

Black **History** Month

THE BLACK FAMILY



Representation, Identity, and Diversity

Friday, February 25, 2021

1:00pm – 2:30pm

Presented by

The Ninth Judicial District Administrative Judge

Honorable Kathie E. Davidson

&

The Westchester Black Bar Association



Welcome

Ninth Judicial District Administrative Judge
Honorable Kathie E. Davidson

Pledge of Allegiance

National Negro Anthem
“Lift Every Voice and Sing”

Song Selection by D’Jarious Allen
“Blessed Assurance”

WriteGirl Poet, Hyla Etame
“Ndolé”

Keynote Speaker
Dr. Michael Baston, J.D., Ed.D
President, Rockland Community College

Write Girl Poet, Sydnee Bluford
“Brittle Branches, Strong Leaves, and the Wounded Puma”

Song Selection by D’Jarious Allen
“How we got over”

Closing

Lift Every Voice and Sing

[James Weldon Johnson, J. Rosamond Johnson](#)

Lift ev'ry voice and sing, 'Till
earth and heaven ring.
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty; Let
our rejoicing rise,
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us, Sing a
song full of the hope that the present has brought us; Facing the rising
sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast'ning rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died; Yet
with a steady beat,

Have not our weary feet,
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered, Out
from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the bright gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way; Thou who
has by Thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee, Lest our
hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee, Shadowed
beneath thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.

**Songwriters: Rosamond J. Johnson / James Weldon Johnson *Lift Every
Voice and Sing* lyrics © Edward B Marks Music Company, Marks
Edward B. Music Corp., GLORYSOUND, A DIV. OF SHAWNEE
PRESS, INC.**

MICHAEL A. BASTON

President, Rockland Community College



Named as one of the country's most Notable Education Leaders of 2017 by *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, Dr. Michael A. Baston serves as the 7th President of Rockland Community College. A national community college leader who helps develop comprehensive supports that foster college completion, his work has been featured on MSNBC, and in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Atlantic*, *Black Enterprise Magazine* and *The Education Advisory Board*. In addition, he is a contributing author to the books *Race, Education, and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens*, and *The Handbook for Student Affairs in Community Colleges*.

Dr. Baston serves as a national Guided Pathways coach for the American Association of Community Colleges and consults with college

leadership teams around the nation, helping them integrate student success initiatives to advance college completion. Prior to serving as President of Rockland Community College, Dr. Baston was Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs at LaGuardia Community College in Long Island City, NY. He was also part of the Aspen Institute's inaugural class of Fellows for Community College Excellence, where he explored systemic issues affecting the educational access pipeline and student success.

Dr. Baston began his career as a public interest lawyer representing educational institutions and social justice organizations. His work with students as a professor of business and legal studies led to his career as a student affairs administrator. Dr. Baston holds a B.A. from Iona College, a J.D. from Brooklyn Law School, and an Ed.D from St. John Fisher College.

D'JARIOUS ALLEN



D'Jarious Allen is a 37-year-old Artist and Entrepreneur. Born and raised in a religious family, he grew up believing that anything is possible. He began singing at age 5 and his love for the arts grew for the stage in 4th grade and beyond. In 2012, D'Jarious received the Richard Maltby Jr. award for Musical Theatre Excellence from the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. This recognition gave him a full scholarship to Western Connecticut State University, where he received a BA in Musical Theatre. D'Jarious now resides in the Atlanta area where he works on upcoming movies and tv shows. With his dedication and determination, there is no way you won't see him on the big screen. Stay tuned. @djarious.allen



About WriteGirl

Founded in 2001, WriteGirl is a nationally-recognized creative writing and mentoring organization serving more than 500 teens annually, mainly from LA's high-density neighborhoods. WriteGirl envisions a world where all teens live, write, and speak boldly as they become inspiring, transformative leaders, driven to effect positive change in their communities. Now in its 20th season, WriteGirl has maintained a 100 percent success rate in helping its seniors not only graduate from high school, but also enroll in college. WriteGirl also works with boys and co-ed groups under the name "Bold Ink Writers." As a founding member of the Arts for Healing and Justice Network (AHJN), Bold Ink Writers brings creative writing workshops and mentors to youth who are incarcerated and systems-impacted. For more information, visit www.writegirl.org.

National Recognition for WriteGirl:

WriteGirl has won more than 90 awards for its 19 years of empowering teen girls. WriteGirl and Executive Director Keren Taylor were awarded the 2020 Los Angeles Times Innovator Award and in 2014 Keren Taylor was named a CNN Hero. In 2013, WriteGirl was honored by First Lady Michelle Obama with the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award – an initiative of the President's Committee on the Arts & the Humanities and the highest national honor awarded to exemplary out-of-school time programs. One of the breakout stars of 2021 so far has been WriteGirl Alum, Amanda Gorman, the national youth poet laureate whose performance at President Biden's Inauguration and the Super Bowl LV struck the hearts of America and the world. We are so proud of Amanda and all that she has achieved since her WriteGirl days, and that pride extends to our entire WriteGirl community. We continue to support and encourage the writing of hundreds of young women like Amanda each year and whether they recite a poem at the Presidential Inauguration or for their families at home, we are filled with pride and hope for the futures of these young writers.

WriteGirl Teens

Ndolé by Hyla Etame

Boom. Boom.
A clap of thunder.
We're leaving "Africa on the Bay"—
the little African store in Tampa
with skin bleaching cream and canned sardines
next to a Yoruba religious store—
heading home
where my grandmother
waits on the couch, watching Nigerian films—
even though we're Cameroonian.

Drip. Drop.
Downpour follows.
I take it as a sign:
We—my sister and I—are meant to cook
for the first time
on this day
a meal from our Fatherland.
From the Atlantic shores our toes have yet to take a dip in
to the tea and coffee leaves on our great-grandfather's old farm we have not yet grasped.
I think of palm trees,
mosquitoes,
waterfalls,
conversations in Bassa or Douala.
Distinct markings of a country I have yet to touch
and that colonizers of centuries ago failed to understand and respect.
Drip. Drop.

We come home and I find my grandmother at the kitchen counter:
cooking commences.
She lists the ingredients using her fingers
Bitter leaf. Ground nuts. Tomatoes.
I use my fingers to memorize things too.
Onions and Celery. Bell pepper. Plantains.
She tells me to take notes.
Shrimp. Egusi. Dried barracuda.

Click. Click.
My sister's neon green acrylics tap against the countertop
Chop. Chop.
I finish cutting the onions and celery
Tsk. Tsk.
"The onions are too big," she tells me
I chop chop again.
Dad stands in the corner
with his arms crossed and an impish smirk on his face.
"You're doing it wrong," he says.
She waves him away like he's a seabird.
"Mine is better," he insists.

We tell him to leave the kitchen
—he doesn't.

The plantains are boiling in a pot
instead of frying in a pan like I'm used to.
In one pan, a red paste is sizzling
in another, garlic and ginger paste is being heated up.
The shrimp is intermingled with the celery and onion
and suddenly the kitchen is a melody of savory flavor molecules
floating in the air.
My mouth waters when I sniff.
"We wait now," she says,
"African cooking takes a lot of time."
My stomach grumbles
I want to dig my teeth into the mushy plantains,
tear the shells of the little shrimp,
and take another bite of that barracuda
that tastes like Heaven on my mouth.
"You like cuda?" Dad asks and I nod
"I'll pack some for you to take back to LA," he promises.

Grandma stirs one of the pots and nods: "It's time."
My sister and I watch, in awe, shock, surprise
as the contents from every pot and pan
are dumped into the biggest pot on the stove
then stirred by my grandma.

My sister and I share a look of unease:
our weak western palates are accustomed
to the division and separation of food.
As I grab a bowl and help myself to a modest serving,
I hope that I will like it
and tell myself that I will because it's from my Fatherland.
It's ndolé: the national meal.
What hamburgers and apple pie are to America.

Grandma leads us in grace,
though my relationship with God is tricky,
I bow my head and close my eyes anyway.
She thanks God for this meal,
for her grandchildren,
our safety,
our interest in learning about our culture.
Amen. Amen. Amen.

I take my first bite—
bitter leaf is foreign to my taste buds
and will take more than one meal to get used to.
My dad hums.
I picture him as a youth
coming home from boarding school on a weekend
and devouring a bowl of ndolé prepared by his *mami*.

Grandma can tell that the meal
isn't "hitting the spot"—as we say in America.
I feel like a fraud,
an imposter,
like this identity,
this culture I was born into isn't mine
that I'm not worthy.
Too American
Too western
Too confused...

"All that matters to me," she interrupts my feelings of insecurity,
"Is that my grandkids have learned
and tried the food of their father's country.

That's what makes me happy."

I wrap my arms around her after I've finished eating.
Clinging to her as if I'm a boat and she's the anchor.
I can feel the energy of love transferring from her to me,
as warmth,
I never want to let her go
I want to cry, out of intense feeling,
But I don't
The sky is weeping for me
As the downpour continues outside the window,
adding moisture to the swamplands
just as it does to the tropical landscapes of Cameroon.
Drip. Drop.

Though I may be an ocean away from my Fatherland
The tether between us is deeper than distance and ndolé.

HYLA ETAME, Age 16



Hyla Etame is a young writer living in Southern California. Last year, she was a writer for her high school's yearbook staff, and this school year she is the Head Writer. Hyla is a member of WriteGirl, a writing organization based in Los Angeles for teenage girls, and her poem "The Nonexistent Divide Between Land and Air" was published in the 2019 WriteGirl Anthology, "This Moment." In the summer of 2020, Hyla was announced as a finalist for the LA Youth Poet Laureate and read her poem "(De)Humanized" for the virtual event with the other finalists. Currently, Hyla is in the process of revising and editing the first draft of her novel about a teenager living in a fictional communist society and hopes to publish all four hundred and forty pages of it as soon as it's complete.

Brittle Branches, Strong Leaves, and the Wounded Puma

By Sydnee Blueford

Complicated

Distant

Is what I think of my family tree

Not of the mighty oak or ageless sequoia

But rather that of a poisonwood tree

Strucken to its roots by lightning

Leaving it standing

But with brittle branches

Like a dying rose who's stem produces nothing but brown sticks on its winter's retreat

Goduncles

Godaunts

First-and-second-cousins and what not

Are what family pride has meant to me

But when I tend to my branch

Three women strong

Is all I need

To keep myself upright

You would be tempted to call our clan a pride

A lineage of lions

From Africa we sprang

And from Africa we lept

Into a greater beast

Only humans could own

Captivity

But

Our black souls aren't that of lions

But rather that of the Puma

With Mama's tongue

Sister's spine

And the elder sister's rhythm-worn feet

Moving to the three-part harmony

Of her family's brass hum

If we were to be played by the hottiness in our breath

The attention-arresting trumpet

And the bellowing under belly of the bass

Would wane with slight exasperation

Upon the light tinkling of the bell

But with a fissure in my design

I, for the longest time have felt weak

My soft-rock heart bleeding like an open secret

Rather than the black stoicism of an unlit den

I have found my Blackness

Not in the Pride Rocks of Africa

But in the hearth underneath the soil

From the pine in Alabama to

The urban jungles of California

Where the souls of my clan will rein

The branches as their throne

With wine-colored coats as their hoods

And if my mother loses her our shadows amongst the overcast of the leaves
And forgets the hue of her soul
Her firstborn's eyes
And second-born's spine Will tell her
Of the puma

SYDNEE BLUEFORD, Age 17



Sydnee Blueford is currently a senior attending Daniel Pearl Magnet High School. Sydnee has been a member of the L.A.-based writing organization, WriteGirl, for over 4 years. She is a book enthusiast, artist, humanist, trivia master, queer advocate, poet, lyricist, author and philosopher, amongst other things. She has served as a curator for the David Labkovski Project, a teen representative for her school, and a semifinalist for The Posse Foundation. She hopes to work as a director and screenwriter in the animation and entertainment industry. Sydnee lives in L.A. with her inspiration of a mother, her devilish saint of a sister, and an inquisitive puppy, Pepper.



Black History Month is an annual celebration of achievements by African Americans and a time for recognizing their central role in U.S. history. Also known as African American History Month, the event grew out of “Negro History Week,” the brainchild of noted

historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent African Americans. Since 1976, every U.S. president has officially designated the month of February as Black History Month. Other countries around the world, including Canada and the United Kingdom, also devote a month to celebrating Black history. The Black History Month 2021 theme, “Black Family: Representation, Identity and Diversity” explores the African diaspora and the spread of Black families across the United States.



Acknowledgements

Westchester Black Bar Association

Barbara Lerman, Esq.

