

THE VOICE

A Trusted Voice From The Community's Perspective



The Reflector
Our Annual
Black History Supplement **Inside**

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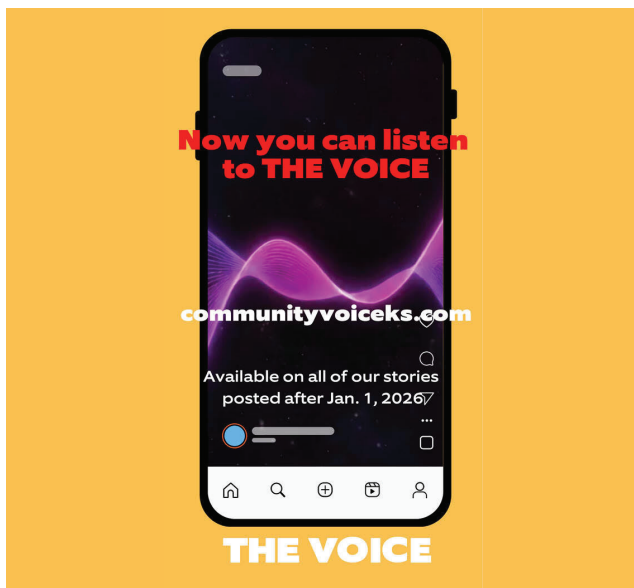
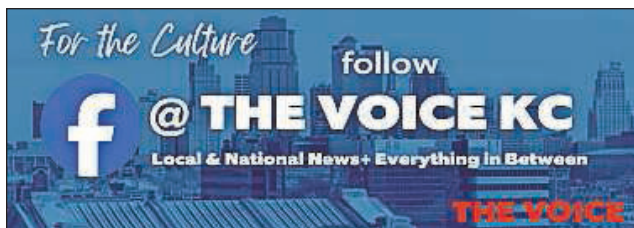
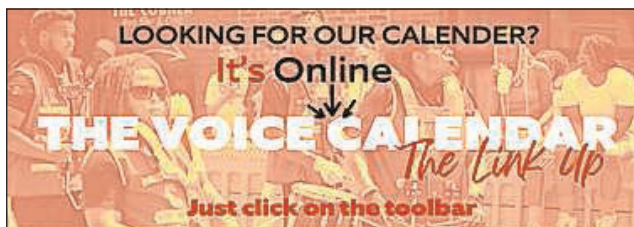
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MORE WAYS TO CONNECT

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The Community Voice Among 11 Newsrooms Selected For Lenfest Beyond Print Program

Funding will support expanded video storytelling and youth-centered digital coverage

By Voice News Service

The Community Voice has been selected as one of 11 newsrooms nationwide to receive funding through the Lenfest Institute for Journalism's Beyond Print program, a competitive national initiative designed to help local newspapers strengthen their digital futures while maintaining their community roots.

The program awarded a total of \$400,000 to independent newspapers across the country, selected from more than 160 applicants. The grants support experimentation in digital storytelling, audience growth, and new revenue strategies — particularly those that help publishers reach younger readers.

Publisher Bonita Gooch said the recognition reflects work The Community Voice has already been doing — and the opportunity to do more.

"Let me be very clear for our print readers: we are not preparing to stop printing our newspaper — at least not right now," Gooch said. "But we also know there is a large and growing audience online, and we've been intentional about building meaningful connections there."

Digital publishing is not new to The Community Voice. The organization has had an active website for 10 years and upgraded its site in 2022 to a state-of-the-art



Bonita Gooch
Editor-in-Chief

CMS designed to enhance visitors' experience. Since then, the organization has steadily expanded its digital footprint. Today, it produces four weekly newsletters, maintains active social media platforms, and engages a growing online community alongside its long-standing print audience.

The Beyond Print grant will allow The Community Voice to take its next step: expanding video storytelling.

"Video is king — especially for younger audiences — and it's an area we've wanted to grow but haven't had the resources to fully support," Gooch said. "This grant funds a six-month program that gives us the space to experiment, learn what works, and develop sustainable ways to integrate video into our journalism."

The expanded video coverage will focus on youth-centered and mobile-friendly storytelling,

with the goal of increasing engagement among audiences 40 and under. Readers can expect to begin seeing more video content as early as February.

As part of the initiative, The Community Voice is also working to build a team of video correspondents and producers.

"The real challenge — and the real opportunity — is figuring out how this work not only grows our audience, but also grows revenue so we can sustain it long-term," Gooch said. "That's what this experiment is about."

Other Beyond Print grant recipients include: Daily Sitka Sentinel (Sitka, Alaska); La Noticia (Charlotte, North Carolina); La Raza Chicago (Chicago, Illinois); Response

Media/The Monitor (Montana); The Berkshire Eagle (Pittsfield, Massachusetts); The News Reporter (Whiteville, North Carolina); The Philadelphia Inquirer (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); The Salt Lake Tribune (Salt Lake City, Utah); Wick Communications; and Willamette Week (Oregon).

The Community Voice is the only legacy print African-American publication selected to receive a grant in this round of Beyond Print funding.

The Beyond Print program is supported by the Andrew & Julie Klingenstein Family Fund and is designed to help local newspapers test new ideas while remaining vital community institutions.

NOT A VIDEOGRAPHER — JUST CURIOUS & CONFIDENT?

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THE VOICE



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The Life, Loss and Legacy of Kiah Duggins

Those who loved her say Kiah Duggins brought light wherever she went — and that light continues to guide what comes next.

When Kiah Duggins was two years old, she saw a picture of a Black ballerina and turned to her mother with certainty.

“God wants me to dance,” she said.

Her parents didn’t laugh it off. They found a dance studio willing to accept a two-year-old, and Kiah stayed there for the next 16 years — learning discipline, balance and grace long before she would need them in courtrooms, classrooms or movements for justice.

Long before she became a Harvard-trained civil rights attorney, a national advocate for bail reform, or a law professor-in-waiting, Kiah was a child who believed her life had purpose — and parents who believed it too.

A Child Who Knew She Was Called

From the beginning, Kiah’s parents say, there was something steady about her.

She was their first child — a good baby, her father recalled — and seemed to carry an early sense of awareness. When her sister, Asha, arrived 20 months later, Kiah took naturally to the role of big sister. When her

younger brother, Donovan, was born, she did the same — sometimes more firmly than he wanted.

“She was always trying to keep everybody out of trouble,” her parents said. “She’d tell them, ‘You’re going to get in trouble. I’m trying to help you.’”

The Duggins family didn’t have much in those early years. Maurice Duggins was in medical residency. Gwen Duggins had left her teaching job to stay home with the children. What the household lacked financially, it made up for in intention.

There were regular trips to the library, story time and the zoo — small, purposeful acts meant to widen young minds. Education was nurtured early and consistently.

Faith was present, too — not as pressure, but as grounding.

Discipline, Confidence, and Joy

Dance became one of Kiah’s greatest joys.

Over the years, she studied ballet, tap, jazz and modern dance, learning control, expression and discipline through repetition and practice. Those lessons stayed with her well beyond the studio.

She also enjoyed being on stage.

Kiah participated in pageants, including competing in Miss Kansas and serving as Miss Black and Gold at Wichita State. The experiences demanded poise, preparation and



Members of the Duggins family in Morocco, one of their last trips. (L-R) Kiah, her sister Aisha, mother Gwen and father Dr. Maurice.

confidence — and helped her grow comfortable in public settings, where her warmth often arrived before her résumé did.

Friends and family remember how easily she laughed and how quickly she found humor in everyday moments. She sent memes. She teased. She brought lightness into spaces that might otherwise have felt heavy.

“She was cheap entertainment,” her parents said. “You could make her laugh so easily.”

That joy coexisted with discipline. Kiah was focused, driven and intentional — but never distant. The balance made people comfortable around her and helped her connect across generations and backgrounds.

Learning When to Lead — and When to Be Quiet

By the time Kiah arrived at Wichita State University, leadership was already familiar territory.

She became deeply involved in student government, serving two terms as chief of staff to student body president Joseph Shepard, a close personal friend. It was a

demanding, behind-the-scenes role during a period of heightened debate around equity, access and inclusion.

“Kiah Duggins was my original right-hand woman,” Shepard said. “She led on all special projects.”

Those projects spanned student hunger, financial access, academic policy and statewide advocacy.

“She was the glue,” Shepard said. “And she continued to be a source of personal inspiration, especially as a Black man in the role.”

During controversy over changes to an on-campus chapel aimed at making the space more welcoming to students of different faiths, student leaders faced backlash from outside the university. When pressure escalated into an attempt to recall Shepard’s presidency over diversity initiatives, Kiah helped organize support.

“She single-handedly mobilized community and students to speak up on my behalf,” Shepard said. The recall failed.

Her parents later said experiences like these reinforced something Kiah already understood: leadership doesn’t always look loud.



Kiah announced to her mother at age two “God wants me to dance.” Her mother found the toddler a dance studio and she took lessons and performed through high school. As she grew up, her career goal was to be a “preaching ballerina, until a college professor told her if you really want to change the system, you have to change it from the inside out.

See KIAH DUGGINS Page 4 →

KIAH DUGGINS, from Page 3 ↓

Often, it looks like preparation, persistence and knowing when to let others take the spotlight.

That approach shaped her response to student hunger. While living in the dorms, Kiah noticed many students struggled to access food on weekends. When initial concerns were dismissed, she gathered data, surveyed students and returned with evidence. The result was the Shocker Food Locker — first operating out of a small office and later expanding into a permanent resource serving thousands.

“She didn’t argue,” her parents said. “She proved the need.”

“She was a hard worker, loyal and a passionate advocate for justice,” Shepard said. “Kiah is and continues to be the bar for the type of leaders — and women — I keep at my side.”

She didn’t lead with speeches. She led with facts and results.

Dreaming Big — and Doing the Work

Kiah never believed proximity to power was reserved for other people.

As a college student, she Googled how to intern for Michelle Obama. She applied and was rejected. Instead of moving on, she refined her application and applied again. The second time, she was accepted.

She spent five months interning at the White House as part of First Lady Michelle Obama’s Let Girls Learn initiative, supporting behind-the-scenes work focused on expanding educational opportunities for girls.

After graduating from Wichita State, Kiah became a Fulbright scholar, spending a year in Taiwan teaching English to elementary students in a small mountain town. The highly competitive fellowship demanded adaptability and discipline.

It was also a year of preparation. While teaching and adjusting to a new culture, Kiah maintained a daily LSAT study schedule, working methodically toward law school.

When she returned home, she was ready.

Why Harvard Mattered

By the time Kiah Duggins arrived at Harvard Law School, she



As a Wichita State University student, Kiah researched, advocated for and helped found the Shocker Food Closet to help address food insecurity on campus. The closet, which has grown significantly and assisted 7,000 students last year, was renamed in her honor in 2025.

understood why she was there.

She chose Harvard deliberately. As a Black woman entering the legal profession, she believed the degree would carry weight in rooms where her voice might otherwise be dismissed.

At Harvard, she focused on pro bono clinic work involving housing instability and evictions. She became president of the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, working directly with individuals and families facing unequal laws and limited resources.

Her commitment was recognized at graduation, when she was one of just two students to receive Harvard’s pro bono clinical award.

Law for the People

After graduating in 2021, Kiah continued the work she had begun.

From 2021 to 2024, she practiced civil rights law, challenging policing practices and bail systems, and working on cases focused on how pretrial detention affects people with limited resources. She worked with organizations including Civil Rights Corps and previously the ACLU of Northern California.

At the same time, she was preparing for her next chapter.

Kiah had accepted a position to teach at Howard University School

of Law, an HBCU with a long history of training civil rights lawyers. She was scheduled to begin in fall 2025.

For her, teaching was not a departure from advocacy. It was an extension of it — law not as status, but as service.

A Daughter, Always

Kiah spoke with her mother every day. The calls were part of life’s rhythm, even as her career and travels took her far from home.

She loved to travel — visiting Sweden, Switzerland, Iceland, France, the Dominican Republic and Morocco.

In 2024, she celebrated her 30th birthday with a trip to Morocco alongside friends, with family meeting them there. That same year, she insisted on another trip — this one to celebrate both her 30th birthday and her mother Gwen’s 60th.

She planned the Paris trip, hired a photographer, chose a spot in front of the Eiffel Tower and insisted they wear red — her mother’s favorite color.

Gwen told her daughter, “You are so extra.” Kiah disagreed.

The photographs, taken just four months before her death, became among her mother’s most cherished possessions.



Kiah was accepted into a number of law schools with full-ride offers, but decided as a Black woman, a Harvard Law Degree would give her more credibility.

In her final months, the family spent significant time together. Kiah was home for Thanksgiving, her mother’s birthday, Christmas, and again in January to support her mother through surgery.

None of them knew these would be their last moments together.

The Day Everything Changed

On Jan. 29, 2025, Kiah Duggins was traveling back to Washington, D.C., when American Airlines Flight 5342 collided midair with a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter over the Potomac River. There were no survivors.

For her parents, the shock was immediate.

In the year since, grief has not been something to move through — it has been something to live with.

“So grief never goes away,” Maurice Duggins said. “It’s just how you deal with the grief that gets better.”

“It’s been the hardest year of my life,” Gwen said. She has cried every day since her daughter’s death.

Grief arrives in moments, Maurice said — triggered by memory.

“I have my cry,” he said. “Then I calm myself down and move on with life.”

For Gwen, the loss reshaped her sense of self.

“I’m not the person I used to be,” she said. “Now I have to figure out how to move forward differently.”

Seeking Accountability — and Change

As investigators examined the crash, the Duggins family came to a firm conclusion: what happened was not an accident.

They learned the helicopter was flying higher than permitted, did not have ADS-B real-time tracking activated, and that the FAA control tower was understaffed.

More troubling was what the data showed long before the crash.

From 2001 to 2024, there were **15,204 near misses** between helicopters and commercial aircraft near Reagan National Airport.

“That number is etched in my brain,” Gwen said. “That’s not an accident. That’s a system failure.”

This week, as the one-year anniversary approaches, the family is in Washington, D.C., attending an NTSB hearing where final findings are expected. They will also join families of the 67 victims in remembrance events.

Federal officials have since announced permanent restrictions limiting non-essential helicopter flights near Reagan National. Congress is also considering rotorcraft safety legislation aimed at mandating tracking technology and restricting helicopter operations in congested airspace.

For the Duggins family, the focus is not lawsuits.

What they want is accountability — and change.

Carrying Kiah Forward

Long before law school, Kiah created Kiah’s Princess Project, an initiative to help underrepresented girls build confidence, social capital and practical tools for success.

Her family is continuing that work through Kiah’sPrincessProject.org.

“Every young girl should know about Kiah,” Gwen said. “If we can encourage young women to pursue their dreams and not let limitations stop them — she lived that.”

The goal is not simply remembrance, but impact.

In that way, Kiah’s story does not end.

It continues — in the systems she challenged, the people she changed, and the young women who will learn her name and see what is possible.

Trump Administration Drops DEI Appeal — and Changes Strategy

Why the ruling offers relief now — but little long-term protection for schools and colleges

By Voice News Service

The Trump administration's decision to drop its appeal of a federal court ruling blocking threats to cut education funding over diversity, equity, and inclusion programs has been widely celebrated as a win for schools and colleges. And it is — just not the decisive victory many hoped for.

By abandoning the appeal, the administration leaves in place an August ruling that struck down federal guidance warning K-12 schools and universities they could lose federal funding if they continued a broad range of DEI-related practices. The judge found

the policy violated the First Amendment and failed to follow required federal rulemaking procedures. As a result, schools no longer face an immediate federal funding cutoff tied directly to DEI initiatives.

For educators, that matters. The ruling restores a measure of certainty after months of concern that classroom discussions, student support programs, or faculty initiatives could trigger federal punishment. Legal advocates for the plaintiffs, including the **American Federation of Teachers**, described the decision as a meaningful win for public education.

But the administration's decision to drop the appeal should not be mistaken for a retreat from its broader effort to dismantle DEI.

Rather than continue defending guidance that a federal judge said chilled free speech

and overstepped executive authority, the administration has reframed its legal narrative around the Supreme Court's 2023 decision in **Students for Fair Admissions**.

That ruling ended the use of race-conscious admissions at most colleges and universities, finding such policies violated the Constitution's guarantee of equal protection. While the decision was formally limited to admissions, the administration has treated it as a broader legal foundation for challenging programs that explicitly consider race.

Under this interpretation, DEI initiatives are no longer framed primarily as issues of academic freedom or campus culture. Instead, they are cast as potential violations of civil rights law — what administration officials describe as unlawful racial preferences. Scholarships limited to certain

racial groups, fellowships designed to diversify faculty pipelines, race-conscious hiring initiatives, and some student support programs have all come under increased scrutiny.

This shift allows the administration to move away from sweeping, highly visible threats — such as cutting off federal funding through informal guidance — and toward quieter enforcement mechanisms. Rather than banning DEI outright, agencies can open civil rights investigations, revise grant conditions, and apply compliance pressure on a case-by-case basis, pressuring institutions through administrative reviews rather than broad policy pronouncements. The result is a strategy that is slower, less dramatic, and significantly harder to challenge in court.

State governments are reinforcing that approach. In several conservative-led states,



A demonstrator holds a sign supporting "fair admissions" outside the U.S. Supreme Court, where the 2023 Students for Fair Admissions ruling ended the use of race-conscious college admissions.

legislatures have passed laws eliminating DEI offices, restricting curriculum language, or cutting funding through budget decisions, limiting the practical impact of the federal ruling.

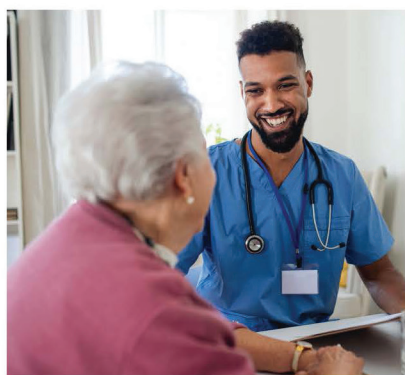
Skye Perryman, president and CEO of **Democracy Forward**, called the dismissal of the appeal a welcome relief

— but not an end to the fight.

For schools and colleges, the message is clear: this ruling blocks one tactic, not the broader effort. The administration has not abandoned its challenge to DEI. It has shifted the battlefield.

In that sense, the decision is a win — just not the one that ends the war.

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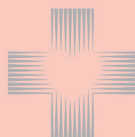
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District Expands Effort Linking Churches to Student Success

Built around the 95-0-3 framework, the program helps faith communities understand and encourage student progress.

By Ty Davis
The Community Voice

For many faith communities, supporting young people has long meant prayer, mentorship, and encouragement. A growing effort within **Wichita Public Schools** is inviting congregations to build on that foundation by taking a more intentional role in supporting student achievement—work that extends well beyond Sunday services.

Led by Corinthian Kelly, director of partnerships and belonging, the district's Engaging Congregations for Future Readiness initiative is designed to help churches and other community groups better understand how the students connected to them are performing academically and how they can offer encouragement and support in meaningful, appropriate ways. The initiative is now seeking to engage additional congregations and community organizations, prompting an upcoming informational meeting for those interested in learning more.

Rather than positioning congregations as extensions of individual schools, the program emphasizes their role as trusted community partners—places where students are known, encouraged, and reinforced in their efforts to succeed.

The 95-0-3 Framework: Where It Started and Why It Matters

At the center of the initiative is a straightforward but powerful framework known as 95-0-3:



Corinthian Kelly

- 95% attendance
- Zero suspensions
- A 3.0 GPA

The framework was developed by the late **Dr. William Polite**, whose work supporting student achievement spanned years of community-based efforts, including the Kathryn Johnson Scholars program.

While Dr. Polite had been engaged for years in community-based student success efforts, including the Kathryn Johnson Scholars program, his work with the Wichita Bulldogs football organization helped illustrate how community organizations could intentionally support the academic performance of the students they served. That effort became an early precursor to what would later evolve into the Engaging Congregations for Future Readiness framework.

Over time, the 95-0-3 framework expanded beyond athletics and was adopted more broadly as an indicator of student success—one Wichita Public Schools now uses to help guide community engagement.

Kelly has emphasized that consistent attendance is foundational. Students who are present more often have greater access to instruction, support services, and



Corinthian Kelly, left, shares a moment with the late William Polite during a community event. Kelly was a strong supporter of Polite's work and an active volunteer with his Build & Rebuild program, which focused on improving academic outcomes, increasing graduation rates, and helping youth avoid pathways that limit future opportunity.

positive school relationships, all of which influence long-term outcomes.

How Congregations Participate

Congregations that choose to participate formally enroll in the initiative. With parental consent, the district provides quarterly, **fully aggregated reports** reflecting how students connected to that congregation are doing across attendance, behavior, and GPA.

No individual student names, grades, or disciplinary records are shared.

For example, if a congregation has multiple students participating, it receives one combined attendance rate, one average GPA, and one behavior indicator. The data is intended to create

awareness—not oversight—and to help congregations think about how they can encourage students and families more intentionally.

That awareness often becomes a starting point for action.

Tabernacle as One Example

Tabernacle Bible Church offers one example of how a congregation can engage through the program.

Encouraged by Dr. Polite, who was a member of the church, Tabernacle was an early adopter of his Engaging Churches concept and began using aggregated data as a tool for motivation and celebration. The congregation incorporates academic

See TABERNACLE Page 8 →



Groundwater, Health, and You.

A Clear Way Forward: Free Health Testing

These tests look for health effects that may be linked to contaminated groundwater exposure.



FREE Health testing events provided by the Wichita Black Nurses Association

You are invited get a free health test if you lived, worked, went to school, daycare, or church near 29th & Grove at any time from the early 1970s to today.



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Chisholm Trail Church of Christ | 5833 E 37th St E, Wichita, KS
- **Saturday, February 14, 2026 10am—2pm**
Greater St. Mary's Baptist Church | 1648 E 17th St. N, Wichita, KS
- **Saturday, February 21, 2026 10am—2pm**
The Center | 1914 E 11th St N, Suite B, Wichita, KS
- **Saturday, February 28, 2026 10am—2pm**
Homebound Visits | If you are homebound, please call 316-882-1778 between 9 AM to 3 PM, Mon-Fri, to schedule a home testing appointment.

Wichitan Dr. Rhea Rogers Joins National Weekday Show Aging Untold

When *Aging Untold* begins airing this spring, Wichita viewers will see a familiar face on a national stage. **Dr. Rhea Rogers**, a Wichita-based physician whose career has evolved from traditional gynecology into functional and longevity medicine, is one of four experts featured on the new national weekday series.

Produced and distributed by Gray Media, *Aging Untold* is a 30-minute talk show that will begin airing at the beginning of March, Monday through Friday on more than 100 stations nationwide. Locally, viewers can watch the program in **Wichita on KWCH at 3 p.m.**, and in the **Kansas City metro area on KCTV at 12:30 a.m. and KSMO at 10 a.m.**

The show also begins airing online Feb. 1 at AgingUntold.com, with episodes available on YouTube. Mobile apps and streaming TV platforms are expected to follow later this year.

How A Wichita Conversation Became A National Show

The path from Wichita to a national television platform began quietly in **summer 2025**.

Rogers had been collaborating locally with **Katherine Ambrose**, also from Wichita, an aging-well coach who regularly convenes senior-focused educational events and community conversations. Rogers often participated in those sessions as a medical expert, addressing aging-related health concerns and preventive care.

During one of those Wichita events, **Sam Cradduck**, a gerontologist based in California, was in town as a guest speaker. Afterward, Ambrose, Rogers and Cradduck continued the conversation informally, comparing notes on caregiving, cognitive decline, chronic disease and the growing gap between traditional medicine and the realities families face as they age.

Following that discussion, the group sat down and recorded a **pilot-style sample episode**, which was shared within media circles. Over the next several months, the recording made its way through industry channels and ultimately reached senior executives at Gray Media.

What followed was a rapid progression. Additional conversations and test recordings were requested, and by fall 2025 the concept had been approved as a nationally distributed weekday series.



Production for *Aging Untold* is organized around monthly filming blocks, **with taping in Atlanta**. Rogers travels once per month, typically for a week at a time, during which the panel records multiple episodes each day. According to Rogers, the team films about **four shows per day**, producing **roughly 20 episodes during each production week**.

Each episode centers on a primary theme related to aging, caregiving, health, finances or quality of life, with an emphasis on practical information and solutions.

A Broader Medical Focus

While many in Wichita know Rogers for her years practicing gynecology, her role on *Aging Untold* reflects a significant evolution in her medical work.

Since 2017, Rogers has transformed her practice into **Medical Innovative Solutions**, now located at 902 N. Hillside. Her work centers on functional, cellular and longevity medicine — an approach that focuses on identifying root causes of disease rather than treating symptoms alone.

Her work addresses chronic inflammation, metabolic dysfunction, hormonal imbalance and cognitive decline, areas that often intersect as people age. On the show, Rogers brings that perspective to discussions aimed at helping viewers better understand their health and make informed decisions earlier in the aging process.

For Rogers, the national platform represents an extension of work she has been doing for years — educating patients, supporting families and helping people better understand how health, aging and quality of life are connected.

A Change is Going to Come

By Peggy Jones-Foxx,
President and CEO
Wichita Black Nurses
Association

Wichita family, We are here — and we are coming to you.

The Wichita Black Nurses Association is proud to begin free health testing for residents who may have been impacted by groundwater contamination connected to the chemical spill near 29th & Grove. This work is deeply personal to us, because it is about protecting the health of our neighbors, our elders, our families, and our future.

Thanks to grant funding, all testing is provided at no cost — and no insurance is required.

You'll see WBNA nurses



Peggy Jones-Foxx,
President and CEO,
Wichita Black Nurses

where we have always shown up:

- Neighborhood churches
- Community health fairs
- Local community facilities
- And now — in our new WBNA mobile testing van, allowing us to reach residents

directly, including those who are homebound

As part of this effort, every participant will be offered:

- Blood pressure checks
- Blood glucose finger sticks

Free COVID-19 testing

Screenings recommended for those who may have lived, worked, worshipped, or gone to school near the affected area

If you or a loved one is homebound or unable to attend an event, please know this: we will come to you.

Call 316-882-1778, Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–3 p.m., to schedule a home testing visit or email Email: admin@wichitabna.org

The Wichita Black Nurses Association was founded

more than 50 years ago with a simple mission — to provide care, education, and prevention where it is most needed. That mission has not changed. Our commitment to the community has only

grown stronger.

During COVID, many trusted us when trust was hard to find. Today, we are once again stepping forward to serve with compassion, transparency, and respect.

This has been a long time coming. The change you've been waiting for is here.

Follow the Wichita Black

Nurses Association on Facebook and Instagram — and stay connected through The Community Voice for testing locations, dates, and updates.

From our hearts to yours — Cheers to your health.

— Peggy Jones Foxx
President, Wichita Black Nurses Association



The Wichita Black Nurses Association's new mobile testing van expands the group's ability to deliver free health screenings directly to neighborhoods, churches, and homebound residents across Wichita.

TABERNACLE, from Page 6 ↓

recognition moments that affirm students' efforts and reinforce the importance of school success as part of overall well-being.

Tabernacle's approach is presented as one illustration of how faith communities can support students beyond spiritual development and help reinforce habits that contribute to long-term success.

As Kelly has noted, the framework itself is flexible. "That model can be replicated anywhere," he said. "Whether a congregation has sixty students or six, everyone can participate."

Why Community Support Matters

Wichita Public Schools serves more than 45,000 students across a large, diverse district. Kelly has said that scale makes community involvement essential.

"Wichita is resource-rich, but schools can't do this work alone," he said. "We have to engage the community if we want long-term success for students."

Through Engaging Congregations for Future Readiness, the district is working to ensure that adults who already have trusted relationships



Students from Tabernacle Bible Church stand before the congregation wearing their TBC Scholar 95-0-3 shirts after being recognized as part of the church's Engaging Scholars program. The students were honored during Tabernacle's quarterly recognition celebrating academic progress and student achievement.

with students—pastors, mentors, coaches, and community leaders—understand what academic success looks like and how to reinforce it.

The initiative is not about discipline or surveillance. Student privacy remains central, with all shared data aggregated and participation requiring parental authorization.

Families may choose to share individual report cards with trusted community members, but that decision remains theirs.

Looking ahead, Kelly sees the framework extending beyond congregations to include youth-serving organizations, nonprofits, and others who work closely with young people.

Changing the Narrative Around Education

At its core, Kelly says the initiative is about reshaping how students see themselves and their potential.

"I want kids to know it's cool to be smart," he said. "Being smart gives you options."

Through Engaging Congregations for Future Readiness, Wichita Public Schools aims to strengthen academic identity, increase graduation rates, and build a broader community culture that reinforces the value of learning—support that follows students not just in classrooms, but throughout their daily lives.

Informational Meeting for Churches and Community Groups

Faith leaders and community organizations interested in learning more about Engaging Congregations for Future Readiness are invited to attend an upcoming informational meeting. While congregations are a key focus, individuals and organizations that work with youth are also encouraged to participate. Organizers request that one **representative**

Engaging Congregations for Future Readiness – Informational Meeting

When:

Monday, Feb. 9, 2026

Time: 6–7:30 p.m.

Where: Alvin Morris
Administrative Center
(AMAC)

903 S. Edgemoor, Room 813

Parking: South lot between
AMAC and Curtis Middle
School

Dinner: Light meal provided

RSVP by Jan. 26, 2026

Rebecca Porter
rporter1@usd259.net
316-973-4413

per congregation or organization attend. RSVP is required.

SPECIAL EDITION: BLACK HISTORY 2016 CELEBRATED

The
ReFlector



1965–1975: A Decade of Cultural Change

**A Time When Culture, Pride
and a Name Redefined Us**
James Brown and the Song of a Movement

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How Black America Claimed Its Name—and Its Power

A look at the cultural shift that transformed language, pride, and power in Black America

By Bonita Gooch

The years from 1965 to 1975 marked a decade of major change in America, but for Black America, they represented something deeper—a decade of transformation. It was a period when we renamed ourselves, a change that carried far-reaching cultural, political, and social implications.

The shift from *Negro* to *Black* was not cosmetic. It was deliberate, public, and unapologetic. We shed a name tied to slavery and accommodation and claimed one that had long been used against us—turning it into a declaration of pride.

This was not a quiet transition. It was proud and out loud. *Say it loud—I'm Black and I'm proud.* The words, made famous by **James Brown**, captured the spirit of the era perfectly. The change demanded recognition. It told America that we had redefined ourselves—and expected the world to keep up.

For earlier generations, Negro had represented progress and dignity—a step up from Colored and other vulgar labels best left unnamed. But by the mid-1960s, the term sounded dated and constrained, especially to young people. It felt shaped by someone else's comfort, not our own truth.

When **Stokely Carmichael** popularized the phrase Black Power in 1966, the word Black was reclaimed almost instantly. What had once been an insult became an affirmation. Being called Black was no longer offensive—it was empowering.

That shift in name carried an attitude with it. We didn't just rename ourselves; we reintroduced ourselves. The change showed up in how we walked, talked, and related to one another. We developed our own gestures and codes: clenched fists raised high, soul-brother handshakes, and high fives. We called each other brotha and sista—familial terms that reflected a closeness we felt and claimed.

There was a sense of belonging—an inside



The Decade of Change (1965–1975)

From 1965 to 1975, Black Americans underwent a profound transformation, redefining themselves from *Negro* to *Black* and expressing that pride in visible, lasting ways. (Clockwise from left) Elaine Guillory, a VOICE team member, was among those who put away the pressing comb and embraced natural hair. Following passage of the Voting Rights Act, Black political power expanded, leading to the election of Black mayors nationwide, including **Maynard Jackson**. Cultural pride flourished as Black-led programs appeared on television, including **Soul Train**. Host **Don Cornelius** interviews **James Brown**, whose anthem “*Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud*” helped define the era.

understanding that didn't need explanation. If you knew, you knew. If you didn't, you weren't part of it.

Style reinforced the message. Natural hair and Afros became visible symbols of self-acceptance. Women stopped pressing and relaxing their hair to fit someone else's definition of beauty. Men wore Afros proudly, often larger than life. These weren't just fashion statements; they were cultural signals. Our appearance said what words didn't need to: we were done reshaping ourselves for approval.

Music amplified everything. Soul music didn't just sound good—it *felt* like freedom. When **Aretha Franklin** demanded “*Respect*,” she gave voice to a broader insistence that had been building across the community. Respect wasn't requested; it was required.



Elected as mayor of Atlanta, in 1973 Maynard Jackson was the first Black mayor of any major Southern city,



James Brown and Don Cornelius

Black pride came with expectations.

Athletics added to that visibility. With sports increasingly integrated, Black athletes dominated fields, courts, and tracks, showcasing excellence that could not be ignored. Whether through music or sports, Black culture was leading—cool, confident, and commanding attention. America watched closely. Admiration

grew, even when full acceptance lagged behind. Respect increased, even when comfort did not.

Cultural change was

matched by political power. In August 1965, **President Lyndon B. Johnson** signed the Voting Rights Act, outlawing literacy tests, empowering the federal government to register voters, and blocking discriminatory changes to voting laws. The result was immediate and lasting: Black voters demonstrated their power at the polls.

That power translated into representation. **Edward Brooke** became the first Black U.S. senator elected since Reconstruction. **Shirley Chisholm** became the first Black woman elected to Congress. Cities across the country began electing Black mayors, reshaping local leadership and priorities.

Economic opportunity followed, slowly but steadily. In 1966, Johnson signed Executive Order 11246, requiring federal contractors to take affirmative action in hiring and promotion. That momentum expanded in 1972 with the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, which strengthened enforcement against hiring discrimination. Doors that had long been sealed began to creak open.

For decades, teaching had been the primary professional path available to many Black college graduates, with medicine and law accessible to a limited few. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, recruiters began appearing on campuses. Careers in management, accounting, engineering, marketing, journalism, and corporate leadership became possible. The future widened.

Together, these changes marked a turning point. This wasn't just a name change—it was an identity shift. Black America stopped asking to be included and started insisting on being recognized on its own terms. The pride was visible. The confidence was shared. And once it was claimed, it could not be taken back.



Say it loud—
I'm Black
and I'm
proud.”

JAMES
BROWN

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The Great Debate: Booker T. or Du Bois?

With such divergent views on how to advance the post-slavery Negro, there was no middle ground. You had to take sides.

Think **Clarence Thomas** versus **Thurgood Marshall**, or the **Black Panther Party** versus the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference**. If what comes to mind is opposing philosophies

and sharply different strategies, then you're beginning to understand the divide between **Booker T. Washington** and **W. E. B. Du Bois**.

At the turn of the century—the late 1800s and early 1900s—these two men stood as the most influential Black leaders in America. Both sought advancement for a people only decades removed

from slavery, but they disagreed fundamentally on how that progress should be achieved. Through speeches and published works, each laid out his vision, and as their voices grew louder, so did the divide among Black and White Americans over what was then called “the Negro problem.”

In 1865, millions of formerly enslaved people were freed with

little consideration of what freedom would require. Should they be educated? Employed? Treated as equals?

As White Americans debated those questions, so did Black Americans themselves. Washington and Du Bois confronted the same realities but reached opposite conclusions.

Their disagreement ultimately

split African American leadership into two camps: Washington's conservative supporters and Du Bois' more radical critics. Du Bois' call for agitation and civil rights foreshadowed the modern Civil Rights Movement, while Washington's emphasis on self-help and gradualism continues to echo in contemporary debates over race, opportunity, and equality.

Booker T. Washington: Accommodation and Self-Help

Booker Taliaferro Washington was born into slavery in 1856. After emancipation, he worked in a salt mine and later as a domestic servant for a White family. Determined to improve his circumstances, Washington pursued an education at the Hampton Institute, one of the nation's earliest schools established to educate Black Americans.

After completing his studies, he began teaching and quickly gained recognition as a capable organizer and leader.

In 1881, Washington was selected to lead the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama. At the time, Tuskegee was little more than a concept. Under Washington's leadership, it grew into a nationally recognized institution focused on



Booker T. Washington

vocational education, moral discipline, and economic self-sufficiency. His rise mirrored his philosophy: progress achieved through discipline, productivity, and patience rather than confrontation.

Educational Philosophy

Washington believed education should be practical and rooted in immediate economic need. He argued that Black Americans—newly freed and largely impoverished—required skills that would allow them to survive and prosper in a hostile economic environment. Trades, agriculture, construction, and domestic sciences, he believed, offered a more realistic path forward than classical or theoretical education.

This view did not stem from a

belief in Black inferiority. Rather, Washington maintained that education should match social realities. He believed dignity existed in labor and that mastery of a trade provided a foundation for independence and self-respect.

“One man may go into a community prepared to supply the people there an analysis of Greek sentences. The community may or may not be prepared for Greek analysis, but it may feel the need of bricks and houses and wagons,” —*Up From Slavery*

At Tuskegee, learning was inseparable from application. Students built many of the school's buildings themselves, an approach Washington viewed as education in action rather than exploitation. Producing tangible results, he believed, demonstrated competence and worth.

Washington also emphasized character. Education must train the mind, the hands, and the heart. Moral discipline, personal responsibility, and economic independence were central to his vision of progress.

Respect Must Be Earned

Washington was an optimist who believed progress was inevitable, though slow. He viewed American society as evolving and believed Black Americans could advance by proving their value within it. Pressing too hard for immediate political or social equality, he warned, risked provoking resentment among Whites and endangering fragile gains.

Instead, Washington urged patience. He believed Black Americans should focus first on establishing themselves

See **WASHINGTON** Page 15 →



Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee Institute

W. E. B. Du Bois: Agitate

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868–1963) was born in Massachusetts to a free Black family living in an integrated neighborhood. He excelled academically, graduating as valedictorian of his high school class. In 1885, he attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where he experienced overt bigotry for the first time and witnessed Jim Crow repression up close.



W. E. B. Du Bois

earn a Ph.D. there in 1895. He emerged as a towering Black intellectual, scholar, and political thinker.

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois took a forceful stand against accommodation, rejecting

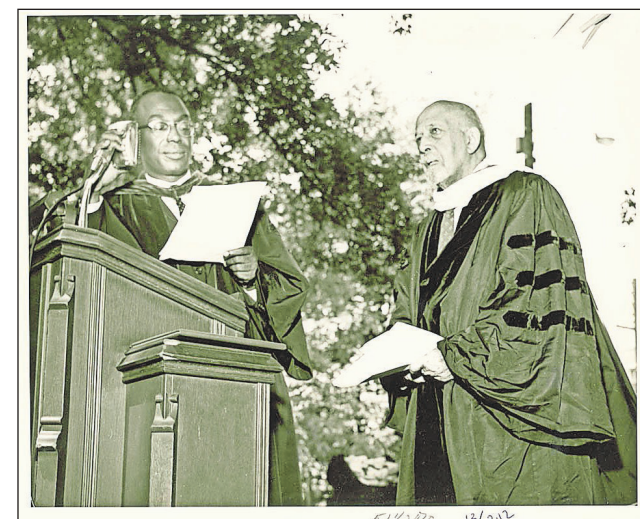
vocational-only education and insisting that full citizenship and equality were essential.

Education

Du Bois insisted that culture could never be built from the bottom up.

After Fisk, Du Bois continued his education at Harvard University, becoming the first African American to

See **DU BOIS** Page 15 →



W.E.B. Du Bois June 1924 commencement speech at Fisk University

Black Athletes and the Nazis

The 1936 Olympics were possibly the most politically charged Olympic Games in history, and the success of Black athletes added to that politicization.

Berlin, Germany, was awarded the 1936 Summer Olympics in 1931, two years before Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler became the country's chancellor and quickly transformed the nation's fragile democracy into a one-party dictatorship. Hitler viewed the Olympics as a golden opportunity to showcase his country and to promote the idea of Aryan racial superiority.

Eighteen Black athletes—16 men and two women—played a significant role in challenging that narrative. Together, they won 12 Olympic medals, accounting for nearly 20 percent of the United States' 56 medals, despite making up less than 5 percent of the 312-member U.S. team.

Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, reportedly called the victories by

Black athletes "a disgrace." Hitler largely ignored them.

On the first day of track and field competition, Hitler left the Olympic Stadium as rain threatened and darkness fell, missing the opportunity to greet the American medal winners in the high jump, two of whom were Black. Olympic officials objected and informed Hitler that he must either receive all medalists or none. From that point on, Hitler chose to receive none.

International journalists took note, speculating that Hitler's absence reflected the dominance of African-American athletes in track and field events, where they won 14 medals. Some journalists openly suggested these victories undermined the Nazi myth of Aryan superiority.

To international audiences and Olympic crowds, Black American athletes were a major success, particularly Jesse Owens, the star of the Games. Owens,

a track standout from Ohio State University, won four gold medals, set a world record in the long jump, and helped set another in the 400-meter relay. German fans chanted his name and sought his autograph.

Hitler never formally met Owens. German media often referred to him as "the Negro Owens," while other Black athletes were described as "America's Black auxiliaries," language that suggested they were not full members of the team.

Owens later said he did not feel personally snubbed by Hitler, recalling that the Führer once stood and waved to him during competition, a gesture Owens returned.

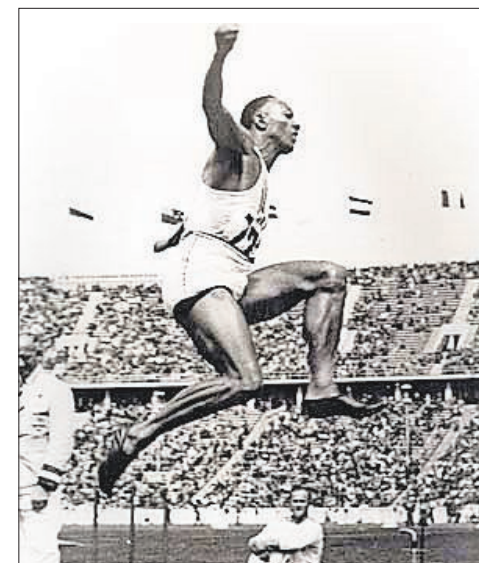
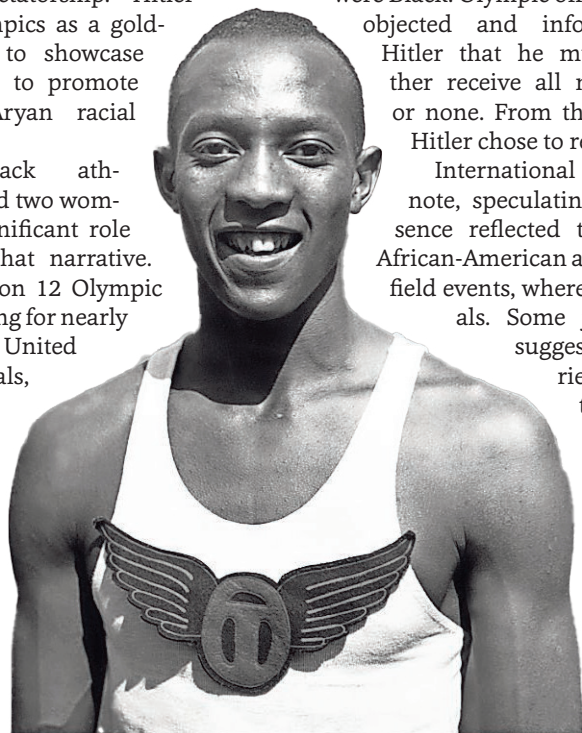
Another controversy emerged when the only two Jewish athletes on the U.S. track team, Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller, were removed from the 400-meter relay at the last minute. They were replaced by Owens and Ralph Metcalfe. Glickman later speculated that Olympic official Avery Brundage may have pressured coaches to avoid offending Hitler.

Throughout the 14 days of competition, Hitler maintained a deliberately restrained public presence, both to appease Olympic officials and to present a controlled image to international observers.

Boycott Avoided

After Hitler came to power, debate arose in the United States and other democracies over whether to boycott the Games. Critics cited Nazi treatment of Jews, while others opposed politicizing the Olympics.

Most African-American newspapers



Jesse Owens, often called "the fastest human being," won four gold medals and emerged as the star of the 1936 Olympic Games. In the long jump, he leaped 26 feet, 1½ inches, setting an Olympic record.

After the Games, Owens sought to capitalize on his fame and withdrew from the AAU's European post-Olympic tour, for which he was suspended from amateur competition.

opposed a boycott. Black journalists highlighted the hypocrisy of condemning discrimination in Germany while ignoring racial injustice at home. Publications such as The Philadelphia Tribune and The Chicago Defender argued that Black athletic success would challenge Nazi racial ideology and inspire pride among African Americans in the United States.



Members of the U.S. men's 4 x 100m relay team. The record-setting team won the Olympic and World gold (L-R) Jesse Owens, Ralph Metcalfe, Foy Draper and Frank Wykoff.



Berlin, 1936: American athletes swept the Olympic 100-meter sprint titles. Helen Stephens won gold in the women's race, while Jesse Owens captured gold for the men.

Olympic Defiance

It was a moment that shocked the world.

It was a muggy October evening in Mexico City in 1968 when Americans Tommie Smith and John Carlos rose to the victory platform to receive their medals for the Olympic 200 meters. Moments earlier, Smith had powered away from the competition, tying the world record at 19.8 seconds. Carlos, a co-favorite, finished third.

The Americans stepped onto the medal podium wearing black socks and one black glove each. Carlos wore a beaded African necklace. Smith wore a black scarf.

All of the medalists wore a large white button emblazoned with “Olympic Project for Human Rights,” an organization formed a year earlier by activist Harry Edwards to address the civil-rights concerns of African-American Olympians.

After the medals were presented, “The Star-Spangled Banner” began. At the sound of the first trumpet, Smith and Carlos thrust their gloved fists skyward and bowed their heads.

At first, attention remained on the flag. Then the stadium’s focus shifted—the photographers, officials, athletes, and cameras turned toward the podium. Soon, the attention of the world followed. Their gesture conveyed opposition to racial inequality and discrimination faced by people of color in the United States.

As Carlos later recalled, “The American people in the stands were shocked into silence. One could hear a frog piss on cotton—it was so quiet in the stadium.”

It was a moment that would go down in history

as one of the most controversial acts of defiance against American ideals. These two Black men, one from the inner city and the other from a sharecropper’s farm, stood on the victory stand at the world’s most visible sporting event and made a symbolic statement during the national anthem.

For African-American athletes, sports had long represented both opportunity and contradiction. Black athletes could gain

recognition for excellence while continuing to face discrimination elsewhere in society. Many professional leagues integrated before schools, housing, or workplaces,

creating a perception of progress that did not always reflect broader reality.

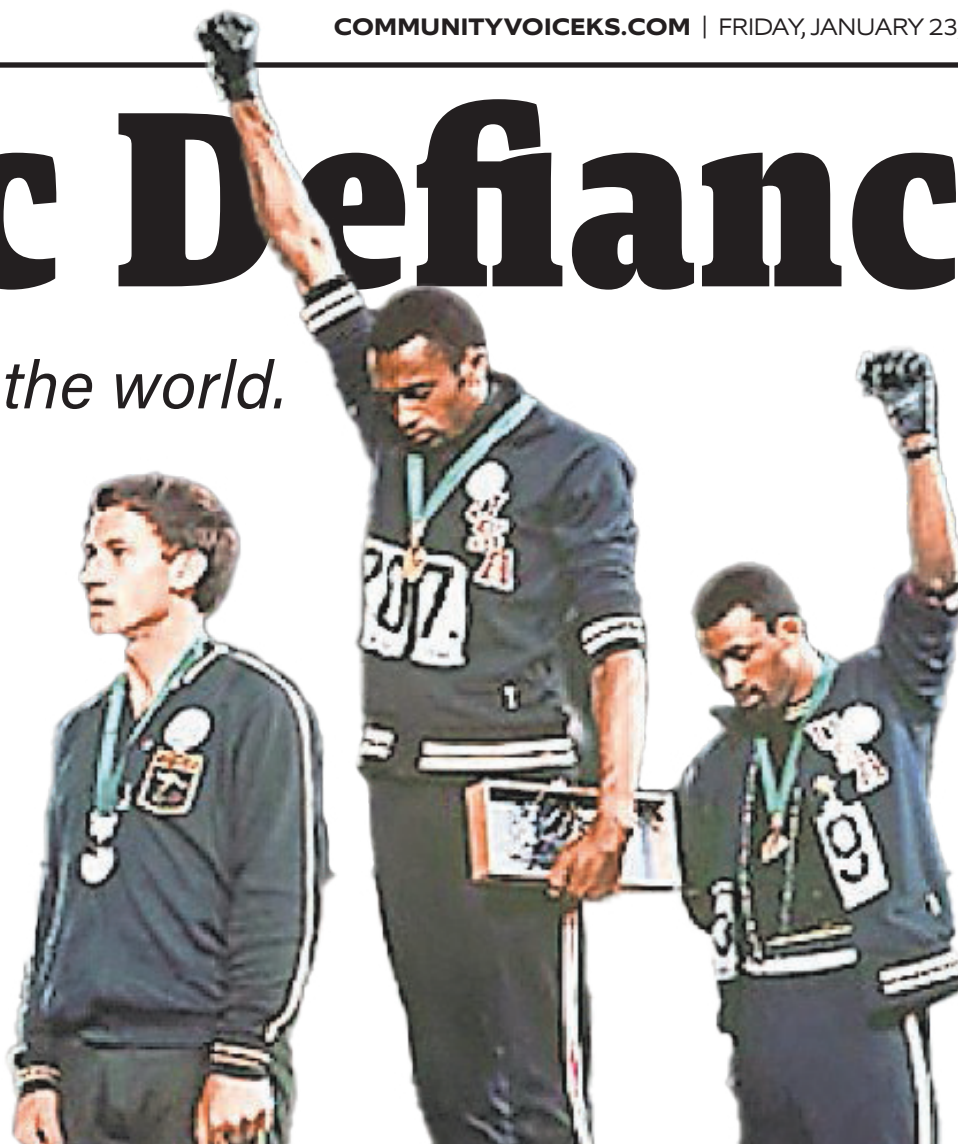
Smith and Carlos no longer believed that athletic competition alone advanced the civil-rights struggle. They questioned the idea that success in sports was evidence of meaningful racial progress. In their view, participation without protest risked reinforcing the perception that racial inequities had already been resolved.

The protest on the victory stand became the most visible moment of a broader movement associated with the Olympic Project for Human Rights, led in part by Smith and Edwards, a San Jose State University professor. One of the movement’s original goals was to encourage a boycott of the Olympic Games by African-American

athletes. Organizers believed that the absence of Black athletes—and the medals they were expected to win—would draw national and international attention to civil-rights concerns in the United States.

The proposed boycott did not gain widespread participation, with many athletes expressing sympathy with its goals but choosing to compete after years of training and preparation. The protest ultimately took place not through withdrawal from the Games, but through a symbolic action carried out during the medal ceremony.

Their action remains one of the most widely recognized examples of athlete protest in Olympic history and continues to be referenced in discussions about the role of sports figures in social and political movements.



The Olympic Project for Human Rights badge, worn by activist athletes in the 1968 Olympic Games, originally called for a boycott of the 1968 Olympic Games. Tommie Smith (left) and John Carlos raise gloved fists during the U.S. national anthem at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, a silent protest calling attention to racial injustice and human rights.

After the Protest: Smith and Carlos

Following their protest at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, **Tommie Smith** and **John Carlos** faced immediate consequences. Although they **were not stripped of their medals**, they were suspended from the U.S. team, expelled from the Olympic Village, and required to leave Mexico City shortly

after the ceremony.

Back in the United States, both men encountered public backlash, harsh media criticism, and threats to their personal safety. Their athletic careers were disrupted, and professional opportunities became limited.

In the years that followed, Smith and Carlos remained

involved in sports, education, and community work. Smith pursued teaching and coaching, while Carlos worked as a coach, counselor, and author. Over time, public perception of their protest shifted. What was once widely condemned is now recognized as a pivotal moment in the history of athlete activism and civil-rights advocacy.

The Yates Branch: How One Place Shaped Generations

The Yates Branch, located at 644 Quindaro, played a central role in much of LaDora Murphy Lattimore's early success in life.

As a teen in the early 1960s, Lattimore and her friends packed the branch, which served as a welcoming hangout for students.

"Parents would always let you go there when they wouldn't let you go other places," she recalled.

It was a role the Yates Branch had served for more than half a century. Although the organization no longer carries its YWCA designation, the Friends of Yates organization continues to serve the Kansas City, Kansas, community, carrying forward a legacy rooted in empowerment, safety, and belonging.

The Yates Branch YWCA dates back to 1915, a time long before women were empowered feminists and long before integration. Women were expected to marry, work in the home, and raise children. Those who did not marry often worked, and for women of color, opportunities were limited largely to domestic service. For college-educated Black women, teaching was one of the few professional careers available.

Across the country, YWCA branches provided safe housing for young women—some year-round, others as affordable places to stay while traveling. However, these options were largely unavailable to Black women. Recognizing this need, members of the Kansas City community began advocating



LaDora Murphy

for a YWCA branch to serve Black women.

Proposals for a "colored branch" surfaced as early as 1907. A mass meeting was held on March 16, 1911, at First Baptist Church at Fifth and Nebraska to organize such a branch. The Yates Branch YWCA was officially organized on March 4, 1913.

The idea was not new to the national YWCA. The first "colored" YWCA opened in 1889 in Dayton, Ohio, following a model similar to Black YMCAs that dated back to 1853. The Kansas City YWCA was the only colored YWCA ever established in Kansas.

The branch's original theme was "Service, involvement, love."

Churches and individuals from across the Black community were instrumental

in making the branch a reality, creating a deep sense of ownership from the beginning. Although the branch operated under the Central YWCA in downtown Kansas City, Kansas, and did not control its own finances, the Yates Branch maintained an administrative board to oversee daily operations.

The branch was originally housed in a rented building at Fifth and Nebraska, with Lydia Smith sent from the national office as its first Negro secretary and executive director. In 1915, it moved to Ninth and Nebraska, where a matron supervised roomers. By 1920, the branch relocated to 337 Washington Boulevard and housed 25 young women.

In 1919, the branch was renamed Yates in honor of Josephine Yates, believed to

be the first African American woman to hold a full professorship at a university and a prominent women's club leader in Kansas City, Missouri.

Leadership played a critical role in the branch's growth. In 1929, "V" Velma Hardee Middlebrooks became director, serving until 1960. In a 1949 article in The Kansas City Call, Middlebrooks said she was



"V" Velma Hardee Middlebrooks

brought to Yates "to help this baby walk." At the time, the branch had just 45 members and limited programming. Under her leadership, membership grew to more



Tall Girls Club

than 1,000.

Fundraising efforts included teas and lawn parties, particularly after a 1940 fire destroyed the Washington Boulevard building. The Y temporarily relocated before moving in 1942 to two buildings at 636 and 640 Quindaro—one for residences and one for offices. Middlebrooks took pride

in the fact that the second building was paid off in just 18 months through community and church contributions. However, the Central Y retained the deeds, a point of tension that would later resurface.

Middlebrooks also expanded programming. The Yates Branch gained national attention for its Cosmopolitan Club, which successfully merged business, professional, and industrial

women—groups that were typically kept separate elsewhere.

"In keeping with the 'Y' movement for world peace, we felt we must first create peace among ourselves," Middlebrooks explained. "Where there are barriers, there is no true peace."

Other programs included Y-Teens, the Deroloc Club, Y Collegiate, and even a Tall Girls Club. With the help of volunteers, Yates offered educational and recreational opportunities for children, youth, adults, and seniors. Over time, programming evolved from etiquette and crafts to preparing women for broader roles, including employment.

The Yates Branch offered a free employment service and assisted women in finding housing, particularly young women new to the city. Although focused on women, Yates also welcomed men, addressing a lack of programming available to

See **YATES** Page 15 →

YATES, from Page 14 ↓

Black men at the time. Its facilities became a central gathering place for community organizations, hosting teas, meetings, and social events.

One of the branch's most enduring programs was its summer day camp. Dating back to 1911, the Stay-at-Home Camp provided a six-week daytime option that allowed children to return home each night. Affordable and safe, the program remained popular well into the 21st century, with fees often subsidized when families could not pay.

Nationally, the YWCA was an early advocate for racial justice. By the 1930s and 1940s, it publicly opposed lynching, promoted interracial cooperation, and adopted an interracial charter declaring its commitment to addressing injustice wherever it existed.

Locally, however, progress was slower. Efforts to integrate Kansas City Y branches never fully took hold. Few African Americans participated in Central Y programs, and few White residents visited the Yates Branch.

By the late 1960s, frustration grew over the Central Y's control of funding. In 1967, Yates supporters called for open discussions on racial integration and demanded



Y Teens Club

greater recognition of Yates as a vital part of the association. Despite growing membership and revenue, funds were funneled to the Central Y, while Yates facilities and programs suffered from underinvestment.

These concerns coincided with broader challenges facing the Central Y, including urban renewal, changing demographics, competition from other programs, and declining participation. Without meaningful reform, the organization continued to weaken.

In 1979, United Way ended its funding, citing insufficient services to justify continued support. Although warnings had been issued for two years, the decision proved devastating for both

the Central Y and the Yates Branch.

Anticipating the loss, Yates supporters organized the Friends of Yates and hired a young executive director, LaDora Murphy Lattimore—ensuring that while the YWCA chapter closed, the spirit and mission of Yates would endure.

Friends of Yates Today

Today, the legacy of service connected with the historic Yates Branch continues through **Friends of Yates**, a long-standing community agency providing critical domestic violence support in Kansas City, Kansas. Friends of Yates operates a **24-hour hotline and emergency shelter, offers advocacy, case management, legal**



National Industrial Progress Day 1941



Ladies Dinner

and financial assistance, counseling, and support groups for survivors and

their families, and provides broad **outreach, education, prevention, and community**

training programs designed to help individuals and families affected by abuse.

WASHINGTON, from Page 11 ↓

economically and socially. Once they demonstrated reliability, productivity, and usefulness, equality would follow.

The Atlanta Compromise

Washington's philosophy reached its most influential moment in his 1895 address at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta. Invited because of his moderate reputation, he became the first Black man to address the largely White audience.

In his speech, Washington called for cooperation between the races, emphasizing economic partnership

over social integration. He reassured Whites that Black Americans sought opportunity rather than upheaval, while encouraging Black Americans to focus on progress from the ground up.

"No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem."

His most controversial statement followed:

"In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."

The address was widely praised by White political and business leaders and became known as the **Atlanta**

Compromise. It suggested that Black Americans would temporarily accept segregation and political disfranchisement in exchange for economic opportunity and access to education.

Critics later argued that the speech helped legitimize the doctrine of "**separate but equal**," which was formalized by the Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). Supporters countered that Washington's approach was pragmatic, stabilizing, and protective during a period marked by racial violence and repression. Regardless of interpretation, the speech cemented Washington's national prominence and defined his role in shaping the racial debate of the era.

DU BOIS, from Page 11 ↓

Leadership and education, he argued, must lift the masses.

"It is, ever was and ever will be from the top downward that culture filters."

He championed the idea of the **Talented Tenth**, an educated Black leadership class responsible for guiding and uplifting the broader community.

Constant Agitation

A brilliant writer and speaker, Du Bois called for "ceaseless agitation and insistent demand for equality," including moral

persuasion, protest, and political pressure. He helped found the NAACP and *The Crisis*, serving as the magazine's editor-in-chief for more than 25 years.

Over time, Du Bois grew increasingly disillusioned. He broke with the NAACP in 1934 and later aligned himself with Pan-African and socialist movements. In 1960, he moved to Ghana, where he died on August 28, 1963—the eve of the March on Washington. The man who had spoken longest and loudest for Black equality was silent as many of his aims were finally realized.



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Linwood Grocery: New Operator, New Model

The city is betting new structure and support can help maintain stability of proposed new grocer in Linwood Shopping Center.

By Bonita Gooch,
Voice Editor-in-Chief

Kansas City leaders are moving forward with a plan to reopen the long-troubled grocery store at 31st Street and Prospect Avenue under a new operator and revised expectations aimed at addressing safety, theft and long-term sustainability.

The City Council is expected to consider an ordinance authorizing a 10-year lease, with two five-year renewal options, with United Market KC, LLC. The company would operate a full-service grocery store in the city-owned building at 3110 Prospect Ave., last occupied by Sun Fresh Market and operated by Community Builders of Kansas City. City officials have said they hope the store can reopen by mid-April.

Community Builders closed the store in August 2025 after sustained financial losses and ongoing safety challenges, despite city assistance intended to keep the grocery operating.

Background: City Ownership and Prior Investment

The City of Kansas City owns Linwood Shopping Center, where the store is located, and has invested more than \$15 million over time to acquire, renovate, construct and equip the center, including the grocery store space. Those improvements were part of broader efforts to support East Side revitalization and improve access to fresh food.

That level of public investment reflects the city's long-standing commitment to maintaining a grocery store at the site — and the



The city-owned grocery store at 31st Street and Prospect Avenue has been closed since August 2025 and is slated to reopen under a new operator.

importance city leaders place on getting this next attempt right.

Community Builders' Role and What Went Wrong

Community Builders of Kansas City, a local nonprofit community development corporation, took over operations of the grocery store in 2019 after a previous operator exited, stepping in to prevent the neighborhood from losing its full-service grocery store.

The organization also operates a Sun Fresh location on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in a shopping plaza it owns. That store has remained stable and does not face the same outside safety and security challenges present at the Linwood site. In both cases, Community Builders assumed operations after another operator left.

At the Linwood location, however, the company

struggled with persistent issues beyond its control, including loitering, drug activity, prostitution and panhandling. Those conditions drove customers away and forced the organization to spend thousands of dollars per week on private security.

While empty shelves became visible in the final year of operation, Community Builders President and CEO Emmitt Pierson and city officials said the core issue was sustained net losses tied to theft, security costs and declining customer traffic. In 2024 alone, Community Builders reported losing more than \$1.3 million operating the store.

The experience highlights the razor-thin margins common in grocery retail, where profits typically range from 1% to 3%, leaving little room to absorb theft, security expenses or drops in customer traffic.



Bus stops at 31st Street and Prospect Avenue have become regular gathering spots, contributing to safety and loitering concerns that previous grocery operators said hurt business.

A Different Model Proposed

City officials say United Market KC was selected after interviews with multiple candidates and because of its proposed operational

approach.

The store will operate as a full-service grocery and is considering a membership-based access model, similar to Costco, intended to reduce theft and improve

safety by limiting access to paying members.

United Market KC is also expected to be affiliated with Associated Wholesale

See **LINWOOD** Page 23 →

A New Book, Not a New Chapter: Inside the Ad Hoc Center for Healing and Justice

After decades of serving families impacted by violence, Ad Hoc Group Against Crime is reintroducing itself through the Center for Healing and Justice — a place where healing comes first, supported by neighbors investing in their own community through the Central City Economic Development (CCED) Sales Tax Program.

By Brian Escobar,
EDC-KC

On Kansas City's East Side, just off 31st Street, a new building is rising with a clear purpose: to serve as a place where healing is treated as essential infrastructure and where a neighborhood shaped by disinvestment can move forward through a different story.

For nearly fifty years, Ad Hoc Group Against Crime has shown up when violence disrupts families and communities, providing support, advocacy, and guidance through grief and uncertainty. With the development of the Ad Hoc Center for Healing and Justice, the organization is extending that work by creating a permanent, community-rooted hub focused on healing, stability, and long-term resilience alongside justice.

This moment represents more than growth. As Ad Hoc President and CEO Damon Daniel describes it, the Center marks “a new book, not a new chapter,” shaped by lived experience and a clearer understanding of what communities need to heal.

A Legacy Built on Showing Up

Ad Hoc Group Against Crime was founded in 1977 by civic leader Alvin Brooks during a moment of crisis in Kansas City. A series of violent deaths along Prospect Avenue exposed both the danger facing Black women and the absence of systems families could trust. What began as a coalition of concerned residents became a community-based organization willing to stand between residents and the criminal justice system when no one else would.

Over time, Ad Hoc became a trusted presence when violence occurred, helping families navigate



Hoc President and CEO Damon Daniel say the organization's work has expanded beyond crisis response into prevention, advocacy, and healing, through partnerships with courts, hospitals, schools, and community organizations across the region.



Thanks to support from the Central City Economic Development Sales Tax Program, Ad Hoc is building a new facility for its Center for Healing and Justice and creating a permanent, community-rooted hub focused on healing, stability, and long-term resilience alongside justice.

courts, hospitals, and unfamiliar processes. That role established the organization as a bridge in communities where institutional systems had often failed to show up with consistency or care.

Under the leadership of Damon Daniel, Ad Hoc's work has expanded beyond crisis response into prevention, advocacy, and healing, through partnerships with courts,

hospitals, schools, and community organizations across the region. That history gives credibility to the organization's next evolution: its mission opening the Center for Healing and Justice.

Why Healing Has to Be Part of the Solution

For the communities Ad Hoc serves, violence is rarely an

isolated event. Daniel describes it as layered, shaped by disinvestment, racism, and limited access to opportunity. Many families who seek support are not encountering trauma for the first time. They are carrying it.

“Eighty-five percent of the people we serve have lost a loved one to violence,” Daniel explains. “Some have lost multiple family

members. Violence becomes a constant, not an interruption.”

That reality affects family stability, neighborhood health, and workforce participation. Responding only after violence occurs, Daniel says, is incomplete. A purely punitive approach may satisfy a narrow definition of justice, but it rarely brings resolution to the people left behind.

For many families, justice begins with dignity. It means being listened to, supported, and guided through a process they were never prepared to navigate. Healing is not an add-on. It is foundational.

Inside the Ad Hoc Center for Healing and Justice

As the scope of Ad Hoc's work grew, it became clear that borrowed spaces and temporary offices were limiting what the organization could offer. The Center for Healing and Justice represents a structural shift in how care, prevention, and community empowerment are delivered.

“We can't keep doing the same work the same way and expect different outcomes,” Daniel says. “This isn't a new chapter. It's a new book.”

The Center is designed as a centralized, place-based hub where individuals and families impacted by violence can access services without navigating disconnected referrals. Trauma-informed counseling, crisis intervention, legal navigation, health partnerships, and community education are coordinated under one roof, allowing people to move forward with continuity rather than fragmentation.

Equally important, the Center creates space for collaboration. By co-locating partners, medical providers, and community leaders,

See **AD HOC CENTER** Page 23 →

Groundbreaking Marks New Chapter for Historic Yvonne Starks Wilson Park

By Voice News Service

Shovels hit the ground Wednesday as city leaders, neighborhood advocates, and residents gathered to mark the start of a long-anticipated transformation of **Yvonne Starks Wilson Park**. The groundbreaking launches approximately **\$3.2 million** in improvements aimed at restoring the historic park as a vibrant, inclusive hub for recreation and community life in east Kansas City.

Led by **Kansas City Parks and Recreation**, the project is scheduled for completion ahead of the 2026 World Cup, ensuring the park is ready to welcome residents and visitors alike. Once finished, the upgrades will include expanded parking, new restrooms and picnic shelter, an inclusive playground, basketball courts, a multi-purpose recreational field with lighting and bleachers, more



Yvonne Starks Wilson

than 2,000 feet of paved trails, new site furnishings, and interpretive signage highlighting the park's history and namesake.

Third District Councilmember **Melissa Patterson Hazley** said the investment reflects both the park's significance and the city's responsibility to the surrounding neighborhoods. She noted that Yvonne Starks Wilson Park holds a unique place in the city's park system **as the only park named for an African American**

woman, adding that the improvements represent a continued commitment to safe, accessible, and welcoming public spaces for families.

Kathryn Persley, president of the Heart of the City Neighborhood Association, emphasized the park's long role as a gathering place and praised the collaboration between residents and KC Parks. Persley said the project honors the community's advocacy and ensures the park will serve current and future generations with dignity, accessibility, and opportunity.

The park is named for the late **Yvonne Starks Wilson**, a trailblazing Missouri state senator and longtime community leader. The park was dedicated in her honor in 2018, recognizing both her legislative legacy and deep roots in the Dunbar-Leeds area. She died in 2019.

Originally opened in June 1922 as Liberty Park, the site

carries a powerful history. It was privately funded to provide African American residents a place for recreation at a time when racial segregation barred them from facilities like Swope Park. Early descriptions called it the only amusement park in the nation created specifically for Black residents, featuring boating, sports, picnicking, and live entertainment. The city purchased the park in 1950 and expanded it in 1953 to nearly 18 acres.

In more recent years, KC Parks identified the park as part of its Quality of Life Improvement District, recognizing the need for focused investment in neighborhoods with historically lower



life expectancy and fewer recreational resources. The current project builds on that commitment, combining infrastructure improvements with storytelling elements that preserve neighborhood history.

When complete, Yvonne Starks Wilson Park will stand as a renewed symbol of resilience — honoring its past while offering modern spaces for play, wellness, and connection in the heart of east Kansas City.



Gathered for the ceremonial groundbreaking for the expansion of the Yvonne Starks Wilson Park in KCMO are (L-R) James Wang, Deputy Director of the Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department; Alvin Brooks a historic Dunbar-Leeds Neighborhood resident; Kathryn Persley, president of the Heart of the City Neighborhood Association; Third District Councilmember Melissa Patterson Hazley; Fifth District At-Large City Councilmember Darrell Curls, Mario Vasquez, Kansas City City Manager; Stephenie K. Smith, Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioner; and Parks Board President Beth Haden.



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KCK MLK Holiday Celebration

The 46th Annual Kansas City, Kansas Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Celebration was held on King Holiday at Memorial Hall under the theme “Mission Possible: Freedom, Equality and Justice for All.” The program featured local leaders, musical performances, and youth dance presentations honoring Dr. King’s legacy. Guest speaker **Dr. Claybon Lea Jr.**, senior pastor of Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Fairfield and Suisun City, California, delivered the keynote address. The celebration also included the presentation of numerous college scholarships to local high school students.



Trump’s Belated MLK Proclamation Follows Holiday Snub and NAACP Rebuke

By Voice News Service

President **Donald Trump** formally recognized the 2026 Martin Luther King Jr. federal holiday only after facing mounting criticism from civil rights leaders and organizations for failing to issue a timely statement honoring the day.

The proclamation, released late on Martin Luther King Jr. Day came hours after the **NAACP** publicly rebuked Trump for remaining silent while communities across the country commemorated the legacy of the civil rights leader. By contrast, President **Joe Biden** had issued a

statement honoring King several days earlier.

NAACP President Derrick Johnson accused Trump of deliberately ignoring the holiday, saying the president has “zero interest in uniting this country or recognizing its history and diversity.” Johnson and other advocates argued that Trump’s delay reflected a broader pattern of minimizing the contributions and struggles of Black Americans.

The backlash followed controversy late last year after the Trump administration removed Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Juneteenth from the National Park Service’s

annual free-entry calendar, replacing them with Trump’s birthday, June 14 — which also coincides with Flag Day. Critics said the move symbolized an effort to sideline historic milestones central to Black history.

“Removing MLK Day and Juneteenth from the national parks calendar is more than petty politics — it’s an attack on the truth of this nation’s history,” the NAACP said at the time, calling it an attempt to erase King’s legacy and minimize the meaning of emancipation.

In his eventual proclamation, Trump defended his record by pointing to his

decision last year to declassify documents related to King’s assassination. That move was met with resistance from members of King’s family, including **Bernice King**, who criticized the administration’s broader approach to civil rights.

Speaking during King Day observances, Bernice King also condemned Trump’s recent comments suggesting the Civil Rights Act of 1964 harmed white Americans. She called the claim “wrong and dangerous,” warning that it rewrites history and fuels division rather than unity.

“The Civil Rights Act did



Bernice King condemned President Donald Trump’s comments on the Civil Rights Act, saying they fuel division and misrepresent the purpose of the civil rights movement.

not give Black people special treatment,” she said. “It made discrimination illegal.”

While Trump’s proclamation praised King’s words and encouraged Americans to engage in service, it notably

avoided explicit references to Black Americans or the systemic racism King spent his life confronting — omissions that critics say underscore why the delayed recognition drew such sharp reaction.

ICTea's New Owners Focus on Community, Consistency and Connection

By Jacinda Hall
Wichita Journalism
Collaborative

For years, Paul, 32, and Shaunte, 30, Stovall were simply regular customers at ICTea (pronounced eye-see-tea), stopping in for fruit teas and smoothies that fit their dairy-free lifestyle. Today, the

Wichita couple are the owners of the North Rock Road boba tea shop, continuing a business that already had a strong reputation while adding their own vision for community connection.

A Local Favorite With a Strong Foundation

ICTea, located at 3300 N.

Rock Road, Suite A3, specializes in boba tea, fruit teas, smoothies, slushes and coffee drinks. The shop originally opened in 2016 under previous ownership and developed a loyal following for its quality drinks, clean environment, friendly customer service and its extensive variety of customizable options.

"That was just kind of our spot to be," Paul Stovall said, recalling their years as customers. "We're both lactose free and dairy free, and this was a place where we didn't have to worry about getting sick."

An Unexpected Opportunity to Step in

In July 2024, the previous owner announced plans to close the shop if a buyer could not be found. When Shauntel learned the business might shut down, she contacted Paul to talk through whether purchasing the shop was even possible. Shauntel had long been interested in owning a coffee-related business, and ICTea began to stand out as an opportunity that felt both familiar and realistic.

The Stovalls officially took over ICTea in August 2024, with less than a month of downtime between the previous owner's closure and their reopening — a quick



Paul and Shaunte Stovall, owners ICTea



turnaround made possible by purchasing an already established operation.

Keeping Continuity With Staff And Customers

Rather than starting from scratch, the Stovalls rehired the existing staff, leaning on their experience to ensure continuity for customers.

"Without them, the transition from not owning a business to owning a fully developed one would have been impossible," Shauntel said.

Paul's background in business studies and Shauntel's experience managing people helped smooth the learning curve. Shauntel said one of the most rewarding parts of ownership has been building relationships with employees and seeing their passion for the drinks they make.

What Is Boba Tea — and Why ICTea Stands Out

ICTea's menu centers on boba tea, also known as bubble tea — a sweet, customizable drink that originated in Taiwan and is commonly found at Asian tea shops and restaurants. Boba tea typically includes a tea or fruit base, optional milk or dairy-free

alternatives, and chewy tapioca pearls added to the bottom of the drink for texture.

In addition to boba tea, ICTea offers a wide range of flavored green teas, milk teas, smoothies, slushes, chai teas and coffees. For customers who prefer warm drinks during colder months, the shop also serves hot coffee options.

A Casual, Family-Friendly Gathering Space

The restaurant features casual dine-in seating and positions itself as a family-friendly space where customers can relax and spend time together. ICTea offers a **loyalty program for frequent customers** and regularly brings in special events such as **karaoke nights, trivia, and live entertainment**.

Specials of the day and upcoming events are typically shared on the shop's social media pages, including its Facebook page at **facebook.com/TheICTea**.

The alcohol-free environment makes the shop a welcoming option for families and customers of all ages.

Service Beyond the Shop

Both Paul and Shauntel also serve in the **Army National**

Guard, a commitment they say reflects their shared value of service and community involvement.

Paul's mother, Stephanie Stovall, said his work ethic and dedication to community were shaped by his late father, Carl Stovall.

"He's always been willing to take on challenges," she said.

Stephanie said she was supportive when she learned the couple were considering buying ICTea, even though she wasn't familiar with boba tea at the time. After trying the drinks herself, she quickly understood the appeal.

Looking Ahead

ICTea is **open seven days a week**, with longer hours during the summer months and shorter hours in the winter. For the Stovalls, maintaining the shop's reputation for quality while expanding its role as a welcoming, community-centered gathering place remains the priority.

"We were very thankful the opportunity came to us," Shauntel said. "It felt like the right time, and we wanted to keep this place available for the community."

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A.R.I.S.E. Heroes and Sheroes Breakfast

Cold weather did not dampen attendance at the ARISE Spirituals Choir's annual Heroes and Sheroes Breakfast, held on King Holiday at the WSU Metroplex. This year's honorees included Dr. Galyn Vesey, Eric Sexton, Telena Sexton, and Bishop Mark Gilkey, honored posthumously. A scholarship was also presented to Amare Batiste, recognizing academic promise and community impact. *PHOTOS BY GARY KIANRD, MY PICTUREMAN*



Wichita Ministerial League Worship Celebration

Despite frigid temperatures, a large crowd gathered at Wichita State University's Metroplex for the Wichita Ministerial League's King Holiday Worship Celebration. This year's keynote address was delivered by Bishop Herman Hicks. As part of the celebration, the League awarded scholarships to Amya Williams, Clark Peeples, and Antwan Banks, Jr., continuing its commitment to uplifting the next generation. *PHOTOS BY GARY KINARD, MY PICTUREMAN*





Patricia Ann Silmon, 70
April 2, 1954 - Jan. 18, 2026
Service will be held at 10 a.m. Wed., Jan. 28, at St. Andrews Baptist Church, 3901 E. 25th St.

Paul White, Sr., 79
Nov. 12, 1946 - Jan. 17, 2026
Service will be held at 10 a.m. Sat., Jan.31, at St. Mark United Methodist Church, 1525 N. Lorraine.

Derrick Dwayne Mason, Sr., 59
Dec. 12, 1966 - Jan. 13, 2026
Service was held Jan. 21, at First Church of God in Christ.

Dorothy “Faye” Rogers, 61
Aug. 5, 1964 - Jan. 11, 2026
Service will be held at 11 a.m. Fri., Jan. 30, at Greater New Testament Baptist Church, 1833 N. Hydraulic.

Thomas Smith Jr., 87
June 13, 1938 - Jan. 10, 2026
Service was held Jan. 22 at New Philadelphia Church of God In Christ.

Naysh Gray Nero, Newborn
Jan. 5, 2026 - Jan. 7, 2026
Service was held Jan. 20 at Jackson Mortuary Chapel.

Cleo Nunn, 93
Aug. 23, 1932 - Jan. 7, 2026
Service was held Jan. 24 at New Hope Missionary Baptist Church.

Vevelyn “Yvonne” Jacques, 78
Jan. 18, 1947 - Jan. 5, 2026
Service was held Jan. 13 at St. Mark United Methodist Church.

Stephen Maloney, 72
April 7, 1953 - Jan. 3, 2026
Service was held Jan. 24 at Jackson Mortuary Chapel.

Janet Kaye Bonner, 62
Feb. 18, 1963 - Jan. 2, 2026
Service was held Jan.23 at St. Mary Baptist Church.

Joe Smith Jr., 68
July 25, 1957 - Jan. 2, 2026
Service was held Jan. 23 at Jackson Mortuary Chapel.

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32.13.00 – Site Concrete

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LINWOOD, from Page 17 ↓

Grocers, a Kansas City–based cooperative that supplies independent grocers with distribution, national and private-label products, and pricing programs designed to help keep shelves stocked and control costs. Associated Wholesale Grocers would not own or operate the store.

United Market will focus on workforce diversity and neighborhood representation, with projected wages ranging from about \$15 to \$28 per hour for skilled positions. Benefits options are still under review.

Anthony Estrada, the proposed operator, has said he brings more than 30 years of experience in grocery retail operations. City documents and publicly available records do not identify any previous grocery stores he has owned or operated.

Security, Funding and Open Questions

Security remains central to whether the store can succeed where others struggled.

Reportedly, the proposed lease includes the city paying the operator’s security costs for one year. The ordinance authorizing the lease — sponsored by Mayor Quinton Lucas and Councilmembers Melissa Robinson and Melissa Patterson Hazley — also includes language appropriating \$1.5 million in support of the agreement.

The ordinance does not specify how the \$1.5 million would be used, whether it is for or in addition to the proposed security support, or where the funds will come from. The lease itself has not yet been made public, and the rent United Market KC would pay has not

been disclosed.

Other Proposed Supporting Changes

City leaders have also discussed expanding the Community Improvement District along the Linwood corridor. A CID is a special taxing district that collects additional sales tax to fund services such as security, maintenance and improvements. Expanding the district would increase available revenue for corridor upkeep beyond the store itself.

City officials have also outlined proposed law enforcement changes along Prospect Avenue, including plans for a new proactive police squad of six officers and one sergeant, continued coordination among law enforcement, prosecutors and judges, and an emphasis on accountability alongside wrap-around services.

Rebuilding a Sense of Safety and Stability

For nearby residents, reopening the store is about more than restoring grocery access. It is about whether a sense of safety — inside and outside the store — and stability in the store’s operation can be maintained.

Membership controls, coordinated security and city involvement may help stabilize operations. But past experience shows grocery stores in high-risk environments operate on a narrow margin for error. If safety concerns resurface or key supports fall short, the same pressures that undermined previous efforts could return.

The reopening represents another chance — shaped by hard lessons — to determine whether long-term grocery access can finally take hold at Linwood and Prospect.

AD HOC CENTER, from Page 18 ↓

Ad Hoc is shifting from a reactive model to a coordinated ecosystem that treats healing, education, and accountability as interconnected.

This approach reflects a public health understanding of violence that requires sustained investment, shared responsibility, and long-term infrastructure. The Center becomes the anchor for that work.

Public Investment as a Commitment to Healing

The Ad Hoc Center for Healing and Justice was made possible through support from the Central City Economic Development Sales Tax Program. Daniel describes the investment as essential. For nonprofits, raising capital for facilities is often the greatest barrier to growth. Without CCED support, the Center would likely still be years away from opening.

More than feasibility, the investment signals trust. It reflects neighbors choosing to

reinvest in people and places long affected by disinvestment. In this case, public dollars support healing, stability, and prevention as core components of economic development.

The Center reflects CCED’s broader understanding that economic development is not only about projects, but about strengthening the conditions that allow families and communities to thrive.

Laying the Foundation for What’s Next

The Ad Hoc Center for Healing and Justice is still under construction, but its purpose is already clear. It represents a commitment to people and to the systems that support stability.

By addressing trauma, coordinating care, and strengthening families, the Center creates conditions where economic opportunity can take hold. Stability becomes the foundation. Healing becomes the pathway. Community becomes the measure of success.

Healing is infrastructure. And infrastructure is economic development.



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