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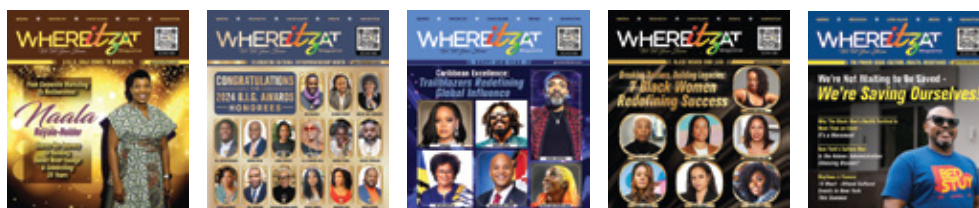


BABY CHAM

MARCIA GRIFFITHS

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# The Empowerment Blueprint



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I attempted to address this issue of “community complicity” in our prevailing decline in legacy building and economic status, I was roundly criticized as being elitist and patriarchal, much like the backlash Bill Cosby experienced after his famous “Pound Cake” speech in 2004. Here is the difference between his point of view and mine, I still live and work in my community, I am not rich or elitist, and my opinions are confirmed every day I spend in my community.



Dr. Clive Williams BH(M)  
Publisher / Editor-in-Chief

One of the clearest analogies of the concept of empowerment I have seen to date is the one that tells the story of Donald who always drove on a set route to work every day because it was short and convenient, until one morning he encountered roadwork which delay made him late to work; for us New Yorkers that is a normal event in our lives. On the second morning, simply out of habit he failed to notice the detour signs and again got caught in an unpleasant and interminable delay which earned him a strong reprimand at work for again arriving late. His response to his self-inflicted dilemma was, “it wasn’t my fault, roadwork is taking place all over the city.” Of course his boss’s response was, “Donald, you’ve got to plan, and be prepared for all eventualities, John lives up the street from you, doesn’t he, and he hasn’t been late.” Angry and upset Donald went over to John and asked, “how come you did not get caught in the major traffic jams in our neighborhood? John replied calmly, “the first morning I saw the traffic backup I changed my route and discovered two different ways to get to work.”

At that point Donald realized how unaware he had become, he understood very quickly he had become a creature of habit, blindly following the car before him, relinquishing his agency, and critical thinking abilities.

I have news for you folks, and it is troubling, the real meaning of empowerment is losing meaning in our Black and Brown communities, we mouth it as symbolism, appeasement or simply cliché! Like Donald, we have become unaware, apathetic, (follow-fashion), and down-right blind to the environment around us, if an event affects us adversely, it is easier to blame the system, the politicians, police, and our neighbors for the problem, never us! The last time

Are you still pondering on the story I shared above, are you mindful of how uncommitted you are to the concept of empowerment, even though you verbalize and amplify it’s value; are you a Donald or a John, are you responsive and aware, or are you still going along with the herd, following the car before you, or are you looking for another route? My daily journey through the neighborhoods I serve gives me an intimate and sometimes uncomfortable insight in the current community consciousness – the zeitgeist if you will; my anecdotal surveys derive from talking to the young, middle aged, service workers, teachers, business people and professionals. These interactions offer an opportunity to listen and learn, and I am convinced, that for Black and Brown communities to take their rightful and respected place in American society – **“we must become the change that we want to see happen.”** To do that, we must become like John in the story above - we must see the detour signs early, change course, and find new routes to our destination, which is the epitome of empowerment, and that is what empowerment really means, it is a dynamic, not a static process. This means that complacency is not an option, and clear objective strategies must be devised, religious invocations are not working, dependence on the State, or our political leaders are not working, neither is going along to get along; **“we must also become the leaders we seek.”**

There is no doubt in my mind that unless we respond, and act quickly in reimagining our priorities, history will begin to repeat itself in ways that Gen X’s and Millennial’s are incapable of understanding. Already many of the safeguards earned by the sacrifice of the Great generation and Baby Boomers are being

removed, protections enshrined in the Constitution are being eroded, all while too many in the younger generation are oblivious to the crisis. Our Brown Latino/Hispanic brothers much like the Asian – Chinese/East Indian, (model minorities) are experiencing a socio/cultural meltdown as their Status Quo has clashed with the wrecking ball of new immigration policies, reminding them that Sacred Cows are White. This socio/ cultural, socio/economic levelling, if nothing else should accelerate a unification of common interests, an allyship especially among Black people who through blood sacrifice, and martyrdom set the stage for others to attain mobility, who then go on to act as if they are superior.

Yep! It is time to shine, in case you forgot we have models of “good trouble,” Douglas, Garvey, Dubois, Malcolm X, Dr. King, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells and Shirley Chisholm, just to mention a few who did the hard work. They epitomized empowerment – they all saw an obstacle in their way, they either moved it, went around it, or demolished it, at a time when they had little or no rights. We on the other hand still have some legal rights and resources, but more profoundly, we have the benefit of Technology/Artificial Intelligence, a tool that is not only levelling the playing field, it is dramatically changing the power game, and it is available without discrimination. Yes, we have the technology to change the narrative, use it for our benefit and to the benefit of those who are unable to, it is not someone else’s responsibility to empower us, it is an act of self-love to find a new route when the old one is blocked – that’s Empowerment!

*Clive*

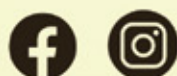




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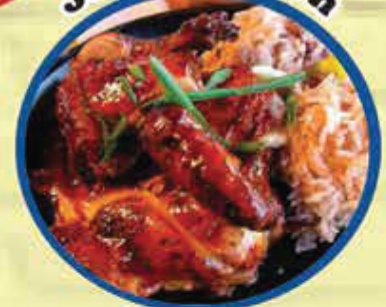
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# Love, Lyrics & Legacy: The Beres Hammond *Experience*

*Featuring Marcia Griffiths & Baby Cham - a Celebration  
of Reggae's Finest*

By **Chris Godfrey**



Photo: **Peter Verwimp**

Jamaican music legends are set to bring a wave of reggae and dancehall magic to Newark, NJ and Coney Island, Brooklyn this summer courtesy of Jammins Events. The New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) and Coney Island Amphitheater will each host an evening of **Jamaican music and soul** on Saturday, August 16 and Sunday, August 17, featuring the iconic

**Beres Hammond**, the indomitable **Marcia Griffiths**, and dancehall star **Baby Cham**. The performance at each venue promises “*feel-good music and uplifting vibes*”. Fans are already buzzing about this rare gathering of reggae royalty – a lineup that spans generations and styles, from lovers’ rock to roots and dancehall. Special guests **Romain Virgo** and **Louie**

**Culture** are also scheduled to join the bill, making it an unforgettable celebration of Jamaican culture and music.

Headlining the show is **Beres Hammond**, often hailed as the “**king of lovers rock**” for his soulful, romantic brand of reggae. Now 69, Hammond brings decades of hits and a **signature blend of smoky-sweet vocals and smooth reggae rhythms**. “*I don’t sing for charts; I sing for hearts*,” he famously says – a motto that reflects his focus on touching souls rather than chasing trends. Indeed, Hammond’s music has been the soundtrack of love for reggae fans worldwide. Classics like “**Rockaway**,” “**No Disturb Sign**,” “**What One Dance Can Do**,” and the seductive “**Tempted to Touch**” remain perennial favorites that ignite sing-alongs whenever he performs. His 1990s anthem “**Tempted to Touch**” even topped reggae charts internationally, exemplifying how his passionate songwriting transcends borders.

Beres Hammond’s influence in reggae is profound. Though he’s humbly never had a mainstream U.S. pop hit, he’s a two-time Grammy Award nominee recognized in the Best Reggae Album category, and his work commands respect from the biggest names in the industry. Pop superstar **Rihanna** once publicly sang along to Hammond’s lyrics and tweeted lines from his song “*They Gonna Talk*”, while rapper Drake expressed he’d want Hammond to sing at his wedding. Even fellow artists revere him – on their 2001 duet “*Dance 4 Me*,” **Wyclef Jean** crowned Hammond a legend, declaring “*All you fake singers, bow down to the legend*”. Such accolades underline Hammond’s status as a reggae **living legend**. His rich, grainy voice has even drawn



comparisons to soul greats like Otis Redding and Sam Cooke for its emotive power.

On stage, Beres is a consummate showman who **thrives on live performance**. At Jamaica's Reggae Sumfest last year, he had a crowd of 15,000 in the palm of his hand, spanning *"three generations of fans"* united in song. Here in New York, Hammond recently sold out arenas like Brooklyn's Coney Island Amphitheater and NJPAC itself as part of his *Forever Giving Thanks Tour*. Concertgoers describe his shows as almost spiritual experiences. *"When Beres sings, you feel every word in your heart,"* says longtime fan Michelle Young, 47, of Queens. From the moment he saunters on stage – often opening with upbeat favorites like **"What One Dance Can Do"** and **"She Loves Me Now"** – the atmosphere is pure joy. He engages the audience with playful banter and heartfelt delivery, making every person in the hall feel the love in his lovers-rock anthems.

Sharing the stage will be the one-and-only **Marcia Griffiths**, aptly known as the **Queen of Reggae**. **Griffiths is celebrating an astonishing 60 years in the music industry**, a milestone that underscores her status as reggae's most enduring female vocalist. From her early days in the 1960s rocksteady era to her global tours today, Griffiths has continuously broken barriers and inspired generations. At 74, she still belts out songs with the same soulful fervor that first captivated audiences in Kingston. Her career is studded with hits: **"Feel Like Jumping"** (her breakout 1967 solo hit), the uplifting duet *"Young, Gifted and Black"* (a 1970 top-5 UK hit she recorded with Bob Andy), and of course the timeless **"Electric Boogie."** Released in the 1980s, Electric Boogie sparked the global **"Electric Slide"** line dance phenomenon, making Griffiths a crossover star and a household name far beyond Jamaica. To this day, no wedding or party feels complete without her feel-good anthem powering the dance floor.

Marcia Griffiths' contributions go even deeper: she was one of *Bob Marley's* renowned **I-Threes** harmony trio in the 1970s, lending her voice to classics like "No Woman, No Cry" and touring the world as Marley's backing vocalist. In doing so, she helped carry the message of *One Love* worldwide and cement reggae's global legacy. Her artistry earned Jamaica's highest accolades – she received the **Order of Distinction** in 2014 and, most prestigiously, the **Order of Jamaica** in 2023, becoming **the only Jamaican female**

**artist ever to earn that honor**. It's a fitting recognition for an artist often described as *"the only Queen of Reggae"*, and *"arguably the most influential woman in the history of reggae"*.

Despite her decades of success, Griffiths remains as hardworking and humble as ever. Just last year, she completed tours of **Europe and Japan**, thrilling overseas fans even as she quietly conquered a personal fear of flying to do so. *"The show must go on,"* she says resolutely, noting that it's the fans' love that motivates her to keep performing no matter the obstacles. She recalls doing shows *"money or no money"* simply because the audience was there, hungry for the music. That devotion runs both ways: Griffiths has fans so loyal, they've named their children after her – a testament to how deeply her songs touch people's lives across the globe.

When Marcia Griffiths takes the stage, expect **a master class in reggae history and positivity**. Whether she's serenading the crowd with her 1970s love ballad "Truly" or getting everyone dancing to *"Electric Boogie,"* her performance is sure to be a highlight. *"I can stay in one place and send my voice to the four corners of the world and touch souls,"* Griffiths says of her calling – and on these two nights; August 16 at NJPAC and August 17 at Coney Island Amphitheater, her voice will undoubtedly unite young and old in celebration. Fellow artists revere her as well; dancehall icon **Shaggy** and reggae star **Buju Banton** have both collaborated with her in recent years, demon-

strating her continued relevance. Truly, *the Queen's* reign continues stronger than ever, and her set is likely to be an inspiring trip through six decades of reggae magic.

The evening will shift into high-energy gear with **Baby Cham**, the dancehall superstar whose **hard-hitting anthems and crossover collaborations** have made him a force in reggae and hip-hop circles alike. Born Damian Beckett and now often billed simply as *Cham*, he first burst onto the scene in the late '90s and achieved international fame with **"Ghetto Story"** in 2006 – a gritty, authentic narrative of inner-city life that

Continued on Page 17



**Marcia**  
*Griffiths*

Photo: John R. Wisdom



resonated across the world. “*Ghetto Story*” became an **international hit** and a defining song of modern dancehall; it was so influential that it spawned answer tracks (“*chapters*” of the story) by other artists. The song’s appeal even caught the attention of R&B superstar **Alicia Keys**, who

jumped on the official remix. The “*Ghetto Story Chapter 2*” version featuring Keys helped propel Cham further into the U.S. mainstream, with a glossy video on MTV and BET and a peak of No. 77 on the Billboard Hot 100. (To date, the Alicia Keys remix’s official video has racked up over **45 million YouTube views**, underscoring the track’s enduring popularity.) Cham earned a Grammy nomination for his work – highlighting how his **blend of reggae authenticity and hip-hop savvy** made waves beyond Jamaica’s shores.

Beyond *Ghetto Story*, Baby Cham has a catalog of dancehall hits that get parties bouncing. Tracks like the cheeky “**Vitamin S**”, club bangers “**Boom**” and “**Wine**”, and guest verses on hip-hop remixes have showcased his versatility. He’s also a noted collaborator: throughout his career Cham has teamed up with a who’s-who of

R&B and rap, including **Foxy Brown, Rihanna, Carl Thomas, Mims, Akon, T-Pain** and actress-singer **Keke Palmer**. Indeed, Cham’s charismatic flow and **crossover appeal** helped pave the way for dancehall in the American charts during the mid-2000s, following the path of Sean Paul’s breakout. He’s stayed true to his roots as well, frequently working with legendary Jamaican producer **Dave Kelly** (the mastermind behind many of Cham’s hits) and even recording with reggae royalty like **Damian “Junior Gong” Marley**.

On stage, Baby Cham is pure energy. Fans can expect him to deliver rapid-fire rhymes and command the crowd with the confidence of a seasoned dancehall *deejay*. Whether he’s performing the **hard-hitting original “Ghetto Story”** or the remix duet with Alicia Keys, the song’s thumping bass and catchy “*this is my story*” hook are sure to bring the audience to its feet. Cham’s presence on the **Beres Hammond & Friends** lineup also brings a younger generation’s flavor to both nights – he represents the bridge between classic reggae and contemporary dancehall. As an artist who found **crossover success** without compromising his Jamaican identity, Cham remains a powerful voice in reggae and dancehall music, showing that the genre’s new school can hold its own alongside the veterans.

With Beres Hammond, Marcia Griffiths, and Baby Cham all sharing one stage, for Jammins Events very special Beres Hammonds & Friends concert series, August 16 and August 17 will be a **weekend of musical fireworks**. It’s a rare opportunity to see three eras of Jamaican music excellence – **roots, lovers’ rock, and dancehall** – converge in one concert. **Romain Virgo**, a rising star known for his silky lovers-rock vocals, and veteran sing-jay **Louie Culture** add even more depth to the lineup. Virgo, at just 33, represents the next generation inspired by legends like Hammond (in fact, Virgo has covered Beres’s songs in tribute) and Griffiths. Louie Culture, for his part, brings the flavor of 90s dancehall with hits like “Gangalee,” connecting past and present. Together, the roster truly spans the spectrum of reggae music’s evolution.

**For tickets to Beres Hammond & Friends on Saturday, August 16 at NJPAC and Sunday, August 17 at Coney Island Amphitheater visit [ticketmaster.com](http://ticketmaster.com) or call (646) 210-6615.**





# Why do so many *American workers feel guilty* about taking the *vacation they've earned?*

By **Karen Tan**

Assistant Professor of Tourism and Hospitality Management,  
Middle Tennessee State University  
Originally published on *The Conversation*



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"My dedication was questioned."

"Managers or upper management have looked down upon taking time off."

"People think that maybe you're not as invested in the job, that you're shirking your duties or something."

These are just a few of the responses to questions I asked during a study I conducted on vacation guilt among American workers.

More than 88% of full-time, private sector workers in the U.S. receive paid time off. This benefit is ostensibly in place to improve employee morale and well-being.

Yet a 2024 Pew Research Center survey found that nearly half of American workers don't take all the vacation days they've been allotted. And many of them feel as if they're discouraged from using their time off. Ironically, what's supposed to be a source of relaxation and restoration morphs into a stressor: As vacations approach, feelings of doubt and guilt creep in.

I'm from Singapore. Upon moving to the U.S. in 2016, I was surprised at how pervasive vacation guilt appeared to be. Compared with many of the

other countries where I've lived or worked, American culture seems to prioritize mental health and wellness. I assumed these attitudes extended to the American workplace.

Surprisingly, though, I noticed that many of my American friends felt guilty about taking time off that they'd earned. So as a scholar of tourism and hospitality, I wanted to understand how and why this happened.

## Vacation guilt

To carry out the study, I collaborated with tourism scholar Robert Li. We interviewed 15 workers who had experienced feelings of guilt over taking time off. We also administered an online survey to 860 full-time employees who received paid time off from their employers.

We wanted to know whether employees felt less respected or believed that their bosses and colleagues saw them in a worse light for taking time off. Maybe they feared being seen as slackers or, worse, replaceable.

We found that 1 in 5 respondents to our survey experienced vacation guilt, and these concerns made them think twice about following through with their vacation plans. For those who eventually did

take a vacation, they often tried to ease their guilt by going for fewer days. They might also apologize for taking a vacation or avoid talking about their vacation plans at work.

Some of the people we interviewed had pushed through their hesitation and taken their vacation as planned. Yet all of these employees believed that they'd been penalized for taking time off and that it led to poor performance reviews, despite the fact that their paid vacation days had been a clearly articulated, earned benefit.

## The US is an outlier

The U.S. is the only advanced economy that doesn't legally mandate a minimum number of vacation days. On top of that, only a handful of states require workers to be compensated for their unused vacation days.

Meanwhile, the law in other advanced economies entitles employees to a minimum amount of annual paid leave. The EU, for example, mandates at least 20 days per year on top of paid public holidays, such as Christmas and New Year's Day, with a number of EU member countries requiring more than 20 days of paid vacation for full-time employees. Even in Japan, which is notorious for its workaholic culture, employees are entitled to a minimum of 10 days of paid leave every year.

Throughout much of the U.S., whether paid vacation time is offered at all depends on an employer's generosity, while many employees face a "use-it-or-lose-it" situation, meaning unused vacation days don't roll over from one year to the next.

Of course, not all workers experience vacation guilt. Nonetheless, the guilt that so many workers do feel may be symbolic of broader issues: an unhealthy workplace culture, a toxic boss or a weak social safety net.

For paid time off to serve its purpose, I think employers need to provide more than vacation days. They also need to have a supportive culture that readily encourages employees to use this benefit without having to worry about repercussions.



# Talent Over Tokenism: *Black Mayors* *Slash Crime* Despite Media Silence

By *Stacy M. Brown*

While cable news pundits and national newspapers often fixate on urban dysfunction, Black mayors across America are delivering measurable, record-breaking progress in public safety—and getting almost no credit for it. Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott and Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin have overseen some of the steepest reductions in violent crime their cities have experienced in decades. But they are far from alone. From New York to Los Angeles to Chicago, Black mayors are proving that talent, vision, and a relentless focus on evidence-based policy—not tokenism—are transforming communities. Yet their achievements have largely been ignored by mainstream media outlets that rarely look past sensational headlines.

Baltimore, long branded one of America's most dangerous cities, released midyear crime data showing a 22% drop in homicides compared to the same period last year. Nonfatal shootings are down 19%, and juvenile homicide victims have declined by an astonishing 71%. Police are solving more crimes, with a homicide clearance rate of 64% and a nonfatal shooting clearance rate 20 percentage points above the department's 10-year average. "These historic lows are the result of a comprehensive, evidence-based public safety strategy that we have implemented in partnership with residents," Mayor Scott said. "But our work is far from over—68 lives lost to violence is 68 too many."

The progress didn't happen by chance. Under Scott's leadership, the Baltimore Police Department has combined targeted enforcement with offers of help. Commissioner Richard Worley described how the Group Violence Reduction Strategy works: "We go out and give them a letter and basically say, 'Listen, we know you were doing the shooting. We want you to put the guns down, or we will take you and your entire drug operation off the street. But here are the services—job training, education, relocation.'" Meanwhile, in Birmingham, Mayor

Woodfin has led an aggressive, community-driven approach that's paid off. The city's homicide rate has fallen 52% compared to last year, and the clearance rate for homicides has surged to 79%, a level rarely seen in major cities.

"The Birmingham Police Department is extremely aggressive in what they're doing and how they're taking a different approach in policing our community," Woodfin said. He credited a blend of new technology, such as the Real Time Crime Center, and grassroots cooperation. "When you share information, it doesn't allow the criminal element to be emboldened and hide behind fear of people," Woodfin explained. "Those who are killing people are not just walking our streets." Birmingham Police Chief Michael Pickett said the city's street outreach teams are also preventing retaliatory shootings before they happen. "We are really, really hammering at it," Pickett told the City Council. "I am very appreciative of all the men and women in the Birmingham Police Department who are leading our fight."

While total violent crime in Birmingham has edged up slightly, the plunge in homicides shows that sustained focus and coordination can work—even if major media don't bother to cover it. State and federal partners in Maryland have also acknowledged Baltimore's progress. "Baltimore City released a midyear report showing the fewest homicides ever recorded at this point in a single year," Maryland Governor Wes Moore's office said in a statement. Across the country, other Black mayors are driving similar results.

In New York City, Mayor Eric Adams has presided over a 24% drop in shootings and a 14% decline in murders so far in 2025, the fewest shooting incidents recorded in more than a decade. Robberies and burglaries are also down, with NYPD data



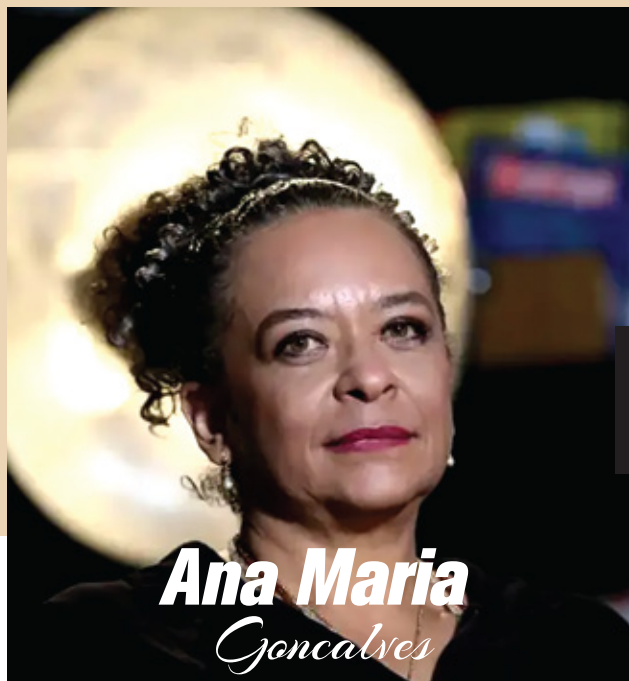
*Birmingham  
Mayor  
Randall  
Woodfin*

showing consistent reductions across nearly every major crime category. On the West Coast, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass saw homicides fall 14% in 2024 and gang-related killings drop nearly 45% in areas targeted by community safety programs. Overall violent crime declined by 3%, and property crimes like burglary and auto theft dropped by thousands of incidents compared to the prior year.

In Chicago, Mayor Brandon Johnson has overseen a 22% decrease in murders and a 31% drop in shootings through early 2025, reaching the city's lowest homicide totals in over a decade. Officials credit community-based outreach and investments in neighborhood violence prevention. And in Atlanta, Mayor Andre Dickens announced that violent crime was down nearly 16% in 2024, with homicides decreasing and property crime dropping as well. The city has invested in hiring more officers while expanding the At-Promise Centers that connect youth with educational and mental health resources.

In both large and mid-sized cities, the results are undeniable: fewer families burying loved ones, more cases solved, and more residents willing to engage with police. But to hear much of the national narrative, you'd never know it. As several social media users have pointed out, in Baltimore, Birmingham, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Atlanta, Black leadership is not a box to check or a headline to boast about. It's what drives real, life-saving change—whether the national media notices or not. "While we acknowledge the historic lows we are experiencing, we must simultaneously acknowledge that there is much more work to do," Scott stated. "And our success makes me commit even further to doing it."





**Ana Maria**  
*Gonçalves*

**Writer Ana Maria Gonçalves became the first Black woman to be elected to a seat at the Brazilian Academy of Letters.**

On July 10, the Brazilian Academy of Letters (Academia Brasileira de Letras — ABL) announced that it had elected the first Black woman as a member in its 128-year history. The woman who broke the ceiling to become an “immortal” — how members of the institution are called since their membership is perpetual — is Ana Maria Gonçalves, a 55-year-old writer born in Minas Gerais state, best known for her best-selling historical romance “Um defeito de cor” (in English, “A color defect”).

Established in 1897, shortly after Brazil became a republic, the Academy is a non-profit organization dedicated to “cultivating the national language and literature,” as stated on its website. Currently, it has 40 active members and 20 foreign associates.

Despite the fact that Brazil is a mixed-race country with a population that is more than half women and the majority self-identify as Afro-descendants (people of Black and Mixed ethnicity according to the methodology used by the national census), the seats at the institution haven’t always reflected the true composition of its people.

Only 13 women have been elected to the Academy throughout its history. The first was the writer Rachel de Queiroz, in 1977, one year after the prohibition of women members was lifted. Gonçalves is the latest addition, and she joins

# A Black woman is elected to the Brazilian Academy of Letters for the first time in 128 years

**Writer Ana Maria Gonçalves is the woman who broke the ceiling to become an ‘immortal’**

By **Fernanda Canofre**

five other current women members. She succeeds grammarian and philologist Evanildo Bechara, who died in May this year.

In 2018, another writer from Minas Gerais, Conceição Evaristo, presented her candidacy and came close to becoming the first Black woman to gain a seat at the Academy. Filmmaker Cacá Diegues, a white man, was elected instead.

On the importance of Gonçalves’ election, ABL president, Merval Pereira, addressed the Academy, saying that her appointment helped “to demonstrate that the ABL aims to increase its representation towards gender, race and any factors that represent the Brazilian culture.”

*We want to be recognized as a cultural institution that represents Brazil, the Brazilian diversity. She increases our willingness to be present at relevant social movements.*

Gonçalves said that literature was the lens that introduced her to the world and the possibility of different cultures, and remarked:

*I hope that I won’t be the only Black woman [here]. More than the representation that this moment calls for, it’s important to create presence. That is what I wish to do within the ABL. I’m arriving here, learning and trying to understand how my colleagues and the Academy work. I’m fascinated by the possibility of working institutionally for books in a country where we have been losing readers.*

## Writer’s work

Gonçalves is a novelist, screenwriter and playwright, and she teaches creative writing.

Her best-known work is the historical romance “Um defeito de cor,” which was selected as one of the best Brazilian books of the 21st century by a jury invited by the Folha de S. Paulo newspaper in May 2025. First published in 2006, it sold over 150,000 copies and reached its 41st reprinting. In 2024, it inspired the theme of the parade of Portela, one of the main samba schools in Rio de Janeiro’s carnival.

Through 951 pages that demanded five years of researching and writing, Gonçalves tells the story of Kehinde, an African woman born in the kingdom of Dahomey (renamed Benin in 1975), who is captured at the age of eight and trafficked to Brazil to be enslaved. The book runs through her life, including disillusionment, suffering, love stories, the search for a son, her religiosity and how she turns around on this faith and gains her freedom.

The character is said to be based on a real-life historical figure, Luísa Mahin, about whom there is a lack of historical records, as reported by DW Brasil. It is believed that Mahin took part in uprisings and historical revolts of those enslaved during the colonial era in 19th-century Brazil, such as the Malês Revolt, which gathered enslaved Africans, including many Muslims, fighting for abolition in Bahia in 1835. Mahin is also believed to be the mother of Luís Gama, who would later become an important abolitionist figure in the country.

Gonçalves herself called her book a “romanced true story,” as told to news outlet G1:

*“A color defect” is the story of the Black struggle in Brazil embodied by a woman who faced the biggest imaginable challenges to stay alive and to preserve her inheritance and roots.*



# Home Care with a Heart - *The Eden Story*

By **Cliff Stone**



How often do we use the expression, “if we only knew, things would be different,” and it is true, if we had advance knowledge or information about a circumstance, product or service, in many cases the results or outcomes would change - usually for the better. I will give you some examples: what if you had listened to your parents who always said, “time waits for no man,” in that circumstance they were teaching the value of time. Wow! Aren’t you sorry you ignored that advice. What about your relationships at home and at work? Remember how we were always told that we have two ears and one mouth for a reason, listening was far more important than simply talking most of the time. We didn’t listen for half the time, and now we have a lifetime of regrets to prove it. There is no doubt in my mind that in our current age of information we are often overwhelmed by the choices we have to make, one can only imagine how difficult it must be to make decisions, not just for ourselves, but for our aging parents, or grandparents as well.

**Whether we like it or not, an entire generation of Baby-boomers are aging out, and the need for care-givers has never been greater, families are scrambling to find help in caring for aging mothers, grandmothers, fathers, grandfathers, aunts and uncles. If only you knew where to find the help you need – hopefully this article will inform you as to where to find the help you need.**

If you only knew that Eden Home Care Services existed, then you would have made better informed decisions about the care of your family - wouldn't you? If you knew that Eden Home Care was Caribbean-American owned, by some of the most qualified professional administrators in the Health/Home Care space – wouldn't that help you make a better decision for the care of your family? Why is it relevant that Eden emphasizes it's Caribbean ownership? The cultural and social history of the Caribbean is rooted in caring

for others in the home, when they are old, sick or infirm, that cultural norm is second-nature, especially for those who have had further training in healthcare. So! What if you knew that the Eden Home Care Services didn't stop there, they wanted to be certain that both their clients, and their caregivers have the best experience, so they created the “Great Oaks Health Academy,” a teaching and educational facility where their caregivers continue to receive training to maintain that deep tradition and enduring cultural commitment to caring and professionalism.

Now that you know, things can be different, the region called the Caribbean, whether English speaking, French/Creole, Spanish or Papiamentu has a tradition of providing many of the most distinguished healthcare professionals anywhere in the world; they produce world class nurses, doctors, psychologists, physical therapists, physician assistants, CNAs and HHAs. To be sure, (now that you know), when you need the very best in home health care, choose **Eden Home Care Services, who are known for their pursuit of education, their culture of hospitality, and their dedication to service. These Caribbean caregivers have carved out a niche for themselves in the healthcare and homecare industries synonymously, that's because for them, caring is a cultural identity!**

In our interview with Eden Home Care Services, Mr. Wayne Peters, CEO & President, emphasized the fact that Eden's business model has survived the Covid pandemic of 2020, and has remained in business,



**Wayne Peters**  
CEO & President



**Teri Punch-Borderon**  
VP, Education & Training

celebrating a decade of serving their many clients in New York's boroughs and Nassau County. Mr. Peters said, “We at Eden have learned invaluable lessons in our decade long service to our clients, among those lessons are a better understanding of how Medicaid and Medicare work to the benefit of our clients. We are experts in assisting our clients on how to navigate the healthcare systems to empower themselves and their loved ones who deserve care. We use our cumulative knowledge of nursing and healthcare management to the benefit of our clients, and especially during these difficult times when cost cutting and reliable caregiving is a big concern we are qualified and ready to provide real solutions here at Eden.”



**Karen McLeod**  
VP, Finance & Accounting

We also discussed the Great Oaks Health Academy (the training center at Eden Home Care Services) with Vice President of Education & Training, Ms. Teri Punch-Borderon, who explained the value of the structured lessons, and the effectiveness of the lesson plans taught to their students. Ms. Borderon said, “The environment that Eden provides is somewhat unique in the industry, the recessed, well-lit, quiet, comfortable and practically designed classroom allows for a great learning environment. She also explained that training lessons are standardized by the State which is an advantage for everyone.” She believes that the professions of CNA and HHA offer great opportunities for everyone looking for a career in caregiving, and Great Oaks Health Academy should be their first destination.



# Clark Atlanta University Announces Collaboration with IBM to cultivate AI skills among students and aspiring developers

**Through IBM SkillsBuild, students at Clark Atlanta University will have access to watsonx to build new solutions to real-world problems**

By Hunter Abell

Clark Atlanta University today announced a collaboration with IBM SkillsBuild to help cultivate talent among future developers and drive economic growth. AI training continues to be vital. The latest Future of Jobs report from the World Economic Forum shows that the skills gap remains the most significant barrier to business transformation, and that by 2030, 39% of current skills may become outdated. Additionally, recent research from IBM and Morning Consult reveals that 76% of developers don't consider themselves to be experts in generative AI. This shows how the growth of generative AI has compounded the existing skills gap across roles.

In response to this, Clark Atlanta University is working with IBM as part of a new strategy to help university students and aspiring developers build the AI competencies that will help them thrive.

"As we embark on this transformative partnership with IBM, we recognize the critical importance of closing the digital divide and fostering an inclusive technological landscape," says Dr. Charlene D. Gilbert, Provost and Senior Vice-President for Academic Affairs at Clark Atlanta University. "By equipping our students with essential AI competencies, we not only prepare them for future opportunities but also ensure that the development of artificial intelligence reflects the broad range of perspectives of the communities it serves. It is imperative that the architects of AI systems represent the very populations they impact, thereby promoting economic viability and sustainable growth in the digital age."

"The pace of AI innovation continues to challenge and inspire businesses across industries, making skilled talent more important than ever," said Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM VP and Chief Impact Officer. "As we see the rise of more open-source AI models, it's clear that the pace of transformation is not slowing down. The future of AI will be shaped by students, educators, and professionals who not only have the skills to use generative AI, but also to manage AI agents, or even build them."



The key elements of Clark Atlanta University's collaboration with IBM SkillsBuild are faculty training and practical real-world learning opportunities through access to watsonx (IBM's portfolio of generative AI products) and Granite (IBM's family of open-source large language models).

**Faculty Training:** IBM will offer Clark Atlanta University professors AI training and resources that can help them cultivate their students' abilities. This additional guidance and support from IBM experts, along with new coursework on generative AI, and access to watsonx and Granite, will give professors more options to incorporate advanced AI learning into their curriculum.

## Real-world tech experiences for students:

- **Hands-on labs:** IBM is offering students a deeper dive into AI learning with interactive components through labs that are up to 90 minutes in length. These will help students dive deeper into topics like code generation and data classification using LLMs, like IBM Granite. Students will also have opportunities to earn digital credentials that are recognized by future employers.

- **Group innovation challenges:** IBM will offer innovation challenges, like hackathons, which are short-term experiences that give groups of aspiring developers the opportunity to use Granite.
- **Generative AI Capstone projects:** Students will have access to watsonx to build real-world solutions. These students will have the opportunity to work with IBM experts and their classroom professors to build innovative capstone projects over the course of a semester. IBM mentors will equip the students with problem statements, including some from IBM clients, which could span different industries such as financial services, healthcare, insurance, life sciences, manufacturing, telecommunications, marketing or energy.

**Free generative AI courses for beginners:** New coursework will also help students across disciplines build a foundation of AI understanding. The courses from IBM SkillsBuild are about one hour each and include topics like exploring text to speech; building a chatbot; and an introduction to open-source LLMs.

**To learn more about Clark Atlanta University, visit [www.cau.edu](http://www.cau.edu) and for more about SkillsBuild, visit [www.skillsbuild.org](http://www.skillsbuild.org).**





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AUGUST IS  
**BLACK  
BUSINESS  
MONTH**

# Buy Black, Build the Future - Celebrating Black Business Month with Purpose

By *Chris Godfrey*

August is National Black Business Month in the United States, a time to recognize and uplift Black-owned businesses. This year's celebration carries new urgency. Since early 2025, changes under the current administration, including the overturning of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, have raised alarms in Black business communities. In January, a White House statement justified rolling back DEI programs by claiming they "create... prejudicial hostility" instead of reducing bias. This shift emboldened some major companies to scale back their own diversity commitments. Notably, retail giant Target announced plans to end its diversity goals that advanced Black employee representation and amplified Black-owned brands. For many, these developments threaten to reverse hard-won progress, making it more critical than ever to support Black-owned businesses at local and national levels.

## Origins of National Black Business Month

National Black Business Month itself was born out of a desire to drive positive change. The observance was co-founded in 2004 by historian John William Templeton and engineer Frederick E. Jordan, two entrepreneurs who understood the challenges Black business owners face. Jordan, who had struggled to secure financing for his own company,

teamed up with Templeton with a shared goal: to "drive policy change affecting African American entrepreneurs" and seek greater equity and inclusion. What began as an idea

to influence policy and empower Black business owners has grown into an annual, month-long celebration each August. It's a time to acknowledge the achievements of Black entrepreneurs, often accomplished against the odds, and to encourage everyone to invest in and support Black-owned businesses.

This focus on celebration and support is rooted in

history. Black Americans have been launching businesses since at least the late 18th century, and despite enslavement and segregation, a "golden age" of Black entrepreneurship flourished in the early 20th century. By the early 2000s, Black-owned firms had grown to over a million nationwide. National Black Business Month builds on that legacy, reminding us that behind every Black-owned enterprise is a story of innovation, resilience, and contribution to the economy.

## The Economic Impact and Importance of Black-Owned Businesses

Today, Black-owned businesses are a vital part of the U.S. economy. According to recent data, there are roughly **3.12 million Black-owned businesses in the United States**, which collectively employ about **1.18 million people and generate \$133.7 billion** in annual sales. These enterprises create jobs and opportunities, and many are pillars in their local communities. In New York City alone, one of the nation's most diverse markets, Black entrepreneurs are driving a rise in employment and cultural vibrancy. (In fact, New York City's Black labor force participation hit a record high in 2024, reflecting growing engagement in entrepreneurship and employment.) As NYC Council Speaker Adrienne Adams put it, *"our Black-owned businesses and entrepreneurs... drive innovation, create jobs, and strengthen our communities"*.

Yet, despite their contributions, Black-owned businesses still face an uphill battle for equality. Nationally, they make up only **about 3% of all businesses** that can be classi-

fied by owner race, even though Black Americans are around 14% of the population. This disparity highlights longstanding structural challenges, from access to capital and corporate supply chains to racial wealth gaps that have limited the growth of Black firms. The picture is similar at the local level: in New York City, Black individuals own only around **2% of businesses while accounting for over 20% of the city's population**, and Black-owned businesses are



statistically less likely to survive beyond five years compared to others. These gaps underscore why preserving and expanding Black business ownership is so critical. It's not just about economic fairness; it's about closing wealth gaps, revitalizing communities, and inspiring the next generation of Black entrepreneurs.

## DEI Rollbacks, the Target Boycott, and Fallout for Black Brands

The urgency of supporting Black businesses has been underscored by recent events, such as the backlash over Target's DEI pullback. When Target announced in January that it would **halt its diversity and inclusion goals**, including initiatives to promote Black advancement and Black-owned products, many loyal customers felt betrayed. Target had cultivated a reputation as an ally by partnering with over 100 Black-owned or founded brands on its shelves. The abrupt policy reversal prompted calls for a boycott of the retailer. In the spring of 2025, civil rights leaders and clergy organized a 40-day nationwide boycott of Target to protest its retreat from DEI commitments. The boycott had an impact: Target's store foot traffic dropped by 11% and its website traffic by 9%, according to Forbes. The public pressure even forced Target to backtrack and **reverse its decision**, reinstating some of its diversity pledges. But for many Black shoppers and entrepreneurs, the damage was done; the incident eroded trust, showing how quickly a company could "forsake their commitment to equity" after the 2020 racial reckoning.

Ironically, the Target boycott revealed a complex dilemma. While many agreed that holding corporations accountable is important, Black-owned brands themselves stood to lose business if Target's sales fell





or if they were pulled from its shelves. **Melissa Butler**, founder of the cosmetics company The Lip Bar (a Black-owned brand carried at Target), took to social media to urge a nuanced approach. “If you boycott shopping in these stores, you will directly impact the hundreds of Black-owned, brown-owned, and women-owned brands that are at Target,” Butler warned. Other Black entrepreneurs echoed that sentiment. Chantel Powell, creator of Play Pits deodorant (stocked in over 300 Target locations), noted that Target’s now-rescinded DEI program had allowed her to hire staff and “exhibit Black excellence on and off the shelves.” She understood why consumers were upset, but cautioned that abandoning retailers entirely could be “detrimental” to Black founders like her. In short, the Target episode highlighted both the fragility and the importance of the gains Black businesses have made in big retail. It reinforced why intentional support for Black-owned companies, especially in times of backlash, is vital to keep them thriving.

### Spotlight: Black-Owned Businesses to Support (Especially in NYC)

National Black Business Month is not only about reflecting on challenges; it’s a call to action for consumers to celebrate and support Black entrepreneurs. One powerful way to do this is by patronizing Black-owned businesses in your community. Here in New York City, for example, a rich array of Black-owned establishments are contributing to the city’s economy and culture. Below are just a few standout businesses (among thousands) that New Yorkers can support this month and beyond:

- **The Lit. Bar (Bronx)** – The only independent book store in the Bronx, The Lit. Bar is a combo book store and wine bar offering a carefully curated selection of books, gifts, and events emphasizing local interest and diversity. Owner **Noëlle Santos** opened it to fill a void in the community, and it has become a beloved hub for literature and culture in the borough.
- **Harlem Hops (Manhattan)** – Located in Harlem, this is the city’s first 100% African American-owned craft beer bar. Harlem Hops offers a rotating selection of New York’s best craft brews, including beers from Black and other minority-owned breweries. It’s not only a great place to grab a drink, but also a business that invests in its community (the founders host scholarship programs for Harlem students).
- **Brooklyn Tea (Brooklyn)** – What started as a local tea shop in Brooklyn has become a premier destination for tea lovers, now with locations in Brooklyn and Atlanta, and soon to be at JFK Airport Terminal 4. This Black-owned brand makes high-quality teas accessible to all, in a welcoming café environment. Brooklyn Tea also sells its own line of teas available for purchase in store or online and their brand became so popular that it caught the attention of Shonda Rhimes, Beyoncé and major retailers.
- **Negril Village (Manhattan)** – A staple in the heart of Greenwich Village, Negril Village blends modern Caribbean cuisine with rich island ambiance. Known for its jerk chicken, rum punch, and lively brunches, this restaurant celebrates Caribbean heritage while attracting a diverse crowd. It’s a go-to spot for authentic flavor and culture.
- **Omar’s Kitchen & Rum Bar (Lower East Side)** – This stylish downtown venue offers Jamaican-inspired fine dining with a modern twist. Founder **Omar Walters** brings Caribbean luxury to the NYC food scene with dishes like rum-glazed salmon and oxtail ravioli, paired with one of the city’s most extensive rum collections.
- **Savvy Bistro & Bar (Crown Heights, Brooklyn)** – This sleek neighborhood bistro fuses Caribbean and American flavors in a cozy, upscale environment. Owned by **Dwayne Winter** and **Kwesi Williams**, Savvy Bistro is a go-to for elevated dining experiences and is deeply rooted in community celebration and connection.
- **Crown Hill Theatre (Brooklyn)** – A new and independent Black-owned venue, Crown Hill Theatre is dedicated to showcasing emerging talent in the performing arts. With a mission to promote cultural expression through theater, live music, and storytelling, it’s becoming a cornerstone for Brooklyn’s creative community. The venue is also available to rent for select special events, corporate functions, galas, film shoots and concerts.
- **Stuart Cinema & Café (Greenpoint, Brooklyn)** – Owned by filmmaker **Emelyn Stuart**, Stuart Cinema is one of the few Black-owned independent theaters in NYC. It screens indie films, hosts community events, and offers production services – all while serving up coffee, snacks, and Caribbean eats.
- **Black Spectrum Theatre Company (Queens)** – Founded in 1970, Black Spectrum is one of the longest-standing Black theater companies in NYC. With a history of producing original plays, films, and youth arts education, it remains a cultural power house rooted in Black storytelling and social justice.
- **Aunts et Uncles (Flatbush, Brooklyn)** – A plant-based café and lifestyle boutique founded by husband-and-wife duo **Michael and Nicole Nicholas**. It’s a vibe-forward space serving vegan Caribbean fare, coffee, books, and merchandise that reflect diasporic style and wellness.
- **Lips Café (Flatbush, Brooklyn)** – A neighborhood gem offering premium coffee, Caribbean-inspired bites, and a warm, creative environment. Lips Café is known for hosting art shows, poetry nights, and community pop-ups – and for being a hub of culture in Flatbush.
- **Uncle Waithley’s (Available in stores and online)** – Founded by **mixologist and entrepreneur**

**neur Karl Franz Williams**, Uncle Waithley’s is a premium ginger beer brand made with Caribbean scotch bonnet and real turmeric. Inspired by his grandfather in St. Vincent & The Grenadines, Williams created a product that’s now stocked in top-tier restaurants and gourmet grocers across NYC.

These examples barely scratch the surface. Black-owned eateries, boutiques, salons, tech startups, beverage brands, retail stores and service firms abound in New York and other cities, each with its own story and community impact. Directly supporting them by shopping, dining, or using their services is one of the best ways to celebrate Black Business Month. As a D.C. government report noted, *buying from Black-owned businesses helps “strengthen the economic foundation” of communities, fostering local job growth and sustainability.*

### Why It Matters More Than Ever

This year, National Black Business Month arrives at a pivotal moment. The **dismantling of formal DEI programs** in some quarters has put the onus back on everyday people and private networks to ensure Black-owned businesses are not left behind. Despite recent setbacks, there are signs of resilience and optimism. Black entrepreneurship has been on the rise, for instance, Black-owned firms with employees grew by nearly 57% from 2017 to 2022, and Black women have been leading the charge as one of the fastest-growing segments of new business owners. Supporting these businesses isn’t just about righting past wrongs; it’s about investing in a more equitable future.

During National Black Business Month, advocacy groups and leaders are urging consumers, corporations, and policymakers alike to take intentional steps, from shopping at Black-owned stores and eating at Black-owned restaurants, to improving access to capital for Black entrepreneurs. The underlying idea, as one commentator succinctly put it, is simple: *supporting Black-owned organizations promotes greater economic freedom for Black communities.* In turn, economic empowerment benefits the entire country through job creation, innovation, and shared prosperity.

In this spirit, celebrating Black Business Month means more than posting a hashtag, it means actively contributing to the success of Black businesses **during August and all year round.** Whether it’s choosing a Black-owned brand at Target or another retailer or discovering a local Black-owned business in your city, each action is a vote of confidence in maintaining the diverse tapestry of American entrepreneurship. Amid the current challenges, standing by Black-owned businesses is not just about commerce, but about affirming the inclusive values that strengthen our communities.



# Vincentian-Canadian writer Chanel Sutherland, winner of the 2025 Commonwealth Short Story Prize, says stories help acknowledge shared humanity

By Janine Mendes-Franco  
Originally published on GlobalVoices.org

***'This is exactly the level of craft and originality [the Prize] exists to celebrate'***



On June 25, the Commonwealth Short Story Prize hosted its annual online reveal of its overall winner, from among the five regional winners: from Uganda, Joshua Lubwama's "Mothers Not Appearing In Search" representing Africa; from Bangladesh, Faria Basher's "An Eye and a Leg" emerging as the Asia winner; Chanel Sutherland's "Descend" representing the Commonwealth regions of Canada and Europe; Guyana's Subraj Singh flying the flag for the Caribbean with "Margot's Run"; and Australia's Kathleen Ridgwell repping the Pacific region with her story "Crab Sticks and Lobster Rolls."

The 2025 prize attracted a record-breaking 7,920 entrants from all parts of the Commonwealth, from which 201 were longlisted and 25 made the shortlist. Chair of the judges, award-winning writer and filmmaker, Vilsoni Hereniko, acknowledged how the stories from each of the regional winners "illuminate many aspects of human nature and demonstrate true mastery of the short story form." Explaining that fiction is "inseparable from the local culture and history from which they have sprung," he also noted that "geography matters in storytelling."

As a cultural initiative of the Commonwealth Foundation, the Commonwealth Short Story Prize has helped jump-start the literary careers of many writers, elevating their voices so that their ideas and

work can have a broader impact. More often than not, the creativity expressed in the submissions stirs debate on pressing social issues and helps others to better understand them from another perspective.

Opening the live event with a stirring preamble that recognised storytelling as "the foundation of every other art form," Rwandan presenter Malaika Uwamahoro noted that "while we're all familiar with consum-

ing it effortlessly, crafting stories with clarity, emotional power, reaching and relating to audiences worldwide, that's actually one of the most difficult things to do."

Caribbean literature lovers were undoubtedly hoping that Singh's story about a new mother "venturing into the night to protect her child from a bloodthirsty creature" would bring home the overall prize, but as it turned out, the winner was Chanel Sutherland, for her powerful tale of what happens as a slave ship sinks. The Caribbean was still represented, however: Sutherland currently resides in Montreal, but is originally from St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Her winning entry, set in the hold of a slave ship where the kidnapped Africans are wounded, exhausted and in chains, explores how they manage to reclaim their identity by sharing their stories as they figure out how to survive. Hereniko called it an allegorical "masterpiece," while Director-General of the Commonwealth Foundation Anne T. Gallagher admired how Sutherland "handles the weight of history with precision and imagination. This is exactly the level of craft and originality the Commonwealth Short Story Prize exists to celebrate."

Growing up in the Caribbean, Sutherland says,

imbued her with a love for storytelling. Describing the grandmother who raised her as her "favourite storyteller" because of her ability to spin tales that were both funny and wise, Sutherland wanted to grow up to emulate her. It was only when she moved to Canada as a teen, however, and happened across Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird," that she fell in love with writing: "I realised that there were stories out there that were very similar to my own, and from there, there was just this need to start writing down stories that I had like, in me, since I was six [...] seven years old."

For her, she explained, writing, which she tries to do every day, goes well beyond just putting words down on paper. She plays with structure when drafting her stories, and credits walking in nature with helping her find inspiration. Her best advice to up-and-coming writers? "Write the stories that move you," she says. "If you don't care about the story, it doesn't matter what's trending – you're not going to enjoy the process of writing." Without that enjoyment, she adds, there's no point: "Write the stories that you want to tell [and] the rest will take care of itself."

Lubwama, the regional winner for Africa, was curious about how Sutherland was able to so vividly capture the experience of an event rooted in a historical time period she wasn't part of. For Sutherland, the process was a combination of approaching the work with a "deep respect," understanding that the sacrifices of her ancestors, over generations, have afforded her a position of both "distance and privilege." She also strives to find the truths she can get close to in a story, which involves painstaking research: "I think it's important to write form a place of humility and to not use that past as a spectacle [...] I'm writing to learn; I'm writing to tell a certain truth [...] an emotional truth that is rooted in the spirit of those who survived."

Her response when she was told she won the overall prize for 2025? "No way! I did not expect that!" She added that she was grateful and honoured, saying she didn't think she had it in her "to tell a story that was deserving of this prize [...] it's such a validation."

For the rest of the story visit [gowhereitzat.com](http://gowhereitzat.com)



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# Sly Stone turned isolation into inspiration, forging a path for a generation of music-makers

By **Jose Valentino Ruiz**, Associate Professor of Music Business and Entrepreneurship, University of Florida (*Originally Published on The Conversation*)



In the fall of 1971, Sly and the Family Stone's "There's a Riot Goin' On" landed like a quiet revolution. After two years of silence following the band's mainstream success, fans expected more feel-good funk from the ensemble.

What they got instead was something murkier and more fractured, yet deeply intimate and experimental. This was not just an album; it was the sound of a restless mind rebuilding music from the inside out.

At the center of it all was front man Sly Stone.

Long before the home studio became an industry norm, Stone, who died on June 9, 2025, turned the studio into both a sanctuary and an instrument. And long before sampling defined the sound of hip-hop, he was using tape and machine rhythms to deconstruct existing songs to cobble together new ones.

As someone who spends much of their time working on remote recording and audio production – from building full arrangements solo to collaborating digitally across continents – I'm deeply indebted to Sly Stone's approach to making music.

He was among the first major artists to fully embrace the recording environment as a space to compose rather than perform. Every reverb bounce, every drum machine tick, every overdubbed breath became part of the writing process.

## From studio rat to bedroom producer

Sly and the Family Stone's early albums – including "Dance to the Music" and "Stand!" – were recorded at top-tier facilities like CBS Studios in Los Angeles under the technical guidance of engineers such as Don Puluse and with oversight from producer David Rubinson.

These sessions yielded bright, radio-friendly tracks that emphasized tight horn sections, group vocals and a polished sound. Producers also prized the energy of live performance, so the full band would record together in real time.

But by the early 1970s, Stone was burnt out. The dual pressures of fame and industry demands were becoming too much. Struggling with cocaine and PCP addiction, he'd grown increasingly distrustful of bandmates, label executives and even his friends.

So he decided to retreat to his hillside mansion in Bel Air, California, transforming his home into a



musical bunker. Inside, he could work on his own terms: isolated and erratic, but free.

Without a full band present, Stone became a one-man ensemble. He leaned heavily into overdubbing – recording one instrument at a time and building his songs from fragments. Using multiple tape machines, he'd layer each part onto previous takes.

The resulting album, "There's a Riot Goin' On," was like nothing he'd previously recorded. It sounds murky, jagged and disjointed. But it's also deeply intentional, as if every imperfection was part of the design.

In "The Poetics of Rock," musicologist Albin Zak describes this "composerly" approach to production, where recording itself becomes a form of writing, not just documentation. Stone's process for "There's a Riot Goin' On" reflects this mindset: Each overdub, rhythm loop and sonic imperfection functions more like a brushstroke than a performance.

## Automating the groove

A key part of Stone's tool kit was the Maestro Rhythm King, a preset drum machine he used extensively.

It wasn't the first rhythm box on the market. But Stone's use of it was arguably the first time such a machine shaped the entire aesthetic of a mainstream album. The drum parts on his track "Family Affair," for example, don't swing – they tick. What might have been viewed as soulless became its own kind of soul.

This early embrace of mechanical rhythm prefigured what would later become a foundation of hip-hop and electronic music. In his book "Dawn of the DAW," music technology scholar Adam Patrick Bell calls this shift "a redefinition of groove," noting how drum machines like the Rhythm King encouraged musicians to rethink their songwriting process, building tracks in shorter, repeatable sections while emphasizing steady, looped rhythms rather than free-flowing performances.

For the rest of the story visit [gowhereitzat.com](http://gowhereitzat.com)



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