

28 DAYS OF BLACK HISTORY WEEK 4

FROM THE GLEN RIDGE DIVERSITY & INCLUSION ASSOCIATION

Day 22

Olympic Spotlight: Erin Jackson



"[Erin Jackson](#) ended a drought of U.S. speed skating medals by taking first place in the women's 500-meter race, . . . becoming the first African American woman to win a medal in the sport. It is also the first medal for an American speed skater in Beijing and the first individual speed skating medal won by an American since the 2010 Vancouver Games." Source: [NY Times](#)



Roller Derby to Speed Skater

Jackson started her skating career not on the ice but as jammer for the New Jax City Roller Derby team in Florida. Her very first time on the ice was in 2016, which eventually lead to her qualifying for the 2018 Olympic team.

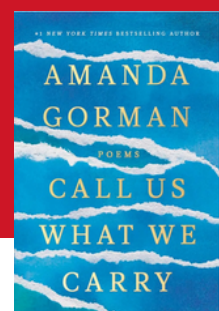
Day 23

Poet Spotlight: Amanda Gorman



Amanda Gorman is the youngest inaugural poet in U.S. history, delivering the 2020 ceremonial poem, as well as an award-winning writer and cum laude graduate of Harvard University where she studied sociology. She has written for the *New York Times* and published three books with Penguin Random House.

Listen to her deliver her new poem, [New Day's Lyric](#).



Day 24

Get to Know...

Dr. Keisha Harris

Principal, Central School



Greetings, my name is Keisha Harris and I am currently the Principal of Central School. I am the daughter of two retired administrators and I have a brother who is also an educator in a neighboring school district. I was fortunate to grow up surrounded by a family who believed strongly in education and allowed me to explore my unique gifts and talents. I grew up in a household that celebrated being Black and took great pride in honoring traditions both familial and cultural.

I have been employed in the Glen Ridge School district since 2001 and have worked at Ridgewood Avenue School as well as Glen Ridge Middle and High Schools in various roles, including Teacher of the Gifted & Talented and Assistant Principal. I have had the pleasure of seeing Glen Ridge grow in diversity of thought, culture and race since the time I first began working within the district.

One of my fondest memories from my childhood is time with my father and the neighborhood kids watching Gill Noble's "Like it is." My father felt it important to have us view history, engage in conversation on differing viewpoints and to be immersed in culture. My mother filled the house with literature, art and story-telling.

As educators, both of my parents understood the need for my brother and me to be surrounded by images, ideas, music and food that celebrated our Nigerian/Ivorian-American culture. To say that I was immersed in history would be an understatement!

I experienced my first cultural "disconnect" once I attended high school, where my culture was not denied but it was not celebrated. To be frank, I was politely tolerated and Black history consisted of a few topics corralled and segregated to the month of February, with the emphasis on a sanitized history where Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks and George Washington Carver were lifted away from the uncomfortable social unrest and government-sanctioned racism.

I experienced cognitive dissonance and emotional unrest when those who were presented in the schoolhouse were discussed apart from the fabric of the movements and people that they represented. History seemed to be presented through a finely tuned filter of control so as not to upset anyone, but also not to educate anyone past the thin veneer of acceptable well-worn facts. I was introduced to a Black history in school that was heavily guarded, a particular sound bite of Black culture that seemed foreign to what I had been taught. There was no love for the people it spoke of.

The voice that won out was that of the one telling the story and it was rarely that of any Black person. Slave narratives were welcome. Stories of Jim Crow and segregation were referenced but there was no understanding of their humanity, family systems, culture, religion, language or the socio-emotional impact that the Africans who were enslaved underwent. Isolated history told from the mouths of those who had little information, education and understanding made it hard to feel seen, appreciated and worthy.

I was in school where I learned that I had to be bilingual, to code switch between the world of my home and that of school. At home, we had kitchen-wit from the women in my family along with a side of cornbread and collard greens.

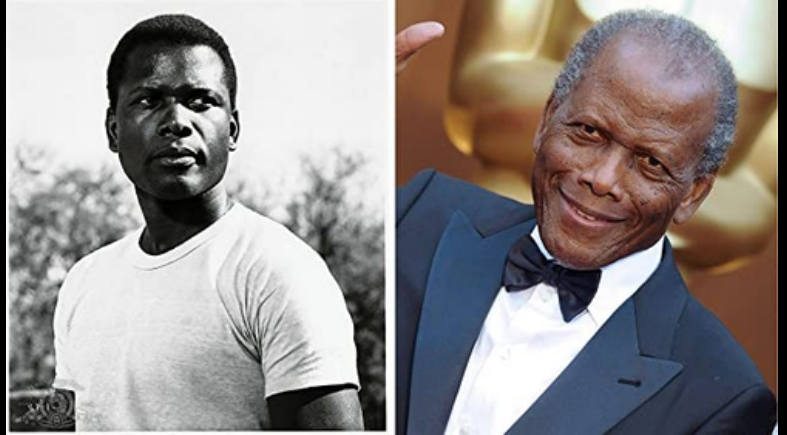
It was at the living room table where my parents taught my brother and me that we had to be twice as good to get half as far and how to keep our hands at 10 and 2 on the steering wheel when pulled over and confronted by the local police. We learned quickly that the braids and natural hair that was celebrated at home would not inspire the same reaction in the workplace, and that to get openly angry was dangerous. We learned not just Black history but the history of being Black.

Day 24 Dr. Harris (continued)

Glen Ridge students who want to learn more about Black people, culture and history can do more than Google it online. History is living, breathing and being made in the lives of those who surround you. Yes, museums are a great source, as well as texts, and I encourage everyone to take advantage of them, but the circle must go wider than what was and must expand to also what is to be.

No one's particular history can be extricated from the primary timeline without either unraveling or deforming it. If you want to know more about Black history do not view stagnant historical snapshots of it and attempt to either glorify or denounce it; look at the continuum of time and ask bold questions. Demand to hear the story from the perspectives of those who seem to have no voice and always follow the politics of gain and power.

Day 25 Actor Spotlight: Sidney Poitier (1927-2022)



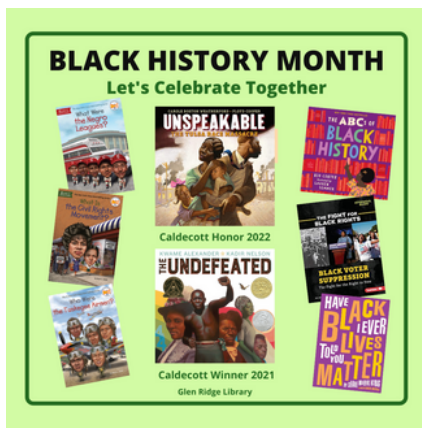
"For 20 years, beginning in the early '50s, Sidney Poitier was the top and virtually sole African-American film star—the first Black actor to become a hero to both black and white audiences. Poitier was also the first black actor to win a prestigious international film award (Venice Film Festival, *Something of Value*, 1957), the first to be nominated for a Best Actor Academy Award, *The Defiant Ones*, 1958), the first to star as a romantic lead (*Paris Blues*, 1961), the first to win an Oscar (*Lilies of the Fields*, 1963), the first to become the number one box office star in the country (1968), and the first to insist on a film crew that was at least 50 percent African-American (*The Lost Man*, 1969)."

Source: [The Kennedy Center](#)



Day 26 Black Voices on Broadway

Explore new tales, plays and productions by Black playwrights, directors, and actors. Check out the lineup [here](#) and go catch a play in NYC!



Day 27

Children's Nonfiction Recommendations

Check out one of the nonfiction books about Black history from a list compiled by The Glen Ridge Library. Click on the image to request these titles from the Glen Ridge Library.

Book Spotlight *Unspakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre*

This Caldecott 2022 winner celebrates "Black Wall Street," the very prosperous early 1900s Black community and businesses of Tulsa, O.K. It is an extraordinary account of the worst racial attack in American history.

Day 28

Honoring Black History All Year

A message from
Rev. Jeff Mansfield
Senior Minister, Glen Ridge
Congregational Church

Black history is American history. I didn't come up with that, but sometimes it's helpful just to state the obvious: No group has been more influential in our nation's history or more outstanding in our national achievements than the Black community. Whenever we celebrate Black history and the contributions of Black people to the nation, we celebrate the very best of the nation.

Here at the end of Black History month, I'd like to offer two brief reflections on how we can continue to honor and celebrate Black history all year long:

In our local and national politics, in our children's educations, and on our own bookshelves, we need to resist a whitewashed version of Black history. A new wave of book bans and curricula strangulation is upon us in a majority culture that already preferred simple and sanitized to complex and uncomfortable. These resistances are now being marketed as "anti-obscenity" or "pro-parental-choice." They are, in fact, disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining Black social and political power by obscuring Black history and disconnecting American history from the roots of Black power.

Those of us committed to the idea that "the truth will set you free" can honor Black history by pushing against the limits of our personal and collective tolerance for the discomfort we experience when encountering racism in American history (and in the American present). All year long, we need to seek out and support the efforts—especially from Black parents, educators, and authors—to bring us the whole story.

"Let's continue to research, share, and cultivate national pride in stories of Black accomplishment, autonomy, beauty, and service—the stories from Black history that reveal to all of us what Black people will continue to achieve in the future."

Just as we cannot allow White discomfort to conceal Black history, we also cannot allow White guilt to continually drag down an uninhibited, joyful celebration of Black culture and achievement. James Weldon Johnson wrote about the Black American experience, "We have come over a way that with tears has been watered / We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered." But any vision of Black history that is reduced to suffering and oppression is as hopelessly incomplete as a whitewashed history. Let's continue to research, share, and cultivate national pride in stories of Black accomplishment, autonomy, beauty, and service—the stories from Black history that reveal to all of us what Black people will continue to achieve in the future. Until next February, let's follow Johnson's lead and continue to "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."