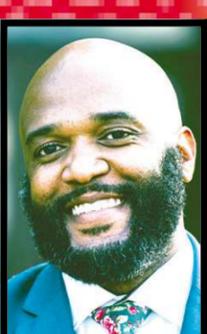
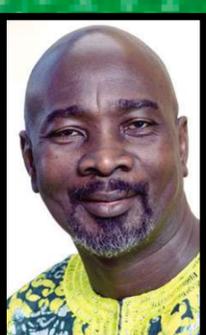


HONOR YOUR ROOTS

Dream audaciously. Read. Listen. Protect your name. Embrace your identity with heritage and pride. ¶ Those are among the thoughtful words of wisdom our panel of community difference-makers have for the next generation in our eight-page salute to Black History Month. ¶ Fifty-seven educators and history makers, award winners and business owners, mayors and clergy members shared their advice on how to thrive, who to listen to, what to read, watch, experience, eat and much more.

Words by Editor JEFF D'ALESSIO, jdalessio@news-gazette.com
 Design by Managing Editor NIKO DUGAN, ndugan@news-gazette.com



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

WORTH A WATCH

→ 2023 Central Illinois Business Magazine Forty Under 40 Woman of the Year Ja'NAEA MODEST — aka DJ Silkee — recommends: "Since I have been diving into my interests in cooking lately, my suggestion would

be to watch certain food cooking shows that focus on the history of where Black meals come from.

"These shows have been eye-opening because it explains why we eat certain foods and the way

they are cooked.

"I suggest watching 'Searching for Soul Food' with Alisa Reynolds and 'High on the Hog: How African American Cuisine Transformed America.'"



WORDS TO THE WISE

For a new twist on Black History Month, Editor **JEFF D'ALESSIO** convened a panel of community difference-makers and asked: **What's the single-best piece of advice you'd offer today's Black youths?**



REBECCA GINSBURG
Director,
Education Justice Project

"Don't be complacent and don't be fooled; the struggle is not yet over. That doesn't mean that you have to dedicate your life to fighting racism, but neither are you free to avoid doing your part to usher in a more just society."



DAVID GOUARD
Boys' basketball coach,
Danville High

"Protect your name. Your reputation will walk into rooms before you do. Move in a way that makes people respect it. Also, choose your circle carefully. If the people around you don't talk about goals, growth or getting better, you're in the wrong circle. Lastly, control your emotions. Anger can cost you opportunities. Patience can create them. Never make a permanent decision over temporary emotion."



MARY CATHERINE ROBERSON

2022 Central Illinois Business Magazine Forty Under 40 Woman of the Year and 104th Illinois House District candidate

"Know that you are limitless. You stand on the shoulders of giants who gave their last breaths

'Walk boldly. Dream audaciously. Persist relentlessly'



CIERRA McCULLOUGH
Associate attorney, Meyer Capel

"To the young Black men and women coming of age in this world:

"Let every obstacle you encounter — not least those rooted in prejudice or systemic inequality — become fuel for your determination rather than a barrier to your progress. The challenges that may arise simply because of who you are do not define your limits; they reveal your strength.

"No matter how deeply systems may be stacked against us, nothing is beyond your reach. Your dreams were not placed in your heart by accident — they are yours to pursue and to claim. Be curious. Be disciplined. Be unwavering in your commitment to your goals. Whatever you aspire to do, pursue it with conviction, even when it feels

difficult, even when it feels impossible.

"If someone else has achieved it, so can you. And even if no one has done it before, you can be the first.

"Being Black in America carries unique challenges, but it also carries a powerful inheritance. You are the descendants of people who survived and overcame oppression, enslavement, discrimination and exclusion. That legacy lives within you. It has shaped you into someone stronger, wiser, more creative and more resilient than you may yet realize.

"Walk boldly. Dream audaciously. Persist relentlessly. The world may test you — but you are built to rise."

so you could thrive. Do not minimize yourself to fit someone else's expectations. Never clip your own wings. You will need those to fly."

SAM HALL
Rantoul mayor

"I always tell youth and adults the same thing when it comes to one piece of advice, which is to understand that your voice, your choices and your character matter right now; you do not have to wait for some day in the future.

"All too often, the message young people receive is to wait



their turn or to wait until they have reached a certain point in their life, but our history has shown that change has been led

by youth who have chosen to lead from where they were.

"I encourage them to practice self-discipline, connect with mentors who will tell them the truth and to remember that success is measured by how you serve others as you progress. When you commit to doing the right thing, even when no one is watching, door open, opportunities come more often and people notice.

"I grew up believing that anything is possible when you help others achieve. I want our young people to understand that they matter now."



SHAREE TANKSLEY
Westview Elementary teacher's assistant, 2024 CU Schools Foundation Super Star

"Your joy is a revolution! Build a strong foundation now so that every challenge shows the strength in your resilience. After which you can adjust the crown that we as beautiful Black people were born with to overcome every last one of them."



PETER MCFARLAND
2024 Dave Benton Crime Fighter of the Year Award winner

"My dad had two quotes he would always say: 'Education is the key to success' and 'Whatever you do, do it to the best of your ability; someone is always watching.'"



VERDELL JONES III
Champaign firefighter

"One thing I would share with today's Black youth would be what my father told me after I hit the full-court shot to win the eighth-grade state championship, and it's something that I hold with me still today: 'Never let one chapter or moment define your book or your whole life. Always strive to do more and be better; whether it's a high point in your life, or a low point, your journey is still ongoing.'"

Celebrate Black History w/ Urbana Park District



MLK Jr. March for Peace

Saturday, Apr 4, 5:30-7pm

King Park

Juneteenth Celebration & Neighborhood Night w/ New Souls

Wednesday, Jun 17, 6:30-8pm

Prairie Park & Health & Wellness Center

Martin Luther King - Jettie Rhodes Neighborhood Day

Saturday, Jun 27, 12-4pm

King Park

You belong here.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

WORTH A READ

→ Professor **CANDICE JENKINS**, head of the UI's Department of African American Studies, recommends: Kiese Laymon's 'Long Division,' "which is a book about and for you."



→ **LEON DASH**, the UI's Pulitzer Prize-winning Swanlund Professor Emeritus of Journalism, recommends: Isabel Wilkerson's 'The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration.'



→ Champaign licensed social worker and music artist **CHARLES "JARREL" YOUNG** recommends: 'The Mis-Education of The Negro' by Carter G. Woodson.



→ **DANIEL ALABI**, a UI assistant professor of electrical and computer engineering, recommends reading about UI alum **David Blackwell**: "Some NVIDIA chips are named after him."



→ **DeSHAWN WILLIAMS**, the city of Urbana's first Black mayor, recommends: 'The Anatomy of Peace: How to Resolve the Heart of Conflict,' by the Arbinger Institute.



RICKEY WILLIAMS JR.
Danville mayor

"You can never go wrong by doing what's right. Integrity and a willingness to do the next right thing for the greater good will always serve everyone, including you, well."



SONNY WALKER
Athletic director and assistant principal, Centennial High

"Navigating the educational system is a game. If you can figure out the game of working hard, making positive connections, then you can get through the system. Always be authentic."



OLLIE WATTS DAVIS
UI's Suzanne and William Allen Distinguished Professor of Music

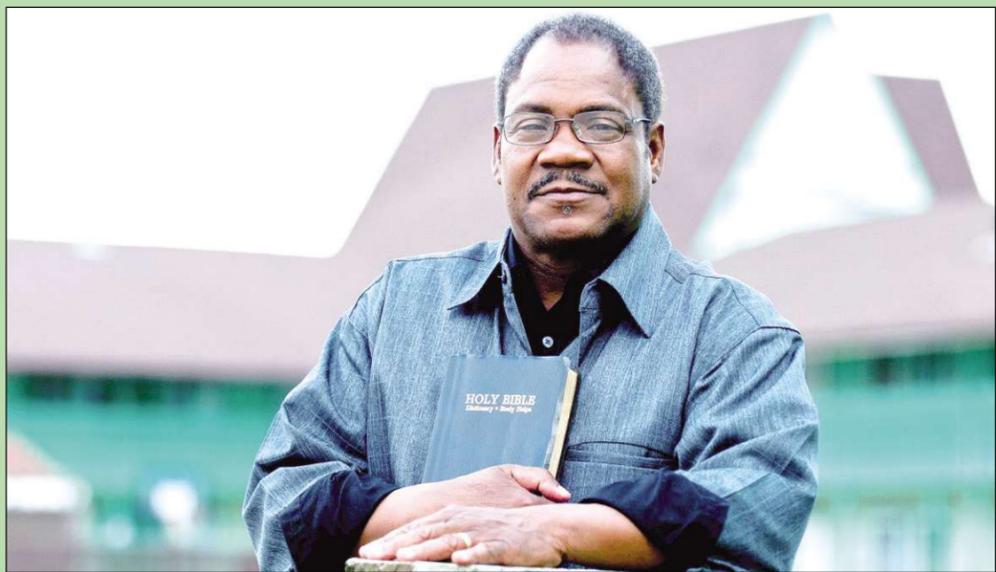
"Here are a couple of quotes I share with my students often:
"People want to be a part of success. Your job is to give people some success to be a part of."
"You must have vision — look ahead and see where you want to be. Then, do all you can to get there."



JAZZ CATCHINGS
Owner, Aligning Dynasty Investment Group of Champaign

"Forgive your parents. They were learning and making mistakes as well."
"Always look out for people who aren't able to look out for themselves, and create the life you wanted as a kid for all the youth around you."

'Forgive me and others as we have at times made you feel valueless, unimportant and not included'



THE REV. ERVIN WILLIAMS
Founding executive director, Restoration Urban Ministries

"To my young Black brothers and sisters, there is a scripture that spoke to me many years ago. It says, 'You were fearfully and wonderfully made.'"

"You don't need to be vindicated or approved by other people to be fully accepted as equals. You are valuable and needed by those around you."

"You see, you were meticulously made for such a moment as this. You are unique, so unique that America cannot be as great as it could be without you. You are here because you are needed. You are a special gift to society."

"Forgive me and others as we have at times made you feel valueless, unimportant and not included. We need you to see the greatness that lies within you. A rich history, of great contributors despite the obstacles they may have endured yet have changed the world for the better."

"Your passion, your creativity, your loyalty, your tenacity is amazing and should be shared with the whole world. Greatness does not come about because people dream of it. Greatness comes because of what people do."

"Our world is waiting on you."

Great FUTURES Start Here.



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PARKLAND COLLEGE

BLACK HISTORY MONTH



At WMI Automotive Group, we honor and celebrate Black History Month by recognizing the remarkable contributions African American individuals have made to our nation's history, culture, and progress. This month, we stand together in appreciation of the strength, resilience, and achievements of the African American community.

Contact Us At: Drive217.com



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

WORTH EXPERIENCING

→ **CHRISTOPHER LEGGINS**, the newly appointed director of the Danville Public Library, recommends catching the Suzan-Lori Parks play 'Topdog/Underdog.'



→ **BRENNON HIGHTOWER**, director of student life at Parkland College, recommends "volunteering virtually with the Black Homesteading Project through the National Park Service."



→ **2021 CU Schools Foundation Distinguished Alumni Award winner GRACE GIPSON** recommends "crafting a groovy playlist at the National Museum of African American Music in Nashville."



→ **JACQUELYN DOUGLAS**, special education administrator for the Urbana School District, recommends "tuning into SiriusXM Channel 64. Let praise be your pause."



→ **STACEY ROBINSON**, a UI associate professor of graphic design, recommends "checking out (the graphic novel) 'Megascope,' the imprint curated by John Jennings from Abrams Books."



MARNITA HARRIS

UI assistant dean of students

"If you ever feel like you have to shrink yourself to make others comfortable, that is not your space. You were not created to be dimmed, diluted or downsized. Go where your brilliance is celebrated, not just tolerated. Your voice, your culture and your excellence belong in rooms that honor you fully."



JERRY MORELAND

Urbana High student relations supervisor, 2023 CU Schools Foundation Super Star

"My grandmother, Arah Mae Shelton, simply told my siblings and I to 'be nice.' Because I knew what she endured and accomplished in her life, that advice has always been a part of who I am."

'Surround yourself with people who see your potential, not your limits'



JEREMY THORPE

2024 Central Illinois Business Magazine Forty Under 40 Man of the Year and Busey client and community relations manager

"If I could offer today's Black youth one piece of advice, it would be this: Don't let anyone shrink your sense of what's possible — not society, not a teacher, not your neighborhood and not even the people you love who may be speaking from their own fears."

"I grew up with parents for mentors who reminded me that my identity and my dreams were strengths, not liabilities. That message shaped me. And now, through my work in the community, I see how important it is for young people to hold onto that truth."

"So here's what I say to them:

"Know who you are. Walk with purpose. Surround yourself with people who see your potential, not your limits."

"You'll hear a lot of voices throughout life — encouraging, doubtful and some projecting their own fears. Take it in, but don't let any voice override your own."

"Keep learning. Keep showing up. Keep giving back. When you invest in your community, your community invests in you."

"Above all: You belong in every room your talent, your heart and your hard work can take you."



MICHAEL McDONALD

Owner, Wood N' Hog BBQ

"Turn passion into purpose."



LASHAUNDA CUNNINGHAM

Community liaison and services supervisor, Urbana Police

"Honor your roots. They are powerful, sacred and filled with brilliance. Do not let this world place limits on who you can become or what you can achieve. Every obstacle you face is proof of your strength, not a measure of your limits."

"There are endless opportunities waiting for you to claim them boldly. Your skin carries resilience, creativity and greatness. It tells a story of survival, innovation and excellence. Stand tall in it."

TAMEKA TURNER
Carrie Busey Elementary teacher's aide, 2023 CU Schools Foundation Super Star

"I want young people to know there is a whole world out there. You can go beyond Champaign-Urbana. The world is big, and there are many opportunities."

"I understand that some Black youth face challenges because of their environment, but you have to push yourself to want something better."

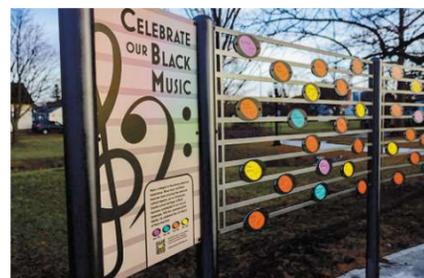
"My one piece of advice is to do your best today, because people will always remember who you were, not who you are. Your feelings matter, and you are allowed to feel anger without becoming that anger."



CHAMPAIGN COUNTY African American Heritage Trail

Discover over 170 years of rich cultural history and building community.

Through Reconstruction and the Great Migration, the Depression and two world wars, and the Civil Rights era right up to the present day, learn the powerful stories of African Americans who directly shaped the place we call home.



ccafricanamericanheritage.org

Visit our website for information on events and outreach.

Download our mobile app in the Apple Store for self-guided tours.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

WORTH A DOUBLE FEATURE



→ **JEWELL WHITE**, assistant dean for access and multicultural engagement at the UI's Gies College of Business, recommends "reading the autobiography of Frederick Douglass and watching 'Black Panther' — an inspiring blend of historic resilience and modern cultural power."

→ **ZELDA GARDNER**, associate dean for undergraduate academic affairs at the UI's College of Fine & Applied Arts, recommends "attending the Hip Hop Covene at Krannert Center for Performing Arts on Feb. 25-28 and checking out 'Acts of Faith: Daily Meditations for People of Color,' by Iyanla Vanzant."



'You know what you are capable of accomplishing when you see what other Black Americans have done'

RONDA HOLLIMAN
Champaign County associate judge

"Read. Start reading or continue to read. There is a systematic attempt to erase the accomplishments and contributions of Black Americans to this country, through book bans, the removal of information from websites, books from school libraries and the removal of information from national parks. You know what you are capable of accomplishing when you see what other Black Americans have done. Representation matters. Read books — whether fiction, historical fiction or non-fiction — and learn all that you are capable of accomplishing. Black authors write in every genre, and you are sure to find a book that you will like. Reading also improves your critical thinking skills, builds vocabulary and enhances your conversational skills. These are all skills that will increase your chances of success."



Create opportunities for people to restore their faith and hope in a society that cares for them.

"My upbringing in Lagos tries to remind them that people are growing to create a beloved community.

"The last five years of Super Bowl Sunday have shown that our boys want to create that beloved community of care because their friends are the rainbow coalition of all hues and faiths."

community that reminds you who you are when the world forgets.

"I would also encourage young people to study both history and possibility. Read the works of James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, but also look around your own community for living examples of leadership and integrity. Excellence is not only found in headlines; it is often sitting next to you in church, at school or at the dinner table. Above all, protect your joy. Joy is not a distraction from the struggle; it is fuel for it."

"In short, I would tell young men not to measure themselves by one standard or what they see in the media as successful. You are successful when you administer your own plan, at your own pace.

"Don't allow anyone to change your trajectory. This means if you want to be that plumber, electrician, scientist, investor, then do it. As you travel to your life's destination, take time to acknowledge the many hurdles and barriers you've crossed. This helps build momentum in moving forward.

"Never allow anyone to dim your light."



KIM TATE

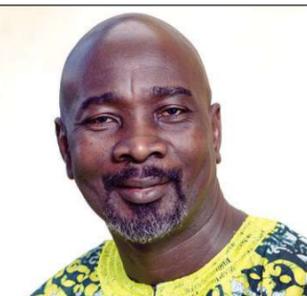
Teacher, International Prep Academy

"My inspiration comes from my high school honors English teacher. We read, then listened to the audio recording of Toni Morrison's 1993 Nobel Prize lecture. I would encourage all youth, but especially Black youth, to listen to her words, as I did, and analyze her meaning for themselves.

"My own understanding of her speech was that language and our words carry power: the power to obfuscate or make clear; the power to emancipate or subjugate; the power to encourage or ridicule.

"These lines always stood out to me: 'We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.'

"Accordingly, my advice is to thoughtfully consider the words you choose, as well as the words you consume, for they impact history and lives beyond our own."



JOE OMO-OSAGIE

Life and community facilitator, Kemeti yoga instructor

"As a parent, I expected our children to have a sense of the history of this country — good, bad and ugly. However, as an immigrant, it is imperative that the history of their cultural background was important too.

"Both my parents came from the old Benin Empire. Our children are enthusiastic and curious learners. I encourage them with this statement from their experiences at the Unitarian Universalist church: It is better to have a question than an answer.

"Creating a community of care is one of the most important things we can do and in my work with young people in this community, I have seen siblings that went in opposite directions based on their connections to an accountability community.

"My goal for myself and our community is to be that of community actualization. This means to me that we use logic and critical thinking in our interactions as opposed to the punishment mindset.



MICHELE COOPER

Retired U.S. Army Corps of Engineers/CERL equal employment opportunity manager

"Do not shrink to fit into spaces that were not designed for you; expand them.

"There will be moments when you are the only one in the room, when your excellence is questioned or when the path forward feels unclear. In those moments, remember that you come from a lineage of brilliance, resilience, faith and innovation.

"You are not an exception; you are an extension. Stand firmly in your gifts, pursue education relentlessly — in classrooms, in books, in lived experience — and cultivate a



JAMES 'TYGAR' CORBIN

Drop-in coordinator and peer mentor, FirstFollowers

"Booker T. Washington said: 'Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.'

"To me, this statement ties directly into something my late Uncle Allen and my pops used to regularly drive home regarding 'learning to run my own race, at my own pace.' This took a while for me to internalize and implement into my life, but once instilled and continuously practiced, success was inevitable.



JANELLE JOHNSON

Champaign Central alumna, 2018 C-U Schools Foundation Distinguished Alumni Award winner, Chicago landscape architect

"Trust your voice. You don't need to be the loudest in the room to lead, and you don't need to perform to own your confidence. True power is found in your discipline and your curiosity.

"Know yourself first. Before the world tells you who to be, take the time to listen and observe. Think critically and move intentionally. Staying true to your values is more liberating than seeking attention

or approval from others. "Own your excellence. Excellence is an ongoing commitment. Do the work, show up prepared and let your results speak for you. You belong in every space you step into, not by permission, but by right. "You are capable, you are needed and you are enough. Walk in with that quiet certainty."



LEONARD MCKINNIS

UI associate professor of religion, African American studies

"Remember. The power of memory is that it permits us access to the past. Not just as a matter of 'knowing' the past, but rather to allow the past to instruct us.

"When we remember the past, including the men and women who courageously risked life and limb to push their nation to live up to the more authentic meaning of its creed, we become inspired to continue and extend their legacy of freedom fighting.

"When we remember that our ability to live as free people was not merely because of time, but because of the vision and moral stamina of generations of visionary leaders, we then understand our own role in paving the way for future generations.

"Indeed, remembering the past, in all of its ugliness and glory, protects us from complacency in the present when there is still work to be done.

"In the words of James Weldon Johnson: 'Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world we forget thee ...'

"Remember on, friends, remember."



TYRA PERRY

Illini softball coach

"My advice would stem from a passage in the Bible — Proverbs 3:5-6 KJV — that my dad would always share with me and my siblings growing up: 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; And lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.'

"Trusting in the Lord is like a cheat code for life. Believing in something bigger than yourself can give you hope, purpose and balance."

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BLACK HISTORY MONTH

WORTH A TRY



→ Champaign County court clerk **EVETTE CAMPBELL** recommends “trying things that aren’t necessarily popular such as golf, chess, tennis, archery, debate, multimedia or cooking. The more things you try, the more you’ll begin to understand yourself more. You learn to meet and network with people. I also encourage the parents to push their kids into unique interests as well. There’s way more opportunities other than basketball and football. You just gotta try them.”

→ **PETE SHUNGU** (right), a UI teaching assistant professor in music education, recommends “trying the Curry chicken, greens and plantains at Stango Cuisine in downtown Champaign.”

→ **TY’ESHA LEWIS**, an adjunct lecturer in the UI Department of Dance, recommends “listening to the ‘Human(ing) Well’ podcast” with Amber Cabral.



‘Understand that being Black is a strength’



LaQUANDRIS ‘QUAN’ GLADNEY

Centennial head flag football coach and assistant boys’ football coach, 2024 recipient of CU Schools Foundation’s Super Star Award

“If I could give one piece of advice to today’s Black youth, it would be to understand that being Black is a strength. You come from resilience, creativity and leadership — walk with that confidence every day.

“At the same time, putting in the work is non-negotiable. Sometimes, criticism may feel unfair. Sometimes, you may have to prove yourself more than others. That isn’t always fair, but it’s the world we inherited, so use it as fuel to get better. Encourage the people around you to do positive things and support them along the way.

“Discipline is the bridge between you and your

goals. Don’t let setbacks define you — there will be plenty, but you can make it through hard things. Your effort and your character will take you further than anything else.

“Be vulnerable and find trustworthy adults and peers you can talk to. Take advice from people with good intentions and build a mental database of what you learn.

“There’s no such thing as a life that’s better than yours, so love yours. And when you win, reach back and be the person you needed when you were younger.”



TRICIA TEAGUE
Danville alderwoman, founder of The Trep School

“As you venture into adulthood, before you go into college and the workplace, decide for yourself who you are and what you stand for. When you choose your values and stand in them, no one else will be able to diminish you or your worth.”



DR. NAPOLEON KNIGHT
Carle Health’s first Black chief medical officer

“Never let anyone else determine what you are capable of achieving. Take the time to find out what you love, and then go after it.”



ANDRE DAVIS
Justice victim advocate, city of Champaign

“Manage your time wisely — time is the most valuable, non-renewable commodity a person will own.

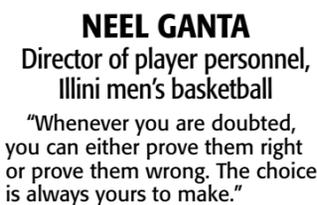
“Be intentional with using your time productively, spending your time with who matters the most and enjoying the time you do have.

“Most of all, do nothing that will cause you to have time taken from you.”



P.J. KEATON
Champaign Central boys’ basketball coach

“Push through adversity and go for what you want to be in life.”



NEEL GANTA
Director of player personnel, Illini men’s basketball

“Whenever you are doubted, you can either prove them right or prove them wrong. The choice is always yours to make.”



THE CITY OF CHAMPAIGN CELEBRATES

20 | BLACK HISTORY MONTH | 26

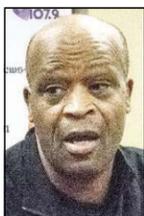


BLACK HISTORY MONTH

THE REV. HERBERT 'HUB' BURNETT

Pastor, New Free Will Baptist Church

"Dear Black Youth,
"Two things are very important for you to be successful in life:
"First, establish a relationship with God because if you don't, it will be difficult to reach your purpose.
"Second, find anyone or any group that will help you get exposure outside of C-U. If you don't, you will believe that C-U is the world — and that's simply not true."



'Unite in nonviolence to fight to eliminate racism and injustice wherever they rear their ugly heads'

PATRICIA AVERY-NEAL

Former NAACP Champaign County president, first woman to chair Champaign County Board

"I believe Black history is American history. It's as important to the American experience as the Lewis and Clark exploration of the Louisiana Purchase and Pacific Northwest.

"The way of the future is to train not only to become local leaders, but to become global ones. You must think beyond your borders. Use technology to better understand the lessons from the past in order to build a brighter and more sustainable future.

"Our world is merging. Help to build communities near and far. Unite in nonviolence to fight to eliminate racism and injustice wherever they rear their ugly heads. Don't be afraid to speak truth to power.

"Here's a few tips on how to prepare:

"1. **Be self-aware.** Know what motivates you, and be able to assess situations and adapt.

"2. **Be globally aware.** Learn and understand different languages, cultures, values and norms.

"3. **Make good ethical decisions.** Be responsible and transparent.

"4. **Think strategically.** Understand how strategy fits into a global space.

"5. **Practice cross-cultural communication.** Build trust within your community. Communicate effectively, use empathy and foster a sense of belonging.

"6. **Be good stewards** — of your money, time, mindset and yourself.

"7. **Save your money.** Be frugal. Have money to travel and gain new experiences.

"8. **Save your time.** Use it wisely. If something doesn't add value to your life, reassess the situation.

"9. **Save your mind.** Don't fill your head with



useless or negative things. Save space for happy, meaningful thoughts. Take mental breaks.

"10. **Save yourself.** Stay away from trouble. If it doesn't feel right, it isn't right. Change your course.

"Since it is Black History Month, you might ask yourself this question: How is it possible that the mountain of Martin, the 'promised land,' seems even further and harder to climb? It might be — but I'm here to tell you to never stop climbing. Here's why.

"If a formally uneducated, enslaved African American young man named York could travel the entire expedition with Lewis and Clark and make significant contributions to their exploration in 1804, then you can make a difference in your life. York developed skills that made him a valuable member of the team. Make yourself valuable.

"He was the first African American to cross the continent and see the Pacific Ocean. In his time, that must have felt like a global expedition to York.

"Today, York is an American icon. You can become one too."

VILMA HOWARD

Owner, HowardHold Insurance Group of Champaign

"Embrace your identity and heritage with pride. Understand that your history is rich with resilience, innovation and cultural wealth.

"Educate yourself about your ancestors' struggles and triumphs and let that knowledge fuel your ambition. Recognize that your unique perspective is valuable and can bring fresh insights to any field you pursue.

"Don't be afraid to challenge stereotypes and defy expectations. Your potential is limitless, and the world needs your voice, your creativity and your leadership."



DOMINIQUE CAIN

Teacher, Robeson Elementary

"Don't ever stop chasing your dreams, no matter the obstacles you face or how hard times may get in life. Embrace who you are. It's OK to be different and to stand out.

"Knock down every obstacle that comes in front of you until you reach your dream. It's waiting on you and will be happy to greet you when you arrive."

KENYON SIVELS

Pastor and admin, Salvation Army of Champaign County

"Jesus is worth you building your life on and completely changing the way you think or construct your future.

"Secondarily, we do not live in a society that offers a great deal of grace or assumes the best in others. This seeps into the messages we tell ourselves as we frequently fail to extend ourselves grace when we should.

"Adopting the posture of showing grace to and assuming the best of others, especially when the inclination is they do not deserve it, will open tremendous doors in your life. It might just help your heart to stay on the right side of hate and cynicism."



CHAD HARPER

Co-director of Urbana's Before & After School Child Care Program

"When speaking to some of today's youth, they don't want to hear from the 'old heads.' That's part of the problem — our history is being forgotten.

"This generation for a large part has no idea or care about what took place in order for them to have the freedoms that they have now. The old saying goes 'those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it.' There are a lot of things that we don't want to revisit — ever.

"Start practicing this: When someone is giving advice, listen to receive, not to respond."

DIONNE WEBSTER

Urbana schools' director of family engagement and student supports

"Value and treasure your right to an education. Our ancestors fought for the right to read and write. They risked their lives to learn. You are blessed with access to an abundance of knowledge without fear of punishment.

"You are a living testimony of phenomenal men and women who paved the way for you — often sacrificing their safety and, sadly, their lives. Do not take education for granted.



JOLYNN CAROLINE

Senior director for inclusive excellence, career planning and professional development, UI College of Law



"Do it afraid. Imposter syndrome is real. Do your research and prepare to the best of your ability, but sometimes, you will still feel anxious.

"Do it anyway. Some achievements require courage."

TERRY NAPPER

Co-director of Urbana's Before & After School Child Care Program

"Learn — and learn seriously. Sounds odd but I'm witnessing too many youth being unlearned.

"They can't comprehend anything important that comes

to them. Some don't know that it is important what is being offered to them. They need to learn about everything that will help them be successful."



AUSH KNOX

Owner, Urbana's Beard Culture Barbershop & Gallery



"It is OK to be unique and be yourself. Explore and find your passion, career avenues that you can control.

"Set goals and go after them full throttle. Don't be afraid of failure because it teaches lessons that will result in wins if you stay the course and believe in God's journey he has set for you."

DENARDO WILLIAMS

Thomas Paine Elementary lead student engagement advocate, 2023 CUSF Super Star



"Stay focused and remain true to yourself despite what the media — including social media — shows you.

"Growing up, my mentors always told me that hard work will carry you further than any other attribute you have. Do things with enthusiasm and you will never have a hard day in life."

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Two families in the late 1970's formed a partnership to establish a Dry-Cleaning business in southwest Champaign. Their Dry-Cleaning business that was established is presently Colony Square Cleaners. This is a well-established Dry-Cleaning and Laundry business in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. Colony Square Cleaners opened for business in October of 1979 by the families of Alvin Griggs and William Renfro. The original location of the business is 701 Devonshire Drive, Champaign IL. There were no Dry-Cleaning businesses on that side of town when the business opened.

Before the business was established, many hours of research and planning took place between Alvin Griggs & William Renfro regarding the possibility of owning a Dry-Cleaning business in C-U.

A Business Plan was developed, as our first step in establishing the business. Building the plan was accomplished with the help of two U of I faculty members. After the plan was developed, we started our journey in establishing the business which included securing financing, location, facility, and equipment for the business.

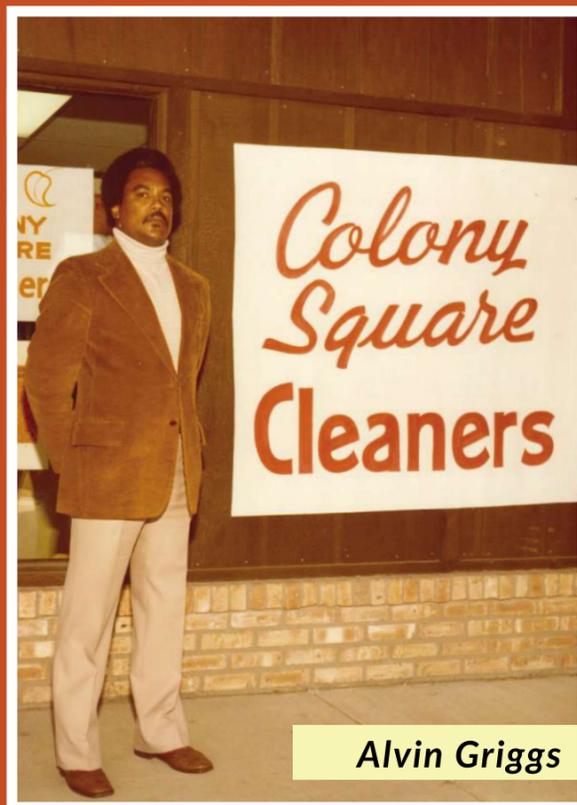
The Grand Opening for Colony Square Cleaners was held on Sunday, October 21, 1979. To introduce the new business to C-U. A "One-Cent Sale" was held the first two weeks of operation. This is one of many sales that was very successful.

Bill was trained in dry-cleaning and laundry in the Navy in the early 1940's. He was stationed at Pearl Harbor. After his military duties, he moved to Champaign and worked at Whiteline Laundry, Garber, Tinsley Cleaners, and Country Squire. His last stop was his own shop, CSC. He also administered an insurance business and was raised in a family business atmosphere in Metropolis, Illinois. Bill's wife, Alma Faye Renfro was a supervisor at Kroger and knew the business world and was willing to help in the business when needed.

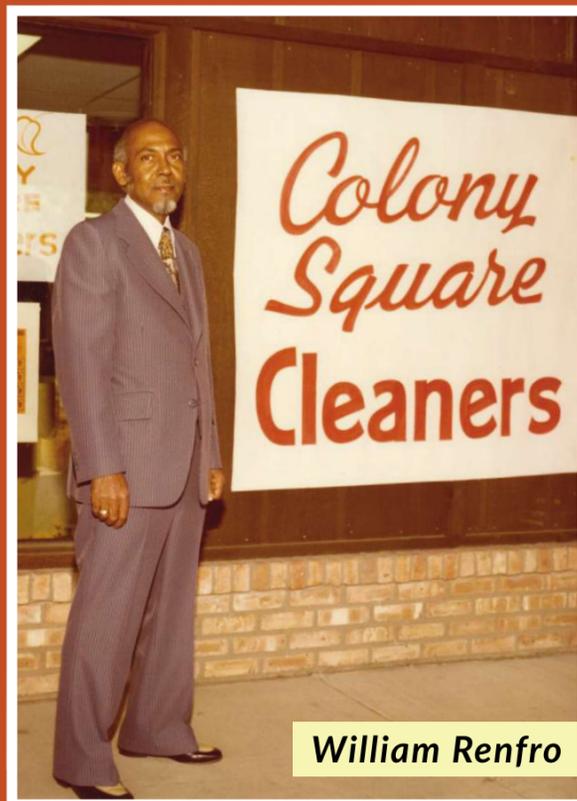
Bill and Alma retired from the business in 1991. After they retired from the business, a family S-Corporation was formed. Alvin Griggs, President; Mildred Griggs, Secretary and Treasurer; Scott and Paul Griggs, Vice Presidents. This new business model had no impact on the Mission and Goals of the business. They remain the same today as they did at the start of the business. The changes came with financing and expanding the business.

Where appropriate, for many years people dressed for work, church, and others special occasions in a suit and tie, Casual Friday changed our dress culture. CSC had the foresight to understand how Casual Friday would adversely affect the Dry-Cleaning industry and we made adjustments to survive. In 1996, the plant was expanded to include laundry, more storage and office space. 2,000 square footages were added to the dry-cleaning plant to include residential and commercial laundry. The total square footage of CSC is now 3,450.

Our future will include more services for our customers such as curb side pick-up and become a bigger player in the electronic advertising media arena. Laundry will be the big player in the future of the dry-cleaning and laundry industry. The amount of dry-cleaning will continue to be reduced. Casual wear trends with wet-cleaning will become part of our culture. This trend will help eliminate the many chemicals that we use in the industry and reduce the cost of cleaning garments and save water. The need for residential and commercial laundry processing will increase because of the environment, population, and economy. Casual dress and wet-cleaning are our future.



Alvin Griggs



William Renfro



Colony Square Cleaners