylegends.com. 631 S. Richard Allen Court, Suite 205, Spokane, 99202. Also at P.O. Box 28931, Spokane, 99228.

Mary Kay –

Beauty Consultant Nicole Mills. (509) 666-4929, (252) 365-4971 or MKwithNicole@gmail.com. Online at mkwithnicole.wordpress.com, Facebook: facebook.com/MKwithNicoleM.

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@mooreassistedliving.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 tsdmasterj@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 jsmooov923@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), wrightsbautysupply@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 Tommy 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.

FEB. 10: SPOKANE BLACK VOICES SYMPOSIUM –

The theme for this year's symposium is Powered by Courage. Accepting submissions from Spokane-area high school students who explore the Black experience in all mediums, such as writing or art. 7 p.m. Monday, Feb. 10. Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, Gonzaga University, 211 E. Desmet Ave. Tickets are free, but must be reserved in advance at spokesman.com/northwest-passages. Tickets also available at the door, but may sell out.

Black Lens pickup and distribution: Get on our list!

For newspaper pickup and distribution, please contact info@blacklensnews.org. Pickup is at Carl Maxey and 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

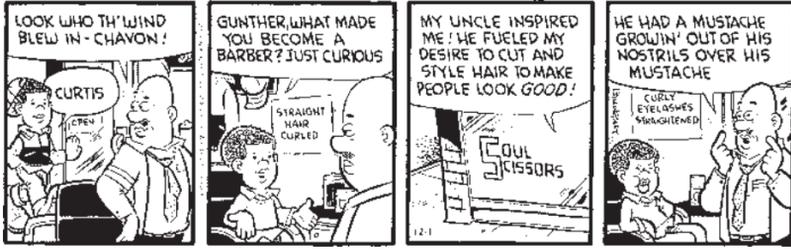
We are offering free obituary services. Email info@blacklensnews.com with "Obituary" and your loved one's name in the subject line. Please limit obituaries to 400 words or less. A photo of the loved one is encouraged, but not required. We may lightly edit the obituary for brevity and clarity, but will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

LEISURE

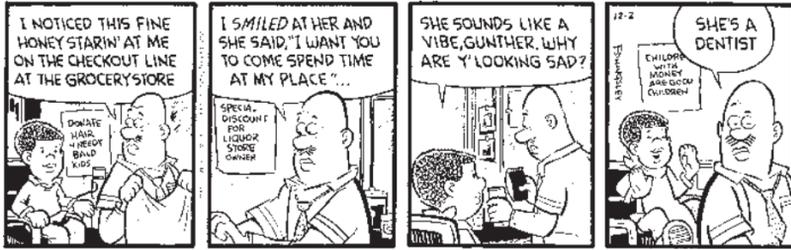
COMICS & QUOTE OF THE MONTH

CURTIS • BY RAY BILLINGSLEY

DEC. 1



DEC. 2



DEC. 3



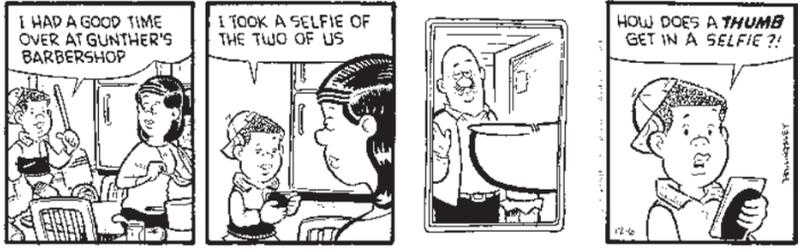
DEC. 4



DEC. 5



DEC. 6



Quote
OF THE MONTH

YOU'VE GOT TO GET TO THE STAGE IN LIFE WHERE GOING FOR IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WINNING OR LOSING.

Arthur Ashe

CRABGRASS • BY TAUHID BONDIA

DEC. 1



DEC. 2



DEC. 3



DEC. 4



DEC. 5



DEC. 6



PETS

A KID'S COMIC • BY MJ BETHELY



BLACK POETS SOCIETY

Black Literary Icons: Maya Angelou

By Anna Sophia Flood
THE BLACK LENS

An absolute treasure, Maya Angelou has given Black women a voice of strength and beauty. I was first introduced to her work when I recited her poem “Caged Bird” for a poetry contest in high school—a moment that changed who I am and set me on a “healthy” obsession with Black literary figures. “Caged Bird” is a poem that describes the difference between a free bird and caged bird, highlighting how the caged bird sings a notable and powerful song because its voice is all it has while entrapped. While a free bird can enjoy the light of day and the air in its wings, a caged bird can only sing its freedom song. The poem uniquely expressed the difference between freedom and oppression and I remember how deeply the poem moved my spirit as

I practiced, perfected my vocal inflections, and added gestures to give it life.

Angelou’s words have undeniable power—so much so that she was chosen as the Presidential Inaugural Poet in 1993, gifting us with “On the Pulse of Morning”, a moving call to action for a return to “the dream”, eloquently noting that “history, despite its wrenching pain cannot be un-lived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again”—words of wisdom we can continue to reflect on in this moment. She later received the National Medal of Arts from President Bill Clinton in 2000 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom—the highest civilian honor—from President Barack Obama in 2010. There is no doubt that Maya Angelou’s words have shaped the world, and her legacy will continue to inspire generations to come. Angelou was a wom-

an of many talents—an actress, singer, and dancer who performed with the renowned Alvin Ailey and toured Europe in a production of Porgy and Bess. For nearly a decade, she forged a name for herself on stage before relocating to Africa and embarking on the writing career that would define her legacy. She went on to write seven profoundly moving autobiographies that capture various stages of her life, blending the emotional depth of fiction with the intimacy of memoir. Her work earned her over 50 honorary degrees, a Literarian Award, and a National Book Award nomination, all recognitions that reflect the depth of her contribution to literature and to the world. Maya Angelou lived a dynamic, extraordinary life worthy of every honor she received, and every accolade still to come. Her poetry speaks

directly to the experiences of Black womanhood, offering solace, reflection, and empowerment. Her life marked by trials yet filled with hope reveal to us what it means to overcome, to rise, and to shine despite adversity. Through her words, I am reminded of my own power as a Black woman and remaining confident, steadfast, and unmovable in this life.

*I leave you with words from her, as a reminder to keep moving forward—
Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear*



Maya Angelou

*I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.*

*I rise
I rise.
—“Still I Rise,” Maya Angelou*

Am I going insane?

By Jā Corbett-Sparks
THE BLACK LENS

Am I going insane? I've got to be irrational. I've got to be impatient. I've got to escape. Am I going insane? I am wrong in theory. I am wrong in practice. I am wrong when I'm correct. Am I going insane? I need to vent. I'm sure I won't. I live in pressured silence. Am I going insane? I'm talking. I'm loud. They see. They turn. I wear it well. Am I going insane? No rhyme. Not a reason. No want. No drive. I'm tired and just feel like I'm going insane.



By Jā Corbett-Sparks
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



FINDING SELF

By Alanah Jones
THE BLACK LENS

And she gargles under the weight of the world.

She suffocates in the bath she ran, the faucet un-stopping, and it disgusts her to be so vulnerable that she's all wet again.

The downpour only hardens as she screams. Muffled in the saturation of her tears for she hates herself and fears the praise and affection she receives from others.

They lie to her, only the prevarications she's formed all along are truth.

Ugly, untalented, unworthy.

She fights to find the drain because she's running out of time.

It has run cold, there is no more warmth or comfort here in her sorrows.

Her body is pruned up, soggy from her melancholic mind.

Every problem is too big to fight but she reaches to sewer the river she has cried.

Praying for grace, relief and peace.

To heal from the toxic relationship she holds with herself.



By AP Tha Warrior
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



Hymns not poems

By AP Tha Warrior
THE BLACK LENS

First & foremost, these aren't poems, they're hymns because I'm him. When I 1st moved here, my light was a little dim.

Now it's my time to shine, what I'm told in my mind. God did, Hov did, & AP did the modern day Trifecta.

Even when I was vegan, I was always about my feta. Better, wake up and do one thing, to get me closer toward my goals.

My name's not origami, no time to fold. Only thing I know walk head up, chest out, real bold. Meaning no words I utter, shall be

micro nor soft. That's been established since 97, when I could speak. It's what got me that corner office everyday of the week

UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS

Conscious chaos or observational order

PAC had it right!

by the age of 30 there are no more loud mouths, just quiet excuses ...

When bold voices are Silenced, something is felt in its place, this chase for finding what is right and, wrong is literally how we define the human race!

We are !!

Divine instrument of cosmic intelligence

Walking towards a future that's walking back towards us!!

It's a shame that !!!

Stealing us was the best thing they ever did too bad they'll never tell their kids.

You can call me lazily lazy, but I prefer Lazarus lets not be disrespectful with the humble history facts, especially when it comes to the blacks.

THEY felt uncomfortable while WE unseen, what does it mean when we cast out social justice for the right to JUST BE MEAN!!!

What hill are you willing to die on for your opinion?

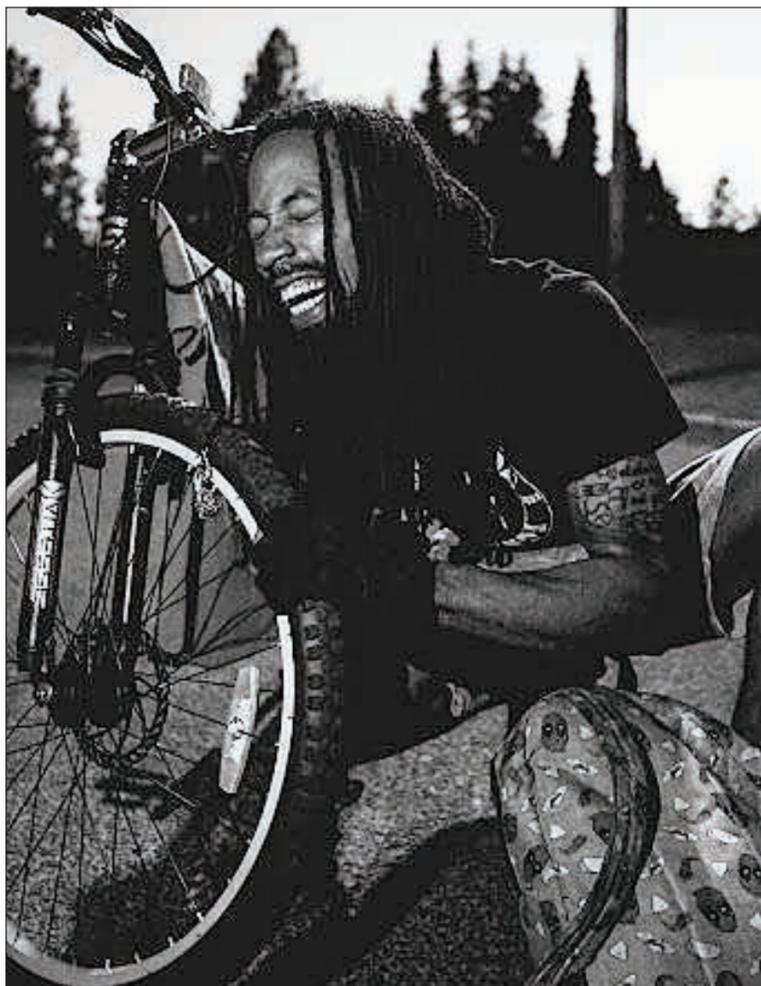
how many guns can you stand pointed at your face because you didn't know your place?

lastly

When was the last time someone looked at you like you didn't deserve to be part of the same species!?

We can define it, & yet They refine it.

No matter who is wrong we can't live out of spite, this isn't mortal kombat so stop looking at me as if I said "TEST YO MIGHT "



AJ the Wordsmith