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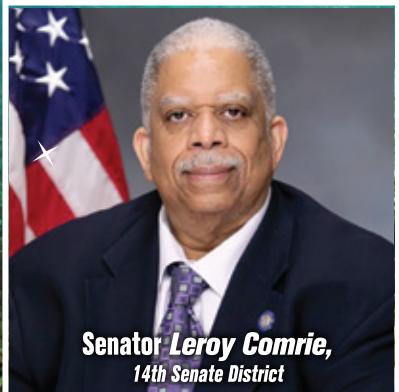
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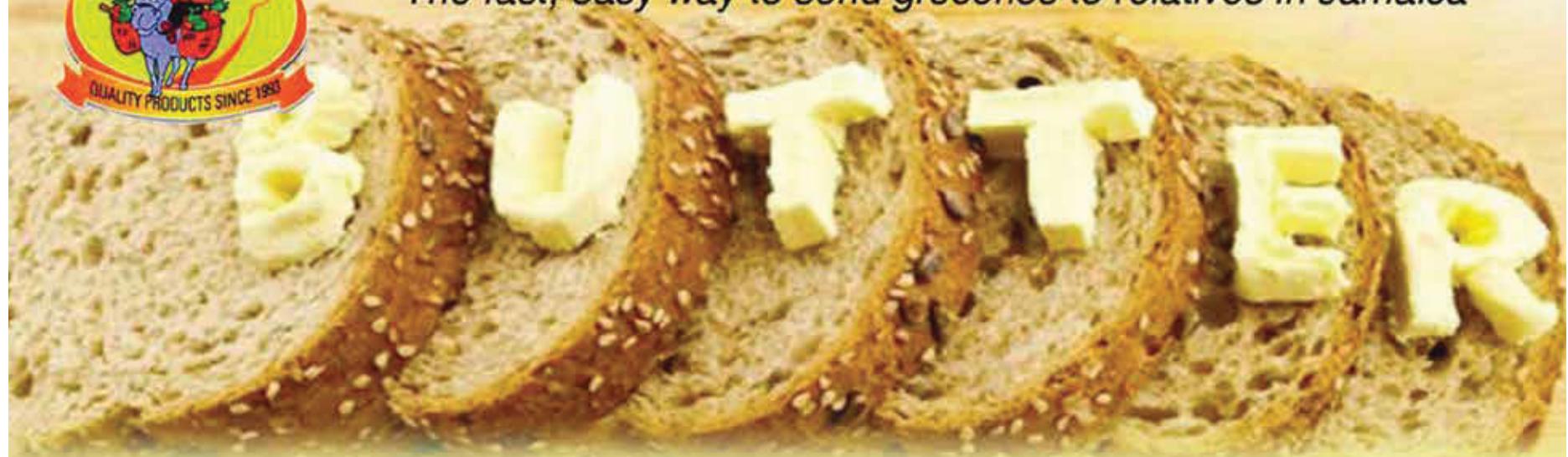
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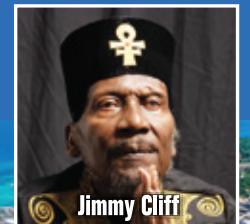
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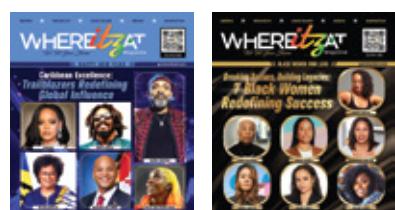
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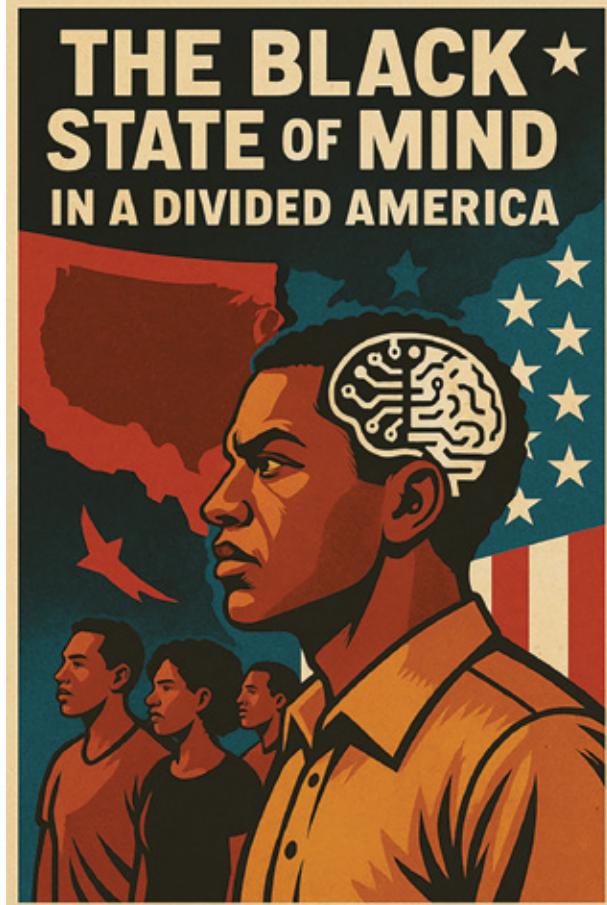
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The Black State of Mind in a Divided America



There is a growing uneasiness rippling across Black communities and immigrant households in the United States - an uneasiness that is neither fleeting nor imagined. It is rooted in lived experience, history, and the sobering data emerging from institutions like the Pew Research Center. Pew confirms what many of us have long felt: **63% of Black adults say being Black hurts their ability to get ahead in America**, and a majority believe the country is moving backward on issues of race and justice. **That is not pessimism; that is lived reality affirmed by research.**

The Black state of mind today is shaped by an acute awareness of division - political, racial, and economic, and a persistent questioning of whether the American promise still applies to us. Pew's findings show that **82% of Black adults say Black people are treated less fairly by the criminal justice system**, and discrimination is described as "widespread" across **employment, policing, housing, and education**. These are not anecdotes; **they are patterns supported by data**.

Yet beneath this anxiety lies something else: **clarity**. A growing recognition that the struggle has entered a new phase - one in which information, technology, and the emerging power of artificial intelligence will determine whether minorities advance or fall further behind. **And the stakes could not be higher.**

The reality is we are living in two Americas; Black Americans and immigrants often experience a different America than the one proudly advertised to the world. While one America thrives on innovation, prosperity, and political influence, the other - our America, is still fighting for recognition, access, and opportunity.

Pew reports that **70% of Black adults say their race is central to how they experience life in the U.S.**, and that experience is often defined by barriers others never encounter. **Economic disparities remain staggering. Wealth and health gaps persist. Educational inequalities deepen**. And trust in government institutions is disturbingly low.

Pew's research further reveals that **nearly 60% of Black Americans believe their local political leaders do not care about the needs of Black communities**. That feeling of abandonment is shaping a new, uneasy psychology, a worldview shaped at the intersection of **hope and exhaustion**.

Why This Moment Is Different, And More Dangerous!

We are not just confronting the old battles of racism and injustice. We are confronting them in an era of **weaponized misinformation, hyper-partisan politics, economic instability, and rapid technological change** that threatens to widen the divide.

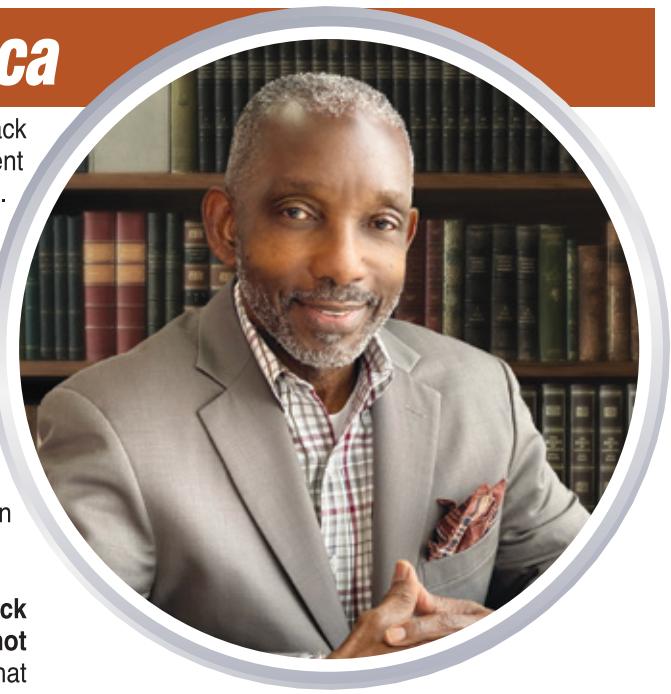
Pew shows that **almost half of Black adults believe racial progress has stalled**, while an increasing share believes the U.S. is becoming more racially divided. **This is a dangerous trajectory**.

And while we have never lacked courage or creativity, **access to the tools of the future**, capital, networks, and now digital technologies creators, **we lock in the same disparities for another generation**. If we stay only **consumers** while others become **creators**, the future remains uneven.

We must reimagine a new frontier and create solutions rooted in innovation. Empowerment in this era will not be won through protest alone. It will be won through proactive participation in the technological revolution unfolding before us.

Artificial Intelligence, when understood and applied skillfully, can become a crucial equalizer in closing the knowledge gap.

Pew notes that **Black Americans are among the most hopeful that technology can reduce racism** yet remain among the least likely to have access to advanced digital tools. **AI can: support academic achievement, strengthen financial literacy, assist small business, provide mental health support, and offer expert-level problem solving**.



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

This New Frontier represents 21st century empowerment, which can only strengthen our Civic Power, especially in this era of misinformation where our communities need **Clarity**; **AI can add clarity to voting laws, policy changes, government actions, legal terminology, and misinformation strategies**. Acquiring this level of political literacy is a survival skill which is necessary for our economic mobility, the incontestable truth is that Artificial Intelligence is democratizing entrepreneurship. Almost everyone has a smart phone, match that with a willing mind and the drive to succeed you can create a business plan, create marketing strategies, use automation, learn high-value skills and reach overseas markets.

Let me repeat for emphasis, **technology by way of AI is levelling the playing field, now we need to step on it!** Now we can tell our stories while we preserve and amplify our narrative! Finally, we can tell our stories with much less interruption, retain our oral histories, install digital archives, set up educational platforms and launch independent media.

Ownership of our story is ownership of our future! Use AI not only to compete, but to leap ahead! Learn the tools people, master the technology, empower our children, grow your business, protect your community, so let me repeat, use AI - not only to compete - but to leap ahead!

The Black state of mind cannot remain indifferent, or fearful or frustrated. It must evolve into a state of **preparedness, ownership, and strategic advancement!** America may be divided - but we do not have to be defeated.

Why I Founded Heart, Body & Soul: *From Crisis to Calling*

By Chris Williams

Photos by Ralston Smith



It's one thing to survive a storm; it's another to find direction in the aftermath. In the span of a few years I suffered multiple heart attacks, battled stage III cancer of the appendix, and learned firsthand how the health-care system too often fails our communities, particularly Black men. These challenges forced me to ask hard questions: *What am I here for? If I'm given a second chance, how will I use it?*

Before those crises, I defined success by career milestones and the weight I could shoulder. After them, I realized survival alone wasn't enough; I needed to live with intention. That epiphany led me to start **Heart, Body & Soul**, a nonprofit committed to supporting the physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing of Black men. Our mission is simple: create a safe space where we can talk openly about health, access preventive care, and build resilience together. We offer health screenings, wellness workshops, community events and, most important, a network of brothers who uplift one another.

Volunteerism: The Heartbeat of Our Work

While my health journey sparked the idea, volunteers brought it to life. Research confirms what I've felt intuitively: volunteers are the lifeblood of community health. According to AmeriCorps, more than 75.7 million Americans, around **28.3 percent** of the population, formally volunteered in 2023, collectively giving **4.99 billion** hours of service worth roughly **\$167.2 billion**. This surge shows that the spirit of service is on the rise, and Heart, Body & Soul has been blessed to ride that wave.

Why does volunteering matter beyond the immediate help it provides? Studies show that giving time is good for you, too. Older adults who volunteer **200 hours** a year reduce their risk of high blood pressure by **40 percent**. Volunteering reduces stress

and depression and boosts satisfaction; volunteers report better physical health and lower rates of anxiety. A Mayo Clinic Health System summary notes that volunteering releases dopamine, providing a sense of meaning and appreciation that lowers stress and reduces risks for heart disease and stroke.

The benefits aren't limited to physical health. A London School of Economics study found that compared with people who never volunteer, the odds of feeling "very happy" increase **7 percent** for those who volunteer monthly, 12 percent for those who volunteer every two to four weeks, and **16 percent** for weekly volunteers, an increase comparable to the happiness boost of earning \$75,000–\$100,000 versus \$20,000. Research from Carnegie Mellon University shows that volunteers who give at least 200 hours annually are **40 percent** less likely to develop hypertension, and a Philanthropy News Digest report notes that older volunteers are more likely to get flu shots, mammograms, Pap smears, and cholesterol tests, and spend **38 percent fewer nights in the hospital**. These benefits explain why the UnitedHealth Group's Doing Good is Good for You study found that **75 percent** of volunteers feel physically healthier, **93 percent** report improved mood, **79 percent** report lower stress levels, and **88 percent** report higher self-esteem.

At Heart, Body & Soul, our volunteers embody these statistics. Every time someone helps with blood-pressure checks, leads a meditation session, or mentors a young man, they aren't just giving; they're part of a reciprocal process that strengthens their own wellbeing.

Purpose: The Soul of a Fulfilling Life

Volunteerism matters because it fosters purpose, and living with purpose is more than motivational speak. A 2019 study in *JAMA Network Open* followed nearly **7,000 adults over age 50** and found that those who ranked highest on a "life purpose" scale were less likely

to die during a four-year followup and specifically less likely to die from heart or circulatory conditions. A 2022 study of more than **13,000 Americans** found that people with the highest sense of purpose had a **15.2 percent** mortality risk over eight years, compared with **36.5 percent** among those with the lowest sense of purpose. Researchers argue that purpose encourages health-protective behaviors, better diet, more sleep, regular preventive care and reduces stress and inflammation. In other



words, having something to live for literally keeps you alive.

Volunteering isn't the only path to purpose, but it's a powerful one. When you help someone else, you see that you matter. Your skills and time are valuable. You belong to something larger than yourself. For Black men like me, who may be underserved or marginalized, that validation is transformative.

Our Collective Journey: Living With Intention

I often think about the men who come to our events because they're nervous about getting a prostate exam or because they've lost a friend to cardiovascular disease. I see how their shoulders relax when they're greeted by volunteers who look like them and understand their experience. I remember our first installment of **The Black Man's Health Festival®**, where retired nurses, teachers and city employees sat next to college students, fathers, grandfathers and sons, all checking in on each other. That moment crystallized our mission: Heart, Body & Soul is not just about surviving, it's about thriving together.

Living with purpose doesn't require a monumental mission. It starts with small, intentional acts: showing up for a neighbor, sharing your story, or volunteering for a few hours a month. Research shows that even modest amounts of service can boost happiness and health. And when you do it for reasons beyond yourself, when you volunteer out of compassion rather than obligation, the benefits are even greater.

My journey taught me that life's challenges can become catalysts for change. Heart, Body & Soul exists because pain pushed me to seek purpose. Every volunteer who joins us amplifies that purpose, transforming individual struggles into collective strength. If you're searching for meaning, consider giving your time. You might find that the path to a fulfilled, healthy life begins not with asking "What do I want?" but with asking "How can I serve?"





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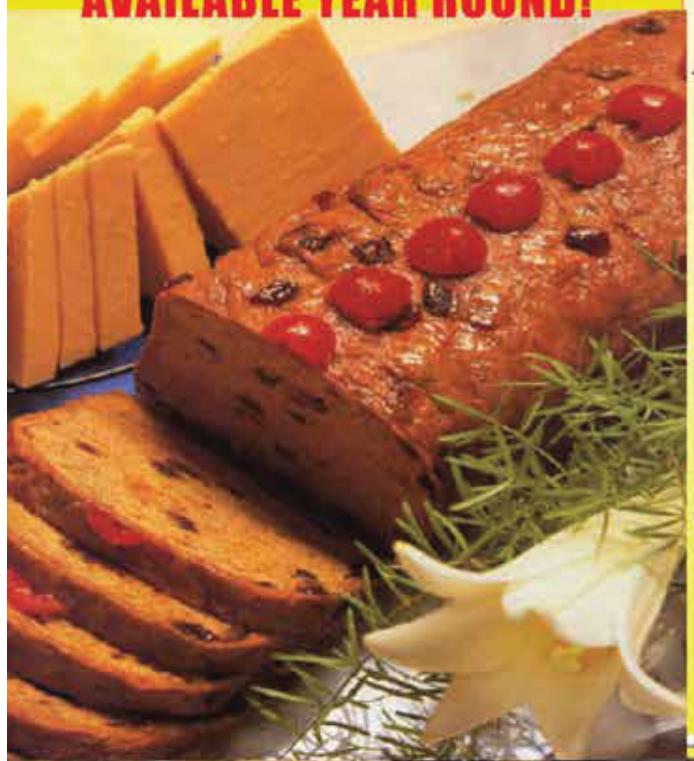
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Jamaican Bobsledders Bring Unexpected Joy to an Island Beset with Post-Hurricane Stress

[T]he medals were a reminder of Jamaica's ability to rise even when times are hard

By Emma Lewis

Originally appeared on GlobalVoices.org



Photo of a display about the Jamaican bobsled team at the Jamaican Bobsled Café in Montego Bay by David Drissel on Flickr (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0). The original team first gained fame at the 1988 Winter Olympic Games in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Jamaica has been struggling to keep its head above water (literally, in some places) since it took a direct hit from catastrophic Hurricane Melissa, which struck with record-breaking winds on October 28. Four weeks later, **45 deaths have been confirmed, with 16 people still missing**. Hundreds of Jamaicans remain in shelters, and an outbreak of leptospirosis has claimed 11 lives to date. Seventy-five percent of customers now have power, and 79 percent have water, utilities companies report, though the Planning Institute of Jamaica has estimated it will take up to five years for the island's economy to

recover.

Amid the gloom, Jamaicans were thrilled by an astonishing piece of good sports news, which brought a silver lining to the dark clouds: Jamaica's four-man bobsled team **won its first-ever gold medal** at the North American Cup in Whistler, Canada, beating two teams from the host nation. In the interest of Caribbean unity, it must be noted that the team from Trinidad and Tobago came in fourth, and a little earlier, Jamaica's two-man team of Shane Pitter and Nimroy Turgott had **won bronze** in the same competition.

In total, Jamaica won a gold and two bronze medals. Pitter, a 26-year-old from Spanish Town, went on to pilot the four-man team on what has been described as a challenging course "known for its steep drops and blistering speeds" with a

powerful 4.91-second start. His teammates were Andrae Dacres, Junior Harris, and Tyquendo Tracey. The team subsequently won a second bronze medal at the event.

The idea for the Jamaican bobsled team, which gained fame through the movie "Cool Runnings" in 1993, had its origins in an annual push-cart derby, where homemade vending carts are used in competitive races. A former U.S. Embassy official and a Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) officer were initially responsible for the birth of the team in 1987. Financing the team's visit to Canada was challenging, and after their sled crashed in a qualifying event, their future looked bleak. However, if you watched the film — which did not always stick to the facts — you would know that the team spirit remained undaunted, and they went on to make history while gaining thousands of fans at the **1988 Winter Olympics**.

A Jamaican diaspora website summed up the mood perfectly:

The past few weeks brought news that weighed on many Jamaicans. Hurricane Melissa caused damage across the island. The Reggae Boyz did not secure automatic qualification for the World Cup. Miss Jamaica Universe also suffered a fall during her stage appearance. Each incident added to the sense of disappointment many people were feeling...Sports often bring the country together, and these results did exactly that. For many people, the medals were a reminder of Jamaica's ability to rise even when times are hard.

Soon after the hurricane hit, Jamaican bobsled team member Nimroy Turgott appealed from Canada for assistance on behalf of his country:

"We appeal to all organizations and individuals to lend support to our nation during this difficult time. Every little effort counts to help families and communities to recover."

By November 22, Jamaican Prime Minister
Continued on Page 30

Deon Cole Returns to Host The 57th NAACP Image Awards – A NIGHT CELEBRATING BLACK EXCELLENCE



When the NAACP Image Awards returns on **Saturday, February 28, 2026**, live from the historic Pasadena Civic Auditorium, audiences across the nation will once again witness a powerful celebration of Black artistry, creativity, and cultural impact. Airing at **8 PM ET/PT on BET**, the ceremony will bring together the brightest voices in entertainment, activism, and storytelling, and this year, one familiar face is stepping back into the spotlight.

Beloved comedian, actor, and writer **Deon Cole**, a multi-Image Award winner himself, will return as host, bringing his unmistakable authenticity, humor, and cultural insight to one of the most influential nights in Black entertainment.

"BET is honored to continue our longstanding partnership with the NAACP to bring the Image Awards to the world in a way that uplifts and celebrates our stories," said Connie Orlando, BET's EVP of Specials, Music Programming & Music Strategy. "Deon Cole's sharp wit and deep connection to our community make him the perfect guide for this unforgettable night."

NAACP President and CEO Derrick Johnson echoed that sentiment, calling Cole "a cultural icon" whose work has consistently entertained, uplifted, and inspired. "His presence," Johnson shared, "will guide us through an evening of unforgettable moments as we celebrate the

visionaries and trailblazers who continue to define and revolutionize culture."

A Spotlight on a Multifaceted Talent

Deon Cole's return signals more than a hosting gig, it's a celebration of a career that continues to expand across genres and platforms.

Cole currently stars in BET+'s dark comedy *Average Joe*, which has earned high praise from *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Entertainment Weekly*. His recent roles include Netflix's political drama *The Madness* and a standout performance in Blitz Bazawule's critically acclaimed remake of *The Color Purple*, which dominated the 55th NAACP Image Awards with 16 nominations and 11 wins.

From *The Harder They Fall to You People*, his filmography reflects a versatility that audiences have come to love. And fans of *Black-ish* and *Grown-ish* will always remember him as Charlie, a role that earned him *three consecutive NAACP Image Awards* for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series.

Cole's voice acting work, including DreamWorks' *Kipo and the Age of Wonderbeasts* and the upcoming BET+ animated series *Lil Kev*, continues to broaden his reach. His stand-up career remains equally strong with multiple

57TH NAACP IMAGE AWARDS

Netflix specials — *OK, Mister, Charleen's Boy, Cole Hearted*, and more — along with millions of views on social content like his Netflix Is A Joke documentary *Workin' It Out*.

Honoring the Artists Who Shape Our Stories

Widely regarded as one of the most distinguished multicultural award shows in the world, the NAACP Image Awards has long been the gold standard for recognizing Black brilliance, from film, television, and music to literature, activism, and beyond.

This year, the organization introduces **two new categories** that reflect the evolving landscape of storytelling:

- Outstanding Literary Work — JournalismSpotlighting impactful journalism that informs, uplifts, and authentically reflects Black experiences and perspectives.
- Outstanding Editing in a Motion Picture or Television SeriesHonoring the editors whose craft enhances narrative flow, emotional resonance, and cinematic vision.

These additions continue the show's mission to uplift the creative disciplines that shape our cultural narrative.

A Night of Icons, Trailblazers, and Cultural Giants

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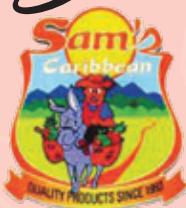
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NO TIME TO RECOVER: *Hurricane Melissa and the Caribbean's compounding disaster trap as the storms keep coming*

By Farah Nibbs

Assistant Professor of Emergency and Disaster Health Systems, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Headlines have been filled with talk of the catastrophic power of Hurricane Melissa after the Category 5 storm devastated communities across Jamaica, Cuba and Haiti in October 2025. But to see this as a singular disaster misses the bigger picture: Melissa didn't hit stable, resilient islands. It hit islands still rebuilding from the last hurricane.

Jamaica was still recovering from Hurricane Beryl, which sideswiped the island in July 2024 as a Category 4 storm. The parish of St. Elizabeth – known as Jamaica's breadbasket – was devastated. The country's Rural Agriculture Development Authority estimated that 45,000 farmers were affected by Beryl, with damage estimated at US\$15.9 million.



St. Elizabeth Parish, Jamaica, suffered intense damage from both Hurricane Melissa in October 2025 and Hurricane Beryl a year earlier. Ivan Shaw/AFP via Getty Images

In Cuba, the power grid collapsed during Hurricane

Oscar in October 2024, leaving 10 million people in darkness. When Melissa arrived, it struck the same fragile infrastructure that Cubans had barely begun to rebuild.

Haiti's fragile situation before Hurricane Melissa cannot be overstated. The island nation was still reeling from years of cascading disasters – deadly hurricanes, political instability, gang violence, an ongoing cholera crisis and widespread hunger – with over half the population already in need of humanitarian assistance even before this storm hit. This is the new reality of the climate crisis: Disasters hitting the Caribbean are compounding and can trigger infrastructure collapse, social erosion and economic debt spirals.

The compounding disaster trap

I study disasters, with a focus on how Caribbean island systems absorb, adapt to and recover from recurring shocks, like the nations hit by Melissa are now experiencing.

It's not just that hurricanes are more frequent; it's that the time between major storms is now shorter than the time required for a full recovery. This pulls islands into a trap that works through three self-reinforcing loops:

Infrastructure collapse:

When a major hurricane hits an already weakened system, it causes simultaneous infrastructure collapses. The failure of one system – such as power – cascades, taking down water pumps, communications and



When schools are heavily damaged by storms, like this one in Jamaica that lost its roof during Hurricane Melissa, it's harder for families to remain. Ricardo Makyn/AFP via Getty Images

hospitals all at once. We saw this in Grenada after Hurricane Beryl and in Dominica after Hurricane Maria. This kind of cascading damage is now the baseline expectation for the Caribbean.

Economic debt spiral:

When countries exhaust their economic reserves on one recovery, borrow to rebuild and are then hit again while still paying off that debt, it becomes a vicious cycle.

Hurricane Ivan, which struck the region in 2004, cost Grenada over 200% of its gross domestic product; Maria, in 2017, cost Dominica 224% of its GDP; and Dorian, in 2019, cost the Bahamas 25% of GDP. With each storm, debt balloons, credit ratings drop and borrowing for the next disaster becomes more expensive.

Social erosion:

Each cycle weakens the human infrastructure, too. More than 200,000 people left Puerto Rico for the U.S. mainland in Maria's aftermath, and nearly one-quarter of Dominica's population left after the same storm. Community networks fragment as people leave, and psychological trauma becomes layered as each new storm reopens the wounds of the last. The very social fabric needed to manage recovery is itself being torn.

The trap is that all three of these loops reinforce each other. A country can't rebuild infrastructure without money. It can't generate economic activity without infrastructure. And it can't retain the skilled workforce needed for either when people are fleeing to safer places.

Rebuilding a system of overlapping recoveries

The Caribbean is not merely recovering from disasters – it is living within a system of overlapping recoveries, meaning that its communities must

begin rebuilding again before fully recovering from the last crisis.

Each new attempt at rebuilding happens on the unstable physical, social and institutional foundations left by the last disaster.

The question isn't whether Jamaica will attempt to rebuild following Melissa. It will, somehow. The question is, what happens when the next major storm arrives before that recovery is complete? And the one after that?

Without fundamentally restructuring how we think about recovery – moving from crisis response to continuous adaptation – island nations will remain trapped in this loop.

The way forward

The compounding disaster trap persists because recovery models are broken. They apply one-size-fits-all solutions to crises unfolding across multiple layers of society.

Breaking free requires adaptive recovery at all levels, from household to global.



Residents formed a human chain among the hurricane debris to pass food supplies from a truck to a distribution center in the Whitehouse community in Westmoreland, an area of Jamaica hit hard by Hurricane Melisa in October 2025. Ricardo Makyn/AFP via Getty Images

At the household level: Helping amid trauma

Recovery isn't just about repairing a damaged roof. When families experience back-to-back disasters, trauma compounds. Direct cash assistance and long-term, community-based mental health services can help restore dignity.

Cash transfers allow families to address their own needs, stimulate local economies and restore control to people whose lives have been repeatedly upended.

At the community level: Mending the social fabric

Repairing the “social fabric” means investing in farmer cooperatives, neighborhood associations and faith groups – networks that can lead recovery from the ground up.

Local networks are often the only ones capable of rebuilding trust and participation.

At the infrastructure level: Breaking the cycle

The pattern of rebuilding the same vulnerable roads or power lines only to see them wash away in the next storm fails the community and the nation. There are better, proven solutions that prepare communities to weather the next storm:

- Decentralized power grids with renewable energy sources can operate independently when the main grid fails.
- Natural infrastructure such as restored mangroves and wetlands provide natural storm barriers.
- Strong enforcement of modern building codes can require structures to withstand Category 4 and above winds.

At the global level: Fixing the debt trap

None of this is possible if recovery remains tied to high-interest loans. There are ways for internal financial institutions and global

development lenders to allow for breathing room between disasters:

- Hurricane clauses in bond agreements can automatically pause all debt payments when disasters strike. These clauses allow governments to automatically suspend debt service payments to bondholders for up to two years when a qualifying disaster strikes. After Beryl, Grenada became the first government to activate a hurricane clause with private creditors.
- Comprehensive debt-for-climate swaps involve



Hurricanes can damage infrastructure, including water and drainage systems. Hurricane Beryl left Jamaican communities rebuilding not just homes but also streets, power lines and basic infrastructure. Ricardo Makyn/AFP via Getty Images

reducing existing debt – owed to private banks, institutional investors, countries or multilateral banks – in exchange for the debtor country committing funds to climate adaptation or resilience projects.

- Pre-positioned climate finance is money made available through dedicated international climate funds, such as the Green Climate Fund and Loss and Damage Fund, or parametric insurance mechanisms. It pays out before storms hit, not months later, so countries are ready to respond to the damage.

The current international disaster finance system, controlled by global lenders and donors, requires countries to prove their losses after a disaster in order to access assistance, often resulting in months of delay. “Proof” is established by formal evaluations or inspections, such as by the United Nations, and aid is released only after meeting certain requirements. This process can stall recovery at the moment when aid is needed the most.

The bottom line

The Caribbean needs a system that provides support before disasters strike, with agreed-upon funding commitments and regional risk-pooling mechanisms that can avoid the delays and bureaucratic burden that slow recovery.

What's happening in Jamaica, Cuba and Haiti today is a glimpse of what's coming for coastal and island communities worldwide as climate change accelerates. In my view, we can either learn from the Caribbean's experiences and redesign disaster recovery now or wait until the trap closes around everyone.

Originally Published for The Conversation

Standing *with* Jamaica:

A Call to Rebuild and Renew

By Senator Leroy Comrie, 14th Senate District

Over the past few weeks, the world has witnessed the devastation left behind by Hurricane Melissa across Jamaica: homes destroyed, infrastructure washed away, and entire communities struggling to recover. For those of us with deep family ties to the island, this disaster is not distant news, it's personal. Jamaica is more than a country we trace our roots to; it's a part of who we are.

I want to begin by extending my deepest prayers and solidarity to the people of Jamaica as they face the difficult task of rebuilding. From St. Ann to St. Elizabeth, Westmoreland to St. James, countless families have lost everything. Roads and bridges have been damaged or destroyed. Farmers have lost their crops and livestock, and roofs have been blown to smithereens. Thousands remain without reliable access to power, clean water and transportation.

In the wake of this tragedy, we are reminded of Jamaica's greatest strength: the resilience of its people. Time and again, Jamaicans have shown that no storm, no matter how powerful, can break their spirit. That determination is inspiring and it is something the world should never take for granted.

Still, resilience alone cannot rebuild a nation. Jamaica needs sustained, coordinated support, not only emergency aid, but a long-term commitment to restore and strengthen its infrastructure. This is a moment that calls for serious investment, collaboration and innovation. As someone who represents one of the largest Caribbean communities in New York, I stand ready to use

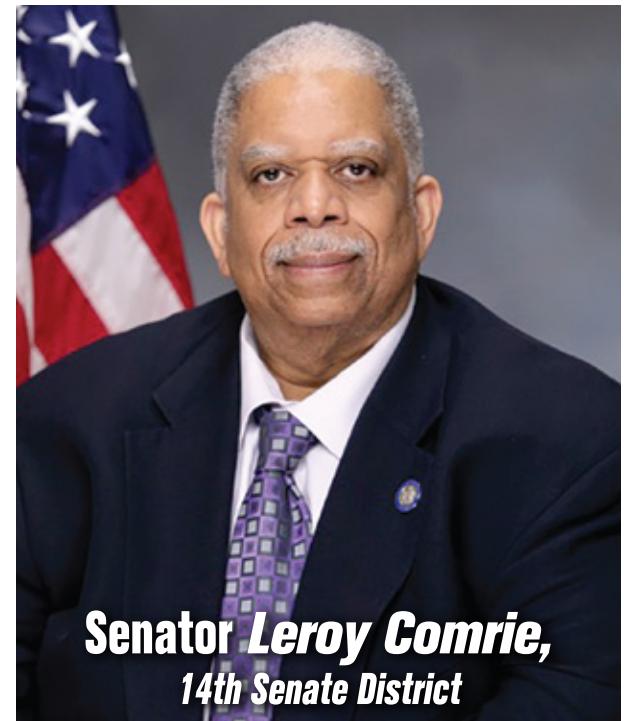
my platform to raise awareness and build bridges of support, even as the nation seeks to rebuild or strengthen literal bridges.

My office has already been in touch with community partners and consular officials to identify trusted relief organizations. We are encouraging residents to donate responsibly, volunteer where possible and keep the focus on rebuilding efforts that truly reach those most in need.

Beyond immediate relief, we must also prioritize prevention and preparation. Jamaica's infrastructure, from its roads and drainage systems to its electrical grids, must be rebuilt with the future in mind. Climate change has made storms more frequent and more destructive. If we want to protect the next generation, we must ensure that what is rebuilt now will endure.

That means investing in resilient housing, reinforcing coastal and hillside communities and modernizing the systems that connect Jamaica's economy. Every bridge, every road and every utility line rebuilt today is a promise to future generations that their country will not only recover, but thrive and endure.

I also want to encourage Jamaica's partners in the diaspora, in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and beyond, to continue stepping up. The Jamaican spirit doesn't stop at the water's edge. Whether through donations, expertise, or advocacy, the diaspora plays an essential role in the rebuilding process. Many of the engineers, doctors and entrepreneurs in our communities have the knowledge and resources to



**Senator Leroy Comrie,
14th Senate District**

make a lasting difference "back home."

In the days ahead, it will be crucial for Jamaica's government and the diaspora to work hand-in-hand – sharing ideas, coordinating efforts and ensuring that every dollar and every initiative leads to meaningful impact. This is not the time for duplication or competition. It is a time for unity, accountability and shared vision.

There are lessons here for all of us in government as well. Natural disasters remind us of the importance of planning ahead, investing in strong infrastructure and caring for the most vulnerable. Whether in Jamaica, New York, or anywhere else, we must lead with empathy and foresight, understanding that communities are only as strong as the systems that support them.

In the coming weeks, I will continue working with partners here in Queens to raise awareness about Jamaica's recovery efforts and connect residents to reliable information and trusted organizations providing aid. Our community has always shown up when it matters most and I have no doubt we will do so again.

To the people of Jamaica: please know that you are not alone. Your family abroad stands with you in prayer, in solidarity and in action. Together, we can rebuild what was lost and create something even stronger in its place.

May God bless Jamaica, her people, and all who continue to lift her up during this difficult time.

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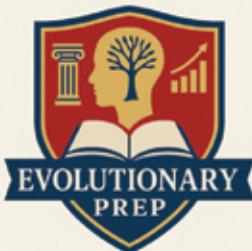
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Dr. Courtney Johnson is the visionary behind Evolutionary Prep, Inc. Born to an American mother and Jamaican father as the 3rd child of 7, Dr. Johnson learned early that success is strategic. She began working at 8 years old in her mother's early childhood center in Queens, NY balancing books, creating schedules, and supporting families. By age 15, Dr. Johnson gained experience in negotiations and legal jargon, working for her father editing contracts and riders for music artists. Pursing her Bachelors Degree in English World Literature from SUNY Old Westbury, she spent her undergraduate career supporting the development of local businesses such as Life Camp, Inc., The Carl David Richardson Foundation, Bracketville Books, and more. Pursuing a career in education, Dr. Johnson joined the NYC teaching fellows and obtained a Dual Masters Degree in Childhood Education and Students with Disabilities from PACE University. An active contributor to her middle school community, Dr. Johnson was encouraged to pursue Educational Administration where she obtained her School Building Leader and School District Leader Licenses from the College of Saint Rose. She went on to complete her Doctoral Studies at St. John Fisher University. Dr. Johnson holds administrative experience as a Committee on Preschool Special Education Administrator, Assistant Director of Special Education for Elementary Schools, and an Account Executive for an EdTech company managing a \$1M+ portfolio. Today, Dr. Johnson leads a team with over 40 years of experience comprised of directors, educators, principals, and staff aligned around Evolutionary Prep's mission to empower academia, value consciousness, and yield in economics.



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We Can See Clearly Now

Remembering Jimmy Cliff, A Reggae Music Legend

By Chris Godfrey

When the news broke on November 24, 2025 that James Chambers, known to the world as Jimmy Cliff—had passed away, an unmistakable stillness fell over Jamaica and the global reggae community. Cliff, who was born July 30, 1944 in Somerton, St. James, was more than a superstar. He was a bridge between Jamaica and the world, a voice of defiance and hope, and one of the fiercest cultural ambassadors the island has ever produced. His passing marks the end of a monumental chapter in music history, yet his legacy remains as vibrant and unshakable as the rhythms he gifted us.

Cliff grew up surrounded by music, first discovering his voice in church before shaping his early sound in the ska and rocksteady era. By the age of 17, he had written and recorded "Hurricane Hattie," launching a career that would alter the trajectory of Jamaican music. Legendary producer Leslie Kong recognized the young artist's potential and brought him onto the Beverly's Records label, producing hits like "Miss Jamaica," "King of Kings," and "One-Eyed Jacks." But this was only the beginning.

The world met Jimmy Cliff in 1972 through *The Harder They Come*, a film that not only immortalized his image but cemented his role as reggae's first true global star. Cliff's portrayal of Ivanhoe "Ivan" Martin, paired with a soundtrack featuring "The Harder They Come," "You Can Get It If You Really Want," and "Many Rivers to Cross," introduced reggae to international audiences long before Bob Marley carried the baton forward. Cliff didn't just entertain, he shifted the cultural landscape.

Throughout the decades, Cliff's music remained a



soundtrack for resistance, resilience, and renewal. Songs like "Vietnam" made him one of the first reggae artists to speak directly to global politics, inspiring even Bob Dylan, who once called it "the greatest protest song ever written." His voice carried the eternal message of possibility, reminding generations: "You can get it if you really want, but you must try."

Though known primarily for music, Cliff's artistic reach extended beyond the studio. His acting in *The Harder They Come*, *Club Paradise*, and *Marked for Death* reflected his natural charisma and cultural fluency. His achievements were formally recognized when he received Jamaica's Order of Merit in 2003 and became one of the rare reggae artists inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2010.

Even as his awards accumulated, including two Grammy wins, Jimmy Cliff remained humble. "I'm just a humble servant of the music," he once said. "I'm here to serve the music, and the music is here to serve the people." That philosophy defined him. Cliff was never just performing, he was healing, teaching, challenging, and uplifting.

His humanitarian work, advocating for education, supporting youth, and fighting poverty, was as integral to his identity as his music. And his songs became global standards, covered by artists from Bruce Spring-

steen to Cher to The Clash. His voice traveled far, but it always carried the unmistakable cadence of Jamaica.

Today, as Jamaica rebuilds from hurricanes, as inequality persists, as communities search for hope, Cliff's music remains a lighthouse. *Many Rivers to Cross*, once a personal lament, is now an anthem of endurance for millions. *The Harder They Come* is still the rallying cry for those pushed to the margins. *You Can Get It If You Really Want* continues to inspire dreamers everywhere.

Jimmy Cliff may be gone, but his voice, bold, pure, and prophetic, will never fade. He opened doors for reggae, lifted Jamaica onto the world stage, and taught us that struggle and joy can live inside the same song. His life was a testament to courage; his art, a gift without expiration.

We can see clearly now: his legacy is forever.

Jimmy Cliff's Enduring Impact – Things to Know

- Helped introduce reggae to international audiences and became its first global film and music ambassador.
- Breakthrough hit "Wonderful World, Beautiful People" (1969) charted internationally.
- Starred in the landmark Jamaican film *The Harder They Come* (1972), which transformed the global perception of reggae and Jamaican culture.
- Awarded Jamaica's **Order of Merit** in 2003 for outstanding contributions to music and film.
- Inducted into the **Rock and Roll Hall of Fame** in 2010.
- Received **7 Grammy nominations with 2 wins** for Best Reggae Album.
- Collaborated with major artists including The Rolling Stones, Elvis Costello, and Annie Lennox.
- Known for humanitarian work focused on poverty alleviation and education in Jamaica.
- His catalog has been covered by artists across genres, from Bruce Springsteen to Cher to The Clash—a testament to his universal reach.



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VMBS Strengthens its New York Presence with relocation to Church Avenue



Photo: Paul Elliott, CEO, VM Building Society, delivers remarks at the opening ceremony of VMBS' new location at Church Avenue, Brooklyn on Wednesday, October 29.

VM Building Society (VMBS) has reaffirmed its long-standing commitment to the Jamaican diaspora with the official opening of its new, expanded New York Representative Office at 2700 Church Avenue in the heart of Flatbush, Brooklyn.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony, held on Wednesday, October 29, formed part of a weeklong series of diaspora engagement events across New York City, including Financial Forums in Brooklyn and the Bronx and a networking reception in partnership with the Consulate General of Jamaica in New York.

The relocation from VM's previous Cadman Plaza location represents a major milestone in the organisation's ongoing diaspora growth strategy. For the first time, VM's New York office will operate on a walk-in model, giving current and prospective Members convenient, face-to-face access to trusted financial guidance without the need for appointments.

Paul Elliott, Chief Executive Officer of VM Building Society, described the relocation as both a continuation of VM's legacy and a new chapter in deepening its relationship with the diaspora community.

"For over 147 years, VM has been more than just a financial institution. It has been a partner, a guide, and a trusted friend to Jamaicans everywhere," Elliott said during his remarks at the ribbon cutting ceremony.

Elliott noted that the new Church Avenue office reflects VM's commitment to accessibility, inclusion, and empowerment for Jamaicans abroad. He further emphasised the importance of investing in Jamaica as a pathway to wealth creation and legacy building.

"Home ownership remains a powerful way for our diaspora community to maintain strong ties to Jamaica. Beyond property, we help Members build financial security through savings and investments that create lasting legacies for their families and communities. Our mission is clear — to be your financial bridge, connecting your life abroad with the opportunities back home."

Leighton Smith, Vice President, VM Building



(From left) Courtney Campbell, President and CEO, VM Group Limited shares a moment with Leighton Smith, Vice President of VMBS with responsibility for VM Overseas; and Paul Elliott, CEO, VM Building Society, at a reception hosted by the Consulate General of Jamaica, New York on Friday (Oct. 31) to celebrate the relocation of VMBS' New York office to its new location on Church Avenue in Brooklyn.



(From left) Paul Elliott, CEO, VM Building Society (VMBS); Suzette Rochester Lloyd, Chief Representative Officer, VMBS Florida; Natasha Service, Chief Representative Officer, VMBS New York; Natasha Reid, Chief of Staff, VM Group; and Leighton Smith, Vice President of VMBS with responsibility for VM Overseas, share a photo op following the opening ceremony of VMBS' relocated New York office on Wednesday (October 29). VMBS has relocated from Cadman Plaza to a central Flatbush location on Church Avenue in Brooklyn.

Society with responsibility for Overseas Offices, concurred, describing the relocation as an important investment in community connection and customer experience

"This move puts VM right at the centre of the Jamaican and Caribbean community in New York," Smith said. "It's about accessibility, but it's also about presence, being part of the rhythm of diaspora life. We want every Jamaican abroad to know that VM is here, ready to guide them in achieving their financial goals while staying connected to home."

The new office is centrally located in one of Brooklyn's most vibrant cultural corridors, known for its strong Jamaican and Caribbean presence. By establishing a larger, modern space in Flatbush, VMBS reinforces its role as a trusted partner and cultural anchor for Jamaicans abroad, supporting financial empowerment and national development.

VMBS has representative offices in New York, Florida, and the United Kingdom. The previous New York location at Cadman Plaza was opened in 2019.



My name is Yvette Hallman, I grew up in a town on Long Island's North Shore. Although it was a nice place to live, I often refer to myself as "*the unprivileged privileged*".

I was always very social, I had friends, played sports, and may even be deemed as someone that was widely accepted. Despite my likability, micro-aggressions, prejudice, and racism were always looming. I remember teachers and adults confidently assuming I needed reduced lunch, or stating I lived in a particular area of town, I did not live in; simply because I was Black. As a young adult I had to leave work early to attend my uncle's retirement from Cornell. My co-worker (an older white woman) asked me – "are you sure he's retiring from Cornell?" In her mind I must have been mistaken, because there was no way my uncle could be retiring from a prestigious institution.

There were always attitudes, behaviors, and subtleties that sent the message of "you can't do that, you shouldn't have that and why are you here?" It was hurtful and frustrating.

To add assault to injury, I often witnessed some of my peers of color disassociate from Black people, culture and customs in hopes of gaining acceptance from our white counterparts. I could never quite understand this. I remember a classmate of mine— also a female of color insisting she will only date white men. I was confused and asked why? Her reply: "I don't want

saddened at the possibility that society and our local environment influenced her to think this way.

Despite these encounters, I remained proud of who I was and where I came from, I didn't want to assimilate or be anyone else; I just wanted to be me.

My personal community of family and friends shaped me to be confident and proud, I wanted to be Black and nothing else. I came from an African American family, blended with Caribbean relatives from Antigua and Jamaica. I loved my family's conversations and intellectual debates in the living room on social matters, religion, and everything in between. I loved decorating and singing to the Jackson Five Christmas album and playing Loodie and all kinds of games after Thanksgiving dinner. I felt blessed that my family had cultural diversity that shaped the way I saw myself, and the world around me.

During my college years I took a semester abroad in Paris, France. I'll never forget missing the late-night train with friends from my program. Our cellphones were dead, so I had no help from Google; I had to ask for directions in French and take the local bus. We got to our apartments safely but all I could think about was all the people that migrate to the United States, speaking minimal to no English. I began to feel so much empathy for my childhood classmates who had to adjust to a new country and language, as children. I feel my life has been training me to have a different level of compassion and care for cultural and race

Craving Culture

Yvette Hallman

black babies with nappy hair." I was in complete disbelief, so many things ran through my mind— "Who made her think this way? Black is so beautiful. I was also

relations.

Every experience good and bad stirred up my desire to create safe spaces for people of color on Long Island. I began to curate events and social experiences that celebrated the African Diaspora; this is how **Craving Culture** was born.

Today I'm proud to say **Craving Culture** curates cultural events and provides workshops for organizations centered around entrepreneurship & self development. **Our mission** is to provide a platform that educates and inspires individuals—through curated experiences that celebrate culture, community and promote entrepreneurship & personal transformation.

Our events have publicized local business owners, entrepreneurs, and artists of color. We're building a special community of people that uplift one another, educate each other, and help each other succeed.

We recently began the launch of **Craving Culture** the Podcast, to further amplify the voices & unique stories of Black entrepreneurs and creatives. We believe our podcast will give us the opportunity to impact lives beyond our local reach.

Ultimately my vision is to unify the African Diaspora and encourage individuals to find hope within themselves and the possibilities of their dreams. I hope **Craving Culture** dispels stereotypes, misinformation, stagnation and ultimately provokes transformation in our community. Simply put, I want to see lives and communities changed for the better.

You can find more about Yvette Hallman at www.yvettehallman.com or via Instagram @iamyvettehallman.

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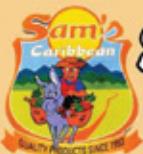
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11030	11356	11379	11423	11451	11549	11568	11596	11758	
11040	11357	11380	11424	11499	11550	11569	11598	11762	
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Andrew Holness was congratulating the team on their first bronze medal:

Prime Minister Andrew Holness on X: "Huge congratulations to the #TeamJamaica bobsled team! The two-man team of Shane Pitter and Nimroy Turgott secured a bronze medal at the North American Cup in Whistler, Canada. Truly a remarkable feat that showcases the talent and determination of our athletes."

A Jamaican on X shared the news of the team's three medals:

X User @IAmThatGuy_JA: "GOLD AND 2 BRONZE MEDALS!!! Our Jamaican bobsled team continues to make us proud. Keep up the excellent work!"

Jamaican actress and broadcaster Fae Ellington was overjoyed:

Fae Ellington on X: "I am so overwhelmed with joy. I am so proud of our Bobsled Team. You have brought a much-needed ray of sunshine to our land. Congratulations Team Jamaica!"

Yet another Jamaican was grateful for the win:

X User @jajohnny07: "Thank you Team Jamaica bobsled team. This is exactly what we needed to lift the spirits."

One team member, Tyquendo Tracey, posted simply:

Tyquendo Tracey on X: "Outside"

"Outside" is slang for "going places." Another fan, meanwhile, posted a group photo of the original bobsled team, reunited:

X User @RastafariQueen: "Yesss to the new Bobsled Team, but a big shout out to the pioneers. Cool Runnings forever! 🙏"

Jamaicans weren't the only ones who were



Jazmine Fenlator-Victorian and Carrie Russell had respectively won second and third place medals at the Monobob World Series race in Lake Placid, New York, in 2021, and also competed in the North America Cup, placing fifth and sixth. As the name suggests, monobob is a one-person bobsled event, in which 17-year-old Adanna Johnson is aiming to qualify for the 2026 Winter Games.

Some found the timing of Jamaica's bobsled victory extraordinary. The teams' performance took place on November 22 and 23, while legendary reggae singer Jimmy Cliff died on November 24:

X User @TheReal_Ras: "It's hard to imagine, but perhaps the timing of these medals and his passing were meant to be. Jimmy Cliff saw them run their race and then he

made his transition. We will never forget him."

impressed. On Bluesky, a Canadian shared a television news report on the country's win:

Canadian Bluesky User: "Remember the Jamaican Bobsled Team? People kind of laughed in the past... well, this just in: Jamaica just won Gold in the 4-man bobsled North American Cup! Yes!"

Jamaica also has a women's bobsled team, which trained, qualified and competed in the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeong Chang, China.

On its Facebook page, the Jamaica Bobsleigh Federation paid a touching video tribute to Cliff. His triumphant song "I Can See Clearly Now" was featured in "Cool Runnings," and helped introduce the bobsled team to the world.

Meanwhile, as all athletes do, Jamaica's bobsledders have set their sights on the future, with the goal of qualifying for the **2026 Winter Games** in Milano Cortina, Italy.



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MONDAY	Sm.	Lg.	TUESDAY	Sm.	Lg.	WEDNESDAY	Sm.	Lg.
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Jerk Ch.....	\$6.99	\$7.99	Jerk Ch.....	\$6.99	\$7.99	Jerk Ch.....	\$6.99	\$7.99
Br.Stew Ch...	\$6.99	\$7.99	Br.Stew Ch...	\$6.99	\$7.99	Br.Stew Ch...	\$6.99	\$7.99
Fried Ch.....	\$6.99	\$7.99	Fried Ch.....	\$6.99	\$7.99	Fried Ch.....	\$6.99	\$7.99
Curry Ch.....	\$6.99	\$7.99	Curry Ch.....	\$6.99	\$7.99	Curry Ch.....	\$6.99	\$7.99
Curry Goat...	\$7.99	\$8.99	Curry Goat...	\$7.99	\$8.99	Curry Goat...	\$7.99	\$8.99
						Cowfoot.....	\$7.99	\$8.99

Soup			
Sm - \$2.50	Med. - \$3.50	Lg. - \$6.50	
Monday	Chicken	Thursday	Cow Foot & Chicken
Tuesday	Red Peas & Chicken	Friday	Chicken
Wednesday	Chicken	Saturday	Goat Head & Chicken

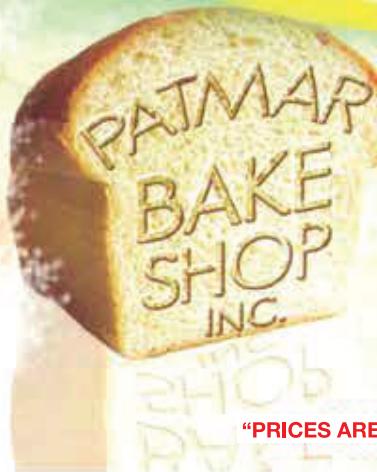
Chicken Soup
Sm - \$2 Med. - \$3 Lg. - \$6



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