

THE BLACK LENS

JANUARY 2026 - VOL. 11 - ISSUE NO. 1

JUSTICE IN ACTION

COURAGE, CARE AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

We are navigating division, fatigue, misinformation and widening inequities. DR. KING CALLED FOR ACTION, NOT COMFORT.

False neutrality is not baseless, it is duplicitous danger

IN HER WORDS

"Black communities should not have to petition for the right to be remembered." – Kerra Bower

When federal actions quietly erase Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Juneteenth from the National Parks Registry, silence is not neutrality it is complicity. These removals are not administrative oversights. They are

part of a larger, ongoing attempt to diminish Black history, Black struggle, and Black contributions to this country. In that context, affirming support for these holidays is not symbolic. It is a moral line in the sand.

History is not erased all at once. It is eroded slowly, deliberately and often under the guise of process. What makes this moment dangerous is not only the federal rollback itself, but the growing comfort with inaction

at every level beneath it. When institutions hesitate to respond, they signal that Black history is conditional and something to be defended only when convenient, popular, or requested.

We have heard the language before: "Every time the feds upset us, we don't need to respond."

This framing trivializes the erasure of Black history as an emotional reaction rather than a predictable and documented pattern. The removal of MLK

Day and Juneteenth is not simply the federal government "upsetting" communities. It is an attack on collective memory, the very mechanism that helps ensure we do not repeat the atrocities of history, distort civil rights legacies, or forget the truths that shape our present.

Even more concerning is the insistence that support must wait until leaders "hear from the



By Kerra Bower
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR

See NEUTRALITY, 10

NO WRONG DOOR



COURTESY

Kitara Johnson-Jones speaks during the opening of Gabriel's Challenge in NorthTown Mall.

Kitara Johnson-Jones on addiction, fentanyl and building Gabriel's Challenge Community Care Kiosk in NorthTown

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

Q: Kitara, who was Gabriel?

A: "Gabriel was not just my third son, the middle child, he was also my best friend. I have a really close relationship with all of my kids, but Gabriel and I had like partnerships. We would do business and things together. He was the kind of person that if you have a dream, you had to slow him down because your dream would become his dream and he'd build it out."

Q: How did his struggle with addiction begin?

A: "What started the drug use was trauma. In a moment of pride, he told my sister he wasn't going to watch my nephew anymore...my sister let a co-worker babysit him. [Someone ended up beating the baby to death]. After that, Gabe just couldn't go back to school anymore. He had a 4.5 GPA

See GABRIEL, 10



Kitara Johnson-Jones, center in white coat, claps after community members cut the ribbon on the opening of Gabriel's Challenge in NorthTown Mall.

ART AS ACTIVISM: WHY OUR STORIES MATTER

Quincy Jones Square and Black memory work

Conversation with Judge Tracy Flood on archiving, place-keeping and why history must be protected in plain sight

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

Quincy Jones Square in Bremerton is more than a public gathering space, it is a living archive. Anchored by public art, historical artifacts, and community memory, the square honors the early life and legacy of Quincy Jones, whose musical genius was nurtured in Washington long before the world knew his name.

In this Q&A, Judge Tracy Flood reflects on why marking place matters, how Quincy Jones Square came to be, and why preservation and archiving are essential acts of cultural survival, especially now.

Q: I grew up listening to Quincy

Jones's music, but I never knew he had roots in the Pacific Northwest. Can you talk about that connection?

Judge Tracy Flood: Absolutely. Quincy Jones's family relocated from Chicago to Kitsap County for work at the Bremerton shipyard. While living here, Quincy encountered music in a transformative way, touching a piano for the first time at the armory in Bremerton. Those early experiences mattered. After that period, the family moved to Seattle, but Bremerton was foundational. This is where the spark was lit.

Q: Quincy Jones Square feels inten-

See QUINCY, 10



COURTESY OF CITY OF BREMERONTON

A mural depicting Quincy Jones adorns a parking garage at the northwest corner of Fourth Street and Washington Avenue and will direct visitors to the new Quincy Square.

HEALTH EQUITY IS COLLECTIVE WORK: REPRESENTATION WITHOUT AWARENESS CREATES BIGGER PROBLEMS

A conversation with Daphne Smith, health equity advocate

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

Daphne Smith knows systems—from the inside out. As a health equity advocate and co-executive director with Northwest Health Law Advocates (NoHLA), Smith's work sits at the intersection of healthcare access, policy, labor

rights, and racial justice. In this conversation, she reflects on her roots, her path into advocacy, and why universal healthcare is not about charity—but about survival, dignity, and collective power.

Q: Can you start by saying and spelling your name, and telling us a little about yourself and your connection to

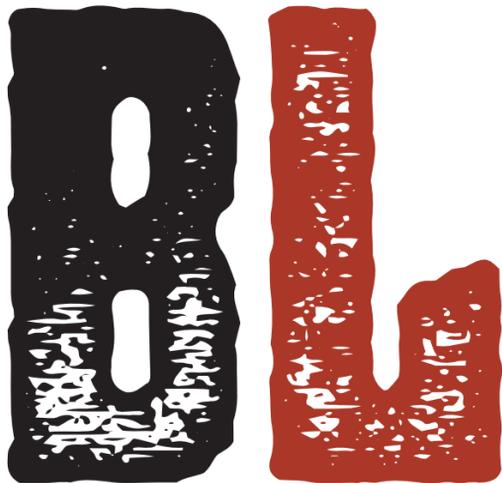
Spokane?

I'm originally from Ogden, Utah. My mom got a job here in the eighties and relocated all of us up here. I struggled being up here because there's a lot of white people and I was not used to being around a lot of white people. So I moved

See HEALTH, 10



JUSTICE IN ACTION



NEWS

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Maryland to consider slavery reparations after Gov. Wes Moore's veto is overridden

Maryland will create a commission to study potential reparations for slavery after lawmakers voted Dec. 16 to override a veto by Gov. Wes Moore – the nation's only Black governor – that disappointed many fellow Democrats, the Associated Press reported.

Moore said in his veto letter in May that it was a difficult decision to veto the bill, which was a priority of the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland, the AP wrote. But he wrote there has been enough study of the legacy of slavery, and it was now time to “focus on the work itself” to address it.

But Democrats who control both chambers of the Maryland General Assembly decided the commission was needed to better examine how to do that, the AP reported.

“This topic isn't easy, but, again, without formal study, reparations risk being dismissed as symbolic or unconstitutional, regardless of moral merit,” Sen. Charles Sydnor, a Democrat, told the AP.

After his veto was overridden, Moore told the AP that while he disagrees with the legislature's decision, “I am eager to move forward in partnership on the work of repair that we all agree is an urgent and pressing need.”

“I believe the time for action is now – and we must continue moving forward with the work of repair immediately,” Moore said in a statement. “That mission is especially vital given the immediate and ongoing effects of this federal administration on our constituents, including communities that have been historically left behind.”

Potential reparations outlined in the bill include official statements of apology, monetary compensation, property tax rebates, social service assistance, as well as licensing and permit fee waivers and reimbursement, the AP wrote.

Maryland's Black population is about 30%, the AP reported, the highest percentage of any state outside of the Deep South.

U.S. Capitol unveils statue of teen civil rights icon, taking Robert E. Lee's spot

The U.S. Capitol on Dec. 16 began displaying a statue of a teenage Barbara Rose Johns as she protested poor conditions at her segregated Virginia high school, the Associated Press reported, a pointed replacement for a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee that was removed years ago.

An unveiling ceremony of the statue representing Virginia in the Capitol took place in Emancipation Hall, featuring Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson, Democratic Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, Republican Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, Virginia's congressional delegation and Democratic Gov.-elect Abigail Spanberger.

Johnson said more than 200 members of Johns' family were on hand.

Johns was 16 in 1951 when she led a strike for equal education at R.R. Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia. The cause gained the support of NAACP lawyers, who filed a lawsuit that would become one of the five cases that the U.S. Supreme Court reviewed in Brown v. Board of Education. The high court's landmark 1954 decision declared “separate but equal” public schools unconstitutional.

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NEWS

FROM THE EDITOR

The chokehold of competition

The chokehold of ego-centric competition is something worth pausing to reflect on, because it engenders a posture of territorial defense. At times, that posture can feel like self-honor, like vigilance, preparedness, or strength. But as we move through this season of history, I find myself wondering if we do not challenge the spirit of competition that has been ingrained into our collective psyche out of fear: fear that there will not be enough, fear that we will not be chosen, fear rooted in scarcity.

Left unchecked, this pressure cooker begins to see threats where there are none. The balance between protection and collaboration becomes uneven. Boundaries, once meant to create safety and clarity, begin to construct silos and trigger estrangement. The rat race accelerates, and in doing so, it steals the potential for collective power.

Scarcity is not an abstract concept. Our human nature is wired to hunt, gather, and survive. But when competition becomes the dominant framework through which we navigate community, it does more than motivate. It fractures. It creates chasms where collaboration could exist. It trains us to see one another not as partners, but as threats, or even enemies.

The spirit of competition



By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS
EDITOR



shouts commands to perform, outdo, chase, and rise to the top. It grips us in ways we often do not recognize, shaping our behaviors beneath the surface. In a culture obsessed with rank, hierarchy becomes the measure of worth rather than collective care. In our exhaustion, maybe even our disillusionment, we push ourselves to win, to prove ourselves, to perform. The energy that showed up in Selma, in Montgomery, in Greensboro shifts, diluted by individualism rather than fueled by collective resolve.

It feels especially important to interrogate this mindset in the month when we honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose legacy is often reduced to words

instead of action, specifically collective action.

Dr. King's vision was never about individual advancement. It was about shared struggle and shared responsibility. Together, we fight a better battle. But that togetherness requires vulnerability. It requires loosening our grip long enough to reach for the hand beside us, trusting that no one reaches the summit alone.

Competition often overshadows our fundamental need to exist without performance. Performance is a display, the outward manifestation of rehearsed lives. It asks us to be constantly visible, constantly impressive, constantly on. But authenticity does not require rehearsal. Community does not require perfection.

Perhaps the challenge before us is to juxtapose authenticity with performance. Are we rooted in truth, or is fear causing harm within our community? Can collaboration, rather than dominance, become our measure of success? Collaboration. Understanding. The ability to disagree and still remain in community. These are not weaknesses. They are disciplines.

Does the chokehold of competition keep us trapped into a scarcity mindset? We have to ask ourselves: what are we so afraid of? Because if competition is driving us, then no amount of winning will ever feel like enough.

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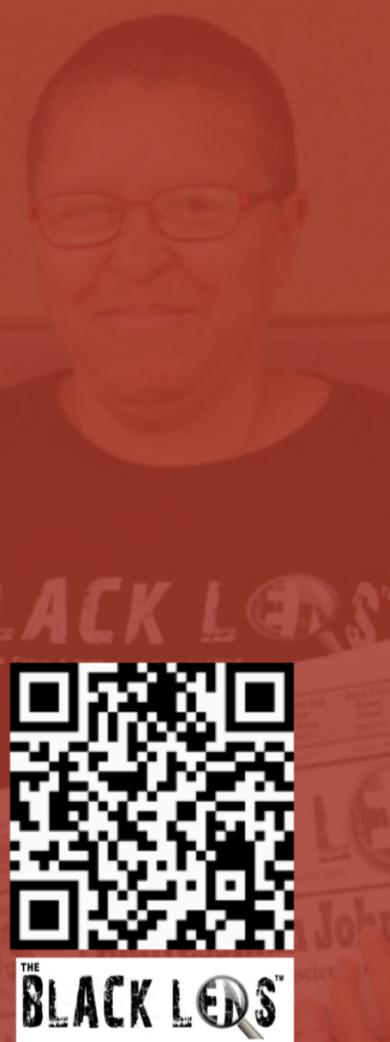
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THE BLACK LENS

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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

GABRIEL

Continued from 1

and he started struggling after that. I tried, I used all my strength, but I just couldn't pull him out. I think I was in a hole too at that moment, and that's when Gabriel started to spiral. But he kept trying. He just kept coming back."

Q: What do people misunderstand about fentanyl and addiction?

A: "Fentanyl changes your entire brain makeup and makes you crave that drug. After a while, you're not getting high anymore. You're using it to curb the symptoms. You're hurting in the marrow of your bones. You can't sleep. You can't go to the bathroom. People think it's a choice, but once that choice has been made, your body is now afflicted."

Q: You've spoken about post-acute withdrawal syndrome. Why does that matter?

A: "It takes about a year and a half for your brain to start healing. During that time, people can't send an email. They can't think straight. They forget things. They get irritable and cranky and don't know why. People think they're not showing up because they don't care, but mentally they cannot go. And then we punish them for that."

Q: What did you learn about the treatment system while trying to help Gabriel?

A: "I started learning what the problems were in the healthcare industry when it came to addiction, substance use disorder, co-occurring disorders, and behavioral health. It felt like he was just changing dealers. It's fee-for-service. It becomes a business. Humans become numbers. And when they kicked him out of treatment, that was it. Shortly after that, he was gone."

Q: How did Gabriel's Challenge come to be?

A: "Before he passed away, Gabriel sent me a 66-page plan. It was a community care collaborative. He talked about co-located services, a one-stop shop. He gave me a philanthropy plan, a marketing plan, a strategic plan. The first 20 pages were him convincing me that I could do it and lead it. I'm following his blueprint."

Q: What is the core mission of Gabriel's Challenge?

A: "The mission is No Wrong Door. I don't care where you come in—you should be able to get help. School, court, hospital, community. No judgment. No barriers. And the other part is the third place. Home is your first place. Work or school is your second. Your third place is where the community welcomes you as you are."

Q: How has grief shaped the way you move through this work?

A: "Grief comes in waves. Some days I'm fine. Some days a song or a smell will take me under. I just feel what I'm feeling in the moment. Somebody told me grief is love with nowhere to go. And gratitude is the remedy for grief. I look at the time I had with my son and the lives being saved now. That's the purpose."

Q: What keeps you going?

A: "If fentanyl were a person, it would be a serial killer. We would pursue it with urgency. And the community gives me hope. Lives are being saved. Narcan is available. Stigma is breaking. Gabriel's life mattered, and this work is proof of that."

The Gabriel's Challenge Community Care Kiosk has its grand opening in NorthTown Mall on Dec. 2.

Ridgeview fifth-grader Zada Lockett honored as districtwide engaged student of the month

Black Lens staff reports

On Nov. 30, Zada Lockett a fifth-grade student at Ridgeview Elementary School was surprised to receive the Engaged Student of the Month Award out of 30,000 students in the district. Zada, accepted the award from Dr. Adam Swinyard, Superintendent Spokane Public Schools.

Lara Nybo, Ridgeview Elementary School Principal highlighted Zada's dedication to academic excellence, her natural leadership, and active involvement on Student Council, the Spirit Club, Choir, Year Book and the Safety Patrol.

Zada is described as a truly special student who is fun-loving, warm, and charismatic. She thoroughly loves school and learning!



COURTESY OF SPOKANE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FACEBOOK

QUINCY

Continued from 1

tional-art, history, community all in one place. How did this come together?

The square represents collective effort and accountability to history. Alongside the sculpture, there's a mural and curated artifacts, including the piano Quincy played, now displayed at the Kitsap History Museum, which sits right on the square. The sculpture itself went through revision. Quincy's family, especially his brother, Senior U.S. District Judge Richard A. Jones, wanted it to be right. The artist was asked to go back to the drawing

board so the final piece truly honored Quincy's spirit and legacy.

Q: Why is it important to physically mark history—through sculptures, museums, and public spaces like Quincy Jones Square?

Because place anchors memory. If history isn't visible, it becomes vulnerable to erasure. When people walk through Quincy Jones Square, they are standing inside a story. They're reminded that Black excellence didn't only happen elsewhere, it happened here. And that matters, especially in places people don't automatically associate with Black history.

See QUINCY, 12



COURTESY

Senior U.S. district judge Richard A. Jones, squatting in front, poses in front of a bronze sculpture symbolizing connection by Michael Stutz, right in black, and Dinah in Quincy Jones Square in Bremerton, Wash. Standing among them are, left to right, Nehemiah Jones, Marlon Jones, Theresa Frank, Margie Jay, Judge Tracy Flood, Leslie Jones and Ms. Washington Globe 2026 Chrishenda Dawkins.

HEALTH

Continued from 1

back down to Ogden and stayed there until my senior year in high school.

I went back and forth my senior year, then came back up here, got out of the trap, graduated high school, started college up here, then went back to Utah to finish college and manage family relationships I had been running from. After I graduated, I got married and stayed up here.

Q: People don't often associate Utah with Black communities. Can you talk about Ogden and its Black history?

Ogden was a redlined district. It had to have been redlined when the Union Pacific and the Continental railroads met. Ogden became one of those western frontier cities, and it ended up being the second largest city in Utah outside of Salt Lake.

There was an actual Black population there, including my grandparents, because of the railroads. People like Duke Ellington would come through. He would take his train to Salt Lake for gigs, but then come down to Ogden to hang out with Black people and eat food, because that's where we were welcome.

By the seventies and eighties, Reaganomics came, they closed our schools down. I had Black schools, Black crossing guards—everything was Black and Latino. Then they shut our schools down and bused us out to rural areas. That's where I was exposed to white people—in second grade.

Q: How did you get into health equity and advocacy work?

Our organization is called Northwest Health Law Advocates. My background is in human resources. I graduated with an English degree, minored in communications and journalism.

Originally, I wanted to be a lawyer—but really I wanted a boyfriend in California, a house in New York, and to travel to London and Paris. God had a different idea. I changed my major my senior year.

I didn't know anything about human resources, but I ended up in HR and realized I got to deal with the law and how people treat people in organizations. That was everything for me.

I wanted to understand strategy—why people were hired, how money moved, what development looked like. I did that for about 18 to 20 years. I didn't want to be an executive director, but this role works because I'm a co-executive

director. I focus on strategy, systems, and advocacy.

Q: Why isn't representation alone enough in these spaces?

I've had to be my own advocate because I couldn't trust human resources to have my back. A lot of people don't know how to protect themselves at work, and by the time they figure it out, it's too late.

Representation matters, but representation with awareness matters more. If the process excludes people for unfair and biased reasons, then I have to talk about the system—not just show up as the representation.

Q: Why is health equity and universal health care so important right now?

Universal healthcare allows people to actually go to a doctor—not just have coverage. It means seeing a doctor who can take care of your basic needs and having a plan to address them.

If you have a country without healthy people, you're not going to be a well-off country. If you don't support the people with the least—the homeless, Black communities, immigrant communities, children, the elderly, the disabled—everything else falls apart.

Healthcare should be

built on supporting those who need support, not giving access to people who already have options.

Q: What systemic barriers are you seeing in Washington state?

Washington is one of the race cars of healthcare, but we're dealing with a massive state deficit. If there's no money, nobody gets care.

Now add federal policies that penalize states for covering immigrants—even lawfully present ones—and costs explode. People are facing \$2,000 copays and still can't get in to see a doctor.

I had to wait six months for a mammogram. That's recent. It's bad out here.

Q: How do race and gender compound health care inequities, especially for Black women?

Doctors still aren't aware of the medical abuse that happened to Black people—Tuskegee, Henrietta Lacks, millions of Black women experimented on. That history lives in our communities.

Serena Williams almost died after childbirth. She had to advocate for herself to get doctors to run tests. If the greatest tennis player in the world had to fight to be heard, we're way further down the totem pole.

Q: What is NoHLA

doing to center community voices?

We are going out to the community. We're not asking people to come to us. We want to hear from Washingtonians about what kind of healthcare system they want.

Our role is to help people build advocacy skills. This isn't our strategy—it has to come from the community.

Q: Why is collective organizing so important right now?

When people experience generational disenfranchisement, they lose the desire to fight. There's fear. But there is power in numbers and strategy.

Look at what Dr. King was doing before he was assassinated—bringing poor whites, Black and Latino families together. If we come together now, when the system is breaking, there's an opportunity to build something new that includes all the people pushed to the margins.

Q: What gives you hope moving forward?

Empowerment. Teaching people how to advocate. Giving people tools.

The systems—healthcare, education, banking—are all built the same way, and they were never built with us in mind. But we can learn them, navigate them, and change them together.

NEUTRALITY

Continued from 1

community."

Black communities should not have to petition for the right to be remembered. No one polls the public to decide whether the Fourth of July deserves recognition. No hearing is required to affirm Presidents' Day. Yet when it comes to Black history—which is American history permission is suddenly required. This is not community engagement. It is gatekeeping. It places the burden of defense on those already harmed and reframes remembrance as something negotiable.

Calls to "generalize" support so that it covers all cultural holidays follow the same logic.

They erase context in the name of neutrality. Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Juneteenth are not interchangeable observances; they mark the end of legalized enslavement, the reality of delayed liberation, and the leadership that forced this nation to confront its contradictions. To compound them into a generic category is to strip them of urgency and meaning. Equity is not achieved by pretending all histories were created equally.

This erosion has real consequences—especially in education. When Black history is minimized, distorted, or treated as optional, it feeds the very systems many claim to oppose. The pipeline does not begin with incarceration;

it begins with disengagement, misrepresentation, and the quiet removal of identity from classrooms. When children do not see their history protected, affirmed and defended, it shapes how they are taught, how they are disciplined, and how they are valued.

Black American communities are watching. We are tired of being told to wait, to generalize, to justify. Our collective history is not optional. Our delayed liberation is not negotiable. Civic leaders do not need permission to protect truth but they will be held accountable when they fail to do so.

Silence, deflection and false neutrality are choices.

And we will name them.

More Information

The National Park Service has announced that beginning in 2026 it will no longer offer free admission on Martin Luther King Jr. Day or Juneteenth, removing both federal holidays that honor Black history from its list of free entrance days and adding President Trump's birthday instead.

Advocates warn the change undermines the significance of MLK Day, which has become a national day of service when community groups rely on free park access to organize volunteer projects. Kristen Brengel of the National Parks Conservation Association called the decision troubling, noting that it diminishes recognition of Dr. King and disproportionately impacts communities engaged in service and stewardship.

NAACP President Derrick Johnson condemned the move as part of a broader effort by the Trump administration to undermine Black history, calling it an attempt to erase the legacy of Dr. King, minimize the history of emancipation, and marginalize Black communities.

The decision aligns with a wider pattern of actions aimed at minimizing or rewriting America's history of slavery and racial injustice, including removing references to inequality from federal websites, restricting Black history in schools, erasing historical figures from public materials, targeting the Smithsonian's treatment of slavery, refusing to acknowledge Juneteenth and directing the National Park Service to remove slavery exhibits while restoring Confederate monuments.

Source: [eji.org](https://www.eji.org)

SHADES OF MOTHERHOOD NETWORK / FROM THE FRONT PAGE

THE DREAM IS HER STORY, TOO

How Black women interpret, shape and propel King's vision forward today through motherhood

DEEP ROOTS, STRONG WOMEN

I've always been a dreamer. My mother told me that if I believed in my dream, it would come true. I look back on the many dreams that have manifested in my life, and I smile, because my mother believed in me and my dreams. I remember the year 1968, when people thought the dream died, with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Many did not understand that Dr. King's dream was never meant to stand still in time. It was meant to grow—carried forward by those with the courage to nurture hope, challenge injustice, and shape the world through love. Among the greatest guardians of this dream were Black women, especially mothers. And at the heart of this legacy stands Coretta Scott King, a woman whose own strength, vision, and motherhood helped sustain the movement during Dr. King's life and long after his death.

Today, Black mothers continue to propel King's vision into the future. Through daily sacrifices, prayers, and wisdom, they raise children who know their worth and understand their calling. Organizations like The Shades of Motherhood

Network amplify this work by uplifting, encouraging, and supporting mothers as they guide the next generation.

Coretta Scott King: A Mother Who Carried the Dream

Coretta Scott King was not simply the wife of a civil rights leader—she was a leader, strategist, and mother who embodied the dream in her own right. She balanced public activism with the daily responsibilities of raising four children under the constant threat of violence. She taught them dignity, courage, and faith while advocating on a national and global scale.

Her motherhood was an extension of the movement itself. In her home, she passed down the belief that justice is a family value, that service is a calling, and that love—even in the midst of pain—is transformative. Her example laid the foundation for generations of Black mothers who continue to raise children capable of carrying the dream further.

The Shades of Motherhood Network honors this legacy each time it supports a mother navigating the responsibilities of raising children in a



By Stephy Nobles-Beans
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



complex world. Coretta's life reminds us that motherhood is leadership, and leadership shaped by love is unstoppable.

Motherhood as a Ministry of Justice

Before laws changed or marches filled the streets, Black mothers were already preparing their children to survive and thrive. They taught pride, caution, wisdom, and courage. They helped children navigate systems not built for them while reminding them that their lives are sacred.

This form of mothering—strong, spiritual, and resilient—is deeply connected to Dr. King's message. Through The Shades of Motherhood Network, mothers find a



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS
Coretta Scott King in 1964.

supportive community that pours strength back into them. It is a space where they can learn, share, grow, and release burdens they have carried alone. By empowering mothers, the Network empowers families—and by empowering families, it carries King's dream into the next generation.

Passing Down a Legacy of Faith and Resilience

Dr. King's ministry was rooted in unshakeable faith. Coretta shared that faith, and Black mothers today continue to embody it. Through prayer, worship, and spiritual grounding, mothers teach children that they are divinely purposed and deeply loved.

The Shades of Motherhood Network provides mothers with emotional, spiritual, and cultural support—a reminder that they are not isolated in their journey. This collective resilience echoes

the determination of the civil rights movement itself: a belief that hope is not optional, but essential. Mothers instill in their children the truth that while the world may challenge them, God has equipped them.

Teaching the Power of Love in a Wounded World

Dr. King preached radical love—love that confronts injustice without losing its humanity. Coretta lived this love through her activism, her marriage, her mothering, and her lifelong commitment to peace.

Black mothers' model this powerful love every day. Their love protects, guides, corrects, uplifts, and inspires. Through its programs and support circles, The Shades of Motherhood Network helps mothers cultivate emotional strength and healthy communication, enabling them to teach children how to love with both compassion and wisdom.

This is love as resistance. Love as healing. Love as transformation.

Preparing the Next Generation of Change-Makers

Black mothers are shaping tomorrow's thinkers, faith leaders, creators, and advocates. They pass down history—not only the trauma, but the triumph. They teach children where they come from so they can walk confidently

into where they are going.

When The Shades of Motherhood Network supports a mother, it indirectly strengthens her household, her children, and her community. This ripple effect is exactly what Coretta Scott King envisioned when she continued the civil rights movement after her husband's death: a future where every family has the support needed to thrive.

Carrying the Dream With Grace, Wisdom, and Vision

The dream is not simply a speech—it is a daily responsibility. And Black mothers, from Coretta Scott King to the everyday heroes raising children with courage and faith, continue to carry this responsibility with grace. The Shades of Motherhood Network stands beside them, echoing the message that mothers do not have to carry the dream alone.

Dr. King's dream lives because mothers keep breathing life into it.

The dream is her story, too. And through the love of Black and Brown mothers—and the support of The Shades of Motherhood Network—it continues to rise, generation after generation.

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

ROOTS AND WINGS

PARENTHOOD: THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Throughout the journey of parenthood, we frequently reflect on the most meaningful gifts we can offer our children. Beyond material possessions, the most valuable gifts are those that cultivate enduring values and empower future achievement. Gifts such as love, joy, peace, truth, hope, kindness, and a heart to serve not only enrich our lives but also prepare our children to navigate the world with resilience and intention.

The foundational values we instill in our children significantly influence their development. Love, as the most essential gift, establishes a secure environment for growth. By expressing unconditional love, we foster a sense of belonging, enabling children to establish strong roots. This foundation promotes resilience, equipping them to face challenges with strength and determination.

Joy represents another essential foundational value. Encouraging children to find happiness in daily experiences teaches them to appreciate simple pleasures. When joy is integrated into family life, children understand that happiness is a deliberate and sustainable choice rather than a temporary emotion.

Peace is crucial in a world frequently characterized by disorder. By demonstrating



By Leola Rouse
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



peaceful conflict resolution and fostering understanding, we enable our children to pursue harmony both internally and in their relationships. This enduring gift of peace establishes a legacy of stability amid life's challenges.

While establishing these foundational values, it is equally important to provide our children with the skills and tools necessary for independence. Truth functions as a guiding principle. Teaching the importance of honesty fosters integrity and builds trust in relationships. When grounded in truth, children are better equipped to navigate complex situations with clarity and purpose.

Hope is fundamental to developing resilience. By fostering hope in our children, we encourage them to pursue ambitious goals and persist in their aspirations.

This sense of hope motivates them to embrace challenges and view setbacks as opportunities for growth.

Kindness enables our children to form meaningful connections and contribute positively to their communities. By highlighting the significance of helping others, we nurture compassion and an understanding of service. Instilling a heart to serve provides a lasting value that can be shared, fostering widespread positive impact.

As parents, we possess a unique opportunity to impart values that endure. Each lesson learned serves as a foundation, while affirmations of their abilities empower children to pursue their aspirations.

By weaving love, joy, peace, truth, hope, and kindness into the tapestry of our parenting, we create a legacy that transcends generations. These are the gifts that endure, shaping the character of our children and empowering them to become the change-makers of tomorrow.

In the end, it is not the material gifts we provide that will be remembered, but the lessons of the heart that resonate through time. Let us all strive to plant roots and nurture wings, ensuring that the greatest gifts we give remain a beacon of light for our children and all who follow.



COURTESY
Senior U.S. district judge Richard A. Jones, right, kneels along historical photos as part of an event at Quincy Jones Square.

QUINCY

Continued from 10

Q: You've spoken about how much Black history exists in Bremerton that many people don't know. Can you share more about that?

At the height of World War II, more than 10,000 Black people lived and worked here in the shipyards. That history includes labor struggles, redlining, legal battles, and community building. Black attorneys came from Seattle to fight discrimination cases here. These stories aren't in textbooks, but they shaped the region. We have enough artifacts and documentation to fill an entire museum. The challenge is making sure they're preserved and accessible.

Q: Why is preservation and archiving especially urgent right now?

Because erasure is active. It shows up in whitewashed textbooks, in policies that minimize Black contributions, and in the absence of public memory. If we don't record our history, write it, catalog it, protect it, it disappears. And when history disappears, people lose context, pride, and power. Knowing where you come from shapes where you



COURTESY
Senior U.S. district judge Richard A. Jones and Bremerton Municipal Court Judge Tracy Flood pose in Quincy Jones Square.

believe you can go.

Q: What do you want young people to understand about history and legacy?

That they come from strength. Our ancestors built institutions, fought for rights, created excellence under impossible conditions. None of this is new, it's just been forgotten or hidden. When young people understand that lineage, they walk differently. Preservation isn't about the past alone; it's about grounding the future.

Q: What does Quincy Jones Square ultimately represent to you?

It represents proof. Proof that Black history lives in Washington state.

Proof that genius can be nurtured anywhere. And proof that when a community chooses to honor its stories, publicly and permanently, it disrupts erasure and restores truth.

Quincy Jones Square stands as a reminder that history is not abstract; it is local, embodied, and alive. Preserving Black history through archiving, storytelling, and public memory is not optional work; it is necessary work. As Judge Tracy Flood makes clear, if we don't protect our stories, someone else will rewrite, or flat out, remove them.

History must be marked. Memory must be defended. And legacy must be made visible.

IN MEMORIAM

REST IN POWER

in Memoriam



CARL CARLTON
(DEC. 14, 2025)

Detroit-native Carl Carlton began his career in music at just 16-years-old, signing with Lando Records under the name “Little Carl Carlton,” later ditching “little” from his stage name. He first reached the Billboard Hot 100 at No. 6, with his 1974 cover of Robert Knight’s “Everlasting Love”. His most well-known hit, “She’s a Bad Mamma Jamma,” stayed on the Billboard Hot 100 for 21 weeks and earned Carlton a Grammy nomination.



ROD PAIGE
(DEC. 9, 2025)

An education advocate for most of his life, Rod Paige helped launch the No Child Left Behind Act as President George W. Bush’s education secretary. Before working in D.C., Paige served as the Houston Independent School District superintendent. There, his changes to the district’s programing, teacher pay and subsequent improve student test scores became known as the “Houston Miracle”.



JUBILANT SYKES
(DEC. 8, 2025)

After performing at world-famous venues like Carnegie Hall and the Barbican Centre in London, Jubilant Sykes admitted in an interview that he didn’t dream of becoming an opera singer before attending Cal State Fullerton. The Los Angeles native was nominated for best classical album at the 2010 Grammy Awards, with many critics praising his performance in Leonard Bernstein’s Mass in the Celebrant role.



JO ANN ALLEN BOYCE
(DEC. 3, 2025)

Jo Ann Allen Boyce was among the first Black students in the South to attend an integrated school following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. She was a part of group known as the “Clinton 12,” who were met with threats, protests and rioters after desegregating the school. Allen Boyce graduated from high school in California and then spent four decades in the nursing field. She was the grandmother of the late actor Cameron Boyce.



RAFAEL ITHIER
(DEC. 6, 2025)

San Juan, Puerto Rico-native Rafael Ithier, a giant in the salsa music world, began playing guitar at 10-years-old. In his teenage years he joined his first musical group, where he taught himself to play multiple instruments and read sheet music. In his 20s Ithier joined the music group El Gran Combo, which he led for more than 50 years. The salsa orchestra played across multiple continents and is known colloquially as the “University of Salsa”.



ANTONE ‘CHUBBY’ TAVARES
(NOV. 29, 2025)

Anthony “Chubby” Tavares was the lead singer of the five-brother band known as Tavares. The brothers signed a deal in the late 1960s before landing several hits, such as “She’s Gone,” “Whodunit” and “Heaven Must Be Missing an Angel”. The group earned a Grammy Award for their recording of “More Than a Woman” for the “Saturday Night Fever” soundtrack. The group is credited by critics for helping shape the sound of R&B and disco music.

Tribute to the late H. Rap Brown: ‘We should never forget!’

By James Smith
THE BLACK LENS

Early life & rise in the Civil Rights movement

H. Rap Brown was born Hubert Gerold Brown in 1943 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

In his youth he earned the nickname “Rap” – reportedly for his knack with wordplay and street wit.

As a young man, he joined the civil-rights movement: in the early 1960s he became involved with a student group, initially the Non-violent Action Group (NAG), and later with the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

Leadership, militancy and ‘Black Power’ advocacy

In May 1967, at roughly 23 years old, Brown became Chairman of SNCC, succeeding Stokely Carmichael.

Under his leadership, SNCC moved away from its earlier, strictly non-violent stance. He was part of a generation of activists who embraced a more militant, confrontational approach to Black liberation and civil rights.

He often spoke in blunt, provocative language: for example, in 1967 he de-

clared “Violence is a part of America’s culture. ... It is as American as cherry pie.”

This phase of his life made Brown a potent symbol of “Black Power” – a radical break from older, more integration-focused civil-rights strategies. For many in the African American community, especially young people disillusioned by slow pace of change and persistent racism, Brown’s message resonated deeply.

Why H. Jamil Al-Amin matters - his legacy & impact

He captured a turning point in Black activism: a move from integration

and nonviolence toward self-defense, Black Power, self-determination, and militancy – reflecting a deep frustration with systemic violence and broken promises.

For many African Americans, Brown’s radical honesty about anger, oppression, and the urgency of justice spoke powerfully.

Later in life, his turn to faith and community-building embodied another aspect of Black struggle: not only political liberation but also spiritual, communal, and social uplift – rebuilding communities, offering guidance, stability, and alternatives where institutions had failed.

A life of contradictions, struggle and significance

H. Rap Brown / Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin lived a life of stark contrasts: from street-smart youth, to fiery Black Power firebrand, to prison inmate, to Muslim imam and community elder. His journey mirrored the broader contours of Black America’s struggles over identity, justice, and dignity.

Whether celebrated as a revolutionary hero or criticized as a radical whose methods were too extreme – or judged for his alleged crime – his story forces us to confront uncomfortable truths



WIKIMEDIA

H. Rap Brown/Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin died a month ago.

about race, resistance, repression, and redemption in America.



01.14.1950

12.23.2025

In Loving Memory of

WILLIE LEE DAVIS

Willie Lee was a beloved wife, mother, and grandmother. Her kindness, wisdom, and laughter touched the hearts of everyone who knew her. She will be deeply missed and forever cherished in our memories.

Rest in the Lord



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.

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 coojone-s4am@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 dgiz-zle21@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@aww.community. 59 E. Queen Ave., Suite 210, Spokane, 99206.

Allie & Austin Accounting Services –

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

Allowing Change, LLC. –

Pre-Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Certified Life & Relationship Coach Britney Richards (she/her). (509) 795-0376 or allowingchangecl@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@com-cast.net. P.O. Box 1629, Veradale, Wash., 99037.

BrewCity Flash Photography –

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

Spokane Beard Papa's –

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

Beauchamp and Chase –

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

Bethely Entertainment Group –

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

Betty Jean's BBQ –

Restaurant owned by Omar Jones. (509) 828-5931 or bettyjeansbbq@yahoo.com. 2926 E. 29th Ave., Spokane, 99223. Online at www.bettyjeansbbq.com, Instagram: Betty_jeans_bbq and Facebook: Bettyjeansbbq.

Black London's –

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

Brendan Blocker Realty Services –

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

Brittany Trambitas Hair Design –

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

Bummy Boss Clips & Beauty Supply –

NorthTown mall hair care. (509) 315-8963 or visit bummybossclips.appointedcd.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 fantasy.kleaning@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.

Generations Barbershop –

Hair services. (509) 505-8745. 3140 N Division St Spokane, WA 99207. Online at generationsbarbershop.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](https://www.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/](https://www.instagram.com/inter_tribal_beauty/).

JSandoval Real Estate –

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

Koala Koi Massage –

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

Lacquered and Luxe –

Nail salon owned by Lisa-Mae Brown. (509) 993-7938 or brownlisamae@yahoo.com. 33 E. Lincoln Road, Suite 205, Spokane.

Larry's Barber & Styling –

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

League of Women for Community Action, Non-profit, dba Southeast Day Care Center –

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

Lilac City Legends Inc. –

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

Mary Kay –

Beauty Consultant Nicole Mills. (509) 666-4929, (252) 365-4971 or 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@nlhawoffices.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.

Northwest Seed & Pet –

Pet feed and care store. Two locations: 2422 E. Sprague Ave. at (509) 534-0694 and 7302 N. Division St. at (509) 484-7387.

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@psurmotalone.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@queenofsheeba.com. 2621 W. Mallon Ave., Suite 426, Spokane, 99201.

Quick and Classy Auto Customs –

Mechanic Jamar Dickerson. (509) 315-5090, (509) 795-6065 or 2gn2tythoon@gmail.com. 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@ragingsuccessconsulting. 2818 N. Sullivan Rd, Suite 100, Spokane Valley, 99216.

Raze Early Learning and Development Center –

Culturally centered pre-K programming by founder Kerra Bower. (509) 587-3490. 6519 N. Lidgerwood St., Spokane, WA 99208.

RJ's So Southern BBQ & Catering –

Food business owned by Reggie Perkins. Contact rjs.sosouthern@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.

SmooV Cutz Barber Shop –

Barber shop owned by Jason "SmooV" Watson. (509) 703-7949 or jsmooV923@gmail.com. Two locations at 13817 E. Sprague Ave., Spokane Valley, 99216, and 14700 E. Indiana Ave., Spokane Valley, 99216.

Spacehub Production –

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

Vision Properties –

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

The Way to Justice –

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

WrightWay Beauty Supply –

(509) 703-7772 (call/text), 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.

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 Tion 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 URBAN BUSH WOMEN'S 'THIS IS RISK' EVENT

Black Lens staff reports

Urban Bush Women is a groundbreaking Black women-led theatrical dance company and social activism ensemble, founded in 1984 by choreographer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar as an amplifier for unheard stories of Black women.

The Urban Bush Women's "This Is Risk" event takes place 7:30-9 p.m. Feb. 13. Tickets are on sale now. Tickets are \$10 for students, \$20 early bird and \$25 general admission. Seating is limited and tickets will sell quickly. Mark your calendars!

NEWS/CULTURE

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FROM REP. NATASHA HILL: WHAT'S AHEAD AND WHAT'S ALREADY PASSED

PULSE ON DEMOCRACY

Black Lens staff reports

As Washington prepares for the 2026 legislative session, Rep. Natasha Hill is advancing policies focused on housing affordability, economic equity, voting rights, and community stability.

Looking Ahead: Bills in Progress

Rep. Hill is developing two major pieces of legislation:

- A land banking bill to expand access to affordable housing by making land available for long-term community benefit.
- A renters' credit bill to help renters build credit without taking on debt.

She is also continuing work on the Washington Voting Rights Act (HB 1750), which would codify existing case law to strengthen voting access and ensure elections

remain fair, transparent and accessible amid national efforts to restrict voting rights.

Constituents are encouraged to engage by tracking bills, signing up to testify (in person or remotely), or visiting Olympia with support from her office.

Budget Reality: A Call for Fair Revenue

Rep. Hill highlighted growing budget pressures caused by federal cuts to education, health care, housing, and infrastructure. She is calling for progressive revenue solutions, including closing corporate tax loopholes and asking the wealthiest to contribute their fair share—while protecting working families.

The goal is a sustainable, equitable budget that supports public schools, behavioral health, housing, and essential services.



Natasha Hill

Community Engagement During the Interim

Over the interim, Rep. Hill visited organizations across Spokane, including:

- Salish School of Spokane (Indigenous language revitalization)
- Latinos En Spokane (education, legal aid, maternal health, and small business support)
- Second Harvest Inland Northwest (food access and zero-waste initiatives)
- Habitat Spokane & Manzanita House (homeownership, apprenticeships, and immigrant legal aid)

- Spokane Regional Health District & Frontier Behavioral Health
- Joya Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT)

These visits inform her advocacy for funding and policy support at the state level.

Food Security: Bills Already Passed

Nearly one million Washingtonians rely on SNAP, and federal proposals like H.R. 1 threaten major cuts to nutrition assistance. In response, Rep. Hill supports the Well Washington Fund, which helps stabilize food programs and protect families from federal uncertainty. She reaffirmed her commitment to ensuring no Washingtonian goes hungry.

Weather & Emergency Preparedness

Amid historic flooding and storms, Rep. Hill urged residents to stay informed through local emergency alerts, weather updates, and shelter resources, and

to check on neighbors when possible.

Housing Affordability: Major Reforms Now in Effect

Washington passed landmark housing legislation, including:

Rent Stabilization (HB 1217): Caps rent increases, requires advance notice, bans first-year hikes, and strengthens tenant protections.

Parking Reform (SB 5184): Reduces costly parking requirements.

Faster ADU Permits (HB 1353): Speeds approval for backyard cottages.

Lot Splitting (HB 1096) and Middle Housing (SB 5471): Expand housing options statewide.

Together, these reforms aim to stabilize rents, reduce development costs, and increase housing choices, helping families, seniors and young people afford to live in Washington.



Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty."

Martin Luther King Jr., letter from a Birmingham Jail



Martin Luther King's 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail" remains a classic document of the Civil Rights movement and is certainly an appropriate read for Martin Luther King Day.

The "Letter" is a response to

a public statement of criticism of MLK's methods of protest and resistance. In defense of a policy of non-violent resistance, King suggests that one is morally bound to resist unjust laws; indeed, drawing on the likes of Augustine, he wants to

suggest that "an unjust law is no law at all." The "Letter" was important enough to King for him to have included the full text in his book, "Why We Can't Wait."

Source: www.jackmillercenter.org

Let your voice be heard on MLK Day, Juneteenth celebrations

Dear Community Members,

On Dec. 14, in my capacity as Director of Communications for the Spokane City Council, I drafted and presented a resolution to the Council reaffirming the importance of celebrating MLK Day and Juneteenth. During this meeting, two Council Members pushed back on the legitimacy to support the resolution, one stating that it is "baseless" and "the community did not ask for this." Council President has agreed to sponsor this resolution, as she believes that, while there is a national attempt to dilute our history, it is our community's responsibility to reaffirm its importance.



By Lisa Gardner
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



The resolution follows a recent federal decision that removed national recognition of MLK Day and Juneteenth as free-entry days at national parks, prompting communities across the country to reaffirm the importance of these historic observances.

While these federal holidays are nationally recognized and deeply rooted in American history, their significance goes beyond a date on the calendar. They represent values our community has long claimed: dignity, inclusion, and the courage to acknowledge both our progress and our unfinished work.

The resolution before Council does not create new holidays, require new funding, or change city policy. It simply affirms that our city remains clear and consistent in recognizing the legacy of Dr. King and the end of legal enslavement in the United States.

This vote will take place during the same council meeting in which an MLK Day proclamation will be read on Monday, Jan.

12, at 6 p.m. in Council Chambers at City Hall.

Your voice matters. If you believe our city should stand firmly and publicly in support of these values, we encourage you to:

Attend the upcoming City Council meeting in person or online at my.spokanecity.org/citycable5/live

Provide public comment in support of the resolution or sign up to testify at my.spokanecity.org/citycouncil/meetings/signup/

Share your perspective respectfully and authentically.

Moments like this remind us that community values are not abstract; they are upheld when people speak up.

As we prepare to celebrate MLK Day, let's show up on Jan. 12 to support Council President and also reaffirm the importance of our country's foremost Civil Rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Thank you for continuing to help shape a city that strives to live up to its ideals.

This message by Spokane NAACP President Lisa Gardner was presented on Dec. 15 at the Public Infrastructure, environment and sustainability meeting (PIES).

International focus

An invitation for contemplation

Greetings Spokane and The Black Lens family.

It's pretty awesome to join you once again here on The BL. Thank you, Sister April, for the invitation to come on board. It is absolutely my honor and privilege to once again share some communications on this platform started by our beloved Sandy Williams.

I figured for this first column I'd start out by reintroducing myself and just talk about why I'm going to call it what I call it.

For those of you that may not know me, I am Kurtis Robinson. I identify as multiracial, and I use he/him pronouns. I'm 62 years old and a Cancer. I had the distinct honor of serving as the Spokane NAACP Branch President three times in seven years (in past times). I am a father of three biological children and two stepchildren.

I acknowledge being a previously justice-involved individual who did my time from 1984 through 1987 for a strong-armed robbery that I committed while I was crack cocaine addicted and gunshot wounded. I acknowledge having 10 ACEs, and come January 1st, I will have 23 consecutive years clean and sober.

I currently serve as a Spokane NAACP 3rd VP; Better Health Together board member/secretary; Just Lead Washington board member/vice chair; Front and Centered community council member; City of Spokane Human Rights commissioner/secretary; and a Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission Commissioner.

I worked for over a decade as a wildland and structural firefighter, and I currently work as the Executive Director for the

Revive Center of Returning Citizens and I Did The Time. Yeah, once in a while I get to get some sleep. Yet believe you me, why I do so much will be a thing to chew on in the future!

Which brings me to the title of this column. Yep, you guessed it: "Some Stuff to Chew On!"

In my years of dedication, exposure, and access to many circles—as well as ridiculously demonstrated commitment to social justice, anti-racism, and pro-equity—I might have learned a few things. So when Sister April invited me to jump back on The Black Lens, it seemed only prudent to share some of those lessons, kick around some concepts, and have an intentional focus that invites us into contemplation about who, why, and where we are—not only as BIPOC individuals and a larger human family, but also (maybe especially)



By Kurtis Robinson
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



our nation and planet.

I will do my best to authentically serve that spirit, the invitation of Sister April, and the memory of Sister Sandy and Pat in such a fashion.

So, in 2026, we're going to start dancing that way! And as you close this year out, regardless of what's going on in this country and the world, may you have a special, blessed, and meaningful experience throughout this holiday season.

Looking forward to it! Merry, merry and happy, happy—however you celebrate.

HAPPENING AROUND TOWN

ART AS ACTIVISM

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

Art as Activism is the theme guiding this year's youth conversations and community storytelling—an exploration of how creativity challenges bias, expands empathy, and pushes culture forward. In this interview, actor Omari Collins reflects on performance, identity, discomfort, and the radical power of humanity through his work on stage, including his role in *Kinky Boots*.

Q: Can you tell me a little about yourself? How long have you been an actor, and was this something you always wanted to do?

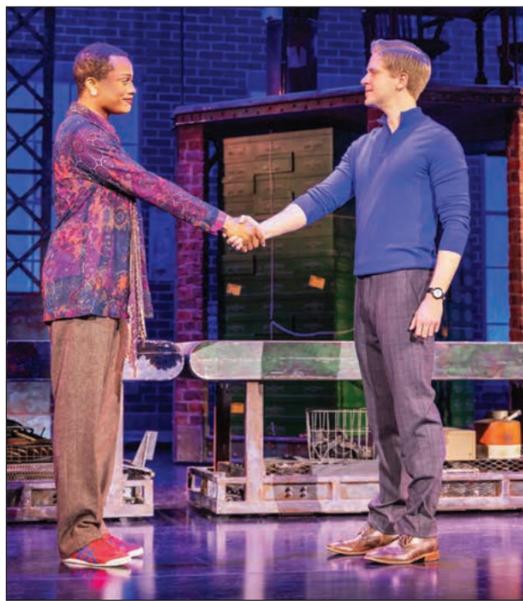
I grew up in Kansas City, Missouri. I started in the theater in about middle school doing regular school plays and things like that. I really just got the bug for performing there.

I grew up in a household with singers and musicians and all types of things, so music was always influenced in the household. I started taking piano lessons when I was about seven years old, and music has just always been at the foundation of who I am as a person.

I found my love for theater with school plays, and then I found out I could merge the two doing musical theater. I've always been a performer. I've always been larger than life—always extra, singing and being expressive.

Professionally, I've been acting since about 2019—actually making money doing it.

Q: Do you consider yourself a rookie, or do



COURTESY OF MATTHEW MURPHY

Omari Collins “Scarlett D. Von’Du” (Lola), left, and Noah Silverman (Charlie Price) in the national touring company of “Kinky Boots,” coming Tuesday and Wednesday to the First Interstate Center for the Arts.

you feel settled in your craft?

I don't think I'm a rookie or a novice, but I'm definitely not a veteran. I'm very comfortable in what I do, but I wouldn't say I'm a veteran by any means.

Q: This interview is centered on the theme Art as Activism. What does that mean to you? Is there a higher purpose behind your work?

To know me is to know that I push boundaries—always. My entire existence is pushing boundaries. Every time I step outside my door, I'm pushing someone's boundaries, whether that's how I present or the art that I create.

I like to think that art, in

its own nature, is to push cultural boundaries and shift the cultural zeitgeist. It pushes people to think past their biases and prejudices and really consider their neighbor and their fellow man.

I think art in itself is always activism. It's always pushing forward and making sure underrepresented people have a voice.

Q: What does it mean to you to embody characters whose stories challenge stereotypes and invite people to confront acceptance, gender, and community?

At the core of this character and the show really is humanity. It's to show that we are more alike than we

A conversation with actor Omari Collins

are different.

If we take the time to accept someone as they are, we may find out we actually like the human being versus just what they present outwardly.

It's not about pushing an agenda. It's literally about humanity and getting to know who these people are as humans.

Q: Kinky Boots disrupts comfort. What conversations do you hope the production sparks in Spokane?

What I want people to ask themselves when they leave the musical is, “Am I part of the solution or the problem?” Am I making it easier for other people to exist in my spaces as their true selves?

This show is all about heart. It's about human connection and making sure we take care of the people who take care of us.

Q: How do you navigate discomfort when your art or existence challenges the status quo?

I can only be me. There's only this version of me you're meeting—the best me that I can present at this moment.

If that is disruptive to you, that's not my issue. The only thing I'm concerned with is being the best me possible.

I would ask whoever I'm disrupting to look inward—why am I disrupting you? Why does this ruffle your feathers? That's worth asking.

Q: Can you share a moment in the show where empathy is created or prejudice is challenged?

“That's really the foun-

ation of the show. Lola is a cabaret drag queen on her own trajectory who meets a shoe factory owner whose business is failing.

Drag isn't accepted everywhere, especially in small towns, but Lola does a good job of bridging the gap by saying, “This is my art. I'll meet you where you are, and we'll find a middle ground where we can co-exist and create something together.”

Q: What role does judgment play in our communities, and how does theater confront it?

As a society, we've become so comfortable judging people by their surface presentation.

Until you sit down and get to know someone, you don't really know who they are. Snap judgments are harmful, especially with people who are recurring in your life.

Our show unpacks that. When people take the time to learn who someone really is beneath the hair, makeup, and glamour, it sets us up to be better humans.

Q: What do you hope this role accomplishes beyond the stage?

For Black queer kids in the audience, I hope they take a piece of power from this. A piece of belonging.

I want them to know they can be their full selves and do whatever they want simply because they see me on stage doing it.

For everyone else, I want people to take a bit of love with them. Even if it's just questioning, “Am I the protagonist or the antagonist, and why?”

I want people to take a piece of joy from this show.

CARL MAXEY CORNER



COURTESY

Wilhelmenia Williams stands, center in red hat, next to a cutout of the late Sandy Williams, her daughter and founder of The Black Lens. The elder Williams is moving to California and was the guest of honor at a party celebrating her time with the Carl Maxey Center.

WE'LL MISS YOU, MRS. WILLIAMS

By Jillisa Winkler
THE BLACK LENS

We were excited to send Mrs. Wilhelmenia Williams to sunnier skies and new adventures but so sad to see her go. Mrs. Williams was the first supporter of Carl Maxey Center having birthed and raised one of our most beloved local heroes, Sandy Williams, there would be no CMC without Mrs. Williams. Williams' legacy in Spokane begins years before however, she has been a steady guiding light for many in our community, walking alongside military families as a nurse at Fairchild Airforce Base, as a church elder, she is a Spokane hero in her own right.

I grew up knowing Mrs. Williams as a strong-willed, wise, and caring lady from my grandmother's church, as they shared the same church home in my childhood, New Hope Baptist Church, pastored by the late Rev. Happedy Watkins. I quickly figured out that Williams, though kind and graceful,

was not to be messed with. With her quiet attention, and occasional warnings of “I don't think I would do that, if I were you”, her guidance is not loud or lecturing, but rather self reflective, and from all I've seen, usually correct.

When Sandy “had to leave,” as Mrs. Williams often puts it, Mrs. Williams did not stop her steadfast support of the mission or the community CMC supports. Bingo with Williams has been one of our most consistent and well attended events, and Williams has hardly missed a Thursday in the last three years, except a few weeks in the bitter cold of winter. It was her wisdom that ensured Sandy purchased the building for CMC, ensuring community ownership of a space on Fifth Avenue, with no chance of anyone pushing us out with lease increases or difference of opinions, our building belongs to Black Spokane because of her.

It is also her quiet guidance that has kept us all in line. I may be the director

of CMC but Williams has always been the boss! Her most recent instruction, insisting we get a “real” sign for the building, and insisting it light up so people see the building as they drive by at night. Rallying the beloved bingo ladies for donations, with help from Maxey Law Office Annual Golf Open and a generous donation from the shareholders of Schroeter Goldmark & Bender, the sign was installed. We couldn't wait to show her, even without electricity it looked amazing. She said, “invite me back down when it's actually working”, and as always, I answered, “Yes, ma'am”, and called an electrician to get that light working immediately. And as usual, she was right, we needed that sign.

Mrs. Williams, we will miss you! Enjoy the sunshine and good company, we'll be ready for a game day whenever you come for a visit.

Jillisa Winkler is the executive director of the Carl Maxey Center.

The Cookers first in long lineup of Imagine Jazz concerts

Legendary jazz group, the Cookers, will perform Monday, Feb. 2, at the Hamilton Studio Listening Room.

“This exciting all-star septet summons up an aggressive mid '60s spirit with a potent collection of expansive post-bop originals marked by all the requisite killer instincts and pyrotechnic playing expected of some of the heaviest hitters on the scene today,” a release from Imagine Jazz says. “Eddie Henderson, Cecil McBee, George Cables and Billy Hart all came up in the heady era of the mid '60s. It was a period that found the dimensions of hard bop morphing from their original designs, and each of these guys helped facilitate the process as members of some of the most important bands of the era.”

Hart and Henderson were members of Herbie Hancock's groundbreaking Mwandishi group; Cecil McBee anchored Charles Lloyd's great '60s quartet alongside Keith Jarrett and Jack DeJohnette; George Cables held down the piano chair in numerous bands including groups led by Sonny Rollins, Joe Henderson, Freddie Hubbard, Dexter Gordon and Art Pepper, the release said.

David Weiss and Donald Harrison, from a more recent generation and the youngest members of the band, are experts in this forthright lingo, the release said, having gained experience performing with Art Blakey, Bobby Hutcherson, Freddie Hubbard, Charles Tolliver, Roy Haynes and Herbie Hancock.

“Each member of the Cookers has spent time leading his own series of groups as well, and each has a keenly individual sound,” the release wrote. “But it's the unmistakable power of teamwork that makes this music so commanding and resonates with a kind of depth and beauty that speaks of the seasoned track record of its principals (combined, the group has over 250 years of experience in the jazz world and has been a part of over 1,000 recordings).”

The Cookers are the first in a line-up of five artists presented by Imagine Jazz in the top half of 2026 including vocalist Kate Reid from University of Miami, instrumentalist from New York Caroline Davis and ECM artist Ralph Alessi.

Imagine Jazz is a nonprofit founded in 2018 by Rachel Bade-McMurphy. Presentations have been made possible through painstaking diligence and grant funding by Spokane Arts, Innovia, Wa Arts, Creative West, Arts Fund and Chamber Music America.

For more information, contact Rachel Bade-McMurphy at rachel@imaginejazz.org or (509) 936-0819.

SPOKANE SYMPHONY

LALALAND

— IN CONCERT —

CONDUCTED BY ESIN AYDINGOZ

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY 14
7:30PM

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BUSINESS

BLACK MEN IN MOTION

Cedric 'Ced' Dickerson's Delicious Dogs, late nights and second chances

Q&A with hot dog cart owner, wife reflects on family entrepreneurship

By James Smith
THE BLACK LENS

In this Black Men in Motion interview, Cedric "Ced" Dickerson and Sheena Williams share the story behind Ced's late-night hot dog cart near Gonzaga University, his passion for feeding people, and the deeper purpose that keeps him showing up—even when times are hard. Their reflections touch on entrepreneurship, community responsibility, family, and the power of second chances.

Q: Can you tell me about yourself and how you first became connected to Spokane?

Cedric Dickerson: I moved out here in 1986 with my mother, and I've been here ever since.

Q: Do you love Spokane?

Cedric Dickerson: Yes, I love Spokane.

Q: As I walked into your home, I smelled food cooking. What do you like about cooking?

Cedric Dickerson: I just like to cook ... for my family ... and I like to feed my students ... I'm passionate for cooking.

Sheena Williams: His love language is food.

Q: Where is your food cart located on certain nights?

Cedric Dickerson: Hamilton and Mission, from 7 p.m. to 2 a.m. We do the late night—Thursday, Friday, Saturday.

Sheena Williams: We try to be—summertime, depending on the weather. Summertime we're at farmer's markets and doing private events for companies and weddings. And we've been having some Gonzaga students getting married—spent their time getting to know their relationships at the cart.

Q: So you cater as well?

Sheena Williams: They invite us, yes.

Q: How did your journey lead you to start a food cart?

Cedric Dickerson: Just wanting to be self-employed and not having to work for another company.

Q: How long have you been in business?

Cedric Dickerson: Nine years.

Q: What else drove your decision to become an entrepreneur?

Cedric Dickerson: I didn't really like working for other people ... I had a previous job where I worked tons of hours and the paycheck wasn't fulfilling—it wasn't making the cut.

Sheena Williams: And then he was at his son's football game one day watching him play football, and he was just looking at all those people out there on that field like, 'Man, if I could just sell a hot dog.' So they need something to eat while they watch the game. It just kind of started a thought process from that day.

Q: Who supported or influenced you when you first got started?

Cedric Dickerson: My brother in Seattle, Demetrius Dickerson. He had his hot dog cart... same thing, but in Seattle. I saw him making money and good money, so I went and bought one.

Q: How did you stay motivated during COVID and other hard times?

I shut down during COVID ... until it was over. I took a big loss during COVID; the refrigerator went out on me. I had to figure it back out—re-motivate myself and get out



COURTESY

Cedric "Ced" Dickerson serves hot dogs along with Spokane Indians mascots Otto and Doris.

there. I wasn't trying to work in COVID. It scared me.

Q: Were there moments you thought about giving up or changing directions?

Sheena Williams: He gets overwhelmed sometimes... the wintertime is slow. It's hard. He's used to being real busy.

But he is so attached—like a string attached—to the students down there. And he feels like it's his priority to be there for them...we're so glad we gave them something to eat before they went home and went to bed. I think those students keep him really motivated to keep going.

Q: Are there parts of your personal journey that shaped who you are today as a business owner?

Cedric Dickerson: I think I was born an entrepreneur.

Sheena Williams: He takes the lead ... he keeps going. Even when he does get frustrated and doesn't wanna go out, or the weather is so bad, he knows that this is what my calling was and this is what I'm gonna do.

Q: Did you do anything earlier in life that led you toward entrepreneurship?

Cedric Dickerson: Back when I was a little younger, I used to buy cars and fix 'em up and sell 'em.

Sheena Williams: He still to this day does it ... he knows millions of people. He'll find something, and he knows that he can turn it around. We're gonna snatch it up and we're gonna turn it around.

Q: Have you encountered stereotypes or challenges with different crowds?

Cedric Dickerson: I wouldn't say no.

Sheena Williams: Sometimes I wonder how it's gonna be when we go to a car show and there's lots of older white men. I wonder how they're gonna take our business. But they're so supportive.

I've never felt disrespected. It doesn't matter the age—it can be from a student all the way up to retired seniors. They always come back and tell us how delicious it is. His little slogan says "Delicious dogs." A lot of people like to support personal-owned businesses.

Q: How do you think what you do impacts the community and younger kids?

Cedric Dickerson: The young kids in the neighbor-

hood that I came from... either walking by or driving by, or even seeing my business on social media... they can do the same thing.

They don't have to make bad choices to earn money. It's good to get your own business if you don't wanna work for somebody—you just have to have an idea. And the idea can grow if you keep following it every year.

Q: What community did you grow up in?

Cedric Dickerson: I grew up in the East Central neighborhood in Spokane, Washington ... it was really rough.

Q: What are your goals for the next three to five years?

Cedric Dickerson: My goal is to get another cart out there ... I want to keep the hot dog cart, but I want to do barbecue ... a soul food truck.

Q: What are some menu ideas you'd like to explore?

Cedric Dickerson: Collard greens ... barbecue ... catfish ... fried chicken ... macaroni and cheese ... potato salad.

Q: What do you want people to experience when they eat your food?

Sheena Williams: The love he puts into it and the hard work—even if it's just a hot dog with ketchup. A lot had to happen before it got to that.

He puts love in. It's his love language. He doesn't like it when people are hungry. If a student comes up without money, he's gonna feed them.

At the end of the night, sometimes he'll take food to the homeless. Or customers will buy food for others sitting around. He doesn't like hunger.

Q: Is there something you can share with young people about hope, change, and second chances?

Cedric Dickerson: I've been through hard times in my life... I made bad choices. I served my time to the community, and I got out. And now I'm helping the community.

A second chance—it was a blessing. It was a blessing. It's an eye-opener.

Q: In your own words, how would you like to close this interview?

Cedric Dickerson: I just want the youth to know there's always a second chance, and to never give up. If you hit the ground, get back up and keep going. Just don't stop—because the more you put in, the more you're gonna get out of it.

Introducing Hope AI

An era of equity is here

IN HIS WORDS

A new chapter in America's economic story has arrived, and its name is Hope AI. For generations, underserved communities—particularly African Americans—have been pushed to the margins of financial opportunity. We have navigated the long shadow of what I call financial incarceration—the intentional obstruction of economic mobility since the moment physical emancipation occurred. Today, however, we stand on the edge of a new frontier: artificial intelligence, a force that will redefine every sector of society by 2030. For our communities, this is not a moment of curiosity. This is a moment of survival.

Hope AI, introduced through the national work of Operation HOPE and visionary leaders like John Hope Bryant, represents exactly what our nation has needed: a national nonprofit support system specifically designed to empower underserved communities through AI literacy, digital skills, and financial capability. It is not just an innovation—it is a declaration. We are announcing to the world that we will not be left behind in the new economy.

Scripture teaches us, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). In the age of artificial intelligence, this truth is more urgent than ever. Without access to digital skills, data rights education, cybersecurity awareness, and AI training, millions will be locked out of the future before it even arrives. Hope AI is specifically built to change that.

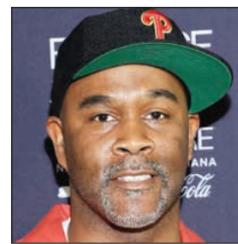
Reimagining Wealth and Power for Underserved Communities

Artificial intelligence is not just a tool—it's an ecosystem. It touches digital literacy, media literacy, data privacy, cyber racism, algorithmic fairness, and the ability to build solutions that shape entire industries. Hope AI positions African Americans—and all marginalized communities—to understand these systems, influence them, and ultimately benefit from them. For decades, we have been the inventors, creators, and innovators America relied upon:

the creators of the cell phone, the pioneers of modern arithmetic, the imagination behind the Super Soaker, and the countless unsung contributions of Black ingenuity from Reconstruction to today.

We have always overcome. Hope AI is the next chapter of that legacy. This national platform provides free access—yes, free—to AI education for underserved community members. It opens doors for Black women to pursue healthcare data science, for returning citizens to gain digital career skills, for working adults to retrain for AI-embedded jobs, and for students to build solutions that solve real community problems. It teaches people how to get a job, keep a job, create a job, or start a business. This is the blueprint for 21st-century economic liberation.

"For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6) Knowledge is wealth. AI literacy is the new capital. And Hope AI is the bridge. A Wake-Up Call for America This initiative is not simply for futurists or tech enthusiasts. It is a wake-up call for: educators and mentors, parents and 501(c)(3) organizations, community leaders and activists, HBCUs and minority-serving institutions, healthcare specialists, small businesses and major banks, policymakers and philanthropists. Everyone has a role in breaking cycles that have held Black communities back for generations. If we fail to engage in AI now, we risk repeating a painful pattern: our children becoming spectators to the very technologies that



By Edmond W. Davis
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



shape their lives. Hope AI is a solution that invites every institution to become part of the transformation. It will allow AI educators to build workflow systems for real classrooms. It will give families tools to navigate digital threats. It will prepare an entire generation to enter high-paying fields that barely existed five years ago.

The New Generation of Black Wall Streets. For too long, Black Wall Streets across America—nearly 100 of them beyond Tulsa—were destroyed or buried beneath policies, violence, and structural inequity (urban renewal plans aka 'negro removal' strategies). But the 21st century gives us a new opportunity to rebuild these legacies—digitally, economically, and academically.

Hope AI aligns perfectly with the future of HBCUs, tribal colleges, and MSIs by integrating:

- elementary and secondary economic education
- financial literacy from early ages
- digital wallet training
- AI career readiness
- small business development
- cybersecurity and data rights awareness

This is the new architecture of community prosperity. We are beginning a new era of economic empowerment, one that does not wait for permission. Hope AI is not a program—it is a movement. A National Step Toward Equity. Artificial intelligence will reshape finance, security, healthcare, e-commerce, education, transportation, real estate, and entrepreneurship. The question is no longer if—it is when. Operation HOPE understands that without intervention, underserved communities will face displacement rather than opportunity. Hope AI is the safeguard. The bridge. The promise.

It democratizes access to the tools that shape modern power. It stands as a testament to what leadership—rooted in purpose, faith, and service—can achieve.

As the Apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2)

Artificial intelligence demands a renewed mind—a willingness to learn, adapt, and innovate. Hope AI gives our communities the space, training, and courage to do exactly that.

A New Era Has Begun

In many ways, this is more than technology—it is a moral moment. An opportunity to correct generations of inequity. Hope AI is pioneering the future of economic wealth for African Americans and underserved communities nationwide. This is empowerment.

This is innovation. This is equity in motion. And it is only the beginning.

Edmond W. Davis is an American social historian, international speaker, and Amazon No. 1 author. He is a nationally recognized authority on the Tuskegee Airmen. He serves as Founder and Executive Director of America's only National HBCU Black Wall Street Career Fest, based in Little Rock, Arkansas. A Philadelphia native and former homeless youth, Davis has dedicated his career to education, social impact, and the empowerment of underrepresented communities.



ANYLA'S TAKE



GETTY IMAGES

A man makes deliveries in Manhattan on Dec. 16 in New York City. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the U.S. economy lost 105,000 jobs in October and added 64,000 jobs in November, resulting in a four-year high unemployment rate of 4.6 percent in November.

Working for no living

By Anyla McDonald
THE BLACK LENS

It's Friday night in Detroit. The TV hums low with news about "record job growth," but nobody in this room feels it. The air smells like reheated pizza and tired dreams. Six of us sit in a half-lit living room, cousins, friends, co-workers, survivors. Everyone's got a story. Everyone's got a scar.

"Man, they said unemployment is down to 4%," Malik mutters, shaking his head. "But for who? It sure ain't us."

He's right. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025) says Black unemployment stands at 8.1%, nearly double the national rate. For Black men ages 20-34, it's even higher, 9.7%. Those numbers don't count the ones "working poor," clocking in 40 hours a week but still behind on rent.

"I been working at that warehouse since January," says Danielle, folding her arms. "\$17.25 an hour. No benefits. No health insurance. They cut overtime, so now I'm bringing home less. I had to move back with my mama last month. And I'm grown. Thirty-one. But rent out here? You need three jobs just to afford one roof."

She isn't exaggerating. The National Low-Income Housing Coalition (2025) reports that a full-time worker earning minimum wage, even at Washington state's \$17.14, must work 85 hours a week to afford a modest one-bedroom apartment.



By Anyla McDonald
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



Meanwhile, evictions among Black renters rose 29% nationwide since January, according to the Eviction Lab at Princeton University.

Across the room, Tasha scrolls her phone. "I just got an email from the dealership. They are taking the car Monday." Her voice trembles, half rage, half defeat. "They said I missed two payments. I told them I got laid off when that call center shut down. They didn't care."

Repossessions have become routine. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) reports that auto repossessions among Black borrowers are 33% higher than pre-pandemic levels.

"I was driving DoorDash just to make ends meet," Malik adds, "but I had to stop, gas hit \$5.09 again this week. I was spending more than I made."

The room falls silent. Somebody sighs. Somebody laughs, that kind of laugh that's half pain,

half disbelief.

"Every day, I feel like I'm working just to breathe," says Renee, a single mother of two. "My check is gone before I even see it. Groceries, gas, daycare. SNAP got cut, and my landlord just raised rent. I applied for 10 jobs this month, all paying \$16.50. I used to make \$24 an hour before layoffs. Now I'm supposed to smile about 'economic recovery'?"

Her words linger like smoke.

This is what the government doesn't see when they brag about "strong labor markets." The Economic Policy Institute (EPI, 2025) notes that Black workers are twice as likely to hold low-wage, unstable jobs and three times more likely to face discrimination during hiring. For every Black woman who earns a promotion, two are laid off, reassigned, or replaced under "budget adjustments."

But even in this small room of grief and grit, hope hums low, steady and stubborn.

"We gon' be alright," Malik finally says. "We always are."

Renee nods. "Yeah," she whispers. "But tired got a face now. And it looks like all of us."

No one disagrees. The TV keeps talking about "growth."

But in this room, growth means learning to survive in the cracks, again.

Because for Black America in 2025, we're still working. We just ain't living.

THE URGENT NEED FOR ETHICAL REGULATION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS OF AI DEEPFAKES

By Anyla McDonald
THE BLACK LENS

Artificial intelligence continues to reshape modern society, offering new opportunities for creativity, communication, and innovation. However, one of its most dangerous byproducts, the rise of AI deepfakes, poses a significant threat to personal safety, democratic stability, and digital trust. Deepfakes, which are hyper-realistic but fabricated videos, images, or audio generated through deep learning, are advancing so quickly that many people can no longer distinguish authentic content from manipulated media. While some argue that AI should be allowed to evolve freely in the name of technological progress, the escalating misuse of deepfakes proves that public education and strong ethical regulation are necessary to protect individuals and communities.

Deepfakes have already demonstrated an alarming capacity for harm. A 2023 Deeptrace Labs study revealed that 96 percent of deepfakes circulating online were non-consensual, overwhelmingly targeting women, which shows how AI can reinforce and magnify existing forms of gender-based violence. In 2024, the FBI issued a public advisory after reports of AI-generated voice scams, including fabricated emergency calls mimicking family members to exploit emotions and extort money.

Europol further predicts that by 2026, up to 90 percent of online content could be AI-generated or AI altered, raising serious concerns about the future of information integrity. These statistics illustrate that deepfakes are not simply a technological curiosity; they are already being weaponized in ways that endanger real people.

Some critics claim that regulating AI could slow innovation or limit creative experimentation. However, leaving deepfakes unchecked ultimately threatens the functioning of democratic processes and the social stability that innovation depends on. Fabricated political videos can spread misinformation quickly, influencing public opinion based on lies. Once false information circulates widely, corrections rarely regain equal visibility or credibility. A 2024 Pew Research Center survey found that 62% of Americans are unsure whether they can reliably identify AI-generated content, and 78% favor stronger regulations. When an entire society becomes uncertain about what is real, institutional trust weakens and civic engagement declines.

To address these risks, public awareness must be strengthened. Digital literacy cannot remain optional in a world where manipulated media circulates at high speed. Teaching individuals to verify sources, examine visual inconsistencies, slow down emotional

reactions, and report suspicious content can significantly reduce the spread of misinformation. Basic safety practices such as enabling two-factor authentication or establishing family verification words also help protect against impersonation attempts fueled by deepfake audio or video.

However, education alone is not enough. Ethical regulation is essential to ensure that AI developers and institutions, rather than individuals alone, bear responsibility for the consequences of these technologies. UNESCO's ethical AI principles emphasize transparency, consent, accountability, and fairness, all of which should guide policy decisions. Regulations requiring labels on AI-generated media, penalties for non-consensual deepfakes, and mandatory bias testing in AI systems would protect human dignity while still allowing innovation to flourish responsibly.

In conclusion, the growing threat of AI deepfakes demands immediate and coordinated action. Strengthening public awareness and establishing ethical regulatory frameworks are not obstacles to technological progress; they are necessary safeguards for a society increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence. Without decisive intervention, deepfakes will continue to erode trust, harm individuals, and destabilize democratic institutions.



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SPOKANE

Youth's small acts of kindness leaves big imprint

By Anyla McDonald
THE BLACK LENS

While adults hustled through malls and workplaces this winter, young Black leaders have been busy giving the greatest gift of all service. Across the nation, teenagers and college students are proving that activism, empathy, and generosity don't require age or status.

At schools and community centers, youth groups have organized coat drives, toy collections and food baskets for families struggling during the holidays. In Baltimore, high school students host a "Winter Warmth Walk," delivering gloves and scarves to the unhoused. In Jackson, Mississippi, a youth choir spent its December

weekends singing for seniors at nursing homes.

These acts might seem small, but their impact is enormous. They build confidence, compassion, and community consciousness. Many of these young changemakers are motivated by their own experiences, growing up in households where resilience was daily practice. They understand the importance of showing up, because they know what it feels like when no one does.

Social media has also become a tool for purpose. Teen-led initiatives use platforms like Instagram and TikTok to raise funds for scholarships, promote voter awareness, and amplify local Black-owned businesses. They're turning likes into

leadership.

The "young, gifted, and giving" generation carries the torch passed down from ancestors who gave everything they had for freedom and opportunity. They are learning that service is not about charity, it's about justice. They're discovering that leadership is not about titles, it's about impact.

This December, while many focus on receiving, these young people remind us of the power in giving. They are proof that the future of Black excellence is compassionate, creative, and community-driven. The next chapter of progress is already being written, by hands still learning, hearts still growing, and voices already changing the world.

EDUCATION

SCHOOL CHOICE AND ITS POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR BLACK COMMUNITIES

By Dr. Goldy Brown III
THE BLACK LENS

School choice—encompassing charter schools, vouchers and open enrollment policies—has become a central topic in education policy debates in the United States. Discussions surrounding its impact on Black communities are particularly significant given longstanding disparities in educational access, school quality and academic outcomes. Scholars who examine school choice argue that, under certain conditions, these policies may offer mechanisms to address structural inequities in public education.

One commonly cited rationale for school choice is the uneven quality of traditional public schools, especially in urban districts with high concentrations of Black students. Decades of research document disparities in funding, teacher experience, infrastructure and academic outcomes between predominantly Black schools and their suburban or predominantly white counterparts. Proponents of school choice argue that when families are not geographically constrained to underperforming schools, they gain access to educational environments better aligned with their children's needs.

Charter schools are often highlighted in this context.



Thomas Sowell's *Charter Schools and Their Enemies* synthesizes data from multiple states and finds that many charter schools serving predominantly Black and low-income students demonstrate higher graduation rates and test score gains than nearby traditional public schools. Sowell emphasizes that these outcomes are particularly pronounced in urban areas where

traditional public-school systems have struggled for decades. His work argues that governance flexibility—rather than increased funding alone—can produce meaningful educational improvements.

From an academic perspective, the significance of these findings lies not in universal superiority of charter schools, but in the variation of outcomes. Research indicates that

high-performing charter schools often adopt rigorous academic standards, extended instructional time, and strong school culture—factors that may disproportionately benefit students who have historically lacked access to such environments. For Black families in districts with limited high-quality options, choice-based systems may expand the range of available educational

pathways.

Another argument frequently examined in the literature concerns parental agency. School choice policies shift decision-making power from centralized bureaucracies to families. Studies in education sociology suggest that parental engagement is a key predictor of student success. By enabling families to select schools that reflect their academic priorities or cultural expectations, school choice may strengthen family-school alignment, which some scholars associate with improved student outcomes.

Critics, however, raise concerns about potential negative effects, including increased segregation or uneven accountability. These critiques are taken seriously in academic discourse. Yet empirical studies cited by Sowell and others challenge the assumption that charter schools exacerbate racial segregation, noting that many charters are no more segregated than surrounding district schools and, in some cases, less so. The debate underscores the importance of policy design, oversight and transparency rather than categorical acceptance or rejection of school choice.

Importantly, discussions of school choice and Black communities must be contextualized within histori-

cal patterns of educational exclusion. For much of U.S. history, Black families were denied meaningful choice through legally enforced segregation and discriminatory housing policies. In this light, some scholars interpret contemporary school choice as a partial corrective—one that allows families to navigate systems that have not consistently served them well.

In conclusion, academic research on school choice suggests that its effects on Black communities are neither uniformly positive nor negative. Evidence from charter school performance, parental engagement studies, and outcome-based evaluations indicates that well-designed choice programs can offer benefits, particularly in underserved urban contexts. Works such as Sowell's *Charter Schools and Their Enemies* contribute to this debate by emphasizing empirical outcomes and challenging assumptions embedded in traditional education policy. Ongoing research and careful policy implementation remain essential to understanding how school choice can best function within broader efforts to promote educational equity.

Dr. Goldy Brown III is a former Whitworth University Professor.

UNPACKING DYSLEXIA AND OTHER COMMON LEARNING CHALLENGES

Dyslexia affects an estimated 15% to 20% of the population, making it one of the most common learning differences in the United States. Yet for many African American students, dyslexia—and related learning differences such as dyscalculia and dysgraphia—often go unidentified and unsupported, contributing to long-standing educational inequities.

Dyslexia primarily affects reading, spelling, and language processing. Students with dyslexia may struggle to decode words, read fluently, or retain written information, even when they are highly intelligent and capable. In classrooms that rely heavily on standardized testing and reading-based instruction, these students are frequently labeled as “behind” rather than recognized as learners who process information differently.

Research and advocacy groups have long noted that African American students are less likely to be screened for dyslexia and more likely to be misidentified for behavioral issues or placed in lower academic tracks.

Dyscalculia, which affects a person's ability to understand numbers and mathematical concepts, is even less recognized in schools. Students with dyscalculia may struggle with basic arithmetic, number sense, time and problem-solving. For African American students attending under-resourced schools, limited access to specialized instruction means these challenges are



By Dr. Sarah Zaab
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



often dismissed as poor performance rather than signs of a learning difference. Without targeted support, students can fall further behind in subjects that are critical for STEM pathways and long-term economic mobility.

Dysgraphia, another frequently overlooked learning difference, affects writing skills, handwriting, spelling, and the ability to organize thoughts on paper. Students with dysgraphia may have strong verbal skills but perform poorly on written assignments and exams. In many classrooms, writing is a primary measure of academic ability, placing these students at a disadvantage and increasing the likelihood of frustration, disengagement, or disciplinary action.

The lack of adequate support for learning differences in African American communities is not due to lower need, but to systemic barriers. Schools serving pre-

dominantly Black students often have fewer resources, limited access to specialists, and less funding for early screening and intervention. Families may also face obstacles navigating special education systems, which often require extensive documentation, advocacy, and in some cases private evaluations that are financially out of reach.

When learning differences go unrecognized, the consequences extend beyond academics. Students may internalize feelings of failure, experience anxiety or depression, or disengage from school altogether. These patterns contribute to achievement gaps, higher dropout rates, and reduced access to advanced coursework and college opportunities.

Early identification, culturally responsive assessment, and evidence-based instruction can significantly improve outcomes. Structured literacy programs, math interventions tailored to dyscalculia, assistive technology, and accommodations such as extended time or alternative assessments allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities.

Addressing dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia among African American students is not simply an educational challenge—it is an equity imperative. Recognizing and supporting learning differences affirms that all students deserve the opportunity to learn in ways that honor their strengths, dignity, and potential.

Did you know?

Did you know that the NAACP has a Dyslexia Resolution? “WHEREAS, Dyslexia is hereditary and the most common reading disability with approximately 1 out of every 5 people struggling with dyslexia. More than 20% of the population is dyslexic, yet many remain undiagnosed, untreated and struggling with the impact of their dyslexia.
IF YOU GO: 6:30 p.m. Jan. 27 the Spokane NAACP Education Committee presents “Left Behind,” a compelling story of the fight for literacy, playing at the Magic Lantern.

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EDUCATION

WHO GETS DISCIPLINED?

Race, bias and the cost of subjective punishment (Part 2)

By Birdie Bachman
THE BLACK LENS

This piece is part two 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."

Walk into any school district meeting in Spokane County and you'll hear administrators say they're committed to equity. They'll point to restorative programs, staff training in handling diverse student bodies or student-support teams. But look closely at the discipline data: who is suspended, who is sent out of class, who is labeled "disruptive" and a different story emerges. A story where race still predicts punishment.

Across Washington, BIPOC students are disciplined at disproportionately high rates and Spokane County reflects the same pattern. And, while some districts acknowledge these disparities, others insist they're doing everything they can even as the numbers remain unchanged. The troubling part? Many of these re-

By Birdie Bachman
THE BLACK LENS
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movals stem from subjective categories: "defiance, disrespect, noncompliance, and/or disruption." These are labels that depend heavily on adult perception, bias and context. What one student sees as expressing frustration or asking clarifying questions can be interpreted by a staff member as talking back.

In Spokane Public Schools, Black students make up 3.6% of the population, and surrounding districts such as CVSD have Black student populations of 2.2%, yet parents report their children are more likely to be removed

NAACP Spokane Branch

from class for behaviors that go unpunished among their white peers. In the Central Valley School District, Pacific Islander students describe being disciplined for speaking Marshallese in the hallway "too loud." In Mead, Hispanic families report that cultural misunderstandings are interpreted as disrespect.

These aren't isolated incidents. They reflect patterns.

The root issue isn't that students of color misbehave more. Study after study shows they don't. The issue is how behavior is interpreted, escalated and enforced. When discipline is subjective, bias (often implicit or unintentional) drives outcomes, and the consequences compound quickly. Phone Usage can cause a suspension and can trigger attendance problems.

Missed class time leads

to lower grades. Falling behind increases the likelihood of dropout. For teens, exclusion sends the message that your school is not a place for you.

Parents see the impact clearly. "I feel like my son is being pushed out," one Liberty Lake mother told me. Other CVSD families have echoed similar concerns: "It's always our kids. Always the ones who don't look like the majority."

Washington's laws require districts to review discipline disparities every year and create improvement plans. However, families say these plans often stay on paper. Reports get filed and meetings get held but nothing changes for the students sitting in the classrooms, especially in districts where School Boards increasingly loosen requirements on issues regarding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

the staffing, planning time or district support to do it well.

So where does accountability fit? It begins with honest data, transparent reporting and community oversight. It requires admitting that racial discipline gaps are real, not accidental. And it demands using discipline not as a punishment, but as an opportunity for understanding and growth.

Families across Spokane County want solutions, not excuses. Students want to feel safe and seen. Educators want tools that actually work. And communities want schools that don't reproduce the inequalities they're supposed to challenge. To close the racial discipline gap, Washington must treat discipline disparities not as unfortunate trends, but as civil rights issues. Because that's what they are.

This article draws on data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), including Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates. Birdie Bachman is an intern for the Spokane NAACP Education Committee.



A landmark study found that students in SEL programs showed an 11% boost in academic achievement compared to peers without SEL instruction.

Importance of social and emotional learning

In today's society, emotional strain among youth and adults is at an all-time high. From academic pressures to global uncertainties, the ability to manage emotions and maintain healthy relationships has never been more critical. Educators and parents alike are turning to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as a solution—not just for classrooms, but for life.

Social and Emotional Learning is the process of developing skills to understand and manage emotions, set goals, show empathy, build relationships, and make responsible decisions. These five core competencies—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making—are essential for success in school and beyond.

Research backs this

up. A landmark study found that students in SEL programs showed an 11% boost in academic achievement compared to peers without SEL instruction. SEL doesn't just improve grades—it builds resilience, empathy, and collaboration, skills that employers and communities value.

Modern life brings unique challenges. Social media pressures, economic uncertainty, and global crises contribute to rising stress and anxiety among students. Adults face similar struggles with workplace demands and family responsibilities. SEL provides tools to navigate these challenges effectively.

For students, SEL fosters confidence and coping strategies. For adults, it enhances communication and emotional regulation. In short, SEL is no longer optional—it's essential.

Benefits of SEL

Academic Success: Students who feel emotionally supported are more engaged and motivated.

Emotional Resilience: SEL teaches coping strategies for stress and anxiety.

Stronger Relationships: Empathy and communication skills strengthen bonds at school and home.

Positive School Climate: SEL reduces bullying and creates inclusive classrooms.

Experts say SEL works best when reinforced at school and home.

Here are practical tips:
Model Emotional Intelligence: Demonstrate empathy and patience.

Create Reflection Opportunities: Journaling and open discussions build self-awareness.

Teach Conflict Resolution: Role-play respectful disagreement.

By Dr. Shantara Smith
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR

Integrate SEL Daily: Morning check-ins and collaborative projects embed SEL naturally.

Celebrate Growth: Recognize effort, not just results, to foster resilience.

With emotional strain at an all-time high, SEL is a necessity. By prioritizing SEL, educators and families prepare students not only for academic success but for life's challenges. Emotional intelligence and resilience are as vital as knowledge—and investing in SEL means investing in a healthier, more connected future.

POWERFUL VOICES

New column highlights issues facing public education, our students and our community

Few things are more powerful than the voice of a passionate community member.

Growing up in Spokane, it was the voices of my parents, teachers and community members that taught me the importance of standing up for what's right and fighting for those who have had the power of their voice taken from them. I have been shown over and over again that the pen is mightier than the sword, and our community has never stopped proving that.

My name is Kenji Linane-Booey and I now have the privilege of working for the League of Education Voters (LEV Foundation). A nonprofit that works to create learning environments from early learning to K-12 to postsecondary where every Washington student feels safe, supported and a positive sense of belonging, so that they can achieve academically and access the life they choose.

Through this work, I get to work alongside everyday people who believe being a neighbor and community member means standing up for those furthest from resources and justice. People who believe that it takes a village to not only raise a child but to raise passionate, empathetic, engaged community members.

Through this article I hope to highlight the issues facing public education and our students and what our community is doing to make sure all of our students can access the life they choose.

Each month I will share stories of community members who are putting others first and taking time out of their life to make a positive change.

Stories like that of the parents who came together after years of abuse, who said enough is enough and used their voices to stop the use of "isolation rooms"

By Kenji M.
Linane-Booey
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR

and forced restraint in Spokane Public Schools. Stories like those who took the time to explain how commissioned police officers as school security were harming students' mental health and making campuses feel less safe for our students from communities of color, low-income, English language learners, and students within special education and then took the time to work with the school district to find a solution. And stories of students who are using the power of their voice to get into some good trouble.

In my work, students and student experience are always at the core of how and why I engage in different issues. I encourage you to reach out to let me know of issues facing you and your classmates or your students as well as share stories of individuals and groups that deserve to be highlighted for the work they are doing.

Kenji M. Linane-Booey was born and raised in Spokane, Washington and has always been passionate about making education an inclusive and diverse experience for students and educators. He has been working for the LEV Foundation since January 2021 and in his free time loves spending time cooking for his family and spending time with his wife, young son, and their two dogs.

YOUTH CONNECTION

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

Standing on the edge



By Janet Tumusifu
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



I think I speak for most people when I say being left out is one of the most hurtful things. The feeling of being left out is like having a place, but you know it's not yours and it is not meant for you. One day it's yours, the next day it's someone else's. You get called in when needed, but when not needed, you are just there. There are people who notice that you are being left out, and some might tell you it's not worth it to stay, but it really isn't that easy to just walk away from people who you call friends.

It's not easy because even though they don't care as much, one can't help but wonder what would happen if they decided to leave. Where would they go? Who would they talk to? While it's hard walking away, it really is the best thing to do, because being dependent on someone who doesn't care is mentally exhausting, and it can cause anxiety, loneliness, and sadness. Not belonging in a certain group doesn't mean you don't belong anywhere; there is always going to be a place you belong in.

Walking away doesn't make you less valuable; it's you realizing that you are more valuable than they make you out to be.

Forgiveness is one of the most transformative, yet challenging, acts a person can choose. It often begins in moments of deep pain, when someone's words, choices, or actions leave a mark that feels impossible to erase. In these moments, forgiveness may seem like surrender or weakness, but in reality, it is one of the strongest steps toward healing you can take.

Choosing to forgive doesn't mean pretending the hurt never happened. Instead, it is an intentional decision to release the emotional weight that keeps you tied to the past. Forgiveness is less about the other person and more about your own inner

peace. Holding onto resentment can feel protective at first, but over time, it becomes a burden.

Like trauma, your pain is not your fault, but healing is your responsibility. Your spark will return only when your core beliefs begin to change. Only you can ignite that spark within yourself. You have to take action in order to heal.

Forgiveness also opens the door to personal growth. It teaches patience, empathy, and emotional maturity. It allows you to reflect not only on what happened, but on what you value, what you deserve, and how you can protect your peace while still keeping an open

heart. Sometimes forgiveness means repairing a relationship, but just as often, it means accepting closure and moving on. Setting boundaries can be a healthy part of the process, giving you the space to rebuild confidence and trust at your own pace.

Most importantly, forgiveness is a journey, not a single moment. It may take time, self-reflection, and repeated effort. Some days you may feel healed; other days, the memories may still sting. Both are normal. The goal isn't perfection, but progress. Little by little, forgiveness replaces heaviness with clarity and resentment with resilience.

It is a gift you give yourself. It is a declaration that you are choosing peace over pain, freedom over bitterness, and your future over your past. By letting go, you make room for healing, happiness, and a life not defined by what hurt you, but by how you rose above it.

When you let go of guilt and self-blame, you create space for growth, healing, and self-compassion. It helps you recognize that you are human, still learning, and deserving of grace. We all make mistakes, but the key is to learn from them and forgive yourself along the way.



By Stori Taylor
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



Style with substance: From overconsumption to good stewardship

As much as we try to look good for certain occasions, fast fashion will never quench that thirst for contentment when it comes to clothes. We are in an era where we, as people, are becoming very reckless when it comes to spending on clothing. We often buy clothes for certain events and never wear them again, and this happens repeatedly. Unwanted clothes begin to build up as shopping has become far easier than it was back then. Apps like Shein and Temu are contributing to this catastrophe, and we need to acknowledge that before it's too late. Not only does fast fashion create excess through convenience, but it also generates waste that causes significant harm to the environment.

Mass production carries an equally dangerous impact in our rivers and oceans, our air, and our landfills. Collectively, we must examine this issue through an ethical lens—one that considers both humanitarian and environmental consequences.

The sad thing is that we lack the honesty to simply say, "I know I will never wear this again; I should give it away." Instead, we lie to ourselves and end up hoarding with the "belief" that we will need the clothes in the near future—but no, that never happens.

We need to take into consideration the fact that other people are struggling to afford even a couple of pieces of clothing. The gap between overspenders on clothes and non-spenders

has frighteningly increased over the past decade, and it is our sole duty as members of this society to do our best to close it. To contribute to that effort, I will be running a clothing drive at Shadle Park High School, and I invite everyone who is capable of donating to do so.

As we can all see, this winter is brutal. Some of us are protected from the weather by appropriate clothing, but unfortunately, not all of us have that privilege. Let us be mindful of the lives around us and do the best we can to contribute to the well-being of others. We are capable of changing lives, and major change starts with one person. Be that one person. Take a step forward and say no to hoarding and yes

to donating. That sweater sitting at the back of your closet could change someone's life.

The number of people who struggle on our streets in winter due to the cold is unbelievably high, and we know it can be addressed with good stewardship of resources and strategic direction of excess. Why do we not do anything about it? We hear the statistics, but we are fascinated by numbers rather than the reality of the situation—and that is not very human of us. What happened to genuinely caring about people? What happened to us? Still, I have hope. We can change—change for the better. God bless us all.

More details about the clothing drive will be sent out to the community



By Anesu Whacha
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



soon. Please think about what you do to make life easier for the next person; it makes us all a little more human. You have the power to change lives, so use it—and use it wisely.

Proverbs 19:17 reads, "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward them for what they have done." Let us help God's children as He has helped us.

NORTHWEST PASSAGES THE BLACK LENS

UPCOMING EVENT BENEFITING SPOKANE'S COMMUNITY JOURNALISM FUND

TUESDAY, FEB. 3 | 7 P.M.

SPOKANE BLACK VOICES SYMPOSIUM

Bethely

In collaboration with The Black Lens - African American students from the Spokane area present their work in the fifth annual celebration of Spokane Black Voices. The Black Lens board member and contributor Michael Bethely will be the evening's master of ceremonies.

THE THEME FOR THIS YEAR IS 'ART AS ACTIVISM: SEASONS, CYCLES AND FINDING YOUR DESTINY'

FREE EVENT: Tickets are free but are needed for admission to theater. A suggested donation of \$10 per ticket.

MONTVALE EVENT CENTER

TICKETS ONLINE AND AT THE EVENT

Montvale Event Center • 1019 W. First Ave., Spokane • spokesman.com/northwest-passages

WELLNESS

THE POWER OF SANKOFA

FROM THE WATER'S EDGE

This article is dedicated to the power of Sankofa. Sankofa is a Ghanaian concept depicted by a bird moving forward with its head turned back with an egg in its beak. The egg symbolizes the good of the past, meaning "It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten." It's about bringing the best of our past forward in order to help us navigate the here and now. What wisdom could we bring forward from when we lived under the age of separate but equal laws?

Like some of you, I came of age during those days, the days of legalized segregation, and I felt its sting on a regular basis. The "Jim Crow" era was in full-swing in the 50s and 60s in my hometown and across the country. Although my home state fought for the North during the Civil War, it was and still is politically and culturally southern and racist.

We lived in predominantly black neighborhoods, went to black only schools, attended black churches, owned our own businesses, owned and managed our own night spots. When we died, we were buried in a black only cemetery. However, there was a level of black unity back then regardless of one's personal or

political views. The law forced our collective hand. Our response was to stay hopeful and to be united in the face of segregation laws.

During the "Jim Crow" era, if you were black, you knew where you stood. There were physical reminders posted on businesses, water fountains, buses, trains, bathrooms and night spots that made it clear that our kind wasn't welcome. Experience taught you to pick your battles wisely and your guard was always up when you left the comfort of your neighborhood.

In Spokane, the color of our skin encouraged us to develop caring and supporting relationships. Black Spokanites lived as neighbors, churched together, raised their children together, created self-improvement support groups and organizations, and created businesses together.

I recently reread Dwayne Mack's 2014 book, *Black Spokane: The civil rights struggle in the Inland Northwest*, and Jerrelene Williamson and the Northwest Black Pioneers' African Americans in Spokane published in 2010. I was particularly interested in what they had to say about early black owned businesses and other ways black Spo-



kanites were supportive of one another and creative in their response to "Jim Crow."

According to Mack and Williamson, black folks owned stand-alone brick and mortar businesses while others had storefront offices in the heart of the city as early as 1883. I focused on those businesses, social clubs and organizations from the late 1800s to the late 1960s. Their names sent a strong black message. There was the Harlem Club, the Ebony Café, the George Washington Carver USO Club, the Porters and Waiters' Club, and the Booker T. Washington Center.

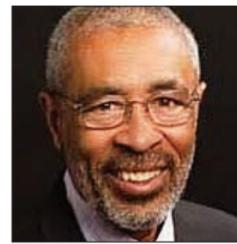
The Poodle Café opened here in 1883. It was owned by Oliver ("Ollie") Williams, and was located at 514 Front Ave. (now Spokane Falls Boulevard). In 1929 the Pirates Den, later called the Harlem Club was owned by E.J. Brown, and opened on Fancher Road and Sprague. According to Williamson, it served and entertained white folks only during its regular business hours.

Black folks could only come in on Sunday nights, sometimes Monday nights after they were officially closed.

Many smaller restaurants and cafés followed. Notable examples are Sam's Pit owned by Sam Willis, the Willow Inn owned by Walter Derrick, Virgil's Chicken Shack owned by Virgil Sexton, the Ebony Café owned by Frank Hopkins, the Golden Bird owned by Tommy Rutledge, the O'Neil Vincent Restaurant, the Lil' Bit of Philly owned by James Whitsett, and Happy's Soul Food Restaurant and Barbeque owned by the late Rev. Happy Watkins and wife Etta.

There was a United Service Organization (USO) downtown in 1941—unfortunately it only supported white service members. In 1945 the George Washington Carver GWCUSO Club opened, named after one of our country's most famous black educators, a scientist and inventor, at 101 South Division Street providing a "home away from home" and social spot for black troops. There was also the Booker T. Washington Center, named after the black self-help advocate and first president of Tuskegee University.

In 1948 Clarence Freeman and his wife Frances opened the Merlin Apartments at 29 W. Second Ave. between Division



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



and Brown. They began renting to black military personnel who could not lease elsewhere in town. They also owned the Freeman Laundry and Grocery Store on Third Ave. Mike's Grocery was owned by Mike A. Stephens and was located at 421 S. Cowley.

There were many cultural and intellectual opportunities offered by such groups like the Wednesday Art Club, the Phillis Wheatley Club named after our country's first black published poet, and the Dunbar Literary Club, named after Paul Laurence Dunbar, another pioneering black poet, novelist, and playwright. The Ashanti Club was active. Ashanti is derived from asante, meaning "thank you" and refers to a people of south-central Ghana. The Pierian Club inspired poetic inspiration and knowledge.

Other organizations devoted to the enrichment of black residents included the Crest Club (an affiliate

of the YWCA), Links Inc, Eastern Star, and Prince Hall Grand Masonic Lodge. The Men's Philanthropic and Social Club planned entertainment and social functions for the black community. The Spokane chapter of the NAACP was established here in 1923. The Spokane's Colored Businessmen Improvement Club had its beginnings in 1911, as did this very newspaper known as the Citizen, published by Charles Barrow.

"Jim Crow" laws forced our hand during those years of social and economic scarcity. The law forced us to open our own businesses, social clubs and organizations—all born out of necessity. Being denied forced us to take care of our own in a way we have forgotten or never learned. We were at our best back then at recognizing a need and filling it—at valuing relationships over convenience.

We need the wisdom of the Sankofa bird—valuing the wisdom of our past that we have forgotten or never known and bring it forward to help us navigate the hard times of our here and now.

Footnote: According to Williamson 2010, in 1969 Spokane had a Black Shoppers Guide because some black citizens were disturbed by the "complacency and indifference" of many residences in town.

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

GENEALOGY

Honoring the past, building the future

As we welcome 2026, many of us are setting goals for the year ahead—whether to improve our health, careers, finances, or relationships. But what if one of our New Year's resolutions was to deepen our connections with the people who brought us here?

Genealogy is about more than just names and dates. It is an act of love—a way of honoring the stories of those who came before us. For those of us exploring Black family history, every document, memory, and ancestor's name we discover is a step toward healing and wholeness.

Before moving forward with the new, take a moment to recognize how much progress you've made. What was your genealogy journey like last year? Did you spend long evenings browsing digital archives? Were you surprised to find a family photograph or story unexpectedly?

As you set your New Year's resolution, consider what you would like to improve in your genealogical journey. Here are some goals to think about:

- Interview an elder relative and document their stories.
- Visit a family cemetery or ancestral hometown.
- Organize your family materials – old photographs, obituaries, files, etc.
- Create a family history website.
- Take a DNA test or help a relative interpret theirs
- Share copies with other family members. Our history shouldn't be kept in just one box or one person's memory.
- Write your family history or a section of it as a narrative in a book or article.
- Join an African American genealogical



By Patricia Bayonne-Johnson
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



society or local history group.

I have one goal: to learn about my adopted daughter's biological parents and their families. The families were identified through DNA, and a maternal aunt contacted me on Ancestry after making the connection. My daughter is in touch with her biological relatives, and they have shared photographs. However, the research is still ongoing and has become more complicated. She has two half-brothers, but they have different mothers. The father of one of her brothers is adopted, and this adopted man is our daughter's grandfather. The paternal family's ancestor is Frank Campbell, whom the Jesuits of the Maryland Province enslaved. Our daughter descends from Campbell. I also descend from Jesuit-enslaved ancestors—Nace and Bibiana Butler. We have two descendants of two different ancestors who the Jesuits enslaved in our family.

As we enter 2026, may our resolution not just look forward but also reach back to those who made our journey possible. Every record we uncover, every story we share, is another way of saying: We remember. We honor. We continue.

Still on the battlefield

The NAACP and the long arc of the struggle

As Americans struggle with the issue of race, the loss of freedoms, the deportation of Black and Brown people, and, to put a cherry on top of the cake, sometimes European Americans with dark skin are deported or held in a holding space.

When I think of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), I think of the 1950s; I think of my childhood and my mother, Mrs. Mattie Sue Free-Williams, the wife of my papa, Mr. Tampa (Willie) Williams, Sr.; they were lifetime members of the NAACP. My little brother and I could overhear our parents talking at night about the 1954 Supreme Court decision that racial segregation inflicted psychological harm on Black children. The ruling was indeed a critical and historic moment in American history.

In 1955, Mama and Daddy whispered in the night about the murder of little Emmett Till, in Money, Mississippi, an hour-and-a-half drive from my hometown. Following the Emmett Till assassination in 1954, the South reeled again when the United States Supreme Court ruled that segregation was unconstitutional. In 1962, the University of Mississippi was integrated when a young Black Mississippian, James Meredith, entered and walked through the halls of the school's lyceum. The University of Mississippi, located in Oxford, is home to the Ole Miss Rebels and the great author William Faulkner. It had been many moons since the South had been "All Shook Up." The Magnolia State was again hanging off a "hill," and a decisive win would have blown her over the edge.

In twentieth-century America, the struggle for Black Americans' citizenship was led by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, a group of young lawyers who challenged the Constitution. The 1954 Supreme Court ruling was a key accomplishment of 20th-century Ameri-



By Terry Williams Buffington
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



cans. Guided by a group of young, gifted, and Black lawyers, led by the Honorable Thurgood Marshall, the country's first Supreme Court Justice of color, and the brilliant Constance Baker Motley, together they successfully argued the *Brown v. Topeka*, Kansas case. The ruling was, by all accounts, a trouble "Blow," as these young legal minds took the words of the United States Constitution written by foreign settlers of European descent who drafted the Constitution and created a space now called America. Marshall and Baker-Motley used their written words to frame an argument that led to a winning victory for humanity. Black children, including me at the time I was 9 years old in Grade 5, were enrolled in the "Negro" separate-but-equal school system.

We, the people, grieve over the loss of legal protection; a loss of citizenship, affirmative action, fair housing, access to the ballot, censorship, civil rights, and now authoritarianism. And to add wood on a heated volcano, as race in America, we can't go back in time. We must wake from the notion of "I Had a Dream." The NAACP is still on the battlefield fighting.

The question is, as Dr. King titled his essays, "Where Do We Go From Here?" With all things considered, will it be the NAACP that again seize

the occasion to fight for fundamental human rights and the whole of protected civil rights? Or are we going to stay in the "dream"?

As Black Americans, we are at our very best in these inhumane political and morally deprived questionable storms. We are called upon to be ready for any challenges that alter our well-being.

We must not allow social media to be our learning platform; we must take to reading again—online media, newspapers, great authors like James Baldwin, John Steinbeck, Ralph Ellison, Elie Wiesel; the great historians and scholars, such as the late and acclaimed historians Dr. John Franklin Hope, C. Vann Woodward, and the critically acclaimed sociologist E. Franklin Frazier; the Black Church—and, in so doing, recharge the energy required to hold our own during this storm. Unlike the storm of the 1960s, we were clear about who the antagonists were. As Southern Blacks, we were closest to the adversaries and knew them, at least individually; we knew most of them. In the 1960s, we could call the White House and talk with the Kennedys. In 21st-century America, who can we call for resolve? Unlike the '60s, today's political environment is more severe and openly hostile, dangerous, and contemptuous of human existence.

The NAACP's Spokane chapter has remained loyal to its founders' philosophy of advocating for the civil rights and equality of Black Americans. Its long history has been marked by its successes and efforts to ensure equality and legal protection under the law since the turn of the century. We, seasoned activists, can genuinely say that the NAACP is the only remaining Black civil rights organization in America; let's ensure its continuation. Who stood up and are still standing—the organization is proud to say—it is named the National Association of Colored People.

Someone on a social

media platform wrote that "Jim Crow is back." I'll argue that, since colonization of what is now America, race, or the color line, has been a continuous theme; in this setting, Jim Crow has been lurking in the wind and never relinquishing his grip. He has been lying in the cut, waiting for what he knew would be his opportunity to rise again—this time openly aggressive, more violent, and cruel. For two hundred and fifty years, the stain of Jim Crow has kept a grip on the American psyche.

Here, we are some sixty-one years later, and we are again fighting to maintain fundamental civil rights and any degree of human decency. This time, it is we, the people, who have lost all legal protections through various executive measures.

Reflecting on the work of the NAACP in Spokane, highlighted in the recent Freedom Fund Banquet, the event served as a crucial reminder that the NAACP "is not just a Black organization," as Spokane NAACP leaders emphasize, but for everyone who believes in an inclusive society where equity is the rule. In a region that has faced its share of cultural insensitivities, this gathering provides a vital space for connection and a renewed sense of hope, living up to its reputation as a formidable force to be reckoned with. The gala was, without a doubt, a premier gathering of people committed to meaningful change.

We're living in the moment of fierce urgency, and as such, this tradition of advocacy continues to inspire us all to do our part. In the city of Spokane, the leadership of the NAACP is still on the battlefield fighting for equal protection under what's left of the laws that initially aimed to provide equal access under the law, protecting Black and Brown people's rights to exist.

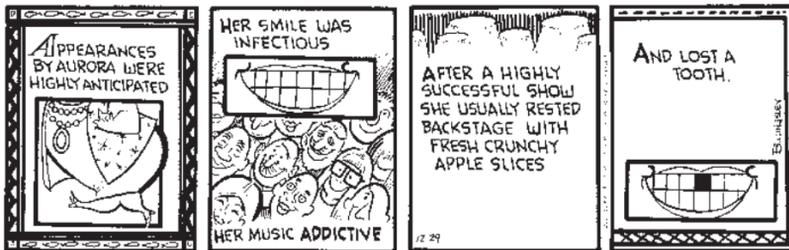
Terry Williams Buffington, MA, is a cultural anthropologist.

LEISURE

COMICS & QUOTE OF THE MONTH

CURTIS • BY RAY BILLINGSLEY

DEC. 29



DEC. 30



DEC. 31



JAN. 2



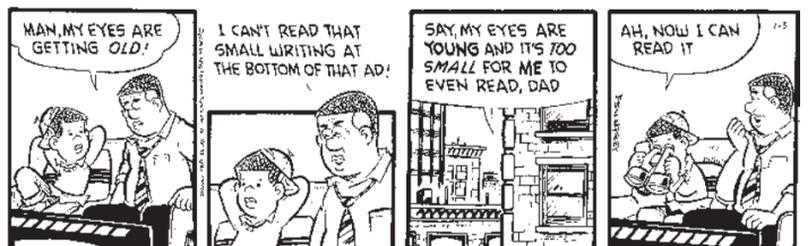
JAN. 3



JAN. 1



JAN. 3



Quote OF THE MONTH

“YOU CAN’T UNDERSTAND MOST OF THE IMPORTANT THINGS FROM A DISTANCE... YOU HAVE TO GET CLOSE.”

Bryan Stevenson

CRABGRASS • BY TAUHID BONDIA

DEC. 22



DEC. 24



DEC. 26



DEC. 27



DEC. 23



DEC. 25



DEC. 27



HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS ADVOCACY DAY

It's time to get excited and sign up to join hundreds of advocates from across the state at Housing & Homelessness Advocacy Day (HHAD) in Olympia on January 26! HHAD is our biggest annual opportunity to meet with lawmakers and demand statewide progress for housing justice—and it's happening in just seven weeks.

The legislative session that begins in January will have tight deadlines and tricky budget dynamics to navigate. We're scheduling HHAD earlier next year, and we know that if we show up strong together—and stay clear on our priorities—we can help ensure the state protects vital funding and programs, and continues investing in affordable homes and renter protections.

Join us in Olympia in January to: Rally on the Capitol steps and build power with advocates in your district and the state.

Meet with your lawmakers—and maybe even share your personal story. Develop and strengthen your advocacy skills. Register by scanning the accompanying QR code.



Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day
January 26, 2026

BLACK POETS SOCIETY

A LINEAGE, A VILLAGE, A LEGACY

As featured in the Spokane Library Series From The Vault: An Archival Poetry Project

“A great many years ago...” our story begins with two named, yet nameless Beloveds. Our re-imagining will intertwine their respective stories, a new narrative fashioned from two tales of markedly different sizes – one tragically short, the other (now) a tad taller, slightly embellished to ensure a good fit.

One:
A Chief's son
A young brave sweetheart and only child

An Indian boy without a name reproduced on any record

The Other:
An enslaved man's son
A freedom-seeker, escape artist, and entrepreneur

A black boy – stamped from the beginning as, and who would later fully lay claim to the name – Barrow

One: It was told by OLD LOBO that a great Chief's only son lost his life in a disaster upon disregarding his father's wishes. His father forbade him from departing the great sun god's worship to ferry his dear across Deer Lake. In failing to heed father's fair warning, the boy-brave-son, his sweetheart, and their canoe were all swallowed whole by a great monster from

the depths below. In the immediate Intertribal council response, “the Spokanes, the Colvilles, the Coeur d'Alenes, and even the far away Nez Perces and Yakimas... all agreed to leave the place at once...and for ages and ages, no Indians approached Deer Lake and all was silent.”

The Other – One Peter B. Barrow: We eventually join the boy-artist-son – Barrow – on his journey out West, inspired from one Washington (Booker T.) to another. First, Barrow escaped the slaver – its patrols, and that sweltering Mississippi plantation – to accompany William (née) Tecumseh Sherman on his bloody march to the sea. Barrow would rise to the rank of sergeant while serving, fighting yet another battle: the Civil War. Finally, Barrow escaped the Jim Crow South – its oppression, and that suffocating brutality of bigotry – to settle in Spokane and surrounding Stephens County. Barrow and a band of Black folks – 45 investors primarily from this region but in fact from across the US – set down roots, planting a foundation. Nestled within the volcanic ash of serene, silent shores, The Deer Lake Irrigated Orchards Company was birthed: all 140 acres owned outright in land and water right, cultivated solely by and for Black hands. In 1909! A Black collective banded



Inga Laurent poses at the event “From the Vault: An Archival Poetry Project” at the Spokane Public Library.

COURTESY

together to build a bright future.

Until a massive orchard complex became dead set on disturbing progress. Arcadia Orchard over developed 17,000 acres, irrigating the land with monster lake water. They flooded the valley, cursing the small but mighty endeavor and spoiling its “perfect winter apples.” Can you imagine? Our dearly Beloved Barrow as he sits upon the misty shores of his homestead one morning with tears pooling in his eyes? Perhaps he cast out a

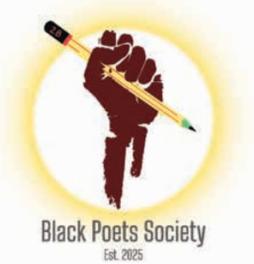
prayer to the dearly departed, pleading intercession “for the race...for the abolition of poverty...and for betterment.” Betting on something from nothing. The orchard described as “nothing like it in all America.” I wonder if from the water arose:

A spirit
A voice
An apparition
One who foretold the future.
Beloved-brother-Barrow, fear not. Though you will certainly be forced to abandon this land due

to exploitative and destructive forces, I have a vision. The roots you've nurtured so lovingly will grow strong; the trees you've nourished well will bear such unbelievably beautiful fruit. From this toil, you will father:

A lineage
A village
A legacy

Our story comes to a close with the prophecy now realized. A lineage: a wife, children, grand and great grandchildren. A village: a community with a printshop for communicating, an especially long reel of newspapers spanning from The Citizen to its contemporary, The Black Lens, a lineup of barbershops set on making us dapper, and a standing spiritual home: Calvary Baptist Church. A legacy: a vast constellation of families with connections, including Eleanor Barrow Chase, wife of Spokane's first Black Mayor, Jim Chase, soil samples that still reside within Howard University's botany nursery, and perhaps even the stilling of One restless, hopefully now free spirit.



THE APOLOGY THAT WASN'T NEEDED

There's a quiet pattern that slips by unnoticed.

“I'm sorry for talking too long.”

“I'm sorry for needing clarity.”

“I'm sorry for taking up time.”

“I'm sorry, I just needed a minute.”

Nothing actually went wrong, but nothing ever felt right

Nothing rude was said.

No harm was done.

No repair was needed.

Yet the apology still came out.

On the surface, it looks polite.

So Thoughtful.

So Self-aware.

But listen closer, as if you people even cared.

What's really being said isn't “I'm sorry.”

It's “I hope I'm not too much.”

“I hope I'm allowed in here.”

“I hope my presence doesn't cost you anything.”



By AJ The Wordsmith
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



There is No Cry for Help Left Unheard

No cry for help is left unheard,

No whispered pain, no silent word.

The echoes reach beyond the night,

And hands will rise to bring the light.

A trembling voice, a heavy sigh,

A longing glance, a tear-run eye.

The weight you carry, though unseen,

It is felt by hearts who stand between.

You are not lost, you are not weak,

Your voice still matters when you speak.

And even if your lips stay closed,

Your sorrow's depth is still exposed.

For in the dark, a spark remains,

A flicker fighting through the chains.

No call for help dissolves in vain-

Love will find you through the rain.

So reach, if only in your mind,

And know that help is close behind.

No cry for help is left unheard-

Your voice is valued, every word.



By Daniella Musesambili
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



JOURNAL 137

Today was not a good day

I looked in the mirror and hated it all

I tried smiling in pictures and videos

but it all disgusted me.

I know I'm different, I'm just noticing that feeling accomplished comes with feeling like you've failed in the first place.

My body isn't me. But it is representative of who I want to be.

My mind isn't me. But it is the nucleus of what I do.

My heart, as hard as it is to admit, isn't me.

But it wants to be.

One day I will conquer this. But tonight imma let it consume me.

I must know how this feels to be impervious to its sting.

-Scorpion (October 1)



By Jā Corbett-Sparks
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



WHY NOT YOU?

You look around,
The world is filled with many people,
Some look happy
Some sad
Some healthy and others sick
Some poor and some rich
Where do you stand?
You might know and might not know
But why do you have to stand somewhere?
Why do you need to belong on one group or the other
Are you really any of those?
Are you happy?
Sad?
You don't know
At least you claim that you don't
That you don't care

And that it doesn't matter
To fit in
To belong somewhere
Where do you belong or stand?
You haven't forgotten where you belong
But since you are somewhere else
You can't help but feel like you never belonged
You want to be somebody to someone
You want to help
You want to be seen by someone
You want to belong somewhere
What about you?
Are you anything to yourself?
You are a friend to many
What about being a friend to yourself?
Ever look around and realize you



By Janet Tumusifu
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



are rushing
But not for you
For others
You make it about them
Sometimes you give it your all
But at what cost?
Why not you?

Why listen to others
But never get heard?
Why be the friend today
But the stranger tomorrow?
Why stand by
While getting eaten away
Bits by bits?
Your time, your help
All go to waste
You look around again
Some are happy
Others are sad
Why not you?
Why don't you allow yourself to be happy
To be the happiest
Why suppress your happiness
What are you afraid of?
Judgment?
Exclusion?
Why don't you allow yourself to be sad
To cry

Why not you?
What are you afraid of?
You know better than anyone that things pass
You're right that the right people exist
Don't you ?
The world is filled with many different people
Don't you think worrying about the those that make you afraid
Is it a waste time?
We only have so much after all
Why don't you be you
Why don't you do your thing in the meantime
The right people always know when to show up
Just live life
It is a gift but it will take some time to understand
But one thing to know is you gotta live it to understand it
Always remember
Why not you?