



MERRICK WASHINGTON MAGAZINE

SPRING/SUMMER 2021

News

Amazon Nabs Doc
'My Name is Pauli Murray,'
From Oscar-Nominated
'RBG' Directors

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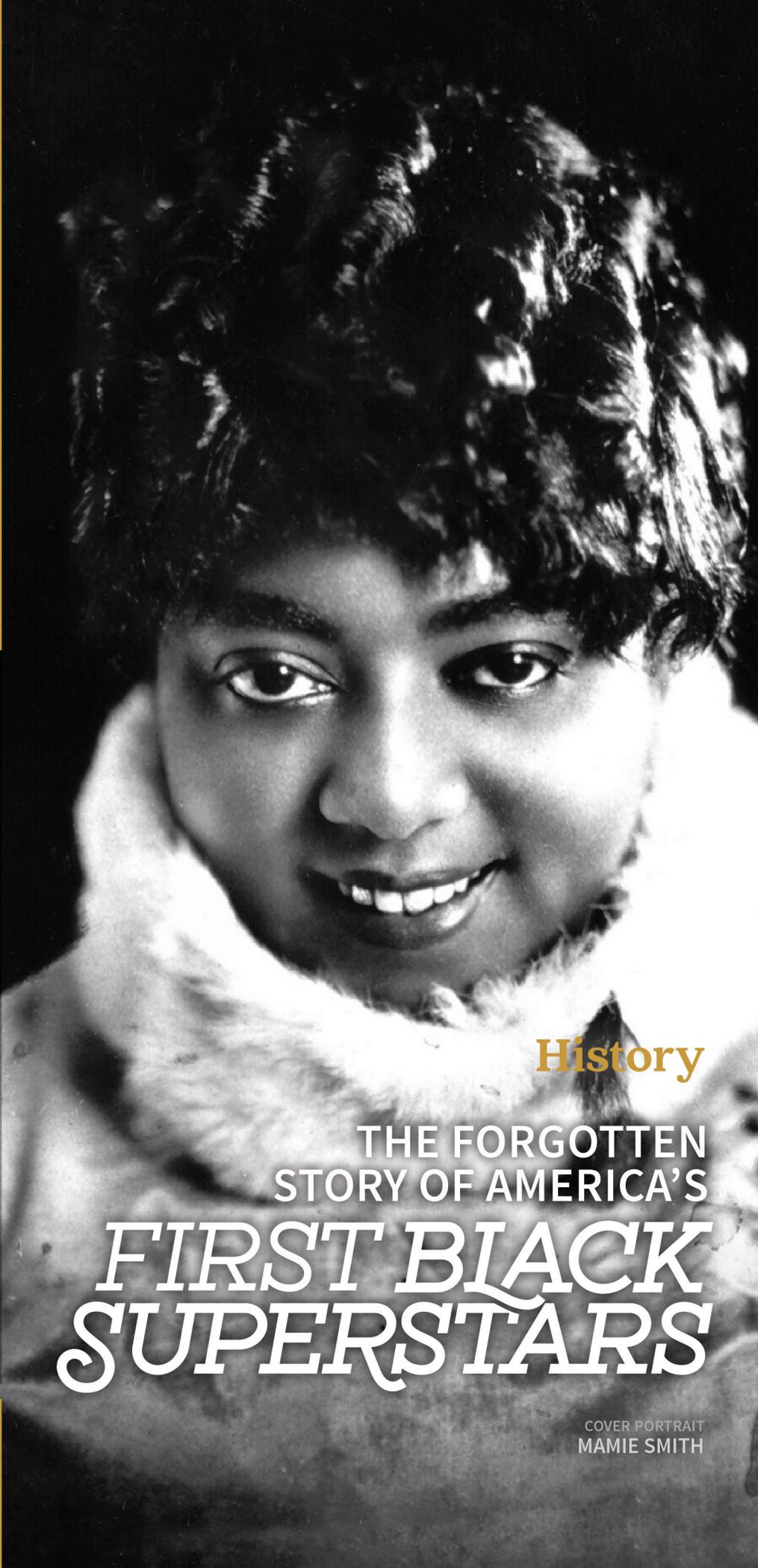
History

A Doctor of Their Own

Merrick Washington Magazine
original content contributed
by author Blake Hill-Saya.

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History

THE FORGOTTEN
STORY OF AMERICA'S

FIRST BLACK SUPERSTARS

COVER PORTRAIT
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Durham Colored Library, Inc. (DCL, Inc.) was founded in 1913 at White Rock Baptist Church and chartered as a non-profit on July 20, 1918.

The bricks and mortar library services were operated by an all-volunteer board until 1967 when a new integrated public library system was created by merging the colored system into the historically white system.

DCL, Inc. has retained its non-profit status and evolved to focus on managing projects that lift up stories about African Americans, both current and historical, to help create a more comprehensive picture of the American experience.



THE MERRICK WASHINGTON MAGAZINE



Lyda Moore Merrick
1890-1987



John Carter Washington
1921-2017

The *Merrick Washington Magazine* is one of DCL, Inc.'s longstanding projects and was originally called the *Negro Braille Magazine*. Founded in 1952 by Lyda Moore Merrick and John Carter Washington, it was the first publication to cull articles from other publications and reprint them in Braille for the Black community. The magazine was self-published by Mrs. Merrick and her husband, Ed Merrick, for more than 20 years.

DCL, Inc. adopted the project in 1975 and Mrs. Merrick continued to consult with the magazine's new editorial staff until 1985. In 2013, DCL, Inc. expanded the Braille magazine to include a large-print edition for low-vision readers. When DCL, Inc.'s board learned that most blind readers preferred audio content and that many of the Braille readers' addresses were becoming obsolete, DCL, Inc. discontinued the Braille edition and expanded the availability of its large print-edition to better serve low-vision readers.

Today the magazine is distributed to more than 1,000 readers twice a year.



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

On June 1, 2021, we marked the 100th anniversary of the destruction of Black Wall Street in Tulsa, OK's Greenwood community. The story behind the burning and massacre is painful but necessary to tell. In some ways, it's a tragic story of what happens when the law sides with hatred and racism. In other ways, it's the story of a Black community's strength and journey to push through fear and trauma to lift the veil on history and seek justice.

Elevating Black stories is vital. It's the only way we can fully understand the history of this country and bring those learnings into the present to achieve positive progress. But these stories can be deeply upsetting – whether it's a violent tragedy like Greenwood or the subtler suppression of Durham NC's prosperous community through urban renewal. As I reflect on our country's tough history, I find solace in a phrase from Pauli Murray's 1987 book *Song in a Weary Throat: Memoir of an American Pilgrimage* - "Don't get mad, get smart."

Murray, who's featured in a new documentary detailed in our News section, realized that by using her intelligence and harnessing emotions like anger into "innovative power," she could figure out strategic actions that led to long-term transformation. This idea is

a thread in this issue and throughout Black history. I imagine this type of thinking was in Frederick Douglass' mind when he agreed to meet with his former enslaver after escaping bondage to become one of America's great abolitionists (page 23). The impetus to use intelligence to combat irrational systems was how one of this country's first Black doctors, Dr. Aaron McDuffie Moore, approached building a Black Wall Street and healthcare system in Durham, NC (page 16). It seems likely Mamie Smith and the other female singers of her time were inspired by this thinking as they translated lived experiences into record-breaking hits (page 21). And this perspective may have given Greenwood's Viola Ford Fletcher, Hughes Van Ellis, and Lessie Benningfield Randle the courage to speak before Congress, revisiting 1921 and calling for justice in 2021.

I'm grateful to share stories in this issue about our elders and ancestors that help us heed the lessons of the past and encourage us to channel the complex emotions that come with remembering into work towards a more inclusive future.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brandi Sansom Stewart".

Brandi Sansom Stewart

Editor, Merrick Washington Magazine



AMAZON NABS DOC ‘MY NAME IS PAULI MURRAY,’ FROM OSCAR-NOMINATED ‘RBG’ DIRECTORS

BY MATT DONNELLY

VARIETY | FEBRUARY 25, 2021 | (EXCERPT)

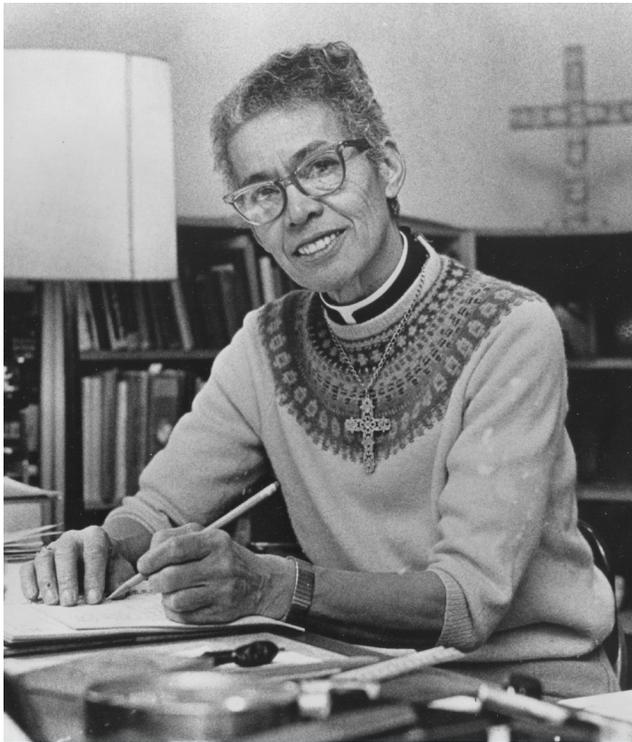


PHOTO: Pauli Murray

Amazon Studios has acquired worldwide distribution rights to the film “My Name Is Pauli Murray,” about the trailblazing LGBTQ and civil rights activist, which premiered this year at Sundance.

Participant, Drexler Films and Storyville Films produced the doc, directed by Oscar nominees Betsy West and Julie Cohen (“RBG”).

The film follows the overlooked history of Murray, a gender-non-conforming scholar and ordained minister who championed the rights of people of color, women and the queer community. West and Cohen were introduced to Murray by the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg while making “RBG,” which was nominated for the best documentary feature Academy Award in 2019.

“We’re incredibly honored to bring Pauli Murray’s inspiring story to light at such a timely point in American history,” said Amazon Studios head Jennifer Salke. “As a pioneer for race and gender equity, Pauli’s extraordinary achievements will surely strike a chord amongst our global audiences...”

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/R3RF50DZhKb>



MORE US CHURCHES ARE COMMITTING TO RACISM-LINKED REPARATIONS

BY DAVID CRARY

ASSOCIATED PRESS | DECEMBER 13, 2020 | (EXCERPT)

The Episcopal Diocese of Texas acknowledges that its first bishop in 1859 was a slaveholder. An Episcopal church in New York City erects a plaque noting the building's creation in 1810 was made possible by wealth resulting from slavery.

And the Minnesota Council of Churches cites a host of injustices — from mid-19th century atrocities against Native Americans to police killings of Black people — in launching a first-of-its kind “truth and reparations” initiative engaging its 25 member denominations.

These efforts reflect a widespread surge of interest among many U.S. religious groups in the area of reparations, particularly among long-established Protestant churches that were active in the era of slavery. Many are initiating or considering how to make amends through financial investments and long-term programs benefiting African Americans.

Some major denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention, have not embraced reparations as official policy. The Episcopal Church has been the most active major denomination thus far, and others, including the United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, are urging congregations to consider similar steps.

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/io1m50DZidV>





RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS: BLACK AMERICANS ARE REDEFINING RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND WITH GARDENING, FARMING

BY ANIKA REED

USA TODAY | AUGUST 5, 2020 | (EXCERPT)

Black people across America are reconnecting to their roots — literally.

Though large numbers of Black people have historically been excluded from land ownership, an emerging group of Black Americans are turning to gardening, farming and agriculture as a means of empower-

ment, self-sufficiency and tapping into their ancestral ties to the soil.

My grandfather was one of those Black people with deep roots to the land. During a Father's Day FaceTime call with my dad, I discovered my paternal grandfather was a master at agriculture, skills he learned from his grandfather. I listened as my dad

RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS (CONT.)

recounted how his father would tend to the soil in their backyard in Bakersfield, California, making do with the small plot of land at their modest family home.

My grandfather Lloyd Reed was a World War II veteran and a fire captain among the first to integrate his fire department in Bakersfield. He would use the almanac as a guide to growing green beans, peas, okra, tomatoes, watermelon, bell peppers, corn and other foods.

“Most of my childhood we would eat fresh vegetables,” my dad, Michael Reed, said. “There was this powerful feeling of pride that was instilled in us from having a father – and a grandmother – who had those kinds of skills.”

The conversation was a reminder of a time that, for many, feels long gone – but also a glimpse at what life tending to the land still looks like for current groups of Black Americans.

Large numbers of Americans have moved away from agriculture-based lifestyles, but there are pockets of people who are creating

communities around sustainable food sources.

“I think farming is revolutionary, fundamentally,” says Leah Penniman, owner of Soul Fire Farm in Albany, New York. “It’s about weaving together a relationship to land, our human communities and the spiritual realm, and producing something that’s undeniably good.”

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/ki8E50DZiBl>



TACTILE IMAGES PARTNERS WITH GETTY IMAGES AND THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND TO DELIVER MORE THAN 45 MILLION IMAGES TO THE WORLD'S BLIND AND DISABLED POPULATION

NEWS PROVIDED BY **TACTILE IMAGES**

PR NEWSWIRE | JANUARY 25, 2021 | (EXCERPT)

Getty Images, a world leader in visual communications, and the National Federation of the Blind, America's civil rights and membership organization of the blind, have partnered with Tactile Images to deliver more than 45 million images to the world's blind and disabled population at museums, science centers, libraries, schools, and government agencies. This partnership will significantly enhance educational opportunities and cultural inclusion for blind and disabled individuals.

As part of this initiative, more than 50,000 members of the blind community shared what photography and art they wanted to experience first. The National Federation of the Blind reinforced this by announcing that they will be granting \$500,000 to museums and institutions for the

development of tactile exhibition displays.

"Blind people have all the same interests, concerns, and aspirations as all who participate in our society and culture, and that culture is reflected in the millions of images that this partnership will help us access," said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. "We look forward to working with Tactile Images and Getty Images to curate a collection that will include, inform, and inspire the blind of America and the world."

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/Nja650DZj1T>



HOW A BLACK FIREMAN BROUGHT A POLE INTO THE FIREHOUSE

MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO, DAVID KENYON, A FIREFIGHTER IN CHICAGO, DISCOVERED THE FASTEST WAY TO THE GROUND FLOOR

BY ALEX POTTER

SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE | JULY/AUGUST 2020 | (EXCERPT)



PHOTO: Chicago Fire Company 21

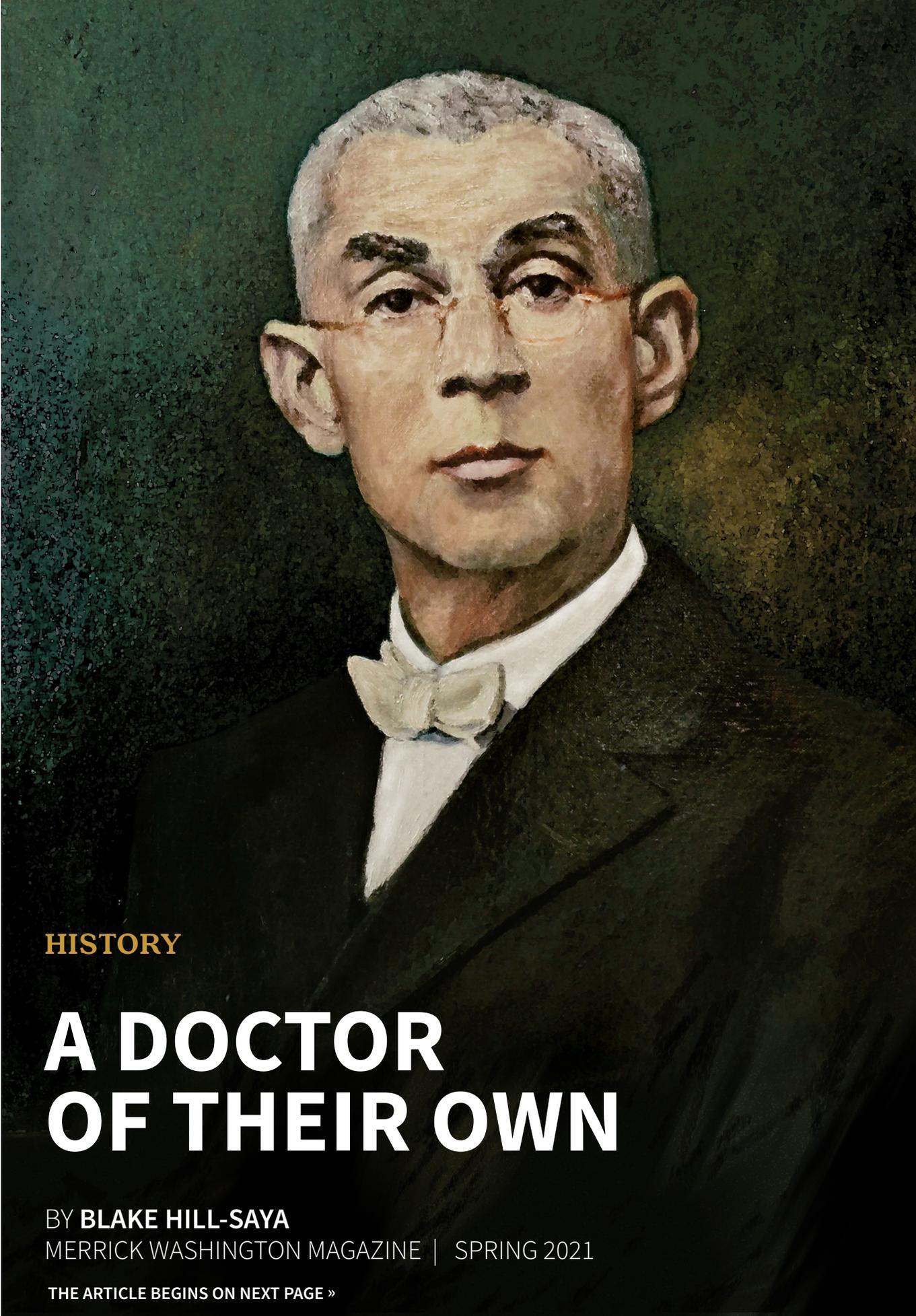
In the 19th century, American firefighters had two ways of descending from their sleeping quarters to their horse-and-buggy conveyances on the ground floor: either by spiral staircase—installed to keep wayward horses from wandering upstairs—or through a tube chute, similar to the enclosed slides you see at playgrounds today. The stairs were cumbersome and the slides were slow, and in the 1870s, David Kenyon of Company 21, an all-African-American firehouse in Chicago, had an epiphany.

One day, Kenyon and a colleague got a call about a fire, and his fellow firefighter reached the ground by sliding down a wooden pole normally used to bale hay for horses. That made Kenyon wonder: Why not place a permanent pole leading directly from the upstairs sleeping quarters to the ground floor, thus avoiding stairs or chutes? When Kenyon installed his pole in 1878, other firefighters in the city thought the idea was crazy—until they saw that Company 21 was now often the first to arrive on scene. In 1880 the Boston Fire Department installed a brass pole, the type still used today. Within a decade, poles stood in firehouses across the nation, and later in Canada, Britain and beyond.

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/5VnY50DZjAW>





HISTORY

A DOCTOR OF THEIR OWN

BY **BLAKE HILL-SAYA**

MERRICK WASHINGTON MAGAZINE | SPRING 2021

THE ARTICLE BEGINS ON NEXT PAGE »

On a Friday afternoon in July 1896 in a neighborhood near what would become Duke University, a fire broke out. Two young Black boys, one seven and the other five, were trying to get a fire started in their yard; maybe for a summer evening barbeque. Something went terribly wrong. The oil can exploded and both boys were burned. In the rush and horror that ensued, the doctor was sent for, a Black doctor who had become a household name in Durham since his arrival in 1888. Building trust hadn't been easy in the beginning, but many called him "Daddy Moore" by this time, although his full name was Dr. Aaron McDuffie Moore. The Sunday edition of the Durham Sun printed an account of this tragedy, and reported "Dr. A.M. Moore was called in and rendered assistance in dressing their burns." Only the younger boy survived this terrible ordeal. The older boy died that night.

This was probably one of many cases on a Friday for Dr. Aaron McDuffie Moore, founder of Black medicine in Durham, NC and co-founder of Durham's Black Wall Street. He himself had a five-year-old and a three-year-old waiting for him. He

likely took both burn victims to his home and tended them through the night, perhaps for one boy until his last breath in this world. In 1896, Dr. Moore's own home was still the only hospital serving the Black community. His revered wife, Sarah McCotta Dancy Moore, of Tarboro, NC, acted as his surgical assistant, head nurse, and mobilizer of healthcare volunteerism, while also being a mother and making a home for him and his daughters. This snapshot of a day in his life captures the many facets of what being Durham's first and only Black physician must have been like. By 1896, he had a few more colleagues in town, but in this case you can clearly see that Dr. Moore's job was more akin to a battlefield medic than any stereotype we can think of that conjures up a "country doctor." He was, in just this case alone: paramedic, forensic examiner, ambulance, ICU burn unit, trauma surgeon, dermatologist, orthopedist, pediatrician, psychiatrist and coroner. Dr. Moore cared deeply for children. It is extremely likely that he knew these boys from the Sunday School

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he taught or from the schools he always took time to visit and advocate for. He may well have delivered both of them; they were both of an age to be born within his tenure there. This was how ingrained Dr. Moore was in the health of and the lives and deaths taking place in Durham's Hayti (pronounced Hay-tie) community. His infinite kindness is documented throughout his life, so it's safe to say that those boys received the best care available to them for miles around. Even more impactful, the care those boys received was from a source they knew and trusted — a doctor of their own. Days of doctoring like that Friday in July of 1896 may have galvanized Dr. Moore's resolve even further in his campaign to open a free-standing Black hospital in Durham. He had only just co-founded his first entrepreneurial venture the year before, a Black-owned, Black-run pharmacy called the Durham Drug Company that served his patient population with dignity and fairness. He and his trusted friend and fellow entrepreneur John Henry Merrick combined their forces of statesmanship and

persuasion to make his dream of a hospital a reality. Dr. Moore not only wanted to be able to medically treat his people in state-of-the-art surroundings, he also wanted to start a teaching hospital for Black medical residents and a nursing school that could change the career trajectory and prospects of Black women. Merrick was the perfect partner with which to see this through; he was, after all, the reason Dr. Moore came to Durham in the first place.

We don't have precise documentation as to when Merrick and Dr. Moore first encountered each other, but Raleigh, NC had to have been the place. Dr. Moore was one of the revered second cadre of Leonard Medical School's students at Shaw University, and Merrick had made a name for himself as a business man in Raleigh with his legendary barbering and charismatic personality. There are numerous ways they could have encountered each other as two gentlemen of note of their race. Whenever it occurred, Merrick was already fully engaged in his plan to make a community of Black entrepreneurs and excellence happen



in Durham. He knew he wanted Dr. Moore to be a part of that and he knew this young doctor would need a post as soon as he graduated and passed the North Carolina State Medical Boards. Dr. Moore passed his Boards with flying colors, in a field of mostly white candidates and before white examiners, and arrived in Durham just after his 25th birthday to begin the process of hand-crafting the foundation of Durham's Black healthcare system. By 1888, Bull City, as Durham was nicknamed, had built itself up

around the tobacco and textile industry. It was a new town with no defining roots pre-Civil War. It was inventing itself as it went along, and a lot of that invention was driven by Black factory labor – highly skilled labor. Keeping expert workers around to do things like process tobacco and operate textile machinery required a decent standard of living. Merrick knew these infrastructure pain points from his associations with white clients who frequented his chair; wealthy clients with surnames like Duke and Carr. He recognized an opportunity for a kind of symbiosis that would make a stable Black middle class safe to grow, and perhaps to thrive. But health was an issue. Life expectancy within the Black community was around 35 years old or less. Families were itinerant and conditions were not conducive to wellness. Whatever could be built, it would have to be from the ground up. Merrick, however, had begun his career as a bricklayer and was a self-taught architect. He wasn't afraid of hard work, or of making and executing

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a grand plan. With the deep-thinking, faith-rooted, and brilliant Dr. Moore on his team, the trust and health of Durham's Black community could be bolstered and the structures, services and successes would surely follow.

If we return to that July in 1896 and look at the time period in light of the extraordinary upbuilding that was to come, it seems that momentum and will were certainly building in Dr. Moore, John Merrick and in their colleagues and co-founders who helped establish Durham's Black Wall Street. Dr. Moore's nephew C.C. Spaulding was also proving to be a promising young businessman, and Dr. Moore's mentorship and support for his education were paying off. Within the next three years, the North Carolina Mutual and Provident Association would be chartered, restructured and then relaunched with Dr. Moore and Merrick as both executives and personal stakeholders, and with C.C. Spaulding as its first official employee. This legendary Black enterprise, that would later be renamed The North Carolina

Mutual Life Insurance Company, was born in Dr. Moore's medical offices on Kemper Street and became the anchor for Durham's thriving Black Wall Street.

In 1901, Dr. Moore would see his dream realized. Lincoln Hospital would open its doors to treat whoever was in need of care, regardless of their ability to pay. Dr. Moore would teach Black medical residents, train nurses at the hospital's School of Nursing, and treat patients there for the rest of his life. The life expectancy, and the expectations for quality of life in Durham's Hayti community, were profoundly altered by a man who saw healthcare as a basic human right. It took time, trust, and an understanding of the power of investing in mutual well-being. It also took worldliness, brave leadership and a constant tending of the boundaries and the bonds that kept it all from burning to the ground.



Blake Hill-Saya is the author of Aaron McDuffie Moore: An African American Physician, Educator and Founder of Durham's Black Wall Street, University of North Carolina Press 2020.

THE FORGOTTEN STORY OF AMERICA'S FIRST BLACK SUPERSTARS

BY **DORIAN LYNKEY**

BBC | FEBRUARY 16, 2021 | (EXCERPT)



PHOTO: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey

In the 1920s US, glamorous, funny black female singers were the blues' first – and revolutionary hitmakers. Why were they then relegated to the sidelines, asks Dorian Lynskey.

On Valentine's Day 1920, a little over a century ago, a 28-year-old singer named Mamie Smith walked into a recording studio in New York City and made history. Six months later, she did it again.

The music industry had previously assumed that African Americans wouldn't buy record players, therefore there was no point in recording black artists. The entrepreneurial songwriter Perry Bradford, a man so stubborn he was known as "Mule", knew better. "There's 14 million Negroes in our great country and they will buy records if recorded by one of their own," he told Fred Hagar at Okeh Records. When a white singer dropped out of a recording session at the last minute, Bradford convinced Hagar to take a chance on Smith, a Cincinnati-born star of the Harlem club scene, and scored a substantial hit. Bradford then decided to use Smith to popularise a form of music that had been packing out venues in the South for almost 20 years. On 10 August, Smith and an ad hoc band called the Jazz Hounds recorded Bradford's

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Crazy Blues. Thus the first black singer to record anything also became the first to record the blues.

Rarely has the music industry's received wisdom been upended by a single hit. By selling an estimated one million copies in its first year, Crazy Blues was like the first geyser of oil in untapped ground, instantly revealing a huge appetite for records made by and for black people. As labels such as Okeh, Paramount and Columbia rushed into the so-called "race records" market, they snapped up dozens of women like Smith, ("Queen of the Blues"), including Gertrude "Ma" Rainey ("Mother of the Blues"), Bessie Smith ("Empress of the Blues"), Ida Cox ("Uncrowned Queen of the Blues"), Ethel Waters, Sara Martin, Edith Wilson, Victoria Spivey, Sippie Wallace and Alberta Hunter. "One of the phonograph companies made over four million dollars on the Blues," reported The Metronome in 1922. "Now every phonograph company has a coloured girl recording. Blues are here to stay." The classic blues was African-American culture's first mainstream

breakthrough and, for several years, it was effectively a female art form.

A century later, however, it's a different story. The reputation of Bessie Smith, the subject of a newly updated 1997 biography by Jackie Kay, was kept alive by prominent admirers such as Janis Joplin and Nina Simone, while Rainey's was revived by August Wilson's 1982 play Ma Rainey's Black Bottom and, more recently, by George C Wolfe's movie adaptation. The rest are largely forgotten. The history of the blues is dominated by men.

This eclipse is the result of a concerted effort by cultural gatekeepers, across several decades, to valorise certain aspects of the African-American experience while denigrating others. The female blues singers were on the losing side of a long, complicated argument about what the blues should be.

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/G1hF50F1jQ3>



‘THIS IS NOT A LESSON IN FORGIVENESS.’ WHY FREDERICK DOUGLASS MET WITH HIS FORMER ENSLAVER.

BY DARYL AUSTIN

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE | DECEMBER 2, 2020 | (EXCERPT)

After spending the first 20 years of his life in slavery, Frederick Douglass became a renowned author and orator and a towering figure in the movement to abolish slavery in America. A firm believer in the equality of all people, the great orator practiced what he preached.

The year 2020 will be remembered as a perfect storm of traumas. A global pandemic crashed on every shore. Politics rattled America. And a long-overdue racial reckoning began.

In the midst of this tumult, one name has emerged again and again—a man, it seems, destined to inform both his time and ours. Frederick Douglass once faced a reckoning of his own, and his words and deeds still teach us today.

Before becoming one of America’s great abolitionists, writers, orators, and icons, Frederick Douglass

spent the first 20 years of his life in bondage. Born into slavery in Talbot County, Maryland, in February 1818, he was enslaved by multiple people during his first two decades. But none affected him like Captain Thomas Auld.

The son of an American Army commander during the War of 1812, Auld became a prominent local shipbuilder and pious Christian. He inherited enslaved people through his first wife, Lucretia, and quickly adapted to the ways of slavery, becoming a cruel master.

In one of three autobiographies Douglass wrote, he recalls his time on the Auld plantation as “the scene of some of my saddest experiences of slave life.” He wrote that Auld “subjected me to his will, made property of my body and soul, reduced me to a chattel, hired me

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out to a noted slave breaker to be worked like a beast and flogged into submission...”

In 1838, after being passed around the Auld family and ending up back with the cruel captain, Douglass escaped the bonds of slavery disguised as a sailor and armed with false papers and a train ticket to the free North.

For the next 40-plus years, Auld remained a distant spectator as Douglass became one of the most famous and influential figures of his generation. Through mutual acquaintances, Auld was aware of Douglass’s best-selling books, read the many tributes to Douglass in newspaper after newspaper, and heard of the venues packed with people yearning to hear the master orator. Perhaps he even learned how much President Lincoln depended on Douglass’s insights and friendship.

In 1848 Douglass published an open letter to his “old master” Thomas Auld in which he denounced slaveholders as “agents of hell” and called for the equal treatment of all people.

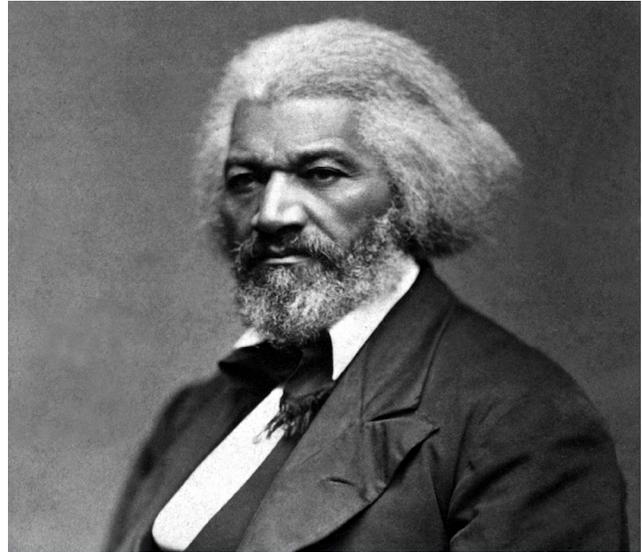


PHOTO: Frederick Douglass

Almost 30 years later Auld, nearing death, invited Douglass to meet with him.

Douglass and his former enslaver didn’t come face to face again until 1877, when Auld was 81. Sick and palsied, Auld knew he didn’t have much time left to make peace with his past. He sent his servant to invite the famous statesman to return to Auld’s home on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay once more.

Douglass accepted the invitation right away. The moment he arrived at Auld’s home was “the first time that a black man had ever entered a white home in St. Michaels by the front door, as an honored guest,” notes historian Dickson Preston, author of *Young Frederick Douglass*.

Douglass describes the encounter at length in his final autobiography. He remembers “holding [Auld’s] hand” and engaging in “friendly conversation.” When Auld addressed him as “Marshal Douglass” (Douglass was then serving as U.S. Marshal for the District of Columbia), he corrected him, saying, “not Marshal, but Frederick to you, as formerly.” Those words caused Auld to “shed tears” and show “deep emotion.” For his part, Douglass writes that “seeing the circumstances of his condition affected me deeply, and for a time choked my voice and made me speechless.”

Near the end of the emotional meeting, Douglass asked Auld what he thought about his running away four decades before. “Frederick,” Auld responded, “I always knew you were too smart to be a slave. Had I been in your place I should have done as you did.” Touched by the answer, Douglass replied, “I did not run away from you, but from slavery.”

Such a warm exchange between two men with their history may be difficult to imagine from a 21st-century perspective. As was

frequently the case with Douglass, however, there’s more to the encounter than meets the eye.

“Douglass shows us in this meeting that it is possible to carry oneself with dignity and to obey the dictates of justice, while still showing respect and kindness towards even those who have committed injustice toward you,” says Timothy Sandefur, a Douglass biographer and an adjunct scholar with the Cato Institute, a libertarian research institute in Washington, D.C.

But showing respect and kindness and forgetting past transgressions aren’t the same thing. “Any interpretation of this encounter that says Black people need to suck it up and forgive white people in order to have peace misses the mark completely,” says Noelle Trent, Director for Collections and Education at the National Civil Rights Museum. “This is not a lesson in forgiveness. This is a lesson in personal reconciliation.”

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/VHy150E1gvM>



MARY MCLEOD WAS AT THE VANGUARD OF MORE THAN 50 YEARS OF BLACK PROGRESS

WINNING THE VOTE FOR WOMEN WAS A MIGHTY STRUGGLE. SECURING FULL LIBERATION FOR WOMEN OF COLOR WAS NO LESS DAUNTING

BY MARTHA S. JONES

SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE | JULY / AUGUST 2020 | (EXCERPT)

The 19th Amendment, ratified in August 1920, paved the way for American women to vote, but the educator and activist Mary McLeod Bethune knew the work had only just begun: The amendment alone would not guarantee political power to black women. Thanks to Bethune's work that year to register and mobilize black voters in her hometown of Daytona, Florida, new black voters soon outnumbered new white voters in the city. But a reign of terror followed. That fall, the Ku Klux Klan marched on Bethune's boarding school for black girls; two years later, ahead of the 1922 elections, the Klan paid another threatening visit, as over 100 robed figures carrying banners emblazoned with the words "white supremacy" marched on the school in retaliation against Bethune's continued efforts to get

black women to the polls. Informed of the incoming nightriders, Bethune took charge: "Get the students into the dormitory," she told the teachers, "get them into bed, do not share what is happening right now." The students safely tucked in, Bethune directed her faculty: "The Ku Klux Klan is marching on our campus, and they intend to burn some buildings."

The faculty fanned out across the campus; Bethune stood in the center of the quadrangle and held her head high as the parade entered the campus by one entrance—and promptly exited by another. The Klansmen were on campus for just a few minutes. Perhaps they knew an armed cadre of local black men had decided to lie in wait nearby, ready to fight back if the Klansmen turned violent. Perhaps they assumed the sight of a procession would be



PHOTO: Mary McLeod Bethune

enough to keep black citizens from voting.

If nightriders thought they could frighten Bethune, they were wrong: That week, she showed up at the Daytona polls along with over 100 other black citizens who had come out to vote. That summer, pro-Jim Crow Democratic candidates swept the state, dashing the hopes of black voters who had battled to win a modicum of political influence. Yet Bethune's unshakable devotion to equality would eventually outlast the mobs that stood in her way.

Bethune's resolve was a legacy of black Americans' rise to political power during Reconstruction. Bethune was born in 1875 in South Carolina, where the state's 1868 constitution guaranteed equal rights to black citizens, many of them formerly enslaved people. Black men joined political parties, voted and held public office, from Richard H.

Cain, who served in the State Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives, to Jonathan J. Wright, who sat on the state's Supreme Court. Yet this period of tenuous equality was soon crushed, and by 1895, a white-led regime had used intimidation and violence to retake control of lawmaking in South Carolina, as it had in other Southern states, and a new state constitution kept black citizens from the polls by imposing literacy tests and property qualifications.

Bethune's political education began at home. Her mother and grandmother had been born enslaved; Mary, born a decade after slavery's abolition, was the 15th of 17 children and was sent to school while some of her siblings continued to work on the family farm. After completing studies at Scotia Seminary and, in 1895, at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Bethune took a teaching post in Augusta, Georgia, and dedicated herself to educating black children in spite of the barriers that Jim Crow set in their way.

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/UuJB50E1gUV>





PHOTO: Amanda Gorman at the inauguration of President Joe Biden

‘UNITY WITH PURPOSE.’ AMANDA GORMAN AND MICHELLE OBAMA DISCUSS ART, IDENTITY AND OPTIMISM

BY MICHELLE OBAMA

TIME | FEBRUARY 4, 2020 | (EXCERPT)

Amanda Gorman captivated the world when she read her poem “The Hill We Climb” at President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris’ Jan. 20 Inauguration ceremony. Sitting just feet away from the 22-year-old that day was former First Lady Michelle Obama, who had met Gorman twice before—in 2016 at a White House event for the National Student Poets program

and again at a 2018 event for Black Girls Rock, an organization that seeks to empower women and girls. Gorman, who was named the first National Youth Poet Laureate in 2017, emerged in an instant as the latest inspiring young artist of the renaissance. Her three upcoming books shot to the top of Amazon’s bestseller list and the NFL soon announced plans for her to recite

an original poem at Super Bowl LV. In a remote interview, Gorman and Obama covered topics ranging from the role of art in activism to the pressures Black women face in the spotlight.

Michelle Obama: We're here to talk about the current renaissance in Black art—this surge of creativity we've seen over the past six years or so. What do you make of calling this period a "renaissance"? And where do you see yourself within it?

Amanda Gorman: We're living in an important moment in Black art because we're living in an important moment in Black life. Whether that's looking at what it means politically to have an African-American President before Trump, or looking at what it means to have the Black Lives movement become the largest social movement in the United States. What's been exciting for me is I get to absorb and to live in that creation I see from other African-American artists that I look up to. But then I also get to create art and participate in that historical record. We're seeing it in fashion, we're seeing it in the visual arts. We're seeing

it in dance, we're seeing it in music. In all the forms of expression of human life, we're seeing that artistry be informed by the Black experience. I can't imagine anything more exciting than that.

Like the rest of the country, I was profoundly moved as I watched you read your poem "The Hill We Climb" at last month's Inauguration. The power of your words blew me away—but it was more than that. It was your presence onstage, the confidence you exuded as a young Black woman helping to turn the page to a more hopeful chapter in American leadership. I have to say I felt proud too; you've always had so much poise and grace, but seeing you address the whole country like that, I couldn't help thinking to myself: Well, this girl has grown all the way up. It made me so happy. How did you prepare yourself for a moment like that?

Every time we meet, I secretly hope you forget me because then I get a clean slate. But you being the amazing person you are,

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you always remember. When I first wrote the poem, I was thinking that in the week leading up to the Inauguration I would be rehearsing every day. But everything was moving so quickly, I actually didn't get to really sit down with the text until the night before. Most of my preparation was stepping into the emotionality of the poem, getting my body and my psyche ready for that moment. There was a lot of the night-before performing in the mirror.

You are part of a rising generation that isn't afraid to call out racism and injustice when you see it. Your generation was out front at the Black Lives Matter protests last summer, and you were using your voices long before that to demand change. How do you think art fits into these larger social movements? Do you think about these things as you write?

Absolutely. Poetry and language are often at the heartbeat of movements for change. If we look to the Black Lives Matter protests, you see banners that say, "They buried us but

they didn't know we were seeds." That's poetry being marshaled to speak of racial justice. If you analyze Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, it's a great document of rhetoric that's also a great document of poetry, of imagery, of song. Never underestimate the power of art as the language of the people.

Poetry sometimes gets a bad rap—people think it's all stuffy. How do you think we can make poetry accessible and cool, especially for a young audience?

Poetry is already cool. Where we run into trouble is often we are looking through such a tight pinhole of what poems can be. Specifically we're looking at dead white men. Those are the poems that are taught in school and referred to as classics. We really need to break out of the pathology that poetry is only owned by certain elites. Where we can start is highlighting and celebrating poets who reflect humanity in all of its diverse colors and breadth.

Tell me about the poets who came before you. Where do you draw inspiration—and do you draw

inspiration from artists working in other forms?

I love Black poets. I love that as a Black girl, I get to participate in that legacy. So that’s Yusef Komunyakaa, Sonia Sanchez, Tracy K. Smith, Phillis Wheatley. And then I look to artists who aren’t just poets. While I was writing the Inaugural poem, I was reading a lot of Frederick Douglass, a lot of Winston Churchill, a lot of Abraham Lincoln. I was also listening to the composers who I feel are great storytellers, but they don’t use words so I try to fill in that rhetoric myself. A lot of Hans Zimmer, Dario Marianelli, Michael Giacchino.

You have a mantra you recite to yourself before performing—can you share it here, and tell me how you came to choose these words?

This mantra I’m about to say is actually in part inspired by Lin-Manuel Miranda’s lyrics in Moana in the song, “Song of the Ancestors.” Whenever I listen to songs, I rewrite them in my head. That song goes: “I’m the daughter of the village chief. We’re descended from voyagers who made the way

across the world.” Something like that. Sorry Lin. I really wanted something that I could repeat because I get so terrified whenever I perform. So my mantra is: “I’m the daughter of Black writers who are descended from Freedom Fighters who broke their chains and changed the world. They call me.” I say that to remind myself of ancestors that are all around me whenever I’m performing.

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/35JB50E1iGx>



MEET THE BLIND PIANO PLAYER WHO'S SO GOOD, SCIENTISTS ARE STUDYING HIM

BY SHARYNN ALFONSI

60 MINUTES | OCTOBER 11, 2020 | (EXCERPT)

Matthew Whitaker has been rocking crowds with his improvisational piano playing for most of his short life. He may be blind, but a neuroscientist has found Whitaker's visual cortex goes into overdrive when he plays.

Every so often, someone so young does something so amazing you can't help but wonder, how do they do that? That's what happened the first time we heard Matthew Whitaker play piano. Matthew is a jazz pianist who is blind, and since the age of 11, he's been performing around the world. He's been called a prodigy and his talent is so extraordinary he's also caught the attention of scientists who are now studying his brain and trying to understand his vision of music.

Whitaker doesn't just play music, he plays with it. Twisting melodies, crafting complex harmonies and improvising at lightning speed. It's

acoustic acrobatics performed over 88 keys and it is not for the faint of heart.

This past spring, Whitaker made his first appearance at the New Orleans Jazz Festival.

"It is amazing to be here. Like, this is where jazz started," Whitaker told 60 Minutes correspondent Sharyn Alfonsi.

Whitaker plays with his shoes off so he can feel the pedals and his head turned so he can feel the crowd. The sheer complexity and spontaneity of his sets make the most seasoned musicians sweat and jazz fans go wild. But even with all his talent, Whitaker said he still feels some nerves before a big show.

"Honestly, I was a tiny bit nervous," Whitaker said. "But, you know, once I started playin', I felt good."

Jazz Fest is a jambalaya for the senses. Whitaker, Alfonsi and her

MEET THE BLIND PIANO PLAYER... (CONT.)

crew negotiated their way through the thick rous of humidity, suffocating crowds and the 14 stages of music that often boil over into the fairgrounds. But as they walked around, Alfonsi noticed Whitaker was able to cut through the sensory assault and identify songs in seconds.

“He’s playing ‘Just Closer.’ Yeah. ‘Just A Closer Walk with Thee,’” Whitaker said, identifying a song he heard.

“I heard like three notes and you already know what song it is? Lord,” Alfonsi said.

Whitaker grew up in Hackensack, New Jersey. His parents, Moses and May Whitaker, say Matthew had an ear for music before he could even talk.

“He was playing ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.’ But he was playin’ it with both hands,” Moses Whitaker said.

“Matt was playing the chords and the melody of the song at the same [time.] He hadn’t had a lesson or anything. And he was three years old. So my question was, ‘Okay, who showed him how to do that? Somebody had to show Matthew how to-- how to play this song.’ And nobody showed him.”

Matthew Whitaker was born at 24 weeks. He weighed 1 pound 11 ounces. His parents were told he had less than a 50% chance of survival. One of the many complications he faced was retinopathy of prematurity, a disease which can lead to blindness.

“I think at the time I didn’t think he was gonna make it,” May Whitaker said. “So it was, you know, just very scary.”

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/tG2H50E1iUP>





PHOTO: B.B. King playing the guitar known as 'Lucille'

WHY ALL AMERICAN MUSIC IS ROOTED IN AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPRESSION, A NEW MUSEUM SHOWS

BY KRISTEN ROGERS

CNN | JANUARY 28, 2021 | (EXCERPT)

As more people are starting to learn about the history of African Americans, there is one component that's particularly integral to understanding the national culture: music.

African American artists created and influenced genres from the blues, jazz and hip-hop to rock and roll. Bluesmen Muddy Waters

and B.B. King electrified that genre and galvanized rock guitarists, and trumpeter and composer Louis Armstrong changed the jazz landscape — all building on traditions brought to American soil by enslaved people.

Educating the world on the central role African Americans have played in “creating the American

soundtrack” and preserving that legacy are the missions of the National Museum of African American Music, which debuted in Nashville on Martin Luther King Jr. Day on January 18. The museum opens to the public on Saturday.

On display here are interactive exhibits as well as artifacts including a Gibson guitar, “Lucille,” played by B.B. King, a Grammy won by jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald, a gold-plated trumpet owned by Armstrong and a kimono worn by singer-songwriter and pianist Alicia Keys.

In development since 2002, the museum seeks to deepen visitors’ appreciation of American music by showing that there is more to the stories of more than 50 music genres and subgenres — details that have been obscured by factors such as racism, cultural appropriation and industry labeling, said NMAAM President and CEO Henry Beecher Hicks and Dina Bennett, an ethnomusicologist and NMAAM’s curatorial director.

“Often the story lines of music and of these songs deal with social justice, the quest for freedom and

the social quest for equality, for a better life,” Hicks said. “Those kinds of messages are nothing new. And they really are a core element of the story that we tell.”

While other museums have focused on different genres of African American music, this is the first comprehensive museum that “has actually laid out the experience of African Americans in the creation of these musical traditions that spanned from the 1600s, when the first Africans were brought to the US as enslaved peoples, to the present day,” Bennett said.

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/aBqo50E1jC7>



AT 107, 106 AND 100, REMAINING TULSA MASSACRE SURVIVORS PLEAD FOR JUSTICE

THE THREE KNOWN SURVIVORS, WHO WERE ALL CHILDREN IN 1921, OFFERED THEIR FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS OF THE RACE MASSACRE AT A HEARING IN WASHINGTON.

BY DANIEL VICTOR

NEW YORK TIMES | MAY 20, 2021 (UPDATED JUNE 1, 2021) | (EXCERPT)

The three known survivors of the 1921 race massacre in Tulsa, Okla., in which white mobs gunned down Black people in the streets and Black-owned businesses were burned to the ground, appeared before a congressional committee on Wednesday, arguing that justice was far overdue.

Adding a personal touch to a House Judiciary subcommittee considering reparations for survivors and descendants of the massacre, the three centenarians recalled how the violence, among the worst attacks of racial violence in U.S. history, changed the trajectory of their lives. They described feeling safe, even prosperous, before the attack, surrounded by friends and family in a neighborhood of mostly Black-owned businesses.

Then, on June 1, a day that is rarely mentioned in history textbooks, the neighborhood of Greenwood, home to a business district known as Black Wall Street, was destroyed by a white mob. The mob looted and set fire to the businesses, and historians estimate up to 300 people were killed, 8,000 left homeless, 23 churches burned and more than 1,200 homes destroyed.

Viola Ford Fletcher, 107, said she still remembered seeing the Black men being shot and bodies in the street, could smell the smoke and hear the screams. She was 7 at the time.

“I have lived through the massacre every day,” she said. “Our country may forget this history, but I cannot.”

Hughes Van Ellis, Ms. Fletcher's 100-year-old younger brother, said the survivors had been made to feel that they were "unworthy of justice, that we were less valued than whites."

"We aren't just black-and-white pictures on a screen," he said. "We are flesh and blood. I was there when it happened. I'm still here."

All of the committee members — Democrats and Republicans — rose for standing ovations after the survivors spoke.

The survivors are among the plaintiffs who have sued the city of Tulsa, claiming the city and the Chamber of Commerce tried to cover up the attacks and distort the narrative of what had happened, deflecting blame onto the Black victims and depicting them as instigators. They seek punitive damages, tax relief and scholarships for survivors and their descendants, along with priority for Black Tulsans in awarding city contracts.

The attacks were sparked when a Black man, Dick Rowland, was accused of sexually assaulting a white woman, Sarah Page, on May

30, 1921. Hundreds of armed white men gathered outside the courthouse where Mr. Rowland was being held, and a group of armed Black men arrived to prevent a lynching. After a shot was fired, the white mob chased the Black men to Greenwood.

A grand jury blamed the Black men for the riots. No one was ever charged with a crime for the riots.

Mr. Rowland was later exonerated and charges against him were dropped, as the authorities concluded he most likely tripped and stepped on the woman's foot.

For the better part of a century, Tulsa did little to remember the victims of the massacre. There was no memorial, no yearly commemoration, and even many Tulsa residents knew little about it. Residents began marking the day with modest ceremonies in 1996.

In recent years, awareness of the massacre has been growing.

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/8Ckd50F1jVY>



THIS BRAND OFFERS STYLISH CLOTHING SPECIFICALLY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

BY MOLLY SIMMS

THE OPRAH MAGAZINE | JANUARY 15, 2021 | (EXCERPT)

With magnetic buttons, special seams, adjustable sleeves, and more, Yarrow is a line of functional clothing that also looks good.

For most of us, getting dressed every day is an activity so simple, we can do it in the dark (and sometimes do). We try on a shirt, then change our minds completely, swap it for a new one, throw on some jeans. But for the 61 million-plus Americans and Canadians with a disability, the tiny motions required for fastening a button or putting on a pair of pants can be part of a grueling, multi-step process that takes hours—if it can happen at all.

Maura Horton watched her late husband struggle with the buttons on his shirts, due to the brutal effects of Parkinson's disease on his fine motor skills. Now, she hopes to give back both time and independence to the “adaptive community”—whether

that means those coping with an illness, injury, disability, or just the everyday effects of aging—via her clothing company, Yarrow. Its skinny jeans, knit jackets, and tunic dresses look as effortlessly stylish as any other line, but these pieces feature clever tweaks that completely transform the way clothing functions.

Yarrow is Horton's followup to MagnaReady, a men's line she created in 2013. That brand's crisp Oxford shirts close with small magnets, but feature just-for-show buttons that make them indistinguishable from other menswear. Horton's husband Don was a 48-year-old football coach at North Carolina State in 2006 when he was diagnosed with early-onset Parkinson's.

“One day after a game,” she says, “he was stuck in a locker room, unable to get dressed. A side effect

THIS BRAND OFFERS STYLISH CLOTHING... (CONT.)

of Parkinson's is a lack of dopamine, which causes dexterity and mobility issues; he couldn't get dressed to catch the team plane. He and one of his players at the time, Russell Wilson—who's now with the Seattle Seahawks—were the only two left in the locker room. Russell came over and helped him get dressed in silence."

When Don arrived home that night, Horton could see he was upset. "We really hadn't talked about the progression of his disease yet," she says, "and how it would affect his ability to do basic things." Wanting to help, she hunted online for clothes tailored to his condition, but her shopping experience was a letdown.

"I overnighted a shirt," says Horton, "and when we opened it, he looked at me like, Are you serious? It was paper thin, almost like a hospital gown, with velcro closures. Around the same time, I saw the iPad covers that were coming out with really small magnets inside. And I thought, 'If they can put them there, why can't we put them into clothing?'"

That's how Horton delved into a world of functional fashion that's

actually fashionable, teaming up with designers who understood the clothing concerns of those with physical challenges—which go beyond just fastening buttons. "We had to really look at how people use their clothing," she says. "Do they need the rise in their jeans to be higher in the back, because they're in a seated wheelchair? Do they need their pants' seams to be in a different place, so they don't get pressure spots? Are they taking medications that could cause swelling or heat changes during the day? If they have a prosthetic limb, how could it get stuck when clothes are coming on or off?"

"Ideally, you can't tell it's adaptive clothing—it should look just like any other clothing line."

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/4LNw50E1kKK>



“BLACK WOMEN BEST”: THE U.S. ECONOMY BENEFITS WHEN WE CENTER BLACK WOMEN

BY ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN

TEEN VOGUE | FEBRUARY 1, 2021 | (EXCERPT)

Shortly after Georgia flipped blue and elected its first Black senator, Reverend Raphael Warnock, many took to social media to praise the unrelenting efforts of Black women in making his victory a reality, from WNBA players to Stacey Abrams and Black Voters Matter cofounder LaTosha Brown. Black women, it turns out, had saved America again, even though Taylor Crumpton had warned the country not to “make us do it again.”

However, later that same day, the country watched as the lives of Black congresswomen were endangered by the Capitol riots — a stark juxtaposition to the well-deserved praise Black women received for the historic wins in Georgia. The two seemingly separate realities make up one painful, all-too-familiar truth: Black women are often expected to save a nation that would not save us.

The simultaneous praise and danger came on the heels of a Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report that showed that the number of men on payrolls in December rose by 16,000 while the number of women fell by 156,000. A separate BLS survey found that fewer Black and Latina women had jobs in December, compared to November, while more white women were employed.

These trends, although discouraging, are not surprising. Our economy has never included everyone — and it still doesn't. If we take our cue from the 2008 financial crisis, the fact that Black women continue to work through the worst crises only to be left behind by economic recovery efforts is a uniquely American phenomenon. Did you know that following the Great Recession, Black women lost 258,000 jobs and their unemployment rate rose more than any other group, irrespective of race

and gender? Thirteen years later, in the middle of a global pandemic and unprecedented job crisis, nothing has changed.

That is why we need Black Women Best, a term coined by Janelle Jones, recently appointed chief economist of the Department of Labor, which calls for an economy in which, as Jones writes, “Black women and [our] needs are centered — [we] are being paid fairly, attaining new levels of education, surviving in hospitals, building wealth, and more.” Right now, there are several ways that everyone in our country is struggling that tie directly back to the economic well-being of Black women:

Gender pay gap: If it takes Black women 19 months to make what white men make in one year, and 15 months for women to make what white men make, then focusing on closing the gender pay gap for Black women effectually impacts all women.

Student debt crisis: Recently, Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley noted that Black women have the highest student debt across all

groups irrespective of race and gender, which means aiming policies that ensure student debt forgiveness for Black women is a win for all dealing with debt.

Economic insecurity: More than 68% of Black mothers are the primary breadwinners of their households, and Black women face the most challenges when it comes to paying rent. Understanding that Black women are facing these two realities makes it painfully obvious that a one-time stimulus check is not enough to cover basic living necessities for anyone.

Small businesses: Despite efforts to expand funding for small businesses during the pandemic, only 12% of the businesses that received federal funding were minority-owned, and as Inc. reports, of minority-women-owned business, Black women make up the majority. Any efforts to provide relief to the hardest-hit businesses would inevitably benefit any other business that is also struggling at this time.

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We know what the country looks like when Black women are centered. There is no better example of Black Women Best at work than the Georgia runoff elections. Both Stacey Abrams and LaTosha Brown knew and deeply understood how centering Black people, especially Black women, would save our country from its worst self. Additionally, WNBA players threw their support behind Reverend Warnock because they understood that in order for the humanity of everyone to be fully realized, they could not align themselves with hate and violence despite the potential professional cost.

We simply cannot build back better without retiring the rhetoric that hails Black women as the arbiters of America’s conscience but fails to hold America accountable for withholding freedom from Black women in every imaginable space. Kamala Harris becoming the first Black and Indian American woman vice president means that our society must commit to equipping, empowering, and elevating all Black women

beyond empty Black Lives Matter statements and disingenuous learning sessions.

Brittany Packnett Cunningham puts it best: “When Black people win, everybody benefits.”

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/cFb650E1lT9>



MEET 5 BLACK RESEARCHERS FIGHTING FOR DIVERSITY AND EQUITY IN SCIENCE

THESE RESEARCHERS ARE STANDING UP FOR THEIR BLACK PEERS IN STEM FIELDS

BY SCIENCE NEWS STAFF

SCIENCE NEWS | DECEMBER 16, 2020 | (EXCERPT)

2020 events launched by Black scientists, such as #BlackBirdersWeek, co-organized by urban ecologist Deja Perkins of North Carolina State University, shed light on the Black experience and showcased numerous Black people in STEM who are contributing innovative work in their respective fields.

As the Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum this year, Black scientists jumped in to call for inclusivity at school and work.

Within days of the news that a Black bird watcher, Christian Cooper, had been harassed in New York City's Central Park, the social media campaign #BlackBirdersWeek was launched (SN Online: 6/4/20), followed closely by #BlackInNeuro, #BlackInSciComm and many others.

Young scientists led many of these efforts to make change happen.

Science News talked with some of these new leaders, as well as a few researchers who have been pushing for diversity in the sciences for years and see new opportunities for progress.

The following conversations have been edited for length and clarity.

Deja Perkins

Urban ecologist, North Carolina State University; President, Black-AFinSTEM; Co-organizer, #Black-BirdersWeek

What prompted you to act?

After the May 25 incident that happened to Christian Cooper, Anna Gifty Opoku-Agyeman another member of BlackAFinSTEM [a collective of Black professionals working across STEM fields],

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thought that it would be wise to highlight other Black birders. BlackAFinSTEM organized a week of events within about 48 hours. It was a good way to capture the momentum and bring attention to the experience of Black people outdoors. Any one of us could have been Christian Cooper. A lot of BlackAFinSTEM members have experienced racism in the field or have had negative experiences with the police.

What makes this year's diversity initiatives different?

The collective effort of all of these events — #BlackHikersWeek, #BlackBotanistsWeek, #BlackInNationalParks, #BlackInNeuroWeek — is bringing more attention to the murders and harassment of Black people who are carrying out everyday tasks. These initiatives are making it easier for people who want to hop on board and make a difference.

Have you seen immediate effects?

Some organizations quickly responded to break down some of the barriers

that prevent Black and Indigenous people from entering into the environmental space. The Free Binoculars for Black Birders campaign provided binoculars to anyone who identified as Black and wanted a pair of binoculars, and a similar campaign launched specifically for kids. Some organizations, such as the Wilson Ornithological Society, offered free memberships. And we have seen an increase in organizations reaching out to BlackAFinSTEM to hire some of our members for presentations, workshops and program development.

What could get in the way of lasting change?

One barrier I can foresee is gatekeeping. It's still on a lot of organizations, nonprofits and government agencies to hire qualified Black professionals. Those groups hold the power for change, and so they have to take the initiative to hire qualified individuals.

With #BlackBirdersWeek and BlackAFinSTEM, we have been creating our own table to get more people engaged and involved in the

outdoors. But we can only do so much. It really comes down to partnerships, working with other established organizations to continue to make change.

— Carolyn Wilke

Raven Baxter

Science education graduate student, University at Buffalo; Raven the Science Maven on YouTube; Founder, @BlackInSciComm

What prompted you to act?

I founded #BlackInSciComm out of the need for Black voices in the science space. This year has been very hard for many, but particularly for Black people. And we've been feeling like Black science communicators have been using their voices advocating for racial justice and for their lives and for their freedom. That comes at a great price. They are sacrificing their voices in science to make sure that people understand that their lives matter. And, you know, that shouldn't even have to be the case.

What makes this year's diversity initiatives different?

We saw the importance of owning our own narrative. That's why we're seeing so many "Black in X" movements. Everybody is unique and doing special work. It should all be celebrated.

What long-term effects do you envision?

I think it's going to be amazing for future generations. One of the biggest issues that marginalized folks have is imposter syndrome — the product of not feeling like you belong because you don't see anybody like you in your field. So you're doing well and you're succeeding, but you feel like you're an imposter because the narrative that's been pushed for so long is that we're not in these fields or that we don't do well in these fields. But that's not true.

How do this year's efforts make you feel?

We're setting roots that spread a message that Black people do belong in things, and building up

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new generations of STEM professionals. I can tell that people want to support and amplify Black voices and invest in the community and it's so cool. I just feel very loved, and I feel like we are giving love.

— Bethany Brookshire

Brian Nord

Cosmologist; Fermilab; Co-organizer, Strike for Black Lives

What prompted you to act?

In early June, theoretical physicist Chanda Prescod-Weinstein of the University of New Hampshire and I initiated the Strike for Black Lives. The Particles for Justice collective, a group of scientists who originally convened to condemn sexism in STEM, organized and promoted the strike very quickly.

I had worked for a long time within the institution, paved pathways to make change, and I tried to make new pathways. But, when I looked around, I saw promises unkept and much work to be done. For years, there's been way too few Black fac-

ulty in physics plus too little investment by academic institutions in Black communities. And there's been little to no accountability for racist and misogynist behavior that drives Black people away from research. It's time for these things to end. We needed to do something different.

What was the aim of the June 10 Strike for Black Lives?

The core objective was for non-Black scientists to stop doing science for a day and invest their time into building an antiracist, just research environment. For Black scientists and other academics, the day was intended for rest or doing the work they may not have otherwise had time to do. Often, when I spend time fighting racism in STEM, this is time that I don't spend doing research or with family. That's time that my white colleagues have to get research done.

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/8ICs50E1mvX>



‘WE HAVE TO DO A BETTER JOB’: HOW STRUCTURAL RACISM IN MEDICINE HARMS BOTH DOCTORS AND PATIENTS

BY ADAM FEUERSTEIN, DAMIAN GARDE, AND REBECCA ROBBINS
STAT NEWS | JULY 17, 2020 | (EXCERPT)

Early in her medical career, physician Rachel Issaka encountered a liver transplant patient who was surprised that she, a Black woman, was one of their treating physicians. All of the other physicians in the same room were white, but none said anything.

Today, Issaka is an assistant professor at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and the University of Washington in Seattle, specializing in gastroenterology and hepatology. But even years later, that moment has remained with her. Last week, Issaka wrote an essay in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* urging all medical professionals to call out and dismantle structural racism in medicine.

Issaka spoke with STAT about her essay and the broader subject of racism in health and health care.

Your experience in that patient’s room was not overt racism. ... But as you wrote in your essay, it’s still had an outsized negative impact on you. What were you thinking and feeling at that time?

So in that moment, I had just started my second year of gastroenterology fellowship, and gastroenterology is a highly competitive specialty. And so oftentimes you go through a rigorous application process to get in. I had been chief medical resident at Northwestern University in Chicago. I had had a great year completing hundreds of procedures, having received great reviews from peers and patients. And I was really on this high. And going into that second year, really feeling very competent and reassured in the decision I had made to pursue this specific field in medicine. So that en-

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counter in that patient room really brought me right back down to Earth.

And as I said in the essay, structural racism is really all of the policies and the procedures and the norms that are perpetuated that lead individuals to believe what and who, you know, people should look like. In that moment, that patient had a very specific picture of what her doctor should look like. And that was not what I looked like in that moment. So it really just brought me back down to Earth and brought to my attention how oversized the impact of structural racism is in our country.

How did your understanding of that moment change in the intervening years?

In that moment, I felt as if it was something that I did wrong, and I felt that my inability to respond was my fault. And I remember having this conversation with my family immediately after, feeling really disappointed that I didn't say something articulate. And I asked them, what would you have said in that

moment? And we had this entire brainstorming session and we came up with, you know, why couldn't they have said, "It's good for all of us that Dr. Issaka is here?"

And over the years, I've really begun to evolve to understand that it wasn't my failing. It wasn't, you know, the onus was not on me. And it was really up to the team and especially those who were leading the team to have stood up for me. And now that I am an attending physician who leads teams and lead students and trainees, I step into that role, because I remember instances like the ones I described where those who were leading me did not step up.

So many of the calls for action today around racism and inequality are focused on law enforcement and criminal justice. But you believe medicine also needs its own racial reckoning. What do you think that will require?

I think that has to begin with medicine and the medical profession owning and just accepting their own role in perpetuating structural racism. So, you know, medicine as

a profession for years perpetuated this message that Black people did not feel pain, that Black people did not need sleep. A lot of these messages that were perpetuated were used to justify slavery and then later on used to justify denying Black people pain medicines when needed.

So one, medicine must first acknowledge its own kind of role in perpetuating structural racism in medicine by exploiting patients, by excluding individuals. Black people were not allowed initially to practice medicine. And it's only very recently that, you know, we see Black people in medicine. So one, recognizing their role in exclusion and exploitation. And then once we recognize that, we need to teach that in a very structured and systematic way to those who are entering the profession. So they have that understanding and therefore don't perpetuate it in their own practice. And once we teach it, then we need to measure if our teaching is working at actually reducing the ways in which new learners and new physicians are interacting with their own colleagues and with their own patients.

In your essay, you cite a statistic that Black Americans represent 13% of the U.S. population, but only 3.6% of full-time medical school faculty are Black. What do medical schools need to do to close that gap?

I think we have to do a better job as far as developing the pipeline of those who are entering medicine. Right now, if institutions want to recruit Black people into medicine, all they have to do is, you know, go in and recruit that individual from an existing institution. It just moves the numbers around, but it doesn't actually increase representation.

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/X7x050E1mRP>



FANTASTIC NEW TECH FOR PEOPLE WITH LOW VISION OR BLINDNESS

BY BARBARA STEPKO

AARP | FEBRUARY 18, 2021 | (EXCERPT)

Low vision affects an estimated 12 million adults over 40 in the U.S., often due to issues such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, retinitis pigmentosa and diabetes-related eye diseases. These sight-stealers can make navigating daily life more challenging, but a slew of fascinating technological innovations are able to help people with vision problems better perceive their environments and, therefore, live more independent lives.

“There are devices that try to take advantage of whatever little vision the person has to try to get them to see better, and there are devices that try to use other senses because their vision sense is essentially gone,” says Calvin W. Roberts, M.D., host of *On Tech & Vision With Dr. Cal Roberts*, a podcast series from Lighthouse Guild, a nonprofit organization dedicated to vision rehabilitation, technology and advocacy for people who are

visually impaired. Roberts, who’s also president and CEO of Lighthouse Guild, and a clinical professor of ophthalmology at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City, points to one such jaw-dropper, the OrCam MyEye Pro: a small, wireless camera that clips onto the arm of any pair of eyeglasses, allowing blind people to “read” their mail, recognize friends and even decipher money. And that’s just for starters.

Here are details about the cutting edge of vision tech. Some of these devices are very pricey, but their makers may offer financing options (veterans may also qualify for assistance).

OrCam MyEye Pro

To decipher the world around them, blind people employ all of their four remaining senses, particularly sound — with the brain using auditory cues to create mental images. That’s the premise behind

the OrCam MyEye Pro: This cutting-edge technology helps those who are completely blind make sense of the visual world by describing what they can't see.

A small wireless smart camera about the size of your index finger attaches with a magnet to the arm of any eyeglasses. Point your finger or tap the touch bar and the camera will capture an image of what's in front of you and communicate the info audibly through a tiny speaker that rests above the ear. It makes shopping easier — scanning barcodes and identifying the denomination of the bill you're holding.

People can teach OrCam to memorize and identify hundreds of everyday objects (from logos on buildings to items in the fridge). The device continuously scans your surroundings, waiting for you to point to whatever you're interested in, then gives you the info you need. It even has facial recognition, so you can program it to remember your spouse, grandkids or coworkers. Use the camera to take a picture of a person's face and it's automatically stored within the device. Whenever

the camera spots the person, it will identify them by name.

It also responds to voice commands, reading text from printed surfaces and digital screens. Open a newspaper and say, "Read the football article," and it will do just that. OrCam MyEye Pro can help users make sense of their mail. Pick up an envelope, hold the clear window in front of your face, let OrCam's camera snap a picture, and it will tell you where the mail is from. Even more impressive, says Roberts: "You can hold up your electric bill and ask, 'How much do I owe?' The device will read through the entire bill, quickly, and respond, 'You owe \$31.92.' It will even tell you when the payment is due. Amazing!"

Cost: OrCam MyEye Pro costs \$4,250. Financial assistance is available for OrCam MyEye, depending on where the user lives and the specifics of his or her situation. Eligible veterans may qualify for the device through the VA.

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Where to buy: You can purchase OrCam MyEye Pro on orcaml.com, thelowvisionshop.com, or Amazon.

WeWALK

When it comes to aiding blind people, the use of a white cane (or probing cane) is invaluable for navigating through the world. The taps provide information, helping the person detect obstacles, know when they've hit a curb or come to stairs, or that someone is standing in front of them. You might say that WeWALK, an innovative smart cane with a touch pad and speaker, does the white cane one better.

First, through the use of ultrasound, WeWALK can detect obstacles that are above chest level — such as tree branches, telephone poles and traffic signs — and alert the user by sending out a vibration. Secondly, it's efficient.

"Today, most every person with a white cane is also using GPS navigation on their phone," notes Roberts. But juggling a white cane in one hand while using a smartphone in the other can be tricky.

The WeWALK smart cane can wirelessly connect to the smartphone, so users can keep the phone in a pocket while walking, leaving one hand free — and allowing them to devote full attention to what's going on around them.

And users can employ the cane's touch pad to access an array of features. For example, WeWALK can connect with public transportation. "If you're walking to a bus stop," says Roberts, "it'll tell you the number of the bus that's coming, as well as when it's coming."

Cost: \$599 for 51-, 54- or 59-inch cane

Where to buy: The WeWALK smart cane runs on Android and iOS-based mobile phones. It features a micro USB input that can be used to charge the battery, with one full charge lasting up to five hours of usage time, which means a few days' usage. You can buy the smart cane on wewalk.io or thelowvisionshop.com.

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/q5AY50E1n72>



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WALLY TRIPLETT, THE FIRST BLACK DRAFTEE TO PLAY IN THE NFL, AND A LETTER THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

BY DANA HUNSINGER BENBOW

USA TODAY | FEBRUARY 28, 2021 | (EXCERPT)

The letter came to the Philadelphia address of a lavish estate in a white suburban neighborhood where Wally Triplett lived in the coach house with his parents. Where his dad was a mailman and his mother was a domestic helper for that house full of wealthy white people.

The letter came to Triplett, who had forged remarkable success on his high school football field. The University of Miami had heard about him and, assuming he was white, seeing that address, sent off a letter to that estate.

“Wallace Triplett, we would be honored to offer you a scholarship to play football at Miami.”

For a moment in time, Triplett experienced what it must feel like to not be judged by the color of his skin. But then, he realized. This must be some mistake. It was 1945 and Miami was a segregated university.

Triplett wrote a letter back.

“Just so you know, I am a Negro.”

The next writing he received from Miami was one rescinding his scholarship offer. Uninviting him to play football. A letter making it clear he was not welcome there.

It was a letter Triplett should have torn up and thrown into the trash. Instead, he held on to that letter. Not just for the next week or the next year or the next decade. He held on to that letter for the rest of his life.

‘It was fuel to the fire’

That rejection, some say, is what pushed Triplett onward in a time when it would have been easier to sit back and accept what fate the powerful people dealt him.

“When Miami retracted that scholarship, he kept that letter. The letter

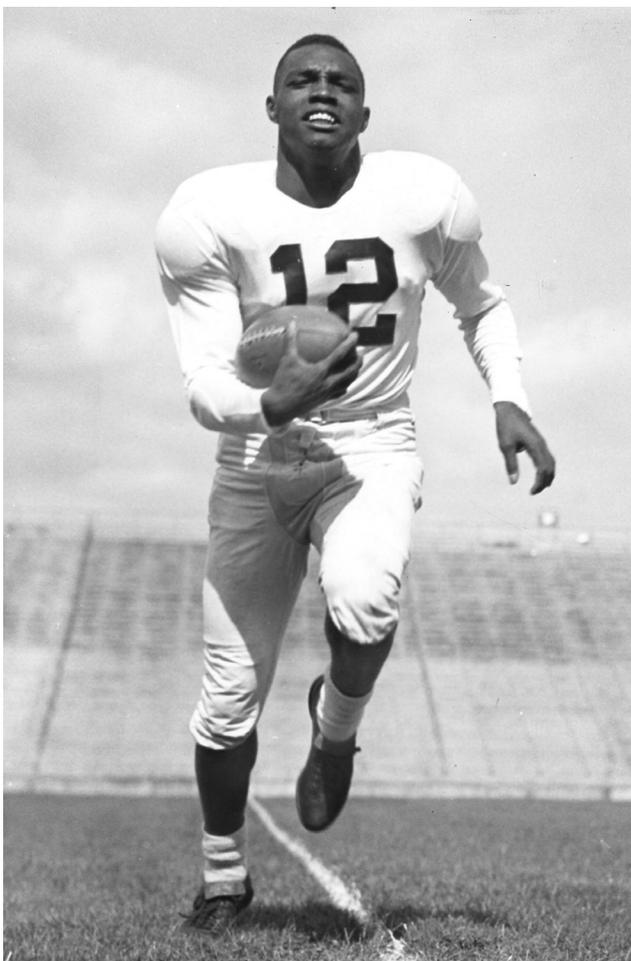


PHOTO: Wally Triplett at Penn State

was such a wound to him, a big scar, a big turning point,” said Camille Tucker, a Hollywood writer, director and producer who is working on a film about Triplett. “That letter was fuel to the fire.”

Triplett held on to that letter to be reminded of what people said he couldn't do, his sister Nancy Triplett told Tucker and filmmaker and author Craig Detweiler, who is also working on the film.

“He said, ‘This is what happened to me and it’s not going to happen again. I’m going to transcend anything they ever thought. I’m going to go beyond,’” Tucker said. “That rejection did not stop him from so many firsts.”

Triplett, a running back, went on to be one of three Black players drafted into the NFL in 1949, picked in the 19th round by the Detroit Lions. Soon after, he became the first Black draftee to play in the NFL — and had tremendous success.

On the field in his first season, Triplett set a single-game record with 294 kickoff return yards, a record that stood 44 years. Today, Triplett still holds an NFL record with his average of 73.5 yards per return against the Los Angeles Rams.

He did it all while battling intense racism that permeated everyday life.

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/6gMq50E1nnc>





PHOTO: Satchel Paige

OVERLOOKED ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ATHLETES RECEIVE NEW ATTENTION

BY LOIS ELFMAN

DIVERSE ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION | FEBRUARY 9, 2021 | (EXCERPT)

Major League Baseball (MLB) is promoting seven professional Negro Leagues that operated between 1920 and 1948 to Major League status, in a move MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred calls “long overdue recognition.”

Statistics of players from the Negro National League, Eastern Colored League, American Negro League, East-West League, Negro Southern League, Negro National League

and Negro American League are now officially considered part of MLB history.

“Individuals in the African American community have always seen the Negro Leagues as major league,” says Dr. Michael E. Lomax, a retired professor at the University of Iowa and author of the books *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs, 1860-1901: Operating by Any Means Necessary* and *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs,*

1902-1931: The Negro National and Eastern Colored Leagues.

“Statistics are absolutely one of the foundations of baseball,” says Ron Thomas, director of the Journalism and Sports Program at Morehouse College. “Having the statistics at least reflect their accomplishments is important, in terms of the culture of the sport.”

“Doing this adds legitimacy to MLB because — at least my personal feeling is — you can’t tell me that Ted Williams was the greatest hitter if Josh Gibson never got a chance and if Williams never had to hit against Satchel Paige,” he adds.

The statistics are in

Dr. Ketra L. Armstrong, professor of sport management and director of the Center for Race and Ethnicity in Sport at the University of Michigan, says she’s happy to see the recognition, but she’s also cautious in gauging the impact.

“Statistics don’t give you nuance,” Armstrong notes. “They don’t talk about the systemic racism that can contribute to those statistics. They don’t address the conditions that

the Negro League players were subjected to. Those are the kinds of things that statistics don’t capture. In many regards, that’s part of the richness of the Negro Leagues.”

“They served a social cultural role in the Black community,” she continues. “The Black fans loved seeing great quality play, but it was the culture of camaraderie and the economic engine that the Negro Leagues could be for the Black community and Black business. Those are part of the history.”

The statistics should be put in thorough context, says Armstrong, notably the vastly different playing conditions for MLB and the Negro Leagues. To excel when playing on a field with uneven pavement shows exceptional talent.

Thomas says recognizing the statistics and exploring the stories of the players of the Negro Leagues is the sports world’s way of acknowledging that Black Lives Matter — that the lives of these extraordinary Black players matter.

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Not only did these players have great achievements, but they were also innovators, says Thomas, referencing such feats as the Negro Leagues playing night baseball under lights before MLB.

“It shows the legitimate achievements and contributions Black people have made to American society,” Thomas says. “That simply is what Black Lives Matter is about — acknowledging that Black lives matter.”

Lost stories

Giving exploration to the stories of the Negro Leagues can also propel people to explore other untold stories in sport. This is the hope of Deborah Riley Draper, co-author of the book *Olympic Pride, American Prejudice: The Untold Story of 18 African Americans Who Defied Jim Crow and Adolf Hitler to Compete in the 1936 Berlin Olympics*. She also directed a documentary on this subject.

While the story of Jesse Owens, winner of four gold medals at those Olympics, is well known, his Black teammates on the U.S. team largely

went unnoticed by White media, despite their medal-winning successes. Among them was future Congressman Ralph Metcalfe, who won silver in the 100 meters and gold in the 4×100 relay.

Black newspapers of the day, such as *The Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier* and *New York Amsterdam News*, brought the stories of these Black athletes to life, but White media largely ignored them, Riley Draper says, because they defied the dominant narrative about Black athletes and Black people.

“[The Black papers] told the true joys and pain of being a Black athlete at that time and what type of discrimination, marginalization and oppression these athletes faced,” says Riley Draper. “So many people who’ve read the book were shocked that they didn’t know the story of these African American athletes.”

TO READ MORE:

<http://ow.ly/hpKx50E1nGy>



‘THERE’S A LOT MORE TO COME.’ AFTER RECORD TURNOUT IN 2020 ELECTIONS ACTIVISM FROM BLACK ATHLETES IS ONLY BEGINNING

BY CHRIS BUMBACA

USA TODAY | FEBRUARY 24, 2020 | (EXCERPT)



PHOTO: LeBron James

On Jan. 27, LeBron James quote-tweeted an article about Georgia’s proposal to limit absentee voting, which had keyed Democratic victories in the presidential and both Senate races.

“I hope y’all understand Black voter suppression doesn’t stop on Election Day,” James wrote. “It’s just going to get worse because they know what we did.”

This was three weeks after the Georgia Senate runoff that capped off an election cycle with record turnout statewide and nationally. What James, his organization More Than A Vote and other coalitions of Black athletes “did” across the country was use their platform on an unprecedented scale, on social media and in the streets.

His tweet signaled that while the movement began last year, large-scale athlete activism — particularly among Black athletes — is just in its beginning stages.

Black athletes have long been on the forefront of activism and societal reform. Jesse Owens at the 1936 Olympics. Muhammad Ali. Arthur Ashe. The WNBA pursued racial

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and criminal justice long before it became popular less than a year ago.

Groups such as More Than A Vote, which seeks to combat voter suppression and other causes, and Color of Change — an online racial justice organization — demonstrate their value by helping bridge the gap between athletes' goals and policy change, while offering resources and connections.

More Than A Vote executive director Addisu Demissie told USA TODAY Sports in November that Election Day was the beginning, not the end, of his group's mission. The 2020 experience — the heartbreak and outrage that followed Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and Jacob Blake — made athletes realize that reform is an ongoing struggle.

"Change takes time and in many ways is painful as you walk down that road," Demissie said then. "There's a lot more to come."

As James said, although athletes' relationship with the White House may be less adversarial compared

to the previous administration, that doesn't mean the work stops.

"The changes in the White House don't change the prosecutor's office," Rashad Robinson, Color of Change's executive director, told USA TODAY Sports by phone. "They don't end the racist actions of police unions that might be right inside of their community.

"Some of the most powerful activism of athletes happened during the Trump administration. You saw so many athletes building relationships with organizations, building their own organizations, taking huge risk."

Dr. Joseph N. Cooper, the chair of sport leadership and administration at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, believes Black athletes should engage in "hybrid resistance" — engaging in different types of strategic approaches to enact change in a political system or in a social context. Examples include James consulting with former President Barack Obama during the work stoppage in the wake of Blake's shooting, an example of flexing power earned, and

‘THERE’S A LOT MORE TO COME.’ (CONT.)

Jaylen Brown marching with Black Lives Matter protesters.

There are other examples. The Atlanta Dream organized against their former owner, Kelly Loeffler, to lift Rev. Raphael Warnock to victory, especially after her comments that derided the Black Lives Matter movement.

In the NBA, players have participated in work stoppages to highlight police violence toward the Black community; after the Blake shooting, the Milwaukee Bucks organized a phone call with Wisconsin state leaders. Formula 1 driver Lewis Hamilton wore a shirt that called for the arrest of the police officers who killed Taylor.

Power Five college football programs marched in community protests. The MLB Players Alliance, comprised of nearly 100 former and current Black players, has raised \$41.7 million for Black communities since its founding less than a year ago.

This is only the beginning and experts say coalition-building is key.

“The (star) athletes don’t have to be on an island by themselves,” Cooper told USA TODAY Sports. “I think a lot of times we expect LeBron James or Serena (Williams) to be the spokesperson for these social justice movements ... they don’t have to be the end-all be-all in every case.”

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<http://ow.ly/sXNF50E1nYH>



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