

Connections

Black History Month
February 2021



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PMB Administrative Services and the
Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights



Message from the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administrative Services

February 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Our cover photograph of IBC's **Shelita Saint-Louis** and her family participating in a peaceful protest/vigil for George Floyd last summer touches my heart in a profound way. Before joining the other participants, Shelita and her husband Jean-Philippe had a painful and difficult discussion (referred by many in the Black community as "the talk") with their nine-year-old son Zion and seven-year-old daughter Zoelle. "We welcome the noteworthy first steps being made to address racism and injustice in America," said Shelita and Jean-Philippe at the time, "but we are concerned about real change and what the future holds for our children."

This year's theme for Black History Month is ***The Black Family: Representation, Inclusion and Diversity***. Over

the course of three roundtable discussions this month led by members of the Administrative Services Special Emphasis Program team, we had the opportunity to explore many different aspects of family life in the Black community, including raising children, caring for elderly parents and welcoming others into blended families. It was so gratifying to hear our colleagues speaking candidly about issues that affect them, from the difficulty of giving "the talk" to their young children, to contending with older parents experiencing the effects of Alzheimer's disease.

During the discussions, many of the more than 200 participants offered helpful information and resources while sharing encouraging stories of hope. Perhaps the greatest takeaway from our sessions was how people rise to challenges time and time again, always striving to overcome obstacles and remain optimistic in the face of daunting circumstances. I am so proud of the Special Emphasis Program Team for shining a spotlight on our remarkable DOI family, and I hope you will find inspiration as I did in the stories shared in this month's issue of ***Connections*** magazine.

As always, please be well and stay safe.

Jacqueline M. Jones



About Connections

Connections magazine is produced each month by a collaborative, multi-agency team of volunteer employees from throughout DOI. Under the direction of Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administrative Services **Jacqueline M. Jones** and Director of the

Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights **Erica White-Dunston**, who serves as the Chief Diversity Officer for the Department, the ***Connections*** team strives to foster an environment where all employees are valued, accepted, appreciated and feel included.

To find out more or to submit your ideas and suggestions, please contact editor Steve Carlisle at stephen_carlisle@ibc.doi.gov. Your input is very much welcome! Thank you.



The Black Family

Representation, Inclusion and Diversity

Black History Month 2021

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This February, during Black History Month, I call on the American people to honor the history and achievements of Black Americans and to reflect on the centuries of struggle that have brought us to this time of reckoning, redemption, and hope.

We have never fully lived up to the founding principles of this Nation — that all people are created equal and have the right to be treated equally throughout their lives. But in the Biden-Harris Administration, we are committed to fulfilling that promise for all Americans.

I am proud to celebrate Black History Month with an Administration that looks like America — one that reflects the full talents and diversity of the American people and that heralds many firsts, including the first Black Vice President of the United States and the first Black Secretary of Defense, among other firsts in a cabinet that is comprised of more Americans of color than any other in our history.

It is long past time to confront deep racial inequities and the systemic racism that continue to plague our Nation. A knee to the neck of justice opened the eyes of millions of Americans and launched a summer of protest and stirred the Nation's conscience.

A pandemic has further ripped a path of destruction through every community in America, but we see its acute devastation among Black Americans who are dying, losing jobs, and closing businesses at disproportionate rates in the dual crisis of the pandemic and the economy.

We saw how a broad coalition of Americans of every race and background registered and voted — more people than in any other election in our Nation's history — to heal these wounds and unite and move forward as a Nation.

But also less than 1 month after the attack on the Capitol, on our very democracy, by a mob of insurrectionists — of extremists and white supremacists — a bookend of the last 4 years and the hate that marched from the streets of Charlottesville, and that shows we remain in a battle for the soul of America.

We must bring to our work a seriousness of purpose and urgency. That is why we are putting our response to COVID-19 on a war footing and marshalling every resource we have to contain the pandemic, deliver economic relief to millions of Americans who desperately need it, and build back better than ever before.

That is why we are also launching a first-ever whole government approach to advancing racial justice and equity across our Administration — in health care, education, housing, our economy, our justice system, and in our electoral process. We do so not only because it is the right thing to do, but because it is the smart thing to do, benefitting all of us in this Nation.

**We must change.
It will take time.
But I firmly
believe the Nation
is ready to make
racial justice and
equity part of
what we do today,
tomorrow, and
every day.**

We do so because the soul of our Nation will be troubled as long as systemic racism is allowed to persist. It is corrosive. It is destructive. It is costly. We are not just morally deprived because of systemic racism, we are also less prosperous, less successful, and less secure as a Nation.

We must change. It will take time. But I firmly believe the Nation is ready to make racial justice and equity part of what we do today, tomorrow, and every day. I urge my fellow Americans to honor the history made by Black Americans and to continue the good and necessary work to perfect our Union for every American.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR., President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of

the United States, do hereby proclaim February 2021 as National Black History Month. I call upon public officials, educators, librarians, and all the people of the United States to observe this month with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this third day of February, in the year of our Lord two thousand twenty-one, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-fifth. JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR.

Glimmers of Hope Amidst National Unrest and Division: Having “The Talk”

By Shelita Saint-Louis, Chief, Acquisition Management Branch 1 Division 1, IBC

Reality check: Unfortunately, racism and social injustice are still a crisis in 2021, 57 years after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his famous “[I Have a Dream](#)” speech. Many African American families still face the daunting task of having “The Talk” with their children. This is when children are taught, among other things, how to behave in the presence of police officers to mitigate potential harm. In many communities, it is viewed as a rite of passage. Having had “The Talk” several times before, my husband **Jean-Philippe** and I realized augmentation was necessary as we prepared to take our 10-year-old son **Zion** and our 7-year-old daughter **Zoelle** to participate in a peaceful [George Floyd protest/vigil](#) last summer [see cover image]. I wrestled with feeling that my words would take away the innocent view in which children see the world, but I quickly shifted my perspective and began the painful conversation to create an awareness of the harsh realities of the world in which we live. During the peaceful protest/vigil, my son carried a sign that said, “When do I go from cute to dangerous?” The protest/vigil was indeed a teaching moment.

Similarly, we have had to have “The Talk” with Zion to explain why his repeated gift requests for nerf guns were not honored by grandparents and other loved ones who vividly recall the [Tamir Rice](#) story, just one in many tragic incidents. In November 2014, Tamir, a 12-year-old African American boy, was shot and killed by the police in Cleveland while carrying a toy gun. The conversation was especially difficult because Zion has been invited to outdoor nerf gun battles with our white neighbors, but he was not permitted to attend. On establishing strict guidelines, we finally gave in and bought nerf guns, but to protect Zion, he is not allowed to take them outside. Some may view our guidelines as extreme; however, in a study published in the [American Psychological Association’s Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#), Phillip Atiba Goff, Ph.D., reported, “children in most societies are considered to be in a



distinct group with characteristics such as innocence and the need for protection. Our research found that Black boys can be seen as responsible for their actions at an age when white boys still benefit from the assumption that children are essentially innocent.” It is studies like these that give me a sense of urgency as a mother of an African American son, to proactively prepare and teach him the potentially lifesaving techniques that will hopefully assist him in appearing to be less of a threat when society decides he is no longer “cute,” he no longer appears innocent, and he is viewed as a threat or dangerous.

Despite these and other heart-wrenching incidents, there are glimmers of hope resulting from the awareness created from these incidents. People are having a different kind of “Talk” at high levels in government, business, organizations, in the media, with friends, in zoom strategy sessions, etc. All are “Talks” which are a necessary first step but they must result in action. As Dr. Phil McGraw says, “Awareness without action is worthless.”

I remain hopeful that many will be moved to take prompt action.

Pictured, above: John-Phillippe, Shelita, Zion and Zoelle.

VIDEO: [Dear Child—When Black Parents Have to Give “The Talk”](#)

From the Perspective of a Teenager

By Joshua Harris

As a teenager, there's often the misconception that because we're not fully adults, we don't experience hardships the same way adults do, but 2020 undoubtedly proved that misconception false. The start of this pandemic was a slow one, and honestly, I don't think anyone expected that it would get this bad. I remember sitting in my history class watching current events back in late 2019, seeing Wuhan be in full lockdown. Not even once did it cross my mind the same disease they were dealing with would impact us and the world this much. I honestly don't think it crossed any of my peers' minds as subtle, but crude jokes were whispered across the room here and there. However, those jokes would soon become no laughing matter as we all had to face the hard truth.

COVID-19 came out of nowhere and seemed to spread so fast, and so soon, no one saw it coming. Even though we went through about four months of watching the same current events headline story, 'Wuhan Epidemic' and eventually 'Coronavirus Epidemic,' it never seemed to faze anyone in my class. We all just thought it'd be another Ebola situation where one country or region might have it hard, and the rest of the world would be unaffected. January 2020 is when the first case of COVID-19 was reported in the US in Washington State. I remember reading the headlines about it on my phone, and sure I was a little worried but never scared. The coming months, however, would prove that maybe I should've been.

February came, and it seemed like the whole world had turned its attention to China and how to slow and possibly stop the spread of this virus. Then on March 1st of 2020, New York City reported its first case, and after that, it spread like wildfire. Spring break came in the following weeks, and honestly didn't feel like it ended till August. The Centers for Disease Control issued guidelines that told us to quarantine and social distance. Everything seemed to shut down in a matter of weeks. I wasn't too upset about learning from home, but then the months started rolling by, and the days went from feeling like 8 hours of school to 12 hours of boredom and isolation.

COVID-19 hit hard and fast. Personally, it reminded me not to take things like going to school and seeing friends, going to a movie, or even just the ability to leave my house for granted. After the school year, summer seemed like a faraway fantasy. Thankfully there was Netflix and YouTube and the evermore



popular app Tik Tok, but eventually, even those became boring. Masks were enforced to help slow the spread, and while most tried to make it 'the newest fashion statement,' some were against being forced to wear them. I personally didn't seem to mind as the winter months in Colorado are frigid, so the mask would help keep your face warm.

August came, and it felt so surreal. I could finally leave the house and go back to school and see my friends. Since March, we hadn't been back to school, so it was kind of euphoric seeing everyone again after what felt like forever. However, the joy was momentary. Headlines of other schools getting shutdown lingered all around. Fortunately, my school fared to be one of the lucky ones and ended up being one of the district's last schools to get a confirmed case. Yet even with that, the inevitable was soon to transpire. *[Continued next page]*

Joshua Harris, 17, is a Senior at Skyview Academy in Denver, Colorado, where he maintains a 4.0 grade point average. He plans to study aerodynamics when he attends college in the fall. Joshua is the son of Catherine Harris, PCS Coordinator, IBC.

The Black Family: From the Perspective of a Teenager (Continued)

The months following August seemed to fly by, and before I knew it was Christmas. It didn't feel like it at all, as it seemed like there was an undertone of sadness mixed with anger, confusion, and worry everywhere you went. Maybe that's because that's really what most of us felt during those months, and still, some of us can feel that today, the worry of not knowing what could happen next.

As we go into the new year and look back on last year and all the hardships that came with it, it's important to remember that

we never know what tomorrow might bring. However, that doesn't mean we should live our lives in fear or constant worry. It's important to remember that we can show gratitude and kindness despite everything. You never know what someone else might be dealing with, or if they've lost a loved one. It's important to be thankful for the things you have, family and friends, and remember the moments of joy in your life. It's essential to always keep an optimistic outlook on things, especially during these challenging times.



COVID-19 and Trauma: Mental Health Struggles Among Black Teens

The nation's recent events have brought on a lot of challenges for many people across the country and around the world. While this can be affecting everyone's mental health, it's apparent that Black teenagers are particularly affected.

Not only can social isolation due to COVID-19 cause feelings of sadness, anxiety and depression but when you add on the fact that Black people are dying at a disproportionate rate due to the virus and recent extreme police brutality and violence, these events can take a serious toll on teens—especially teens of color. Kids and teens rely on connecting with others to feel good. When forced physical distancing comes into play, it makes social connecting very difficult.

Teens really struggle with isolation from friends. "Prioritizing social relationships outside the family is a developmental task for teens, and being disconnected can add to stress," says Dr.

[Sarah Jerstad](#), Associate Clinical Director of Psychological Services at Children's Minnesota Hospital. For teens who already struggle with anxiety or depression, the lack of social connectedness can make things worse.

According to Dr. Jerstad, "Kids of color have long faced barriers to mental health care in areas of prevention, access to care, quality treatment and mental health outcomes. The onset of COVID-19 has only increased that burden on kids of color."

Long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put the Black community at an increased risk of getting COVID-19 or experiencing severe illness, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The disproportionate deaths and illnesses in the Black community due to COVID-19 can be an additional stressor to a teen who is already experiencing stress, anxiety or depression.

For teens of color, racism is linked to anxiety, depression and trauma. "Kids dealing with racism on a daily basis often feel a fear of being targeted, a lack of safety, or may internalize negative messages they hear about themselves," said Dr. Jerstad. "Since the death of George Floyd, anxiety and stress among Black Americans increased at higher rates than any other ethnic group." Suicide rates for Black teens were already increasing at alarming rates, so much so that Black youth under 13 were twice as likely to die by suicide than their white counterparts.

How can parents help? Dr. Jerstad says, "Talk to your children early and often about racism. The most important advice on race and racism is to make sure to talk about it, and to talk early. Research shows that even very young children are aware of racial differences, and children can learn harmful lessons about race when it's not discussed openly."

Breaking the Cycle

By Chiketta R. Wilson, Contract Specialist, IBC

For generations it has been the norm for Black families to not discuss important matters of health. This can be due to lack of coverage, a mistrust in the system, or just a general want for privacy. Society has caused unjust inequalities towards Black families based on hue of skin, financial status, facial features, hair texture, and body features. Facing these challenges while just trying to live day to day is a feat in and of itself. If you add other topics in the mix, families tend to get uncomfortable and hold onto secrets.

The cultural divide for medical care for Black families has started to take a turn for the better. Previously, quality healthcare was something hard to come by. Black families were mistreated, abused, misdiagnosed, and unknowingly used for medical testing. Some Black families did not believe in going to a doctor while others were simply not afforded the opportunity to obtain proper health coverage. All of these factors contributed to an ongoing crisis. No health coverage or mistrust in the system leads to not knowing where to get help which leads to not knowing what signs and symptoms to look for. Some issues seem easier to discuss such as diminishing eyesight or high blood pressure, but there are misperceptions too: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is just being hyper, diabetes is otherwise known as the sugar, etc. They sometimes hold the same value as a common cold or minor issues that some firmly believe can be placated with Sunday church service, Vicks, or a spoonful of castor oil.

The real stigma comes into play when there are more serious health issues. Being among family usually appeases the stressors in life stemming from the everyday injustices of the world. Many do not realize that there is a growing rate of anxiety and depression within Black families. Having to admit that there is a deeper problem makes some Black families see mental health as a weakness. Having a weakness can cause family members to become detached and further withdrawn from reality. The situation can be summed up as it is okay to be fun crazy, but no one wants to be called crazy crazy. Black families have endured generations of trauma and have overcome many adversities. It is time to encourage



conversations and get help. Holding on to these types of family secrets hinders future generations from receiving the proper care they need.

In the current environment of a pandemic, it is even more crucial that Black families speak up and seek medical attention. Some Black families still do not have access to medical facilities that are capable of catering to the Black community. Many have underlying health issues that have spanned across generations but go unnoticed due to lack of medical care. Medical professionals that understand this cultural divide and can treat a patient based on medical status versus skin hue is something that is much needed in today's environment.

Healthcare within Black families have been kept private for way too long and needs to be put in the spotlight. The ultimate goal should be to forge a more positive stance to help people not be ashamed of circumstances beyond their control. The cultural divide within healthcare needs to be obliterated so that everyone can receive proper treatment. Healthcare should be one-size-fits-all, but unfortunately in some places, the hue of your skin determines the type of care you receive.

African Americans and Aging: What Caregivers Need to Know

By Ashley Williams, [Care.com](https://www.care.com)

Wrinkles, gray hair, occasional aches and pains — these are just a few of the minor frustrations that we’ve come to expect with age. As an average 65-year-old can expect to live an additional 19 years, according to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the quality of that phase of life becomes increasingly important. But for African Americans, growing older brings more than mere annoyances or other age-related setbacks.

More than four million African Americans are 65 or older. While the group is far from homogeneous — and a 65-year-old’s experiences and needs likely differ from those of someone 10 or 20 years older — these elders share some unique challenges.

Hit hard by the most difficult health challenges

“Aging is a critical topic right now, especially for the African American community,” says Donna Benton, Ph.D., and research associate professor of gerontology at the University of Southern California. “[The group] tends to have higher risk for diseases like Alzheimer’s, stroke and other health conditions that make their care more complex.”

According to the Alzheimer’s Association, a new case of Alzheimer’s is diagnosed every 65 seconds. African Americans are 64% more likely to develop the disease or a related dementia. (Researchers suspect that factors such as high rates of diabetes and obesity in the community may play a role.) Despite their increased risk, Black seniors tend to be diagnosed much later than other groups. Without a formal diagnosis, they have fewer treatment options and resources at their disposal.

But the disparities in medical care for seniors isn’t limited to Alzheimer’s. Black male seniors are significantly less likely to receive treatment for osteoporosis, which can lead to fractures. And if those seniors do break a bone, they may suffer more than their peers of other races. Researchers have found that African Americans may not be given the same pain management options as other groups. The reason? A persistent myth in the medical community that Black people are less sensitive to pain.

There may be one positive note, however: some studies suggest that acute care for heart attack and stroke appear to differ little between racial groups, according to data provided by the CDC



Division of Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention.

Bearing a financial strain

Retirement often means living on a fixed income and tight budgets. Yet retirees who once had solid middle-class jobs don’t necessarily have pensions that can keep pace with the costs of treating chronic conditions or long-term care. For African American seniors, whose incomes are on average \$18,000 less than other people 65 and older, these additional expenses can bring significant financial strain.

“[The Black community] has a high percentage of people who aren’t in poverty who can’t qualify for [lower-cost] services,” says Benton. “The result is a bigger financial burden and higher out-of-pocket costs than other groups — some \$7,000 to \$8,000 more.”

Combine those additional expenses with lower rates of insurance coverage (32% for African Americans vs. 46% for white Americans) and fewer advance directives in the community (44% vs. 24%), according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and you have the makings of golden years that are anything but for seniors and their family caregivers.

“Look at the history of disparities in health access, which, in turn, contributes to people not being able to care for chronic but high-risk conditions, plus the lack of insurance,” says Benton. “If you [take] all that together, you have a much sicker population that caregivers are dealing with.”

The challenges of asking for (and offering) care

There is one key cultural difference that may compound health and financial challenges faced by African American seniors. In short, they often struggle in silence. *[cont’d]*

“Regardless of socioeconomic status, older [Black] people don’t like to tell their business,” says Angie Boddie, director of Health Programs for the [National Caucus on Black Aging](#), an advocacy group. “Not sharing is a big deal.”

As a result, many seniors might not voice their concerns or frustrations. That means it’s all the more critical that their loved ones and caregivers pay close attention. “Caregivers play an integral role,” says Benton. “But they also need to know what resources are available.”

What caregivers can do

Providing care to the aging African American population requires additional diligence to combat the myriad challenges the community faces. Here’s how you can help.

1. Help break the silence

African Americans have endured much over the course of history, but it’s taken courage and often a quiet strength to do so. “We mask our needs,” says Benton. “We don’t want to be linked to looking for handouts.” That means Black seniors likely won’t let on that they’re having a health problem.

Family and paid caregivers may be the first line of defense when it comes to identifying new health issues. Having a complete care plan, which ensures caregivers are aware of all known medical conditions, along with providers and treatment (or not), can help. If a symptom arises and it’s not on the plan, the caregiver can raise the alarm.

2. Enable empowerment

“Older people will just take their doctor’s word and not challenge it,” says Boddie, when discussing the concerns of the African-American community. “We need to teach them to advocate for themselves.” That’s not always easy to do. To encourage this often fundamental behavior change for some seniors, Boddie suggests taking several steps:

- Encourage the person to write down any concerns or questions before and during discussions with their doctors.

- Before appointments, set up practice sessions with a trusted relative or friend so the person feels more comfortable having an open and honest conversation.
- Remind the senior to speak up when a situation doesn’t feel right or sound right and offer your support when that happens.

Benton also advises caregivers to be proactive even if they can’t be part of every medical conversation. “Assuming the person and their doctor are OK with it, you can look at notes about appointments online,” she says. “That can help you better understand what’s going on and navigate the health care system.”

3. Utilize available resources

It should go without saying, but information truly is power.

“I’m always taken aback by the number of adults who do not take advantage of the state and federal resources available,” Boddie says. “There is an agency for aging in every state and territory.” These organizations serve multiple purposes. They can connect to home health services, provide a script to help convince a loved one they need (and how to get) different types of insurance or coverage or even handle simple queries, like whether or not to get a flu shot and where to get it. And you don’t have to visit in person.

“People always think I have to go to a ‘place,’” says Boddie. “But you can get plenty of guidance over the phone.”

For those seniors and caregivers who are online, a good place to find community-based resources is the [Eldercare Locator](#). The nationwide portal offers a wealth of information on caregiving, senior services, housing and elder rights specific to your location.

4. Build upon the inherent resilience of seniors

Benton believes it’s important to encourage seniors to focus on the things they can still do as they grow older. “We do get wiser in different ways and are able to adapt [to new situations] every year,” she says. “For instance, maybe you lose some of your

friends or social networks. But if you still have a purpose every day, like taking care of a pet or gardening, you’ll age well. Do what you can do — but don’t be afraid to ask for help.”



[African Americans, Anxiety and Depression](#)

[Association of America](#): information on choosing providers and accompanying ADA articles on topics such as how to overcome unique obstacles and the link between racism and stress and anxiety for Black Americans.

[Black/African American, Behavioral Health Equity, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)

[Administration](#): information page from the agency that runs the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255) for confidential support for those in distress and National Helpline (800-662-4357) for treatment referral and support.

[Black and African American Communities and Mental Health, Mental Health America](#)

[America](#): fact sheet about prevalence of, attitudes about, and treatment for mental health issues with information specific to bipolar disorder and clinical depression.

[Brother, You're on My Mind Toolkit, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity and the National Institute on Minority Health and Health](#)

[Disparities](#): website with educational material, checklists and tips on partnerships, outreach and event planning aimed at African American men.

[Sharing Hope: Speaking With African Americans About Mental Health, National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

[Illness](#): presentation about stigma, possibilities of recovery, types of support services and signs of bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and depression.

[Workforce](#): facing the caregiving crisis.

[Centers for Disease Control](#): healthy aging and Alzheimer's disease.

[Therapy for Black Girls Podcast](#): weekly chat about mental health, personal development and more for Black women and girls.

[National Institute on Aging \(National Institutes on Health\)](#): publications on health disparities related to aging

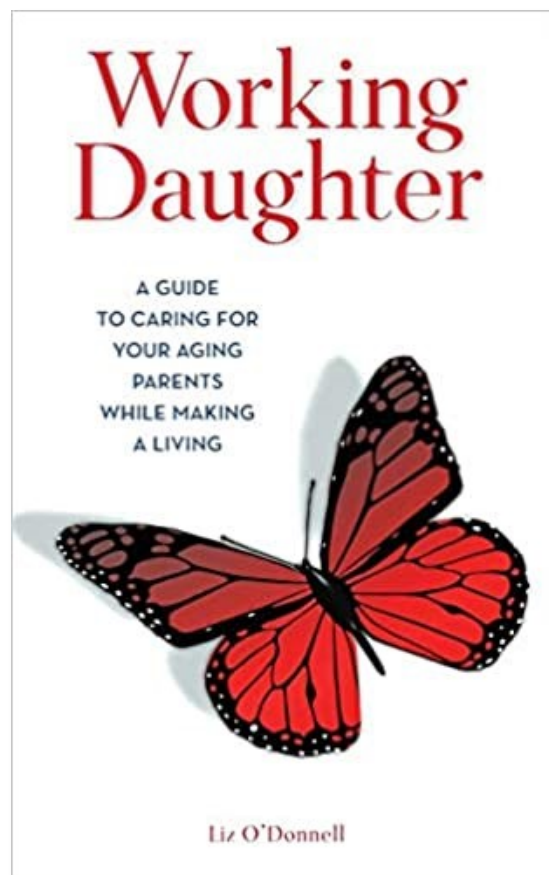
[Innovage](#): all-inclusive care options in Virginia, Colorado, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and California.

[Working Daughter](#): a community for women balancing caregiving and career.

[Working Daughter \(Book by Lis O'Donnell\)](#): a guide to caring for your aging parents while making a living.

[Better Health While Aging](#): practical aging health and caregiving information.

[When Your Aging Parent Needs Help \(Book by Leslie Kernisan, MD MPH\)](#): a geriatrician's step-by-step guide to memory loss, resistance, safety and more.



[Recognizing Caregiver Burnout](#): article by Carol Bradley Bursack, Minding our Elders.

[Aging Care](#) : 10 government resources every caregiver should know about.

[The Safe Place](#): mental health app for the Black community on [Android](#) and [iPhone](#).

Let America Be America Again - Langston Hughes 1935

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—
Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.



Let America Be America Again - Langston Hughes 1935 (Continued)

O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home—
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay—
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be—the land where every man is free.
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's,
ME—
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain—
All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again!

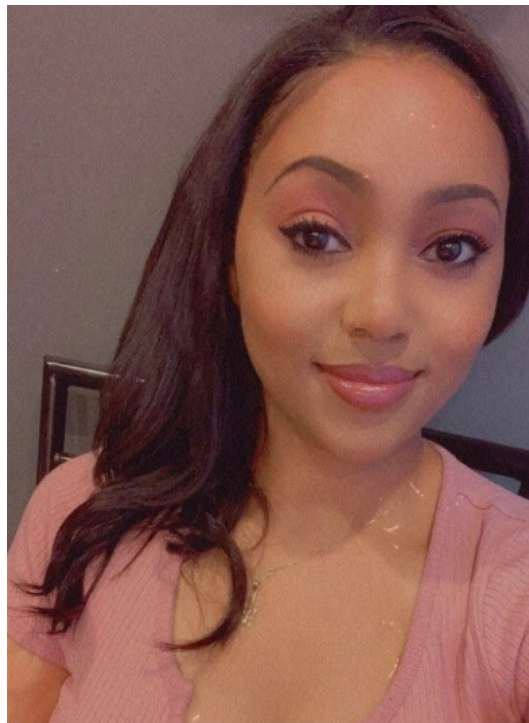


Present-Day Impression of Langston Hughes's Poem "Let America Be America Again"

By Ebony N. Jones, Contract Specialist, Acquisitions Services Directorate, IBC

James Mercer Langston Hughes (Langston) wrote "Let America Be America Again" while traveling on a train from New York to Ohio in 1935. The poem demonstrates the reality of the greed and oppression that existed, while being hopeful for the achievement of the American dream: freedom, equality, peace and justice for all. The literary style of the poem is rhythmic and free verse with at least three points of view: the dreamer, the oppressed and the oppressor. It demonstrates Langston's signature style of Jazz Poetry.

As the pandemic brought tragedy to lives all over the world last year, the chaos continued with cases of police brutality in America. Some Americans were reminded that the wicked reality of racism expressed in "Let America Be America Again" still exists today. It lurks in places and spaces that could cause trauma and tragedy to those affected. Police brutality may be blatant in most cases and unfortunately not a modern phenomenon. However, implicit bias in areas such as police



departments, the medical field, justice systems, educational institutions and professional space is also devastating and can be life threatening to those faced with discrimination. Last year should have awakened those who think we are done making America. We have come so far, and still, we have work to do. Langston's poem reminds us that

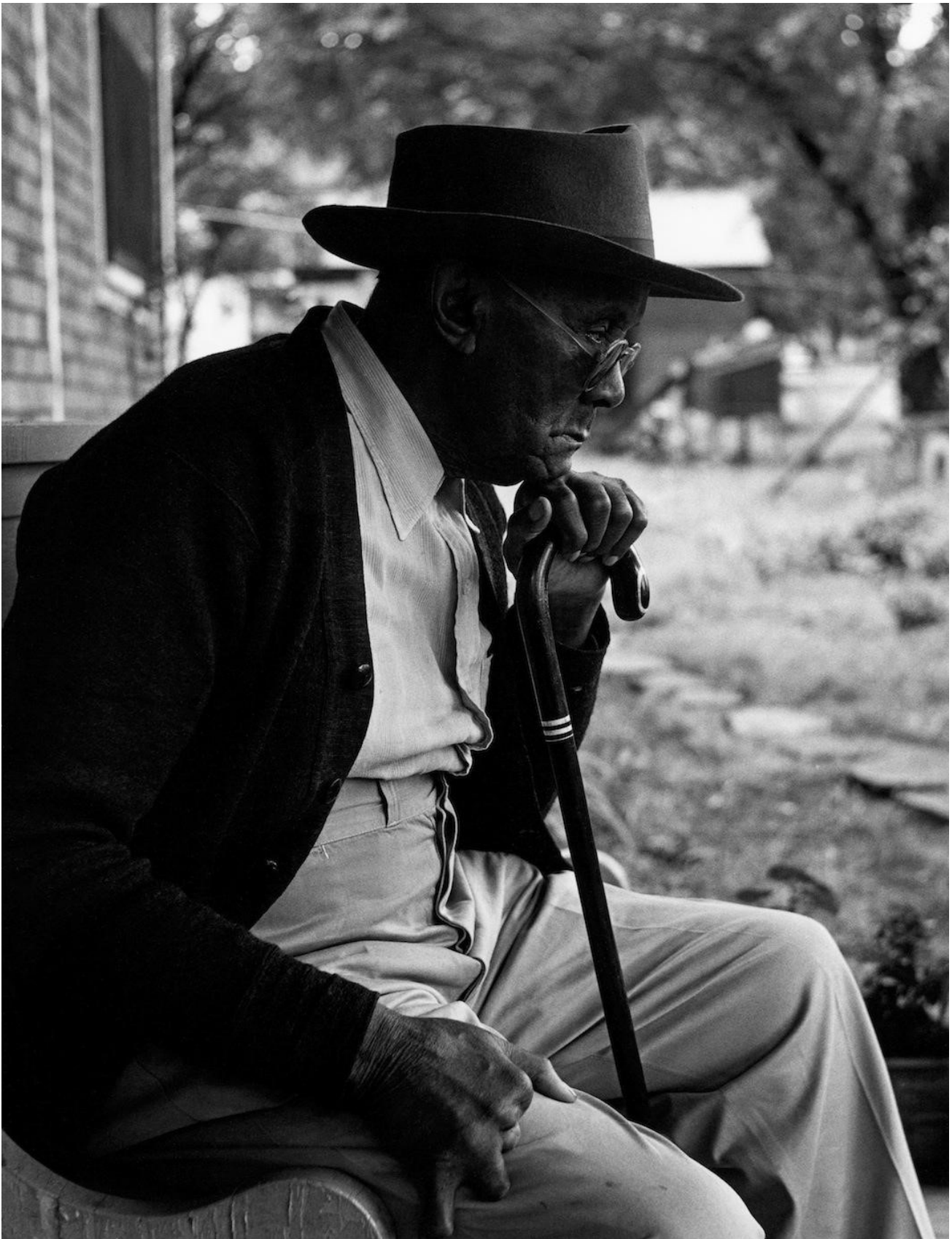
America will be the dream, made by us together. Langston is among the artists that flourished during the Harlem Renaissance. He served as a voice for the oppressed and those unable to share in America's promises. His pieces hold up a mirror to society, while expressing hope in the resilient pursuit of the American dream. His work was revolutionary. His artistic integrity and bittersweet expression made him a spokesperson for the people then and now. Let us continue to make America the dream.



Langston Hughes (February 1, 1901 – May 22, 1967) was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist from Joplin, Missouri. One of the earliest innovators of the then-new literary art form called *Jazz Poetry*, Hughes is best known as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance. He famously wrote about the period that "the Negro was in vogue," which was later paraphrased as "when Harlem was in vogue."

Growing up in a series of Midwestern towns, Hughes became a prolific writer at an early age. He moved to New York City as a young man, where he made his career.

He graduated from high school in Cleveland, Ohio and soon began studies at Columbia University in New York City. Although he dropped out, he gained notice from New York publishers, first in *The Crisis* magazine, and then from book publishers and became known in the creative community in Harlem. He eventually graduated from Lincoln University. In addition to poetry, Hughes wrote plays and short stories. He also published several non-fiction works. From 1942 to 1962, as the civil rights movement was gaining traction, he wrote an in-depth weekly column in a leading Black newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*.



ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHS: [Gordon Parks](#) hadn't been to his hometown, Fort Scott, Kansas, in more than 20 years when he returned there in 1950 as a photojournalist on assignment for Life magazine. Growing up as the youngest of 15 children, Parks attended the Plaza School, an all-Black grade school in the heavily segregated town. Now, as the first Black man hired full-

time by the magazine, Parks wanted to find and photograph all 11 of his classmates from grade school as a way of measuring the impact of school segregation. The photo essay he created, which was never published, was on display at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in the exhibition, "Gordon Parks: Back to Fort Scott," in 2015.



10 National Parks that Honor Black History

African Americans' contributions to our history and culture are deeply interwoven into our collective national heritage. The National Park Foundation (NPF) and the African American Experience Fund (AAEF) has been investing in the preservation of African American history and culture through national parks since 2001 and continues to build on their investment to ensure that these stories are shared, preserved, and honored through parks in ways that connect and inspire current and future generations. Explore the stories behind these parks and make them a part of your next national park trip!

[CARTER G. WOODSON HOME NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE](#)

Carter G. Woodson Home National Historic Site, located in Washington, D.C., served as the home of the "Father of Black History," Dr. Carter G. Woodson from 1922 until his death in 1950.

As the nation's first professionally trained historian of African descent, Woodson institutionalized the study of African American history, and from his home in the heart of the city's Shaw neighborhood, he directed the operations of his organization, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASALH), ran a publishing company, the Associated Publishers, and in 1926, started Negro History Week, which is now observed as Black History Month. Photo NPS/Victoria Stauffenberg.

[MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK](#)

You can walk in the footsteps of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in parks across the country. Known as "M.L." by his family, Dr. King's early years in Atlanta are preserved and honored at Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park. When visiting the park, stop by the visitor center to pick up a map of the park, which includes the home in which he was born and lived until he was 12, the Baptist Church where he worshipped and preached, and the King Center, where Dr. and Mrs. Coretta Scott King are laid to rest. Photo NPS/Katie Bricker.

[TUSKEGEE AIRMEN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE](#)

The skies have long captured our imagination, and several national parks pay tribute to advancements and achievements in aviation history. In Alabama, Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site is the training site of the first-ever African American military pilots, known as the "Red Tails." Nearly 1,000 African American pilots were trained here, and over 10,000 men and women worked as technicians, radio operators, medical personnel, parachute riggers, mechanics, navigators, dispatchers, and more at the site. Visit the park's two hangar museums to learn more about the daily life of the men and women who served here. Photo NPS.

Special Section: National Parks that Celebrate Black History



[SELMA TO MONTGOMERY NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL](#)

Honoring the three 1965 civil rights marches that were meant to stretch 54 miles from Selma to Montgomery, the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail follows the path of the heroic men and women who demonstrated for access to voting registration. The first two marches, met with violent confrontation by the state, were captured by the media and sparked nationwide outrage. The third march on March 21, 1965, saw upwards of 25,000 participants and the Voting Rights Act was signed five months later. Photo by NPS.

[CHARLES YOUNG BUFFALO SOLDIERS NATIONAL MONUMENT](#)

Col. Charles Young was a distinguished officer in the U.S. Army, the third African American to graduate from West Point, and the first to achieve the rank of colonel – in addition to the first African American to serve as a superintendent of a national park! Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument preserves Young's legacy, as well as that of the Buffalo Soldiers. In the face of unrelenting racism and inequality, Buffalo Soldiers showed themselves as strong and successful soldiers in performing their jobs. They were effectively the first park rangers and over a century after their service, their stories and legacies are interwoven with the fabric of our history and the history of our parks. NPS played a major role in the creation of this park by providing the necessary funding through AAEF in 2013 to purchase the historic property from the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.'s Friendship Foundation. Photo by NPS/Thomas Engberg.



[MEDGAR AND MYRLIE EVERS HOME NATIONAL MONUMENT](#)

One of the newest national park sites, the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument commemorates the legacies of two civil rights activists who, from their small ranch home, devoted their lives to ending racial injustice against Black Americans. Upon returning from serving in World War II, Medgar Evers applied to the then-segregated law school at the University of Mississippi. When his application was rejected, he became the focus of a NAACP campaign to desegregate the school. Medgar and Myrlie Evers opened and managed the first NAACP Mississippi State Office and led boycotts, organized voter registration drives, and investigated acts of violence against African Americans.



In June 1963, Medgar Evers was murdered in the carport of their home – an event that served as a catalyst for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Myrlie Evers has continued building on her legacy of activism, becoming one of the first African American women to run for Congress and eventually serving as the chairwoman of the NAACP. Photo by NPS.

Special Section: National Parks that Celebrate Black History



[HARRIET TUBMAN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK](#)

One of two national parks that preserve the life and legacy of Harriet Tubman, Harriet Tubman National Historical Park in Auburn, NY explores Tubman's later years. After masterminding hundreds of rescue missions and serving in the U.S. Army, she continued fighting for human rights and dignity for the last fifty years of her life. Grounded in her unwavering faith, the "Moses of her people" helped establish schools for freed people in the South, pushed for equality and suffrage for African American women, and built the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged to care for the elderly and poor in her community. Photo NPS.

[PULLMAN NATIONAL MONUMENT](#)

Chicago's first national park site honors the 1894 Pullman strike and subsequent national boycott of Pullman train cars. The Pullman Company hired African American men, known as Pullman Porters, who served first-class passengers traveling in the company's luxurious sleeping cars and became synonymous with the railroad's impeccable service and style. In 1894, workers fought for better wages and living conditions. This strike led to the formation of the first African American labor union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and sent a positive message about the potential of labor organizing among the growing labor movement in America. Photo Jay Galvin.



[NICODEMUS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE](#)

On the plains of Kansas, Nicodemus National Historic Site preserves the remnants of a town established by African Americans during the period of reconstruction following the Civil War. In search of a life free from persecution and oppression, Kansas was seen as a "promised land" for formerly enslaved African Americans, many of whom headed west looking for a new life after the war. When visiting the park, you can explore five historic buildings that represent the spirit of Nicodemus – church, self-government, education, home, and business.



Today, the small community of Nicodemus is the only remaining all-Black town west of the Mississippi River to have been settled in the 1800s by formerly enslaved people. Photo NPS.

[MAGGIE L. WALKER NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE](#)

Maggie Lena Walker devoted her life to civil rights advancement, economic empowerment, and educational opportunities for African American men and women during the Jim Crow era. Walker was a prominent businesswoman and a community leader, working as a newspaper editor, fraternal leader, and later the first African American woman to establish a bank in the country. Today, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site commemorates the life of this trailblazing, talented woman. Photo NPS.



HONOR ★ VALOR ★ SERVICE



Meet Derrick "Rick" Battle

Derrick "Rick" Battle currently serves as the Personal Property Management Specialist for BLM Eastern States in Falls Church, Virginia. Born and raised in Washington, DC, Rick served in the US Army from 1983-1986 as a Supply Technician. His tour of duty took him to Stuttgart, West Germany, and Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.

Married with three young adult children, Rick is entering his 21st year of federal government service.

[2020 DOI Veterans Virtual Wall of Honor](#)

For more information
regarding the DOI Veterans
Employee Resource Group:

DOI_VETS@ios.doi.gov

COLORED
ENTRANCE



Segregation in the South, 1956, photo by Gordon Parks

About the Special Emphasis Program

Special Emphasis Programs (SEPs) are implemented and observed throughout the Department of the Interior primarily to ensure that all are provided an equal opportunity in all aspects of employment. These programs help DOI improve its employee engagement efforts and fosters an environment where all employees are valued, accepted, appreciated and feel included.

The Administrative Services Special Emphasis Program Team, in collaboration with the DOI Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights, publishes **Connections** magazine to coincide with each monthly commemoration. We would be delighted to have you be a part of our efforts by:

- Shaping subject matter for each magazine
- Creating and submitting content
- Participating in and hosting virtual observances and informal discussions
- Celebrating diversity with family, friends and co-workers

Team members spend approximately one hour per pay period on SEP initiatives, are able to take time away when work schedules require it, and can focus on those subject areas that are most meaningful to them.

To get started, [please send an email here](#) and a team member will contact you.

Thank you sincerely for your interest!

Connections Magazine for March: Women's History Month

The Special Emphasis Program Magazine is a publication of the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary, Administrative Services, in collaboration with the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights. Your input is essential to making this a valuable resource for all employees. Please feel free to share your ideas, suggestions and articles/pictures with editor Steve Carlisle by emailing Stephen_Carlisle@ibc.doi.gov. Thank you!

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