

Ryan Coogler, left, winner of Best Writing (Original Screenplay) Ludwig Göransson, winner of the Best Original Score Award, Autumn Durald Arkapaw, winner of the Best Cinematography Award and Michael B. Jordan, winner of the Best Actor in a Leading Role Award for "Sinners" pose in the press room during the 98th Oscars on March 15 in Hollywood.



THE BLACK LENS

SPOKANE'S BLACK COMMUNITY NEWS SOURCE

BLACKLENS.NEWS

APRIL 2026 - VOL. 11 - ISSUE NO. 4

GUARD WHAT MATTERS

ON CULTURAL POWER AND SURVIVAL IN RYAN COOGLER'S 'SINNERS'

By Anna Flood
THE BLACK LENS

Ryan Coogler's "Sinners" (2025) made history at the 86th Academy Awards with 16 nominations and four wins in the categories of Best Actor for Michael B. Jordan, Best Original Screenplay, Best

Cinematography and Best Original Score. The film is groundbreaking in the way it fuses horror with historical reflection, crafting a story that uses metaphor to hold space for deeper conversations about American history and the power of cultural expression. Throughout the film,

messages, both subtle and direct, invite viewers to reflect on the long shadow of the past. Central to the story's formula is the Blues, which exists as a thread throughout the film, just as the past threads itself throughout our present.

See SINNERS, 10



GETTY IMAGES PHOTOS
Michael B. Jordan accepts the Best Actor in a Leading Role award for "Sinners."

FROM SEED TO SOUL

Duaa-Rahemaah Hunter on Black Earth Day and environmental justice

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

As part of Earth Month, community advocate Duaa-Rahemaah Hunter is helping organize Black Earth Day: Seed to Soul, an event focused on environmental justice, food access, land stewardship, and community healing through gardening. Hunter spoke about the inspiration behind the event and why reconnecting with the land matters for Black communities.

Q: What is coming up in April? Can you explain it?

Hunter: Oh my gosh. So it's the Black Earth Day Seed to Soul celebration. So what it is is to recognize the environmental



COURTESY OF DUAARAHEMAAH HUNTER

See EARTH DAY, 10

Duaa-Rahemaah Hunter

Chasing power isn't leadership

Erin Jones on what it really means to lead

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

The ShadeMakers Student Leadership Conference is a free, inaugural event focused on empowering high school leadership teams across Washington, held on March 14, 2026, at Gonzaga University in Spokane, and founded by Christian Paige.

At the conference, educator and motivational speaker Erin Jones delivered a keynote that

See JONES, 10

APRIL EBERHARDT/THE BLACK LENS

Erin Jones delivers keynote at Gonzaga ShadeMakers Conference.



APRIL EBERHARDT/THE BLACK LENS

Aaron Dixon spoke at PJALS Youth Kick-Off event at Hamilton Studios on March 20.

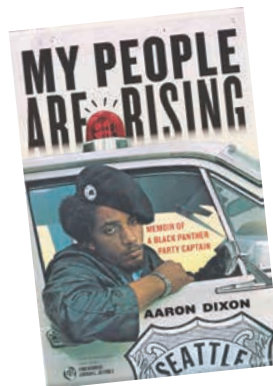
The cost of individualism

Black Panther Aaron Dixon on finding our way back to collective power

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

In a time marked by hyper-individualism, grifting, and spin-off movements, Aaron Dixon offers a grounded reflection on what it once meant to move as a collective and what it will take to return. As a co-founder of the Seattle

See DIXON, 16



Just marvelous!: Earon Davis, Sr., and his 56 years of commitment and community

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

After serving four years in the Air Force, Earon Davis married in April 1969. Balancing newly married life with his pursuit of higher education, he carefully selected a position at Safeway for its flexibility, allow-

ing him to work while attending school. On June 18, 1969, he began what would become a decadeslong career that started at the Lincoln Heights Safeway and ended as a respected leader who poured into so many community members. Starting as a checker and stocker, he worked his way into management, becoming

the first Black assistant manager in Safeway's Spokane division. He later served as first assistant manager and spent 30 years at the Lincoln Heights Safeway, where his presence became a constant in the community.

His dedication and leadership

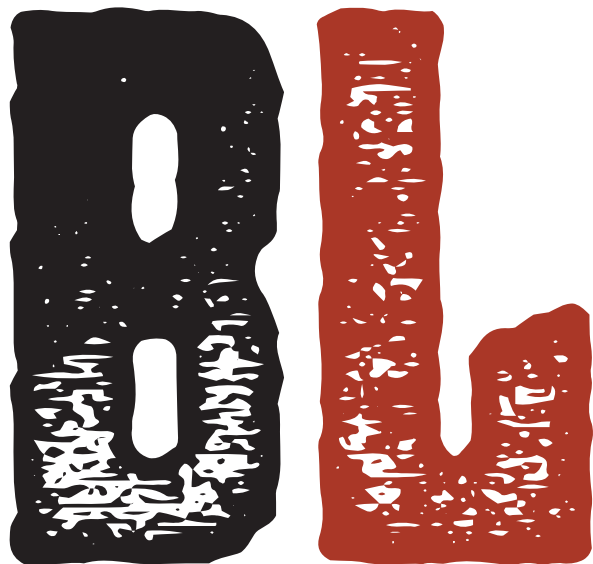
See DAVIS, 15



COURTESY

Earon Davis, Sr., third from left, is retiring after 56 years as a local Safeway employee.

GUARD WHAT MATTERS



NEWS

BLACKLENS.NEWS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Justice department seeks to dismiss ex-officers' charges in Breonna Taylor raid

The U.S. Department of Justice has asked a federal judge to dismiss charges against two former police officers involved in the raid that resulted in the fatal shooting of Breonna Taylor, a Black woman, in her home.

Former detective Joshua Jaynes and former sergeant Kyle Meany were alleged to have used false information to obtain a search warrant to enter Taylor's home in March 2020, the BBC reported.

Prosecutors asked the court to dismiss misdemeanor charges against the Louisville officers, the BBC reported, which were initially more severe felony counts, but later downgraded by a judge.

In a post on social media, Taylor's mother, Tamika Palmer, said she was extremely disappointed in U.S. President Donald Trump and the DOJ.

The request comes just a week after the six-year anniversary of Taylor's death, the BBC reported.

In the filing, the DOJ argued the case should be dismissed altogether "in the interest of justice."

DOJ lawyers said they are seeking to dismiss the pending case with prejudice, which means it could not be revived in the future, the BBC reported. A judge still has to sign off on the motion.

Underground Railroad museum sues Trump administration over canceled grant

An upstate New York museum dedicated to preserving the history of the Underground Railroad is suing the Trump administration, alleging the cancellation of a federal grant was driven by racial and political bias, NBC News reported.

The Underground Railroad Education Center filed the lawsuit in federal court, arguing the termination of a \$250,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities violated its constitutional rights. According to the complaint, the decision amounted to both viewpoint discrimination under the First Amendment and racial discrimination under the Fifth Amendment.

The grant was originally intended to support the museum's expansion efforts, including a planned \$12 million interpretive center. But the funding was canceled following a broader directive tied to Donald Trump's 2025 executive order aimed at eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives across federal agencies, the Grio reported.

Attorneys representing the museum argue the move was part of a wider pattern. "There is just no legitimate basis for the cancellation," said lawyer Nina Loewenstein, who is working on the case through Lawyers for Good Government. She added that the decision is "just explicitly erasing things associated with the Black race."

The lawsuit also claims that the administration "systematically targeted grantees and programs that sought to increase the public's understanding of Black history and cultures," pointing to hundreds of terminated grants that allegedly conflicted with new federal priorities.

Founded in Albany, the museum is located at the former home of abolitionists Stephen and Harriet Myers, who helped thousands escape slavery before the Civil War.

INDEX

NEWS AND POLITICS 2
HAPPENING AROUND TOWN 5
BUSINESS AND FINANCE 6
EDUCATION 7
YOUTH CONNECTION 9
WELLNESS 11
REST IN POWER 13
EVENTS AND LISTINGS 14
COMICS AND LEISURE 15

NEWS

FROM THE EDITOR

The unfortunate mirror of horror



By April Eberhardt THE BLACK LENS EDITOR

Though it took me a while to finally sit down and watch "Sinners," because I have a personal avoidance of horror films, the message of protection from extraction and exploitation resonated. It is not hyperbole rooted in paranoia. It is behavior grounded in recognition. This stance is learned and shaped by generations who have watched opportunity arrive dressed as predatory. For Black communities, the line between collaboration and commodification has rarely been clearly drawn by those in power. As a result, discernment becomes both shield and strategy, keeping our proverbial heads on a swivel to identify bait-and-switch tactics that often appear as saviorism, tokenization, and performative inclusion.

What resonated most was the way history has created an ecosystem of booby traps that demand preservation and survival, offering no real peace, only watchful eyes for hidden snakes.

Hypervigilance, then, becomes a skill honed by society's underdogs navigating uncertainty in an environment designed to do just that. We are constantly weighing professional opportunities, social invitations and spaces that seem to offer possibility against the likelihood of ulterior motives, often tied to someone else's gain. Experience has taught that not everything offered with a smile is rooted in good

intent. While this lesson can apply broadly, for those shaped by occupation, imperialism, and colonization, vigilance is not excessive. It is necessary. Great gain has been built on the backs of those who innovate and labor.

That is why protection from appropriation becomes a legitimate posture. The responsibility to safeguard our legacies, innovations, traditions, ownership, voices, economic power, and the gifts within our communities remains constant.

The movie "Sinners" is indeed a metaphor, and current paradigms still reinforce that this struggle does not end when the credits roll or the Oscar statues are lifted. In communities as small as Spokane, in countries as large as the United

States, and across the vast continent of Africa, the muscle of protection gets regular exercise as we see the recurrence of capitalizing on good fruit while throwing away the rind.

As author Tananarive Due shared in our interview back in November 2025, horror, for all its hyperbole and gore, tells unsettling truths. It reflects real life in distorted form, an unfortunate mirror.

At some point, we must decide whether we will keep studying the reflection, or begin to transform what it shows.



Michael B. Jordan in "Sinners."



Together. For the River.

EARTH DAY RIVER CLEAN UP

Sponsored by:



Join us for a family friendly river cleanup! Cleaning up the banks of the Spokane River is a great way to volunteer, get some exercise, and meet new friends.

APRIL 18, 2026

STARTING AT 10AM

AT HIGH BRIDGE PARK & PEOPLE'S PARK

212 S A ST SPOKANE, WA, 99224



spokaneriverkeeper.org/litter-clean-up

THE BLACK LENS

Serving Spokane's Black community since 2015

IN MEMORY OF SANDRA WILLIAMS FOUNDED EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

THE BLACK LENS EDITOR & BOARD MEMBERS

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

Contact us about delivery

Email: april@blacklensnews.com

Would you like to advertise?

Email: april@blacklensnews.com

Have a news tip?

Email: editor@blacklensnews.com Call: (509) 828-7719

General information Schoenberg Center/Gonzaga University 800 N. Pearl St. Spokane, WA 99258

About The Black Lens



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

Copyright © 2026

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

Statement of Independence

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

The Black Lens retains full authority over its editorial content. This organization maintains a strict firewall between news coverage decisions and funding sources and in-kind help. Acceptance of financial support does not constitute implied or actual endorsement of donors or their products, services or opinions.

All story decisions made by The Black Lens newsroom and its leaders are made independently and not on the basis of donor support. This organization does not give supporters the rights to assign, review or edit content, and if a supporter is covered in a story or other editorial content, The Black Lens will disclose this at the bottom of the story.

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

ensure that journalism's protected First Amendment rights continue to be an essential part of our nation's democracy.

Though much of the content created by The Black Lens may appear in regional publications, newspapers or news websites, those organizations have no rights, authority or influence over the content created by this publication. The Black Lens' publications are only responsible to boards of directors for The Black Lens and the comma community journalism lab. Though other publications, including The Spokesman-Review, are included in distribution, The Black Lens is not a publication of any of its third-party distribution partners.



PULSE ON DEMOCRACY

REP. NATASHA HILL WORKS WITH LAWMAKERS ON HISTORIC STEP TOWARD A FAIRER TAX CODE

After incredibly long and historic debate, WA state Legislature passes millionaire's tax

From Black Lens staff reports

After a 25-hour marathon debate, the Washington state Legislature passed legislation to institute a “millionaire’s tax.”

“We did it!!!” Rep. Natasha Hill, of Spokane, wrote to supporters about the income tax set to begin in 2028.

“This is a monumental step toward economic justice and greater equity and opportunity in our state,” she continued.

Below is Rep. Hill’s address to lawmakers during debate:

There’s a myth floating around today and yesterday. The Capitol will leave Washington. This whole concept of capital flight. The truth is, millionaires would pay more in other states, Madam Speaker. Even our youth today appreciate when we talk about the difference between six, seven figures. And that this only applies to .25% of Washington’s population, meaning 99.75% are not going to be paying this tax.

Those making six figures or less, Madam Speaker, pay less in Washington. If you’re making about 60 K to 120 K a year in Washington, you don’t pay any income tax. Over in Idaho, you’re paying about \$3,400 to \$6,800. If

somebody is making over seven figures, they still pay less. For example, if you’re making \$1.2 million here in Washington, you’re only paying, you get that 1st Milli free and you’re only paying taxes on the 200 grand, about 20,000. Over in Idaho, you’re going to be paying about 68 K.

This is more progressive and fair than any of our neighbors. Idaho, Oregon, California. Oregon has the 9.9% on that first dollar, like we’ve talked about. They’re just not giving that free Millie like we’re doing here in this bill.

41 other states have an income tax, red states, blue states, purple states. California, Rhode Island, and Illinois considering similar taxes on their highest earners. Massachusetts and Minnesota already passed a tax on high earners. And all the terrible predictions that we’re hearing about people leaving those states, it didn’t happen.

This is why you’ve heard us voting down amendment after amendment after amendment. In Massachusetts, the number of millionaires increased by over 30% in the years after passage.

Leaving a million here, a million there. The revenue they gained has fixed bridges, funded bus

routes, hired teachers, and made community colleges and school meals available to all.

Spending has increased with population and cost of living, spending to maintain a safety net for all. I believe we have the ability to earn over a million in wages that we’d be happy, Madam Speaker, you and I, to pay this tax to help us maintain and continue to build a safety net for all Washingtonians.

So, I’m voting yes for fairness and economic justice. For the wheat farmers in Eastern Washington, to the oyster farmers by the Hood Canal, which I learned, Madam Speaker, is a fjord, and the only fjord we have in the Lower 48. Yes, for working parents who need affordable childcare.

When I look across state, I see in the east, I see, you know, we have an urban center in Spokane, but we’re very rural in my region. We go to the West, and there’s coastal regions, and there’s a lot more urban metropolitan centers. And what I see, Mr. Speaker, is that we have more in common than we have different.

I also see how much life has changed, not just for me, but across Washington State since 2016, and I want to leave you, Mr. Speaker, with a poem



LUCILLE STUTESMAN/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Rep. Natasha Hill, D-Spokane, speaks to a crowd on Feb. 10 in Olympia.

that means a lot to me and folks in my district who are supporting this bill.

This is a quote from an author who has helped define science fiction writers in the Black community, who has some eerie reflections in some of her writings. And she tells us that, all that you touch, you change. And all that you change changes you. And the only lasting truth is change.

Vote yes with me on this, Mr. Speaker, so we can move this bill forward, and we can get the change we need for Washingtonians across our state.

Other important bills to watch for

Alongside the passage of the millionaire’s tax,

the House also advanced several important bills that support communities across Washington, including right here in Spokane. These bills are now heading to the governor’s desk.

HB 1974: Expanding Tools for Affordable Housing

HB 1974 gives communities new tools to acquire land and plan for affordable housing before development pressures make it too expensive. This helps cities like Spokane plan ahead and create more housing options for working families.

HB 2416: Recognizing the Role of Waste-to-Energy Facilities

HB 2416 addresses how

waste-to-energy facilities are treated under Washington’s climate program. Facilities like Spokane’s play an important role in managing waste while reducing landfill emissions, and our policies should recognize that contribution while continuing to move toward a cleaner future.

HB 1750: Protecting Voting Rights

HB 1750 strengthens Washington’s voting rights protections and helps ensure every community has a fair voice in our elections. The bill provides clearer pathways for addressing voting barriers and reinforces our state’s commitment to accessible and equitable participation in democracy.

THE LIVING CURRENCY OF POWER

From the Antebellum ‘fancy trade’ to the Epstein files



By Dr. Gina Clarke Sutton
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR

The 2026 release of the final “Epstein Files” has once again forced the American public to stare into the abyss of elite depravity. The names, the logistical spreadsheets of abuse, and the systemic protection of high-status predators have been framed as a uniquely modern horror and product of private jets and offshore islands. However, for those grounded in the history of the Black experience in America, this architecture of exploitation is hauntingly familiar.

The sexual trafficking of children and young women by Jeffrey Epstein and Peter Nygard is not a contemporary glitch in the system; it is the modern iteration of a 19th-century market known as the “Fancy Trade.” By examining the through-lines between the antebellum slave market and modern elite trafficking, we see a persistent historical reality: an amoral class of the powerful that treats the human body not as a person, but as “living currency.”

The Fancy Trade: The High-End of Human Flesh

In the decades preceding the Civil War, the “fancy trade” represented the most explicit intersection of capitalism and sexual violence. While the general domestic slave trade focused on labor, the fancy trade was a specialized market for “fancy girls,” predominant-

ly young, light-skinned Black women and girls sold at a premium to wealthy white men for the sole purpose of sexual servitude (Moran, 2005).

These women were not sold to work in the fields or the kitchens. They were “commodities of rape,” valued for their physical features and marketed in the “Price-Current of Human Flesh” alongside cotton and sugar (Moran, 2005). As Gordon (2015) notes, this trade was the formal commodification of sexual violence within a legal framework. It provided an outlet for the “elite amoral class” of the South to perform their dominance through the purchase and consumption of human beings. The fancy trade was not an underground secret; it was an open, taxpaying, and government-sanctioned arm of the American economy.

The Logic of ‘Living Currency’

To understand the parallels between an 1850s New Orleans slave pen and Jeffrey Epstein’s Manhattan townhouse, we must look at the concept of Living Currency. Scholar Pierre Klossowski (2017) theorized that in certain hyper-capitalist structures, the body itself becomes the medium of exchange. In the Epstein and Nygard enterprises, as in the fancy trade, young women were used as “social capital” to cement alliances between powerful men (Volscho, 2025).

In both eras, the traffickers operated through “harem logic.” Wealthy men did not just seek sexual gratification; they sought the status that comes with the absolute ownership and disposal of others. Wilson (2021) traces this exploitation of Black women from 1619 through to the modern day, noting that the systemic “othering” of these women allowed for a level of violence that the state not only ignored but often facilitated. Whether through the 19th-century laws that

denied Black women “virtue” or the 21st-century “normative ambiguity” grey area that shields billionaires, the result is the same: the powerful are granted a license to moral ambivalence (Watson, 2026).

Elite Trafficking as a Crime of the Powerful

The recent comparative study of Jeffrey Epstein and Peter Nygard by Volscho (2025) highlights that elite sex trafficking is a “crime of the powerful.” This is characterized by using immense wealth to create “protected spaces” where the law does not apply. Epstein used his connections to the global elite such as politicians, royals, and academics, to build a shield of perceived legitimacy.

This mirrors the antebellum “elite” who frequented fancy girl auctions. These were the “gentlemen” of society, the pillars of their communities who used their status to normalize the purchase of children for sex. The “Epstein Files” reveal a similar ecosystem of enablers: recruiters, lawyers, and financiers who acted much like the “slave factors” of the 1800s, who brokered the sale of human beings while maintaining a veneer of professional respectability (Campbell & Elbourne, 2001).

The Erasure of the Victim

One of the most damning parallels is the “epistemic uncertainty” created by the powerful to hide their crimes. Watson (2026) argues that human trafficking is often obscured by conspiracy theories and disinformation, which serves to protect the perpetrators by making the truth seem unreachable. In the 1850s, the “conspiracy” was the myth of the “benevolent master” or the “seductive” nature of the enslaved, which erased the reality of state-sanctioned kidnapping and rape.

Today, the noise surrounding “The Epstein Files” often veers into partisan political theater, distracting from the structural reality: our legal and economic systems are still susceptible

to the same “sex and power” dynamics that fueled the slave trade

(Campbell & Elbourne, 2001). The victims of the fancy trade were often discarded once they were no longer deemed “valuable” by the market; similarly, the survivors of modern elite trafficking have spent decades fighting for a justice system that was designed to protect their abusers’ bank accounts rather than their bodies.

Recognizing the Blueprint

The horror of the Epstein files is not a new phenomenon, but a contemporary chapter in a very old American book. The fancy trade taught the American elite that the bodies of the vulnerable could be bought, sold, and used to grease the wheels of power.

As we analyze the fallout of the current investigations, we must ground our understanding in this historical continuity. The goal of public education is to see through “the normative ambiguity” and recognize that as long as we allow an elite class to operate with total immunity, the human body will continue to be used as a “living currency.” Only by confronting the roots of this exploitation can we begin to dismantle the systems that make “fancy trade” possible in any century.

Additional Context: The 1808-2026 Through-line

- 1808–1860: The Peak of the Fancy Trade

The domestic slave trade expands. Wealthy white men in the South pay 300% premiums for “fancy girls.” The legal system formalizes the idea that Black women have no “virtue” the state is bound to protect (Wilson, 2021).

- 1865–1920: The Transition of Control

While the formal trade ends, the “othering” of Black and vulnerable women persists. The amoral class moves from “ownership” to systemic “exclusion,” ensuring that certain populations remain legally unprotected (Wilson, 2021).

- 2000s–2019: The Epstein/Nygaard Era

Billionaire predators build global networks that mimic the specialized auctions of the 19th century. They utilize “harem logic” to attract other powerful men, creating a modern-day “Price-Current” of social influence (Volscho, 2025).

- 2024–2026: The “Epstein Files” and Truth-Telling

The full release of court records and whistleblowers exposes the enablers. The public begins to recognize that these are not “scandals” but “Crimes of the Powerful” rooted in an ancient American blueprint (Watson, 2026).

More Information

Campbell, G., & Elbourne, E. (2001). Sex, power, and slavery. Ohio University Press.

Gordon, T. A. (2015). The fancy trade and the commodification of rape in the sexual economy of 19th century US slavery. University of California, Riverside.

Klossowski, P. (2017). Living currency. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Moran, R. (2005). The price-current of human flesh: American slavery, the female body and capitalism. *Chronos*, 1(1), 4.

Volscho, T. (2025). Elite sex trafficking as a crime of the powerful: A comparative case study of Jeffrey Epstein and Peter Nygard’s alleged trafficking enterprises. *Deviant Behavior*, 1-31.

Watson, S. D. (2026). Conspiracy theories and human trafficking: Coercive power, normative ambiguity and epistemic uncertainty. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 12(1), 66-83.

Wilson, D. R. (2021). Sexual exploitation of Black women from the years 1619-2020. *Journal of Race, Gender, and Ethnicity*, 10(1), 13.

CULTURE

'ONE NAIL AT A TIME'

NAACP perspective from Spokane Civic Theatre's community conversation



By Lisa Gardner
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR

"One Nail at a Time" is a line from the stage play, "The Glass Menagerie," referring to how escaping a nailed coffin takes one nail at a time. Moderator Kiantha Duncan opened the Civic Theatre community conversation with a scene from the play, setting the tone that to escape a seemingly closed situation, we must be released from the coffin one nail at a time. Duncan, an experienced and empathetic moderator of tough conversations, urged the audience to be curious about each other's perspectives and to recognize that it takes a willingness to be open to one another to create change.

The recent pause of "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" at Spokane Civic Theatre sparked an important and necessary community conversation about representation, inclusion and accountability

within our local arts institutions. Concerns raised by community members and artists focused on casting practices and whether they reflected the diversity and lived experiences of the broader Spokane community. At the same time, the theatre acknowledged these concerns, paused the production, and committed to creating space for dialogue and reflection.

On March 21, a community forum was held to bring these perspectives together in a shared space. The conversation was thoughtful, respectful and rooted in a genuine desire to be heard and to understand. About 100 community members attended, including artists, advocates, production crew and supporters of the theater. While there were differing viewpoints and some skepticism, the overall tone of the event showed a willingness to engage constructively.

Participants openly shared their experiences,

raising concerns about access, opportunity and the need for more deliberate inclusion in casting and leadership. Some audience members expressed feelings of isolation, betrayal, retaliation and even outright discrimination. Theater representatives outlined the steps they have begun implementing, including pausing the production, examining structural changes and committing to ongoing conversations. The forum provided space for both accountability and reflection, which are crucial for progress.

What was clear throughout the evening is that this moment is about more than just one production. It reflects a broader opportunity for Spokane's arts community to examine how its institutions can evolve to better serve and represent all members of our community. These solutions are

neither simple nor quick. Building trust, strengthening relationships and implementing meaningful change requires time, transparency and ongoing effort.

Moving forward, all parties must stay engaged. Progress relies on ongoing communication, a willingness to listen and a shared commitment to thoughtful, measurable solutions. The conversation that started with this forum should not end here.

Lasting change happens when communities unite, not just during moments of tension but through ongoing partnership. This is a chance for Spokane to move forward intentionally, making sure our cultural spaces are welcoming, inclusive, and reflect the richness of our whole community.

Lisa Gardner is the NAACP President of the Spokane branch.

PULSE ON DEMOCRACY



COURTESY

In March, Gov. Bob Ferguson confirmed Megan Matthews as director of the Washington State Office of Equity, formally solidifying her leadership after serving in the role on an interim basis.

INTENTIONAL FOCUS

MODERN-DAY LYNCHINGS, OPPRESSION MUST BE UNPACKED



By Kurtis Robinson
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR

OK, we've made a little progress in unpacking some bias dynamics and pointing to their connection with some of the problems smacking us upside our heads. So, let's continue that fun journey.

Recently, another racist incident occurred at Gonzaga. Yet examinations of patterns over time reveal the historic frequency of such incidents. Further examination reveals these same patterns at most, if not all, of our academic institutions, including our public schools. What also becomes clear is the lack of meaningful and sustained anti-bias, anti-oppression, and pro-equity actions, curricula, and accountability measures by those who oversee these institutions—for themselves and for those they steward. Clear examinations make these truths startlingly obvious.

Another obvious truth revealed is bias based on race—racial bias, or simply put, racism.

An article by Haniya P. at TheGrio points to Julian's Crimson Record, which offers analysis of modern-day lynchings from 2000 to 2025. Over the last 25 years, it has identified more than 70 modern-day lynchings across seven states: Texas, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, Florida, Tennessee and Alabama.

So, when was the last time you saw or heard of a white person (meaning white-identified or white-identifying) being lynched? Let alone a count of 70?

When was the last time you saw findings in such

cases conclude there was nothing suspicious? ("Um ... must be suicide—yeah, that's it.")

Also, in this current time, there is a massive and unwarranted expansion of our "criminal migration" system. Approximately 11 more people have died in ICE detention just this year, and numerous recent reports reveal that more than 900 children have been held in ICE custody so far past the 20-day court-imposed limit that officials are now having to shift that time benchmark just to track it.

I mean, OK—when was the last time any such grouping of deaths of white-identified or white-identifying people being detained occurred? Or such numbers of children being detained? Let alone both of those happening simultaneous-

ly. ("Umm ... never?")

OK, try this one: When was the last time you heard of massive graves of white-identified or white-identifying children being found at multiple boarding school sites?

OK, well if that's not enough, let's try this: When was the last time you heard of droves of white-identified or white-identifying females coming up missing—over generations—and receiving almost no media attention?

(Umm ... never?) Bingo. That's right—we might have an issue with bias. With racial bias.

Let's just be real about it—we've got multiple issues. The environment is a major one. Yet let's start unpacking that piece next time.

Keep pushing for hope. Keep leaning in. Keep

moving forward. Invigorate your joy. Dial in on our collective humanity. Yet also be very, very mindful, intentional and realistic about what the heck is really going on.

Try using some of that energy to help our country push forward into the promise realized of what we're supposed to be.

But how, you ask? Well, since our voter turnout last round was only just under 40%, maybe try voting. Just saying.

Who in their right mind thinks you can take billions of gallons of crude oil out of the mantle of the planet, burn it up, and not replace it—while also pulling billions of gallons of fresh water out of the planet and not replacing it—and think, "No, we're not having a negative impact on our environment?"

KING CARL NIGHTS
AT AVISTA STADIUM

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15TH
FIRST PITCH - 6:35 PM

TUESDAY, JUNE 16TH
FIRST PITCH - 6:35 PM

SPokane Indians logo

(\$1) from each ticket sold will be donated to the Sandy Williams Fund for the Carl Maxey Center

HONORING HIS LEGACY. CONTINUING THE FIGHT.

America
THE
Beautiful
THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN MUSIC WITH THE SPOKANE SYMPHONY

APRIL 11
7:30PM

BYRON STRIPLING
Conductor, trumpet, and vocals

QR code

SPOKANESYMPHONY.ORG

HAPPENING AROUND TOWN

Spokane artist Tracy Poindexter-Canton picked for August Wilson House honor

Mixed media work inspired by Gem of the Ocean will become part of permanent collection in Pittsburgh

PITTSBURGH, PA. – Spokane mixed media artist Tracy Poindexter-Canton has returned from Pittsburgh after being selected as one of just 10 artists in the nation, and the only artist on the West Coast, to create an original work honoring legendary playwright August Wilson.

Poindexter-Canton's mixed media piece, "So Live, My Gems," was inspired by *Gem of the Ocean*, the first play in Wilson's acclaimed 10-play Pittsburgh Cycle. The work will now live permanently at the August Wilson House, Wilson's childhood home in Pittsburgh, which today serves as an arts center and cultural landmark dedicated to preserving and advancing his legacy.

For Poindexter-Canton, the opportunity was both deeply personal and profoundly meaningful.

"To have my work permanently housed in August Wilson's childhood home is an extraordinary honor," said Poindexter-Canton. "Being in Pittsburgh and spending time in a place so deeply connected to Wilson's life and vision made his legacy feel even more alive, rooted and urgent. August Wilson told Black stories with tenderness, complexity, truth and an uncompromising sense of dignity. As a Black artist, that kind of example is both affirming and instructive."

She said the experience strengthened her sense of responsibility as an artist committed to storytelling, memory and cultural expression.

"It reminded me that our work is never just decorative. It carries history, spirit and witness," Poindexter-Canton said. "It asks us to honor where we come from, to tell the truth about our people, and to create with intention. I left Pittsburgh feeling even more committed to making work that is layered, honest and anchored in Black life, beauty and resilience."

Poindexter-Canton's connection to Wilson's work stretches back



COURTESY OF TRACY POINDEXTER-CANTON

Artist Tracy Poindexter-Canton, who has been selected for a national August Wilson House honor, stands in the childhood home of Wilson.

more than two decades. She has been seeing Wilson's plays since the early 2000s, many of them through Seattle Repertory Theatre while she was an undergraduate student at Seattle University. She has now seen eight of the 10 plays in Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle and plans to see a ninth on Broadway this May.

She credits Seattle Repertory Theatre with helping make Wilson's work accessible to her during those formative years and notes the significance of Seattle in Wilson's own life, as he later relocated there.

"August Wilson's plays have meant a great deal to me as both a writer and visual artist," Poindexter-Canton said. "I'm deeply grateful to Seattle Repertory Theatre for making so many of his plays avail-

able to audiences like me during my undergraduate years. Those experiences stayed with me. Wilson understood how place, language, ancestry and everyday people could hold epic meaning. To create work in conversation with his legacy felt sacred."

Known for her vibrant, textured mixed media pieces, Poindexter-Canton often blends literary inspiration with portraiture, collage and layered materials to explore identity, memory and Black American life. Her selection for this national opportunity places her work in dialogue with one of the country's most revered artistic legacies and ensures that her contribution will remain part of the August Wilson House for years to come.

Luc Jasmin gives address at annual Fig Tree fundraiser



COURTESY OF JAYCIE CALVERT

Luc Jasmin, left, gave an address at the Annual Fig Tree fundraiser luncheon at Gonzaga University on March 14.

From Black Lens staff reports

Luc Jasmin gave an address at the Annual Fig Tree fundraiser luncheon at Gonzaga University on March 14, reflecting on the messages he received growing up and the grounding encouragement of his mother as he continues to strive toward building

a strong, thriving community.

"I'm not supposed to be here" is what the world told him – but his mother answered in Creole, "Bondye ak kominote" – God and community.

That truth carried him through every statistic, every doubt, and every moment that said give up.

Are you ready for the challenge?

RACIAL JUSTICE CHALLENGE

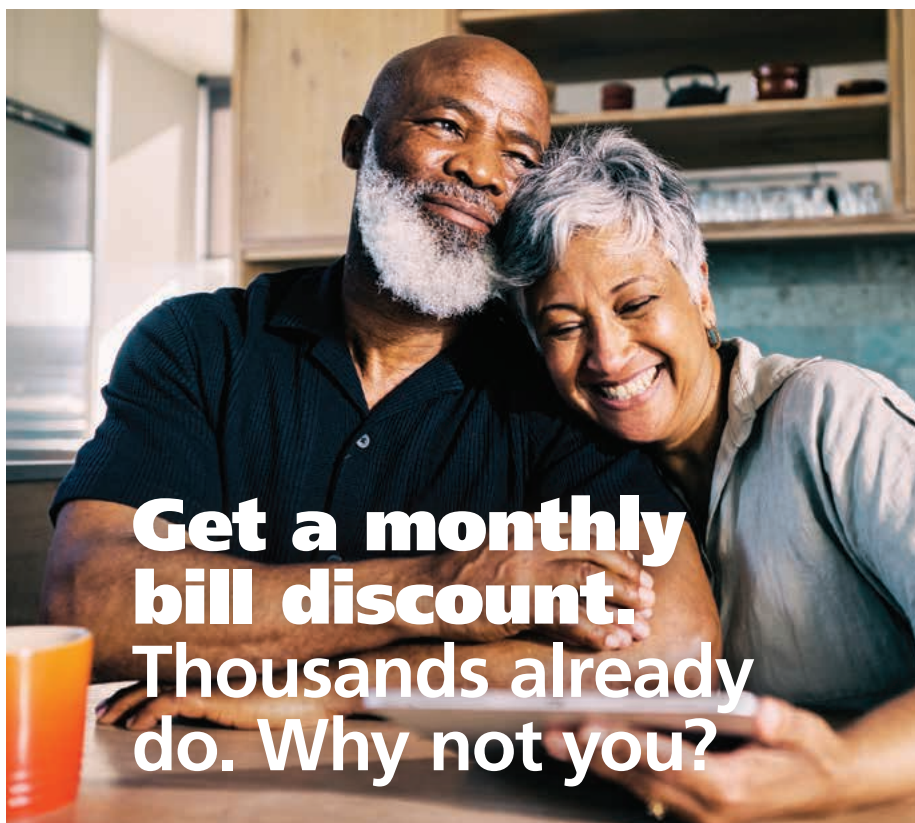
May 11 – 22, 2026
ywcaspokane.org/challenge

Register to Access



Scan with phone.

eliminating racism
 empowering women
ywca
 SPOKANE



Get a monthly bill discount. Thousands already do. Why not you?

My Energy Discount

Join the thousands of Avista customers getting a discount on their bill every month with **My Energy Discount**. It's easy, it's fast, and thanks to new income guidelines, you might be surprised that you qualify. Apply today!

- Nearly 1 in 3 households qualifies
- Apply online in minutes
- No appointments needed
- No paperwork
- Good for two years

See if you qualify. Scan the code or visit myavista.com/myenergydiscountWA, or call (800) 227-9187.



Assistance with alternative languages available.



BUSINESS

MORE THAN HOUSES

Eastern Washington Professionals Organize to Establish REALTIST Board with the National Association of Real Estate Brokers

SPOKANE, Wash. — Real estate professionals and community advocates in Eastern Washington are taking an important step toward expanding homeownership opportunities and strengthening industry collaboration across the region. Following a successful informational event held on March 7, 2026, efforts are underway to organize the Eastern Washington REALTIST board in partnership with the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB). Region XIV Vice President Nicole Bascomb-Green presented the vision and purpose of the organization, highlighting both its national legacy and local relevance to community leaders at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center.

Founded in 1947, the National Association of Real Estate Brokers was established to provide a professional platform for Black real estate practitioners who were historically excluded from traditional real estate organizations. For nearly eight decades, NAREB has championed its advocacy for equitable access to homeownership, professional development, and sustainable community growth nationwide.

As the organization continues to expand, Eastern Washington is being recognized for the growing momentum around equitable housing efforts. Local Realtor Latrice Williams, key organiz-



Latrice Williams speaks with Nicole Bascomb-Green at a community presentation to support the launch of an Eastern Washington Chapter of NAREB.

COURTESY OF GLOS CREATIVE STUDIO

er, emphasized that the work is both urgent and deeply rooted in social justice.

“The goal is to allow democracy in housing—opportunities for folks that didn’t see it happening, heavy on social justice, and making sure that we get the policy

changes that we need to support the Black and Brown communities that are here in Eastern Washington,” Williams said.

Williams pointed to the Covenant Homeownership Program as a direct example of what coordinated advocacy can achieve.

“The Covenant program is a direct result of the advocacy from the national level and the state level,” she said. “Out of the study, we found that Black homeownership was the lowest percentage over decades. Legislators saw that something needed to change, and now

we have a statewide program that allots 20% for a down payment for eligible residents.”

Serving on the governor’s oversight committee for the program, Williams noted that policy work remains ongoing, including efforts to advance the Community Reinvestment Program.

“A lot of us benefited in the nonprofit world to fund these communities and start these programs. Now we need to retain what we started and continue to grow it,” she said.

The formation of the Eastern Washington REALTIST board represents more than industry alignment—it signals a broader commitment to generational impact.

“We’re not just building houses—we’re building communities. We’re building generational wealth and fixing what was all messed up,” Williams said.

Organizers are currently seeking at least 10 founding board members to formally establish the chapter. Real estate professionals, developers, lenders, homeowners, and community members interested in advancing equitable housing are encouraged to get involved.

“We need people that care about people,” Williams added. “Anyone who wants to be part of meaningful change should be at the table.”

NEXT GENERATION HAIR ACADEMY: RESTORING KNOWLEDGE, RECLAIMING CARE

By April Eberhardt
EDITOR

An Interview with Dawniella Moore — **Q:** Can you introduce yourself and share your work?

Dawniella Moore: I am the founder and CEO of Next Generation Hair Academy and the owner of Dawn’s Braids, Dreads, and Twists. I’ve been in this industry for about two decades, and I am a master loctician based in Spokane. I opened my current location to create the academy because I saw a need for education that simply wasn’t being met.

Q: What inspired you to start Next Generation Hair Academy?

Moore: Next Generation Hair Academy was created to educate and empower people about textured hair—the science, the care, and the cultural significance that has often been missing from traditional beauty education. When I was in cosmetology school, textured hair was skimmed over. I remember three young girls with dense Type 4C hair being turned away because no one knew how to care for their hair. That moment stayed with me. It was unfair, and it showed a deeper issue in how education systems overlook our needs.

Q: You’re speaking directly to issues of equity in education. Why is that so important in this work?

Moore: Thank you for recognizing that. This is about equity. When institutions don’t teach textured hair properly, they are



COURTESY OF EDWARD EBERHARDT

High School Senior Shamiya Johnson and Dawn Moore, owner and CEO of Next Generation Hair Academy

excluding an entire group of people. Our academy fills that gap by teaching not only technique but also cultural understanding. People deserve professional, informed care for their hair, and that starts with education.

Q: What are some common causes of damage to textured hair?

Moore: A lot of damage comes from a lack of knowledge. People don’t always know how to properly detangle or wash their hair. You should never detangle dry

hair. You need to section it, work from the ends up, and be gentle. When people skip these steps, they shred the hair, causing split ends, tangling, and matting. I’ve had clients where I had to detangle multiple times because the hair kept matting back up due to damage. Excessive heat and improper handling create the same issues—breakage, dryness, and split ends.

Q: Can you explain traction alopecia and how it happens?

Moore: Traction alopecia is hair loss caused by constant pulling and tension on the scalp over time. Styles like tight braids, ponytails, cornrows, or even locs that are retwisted too tightly can damage the follicles. When follicles are inflamed and stressed, the hair begins to thin and break at the root. If that tension continues, the follicle can become permanently damaged, and the hair may stop growing altogether.

Q: Are protective styles harmful, or is it about how they’re done?

Moore: It’s about how they’re done. I’m not against protective styles at all. What we teach is the proper way to install and maintain them. Many people learn from YouTube, but they miss the fundamentals. Protective styles should never cause pain or tension. Healthy styling starts with proper preparation—clean, conditioned, and detangled hair—and continues with mindful installation.

Q: What are some key tips for maintaining healthy hair with protective styles?

Moore: First, never install styles too tightly. Always read reviews and look at a stylist’s work. Prepare your hair properly before installation. Use sulfate-free shampoos that don’t strip moisture and look for ingredients like shea butter or coconut oil. Maintain your style with aftercare—wear a bonnet at night, keep the scalp clean, and don’t leave styles in too long. Also, be careful with

glue. Never apply bonding glue directly to the scalp. It should go on the weft or a protective barrier. Improper use can lead to irritation, buildup, and even hair loss.

Q: What is your core message when it comes to textured hair?

Moore: My main message is education. People need to understand hair types, texture, porosity, and density. They need to know how to care for their scalp and recognize signs of damage. But beyond that, this is about culture. Textured hair has historical and cultural significance, and it deserves to be treated with knowledge, respect, and care. That’s what we teach—so people can finally receive the level of care they deserve.

On Monday, March 16th, students graduated from the Next Generation Hair Academy’s Afro-Textured Hair Education Program as the very first Pioneer Cohort. High school senior Shamiya Johnson went through this innovative program and shared:

“For a while, when I was younger, my mom would braid my hair a lot. But as I was growing up, she stopped doing my hair, and it was hard for me to take care of my textured hair. I came to learn more about my hair, and Miss Dawn is a very great teacher. I encourage other young people to come out and learn because she’s a great teacher. I liked the class because I like learning about my specific character.”

WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

By James Alexander
CONTRIBUTOR

When I think of community and I look at the word, I see two parts to it. The first part is comm, which represents communication. Communication is the first part of that word because it’s important to build community, and with communication comes sharing ideas, values, and commonalities.

Communication is a two-way street where it takes two people

interacting with one another, sharing and exchanging information that will be used to distinguish whether or not these two people will be able to build a relationship rooted in loyalty, integrity, and trust.

Once the exchange starts to take place, there’s this physical, emotional, as well as spiritual dance that begins to form, creating the cadence of how people talk to each other and the amount of information being shared. As trust builds, it allows individuals

to become part of each other’s lives and to learn things that many others may not know.

In the process of this communication, something begins to happen. There’s this thing called togetherness, or unity. A sense of unity starts to build between these two people. Then, over time, others are brought into this circle, this space of trust, integrity, and unity, which in turn begins to create and build community.

Within this community, people are invited in, those who share common ideas, values, and goals: to build together, learn together, grow together, and thrive together, and in some cases, even walk through life’s hardest moments together.

These two words come together to form something powerful. It’s important that communica-

tion is honest, and that we are able to have difficult conversations during trying times as we continue learning one another. In doing so, we maintain unity within community, understanding when to allow people in and when not to.

Community is a beautiful thing because it brings people from different walks of life into a group built through the intricate weaving of shared growth and unity. Through this, partnerships, companionship, and family are formed.

In community, there are moments when you are surrounded by people who help carry you through heavy, struggling, and tiring seasons, when life happens and painful experiences take place. It is within community that people move through mo-

ments of weakness, agony, and even defeat.

The strength of those who stand beside you, those who encourage you, build you up, and witness your growth, can carry you into places you may not have believed you could reach. It is in community that life-changing moments happen, and to have that kind of support is priceless.

So when we think of community, we think of communication. We think of unity. We think of togetherness.

The next time you see someone standing on the outside looking in, wishing they were a part of that, remember, it takes a village to raise a child, and it takes a community to build one another in times of need.

EDUCATION

EVERY CHILD IS A SCIENTIST: BE CURIOUS

By Dr. Sarah Zaab
CONTRIBUTOR

Every child is born a scientist. From the moment they begin asking “why,” children are testing ideas, observing patterns, and exploring the world around them. That natural curiosity is the foundation of scientific thinking. Yet too often, as children grow older, that curiosity fades when it is not encouraged, supported, or expanded in meaningful ways. Parents play one of the most important roles in keeping that curiosity alive.

Scientific curiosity in children is more than an interest in experiments or lab coats. It is the desire to understand how the world works. When a child wonders why the sky changes colors at sunset, how plants grow, or why a ball curves during a soccer kick, they are engaging in the same type of questioning that

drives professional scientists. Encouraging those questions helps children develop problem-solving skills, creativity, and confidence.

One of the most powerful things parents can do is welcome questions—even the endless stream of “why?” Instead of rushing to provide a quick answer, parents can turn the moment into an opportunity for exploration. Asking questions like “What do you think is happening?” or “How could we find out?” encourages children to think critically and develop their own explanations. Resources such as National Geographic Society offer child-friendly articles, videos, and activities that help families explore science topics together.

It is also important for children to actively seek out answers to their own questions. When chil-

dren are encouraged to research, observe, experiment, or read to find information, they develop independence and stronger critical-thinking skills. Looking up answers in books, exploring reliable online resources, or testing ideas through small experiments teaches children that knowledge is something they can pursue. Educational platforms like Smithsonian Institution and NASA provide interactive content, virtual tours, and hands-on science activities that make discovery exciting for young learners.

Parents can foster this habit by guiding children toward resources rather than immediately giving them the solution. A trip to the library, watching an educational documentary together, or helping a child conduct a simple experiment can turn a single question into an exciting

learning journey. Books such as *The Everything Kids' Science Experiments Book* by Tom Robinson provide simple experiments that families can try at home.

Parents can also foster curiosity by creating hands-on learning experiences at home. Science does not require expensive equipment or complicated experiments. Planting seeds in a small garden, baking in the kitchen, watching the phases of the moon, or building towers with blocks all introduce children to scientific ideas. Organizations such as PBS Kids offer free science activities and videos that connect everyday play with scientific learning.

Another important step is giving children time and space to explore. Over-scheduling every hour of a child's day can limit opportunities for discovery. Unstructured play allows

children to observe, imagine, build, and test ideas on their own. Whether they are exploring outdoors, collecting rocks, or watching insects in the backyard, these simple moments encourage observation and creativity. Nature-focused programs from National Wildlife Federation provide ideas for outdoor exploration that spark curiosity about the natural world.

Parents can also nurture curiosity by modeling it themselves. When adults show excitement about learning something new—reading a book, visiting a museum, or asking questions about the world—children notice. Curiosity becomes contagious when it is part of everyday family life. Visiting science centers or exploring digital exhibits from institutions like the American Museum of Natural History can inspire children to see

learning as an adventure.

Equally important is creating an environment where mistakes are seen as part of learning. Not every experiment will work the first time, and not every question will have an immediate answer. When parents encourage children to keep trying, they teach resilience and perseverance—two traits essential for both scientists and lifelong learners.

Ultimately, fostering curiosity is not about raising the next famous scientist. It is about helping children develop the confidence to ask questions, seek answers, and understand the world around them. When parents nurture that natural sense of wonder and encourage children to pursue the answers to their own questions, they empower them with skills that will benefit them for a lifetime.

Preparing Students for State Testing Season

By Dr. Shantara Smith
CONTRIBUTOR

State testing season is upon us, and families often wonder how to best support their children during this time. While teachers work hard to prepare students academically, there are several practical steps parents and caregivers can take to help students feel confident, calm, and ready to do their best.

A strong foundation begins with daily habits. Children perform better when they are well-rested and well-fed, particularly on testing days. Ensuring your child gets enough sleep and starts the morning with a balanced breakfast can make a noticeable difference in their focus and stamina. These simple routines can greatly influence a student's ability to concentrate, process information, and maintain a positive mindset.

It also helps for students to have the right materials. Whether they are taking a paper test or a computer-based assessment, having #2 pencils and a small sharpener available helps them feel prepared. Being equipped and organized reduces stress and allows them to focus on the task at hand.

In addition to content knowledge, strong test-taking skills can significantly boost performance. Students benefit from practicing strategies such as using the process of elimination on multiple-choice questions, answering multi-part ques-

tions carefully, and reading the questions before reading any accompanying passages to look for. Understanding whether a test is timed can help students pace themselves. It is also useful for students to practice identifying implied meaning and making inferences, as these skills often appear on reading and critical-thinking assessments. For written portions, being familiar with the CER (Claim, Evidence, Reasoning) writing format and understanding how rubrics score organization, clarity, evidence, and reasoning can help students craft stronger, more focused responses.

Building vocabulary is another important tool. Many state tests include academic terms that students may not use in everyday conversation. Reviewing grade-level vocabulary lists helps students recognize common words like “analyze,” “summarize,” or “contrast.” Practice tests—often available through teachers or reputable educational websites—can familiarize students with question styles and reduce anxiety. If parents are unsure where to find these materials, teachers can provide study guides, vocabulary lists, or links to helpful practice resources.

Open communication among students, parents, and teachers is essential. It is important for children to understand who sees the test results, how those re-

sults are used, and how they may impact future placement, support services, or instruction. At the same time, students should be reminded that while effort matters, a single test does not define their intelligence, abilities, or potential. Supportive conversations can help students feel more comfortable and confident.

State tests exist at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, each designed for different purposes. Some assessments measure how well students have mastered grade-level standards, while others—especially at the high school level—can influence academic pathways and future opportunities. College-entrance exams, such as the SAT, are still available even though many colleges no longer require them. While SAT scores may be optional, they can still strengthen a student's application or help them qualify for scholarships. Taking these exams can provide additional pathways toward future success.

Preparing for state testing goes beyond memorizing facts. With healthy routines, the right materials, strong test-taking strategies, familiarity with writing expectations, and open communication, families can help students feel ready and confident. These small efforts can make the testing experience more manageable and empower students to show what they know.



COURTESY OF OLYMPIA LEGISLATOR

Rep. Chipalo Street, left, stands with Brett Devine, a freshman at Lewis and Clark High School in Spokane, during Devine's time serving as a page in the Washington State House of Representatives in Olympia.

LEWIS AND CLARK FRESHMAN SERVES AS HOUSE PAGE

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Rep. Chipalo Street recently welcomed Brett Devine, a ninth grader at Lewis and Clark High School in Spokane, to serve as a page in the Washington State House of Representatives. House pages help legislators by delivering messages and docu-

ments across the Capitol campus while learning about the legislative process through page school. “Brett did a fantastic job helping out during a busy week in Olympia,” Street said. “It's always great to see students from Spokane take an interest in civic engagement and learn how our state gov-

ernment works.” Outside of school, Brett enjoys music, film, building models, and wood whittling. Students between the ages of 14 and 16 can participate in the House Page Program, which includes hands-on experience at the Capitol and a chance to learn more about how laws are made.

POWERFUL VOICES

Youth Voices Take Center Stage

Spokane Poet Laureate Mery Noel Smith creates space for young poets to be heard

By Kenji Linane-Booey
CONTRIBUTOR

January 20th, 2021, the Youngest Inaugural Poet in US History, Amanda Gorman, delivered her poem “The Hill We Climb.” My partner and I sat heavy with fear from the January 6th riot and exhausted after 4-years of a hate fueled presidency. And then Gorman said: “just” is isn't always justice.

And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it. Somehow we do it.

We've learned that quiet isn't always peace, and the norms and notions of what

The poet's words seem to lift the fog we had been living in and allowed us to be hopeful for the future.

It is no secret that the last year and a half under another Trump adminis-

tration has brought more fear, confusion, and pain to many of our communities and neighbors. Many of us have felt powerless to create any positive change in a world filled with war, anger, and lies.

In times like these, we turn to our story tellers, our artists and our poets to show us the beauty we still have around us.

Mery Noel Smith is the Spokane Poet Laureate and in their third year in the role is creating positive change to make sure young voices like Gorman's have a place to speak power and truth for years to come in Spokane.

Mery's role is to do anything she can to incorporate poetry and literary art into the Spokane community and to make sure we, as a nation,



CARLOS M. VAZQUEZ II / U.S. NAVY

Amanda Gorman recites “The Hill We Climb” at the presidential inauguration, Jan. 20, 2021, in Washington.

feel poetic.

With over 10 years of lived experience teaching early childhood education and even more expe-

rience as a parent herself, Mery knows firsthand the power youth voices have. Which is why she, in partnership with the Spokane Arts Foundation, has launched the inaugural Spokane Youth Poet Laureate position.

Mery says the goal of the Youth Poet Laureate program “is to simply give a platform to youth, giving youth purpose and meaningful context is important. It helps create sustainability in the arts community to have youth ownership and representation in their own art.” She continued to say, “I am hoping this role opens the door to creating more engagement and responsibility for students in all aspects of the community from arts to commerce.”

The Youth Poet Lau-

reate position is a new opportunity for student poets, but it is only one of the many programs Mery facilitates for our community. She wants everyone to get involved in literary arts and so she runs after school programs in partnership with Spokane Schools, hosts events and workshops with the Spokane Public Library and even hosts her own workshops which are completely free for community members.

She says without partnerships like Spark Central in Kendall Yards, much of this work would not be possible.

“There is so much that I want to do and there is so little of me to go around. I need community support to do all the (programs). Offering our gifts, talents,

and any other in-kind support is how we make sure our community continues to thrive.”

Mery encourages everyone to connect with her via email at merynoel@gmail.com or at her website, merynoel.com. She wants everyone to support youth artist any chance they get. Her next event is a multi-generational poetry event at Touchmark Senior living on April 14th and encourages the community to show up to the Kendall Yards Night Market this summer to support student poetry performed live every Wednesday in the summer.

To connect with me or learn more about education advocacy opportunities you can email kenji@educationvoters.org.

ARTS AND LEISURE

ALYSHA DESLORIEUX ON 'THE NOTEBOOK'

Broadway actor talks Black womanhood and the courage to choose a fuller life

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

In "The Notebook," actor Alysha Deslorieux plays Middle Allie, the version of the beloved character standing at one of life's most consequential crossroads. In conversation with The Black Lens, Deslorieux reflected on art, identity, love, regret, and what it means for Black women to see themselves inside a story that is both specific and universal.

Q: Can you start by sharing where you're from, how long you've been in theater, and a little about your role in 'The Notebook'?

Alysha Deslorieux: I grew up in a suburb of Dallas, Texas, and I lived there until I was 18. I went off to college, and then I moved to New York when I was 22. I made my Broadway debut when I was 22 in "Sister Act." That was back in 2012, so it's been a long time.

I grew up singing and dancing, and I sort of got into theater when I was in high school. I really fell in love with the idea of being able to mix a lot of these different arts that I had studied as a kid into one venture. When I started with theater, it really connected me to what I wanted to do—getting to tell stories and still getting to sing, but also feeling like I had a purpose to it.

Q: Tell me about your character and what it means to play her.

Deslorieux: The main characters in the show are Noah and Allie, and we see her in three different stages of her life: Young Allie, Middle Allie, and Older Allie. I play Middle Allie.

What connects me most to this character is that she's at a point in her life where she has a really big decision to make about how she wants to live going forward. I really remember that stage of my own life—turning 29, 30—



Deslorieux

and I feel like a lot of people have this transition period where they're choosing to let go of things that are no longer serving them.

Her family means a lot to her. Her fiancé means a lot to her. But she still feels like there's a part of her that's missing, parts of her she's not really getting to express. She doesn't feel all the way full. In order to reach for those things, she has to leave behind some of the classic comforts of her life and the things everyone tells her are best for her.

Q: The story raises questions about women, duty and regret. What stands out to you there, especially for Black women?

Deslorieux: What's interesting to me is that, in the beginning of the story, her mom is so careful to direct her life in a way that will protect her and also instill in her that she's not going to get a second chance because she's a Black woman.

A lot of the steps they take to guide her are about doing what they think is best: study Latin and French, take piano lessons, you can paint, but none of those things are serious, so make sure to marry a man with a lot of money. Of course, the man she eventually finds is well off, but she's leaving behind the parts of herself that could lead her on a more unpredictable path—the things she really loves. She's a painter. She wants to be an artist.

I don't think she realizes how much of herself she is sacrificing for the idea of security and financial stability. She just knows that all of this protection is not serving her anymore.

Q: What does the show suggest about regret and the risk of choosing a fuller life?

Deslorieux: One of my favorite moments in the show is a song called "I Want to Go Back." We're looking at Older Allie, and she's really struggling. She has all these little puzzle pieces of memories from her life, and she's trying to lace them back together.

Young Allie and I get to sing this song together—it's the only time all three versions of Allie are onstage at the same time.



COURTESY OF ROGER MASTROIANNI

Middle Noah (Ken Wulf Clark) and Middle Allie (Alysha Deslorieux) in "The Notebook."

Deslorieux: I have a pretty strong feeling that it's kind of never too late to make a turn. If you're living with regret and you're able to make a change, I don't think it's ever too late, even if it's scary.

If you know you're going to spend your life regretting not having done something, or regretting having chosen what just felt safe, then it would be worth it to take a risk and choose another path. I don't think it's selfish to try and take your life by the reins instead of living with regret.

Because you don't know what you don't know when you're young. You live and experience things, and then you realize what's really important to you as you grow older.

Q: What moment in the show should audiences pay special attention to?

Deslorieux: One of my favorite moments in the show is a song called "I Want to Go Back." We're looking at Older Allie, and she's really struggling. She has all these little puzzle pieces of memories from her life, and she's trying to lace them back together.

Young Allie and I get to sing this song together—it's the only time all three versions of Allie are onstage at the same time.

It's heartbreaking, but it's also a reminder of all the things that make up a person's life. It's not just your one true love. It's all of the friends and the family who make up who you are.

Q: How do you view the power of art?

Deslorieux: I find art to be far more than entertainment. I think it's medicinal. It's crucial and necessary because it cuts right to people's depth. Theater reveals our inner emotions.

One of the reasons I love working on this show is that our co-director, Schele Williams, gave us this explanation of who Allie's family was—an affluent Black community that actually existed in that time period. I didn't even know it existed.

In our story, Allie is Black and comes from a well-off family. The idea

that this could be a real story is much more important than just color-blind casting. It feels based in reality. And it's not just about Black pain—it's a universal story.

When I see young Black girls in the audience, I think about what it would have meant for me to see that—to see a version of myself onstage and immediately imagine it to be possible.

Q: What do you want your legacy to be?

Deslorieux: I just want to live a life surrounded by love and friendship and people that see me and understand me. I don't have a desire to be famous. I want the freedom to live my life the way I want to.

And I think about the women who came before me. I really hope that I am making them proud and

finding joy in ways that they were not able to.

For Alysha Deslorieux, playing Middle Allie ultimately becomes less about the decision itself and more about what it reveals. At its core, The Notebook invites audiences to consider what it means to live fully—and honestly—within the life you claim as your own.

Through her portrayal, Deslorieux asks us to sit with that tension: the weight of expectation, the cost of self-abandonment, and the courage required to choose differently. For Black women in particular, that choice exists within a legacy shaped by survival and sacrifice.

What lingers is not simply the love story, but the possibility—that choosing yourself is not a betrayal of what came before, but an extension of it.

ANYLA'S TAKE

SURVIVAL IN THE BODY

Violence, birth and choosing life



By Anyla McDonald
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR

Many women's stories live in their bodies.

Black women experience intimate partner violence at disproportionately high rates, according to the CDC, yet face barriers to reporting due to fear of housing loss, child welfare involvement, or criminalization of their partners. In Washington State, tens of

thousands of domestic violence incidents are reported annually.

A woman in Olympia stayed longer than she should have because leaving meant homelessness. When she finally left, no headlines followed, only peace. Survival does not always look like justice. Sometimes it looks like escape.

Another form of violence is less discussed: maternal health inequity. Black women in the United States are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women. Medical journals including the New England Journal of Medicine document how Black women's pain is dismissed and symptoms ignored.

A Black mother in Pierce County described labor

pains that were minimized until emergency intervention was required. She survived, but the trauma lingered. These birth stories are part of women's history.

Divorce, too, carries stigma, particularly for Black women socialized to endure. Yet many women leave not because they failed, but because they refused to disappear.

Spoken word artist Arianne True (Seattle) has spoken about healing as nonlinear and communal. Survival, she says, is not the end of the story, it is the bridge.

To Black women who survived violence, childbirth, loss, and rebuilding: your body has carried generations. You are not broken. You are enduring.

Washington state resources

YWCA 42-hour Intimate Partner Violence Helpline: Call (509) 326-2255, text (509) 220-3725 or email: help@ywcaspokane.org

Washington State Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 562-6025

DAWN (King County)

Open Arms Perinatal Services (Seattle)

DOCS WITH KSPS PRESENTS

MAKE A CIRCLE

A FREE film screening and panel discussion

A love letter to early educators and a portrait of a child care system in crisis.

APRIL 22ND - 5:30PM

THE HIVE, SPOKANE WA

DISCUSSION PANELISTS

Kerra Bower, Little Scholars Development Center & Raze Early Learning and Development Center

Bianka DeSure, Spokane Workforce Council & Inland Northwest Early Learning Alliance

Katia Jasmin, Parkview Early Learning Center & Creole Resources

Christine Mulate, Parkview Early Learning Center

Moderator: Luc Jasmin III, Eastern Washington Representative for Governor Bob Ferguson



SCAN FOR TICKETS
AND MORE INFO

make-a-circle.eventbrite.com

KSPS PBS



YOUTH CONNECTION



COURTESY OF DIASPORA DISTRICT AND DONALDA BRANTLEY

Left: Donalda Brantley speaks at the Diaspora District's 2025 Global Education Conference in Accra, Ghana.

Center: Trevon Morris Jr. of the University of Washington, left, Manal Al-Ansi, Esq., founder and CEO of Diaspora District, and Brantley attend the Gold Coast Gala during the World Education Conference.

Right: Brantley holds a baby crocodile on Crocodile Island in Big Ada, Ghana.

FROM THE U.S. TO GHANA WITH DIASPORA DISTRICT

By Donalda Brantley
CONTRIBUTOR

Just months after returning from studying abroad in Kigali, Rwanda, I received an invitation to apply to Diaspora District's 2025 Global Education Conference. A four

day homecoming tour and 3 day global education conference in Accra Ghana led by organization founder Manal Al-Ansi. Many conversations arose while in Rwanda of it being our "last time" in Africa but little did I know I would be returning in De-

cember just two months later. By the grace of God and the hands of the people He has placed in my life, I fundraised over \$1500 and received more in scholarships to cover the costs of this trip. Special people in my life such as April Eberhardt, editor

of The Black Lens, and Jaime Stacy, founder of Strong Women Achieving Greatness, played a meaningful role in making this opportunity possible. Because of their support, what once felt distant became real—the chance to travel across the world.

Soon, I found myself preparing to embark on a 20-hour journey to Ghana, stepping into an experience that would shape my perspective in ways I was only beginning to understand. December 13th, 2025 I arrived in a new world but was welcomed with open

arms like I was part of the family. The main thing I noticed when I landed was not just the change to a warmer climate compared to Spokane/Seattle's freeze but the importance of connection and friendliness and how evident it is Ghanaian culture.

HE ROSE

Easter Through the Spirit of the Black Church

By Anyla McDonald
CONTRIBUTOR

As Easter Sunday approaches, I imagine a globe, not one marked by oceans and continents, but one illuminated by the sanctuaries that have shaped the spiritual life of Black America.

I spin it slowly. My finger lands first on Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, where the voice of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once echoed through the sanctuary with sermons that sounded like both prophecy and protest. Then I move to Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, a historic pillar of Black faith and community leadership. I pause at 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, a sacred space marked by tragedy but strengthened by unwavering faith. My thoughts drift to Mother Bethel AME Church in Philadelphia, founded by Richard Allen and recognized as the birthplace of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Then I land at Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church in Montgomery, where sermons once

stirred the hearts of people preparing to march toward justice.

But the globe doesn't stop spinning.

Where a mother still leans over and whispers to her child, "Sit still."

Where a deacon still clears his throat before beginning prayer.

Where an usher still stands faithfully at the door greeting each person as they walk into the sanctuary.

Where someone's grandmother is still whispering prayers for the entire family.

These churches are more than buildings.

They are monuments to resilience.

With an imaginary magnifying glass, I lean closer to the stories behind them. Under that lens I see the silhouettes of the pastors who shaped generations, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Reverend Jesse Jackson, Reverend Gardner C. Taylor, Bishop T.D. Jakes, Reverend Al Sharpton, Reverend Jamal Bryant, and countless others whose names may never appear in textbooks but whose sermons

carried families through grief, hardship, injustice, and hope.

Their voices still echo. And then the soundtrack begins.

I hear "Total Praise" by Richard Smallwood rising toward cathedral ceilings.

I hear the congregation humming "Soon and Very Soon."

Someone in the choir lifts the room with "Because He Lives."

And somewhere in the background there is always that one voice hold-

ing tightly to "Amazing Grace."

The organ swells.

Tambourines shake. The sanctuary comes alive.

The heat inside the church presses gently against our skin, not just from the crowded pews, but from the spirit moving through the room.

The kind of warmth that has nothing to do with the weather outside and everything to do with faith

stirring within.

And of course, we came dressed for the occasion.

Women glide through the aisles in wide brim church hats, pastel suits, lace dresses, pearl necklaces, and heels clicking rhythmically across the church floor. Men stand tall in pressed suits, polished shoes, bright ties, and cufflinks shining beneath the sanctuary lights, adjusting their collars as if preparing for something sacred.

Even the air carries fa-

ppermint and candy hidden inside grandma's purse, like little treasures waiting to be discovered.

Their faces shine so brightly you can almost see your reflection in them, thanks to their parents sending them to church with half a jar of Vaseline layered across their cheeks and foreheads.

Grandma sits quietly at the end of the pew.

When the offering plate comes around, she slowly reaches into her bra and pulls out the last twenty dollars she has, pressing it gently into the plate with faith that God will provide again tomorrow.

The pastor begins to pray. Hands lift into the air.

Someone shouts, "Amen!" Another voice cries, "Thank you, Jesus!"

The pastor walks through the sanctuary, drawing the sign of the cross across foreheads.

Some people sway gently, others fall backward into the steady arms of church mothers standing ready behind them.

And when the First Lady catches the Holy Ghost, the ushers rush forward

with a white blanket, covering her shoulders while the congregation continues to sing.

Because in the Black church, worship is not quiet.

It is movement.

It is memory.

It is history breathing through every hymn and every prayer.

Easter Sunday in the Black church is more than a religious observance. It is a living testimony.

It is the sound of heels echoing across sanctuary floors.

The smell of pressed hair and Sunday perfume.

The sight of children with shiny cheeks and pockets full of peppermints.

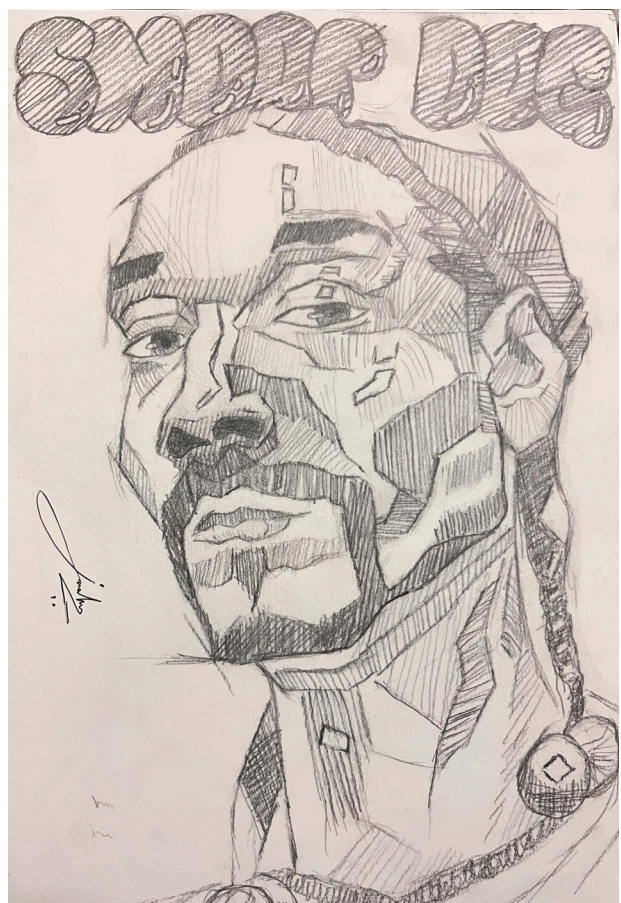
It is the remembrance of grandmothers who prayed us through storms, pastors who preached us through pain, and communities who reminded us that faith could carry us through anything.

And when the choir finally sings "He Rose," we are reminded that resurrection is not just a biblical story.

For Black people, resurrection has always been a way of life.

"In the Black church, worship is not quiet. It is movement. It is memory."

STUDENT ARTWORK



A pencil drawing of Snoop Dogg by Daniella Musesambili, featuring his early hairstyle and graffiti-style lettering.

AFRICAN AMERICAN GRADUATION CELEBRATION

Honoring African American graduates from K-12 schools, colleges and universities from Spokane and surrounding areas.

YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK

A Cultural Salute for Outstanding Academic Achievement

SATURDAY, MAY 2, 2026 • 2-4 PM

GONZAGA UNIVERSITY
Globe Room-Cataldo Hall
429 E Boone Avenue, Spokane, Washington

Registration deadline: Friday, April 17

Graduate Line up 12:15pm
Doors open at 1pm

Registration Link:
<https://www.aagspokane.org/rsvp>

BLACK EARTH DAY: SEED TO SOUL

SAT, APRIL 18, 2026 @ 10AM-3PM
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. FAMILY OUTREACH CENTER
500 S. STONE ST. // SPOKANE, WA 99202

FREE TO PUBLIC // BREAKERS VENDORS // HANDS ON ACTIVITIES FREE FOOD (11AM-1PM) GIVEAWAYS // COMMUNITY EVENT

VOLUNTEER: VENDOR:

Mamasanofamalia

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Vampires are real: Oscar-winning film investigates fine line between freedom and oppression

By Inga Laurent and Jessica Maucione

THE BLACK LENS

This piece is co-authored as a collaborative academic analysis by Inga Laurent and Jessica Maucione, both university professors. Through a shared lens, the authors extrapolate cultural symbolism within the Oscar-winning movie by “Sinners,” offering a layered interpretation that explores ethnicity, religion, race, identity, and the deeper socio-political nuances that underscore freedom and oppression.

“Sinners” is brilliant and Ryan Kyle Coogler is a genius. Jess and I have shared our love of Coogler’s work – like Fruitvale Station and Creed – for over a decade, but this film far surpassed our expectations. Scores have already been written about Sinners. As fangirls, we were tempted to gush on, enamored by the love stories central to the film – both fictional (like Annie and Smoke) and real (like the way Ryan credits his producer wife, Zinzi, for the movie’s success). But as scholars – of law/justice (Inga) and literature (Jess) – we decided to focus on the subtle, well-con-

structed small moments that brought us back to the theater time and time again.

For Inga, the heart of “Sinners” lay in the film’s minutiae – in its quieter scenes, which displayed Coogler’s devotion to showcasing Black dignity and edification. Delroy Lindo’s somatic knee slapping and humming his way from grief to healing, Wunmi Mosaku’s “Elijah” and Hailee Steinfeld’s “Elias,” the only time we hear Smoke and Stack’s real names is from the mouths of the women who love them. The pride and pure awe emanating from Michael B. Jordan’s face when he (and the audience) first hear Miles Caton sing. And impeccably timed one-liners. Some comedic: “Y’all Klan?” and Jack O’Connor’s meme-worthy disbelief captured in one word “Sir.” And some touching, “she here ‘cause she family.”

For Jess, the heart of “Sinners” lay in the rarity of getting to experience a movie as literary. While Coogler credits Stephen King’s 1975 horror novel, “Salem’s Lot,” as an influence, he also did note that the “fearless vibrancy”

Toni Morrison used to immortalize Black life informed the atmosphere of his film. Specifically, he praised her ability to blend “calm serenity” with a “gangster evisceration of white supremacy.” Jess sees “Sinners” as deeply allusive to Morrison. The film’s framing of the primacy of Black art in the U.S. across the continuous contexts of slavery, share-cropping, and the policing of Black life evokes the haunted American landscape of Morrison’s Beloved (1987). Sinners’ reevaluation of the South and its communities recalls Morrison’s Home (2012). The blues as intergenerational Black language harkens back to Morrison’s Jazz (1992). Smoke’s advice to Sammie to find community with “proper Black folk” in the all-Black town of Mound Bayou alludes to Morrison’s exploration of the same in Paradise (1998). The missed opportunity of long-term interracial coalition-building on the basis of common interest that Coogler represents by his triangulation of Black, Chinese, and Choctaw folks and the would-be interracial community of vampires, Morrison also

contemplated in A Mercy (2008). These little and literary joys are seamlessly woven, threaded together through a tapestry that add up to something quite grand.

Finally, we need to talk about Remmick and the subtleties in Coogler’s character – the oppressed turned oppressive anti-hero so desperate to belong he ends up destroying. In the burning barn scene, Autumn Durald Arkapaw (the first woman and woman of color to win an Oscar for Best Cinematographer) captures flames of covetous longing dancing within the character’s eyes. It couldn’t be more evident that he aches to commune. He pines for connection to a people enslaved by troubles who remain liberated in spirit through music, fellowship, love and deep ancestral connections. And perhaps the villain portrays Coogler’s subtle truth. We’ve known our fair share of Remmicks.

This villain encapsulates vampirism through layered exploitation, representing capitalism and constructions of Whiteness in an American

See FREEDOM, 16

SINNERS

Continued from 1

In the film, Sammie (Miles Canton) dreams of living in the world of the Blues and nightlife alongside his cousins, Smoke and Stack (Michael B. Jordan). His father warns him that if he keeps “dancing with the devil” something terrible would happen. The warning foreshadows the chaos that follows, while visual hints, like a snake jumping out on the twins truck inform us that danger is certainly approaching. There is an interesting connection between music and monstrosity where the freedom that comes in playing attracts spirits that desire that same release.

The film is packed with personality as displayed during the scene where Sammie first plays and sings for Stack, who is enthusiastically captivat-

ed by the talent and the money that it will bring on their opening night. Other scenes push viewers to reflect on the function of music as emotion. When Delta Slim (Delroy Lindo) tells the story of his friend who was brutally murdered and begins to hum as if he is moaning or crying producing grief as rhythmic song, mourning his friend. In moments like this, music becomes testimony. Sinners translates the idea that music has long served as a spiritual form of expression for Black people; one that holds memory across generations and cultures.

By the end of the film, we come to understand what was built in the twenty four hours. Creating spaces for Black expression and freedom is crucial, and it takes a collective of people coming together. The SmokeStack twins return to town, and begin tapping the shoul-

ders of everyone that they know to cook, build, play music, and get their juke joint built. Together, the community fosters a place where acceptance allows for relaxation and restoration.

In one of the film’s most striking scenes, Coogler crafts a time traveling journey through music, a sequence described as piercing the veil. As Preacher Boy (Sammie) performs, the music is summoning the past and the future. W.E.B DuBois, one of the most iconic Black sociologists in this lifetime, characterizes the “veil” thinking about a Black American being perceived through their own interpretation and the semblances of white perception. In this scene, all that is present is the spirit of blues music, which attracts memory and in this film, danger.

Yet, Remmick, the antagonist of the film, comes

to represent an opportunity for escape. By turning all the Juke Club patrons into vampires, he promises escape from a world that has already treated them as disposable. He tells Smoke and the last few standing with him, “This world has already left you for dead. Won’t let you build. Won’t let you fellowship.” He offers them eternal life and freedom by embracing monstrosity reveals the movie’s central tension on what freedom truly looks like.

This film interrogates how sustainable spaces for Black cultural expression can endure and what forces persistently threaten their survival. To that end, Coogler offers a meditation on the power of culture and how it is cultivated, protected or distorted. Like the Blues itself, culture carries pain and possibility and can build sanctuary that must be protected to endure.

out of the food places there they’ll be able to get items.

We’ll have box water because it’s an environmental justice piece and it’s about saving the earth as part of Earth Day.

So we want to be mindful about that. We’ll have the city of Spokane emergency preparedness, especially around climate and environmental issues around smoke and wildfires and what to do.

People will be giving out compost so people can learn how to compost at home. Instead of throwing all that food into the garbage it’s learning how to use that food to regrow things.

And seeds. We’ll have where kids can make little starter plants and stuff like that. So I’m super excited.

We’re also going to be asking people to bring a non-perishable item to the Martin Luther King Center food bank so people can also donate to that food bank.

Q: What do you see as one of the biggest environmental justice issues affecting Black communities right now?

Hunter: I would say right now if we’re looking at land stewardship, you know that we don’t get treated like those who don’t look like us around being able to get land to farm or get free land from the city or the state like that to do community gardens.

It’s knowledge, what we don’t know.

I’m not a master gardener. I Google and I ask questions, right?

There’s also where they put us, where they build housing and food deserts in certain neighborhoods.

If you really look right now you can tell where there’s money and where it’s not, because in most places if you look outside your neighborhood and do you have trees keeping you shaded in your neighborhood.

Because if not then you use more electricity when it’s really hot.

And then when you go into certain neighborhoods of money there’s big trees just covering the whole block, right?

You know, so things that we don’t notice that we notice.

Q: You also mentioned learning and building knowledge collectively.

Hunter: Exactly. Because I’m getting ready to go this weekend to an urban homesteading expo to learn more and get ideas.

For me it’s not just about what’s in my yard.

It’s like I’ve been talking to the city, to WSDOT, about land.

How do we make community gardens in food deserts?

Where are our farmers markets located?

So it’s even thinking about how we open up our opportunities.

What I’m really trying to do is get a collective.

I’ve been talking to Black farmers and thinking about all this agricultural land that we have here.

It’s like what can we do? So I’m going to do something about it.

Q: Is there anything else people should know about the work happening around Black Earth Day?

Hunter: Yes. The weekend before on April 11 from one to three at the Carl Maxey Center we’re showing environmental and food justice films and having a community conversation about what we can do together.

One of them is called Riddle which talks about how they we’re trying to dump some toxin into one neighborhood and they stopped them and made a green space and then a farm to table.

And then the other one is about Black folks in Detroit who started gardening and created their own

See EARTH DAY, 16

EARTH DAY

Continued from 1

influence justice in the Black community regarding pollution, food. It also land, land stewardship and the disparities around all that.

Q: Why is this important for this specific recognition and the way you are recognizing it? What is your hope or goal?

Hunter: The reason why I feel this is important is that, as you know, I work in housing, right? But I started gardening in my yard a couple of years ago and made my yard a community garden because I give back what I do know.

When they do build housing for the Black communities, in communities of color and people with low income, it’s always in a place where there’s food deserts, around a lot of factories, which put pollution into that community.

Hunter explains that her interest in gardening grew out of both her professional work in housing and her desire to create spaces where people can reconnect with the land. She said gardening is not only about growing food but also about creating opportunities for people to build skills, share knowledge, and strengthen community relationships.

She reflected on early conversations during the planning stages of the Carl Maxey Center, when Sandy Williams first purchased the building and it was still just a garage. Community members gathered there imagining what the space could become. Hunter often joked during those early meetings that wherever she worked, she knew one thing for certain. One day she would have a corner office in that building overlooking a garden and water fountain. Today, she says, seeing the garden outside her window reminds her how powerful it can be when communities dream collectively about what is possible. She continues below.

Q: It sounds like this is about more than just gardening.

Hunter: Every time I look at my window and see my garden, I always think of that conversation I had with Sandy and others in that room. I got a garden, and how it’s therapeutic to put your hands in the soil and to just see the fruits of your labor.

I see things coming back. I’m not a master gardener, but it’s about bringing people together and food.

Like from the seed to the soul, S-O-U-L, the soul, the seed to the soul.

Hunter also pointed to the quality and accessibility of food in many neighborhoods. She noted that produce purchased at some grocery stores often does not stay fresh for long, which highlights deeper issues related to food access and distribution. For her, community gardening offers a different path. Growing food locally allows people to harvest something fresh from their own yard or a shared garden space, while also creating a sense of pride, ownership, and connection among neighbors.

Q: What can people expect from the event on April 18th at the MLK Center?

Hunter: So since we’re doing the event in the historical Black neighborhood of Spokane, in the East Central, it’ll be a really great event.

We’ll have information, interactive activities for the kids to make sustainable and recyclable items.

There will be some giveaways. There’ll be information around environmental justice and how people can get involved in their community.

We’ll have elected officials come speak. We’ll have music. It’s gonna be like a reunion. We’ll have food.

Everything is paid for, nobody has to pay for anything. They’ll come in, they’ll get three tickets and

JONES

Continued from 1

challenged youth to re-think leadership, identity, and human connection. In a candid conversation, she expanded on themes that resonated deeply with navigating a complex, media-saturated world.

Q: You spoke about owning your narrative, especially in today’s social media landscape. What does that look like for young people?

Jones: “It’s so hard when you’re that young and trying to figure it out. Being accepted is a big deal, being belonging is a big deal. So I think, number one, always be true to yourself. You’re always gonna fail at being someone else’s best self.”

Jones emphasized authenticity over curation, sharing how her own social media reflects both triumph and struggle.

“My social media is really honest. I don’t share the cleaned up version of me. You’re gonna see me when I’m having my best day, but you’re also gonna see me when I’m having a hard day. And that’s me. I want people to know I’m multidimensional.”

For young people, she encourages curiosity and balance.

“Get creative, get curious, stay curious. And don’t be afraid to step

away from social media too. Your social media is just one piece of you. It’s not all of you.”

Q: You reframed leadership in a powerful way. What does everyday leadership look like?

“We’re always leading people, and sometimes you’re leading your little brother or sister. 90% of leadership is without a title.”

Jones grounded leadership in lived experience, not position, emphasizing that leadership is less about designation and more about consistency and character.

“It’s the little ways that we show up and lead that actually, over the long haul, are more important.”

She also cautioned against the pursuit of titles as the goal, noting that leadership is often recognized rather than claimed.

Q: In a time of division, how do we begin to heal across differences?

“I think, No. 1, it requires you to know yourself.

Once you know yourself, it’s easier to get curious about other people.”

Jones describes herself as “radically curious,” approaching every interaction with the belief that connection is possible.

“I wonder where we’re connected. I will continue to ask questions, assuming that we will find a point of contact.”

She reflected on a powerful interaction that underscored the impact of curiosity and humanity.

“He said, ‘I’ve been following you for the last year. I never commented, but I read everything. You taught me how to live differently.’”

Her takeaway is simple but profound.

“It’s really hard to hate somebody once you know their story.”

Q: How should educators approach conversations about race and identity?

“You can’t get good at a thing you don’t practice.”

Jones acknowledges that many educators were never trained to have these conversations.

“It’s not because they’re bad. It’s not because they’re racist. You can’t get good at a thing you don’t practice.”

She emphasizes the responsibility educators carry in preparing students for a diverse world.

“If their first conversation is when they get to college and they have a

HISTORY/CULTURE

THE INDISPENSABLE LEGACY OF CONSTANCE BAKER MOTLEY,
THE SILENT ARCHITECT OF JUSTICE

Byw

CONTRIBUTOR

History often unfolds through a chorus of dramatic moments—the resounding oration echoing from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, the blinding flash of cameras capturing a pivotal presidential signing, and the unified roar of an enthusiastic crowd filling the streets. Yet, the true essence of justice is seldom forged amid this cacophony. It is crafted in the hushed, determined spaces where the painstaking drafting of legal complaints takes shape, the thorough research of precedents unfolds, and a lawyer's unwavering composure stands firm before a skeptical judge. While Thurgood Marshall stood as the vibrant public face of the legal revolution, it was Constance Baker Motley who skillfully engineered its foundational framework.

Born in 1921, Motley was a key figure in the civil rights movement and a pioneer in legal activism, whose impact still resonates today. Motley was the sole female attorney at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund; an esteemed organization headquartered in the bustling heart of New York City. In her pivotal role, she collaborated closely with the renowned Thurgood Marshall (July 2, 1908 – January 24, 1993), a distinguished civil rights lawyer and jurist. Marshall made history as the first African American to serve as an associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, a position he held with honor from 1967 until his retirement in 1991. Together, they were at the forefront of the struggle for justice and equality, shaping the legal landscape of their time. He was the Supreme Court's first African-American justice. The Honorable Constance Baker Motley played a crucial role in pivotal legal battles during the civil rights era. One of her most remarkable contributions was her work on the landmark Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*. While this case is often celebrated for its landmark ruling against racial segregation, it is essential to recognize that Motley meticulously drafted the original complaint that laid the groundwork for desegregation in the South. Her contributions extended to numerous significant cases aimed at opening the doors of prestigious universities in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi.

In the 1950s, a journalist coined the nickname “Civil Rights Queen” to describe her, highlighting her work with the



FRED PALUMBO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Constance Baker Motley, shown in 1965, helped shape key civil rights cases and became the first Black woman appointed to the federal judiciary.

“While Thurgood Marshall stood as the vibrant public face of the legal revolution, it was Constance Baker Motley who skillfully engineered its foundational framework.”

NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Motley's accomplishments are noteworthy: she was the first Black woman to argue before the

U.S. Supreme Court, achieving an impressive success rate, winning nine of ten cases. In 1966, she became the first African

American woman appointed to the federal judiciary, where she continued advocating for marginalized communities through-

out her career.

In addition to her groundbreaking achievements, Motley's strategic legal expertise played a crucial role in the civil rights movement. She collaborated with prominent figures such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Ella Baker, and Bryan Rustin, as well as Dr. Ralph Abernathy, and her efforts were vital in securing the Selma Marchers' right to protest peacefully.

As a cultural anthropologist and educator, my identity is intricately linked to my lived experiences as a Black woman, a practitioner in higher education, a 1960s civil rights activist, and a social justice educator and activist in twenty-first-century America. My teaching and research focus on the Terry Buffington Papers, a digital civil rights collection spanning 1952 to 2014. This collection centers on the lived experiences of Black men coming of age during the 1960s civil rights movement in West Point, Mississippi, archived at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Wilson Library. Southern Historical Collection. <https://unc.edu>

In my approach to education, I draw inspiration from students, the community, local people, and influential Black and Anglo scholars, including James Agree, Ernest Gaines, Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, colleagues, Wm Faulkner, and the American author James Baldwin, whose speech “A Talk to Teachers” emphasizes the importance of empowering students to think critically and challenge societal injustices. Baldwin articulated a “Crucial Paradox” of education. While it is designed to perpetuate societal norms and create compliant citizenry, its true aim should be to foster independent thinkers who can engage with and contest societal inequities.

In honoring the legacy of Constance Baker Motley, we recognize the pivotal contributions of Black women leaders who have tirelessly fought for justice within the legal system and emphasize the crucial role of education in equipping the next generation to carry on this essential work. Her journey created avenues of opportunity for Black Americans, particularly those residing in the American South. It was the honorable Constance Baker Motley who paved the way for equality in education, housing, and voting rights. Her significant legal accomplishments formed a foundation for the civil rights movement in the American South during the 1960s. Let's tell the story of the Honorable Constance Baker Motley.

FROM THE WATER'S EDGE

WHEN THE UNIMAGINABLE BECOMES OUR
DAY-TO-DAY EXPERIENCE

By Dr. Robert L. “Bob” Bartlett

THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR

What happened on September 11, 2001 is now taught in history classes. If you are my age, you remember the state of shock we experienced with the death and destruction that happened that day. The unimaginable/unthinkable played out in real time on our televisions. The skies grew silent when the FAA issued and enforced a strict “No Fly” order. Even birds seemed hesitant to fly. Heavily armed soldiers began roaming our airports and parking garages. Airport security tightened and restrictions were put in place because of what happened.

Limits on the amount of liquids and gels you could carry in your personal belongings when flying were put in place. Anything over 3.4 fluid oz. was confiscated by TSA due to their lethal potential. The simple act

of walking a loved one to their gate or meeting someone at theirs changed forever. And, let us never forget that 9/11 also launched the longest “War” in U.S. history to date, resulting in over 900,000 deaths.

Those too young to remember 9/11 never knew airports or air travel any other way. Changes we had to adjust to twenty-five years ago are normal to the younger generation along with “active shooter drills” in their schools. We are not good students of history but amazingly quick to adjust when the unimaginable happens. We should all be concerned when adjustments like these are deemed necessary.

Imagine twenty-five years from now. What will be taught in history classes about these particular times? What will the history books say about heavily armed federal agents and troops being deployed to our

cities? What will they say about a time when agents roamed our city streets and neighborhoods, boldly racially profiling us or violently arresting and detaining U.S. citizens and killing others in broad daylight? What images and videos will historians use to tell the stories of these times? What reasons or justifications will they give? Worst yet, what will our great grandchildren’s “normal” be as a result of our now?

Myself, I still get stressed in airports just standing in the TSA Precheck line with my passport. I will never grow comfortable sending my personal items or myself through airport scanners. I have a titanium knee these days. Detection of it always sends me to an agent with a wand in hand after exiting a machine where my arms were raised above my head and legs spread apart. I will never grow comfortable with being treated

as a potential threat.

Spokane is not exempt from the unimaginable. A few weeks ago, I was returning home when I spotted two white trucks entering my neighborhood. The lead truck had a light-bar on top and an official looking sticker on the door. My curiosity got the best of me so I circled around to see where they were heading. By the time I circled the block they had parked in front of a neighbor's house. Three federal agents armed and wearing body armor were there, one at the front door and two in the yard. Only one of them was wearing a recognizable uniform. I slowly rolled by in my truck. Apparently, no one was home when I passed a second time.

Later on, while waiting to meet a friend for coffee at the nearby Starbucks, I witnessed several unmarked vehicles with lights flashing and eight to ten heavily armed agents taking a

person into custody. Nothing about that incident appeared on the evening news or in the Spokesman Review. Such a show of forced is hardly news anymore. They are our new “normal,” a normal we should never grow comfortable with.

I grew up around guns and learned how to use them at a young age. They were a tool used to provide food for the table. I later learned to use them for a different purpose. I am a U.S. Army combat veteran. Southeast Asia was my war, and like so many others my age, I suffer the consequence of participating in acts of extreme gun violence. Certain guns and certain behaviors don't carry fond memories. I knew back then that the enemy, although not always obvious, was wanting to, or going to try to, take me out.

SHADES OF MOTHERHOOD

DEEP ROOTS STRONG WOMEN

CELEBRATING BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH:
HONORING STRENGTH, ADVOCACY, AND COMMUNITY

By Stephy Nobles-Beans

SHADES OF MOTHERHOOD NETWORK

April is a sacred time of reflection, awareness, and action as we recognize Black Maternal Health Month, a moment set aside to uplift the voices, experiences, and resilience of Black mothers across our nation. At the Shades of Motherhood Network, this month is not just a campaign; it is a call to honor, to advocate, and to build stronger systems of care rooted in equity, dignity, and love.

Black maternal health is more than a statistic. It is a lived experience. It is the story of mothers who carry life while navigating systems that have not always been designed with their safety in mind. It is the testimony of women who advocate for themselves and their babies, often in moments when their voices are unheard. And yet, it is also a story of strength, faith, and unwavering resilience.

In the U.S., Black women are about 3 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than White women. (CDC)

In 2024, the maternal mortality rate for Black women was 44.8 deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to 14.2 for White women. (American Hospital Association)

In some recent data, the rate for Black women has been reported as high as 50.3 deaths per 100,000 births, still more than 3 times higher than other groups. (CDC)

Earlier data shows the disparity can be even wider, with Black women experiencing up to 69.9 deaths per 100,000 births, nearly 2.6 times higher than White women. (CDC)

Overall, pregnancy-related mortality among Black women is consistently over 3 times higher, 49.4 vs. 14.9 per 100,000, compared to White women. (KFF)

Disparities in care show that Black mothers are more likely to experience:

- Delayed or no prenatal care
- Higher rates of complications during pregnancy
- Lower quality healthcare experiences (KFF)

Systemic factors like implicit

bias, access to care, and social determinants of health play a major role in these outcomes, not individual choices. (CDC)

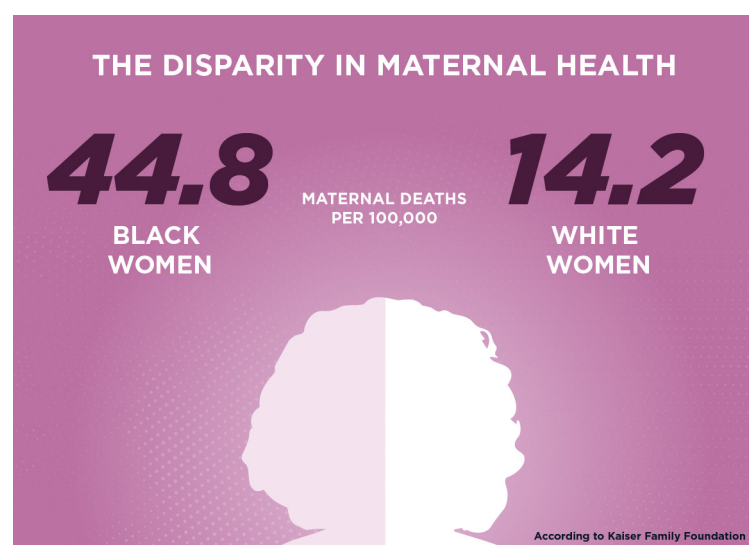
A Hopeful but Urgent Reality

While overall maternal deaths in the U.S. have slightly declined in recent years, the gap for Black women remains persistent and alarming. (The Century Foundation)

“Black maternal health is not just a statistic. It is a call to action. When Black women are three times more likely to lose their lives bringing life into the world, equity is not optional. It is urgent.”

At the Shades of Motherhood Network, we believe that every mother deserves to be seen, heard, and cared for, not just during pregnancy, but throughout her entire journey. Our work centers on supporting Black women and families through culturally responsive care, peer support, education, and community connection. We stand in the gap to ensure that no mother walks this journey alone.

Historically, Black women



ANEYA RAYNOR / THE BLACK LENS

have mothered through unimaginable circumstances. From the legacy of forced labor and systemic inequities to present-day disparities in healthcare, the challenges have been profound. Black women are still more likely to experience complications during pregnancy and childbirth. These realities are not due to lack of strength or knowledge; they are rooted in systemic barriers that must be addressed with urgency and intention.

But even in the face of these challenges, Black mothers continue to rise.

They rise as advocates.

They rise as nurturers.

They rise as leaders in their homes and communities.

And here in Spokane and the surrounding regions, we see that strength every day.

Through the Shades of Motherhood Network, we have witnessed the power of community-centered care, what happens when women are surrounded by support, resources, and genuine connection. We have seen mothers find their voice, families find stability, and communities come together to uplift one another.

Our approach is simple yet powerful. We lead with compassion, we listen with intention, and we act with purpose.

We provide peer support that meets mothers where they are.

We connect families to essential resources for housing, mental health, and wellness.

We create safe spaces for storytelling, because every story matters.

Storytelling is a cornerstone of our work. When Black women share their birth experiences, both the triumphs and the challenges, they shine a light on truths that must be acknowledged. These stories are not just personal; they are powerful tools for change. They inform policy, inspire advocacy, and build bridges of understanding within our communities.

Black Maternal Health Month reminds us that awareness must lead to action.

It calls on healthcare providers to listen more deeply.

It calls on community leaders to invest more intentionally.

It calls on all of us to stand in

solidarity with Black mothers, not just in April, but every day.

At Shades of Motherhood, we are committed to being part of the solution. Through partnerships, outreach, and grassroots advocacy, we are working to shift the narrative and improve outcomes for Black mothers and families. We are building a future where maternal health is not determined by race, but guided by equity and compassion.

This work is deeply personal. It is rooted in our stories.

It is fueled by our faith.

It is sustained by our community.

And it is driven by a vision of generational change.

As we celebrate Black Maternal Health Month, we also celebrate the beauty of Black motherhood, the joy, the love, the legacy. We honor the mothers who came before us, whose strength laid the foundation for where we stand today. We uplift the mothers who are navigating this journey right now. And we invest in the generations to come, ensuring that our daughters and granddaughters will experience a different reality, one filled with support, safety, and opportunity.

So this April, we invite you to join us.

Listen to the stories.

Support Black-led organizations.

Advocate for equitable healthcare.

Check in on a mother.

Because when we support Black mothers, we strengthen families.

When we strengthen families, we strengthen communities.

And when we strengthen communities, we build a better future for us all.

Please join us for Black Maternal Health Week from April 11-17. Visit our website for more information on how to attend this amazing event: www.theshadesofmotherhoodnetwork.org

At Shades of Motherhood Network, we believe this truth wholeheartedly: Healthy mothers create healthy communities. And every mother deserves the opportunity to thrive.

BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH WEEK 2026

APRIL 4TH - 17TH

RAISING OUR VOICES FOR BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH

#BMHW2026

UPCOMING EVENTS

SAT, 4 | BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH CONVENTION

SAT, 11 | CHILDBIRTH KNOWLEDGE EXHIBIT

SUN, 12 | FAMILY FUN DAY 2026

MON, 13 | POLICY AND POETRY SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

TUES, 14 | BLACK MATERNAL DOCUMENTARY

WED, 15 | SPOTLIGHT: WOMEN'S WELLNESS CONVERSATIONS

THUR, 16 | MOVEMENT OF JOY & MATERNAL HEALTH CONFERENCE

FRI, 17 | DEAR SIS HISTORY IN MOTION

More information at:
www.theshadesofmotherhoodnetwork.org

ROOTS AND WINGS

HEALING THROUGH AWARENESS IN CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION

By Leola Rouse

CONTRIBUTOR

April holds a profound significance in my life—not just because it is the month dedicated to raising awareness about child abuse prevention, but because it represents a journey of healing from my own experiences with mental and physical abuse as a child. Officially designated as National Child Abuse Prevention Month in the United States, this month serves as a powerful reminder of the struggles many children face and the importance of community support in fostering safe, nurturing environments for all children.

National Child Abuse Prevention Month was first established by presidential proclamation in 1983, aimed at shining a light on

the urgent need to address child maltreatment. It's a time to reflect on the impact of abuse and neglect and to recognize that we all have a role in preventing these tragic experiences. The statistics surrounding child abuse are staggering; millions of children are affected each year, and the repercussions can last a lifetime. As I reflect on my childhood, I am reminded of how vital it is to create supportive networks for those who have suffered.

Growing up, I was no stranger to the shadows of abuse. The pain of both mental and physical abuse left scars that took years to heal. I remember feeling trapped in a world where my voice was silenced, and my experiences were dismissed. Each incident of abuse chipped away at my sense of self-worth, leaving

me with feelings of shame and confusion. It wasn't until I began to understand the importance of sharing my story that I realized how many others felt the same way I did.

Participating in community discussions during April has been especially healing for me. I have connected with other survivors who have bravely shared their experiences, allowing us to support one another in a way that fosters understanding and empowerment. It is fascinating to witness how our collective stories can catalyze change and inspire action within our communities. Together, we can advocate for the resources and support systems necessary to prevent child abuse and provide healing for those affected.

Throughout April, organiza-

tions and advocates gather to raise awareness and promote education about the signs of child abuse and neglect. From local workshops to social media campaigns, the messages are clear: we must speak out and take action. We must ensure that every child has an advocate who can stand up for their rights and foster an environment where they can thrive.

During this month, I encourage everyone to take part in the initiatives being put forth across the nation—whether it's participating in local events, donating to child welfare organizations, or educating others on how to recognize the signs of abuse. Each small action contributes to a larger goal: creating a safer, more supportive environment for children.

As we observe National Child Abuse Prevention Month, let us honor the resilience of survivors like myself and others who have fought tirelessly to reclaim their narratives. Together, we can forge a future where every child is seen, heard, and protected. April may remind me of my past, but it also inspires hope for a brighter future for all children. Reflecting on my journey, I believe it is essential to transform our pain into purpose—working together to ensure that no child endures the trauma I faced.

This month, let's renew our commitment to preventing child abuse, shining a light on this critical issue, and supporting the vulnerable children in our communities. Remember, advocacy begins with awareness, and every voice matters.

IN MEMORIAM

REST IN POWER

in Memoriam**KARA BRAXTON**

MAR. 1, 2026

WNBA champion Kara Braxton brought strength and determination to every court she stepped on. A powerful center, Braxton helped the Detroit Shock capture a league title and built a reputation as a relentless rebounder and defender. Across multiple teams during her career, she inspired young athletes who admired her perseverance and pride in the game.

**NATHAN "DJ YOUNG SLADE" SMITH**

FEB. 27, 2026

Known in Atlanta's music circles as "DJ Young Slade," Nathan Smith carried a deep passion for music and the culture surrounding it. The son of DJ Lil John and Nicole Smith, he grew up immersed in sound, creativity and community. Friends remember Smith as a trailblazer for his generation whose energy and love for music inspired those around him.

**BERNARD LAFAYETTE**

MAR. 5, 2026

Civil rights organizer Bernard Lafayette stood on the front lines of the struggle for equality in the 1960s. A Freedom Rider and leader in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Lafayette helped organize voter registration drives and demonstrations across the South. In the decades that followed, he devoted his life to teaching the philosophy and strategy of nonviolence.

**MATT SNELL**

FEB. 20, 2026

Matt Snell helped define one of football's most unforgettable moments. The powerful running back played a pivotal role in the New York Jets' victory in Super Bowl III, a historic upset that reshaped the sport. Known for toughness and reliability, Snell earned the respect of teammates and fans, leaving a lasting mark on one of the game's most iconic championships.

**DOMINIQ PONDER**

MAR. 1, 2026

Quarterback Dominiq Ponder earned respect from teammates and coaches for his determination and leadership on the field. Ponder began his college career at Bethune-Cookman before continuing at the University of Colorado. Known for his work ethic and competitive spirit, he inspired those around him with his dedication to the game and commitment to his teammates.

**WILLIE ANTHONY WATERS**

MAR. 3, 2026

Through a career spent on podiums across the United States and abroad, conductor Willie Anthony Waters shared a deep commitment to classical music and mentorship. Waters led orchestras with thoughtful musicianship while advocating for greater opportunity and representation in the field. Students, performers and audiences remember his leadership and dedication to nurturing the next generation of artists.

IN MEMORIAM: MASTER SERGEANT TYLER SIMMONS**HONORING A LIFE OF SERVICE**

COURTESY OF THE OHIO NATIONAL GUARD

Master Sgt. Tyler Simmons served as a KC-135 boom operator.

Master Sergeant Tyler Simmons, 28, was among six U.S. service members killed in the crash of a KC-135 refueling aircraft over Iraq on March 12, 2026. He was stationed at the 121st Air Refueling Wing at Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base in Columbus, Ohio.

Master Sgt. Simmons served as a KC-135 Boom Operator with the 166th Air Refueling Squadron, where he conducted in-flight refueling missions supporting global air operations. His role also included aeromedical evacuation, cargo trans-

port, and passenger support as part of the Air Force's worldwide mission.

He enlisted in the Air Force in 2017, beginning his service in Security Forces after completing training at Lackland Air Force Base. In 2022, he retrained as an Inflight Refueling Specialist and earned his wings as a Mobility Force Aviator in 2023.

Throughout his career, Master Sgt. Simmons deployed multiple times in support of U.S. Central Command operations, contributing to missions across the

Middle East. He logged more than 779 flight hours, including over 230 combat hours.

His military education included the Security Forces Apprentice Course, KC-135 Boom Operations Initial Qualification Course, Airman Leadership School, and the Non-Commissioned Officer Academy. His career progression reflected dedication and steady advancement in both ground and flight operations.

Master Sgt. Simmons received numerous honors, including the Air Force Commendation Medal and

the Air Reserve Force Meritorious Service Medal, recognizing his service and commitment to mission excellence.

He was posthumously promoted to the rank of Master Sergeant on March 12, 2026.

Master Sgt. Simmons is remembered for his professionalism, courage, and commitment to service. His life reflects the sacrifice and quiet strength of those who serve in defense of others.

This report includes information from the New York Post.

**IN MEMORIAM:
LILLIAN LOUISE ANDERSON****A LIFE REMEMBERED**

Lillian Louise Anderson entered into rest on February 28th, 2026. She was preceded in death by her husband, Gardner June Anderson; and her son, Christopher Steven Anderson.

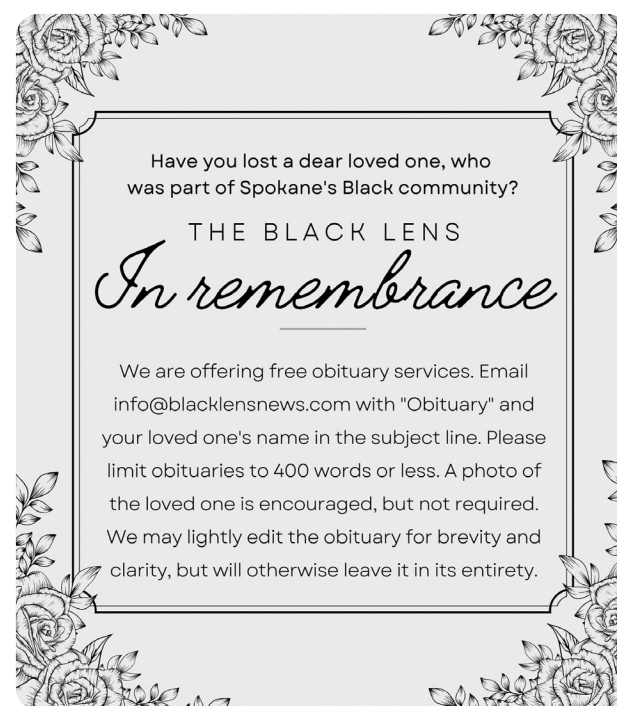
She is survived by five children, Cynthia, Vicki, Sandra, Terrence, and Rhonda; nine grandchildren; and

eight great-grandchildren.

Her celebration of life was held at Heritage Funeral Home, 508 N. Government Way, Spokane, WA 99224, on Friday, March 20th.

To learn about Lillian and her journey to the Pacific Northwest, visit BlackLensNews.com for the article by James Smith.

COURTESY OF
THE ANERSON FAMILY
Lillian Louise Anderson.



BLACK BUSINESS DIRECTORY

3 Performance Institute –

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

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

A Do Good Cleaning Service LLC – Janitorial service by Daryl Givens Jr. (509) 714-8113 or dgizzle21@gmail.com.

Africa Movement LLC. – Founded by Teresa Brooks. (509) 869-2070. Brooksrunner@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 Brittney Richards (she/her). (509) 795-0376 or allowingchangecc@gmail.com. 9 S. Washington St., Suite 420, Spokane, 99201.

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

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

Spokane Beard Papa's – Cream puff bakery owned by Marc Bryant. (509) 290-5128 or spokanebeardpapas@gmail.com. 480 B 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](https://www.instagram.com/betty_jeans_bbq) and Facebook: [Bettyjeansbbq](https://www.facebook.com/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](https://www.facebook.com/BlockerRealEstate).

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

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

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

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

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

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

Compassionate Catering LLC – Catering services. (509) 934-1106 or compassioncatering2023@gmail.com. 1014 N. Pines Road, #120, Spokane Valley, 99216.

Dennis Mitchell Empowerment Seminars – Education services by Dennis Mitchell. (509) 981-0646 or dennis speaks@gmail.com. 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.

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 ihearyou sis@gmail.com. Online at www.ihearyou sis.com, TikTok: [tiktok.com/@i.hear.you.sis](https://www.tiktok.com/@i.hear.you.sis).

Inter-Tribal Beauty – Master esthetician, Reiki practitioner and TV/film makeup artist Octavia Lewis. (509) 201-8664 or octavia@intertribalbeauty.co. 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 Jacquelynn Sandoval. (509) 460-8197 or JSandoval@windermere.com. 1620 E. Indiana Ave., Suite 1250, Spokane Valley, 99216. Instagram: [instagram.com/therealestateantie/](https://www.instagram.com/therealestateantie/).

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 lrrbarberman@aol.com. 3017 E. Fifth Ave., Spokane, 99202.

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

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

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

Mary Kay – Beauty Consultant Nicole Mills. (509) 666-4929, (252) 365-4971 or MKwithNicole@gmail.com. Online at mkwithnicole.wordpress.com, Facebook: [facebook.com/MKwithNicoleM](https://www.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@mooresassistedliving.com. 1803 W. Pacific Ave., Spokane, 99201.

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

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

New Beginnings Hair & Beauty Salon – Hair styling and braiding salon owned by Stephanie Tullos-Brady. (509) 475-3556 or tulos_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.

Next Generation Hair Academy (Suite B) – Hair academy and beauty education services. (509) 904-6717. 327 W. Hastings Road, Spokane, WA 99218. Online at lizard-octahedron-3hgt.squarespace.com or on Instagram @nextgenerationhairacademy. Dawn's Braids, Dreads, and Twists (Suite A).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 "Smoo" 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), wrightwaybeautysupply@outlook.com or visit www.wrightwaybeautysupply.com. 2103 N. Division St., Spokane, 99207.

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

AREA BLACK CHURCHES AND MINISTRIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mount Zion Holiness Church – Pastor Tommy Whitman. 2627 E. Fifth Ave., Spokane, 99202. Sunday Service is at 10 a.m.

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

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

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

NAACP MEETINGS

To join, visit naacpspokane.com/contact.

GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETINGS: Third Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.
HEALTHCARE COMMITTEE: Second Monday of each month at 5:15 p.m.
CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE: Second Wednesday via zoom at 7 p.m.
EDUCATION COMMITTEE: Fourth Tuesday at 6:30 p.m.
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE: First Tuesday at 5 p.m.

NORTHWEST IMPROV FEST 2026

3 DAYS OF IMPROV COMEDY

April 23-25

2026 Sponsors:
 City of Spokane | Synergy Design
 Scheel Studios | The Inlander

SCAN FOR MORE INFO



nwimprovfest.com

Organized by: Blue Door Theatre and Levity Theatre

Black Lens pickup and distribution: Get on our list!

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



CONTINUE THE LEGACY

THE BLACK LENS CONTINUES BECAUSE OF YOU.

YOUR SUPPORT HELPS:

-  Fund monthly production and distribution
-  Sustain our nonprofit mission
-  Honor the legacy of Sandy Williams
-  Invest in youth and community programs

BE A PARTNER
Scan to donate

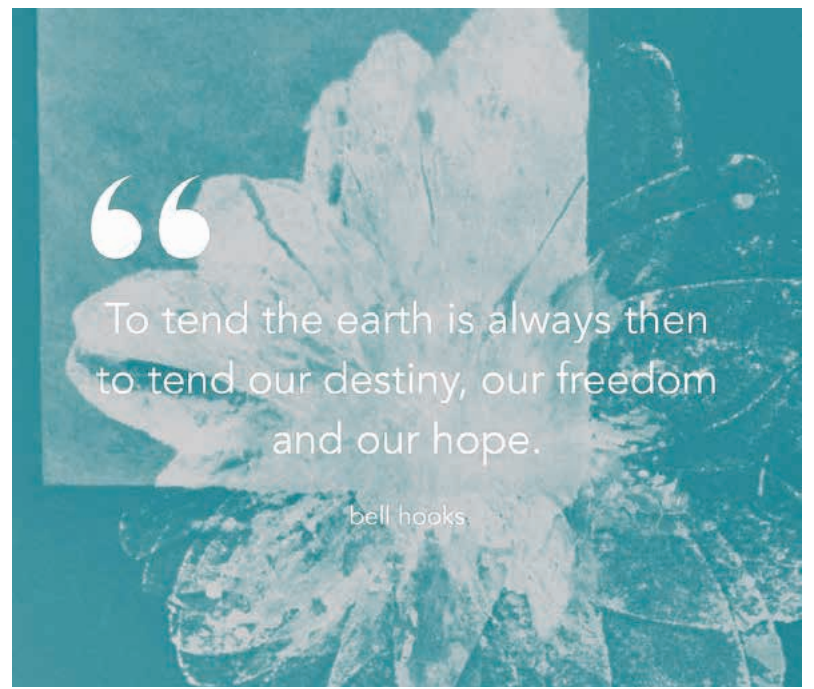


A donation of \$96 or more delivers the full issue to your door each month.

THE BLACK LENS IS A REGISTERED 501(C)(3) ORGANIZATION. PLEASE CONSULT YOUR TAX ADVISOR FOR GUIDANCE ON DEDUCTIBILITY. EIN 99-0496180V

COMICS & QUOTE OF THE MONTH

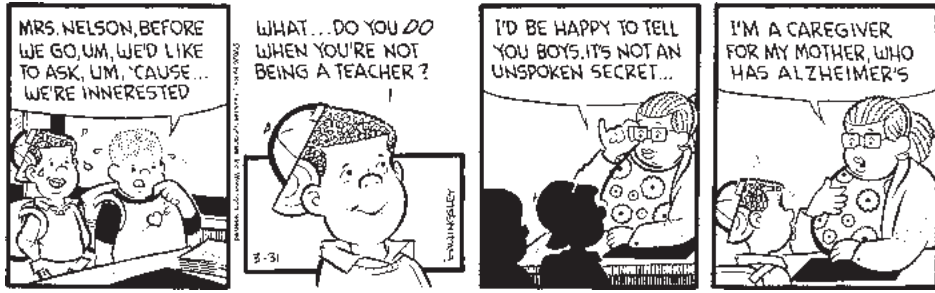
CURTIS • BY RAY BILLINGSLEY



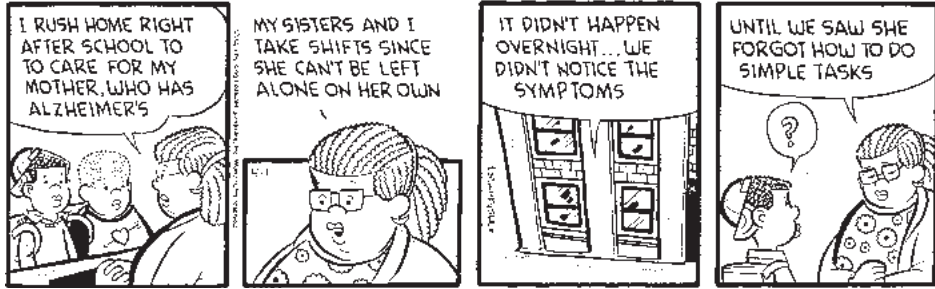
MARCH 30



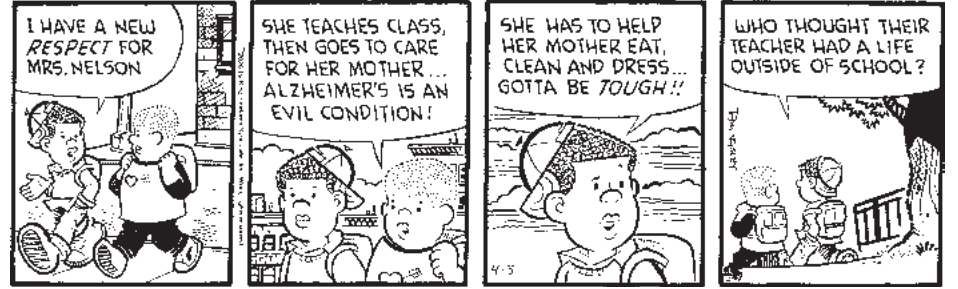
MARCH 31



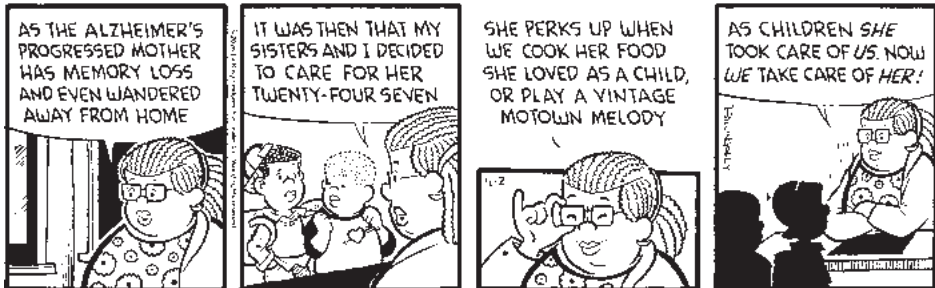
APRIL 1



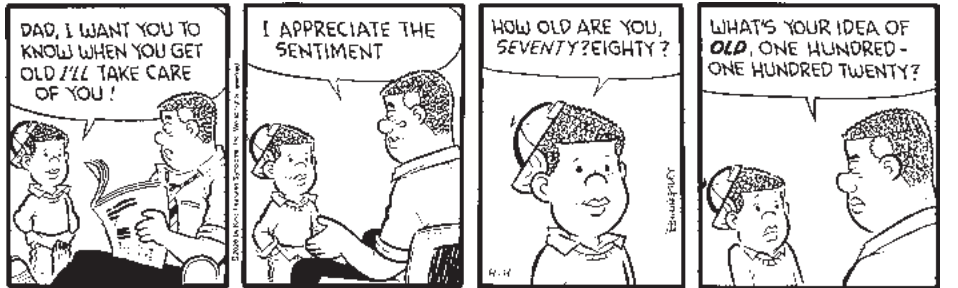
APRIL 3



APRIL 2



APRIL 4



CRABGRASS • BY TAUHID BONDIA

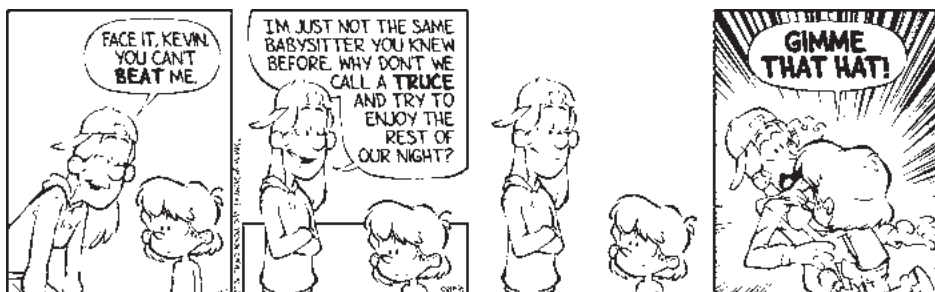
MARCH 30



MARCH 31



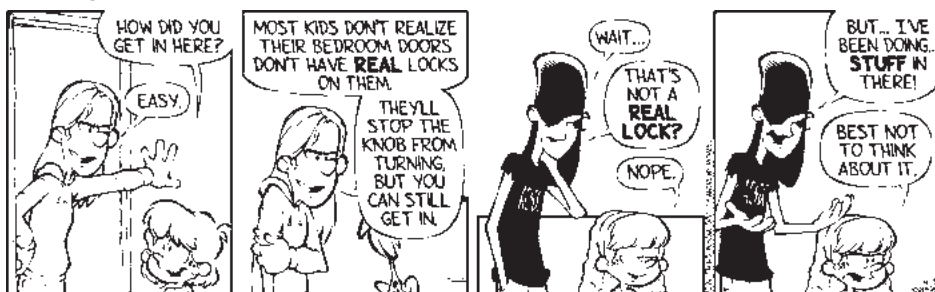
APRIL 1



APRIL 2



APRIL 3



APRIL 4



DAVIS

Continued from 1

quickly set him apart. He was accepted into the Spokane division's management program and, in July 1978, was promoted to second assistant manager, becoming the first Black assistant manager in the division. By November 1981, he advanced to first assistant manager at the Sprague and Stone location, marking a historic rise in a space where representation had been limited.

Beyond his professional achievements, his impact on the community was profound. Hiring extensively from Spokane's East Side, he created opportunities for local youth and became a trusted and familiar presence.

His excellence did not go unnoticed. Over the course of his career, he was formally recognized by leadership at every level, from district managers to senior executives, culminating in a special

luncheon honoring his exceptional service and enduring contributions to the company and community.

For 56 years, Earon Davis was more than a Safeway employee. He was a steady presence, a mentor, and a reflection of what consistency and familiarity look like in a community. Known across Spokane, especially on the South Hill and in East Central, Davis built relationships that extended far beyond the checkout line, a constant face on the East Side of Spokane.

After retiring in October 2025 to care for his wife, whom he married in 1969, and who passed away in December of that same year, Davis leaves behind a legacy rooted in people. He shares more about his journey below.

Q: Mr. Davis, can you tell me one of your best memories of working at Safeway for so many years?

Earon Davis: "Oh, the best memories are the people that I came in con-

tact with over the years, people from all walks of life. And just the interaction with customers and some of the employees that I work with and some that work for me.

Long lasting friendships over the years. And just making people feel good about themselves, and, you know, when you meet them and you greet them, they become a part of your family."

Q: Beyond the paycheck, what life lessons did you try to pass on, especially to young people?

Davis: "Just being honest and being truthful, with integrity. You know, doing the best you can and seeing everybody the same way you want to be treated, fairly.

That's what I tried to help the young people to understand, you know, be on time, be punctual. Make sure you are neat, clean. I tried to instill that in them, and some of them took it, and some of them didn't, and some of them are quite successful

around Spokane."

Davis was known not only for his work ethic but for his role as a visible Black leader in spaces where representation was limited. He modeled standards, habits, and expectations that not everyone had the opportunity to learn or see demonstrated in their early environments.

Q: Why does representation and seeing faces that look like your own matter, especially in a place like Spokane?

Davis: "Well, I feel once people see you, they see someone who looks like you, it makes them want to strive to reach whatever goals they want in life, and they give them an impression that they can do it when they see someone of their color.

Especially when they know that, you know, you not only work in that area, but you're in the community, you see people, different things like church, ball games and stuff, they see. And so, I think it kind of

inspires, especially youth when they see someone of the same color of their skin doing something positive."

His presence was a bridge between generations, between expectation and opportunity.

Q: Why is it important to have strong work ethic and longevity in a career?

Davis: "Well, it's important to have a strong work ethic because I used to always tell the young people, 'you might not like this job, but you do the best you can, be always on time, and I always give a two weeks notice so that you can have a good work history to go to something else.'"

Because some of them went off to college and some of them left Spokane. So I always made a point to make them see whatever you're doing right now is going to affect you later on in life, the choices that you make now are going to affect you later.

If you don't like the job, you still show up on time,

you do a good job, you do what is required of you, and to be, you know, and do it with integrity.

Because a lot of times they have their negative thing about people, and they still do in Spokane, that if they don't watch it, you're going to steal, or what have you.

But again, I've met a lot of good people in Spokane, so Spokane has been good to me. But you have to demand your respect and you have to respect people. But you also have to draw the line that they're not going to walk over you. You're not like everybody else, so don't treat, don't go that way."

In a city where visibility matters, Earon Davis, Sr. stood as a consistent, steady example of leadership in everyday life. His legacy is not only in the years he gave, but in the people who now carry forward what he poured into them.

And if you ever asked him how he was doing, you already know the answer: "Just Marvelous."

FROM THE FRONT PAGE / BLACK POETS SOCIETY

DIXON

Continued from 1

chapter of the Black Panther Party in 1968, Dixon's life bridges living history and present-day urgency.

In this conversation, he traces the roots of his political awakening, the erosion of community-based value systems, and the disciplined strategies that once transformed neighborhoods into sites of grassroots action. He also reflects on how power actually works, not just in theory, but in practice.

Q: As a teenager, you marched with Martin Luther King Jr. and witnessed early integration efforts. How did those experiences shape your decision to co-found the Seattle Black Panther Party?

Aaron Dixon: "I think for everybody, it was a process of growing up in that time period. Who our parents were, where they came from, their experiences. We grew up under segregation, and our parents and grandparents lived under segregation.

The oral tradition was very much alive. We heard stories from our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, not just about family, but about the things they went through.

We grew up watching the Civil Rights Movement play out on television every day. We watched the news with our parents. All of that played a role for our whole generation.

We also witnessed assassinations. John F. Kennedy, Medgar Evers, the bombing in Birmingham. I remember my father crying when Kennedy died. That was the first time I saw him cry. I realize now it was traumatizing for us as young people."

Political consciousness is often not born in a single moment, but in a lattice shaped by family, media, trauma, and shared witnessing. Dixon's generation did not arrive at activism individually. It was formed through collective consciousness, emotional nearness, and historical urgency.

Q: You spoke about growing up surrounded by elders. How critical was that intergenerational connection?

Aaron Dixon: "It's critical. It was part of the cultural value system we lived under. Respect your elders. That was driven into us.

But also, young people were valued and looked after by everybody, not just family, but the whole community. The family was important. People stayed together for the sake of the family.

Under segregation, we had everything in our community. Doctors, lawyers, businesses. It was a community effort in raising children and raising the community.

We don't have that anymore. That cultural value system has been eroded."

Where today's culture often emphasizes independence, Dixon describes a time when identity was anchored in relationship. The loss he names is not just emotional. It is structural. It is the shift from "we" to "I."

Q: Do you see individualism as part of that erosion?

Aaron Dixon: "Yeah. We don't have those ways of socializing anymore. People used to sit on the porch, talk to neighbors. That's how we built relationships.

Now, we have to be intentional. We have to learn how to be together again, how to talk, how to learn from each other.

Technology is one of the things keeping us from getting back to that. But it doesn't mean it can't be done."

Dixon does not romanticize the past, knowing full well that it came with its own injustices. But he is clear that collective life was practiced, not assumed. If it is to return, it must now be rebuilt deliberately.

Q: There's a lot of emotion in movements today, but less structure. What are your key principles for effective organizing?

Aaron Dixon: "Groups should learn how to study together. Create a book list. Read, study, and discuss on a regular basis.

You have to understand the importance of principles. Basic principles. Be respectful. Return what you borrow. Simple things.

We used to say practice is a criteria for truth. People have ideas, but they don't put them into practice.

You need a plan. A strategy. A vision. A goal. Then you map out how you're going to get there. And you hold people accountable.

You don't just talk about it. You put it into practice."

For Dixon, organizing is not reactive. It is disciplined. Study, values, structure, and accountability are the backbone of collective action. In their absence, decentralized efforts often collide, compete, or lose direction instead of building unified resistance and lasting infrastructure.

Q: Many movements today struggle with internal conflict. How did you navigate disagreement within the Panthers?

Aaron Dixon: "One of the principles we learned was constructive criticism. If you see something wrong, you address it, not in an attack, but in a constructive way.

And the other person accepts that criticism.

A lot of times now, people don't bring things out. It festers. Then people split. But you never talked about it."

Dixon identifies fragmentation not as inevitable, but as the result of avoided accountability. A willingness to work through tension, rather than flee from it, is central to collective power.

Q: What is different about how your generation and today's youth experience trauma?

Aaron Dixon: "In our segregated communities, we had love and support. When I came back from Oakland, I was dealing with trauma. But I came back to my neighborhood, and people knew me. They spoke to me. That helped me heal.

We had love in our community. It was easier to heal.

Now there's so much chaos. It's harder to heal. So we have to be intentional about creating spaces of love and support."

The distinction Dixon draws is not in the existence of trauma, but in the existence of community. Healing, in his framing, is collective, not individual.

Q: There's an ongoing debate between abolition and reform. Where do you stand?

Aaron Dixon: "It's both. You can't deal in absolutes.

You can't just tear everything down without having something in place. You have to build programs.

If you want to abolish something like prisons, you need something for people when they come out. Something that helps them reintegrate.

We can't get stuck on terms. You have to do the work."

Dixon reframes the debate from ideology to strategy. What matters most is not the label, but the outcome and whether people's material condi-

tions are actually changed.

Q: The Panthers are often remembered for their image, but less for their programs. What did successful organizing look like in practice?

Aaron Dixon: "We evolved. We started with uniforms and guns, but we shifted.

We started survival programs. Free breakfast programs. Free medical clinics. Legal aid.

We fed thousands of kids. We helped force the government to create national programs.

That's how you transform something. You build what's needed."

This is where Dixon's critique of individualism sharpens. The Panthers were not performing resistance. They were building systems. People's power was measured in impact, not visibility.

Q: What is one of your most powerful memories from that time?

Aaron Dixon: "We had a vision to take over the city of Oakland. And we moved toward that.

We helped put Black judges in place. We influenced elections. We had one of the best community-based schools in the country.

We were running the city. That was about strategy and practice."

His answer underscores a central truth. Real power is not symbolic. It is structural.

Q: You've talked about strategy a lot. What does power look like to you now?

Aaron Dixon: "You have to be strategic. You have to have a long-term strategy.

Your short-term actions may not always fit your ideology, but they're part of getting where you want to go."

Dixon also offered a deeper reflection on power, one rooted not in visibility, but in strategy. He pointed to his run for U.S. Senate as a defining example.

"We knew that I could not beat Maria Cantwell," Dixon said. "But I could persuade her to do what we wanted her to do, which was stop asking for more support for the war in Iraq."

Rather than centering the campaign on victory alone, Dixon approached it as a strategic opportunity to influence policy and shift the conversation.

"That's what our campaign did," he said. He shared that Cantwell eventually changed her position.

The campaign also revealed something broader about reach and influence.

"The largest percentage of votes that I got was in the eastern part of the state, right here, conservative white people," he said. "As a matter of fact, it set a record."

For Dixon, these outcomes underscore a critical lesson about power and how it operates. Power is not only held by those in office. It can also be applied, redirected, and leveraged with intention.

In a culture that often celebrates visibility over substance, Dixon's reflections offer a recalibration. The shift from collective power to individual expression has not just changed how movements look, but how effective they are. The work takes all of us. When collective practice erodes, we trade progress for futility.

And like anything unpracticed, it can be rebuilt.

Aaron Dixon shared at the PJALS Youth Kick-Off event at Hamilton Studios on March 20 the essence of the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements. We cannot live in fear; we have to live in our own power.

All Power to the People.

ADMISSIBLE

I want you to know that I didn't type a single word of this.

Every sentence fell off of my tongue and fell through the doors that are my lips.

Lips that have stayed sealed for the protection of myself and others.

A tongue that has solved many problems that challenged us.

I've been purging myself of all the hurt.

Driven by pride and grief, I have made myself some sort of Frankenstein, trying to revive the part of me that I let you murder.

So I want you to listen... to the next person you give your heart to, I will add them to the bodies.

I wish I was sane enough to call that a metaphor.

I wish I was being playful, like kids with toy swords and guns.

But this is real.

Use this as a confession on any trial your heart may desire it to.

Because I'm guilty.

"yes your honor I did it indeed"

And I'd do it again.

Because your love is worth it. Because mine wasn't.

So instead of playing victim, I become suspect.

Accused of all the crimes in



By Jā Corbett-Sparks
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



my innocence, I now settle in the freedom of criminality. I can't make it better. I don't want to.

So visit me if you must. Call me if you want with the same energy you profiled me with.

If they sentenced me to death, the motto has been the same:

"If my heaven is denied, I'll gladly accept my hell."

Because if they sent me to life, the message stays unchanged.

I want him dead.

I want it all. To go.

PREVAILING POWER

Power... Purpose... Pressure...

Passion, prayers that were proficient in our pro-activity thus describe the longevity of those who stood before me.

The Pro-Blacks,

The ones who preached about wealth, parading ideals I knew nothing of but felt,

And who else but too carry the blame,

For when faced with adversity, they would have the belt and our scars,

That they would call a work of art,

Were a testament to our fears,

That spread like a plague, Too show the whole world that we were broken first,

before they knew we all bled the same, I mean...

How can you be Black and not live in excellence,

For the duality of the two is so blur they might as well be the same,

For the uprising in blacks has reached an all time fame,

From the charisma we speak, and the culture we breath,

It's no wonder that we don't fit the status quo,

For we are the status quo, For WE are not late, lazy or loud,

Nah, We stand tall, play ball and proud,

For my presence, speaks essence to a room before I even enter,

And before you mention my blackness is clutch nah it's a necessity,

For God's gift was so strong and He loved me so much,

He chose to ... make me Black,

For my brothers in Harlem and sisters in Queens,

For our history holds roots that connect us to this never ending tree, of lineage,

purpose, power, passion, prayer, I say again

A few words that describe yet again our significance,

Yet time again our blackness



By Jotham Walugembe
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR

... is diminished ...

For we are trend setters but are often laughed at on our very existence, We are go getters but our passion is hindered by those who have the same desire as us, NO!

For we are innovators ... But our lands our swept on war, greed and hypocrisy,

For every time we rise up we are yet again, faced with their philosophy,

I speak in excellence, but I breathe in poetry,

For I have never known a better way to express myself,

For being Black is a privilege, that stands the tide of my lineage,

The ... melanin-inducing print on our skin,

That is indeed a work of art, For our pride shines as bright the stars,

And our blackness is the canvas that dims the light that sets us apart,

My Blackness is a prevailing, persistence, that has been stretched across history,

The artistic variety of today's trends stand on the foundation of my culture,

Our fashion became a statement, Our customs became a staple,

Our movements turned heads,

When we were forced to bend a knee to realize Black lives do matter, We preached about our worth, thinking we have something to prove

But now we Breathe easy, knowing that we indeed rest in power,

Thank You

EARTH DAY

Continued from 10

co-op with a hall and a kitchen that they rented out for the community

that sustained that.

That's something that we can do in the community.

This is all my heart and it's my passion right now because every time I look at them it's like we can

do more.

And when I'm working with folks and referring them to other folks that don't look like us it's like yeah we need something for us.

We gotta do this for us.

FREEDOM

Continued from 10

melting pot (for which Morrison famously said Black people served as the pot). Being Irish, Rimmick comes from a colonized lineage, whose immigration is largely forced by oppressive conditions. While his character points to his past subjugation, Rimmick fails to turn that experience into a basis for collectivism. Instead, Rimmick revels in his own deranged interpretations, wreaking havoc on souls while shilling his version of "salvation." But Rimmick can't offer any deliverance because his desire to become a savior overwhelms his desire for solidarity.

Annie had answers – sa-

cred secrets safeguarded for seekers not extractors. Her faith prompted Annie to demand the unthinkable from Smoke, who ultimately frees her by driving a stake through her heart – not as an act of violence, but of love. Smoke/Elijah's faith in this woman is rewarded in the end. Before laying slaughter to the supremacists, he rips off his protective mojo bag, ensuring a beautiful family reunification. Annie's ancestral knowledge of non-linear realities where sweet relief waited was in fact what Rimmick was after, but he was too blinded by his own corrupted visions to see.

And so, Rimmick ends up manipulating the very people he longed to play music beside. Perhaps

unforgivably, Rimmick does his worst when he forces a false choice of "freedom," stripping folks of the small measure of agency they possessed. In the end, Rimmick finds release, even though he's forced into it, Smoke finds real, everlasting love and peace, and Stack, well, he finds some measure of redemption. Stack retains some humanity by honoring his brother and the promises made by protecting his kin. In the final post-credit scene, Stack gives what Rimmick denied – the dignity of autonomy. Stack offers to make his baby cousin immortal, but he relents, respecting the refusal when Sammie enquires, "I think I've seen enough of this place." In the final line of the film, Stack and

Sammie contemplate liberation, recognizing that even though that night changed everything, in the end they agree "just for a few hours, we was free."

Environmentally friendly, resource-efficient office space available in both of our buildings



- affordable pricing
- all the tools needed to grow your organization
- private offices
- conference rooms
- high-speed internet
- 24/7 access.

Call Angela Chapman at 509-798-1655
or email at angela@community-building.org