



**The Buzz:**  
**The voices of BSU**

In this episode of the Buzz, we explore how the BHS Black Student Union leaves its mark on students and the BHS community.



**BHS students travel to Afrikan/Black Coalition conference**

BSU and other students traveled to the CSU Northridge conference during MLK weekend. Read online at [berkeleyhighjacket.com](http://berkeleyhighjacket.com).

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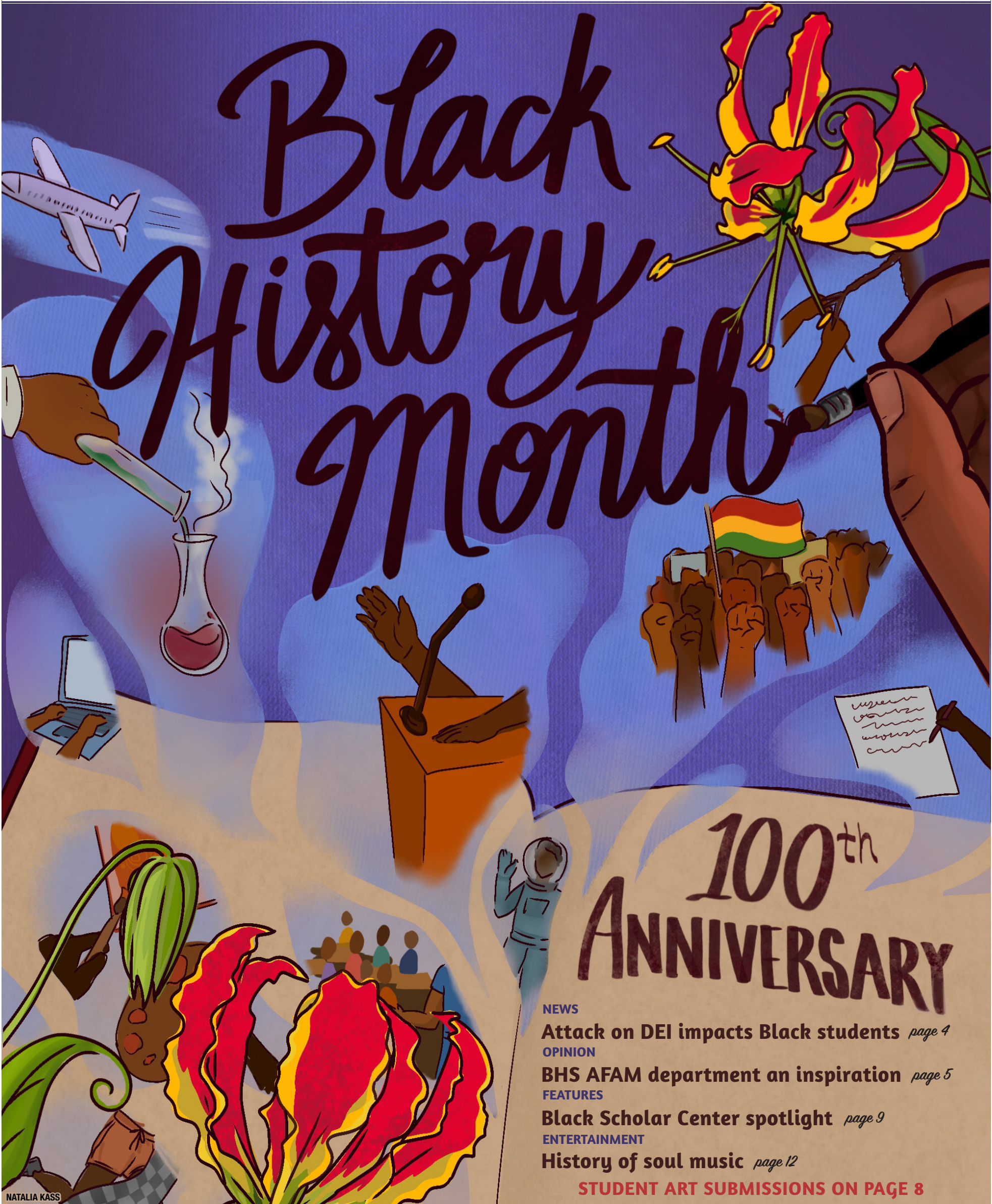
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# Berkeley High teachers spotlight African American experiences

BY EDEN ZIV  
staff writer

“Black history is American history, and American history is Black history ... You can’t separate them. And so if you want to be an educated young person in the United States of America, you have to know about Black history,” Hasmig Minassian, a Berkeley High School Universal Ninth Grade Ethnic Studies teacher, said.

In 1926, Carter G. Woodson, a historian known as the “Father of Black History,” launched a Black History Week. President Gerald Ford officially recognized February as Black History Month in the United States in 1976. To honor Woodson’s goals — that Black history be taught as part of American History and that Black Americans be celebrated — many teachers at BHS highlight Black history and current events throughout their February curricula.

Minassian teaches Black

history throughout the year as it interweaves into the ethnic studies curriculum with the race unit, the culture unit, and more. “(Ethnic studies) is the story of Black, Indigenous, Latino, and Asian Americans, and so (Black history) is part of everything I do,” she said. Minassian educates her students about the ways Black people cannot be erased when telling the story of the United States.

During Black History Month, Minassian likes to incorporate lessons on important Black Americans a couple times a week in warm-ups. This may include watching a video about a famous Black person. Minassian wants to continue amplifying the narrative and stories of Black people’s contributions in our country.

Yahaira Alfaro is an Afro-Latina Spanish teacher at BHS who plans to educate her students about important Afro-Latino figures during Black History Month. Afro-Latino refers to people of African descent

who are from Mexico and parts of Central and South America and the Caribbean. Alfaro noted that many students are unaware of Afro-Latino figures and the contributions they have made. “They have been working hard to support their communities, and they have been successful, too, but we don’t see them in books. We don’t see them in the news. We don’t see them in the newspaper, and many students don’t know them,” she said.

Alfaro will have her students do research on famous Afro-Latino figures to learn about their achievements. In order to help students recognize the faces of the figures highlighted, Alfaro plans to decorate her classroom with posters. Her goal for Afro-Latino education in her classroom is to spark student curiosity about the Afro-Latino culture and figures, and to encourage continued exploration in this area.

“Black and African American peoples’ experiences

have been underrepresented in our media, history, and culture due to white supremacy, culture, racism, anti-Blackness, capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism,” Candiss Youngblood, a creative arts, studio art, and Arts and Humanities Academy (AHA) art teacher at BHS, shared.

Youngblood likes to introduce Black artists to her students, highlighting their art all year long. In honor of Black History Month, Youngblood will present a lesson focused on Black,

African American, and African artists. Following this, her students will create an art analysis statement and creative work inspired by the art presented to them.

Kelly Boylan teaches AP United States History (APUSH) and World History.

During the month of February, Boylan will educate her APUSH classes about the Harlem Renaissance as part of a unit on the 1920s. Students will explore Renaissance art and culture, learning about poetry, lit-

erature, music, and more. In addition, Boylan will teach a lesson about Black resistance to Jim Crow, laws that enforced legal racial segregation in the United States. She plans to educate her students on leaders such as Ida B. Wells, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and more. The lesson will focus on the differences in the philosophies of each individual activist. In World History, Boylan plans to teach a unit on African history and will focus on Black history in a global context.



Advocacy posters are displayed in BHS art teacher Candiss Youngblood’s classroom.

ZIVA AMENDOLA

# Upcoming Black History Month events in the Bay Area

BY LUCY HOHN  
staff writer

Throughout the month of February, SF Jazz will be hosting many performances by artists celebrating Black music and musicians. Upcoming performances include vocalist Tyreek McDole, on Thursday, Feb. 12 and Friday, Feb. 13, 2026, at 7 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. They will also be hosting Dianne Reeves, a 2018 Grammy winner, who will perform on Friday, Feb. 20 and Saturday, Feb. 21, at

## SF Jazz hosting Black musicians and music

7:30 p.m., and Sunday, Feb. 22, 2026 at 7 p.m. Two-time Grammy winner Gregory Porter will perform jazz vocals on Feb. 22, at 8 p.m. Lastly, on Feb. 21, SF Jazz will host the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir for a family matinee at 11 a.m. This performance centers on celebrating Black History Month and using music to give a history of America and African Americans.

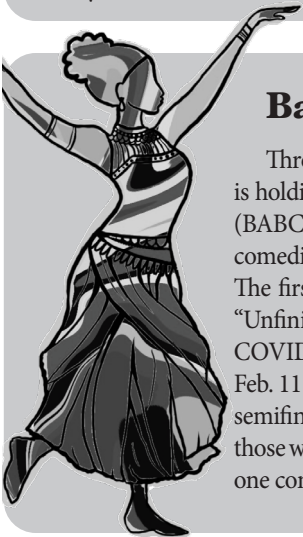
## Freight and Salvage Black History Month Performances

Freight and Salvage (The Freight) has filled the month of February with a packed lineup of African Diaspora-related musical shows, kicked off with a performance by Linda Tillery and the Cultural Heritage Choir on Sunday, Feb. 1, 2026. This Grammy-nominated group uses voice, percussion, and more to bring to life songs of the African Diaspora. On Thursday, Feb. 12, 2026 at 8 p.m., The Freight is hosting eight-time Grammy-nominated duo The Baylor Project. The show will feature vocals and percussion to highlight jazz, gospel, and individual roots. On Sunday, Feb. 15, 2026, Cedric Burnside, Grammy-winning blues and American roots artist, performs at 7 p.m. On Saturday, Feb. 21, 2026, Black Uhuru, Grammy-winning Jamaican reggae band, performs at 8 p.m. and Sunday, Feb. 22, 2026 has a performance from Melba’s Kitchen at 7 p.m., an all-women’s band celebrating Black women artists. The Freight will end the month with “Poetry for the People: The June Jordan Experience” on Tuesday, Feb. 24, 2026, honoring June Jordan, a poet, activist, and teacher, who was deeply focused on justice and self-determination.



## Bay Area Black Comedy Competition

Through the first half of February, the Henry J. Kaiser Center for the Arts is holding the annual Bay Area Black Comedy Competition and Festival (BABCCF). The event lasts from Feb. 10 to Feb. 15, 2026, including over 60 comedians, and is the largest showcase of comedians of color in the world. The first night of the event is on Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2026 at 7 p.m. titled “Unfinished Business.” The first night brings back all five finalists from the COVID-19-interrupted 2020 competition to crown a winner. Wednesday, Feb. 11 and Thursday, Feb. 12, 2026 at 6 p.m. are the first rounds, with the semifinals on Friday, Feb. 13 and Saturday, Feb. 14, 2026 at 8 p.m. Finally, those who make it will move onto the finals on Sunday, Feb. 15, 2026, where one comedian will be crowned the winner of the BABCCF.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANISHA PINTO

## Fourth BHM & Lunar New Year Celebration by OACC

On Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026, the Oakland Asian Cultural Center (OACC) is bringing back its Lunar New Year X Black History Month celebration for the fourth year in a row. The event is free and will be hosted from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at OACC’s center in Oakland. The celebration will feature lion dancers, drummers, performers, Black and Asian martial artists, arts and crafts, and a marketplace of local artisans and businesses. The center will also contain a Black- and Asian-centered exhibition.

Read more at  
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# Berkeley High students declare ‘ICE OUT’



Thousands of protesters missed work or school to attend.

COURTESY OF OWEN UDKOW



The demonstration includes a march to San Francisco City Hall.



Protestors bring signs, megaphones, and speakers.

BY EVA KATZ  
news editor

In the wake of the shooting of Renée Good and Alex Pretti by Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) agents in Minneapolis, Minnesota, thousands of protestors showed up at Dolores Park in San Francisco to call for the removal

of ICE agents from communities nationwide and to stand in solidarity with ongoing Minneapolis strikes. This protest was part of a national day of action including demonstrations in Minnesota, New York, D.C., and Arizona.

Students from high schools all across the Bay Area walked out of school, including a large number absent from Berkeley High School. On Friday, Jan. 30, 2026, BHS attendance dropped by 20.11 percent from the previous Friday.

The protest featured student speakers and a march down San Francisco’s Market Street to City Hall.

To watch video and listen to chants from the Dolores Park protest and subsequent march, scan this QR code or visit [berkeleyhighjacket.com](https://berkeleyhighjacket.com).



Protestors hold signs at Dolores Park. “Courage is not rare. We are the brave and the many, and ... ICE agents are the weak,” Sebastián Puerta, Head Steward of UAW 4811 at University of California, Berkeley, said in a speech.

LEO OSTROY HARP

# Groundbreaking ceremony for AAHRC

BY KATHRYN ZARAGOZA-AARON  
staff writer

The City of Berkeley hosted a groundbreaking ceremony to celebrate important milestones for the long-awaited African American Holistic Resource Center (AAHRC) on Friday, Jan. 23, 2026. The event centered on breaking ground for the future building, which is tentatively scheduled to start construction in 2027.

The AAHRC will be a new building at 1890 Alcatraz Ave.

The ceremonial groundbreaking of a new construction project is meant to symbolize progress by digging the first hole of the construction. Speakers at the event included Mayor Adena Ishii and council members Ben Bartlett and Terry Taplin.

The AAHRC has been in development for around 15 years by city employees, as well as Richie Brooke-Cole Smith, known to the South Berkeley community as Ms. Richie. Smith moved to Berkeley in 1949 and has been involved in service for the community for decades, volunteering much of her time to the development

of the AAHRC.

“The center will be a space to provide culturally relevant services in education, employment, health, mental health, and housing advocacy support to all residents. The AAHRC is designed to meet the specific needs of individuals who have faced disproportionate impacts from racism and gentrification, particularly those from historically Black neighborhoods in South and West Berkeley and/or have been displaced from Berkeley,” the City of Berkeley wrote in a public statement.

The AAHRC will also provide social services referrals, cultural and eth-

nic events, community meetings, and other community services. The space plans to evolve to meet the needs of the community around it.

“It was an honor to stand with the many people who made the moment possible. I have been working to support the center since 2016, and after many hours over those years with the South Berkeley leaders who brought this project to this point, I was thrilled to be present and envision together the beautiful AAHRC that will be built to support our African American community,” Berkeley City Manager Paul Buddenhagen said.



The breaking ground ceremony for the African American Holistic Resource Center occurs on Friday, Jan. 23, 2026.

TESS PETT-RIDGE HENNESSY

## AN ENVIRONMENTAL ROAD TO RECOVERY

MILES PAY



Although environmental issues are commonly known as a global problem, that isn’t necessarily true. Today especially, low-income communities are more likely to experience the effects of our deteriorating environmental infrastructure. As climate change is exacerbated, so are the effects of pollution and other dangers. The effects of climate change are not experienced by these communities by choice, but these struggles are faced because of long term disparity that has not been addressed or identified for decades.

For instance, problems such as access to green technology and unpolluted air are limited for people living in impoverished conditions. Wealthier areas often have more infrastructure such as parks, trees, and green technology which are all strong mitigating factors to keeping a healthy local environment for residents. Also, many areas facing economic struggle experience extreme weather conditions. For example, the urban heat island effect is experienced in areas with less structural balance. This is when weather fluctuates to cold or warm temperatures where cement and buildings trap heat while there is a lack of technology to regulate temperature. Additionally, in areas that lack key organisms such as trees, natural landscape, and bodies of water, these items are replaced with heat-absorbing asphalt and concrete.

One of the most predominant disparities is the locations of industrialism which disproportionately distribute pollution. Across the country, landfills, powerplants, and refineries are more likely to be in the proximity of low income communities. Take West Oakland for example: residents that live near the Port of Oakland, various warehouses, or major freeways are exposed to constant carbon dioxide emissions. In these areas, there are higher rates of lung disease and asthma because of ongoing issues.

Environmental hazards are prominent in communities already facing social issues. A recent study by the University of Tennessee demonstrated that vulnerable populations are far more likely to face multiple concurrent hazards simultaneously. The study was conducted from data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and their own critical data, which found that 11 percent of the United States is at extremely high risk of facing overlapping natural disasters such as flooding, drought, and wildfires. Clean water shortage is another major issue that is not frequently addressed in many communities. In the Bay Area, communities such as those in East Palo Alto have faced the effects of contaminated runoff water flowing into waterways and the bay. This is yet another effect of being located near and exposed to landfills, and the increasing pollutants in water.

As climate change continues to worsen, so will these problems, but at this point the most important course of action that must be taken is public pressure, holding decisionmakers accountable, and living a lifestyle that mitigates environmental harm. Environmental inequality is not caused by an accident. It has evolved into the question of whose health and wellbeing is prioritized. Until there are greater solutions that include communities that face the most harm, climate change will be more of an inequitable issue rather than a collective battle.



# Affirmative action and DEI initiatives face threats of elimination

BY MALINAH DAVIS  
staff writer

Affirmative action in college admissions was significantly limited by a June 2023 Supreme Court decision. In *Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) v. University of North Carolina*, the court ruled that colleges can no longer use race as a deciding factor in admissions. SFFA is a conservative nonprofit that litigates against race-based admissions in universities and colleges, arguing that they are “unfair, unnecessary, and unconstitutional.” SFFA won its cases before the Supreme Court, effectively ending race-based affirmative action throughout the U.S. Still, applicants can discuss how race has shaped their experiences in personal essays.

Programs like Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives and affirmative action were developed to create fair environments and opportunities for historically underrepresented or marginalized groups. In schools, DEI can include mentoring programs for minority and first-generation students, scholarships for underrepresented or low-income students, and counseling related to academic achievement, career planning, and mental health.

Affirmative action is a federal policy that allows race and ethnicity to be

considered in job applications, college admissions, and other federally funded programs, like contracting, grants, and scholarships, in order to increase opportunities for historically marginalized groups.

College Board — a U.S. nonprofit organization aimed at helping high school students prepare for college and career paths — researched the demographics of 60 selective (50 percent and under acceptance rate) four-year public and private colleges and universities from 2018 to 2024 regarding applicants in correlation with acceptance, enrollment, and student outcomes after their first year.

College Board’s report revealed that in 2024, 7.7 percent of admitted students from these 60 selective institutions were Black in comparison to 2023, where eight percent were admitted. Additionally, data in their overall underrepresented minority section showed that admitted students dropped from 28.3 percent to 27.6 percent from 2023 to 2024 respectively.

On Jan. 21, 2025 during President Donald Trump’s first day in office, an executive order was issued directing federal agencies to eliminate DEI programs and any related initiatives. The order claimed that such programs are “illegal and immoral” and would promote discrimination and misuse taxpayer

funds. The order requires agencies to shut down DEI offices and equity action plans, while also revoking several executive orders enacted in the past that laid the groundwork for DEI initiatives and other DEI- and affirmative action-like processes in federal hiring, contracting, and college admissions.

For students like Giada Jones, a Berkeley High School sophomore who aims to excel in her classes throughout high school and attend college in the future, these changes bring direct consequences and immediate concern regarding educational advancement. “I feel concerned because it seems like support is being taken away even though inequality still exists,” Jones said.

Jones worries that without DEI and affirmative action programs, Black students may have added difficulties in being accepted into certain schools or jobs.

“They (the policy changes) make me feel less confident because the process already feels stressful, and now it feels less fair. I worry about being treated unfairly and not having the same opportunities as others, even if I work just as hard,” Jones explained.

Dasaun Brown, a BHS senior, expressed mixed feelings about the removal of DEI and affirmative action policies. While he is less concerned about college admis-



AMELIA NEEDHAM

sions, Brown described feeling discouraged during the job application process and felt that race may have negatively affected his opportunities.

“Recently I’ve been trying to find jobs ... I felt like I didn’t get a job because of my race. I was overqualified for a lot of the positions I was applying for, but I never got a response,” Brown said.

Brown felt that removing race from job applications could lead to more neutral assessments, but he believed getting rid of all DEI efforts would ultimately hurt Black communities.

“I feel like it (DEI programs) might give me a second chance to even get my application looked at,”

Brown noted, adding, “Opportunity is the main resource Black and Brown communities are missing. The reason why they don’t have jobs or they can’t go to school is because of the lack of resources.”

BHS educators and staff share similar concerns, like Rhonda Jefferson, BHS’s budget officer and staff sponsor for the Black Honors Society. Jefferson described that the changes felt like a step backward in our nation’s development. “It’s sad to me that we are regressing ... There are a lot of companies, American citizens, who will not give Black people the equality that they deserve,” Jefferson said.

For the future of Berkeley

and the state, Jefferson noted that California’s sanctuary status provides a degree of security from these policy changes. However, she emphasized that this protection is not nationwide and worries for the country as a whole, adding that she’s apprehensive about where the future of this nation will be headed.

Brown said, “I most definitely feel negative against it, because the people that need it, I feel like, have the most against them.” As programs designed to maintain equality gradually disappear from schools, workplaces, and other systems, many Black students are left uncertain about their future and ability to reach their full potential.

# Berkeley libraries uplift Black authors and stories during BHM

BY ROKSOLANA GOSHYLYK  
staff writer

The Berkeley High School Library spotlights Black History Month through book displays, which is done by the library for every heritage and awareness month. The

library does this as a part of the district’s Black Lives Matter resolution, which aims to share books that are “intended to highlight, uplift and affirm the rich history and contributions of the Black community.” For Black History Month (BHM), Allyson Bogie, librarian at Berkeley High School, rec-

ommends “Death of The Author” by Nnedi Okorafor and “The Girls Who Grew Big” by Leila Mottley. “Black history is American history and shouldn’t be seen as separate,” Bogie said.

Washington Elementary School prioritizes Black History Month through organizing assemblies, read-

alouds, and special projects. Jackie Overlid, the librarian at Washington, makes displays of selected books to highlight stories of joy, as well as narratives that are not commonly heard. Overlid also promotes engagement in the material through formats popular with elementary school students, such as graphic novels. “So it’s a format that kiddos love, and then it kind of sneaks in those stories to hook them into the history,” Overlid said.

Overlid recommends poetry books by Nikki Grimes, historical fiction, and books about activism, such as “Marley Dias Gets It Done: And So Can You!” “I feel like publishing is doing a great job of really finding people who made a difference in ways that, when I was little, we never learned about,” Overlid said.

The Berkeley Public Library is hosting many upcoming events to honor Black History Month, including an author talk with Oakland-based Angela Dalton, who wrote “To Boldly Go: How Nichelle Nichols

and Star Trek Helped Advance Civil Rights,” as well as a writing workshop with Wendy M. Thompson, an Oakland-born author of the poetry collection “Black California Gold.” The library also organizes events targeted for a younger audience, such as A Valentine to Black Stories, a children’s book fair held at the Central Branch on Saturday, Feb. 14, 2026. Senior Librarian in the Children’s Department, Erica Dean Glenn, is planning a story time for Black History Month, to add to the many themed exhibits and book displays. “We’re always trying to amplify voices that are not heard and stories that have not been heard before,” Dean Glenn said.

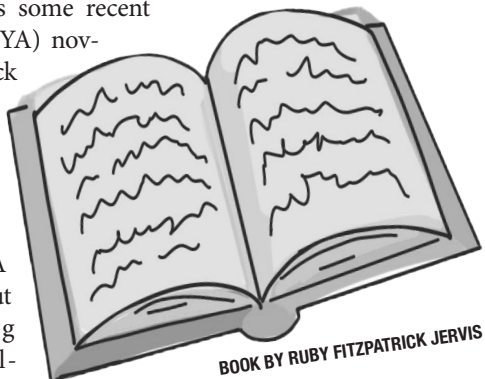
The Berkeley Public Library suggests some recent young adult (YA) novels by Black authors, including “Ace of Spades” by Fari-dah Abíké-Íyímíde, a YA thriller about confronting institutional-

ized racism. Another recommendation for a Black History Month-related read is “Children of Blood and Bone” by Tomi Adeyemi, a fantasy inspired by West African culture. Stephanie Torres, a teen librarian at the library’s Central Branch, recommends “A Small Place” by Jamaica Kincaid and “Their Eyes Were Watching God” by Zora Neale Hurston. As for graphic novels, Adult Services Librarian Emily Joelle suggested “Girl on Fire” by Alicia Keys.

The Berkeley libraries aim to celebrate BHM by providing readers with books by Black authors, and about Black experiences and history. The libraries make an effort to engage the reader and encourage curiosity.



CHARLOTTE GRANT



BOOK BY RUBY FITZPATRICK JERVIS



AFAM  
DEPARTMENTS  
BELONG IN  
ALL HIGH  
SCHOOLS

BY JULIA LIU  
staff writer

The African American Studies (AFAM) Department examines the history, culture, politics, and experiences of African people who have descended into the United States across the African Diaspora. Berkeley High School is widely known as the only stand-alone high school to dedicate an entire department for African American studies at a high school level. Although it's very fortunate that BHS offers such a unique program, it is extremely unfortunate that BHS remains the only stand-alone high school to do so nationwide. The lack of representation across the nation speaks volumes to the African American students who feel under-represented, yearn for a deeper understanding of how exactly their ancestors came to this land — and graduate high school without an accurate understanding of African American history, experiences, contributions, and struggles beyond the surface-level lessons that schools provide.

In high school, students are actively forming their identities, values, and understanding their place in society. Specifically, early adolescents begin to ask complex self questions like, who they are, how they want others to perceive themselves, and where they come from. For Black students in particular, this process often occurs alongside exposure to stereotypes, racial biases, and harmful narratives about Black history. “We provide a unique and critical service to

students from all backgrounds to gain a sense of purpose, develop their identity, and understand the world from multiple disciplines in an incredibly important and impactful way,” Spencer Pritchard, co-chair of the AFAM Department, said. Without structured and intentional AFAM programs, students may only encounter their identities through moments of historical trauma — such as enslavement, segregation, and civil rights endorsements — rather than a well-rounded, affirming, and academic lens.

AFAM departments provide students with the historical context, language, and intellectual framework necessary to grasp their identities beyond these

empowering sense of self. “Entering any profession with a critical analysis and understanding of Black perspectives enhances our decision making, increases compassion, and forces us to be more human centered in all we do,” Prichard said.

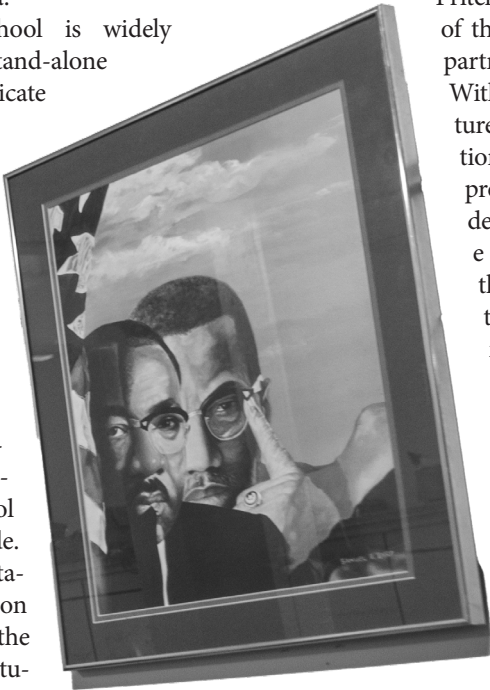
Being represented academically contributes to academic success, as it allows the students to see themselves in the curriculum rather than learning fragments of their origin, which can often do more harm than good. When students are left with dull, surface level lessons about heritage, it can lead to poor long-term retention, inability to apply and connect information to applicable modern-day situations, and demotivate them to put effort into the lessons. While it's recognizable and understandable that many schools do not have the resources and funding for an entire department dedicated to one heritage, there is no excuse to instead “dumb-down” the curriculum. It is crucial for high schools to put attentive efforts into ensuring that students are fulfilled in their academic studies as what they are learning in school reflects their academic studies and what comes out of their learning. When a lesson is comprehensively taught, students can connect patterns, question dominant narratives, and understand how past historical events still shape our present systems and inequalities.

“If everyone had an understanding of our true history for an African American perspective, and had a comprehensive understanding of our literature, psychology, and more, people will themselves live more fulfilling lives centered in purpose and understanding,” Pritchard said.

**Berkeley High School is currently the only public high school in the U.S. with an African American studies department**

limiting portrayals. By learning about Black innovations, resistance, leadership, and cultural attributions, students can then construct a more complex and

A colorful flag displaying an outline of Africa hangs on the wall of Spencer Pritchard's classroom.



A painting of MLK and Malcolm X welcomes students to Pritchard's various AFAM classes.

THOUGHT SYSTEMS:  
IDEAS AND EGO

MAXWELL HESTERMAN



Being a college town, the place we live is rich with ideas. Even so, why do they seem so homogenous? The answer, in short, is that no one, myself included, is as unique as they think; they're all exposed to similar epistemic stimuli.

To examine how one internalizes an idea, we need a foundation of what learning is to argue from. This has been provided by the field of psychology, and goes something like this: Learning can fall under three broad categories, those being operant conditioning, explicit/deliberative learning, and classical conditioning. Operant is largely reinforcement-based, explicit is that “critical thinking” we're always being told that Gen Z lacks, and classical conditioning is what we are focusing on here. Classical conditioning is the type of learning that forms an association with a specific stimulus: think Pavlov's dogs, or an unwitting baby learning how to use a tablet. In these cases the reward is dopamine, and the subject forms a connection with a specific action and obtains the reward. How does this in any way have to do with epistemology?

Well, it doesn't, but it does have to do with its bastardized and widely practiced cousin. For lack of a better term, let it be known as “opinion-slop.”

Opinionslop looks very similar to its dear cousin, but the two really couldn't be more different. This difference lies within how a final thought is reached: epistemic thought follows the process from start to finish; opinionslop only concerns the final opinion, usually drip-fed via algorithm. It's important to note that these terms refer to process, not outcome. Opinions obtained via opinionslop might be just as intellectually valid as those obtained with the traditional epistemic process. It's just that without the connection from start to finish, an individual exposed to a lot of opinionslop is less adept at justifying or defending those beliefs — aside from common rhetorical arguments.

A common attribute of ideas reached via opinionslop is the tendency of the holder to be very passionate about whatever unsupported idea it is that they hold. This is mostly because, for opinionslop to be effective, largely passionate rhetoric involving morals and/or a binary involving one “correct” answer is used. If the belief itself is internalized, nine times out of ten it's internalized using a charged framework. The charge is what these thoughts need to employ in order to be exported across various social media algorithms, creating massive, homogenous blobs of unsupported opinion.

Though opinionslop varies regionally — blue vs red voting tendencies, culturally accepted narratives, biases, etc. — this is only because some regions were more receptive to some narratives than others. Over time, our algorithms will sand it down until eventually all thought produced by opinionslop produces the same, self-derivative conclusions. Or maybe regulation prevents people from getting their news from Instagram reels and Twitter — formerly X — who knows.



A large banner at the entrance of Pritchard's classroom. High school is a transformative time for the identities of students, and classes in BHS's AFAM department can be greatly impactful during that time.

PHOTOS BY GEROGIA PAULOS



# Berkeley housing changes necessary to combat gentrification

BY ILARIA MARINI  
staff writer

The 1970 census found that Berkeley was 23.5 percent Black, a number which was down to 7.9 percent in 2020. This is generally believed to be due to gentrification, which refers to the process in which wealthier people buy and renovate properties in poor neighborhoods for profit, leading to increased property values and the displacement of residents who can no longer afford to live there. This is an issue that disproportionately affects African Americans, according to a 2020 study by Stanford sociologist Jackelyn Hwang. The study found that residents from predominantly non-Black neighborhoods experiencing gentrification had a wider variety of neighborhoods they moved to and were more likely to move to wealthier neighborhoods. Meanwhile, those

from predominantly Black neighborhoods were generally relegated to disadvantaged neighborhoods. Another reason for the steep decline is systemic displacement during the construction of Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) tracks and freeways in the East Bay. According to a 2024 report by KQED, BART tracks were built in neighborhoods with up to 95 percent Black populations, displacing those residents without fair compensation for their homes. During the 1960s and 70s, this practice removed thousands of Black Berkeley and Oakland residents from their

can American people to be continuously pushed out of Berkeley is unjust. The Black community deserves a place in Berkeley that comes with the knowledge that Black residents won't be further dispelled from the city. Many have pushed for Berkeley to densify its housing by increasing the amount of multiple-family homes. Berkeley has a long history of single-family zoning, being the first city in the U.S. to instate single-family zoning laws. These laws prevented more affordable housing from being built in areas like the Elmwood and Claremont neighborhoods, and

**Berkeley was 23.5 percent Black in 1970. 50 years later, in 2020, that number was down to 7.9 percent**

homes. The City of Berkeley has a responsibility to prevent further exodus of Black residents. Displacement due to gentrification is incredibly harmful, and allowing Afri-



Gates on Claremont Blvd. are left over from when it was a gated community, a visible reminder of historic housing segregation in Berkeley. GEORGIA PAULOS

population. A report by the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project asserted that if not handled properly, increased density would not necessarily lead to affordable housing. Movements to densify Berkeley must prioritize the rights and needs of renters and actively work to address inequities. That said, to leave the housing crisis as it is would be detrimental; the mass displacement of African American residents cannot be left unaddressed. Affordable housing is crucial. Allowing gentrification and Berkeley's housing crisis to continue would be incredibly harmful to African American people, especially youth. Young people of color deserve to see a future in which they can reasonably afford basic needs like housing. The City of Berkeley has a responsibility to take action to prevent gentrification from continuing to

push Black residents out of the city. The housing crisis disproportionately affects Black people, and policies aiming to address housing affordability must be aware of this fact and must attempt to make Berkeley's housing as equitable as possible. For countless families of color in the East Bay, the damage has been done. But a focus on affordable, accessible housing will undoubtedly provide hope for future Berkeley residents.

# Contributions of Black women are undervalued during BHM

BY SOPHIE MIRZA  
staff writer

At the March on Washington in 1963, a protest calling for economic and civil rights for African Americans, no women were allowed to address the crowd as official speakers. Despite exclusion from discussions around Black history and women's history, Black women have played an essential role in the civil rights movement, politics, feminism, music industry, and more. Anayah Tankson, a Berkeley High School senior, feels like Black women are not being spotlighted enough at school or in discussions on race in general. "I think that Black women can be put on the back burner ... (they

were) one of the last racial groups to be liberated during the (second) feminism wave," Tankson said. Much of the discussion about the Black civil rights movement involves great male civil rights advocates, but may ignore Black women. "I don't really feel as though women are equally represented as much as men are during Black History Month. We hear a lot about MLK and Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey, but not really (Black) women," Lyric Hill, a BHS junior, said. Black women must be recognized more broadly during and beyond Black History Month for their contributions to the fight for racial equality. Black women were at the forefront of the fight to emancipate slavery in the South. Even before the

height of the abolitionist movement, Black women in the North had been active in their churches and other organizations calling for abolition. Despite this, they are rarely recognized for their work in the movement. Najuna Kiggundu, a BHS senior, believes misogyny is one of the main reasons for the exclusion of Black women from history. "In the Black community, I think misogyny is still a huge and very present problem," Kiggundu said, "When women were fighting for the right to vote ... Black women were not included." "Misogynoir" is a term re-

ferring to intersectional oppression against Black women due to both racism and misogyny, and the unique oppression Black women face due to their identity. Today, the term is primarily used to address anti-Black racism combined with misogyny in the media, but can also be applied to broader conversations. Kiggundu highlighted the masculinization of Black women, and how that leads to their exclusion from conversations about women. "I think there's this kind of over-masculinization of Black women, and I think they're always excluded from these conversations," Kiggundu said. Misogynoir also highlights the harmful stereotypes that have been historically imposed upon Black women. "I think that there is a heavy narrative that's pushed upon them, about being primarily 'domestic,' but not necessarily in a positive way, where they're good providers," Tankson said. Historically, Black women

like Fannie Lou Hamer, the co-founder of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and Diane Nash, the co-founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), have resisted behind the scenes involvement, and established themselves as an essential part of civil rights organizations. Kiggundu highlighted Shirley Chisholm as a key historical figure. "I think she is (important), especially as someone who's interested in policy change and fighting for rights in general," Kiggundu said. Oftentimes, in discussions about Black women in history, there is an overemphasis on oppression and suffering. "I've never once had a liberating conversation about Black people at school. It's always just about how they were murdered, killed, exploited, oppressed, all of the above," Tankson said. Overall, Black women are underrepresented in our schools, and in the pursuit of racial equity, we must teach about the histories, lives, and contributions of women of color. "I don't think we really have changed that whole entire educational narrative of who's mentioned and who isn't," Hill said. Efforts to halt overlooking Black women in history can be implemented in the classroom, where teachers can integrate stories of powerful Black women into curricula.

***"We hear a lot about MLK and Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey, but not really (Black) women,"***

**Lyric Hill**  
*BHS junior*



Women played an essential role in the Black Panther Party during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. At one point, the Party was nearly two-thirds female. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS UNDER CCL



**Desmond McKinnon Russell**



EDITORIAL

# Schools should diversify standard history curricula

Every year, hundreds of Berkeley High School students finalize their schedule choices without including cultural studies courses. Many factors contribute to the classes students choose to enroll in; graduation requirements, personal interest, and academic pressures are often primary considerations. As students begin to contrast their many options, it is crucial to keep in mind the importance of diversifying their cultural education.

Because not all students will enroll in specific department classes, BHS and other high schools should integrate more cultural studies into standard history curricula to ensure all students receive a well-rounded education.

Cultural diversity integrated into schools has substantial benefits to both students and faculty, enriching education and discourse. A study across 29 school

districts by Halpin et al. (2016) found that core subject curricula including cultural diversity saw narrowing achievement gaps, higher graduation rates, and school pride compared to strictly Eurocentric district curricula.

A five-year study by Castagno et al. (2014) found that literacy rates, GPA, and emotional well-being for Black students increased when their schools adopted culturally sustaining African American history and literature courses.

BHS has reflected these findings in programs such as the African American (AfAm) Studies department — which has been a noticeable mark of what makes BHS special. The department was born from protests by the Black Student Union in 1968 demanding a comprehensive Black studies program and an increased number of African American teachers. No other public high school in the country has a specific department dedicated to the study of the African American experience.

The wide range of classes provided by the AfAm department is an incredible resource for students to deepen their understanding of various culturally rich and important subjects. Some currently offered courses include AP Patterns of Black Literature, Spanish in the African Diaspora, African American Psychology, and more.

While BHS students each year enroll in AfAm de-

partment courses and benefit from the subjects offered, many students are unable to fit these classes into their schedule.

Due to stricter course requirements for underclassmen, limited elective spaces, academic pressure to take certain AP classes, or simply a lack of awareness surrounding the AfAm studies program, many students will never have the opportunity to engage with much of the content taught in AfAm courses.

These students' main exposure to Black history is likely limited to within their respective history classes, which vary greatly between small school and teacher. Without specific guidelines, the level of multicultural education a student receives is greatly dependent upon chance. It leaves individual teachers and current curriculum with the most influence, and risks discrepant levels of content coverage between classes.

While the AfAm department remains a defining strength of BHS, access to culturally relevant and sustaining educational opportunities should not depend on whether or not a student has free space in their schedule. BHS and other schools committed to providing an inclusive and equitable education must incorporate culturally diverse perspectives into the standard curricula, ensuring that students unable to take specific cultural courses still benefit from increased exposure to diverse teachings.

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# Classroom curriculum deserves more ethnic diversity

BY RIGZIN GYALTSEN  
staff writer

The City of Berkeley is widely known for being progressive, and there’s no doubt that this political leaning reaches Berkeley High School literature classes. A dedicated African American Studies department, a queer literature class, an Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) literature class, and more are all reflective of BHS’ efforts for inclusion and diversity within their classrooms. Although literature materials are generally diverse in classes at BHS, school-wide materials should include broader perspectives.

Classes like AAPI Literature, African American Literature, and Queer Literature all take up elective slots for students who may be already taking general literature classes. “I was more limited for my junior year class and which courses I could take, because I had to meet the (International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma) qualifications. I was really between taking Queer Lit and Law and Social Justice, and I ended up taking Law and Social Justice,” Delphine Wadlund, a junior in Berkeley International High School (BIHS), said.

“(Varying literature resources in different departments) means that some students are exposed to some things that others are not,” Kate Purnell, a tenth and eleventh grade BIHS English teacher said. To ensure that all students are exposed to diverse mate-

rials, general English literature classes should prioritize providing numerous different perspectives in written works. This year in IB Language and Literature, all eleventh grade classes were presented with a eight week unit on poet Gwendolyn

*“A curriculum with multiple perspectives spanning multiple time periods should be implemented into general literature classes, regardless of small school departments.”*

Brooks. “Gwendolyn Brooks is amazing and a legend, however I think it would have been nice for students to experience other Black poets of that time, maybe other modern poets,” Purnell said.

This poetry unit focused only on one poet and one perspective from the 1950s. Although valuable, there was a clear absence of modern Black perspectives. “In a lot of curricula, students are presented with poetry that is minimum 40 years old ... I would have liked to see a mix of modern and older poetry, styles of poems,” Purnell said, “My concern is that a lot of the joy, the positivity, the up-

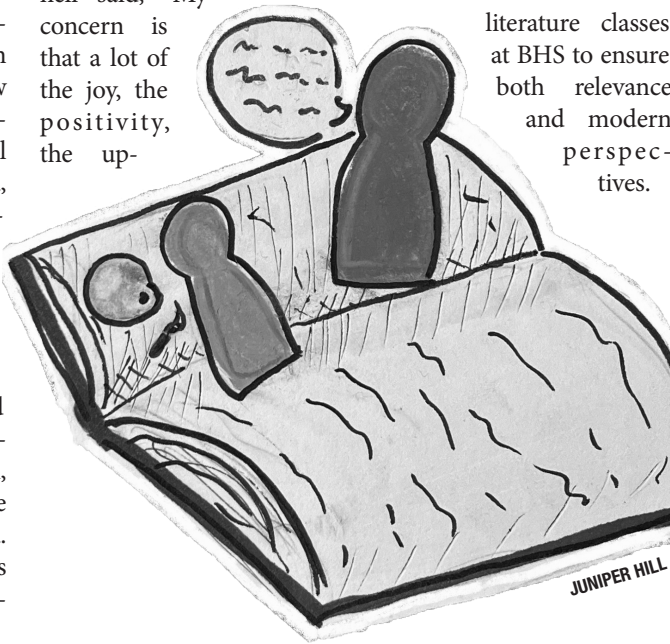
ward mobility that Black arts and literature has, is missed. I don't want our stories to be solely about struggle and suffering all the time, right?” In IB general literature classes, units usually focus on one author or collection without allowing for more authors of the same genre.

Moreover, these outdated materials don’t just come from IB; Adonai Nikodimos, a junior in Academic Choice

said, “Some of the texts that we go over from the AP (English Language and Composition) exam use excerpts from a while ago (that are) really old.”

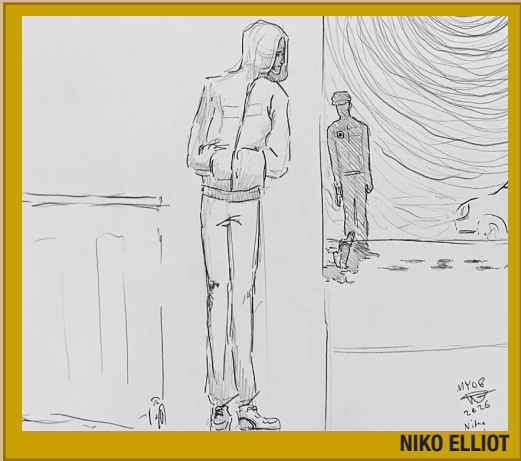
When making a curriculum for a general literature class, it can be difficult to squeeze in multiple authors of differing historical relevance, when so many stories need to be told. To remedy this issue, a curriculum with multiple perspectives spanning multiple time periods should be implemented into general literature classes, regardless of small school departments. More authors

must be covered in literature classes at BHS to ensure both relevance and modern perspectives.





# BLACK HISTORY MONTH SUBMISSIONS



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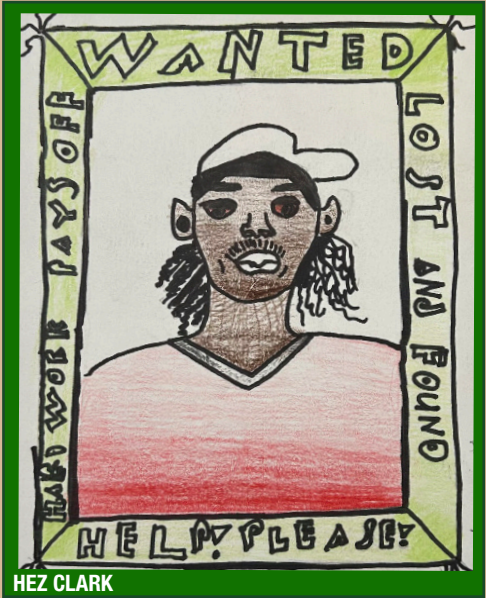
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# FEATURES

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## Black Scholar Center uplifts students, builds community

BY CHLOE PRENDERGAST  
staff writer

“It’s meant to be another community space that will facilitate student success, especially for students who might feel like there are less places available to them,” said Jumari Callaway, a Berkeley High School African American (AfAm) History teacher and Arts and Humanities Academy (AHA) history teacher. Apart from her role as a teacher at BHS, Callaway is a proctor for the Black Scholar Center. The Black Scholar Center, located in C-220, is an afterschool resource for BHS students, particularly students of color, to get help with studying, their schoolwork, homework, or learning in general.

The center is open Monday through Thursday from 3:30 until 5:00 p.m. Callaway explained, “The Black Scholar Center is a space especially for Black students and students of color, but it is welcoming to all students to be another space ... to get work done.”

Jenell Marshall, an AfAm Literature teacher and an AP Patterns in Black Literature teacher, is the other proctor for the Black Scholar Center. Her classroom is the space used for the Black Scholar Center. “The center was created in part to empower Black students in spaces where they don’t normally feel safe and comfortable to get tutoring. So we hire student tutors that are strong in all content areas, like math, science, English, history and they are peer tutors to the students coming in,” she said.

The center is an afterschool tutorial space similar to the Col-

lege and Career Center (CCC) on campus, however, unlike the CCC, the Black Scholar Center is more calm and quiet for students to get work done. “I know other spaces are kind of overcrowded, ours is not. So if you want a more quiet space to study and do homework, then this is the place to go,” Marshall said.

John’Nae Murray, a BHS junior, is a regular attendee at the Black Scholar Center. She explained her experience there, saying, “I’m able to come to my peers and get help from student to student, instead of teacher to student.” Murray elaborated on the purpose of the center, stating that it is meant “for us colored kids to get support and feel comfortable in our own space ... it’s somewhere that everyone can come together.”

One of the main aspects of the center is its student-to-student tutorial model. Marshall said, “We interview (and) hire student

tutors that we think will be able to actually help other students, our tutors are really good, and they can break down concepts really easily.”

Callaway described how it’s more than just a place for tutoring, “It is kind of a community building space. Sometimes it’s a way to meet other needs. Like, there’s snacks here available for students on an ‘as needed basis.’ So a lot of support, and hopefully also feeling seen and known at (BHS).” Students can also clear tardies by going to the Black Scholar Center due to its function and educational environment.

“The mission and the purpose is to help support our African American students on campus, but also other students as well, because it’s not strictly for Black students. Everyone is welcome,” Kanissia Davis, a Universal Ninth Grade (U9) English teacher, said. Davis worked at the Black Scholar Center in the past school year. Marshall echoed this sentiment by saying, “You don’t have to be Black to come to the Black Scholar Center, but we encourage our Black and brown students to come so they can have a place that they feel safe and comfortable.”

Callaway and other teachers

have witnessed a profound impact on students’ academic work and grades. She said, “I have a student who in their sophomore year really turned their grades around because they started showing up here almost consistently ... They usually got help from the tutors, but it was a huge part of them going from failing to passing.” Davis also mentioned the non-academic benefits she’s witnessed students gaining from going to the center, “I’ve seen my students when I used to work in the Black Scholar Center improve in their grades, get the one on one support with tutors that are upperclassmen that they weren’t able to get. I’ve seen students find community there as well and form friendships.”

“I work at the Black Scholar Center because it gives me a sense of purpose. I like seeing students get happy when they start understanding content, I like to see them enjoy coming to the center because of how much it

has helped them,” Najuna Kiggundu, a BHS senior and a tutor at the center, said. Kiggundu explained that the center is available to help bridge the achievement gap but is open to everyone, “I would recom-

mend the center to any student who needs any kind of support in school, not just Black students, because we are there to help out anyone and everyone.”

**“I’ve seen students find community there as well as form friendships.”**

**Kanissia Davis  
U9 English Teacher**

**“I work at the Black Scholar Center because it gives me a sense of purpose.”**

**Najuna Kiggundu  
BHS senior**

The Black Scholar Center aims to empower Black students by creating a safe space and providing tutoring and homework support from peers and teachers.

The Black Scholar Center is located in C-220 and open Mon-Thu from 3:30-5:00 p.m.



WOMEN’S ISSUES:  
BEAUTY & FASHION  
STANDARDS

NEELA GREENE



As I snooze my alarm in the morning, my first thought most likely centers around getting out of bed, a task that’s never fun. But after I roll out of bed, I, like many Berkeley High School students, consider what I’m going to wear. For some, this task is a breeze, while others take their time in deciding the day’s outfit. This process is often stressful, as students fret over whether their hair looks good enough or contemplating if someone will notice that they wore that shirt two weeks ago. Beauty and fashion standards are broadcasted from TV ads, “For You” pages, family members, or friends. What are these standards, and how do they influence students and people everywhere?

Dressing “Y2K” has been extremely popular recently, with Hollister, Abercrombie & Fitch, and low rise jeans all the rage. Along with the early 2000’s clothing trends coming back into style, so has the desired body type. During this era, being extremely skinny was extremely hot. Teenagers were exposed to these images in the media often, encouraging a near skeletal frame that was likely achieved by eating disorder tendencies. Today, there’s another way to attain a highly desired 2000’s-esque physique. Ozempic and other GLP-1 weight loss medications are readily available. With the rise of these products has come a downfall in the popularity of the body positivity movement. As the 2010s progressed, acceptance and positivity had encouraged everyone to feel confident in their bodies. Now, with ads for weight loss drugs on TV often, the message being sent about weight is not as inclusive.

Although fashion standards depend on the time period, they can also be determined by the economic status of a country or region. For instance, the desired body type in Jamaica is full curves and a larger frame, which signals you have lots to eat and are financially stable. During the Great Depression lots of makeup was preferred, as only folks with money could afford the commodity. These examples highlight a pattern of fashion and beauty standards aiming to flaunt your financial status. Throughout the past century, most trendy looks have been expensive and therefore, exclusive. However, in the mid to late 2010s, the Kardashians took the price of beauty to a whole new level. Kim Kardashian got her first butt lift around 2010, when the plastic surgery industry was valued at \$10.7 billion dollars. In 2026, that number has grown to \$66 billion dollars. This provides insight as to just how much influence celebrities have over the beauty industry.

What we wear and how we appear heavily affects how we are perceived by others. As a high school student, it can be a challenge to find ways to present yourself that resonate personally. In a time when social media platforms are constantly providing images of how others are dressing, the task becomes even more complex. Although getting ready in the morning can be stressful, presenting in a way that makes you feel confident walking out the door is often worth the time.

Health & Wellness Centers serve students

BY NIALA LENZ-RASHID  
staff writer

“The Wellness Center is here because life is unpredictable and people need support. High school is a rough time in there. And if I can only imagine if I had something like this in high school, my high school would’ve thrived,” Victoria Butterfield, a Berkeley High School Wellness Center counselor, said. Despite its efficacy in supporting students’ emotional wellbeing, some students are not aware of the Wellness Center because of its relative newness; the Wellness Center made its debut during the 2023-24 school year. The Wellness Center is a space for students to rest, relax, or talk to a trusted adult for 10 minutes during the school day.

Unlike the Health Center, which focused on students’ physical health, the Wellness Center is a place for students

to evaluate and concentrate on their mental health, a critical factor in students’ overall ability to focus and learn. “The Wellness Center is here so that nobody ever feels like they have nowhere to go or no one to talk to. It’s really important because mental health can be hard to access, but with the Wellness Center, support for mental health is here,” Butterfield said.

The Health Center and the Wellness Center have been implemented at BHS due to the need for students to have spaces to take care of themselves, both emotionally and physically. With a very large student population, it is difficult for teachers and counselors to individually check in on and support every single student equally, making the centers a go-to spot for students to seek services

that may not be available for them outside of school. “If you need more personal things, I’m pretty sure you have to go through more of a process, but you’re still able to get it and they provide you (with) so many things,” Naomi Chambers, a BHS junior, said, “I think that’s really important because not everyone has families that will give that to them.”

not feel comfortable talking to their parents/guardians about. Both centers’ counselors are bound to complete confidentiality in most cases, meaning students are able to discuss whatever they would like to without the imminent fear of their parents or guardians being notified. “It’s a space where there’s a lot of confidentiality, you don’t have to go in and they don’t have to tell your parents anything if you don’t want them to,” Francesca Bertolini, a BHS sophomore, said, “and they won’t judge you no matter what.”

*“The Wellness Center is here so that nobody ever feels like they have nowhere to go or no one to talk to.”*

Victoria Butterfield  
BHS Wellness Center Counselor

Asking for help and support with certain services at the Health Center or Wellness Center can be a slightly extensive process and can span a few days or weeks, though students feel they are able to receive services they need. “The resources are easy to access because you kind of just need a pass ... honestly, most things that you need for your personal use are gonna be at the Health Center and it’s very easy to access,” Chambers said.

Along with efficiency, both the Health Center and the Wellness Center offer a scarce but invaluable institutional characteristic: confidentiality. Many students have mental or physical health matters that they do

Although there is a feeling of safety for many students at the Health Center and Wellness Center, stigma surrounding mental health and even aspects of physical health prevent some students from ever seeking help in these spaces. “Mental health itself can be very stigmatized in general,” Butterfield said.

Above all else, counselors at both centers want to help students navigate their life issues and get the support they need regardless of their circumstances. Butterfield explored this. “My wish is that students feel more comfortable coming in if they haven’t already because the space is here for your support. And it’s not a bad thing to need help, it’s actually a brave thing,” Butterfield said.



The Health Center is located in H-105. The Wellness Center is across the hall, in H-104. Both are open daily. LEO OSTROY HARP

Ms. Marshall bridges class and community

BY TEJAL DOPMAN  
staff writer

“A chance to be exposed to different types of literature, different authors, different experiences that is not maybe something in another class they’ve gotten,” Jenell Marshall, Berkeley High School English teacher, said about what she hopes students get out of her AP Literature and Composition: Patterns in Black Literature and African American Literature classes. The two classes are both in the African American Studies Department at BHS and are available to juniors and seniors. According to Marshall, there is a plan to try to make the Black and African Lit classes open to sophomores so that if students want, they are able to take the classes for three years.

For many years, Marshall had worked in the oncology department at the University of California San Francisco Hospital. However, one event changed the trajectory of the future of her career.

“When George Floyd got killed, I had a very bad re-

action ... I couldn’t believe that something like that was being televised on TV, and to see him screaming for his mom, it really broke me,” Marshall said. After the murder of Floyd, Marshall wondered who was going to be there for the Black students who were going through the same feelings of brokenness as her. She decided to go back to school to pursue a career in education, which led her to BHS.

Many larger, national issues are reflected in the BHS community. Marshall said one problem she’s observed in the community is the use of the N-word at BHS by non-Black students. “I feel there’s a culture and acceptance of an N word pass or, ‘it’s okay I can say it because I listen to hip hop music,’ or ‘it’s okay because I have Black friends,’ and there’s not an education on why that word is damaging when it’s used by non-Black people,” Marshall said.

Black History Month provides a specific time to discuss and learn about the Black community and African American history when it is oftentimes ignored. “It’s

cool to highlight (Black students) for one month, but they’re here 365 days a year ... don’t count them out,” Marshall said.

One of Marshall’s favorite units to teach is her unit on the Gullah Geechee people. The Gullah Geechee were an enslaved group of people that were isolated on coastal plantations and islands off the coast of the American South — thus, they were more easily able to retain their own culture, language and traditions while other enslaved Africans were assimilated into American culture.

At the end of the unit, students engage in a creative project. “I have the kids come with their own recipes from their culture and their ancestors. That is one of my favorite (units) because then we create a recipe book based on everybody’s favorite recipe, and they have to talk to their parents, grandparents, ancestors to come up with the recipe and the story behind it,” Marshall said. To Marshall, the value of this unit is rooted in community-based learning; the students are able to learn about their own history while also learning about their peers.



Jenell Marshall teaches several African American Literature classes, including AP Patterns in Black Lit. GEORGIA PAULOS



# BUSD Black History Oratorical Fest fosters self expression

BY JOSEPHINE MCKNETT  
staff writer

The Berkeley Unified School District Black History Oratorical Fest, an event that usually happens in late March, is a valuable way for students to take part in celebrating Black history and culture. While the themes of this event vary, all aim to guide students into discovering historical context, visionary figures, and powerful excerpts from different eras. Past themes include “Black Artists: Art for Change, Art for Joy” in 2024, and “A Reclamation of Narrative: The Cultural Revolution of the Harlem Renaissance” in 2025. Students of all grades are encouraged to participate, although the majority of the competition is made up of elementary students. The Oratorical Fest has been happening annually since 2018.

Students prepare artwork, songs, and speeches that relate to both the theme of the competition and a Black historical figure. Students have the option — and are encouraged — to craft original pieces, which consist of monologues, spoken word pieces and scenes, and more. Additionally, students are able to compete in groups with students from the same grade. “What we really want

to ensure is that we use these opportunities to encourage students to learn,” Kamar O’Guinn, the manager of the African American Success Framework (AASF), said. AASF, a part of the district, aims to improve academic, social-emotional, and cultural outcomes for Black students by closing opportunity gaps.

When writing original pieces, students are pushed beyond just finding an already written piece and are able to create something more personalized and creative. “I had said a poem for my Godmom’s baby shower, maybe a month or two before, and so she had helped me write it and everything,” BHS senior Shavon Johnson, who participated in the Oratorical Festival in fifth and sixth grade, said.

This tournament-style event has different phases, eventually leading up to a

school perform and compete at the district-wide competition. Anyone can attend the Oratorical Fest, and most of the audience is made up of family members. “I think roughly 37 students were on stage last year,” O’Guinn said. The Oratorical Fest goes beyond typical classroom learning and gives students the opportunity to share pieces of their culture, as well as learn from other students, in a unique style.

“I think it’s a chance for kids of all different races to honor Black culture, as well as a good chance for our Black kids to celebrate their own culture,” Allyson Bogie, a librarian at BHS, said. There are multiple winners crowned across different grade divisions — high school, middle school, and elementary school. First, second, and third places are awarded across each grade division.

Beyond celebrating Black history, the Oratorical Fest gives students the chance to develop skills that go beyond the competition itself. Preparing for the event pushes students to research influential Black figures, and hone writing skills when presenting an original piece. “It was a fun experience to be able to have people hear my writing in a bigger setting than just writing an

essay for a teacher,” Johnson said. Because a large majority of competitors are from elementary school and middle school, younger students get valuable exposure to speaking and performing in front of a large audience. Such an opportunity is rare, especially for young students. At the Oratorical Fest, students are able to take ownership of learning in a way that classrooms may not provide.

“It’s a public space for African American students to be able to showcase their writing and their emotions and how

they’re feeling,” Johnson said. Although the Oratorical Fest is an important tradition for students and communities in Berkeley, there is limited

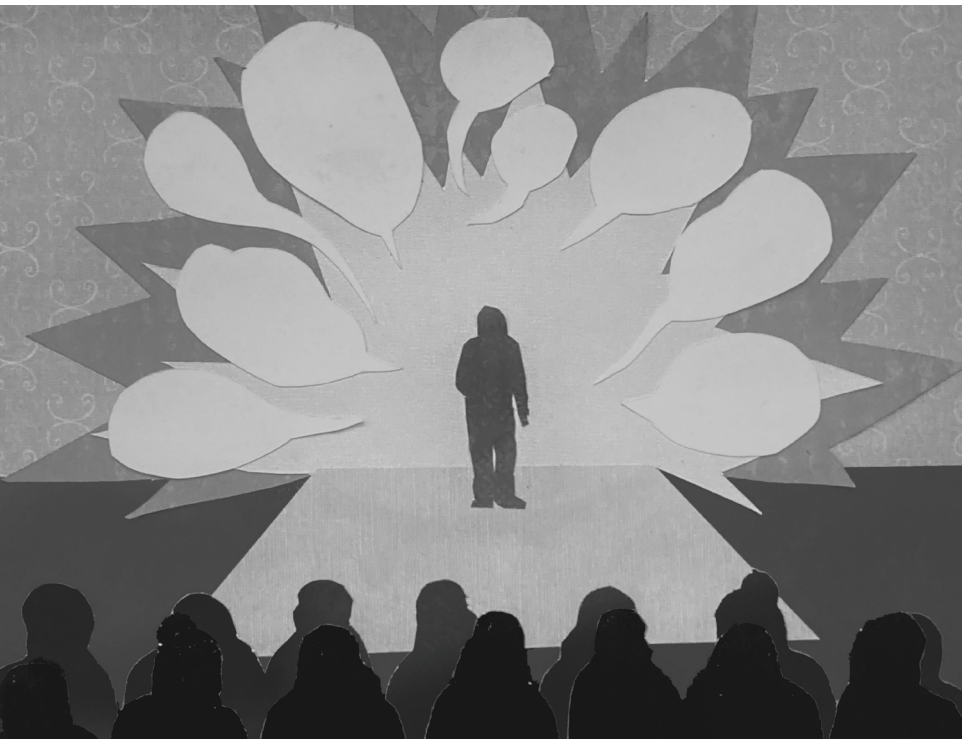
*“It was a fun experience to be able to have people hear my writing in a bigger setting.”*

Shavon Johnson  
BHS senior

information on if there will be a competition hosted in 2026. “I do know that there’s already rumblings at school sites to be able to make it hap-

pen, whether or not we host something at the district,” O’Guinn said.

The Oratorical Fest provides students an opportunity to share poems, speeches, and songs that they wouldn’t have otherwise. It goes beyond just being a competition; it’s a powerful experience in which students are able to express themselves and honor Black historical figures. Such a valuable event celebrating Black culture is crucial to highlight and preserve history, culture, and the power of student voices.



NATALIA KASS



Eli Marienthal and Jesse Sachs co-founded Back to Earth when they reconnected after high school.

COURTESY OF BACK TO EARTH

BY ANNELIESE JARAUSCH  
staff writer

“It’s not always an easy thing to do, to find a way to be useful ... the most obvious way we could think of to really plug in and be useful, was to start offering these backpacking trips,” Eli Marienthal, one of the co-founders of Back To Earth, said. Back To Earth is a backpacking program for youth based in the Bay Area. It was founded in 2015 after Marienthal and his best friend Jesse Sachs reconnected. Sachs and Mari-

enthal both attended Berkeley High School, where they discovered their shared love of backpacking. After going separate ways for multiple years, both found themselves back in Berkeley with the wish to provide something to the community that was “what we needed when we were in high school,” Marienthal said.

Back to Earth offers custom programs and community events along with their main program, a summer backpacking trip for teenage boys, called the Wilderness Immersion and Leadership

## BHS alumni share their love of nature through immersive backpacking trips

Development (WILD). Trips are seven to ten days long for teens starting at age 13. The aim of the WILD program is for boys to learn how to take care of themselves, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Wilderness immersion means that teens are spending time in the backcountry, away from screens and the stress of daily life. The program teaches “How to be a leader in your own life, in some really material, nuts and bolts ways, (to) take care of yourself ... a lot of interpersonal skills, how to deal with other people with kindness, generosity, honesty,” Marienthal said.

“I’ve come to appreciate being outdoors more because of Back to Earth,” Henry Hirsh, a BHS junior, said. Hirsh has participated in three WILD programs, one seven-day and two ten-day trips. One part of the seven day trips is a solo ceremony, where teens spend 24 to 36 hours alone in the wilderness, often fasting.

“From the solo ceremonies, I’ve learned about the importance of having time to yourself, especially in na-

ture and how it’s important to have time away from distractions where you’re just by yourself,” Hirsh said.

“It was an experience not like anything I’d done before, it was pretty difficult because you don’t get food or anything to distract you. You just get a bottle of water,” Luc Haji, a BHS senior, said. “It was really boring at first, because you’re just there with nothing to do and it makes you just think a lot, it’s a super reflective process.”

A key focus of Back to Earth is giving teenage boys a space to explore themselves as people. “I think teenagers these days often get a really bad rep. Teenagers get pegged as lazy, disaffected, digitally addicted, less interested, less curious than their parents and grandparents, etc, etc ... And what I found is the ability to rewire, to transform, it’s closer at hand than we think,” Marienthal said.

“I have a lot of favorite moments ... I’d say what sticks with me the most is probably the fires,” Haji said. Every night after dinner on a WILD trip, everyone gath-

ers around a campfire to talk and sing. “First I thought it was a little bit silly ... but it was really meaningful to me ... it was really cool hearing other young men my age actually talk about their feelings and what they’re thinking about,” Haji said.

The mission of Back to Earth is rooted in connecting with yourself, nature, and other people in your community in a healthy and supportive way. Marienthal

believes that until one steps away from daily life that is potentially disconnected from nature, it’s difficult to know whether or not they have an affinity for nature. “You could spend your whole life thinking that you’re a sad person or an angry person or a person who doesn’t really care about nature ... the interruption of going on a backpacking trip like this lets you see yourself more clearly,” Marienthal said.



The backpacking trips include solo ceremonies, which can involve hours or days of fasting.

COURTESY OF BACK TO EARTH



# ENTERTAINMENT

ENTERTAINMENT EDITORS: AMAR WALKER & ANNIKA JOY

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## NOTES IN THE MARGIN: ‘THE HOUR OF THE STAR’

FLORA KOVEN



“The Hour of the Star,” written by Clarice Lispector and translated by Benjamin Moser, is a difficult story to summarize. On paper, the novella follows a male narrator who tells the life story of a woman named Macabéa, who lives on the outskirts of society, but in reality, the narrator seems to spend more time describing his own life and writing process than the life of the character he creates. Macabéa lives in an impoverished area of Rio de Janeiro, barely surviving off of the little income she makes, but seems to be constantly and blindly happy. She doesn’t feel like she has a purpose, but she continues to work and enjoy the little luxuries: Coca-Cola, painting her nails, and going to the movie theatre. In contrast, the narrator is a struggling writer, trying to make his mark on the world and constantly thinking about what it means to be alive, and what writing really is to him, as he tries to puzzle out the themes of Macabéa’s life.

Macabéa is naïve, inexperienced, and insecure, but seems to be happy even when her life mostly consists of work and sleeping in a tenement apartment she shares with four other girls. The narrator considers himself one of the most important characters of the story, and is wealthier than Macabéa, more confident and much more knowledgeable. He is an unreliable narrator, consistently stating things that contradict with his actions, and demonstrates how we craft a persona to avoid our fears. However, even though the narrator looks down on Macabéa, the narrator’s rich but miserable life seems to be so much worse than Macabéa’s. Lispector contrasts the mindsets of the narrator and Macabéa to show how poverty has affected her identity, as well as how differently the two view the world.

Lispector’s prose is incredibly unique: full of short, snappy clauses pieced together in erratic ways. She uses words in contexts they wouldn’t normally be applied to, drifts from thought to thought within a single sentence, and in many ways, rejects the usual rules of writing structure. This creates a dreamlike effect within the story, because the writing flows as erratically and strangely as a stream of thoughts. Her writing style is vivid and emotional at times, and abrupt or even sterile at others, but ultimately furthers the story and is almost a character in its own right.

I would recommend this novella to anyone who likes slightly strange and somewhat conceptual stories that heavily focus on the emotions, psyche, and differing life experiences of the characters. Each sentence has more ideas packed within it than a whole page of some books, so even though it’s very short, it takes some time to work through. The novella is, in some ways, a meditation on the act of writing, while simultaneously exploring poverty and identity. Try to read it with few assumptions of the plot and characters, and you’ll enjoy it much more and take more away from it.

## Rhythm and blues: The roots of soul music

BY CECILIA TILES  
staff writer

“I grew up listening to soul music in the car on the way to school,” Berkeley High School senior Ty Manning said, “So it definitely just became part of my life.” Soul music, a genre of music invented in the 1950s, is an all-encompassing sound that combines various elements from popular music during the 1940s and 70s. This includes inspiration from genres and subgenres such as R&B, jazz, blues, and more traditional gospel music.

“Soul music has been deeply embedded within the black community since the early 60s,” BHS junior Lyric Hill said, “With music like that, you can’t really deny it, I think that’s how it became so famous.” Soul music is still very influential in modern music today, being present in numerous popular songs and albums from artists like Leon Thomas and Olivia Dean amongst others. For Dean, that includes the usage of neo-soul; which is a contemporary take on the more classic sound.

While soul music is known as a mix of genres, it originates from gospel music. First being mentioned and used in the late 1800s, gospel music eventually became an incredibly important part of the Civil Rights Movement. For many Black communities in the U.S. facing segregation at the time, church was often a place of spiritual support and also a location for political organization. As the movement began to gain traction, so did gospel music as a way to connect communities. Gospel music typi-

cally included emotionally charged lyrics with deep instruments like drums, rhythm guitar and bass, and other percussive instruments. Music in African American communities quickly began to develop, as offshoots of gospel music such as R&B and jazz took influence from other varieties of music, and shot to fame in the mainstream media; with leading artists like Aretha Franklin, Marvin Gaye, and Ray Charles.

“Soul music (is) very heartfelt and authentic,” BHS junior Asha Bui said, “It is very personal, you can imagine yourself in the room with the person singing and playing the piano.” In the instance of Ray Charles, the immensely popular blind singer-songwriter is often



ZAZIE ULTAN

more suggestive lyricism of blues music. At this point in time, jazz and other similar genres had become widely separate from gospel music. But Charles introduced a new style that openly defied the respective standards and genres.

As soul music continued to grow in popularity, artists in different regions across the U.S. began to develop their own style of soul music. In Detroit, Michigan, a record company called “Motown Records”

published a more “radio-friendly” version of soul, something now characterized as the “Motown Sound.” This type of soul thrust new artists like Stevie Wonder and The Supremes into mainstream music, and was a representation of the many ways soul music could be interpreted. Same applied to the developing Southern soul, a more emotionally intense style that often re-

flected the struggles and successes of Black communities in the South.

Similar to gospel music, soul music became a critical tool during the Civil Rights Movement. With its background in African American spaces, and being known for its emphasis on lyrics and emotions, soul music was an ideal genre to give a voice to Black Americans. Songs like “Respect” by Aretha Franklin and “A Change Is Gonna Come” by Sam Cooke are examples of anthems that inspired activism and brought further attention to racial inequality.

Originating more than half a century ago, soul music was revolutionary for the time, and served as an outlet for expressing political, social, and artistic ideas. Ultimately, soul music is a significant representation of how music and art can evolve while still preserving historic and cultural roots.

“Soul music to me is exactly what it’s called, it links to the soul and brings you to another world and environment,” Hill said.

**“Soul music to me is exactly what it’s called, it links to the soul and brings you to another world and environment,”**

Lyric Hill  
BHS junior

## 2026 GRAMMY AWARDS RECAP



ALBUM OF THE YEAR: “DeBÍ TiRAR Más FOToS” — Bad Bunny

RECORD OF THE YEAR: “luther” — Kendrick Lamar, SZA

SONG OF THE YEAR: “WILDFLOWER” — Billie Eilish

BEST NEW ARTIST: Olivia Dean

BEST RAP ALBUM: “GNX” — Kendrick Lamar

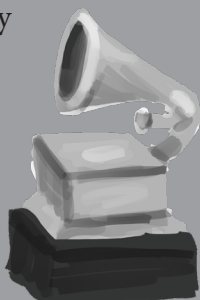
BEST POP VOCAL ALBUM: “MAYHEM” — Lady Gaga

BEST COUNTRY ALBUM: “Beautifully Broken” — Jelly Roll

BEST MUSICA URBANA ALBUM: “DeBÍ TiRAR Más FOToS” — Bad Bunny

BEST R&B SONG: “Folded” — Kehlani

BEST RAP SONG: “tv off” — Kendrick Lamar



IRIS LE LIBOUX





ISA SHIMOMURA

BY KIMIA AZADPUR  
staff writer

Ryan Coogler, an Oakland-born director, is known for directing and writing blockbusters that combine social commentary, and Black culture and identity. On Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026, the 98th Oscar nominations for 2026 were announced with Coogler’s recent film, “Sinners,” earning 16 Academy Award nominations for the horror drama set in

1932 Mississippi, making it the most-nominated film in Oscar history. Among these honors was a Best Director nomination for Coogler, marking the first time a Black filmmaker from Oakland has received recognition in that category. The record-breaking nominations approach nearly every area of filmmaking, including acting, cinematography, editing, costume design, sound, original screenplay, and Best Picture. Even before the Oscars, “Sinners” earned

major — though some say still lacking — recognition at the Golden Globes, where the film won Cinematic and Box Office Achievement along with Best Original Score. These achievements add to Coogler’s already influential career. He first gained national attention with “Fruitvale Station” in 2013, a powerful film centered on Oscar Grant III, whose death deeply affected the Oakland community. From there, Coogler transitioned

# Director Ryan Coogler makes key strides in the film industry

into large-scale studio projects, directing “Creed” and Marvel’s “Black Panther” films. “Black Panther” alone earned seven Oscar nominations and won three, while “Judas and the Black Messiah,” which Coogler co-produced, received five nominations and won two. His work has consistently balanced blockbuster interest with relatable storytelling.

Born in Oakland and raised in Richmond, Coogler attended St. Mary’s College High School in Berkeley before continuing his education at California State University, Sacramento, and later the University of Southern California’s School of Cinematic Arts for his Master of Fine Arts (MFA). While in college, a creative writing class helped unfold his talent for emotional narratives, starting a framework for his future as a director. Coogler’s success has

been supported by his wife and producing partner, Zinzi Coogler. Raised in Oakland, Zinzi Coolger Ryan Coolger while they were both college

*“His work has consistently balanced blockbuster interest with relatable storytelling.”*

athletes. She has remained closely involved in every stage of his career, from helping him access professional screenwriting tools early on to co-founding Proximity Media with Sev Ohanian in 2021. Together, they have built a production company centered around truly meaningful storytelling.

With “Sinners,” Coogler discovered a new genre by blending historical drama with horror. The film follows Sammie, a young blues musician navigating both family conflict and supernatural forces in Jim Crow-era Mississippi. At its core,

the story examines music, faith, race, and survival. Much of the film draws from Coogler’s own family history, especially regarding relatives who migrated from Mississippi to California after World War II. His connection to blues music, passed down through a close family member, also helped shape the film’s emotional foundation.

Music plays a central role in the project. Oakland artist Raphael Saadiq contributed an original song that earned an Oscar nomination. Actor Delroy Lindo, an Oakland resident since the 1990s, also received his first Academy Award nomination for his performance in “Sinners.” Today, Coogler stands as one of the most influential filmmakers of his generation. From local theaters in Oakland to international award stages, his journey illustrates the power of creative ambition rooted in community.

# Our Monologues touchingly captures the teenage experience

BY CECILIA TILES  
staff writer

“I’ve never been comfortable being seen,” was a powerful line at Berkeley High School’s annual student-led production of “Our Monologues,” which thoroughly exceeded audiences expectations. An accumulation of 28 predominantly individual performances, or “monologues,” every single one awed the onlookers with their diverse stories and emotions. Directed by BHS juniors Vivian Roston and Ernst Wang, the show had performances on Friday and Saturday, Jan. 23 and 24, 2026, at the Live Oak Theater in Berkeley.

Today, the purpose of “Our Monologues” is to uplift and share the stories of real BHS students. “Our Monologues” exists to give voice to experiences and thoughts that people have about their life and to tell true life sto-

ries about being a teenager,” BHS sophomore Benjamin Schechter, who performed in the show, said.

The production for the show was a lengthy process. It begins with acquiring the monologues that will be performed in the show. This year specifically, directors Roston and Wang had over 130 submissions to narrow down to just 28. The majority of the pieces were submitted anonymously. “That’s something that’s hard,” BHS sophomore Lily Neta said. “You don’t know who wrote your monologue, and you can’t contact them, and you have to try to convey the artist’s thoughts and feelings in the way that was intended,” Neta said.

Since the beginning of the year, the cast of “Our Monologues” have met once a week to catch up and practice.

The show started with a quick message from the directors, appreciating the lighting techs and teacher supervisor, Victor Aguilera, before the lights dimmed and the show began. All students and performers walked out on stage at once, dressed in black and seated

*“I found pride in bringing (‘How to Survive Drowning’) to the audience.”*

Ken Kemnitz  
BHS junior

on the floor in a semi-circle. The first piece of the night was titled “16,” written anonymously and performed by Ellah Altman. While thoroughly emotionally vulnerable, it told the story of how life passes one by. A perfect representation of a fleeting childhood, it was an impressive start to the production.

Another highlight of the show was the

piece “Always and Forever,” written and performed by siblings Lily and Avi Neta. A poignant piece, performed stylistically in back and forth monologues — it explored existentialism. Despite the fact that typically monologues only include one person, this piece was a welcome and thoughtful change that really got the audience thinking. “I wrote it based on my past struggle with my mental health, and a lot of the thoughts I had during that time,” Lily Neta

said. Performers continued to surprise the audience with a wide variety of pieces that were being performed. They ranged widely, including stories on parent divorce, transgender identity, college applications, and the expensiveness of a sandwich. While the majority of the performances were often dramatic or emotional, the directors

did an excellent job also tying in more comedic and light hearted monologues which kept the flow of the show from being too heavy. This included pieces like “Celebrity Crush,” performed by BHS senior Sydney Fair and written anonymously, which tells the humorous but truthful tale of what it is like to want someone’s attention or appreciation, or “Sandwich,” performed by BHS junior Ken Kemnitz and written anonymously, which analyzes how expensive everything in life truly is.

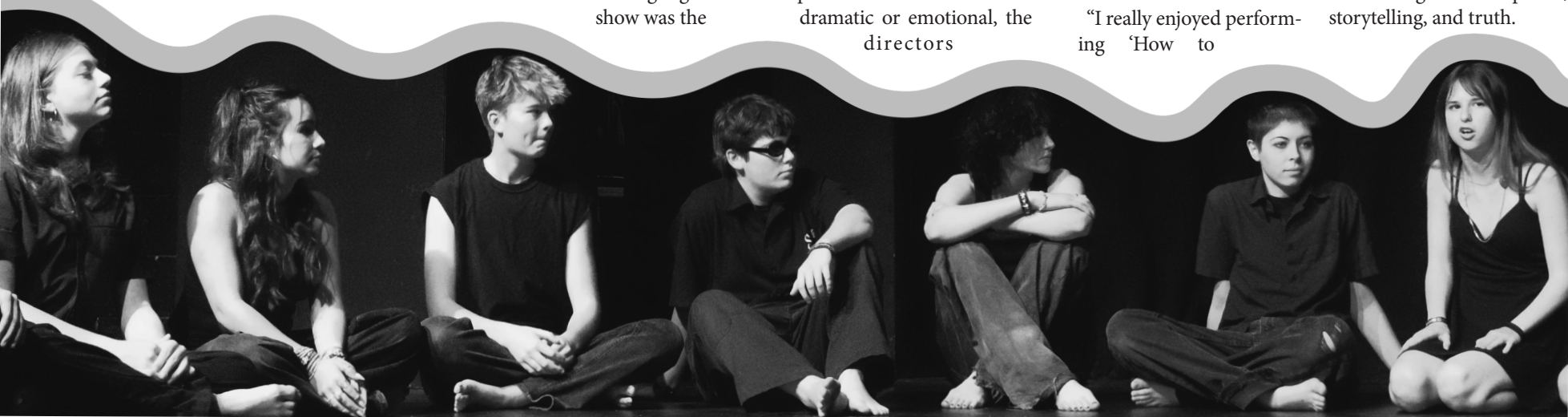
A particularly poignant piece is the anonymously written “How To Survive Drowning,” also performed by Kemnitz, which told the story of someone’s first year of high school and their mental health struggles. The longer monologue followed the character’s first year of high school, and the struggles with losing oneself, seeking support, and relationships with family and friends.

“I really enjoyed performing ‘How to

Survive Drowning,” Kemnitz said, “It’s a very truthful and vulnerable story that I can not only relate to, but I found pride in bringing (‘How to Survive Drowning’) to the audience. It’s a great story about struggle and recovery.”

The final piece was entitled “Fan Mail,” performed and written by BHS junior Charlotte Donaldson. The piece explored her true life experience of visiting the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and the significant impact that it had on her. Lighthearted and enjoyable, it was the perfect way to end the show. The piece highlighted the importance of live theatre and chasing your dreams.

This year’s “Our Monologues” was a stunning production exhibiting the beauty and the struggle of being a high school student and teenager. The group of talented individuals worked together to masterfully execute a night full of power, storytelling, and truth.



Our Monologues performers (left to right) Ben Schechter, Ava Capen, Ryan Jacobs, Charlie Whaley, Elliot Yavorsky, Theo Becerra, and June Ruyle sit on stage in the introduction.

USNEA MCEWEN



# Marvel “Wonder Man” series focuses on friendship

BY AKHILA NARAYAN  
staff writer

“A new breed of man — a living engine of destruction!” That is how Simon Williams, AKA Wonder Man was described when his character debuted in October, 1964. In the comics, Wonder Man was initially created to work as a double agent against the Avengers by Nazi scientist Baron Zemo. They gave Williams superhuman speed, strength, and reflexes, as well as the abilities to grow into a giant and to shoot ionic energy at his opponents. However, it did not take long for Williams to abandon his double agency and truly join the Avengers.

On Tuesday, Jan. 27, 2026, Wonder Man finally came to the big screen. The titular

protagonist of the miniseries is played by Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, an actor who previously participated in DC’s “Aquaman” movies as the character David Kane. The show is a “Marvel Spotlight” series. Under the “Spotlight” banner, Marvel can debut characters and test their reception, without binding them to any major plotlines. This can mean Spotlight features often get less attention and marketing. Nevertheless, “Wonder Man” is one of the best projects Marvel has released in quite some time.

Where Marvel storylines have, of late, been criticized as too complicated, “Wonder Man” is simple yet still manages to surprise. The story begins with a familiar premise: a struggling actor finally gets a shot at his dream role: Wonder Man. In

this universe, Wonder Man is not a real superhero but a movie character in an old classic. Simon himself has superpowers, but ironically has to conceal them while auditioning for the remake. He pursues the role alongside Trevor Slattery, who is auditioning for the role of Wonder Man’s best friend.

One of the most interesting things about Simon is that he does not follow the conventions for Marvel superheroes. For one, he has no apparent exciting origin story. Simon himself doesn’t know where he got his powers. He also doesn’t try to use his powers for good and instead suppresses them. His powers function in the plot simply as an obstacle to his career. In fact, the friendship between Trevor and Simon — in which Trevor gains



EDEN MIDDLESWART

real affection for Simon and Simon makes a true friend — is more central to the plot than any superhero arc.

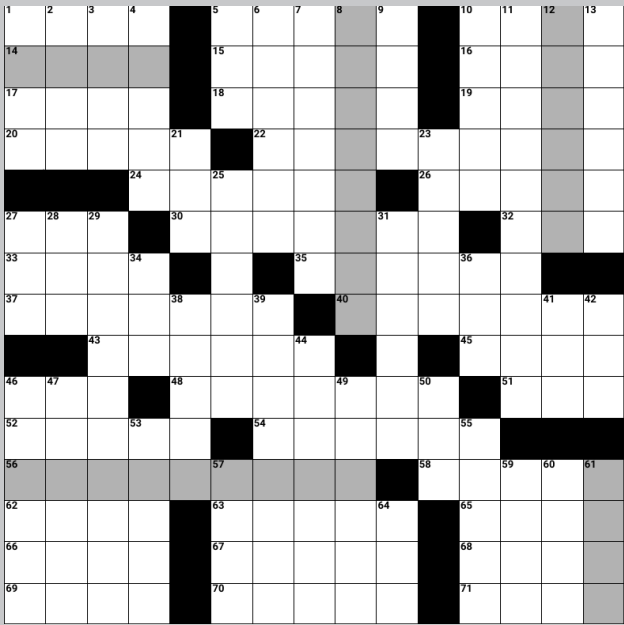
Had the creators conformed to a more typical format for a superhero story, they would have undermined the show’s elegant depiction of what it is to be truly different. Where many superhero films glamorize the life of a superpowered individual, “Wonder Man” depicts how hard it can be

to live a normal, fulfilling life when burdened with that sort of secret. Most superheroes find a passion for using their powers, but Simon’s passion is for film. If anything, the pain his powers cause him only further accentuates his pure and deep love for acting. In turn, this transforms the whole show into a love letter to the artist’s struggle, mission, and world.

The visuals of “Wonder Man” are beautiful. It cap-

tures the glitz of Hollywood along with the beauty of the lower-class suburbs of Los Angeles. The series even momentarily takes advantage of the cheesy practical effects used in old-time superhero movies through clips from the “original” “Wonder Man” movie. “Wonder Man” is an excellent series unlike any other superhero show, one that encapsulates the essence of an artist’s journey to achieve their purpose.

## THE CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1. Isle of Napoleon’s exile
- 5. Girl in Wonderland
- 10. Woman’s work basket
- 14. Bebop virtuoso
- 15. Athlete’s shoutout, often
- 16. Stomach liquid
- 17. Ho-hum
- 18. Selassie of Ethiopia
- 19. Come together
- 20. Genesis city
- 22. In hot water
- 24. Roman salad?
- 26. Sprinter with a fitting surname
- 27. “Miss Murder” band
- 30. Not much power
- 32. Flanders on “The Simpsons”
- 33. Join (with)
- 35. Was jealous of
- 37. Diagonal movers
- 40. Classy
- 43. First mode of a major scale
- 45. Fairy-tale creature
- 46. Spot to crash
- 51. Slay
- 52. “It’s of no \_\_\_\_ me”
- 54. 23-\_\_\_\_
- 56. “Duke’s Place” owner
- 58. Societal ranking
- 62. “\_\_\_\_ me up, Scotty!”
- 63. \_\_\_\_ ritardando
- 65. Turquoise
- 66. Late-night host
- 67. Blanc in “Knives Out”
- 68. The Bad Place, essentially
- 69. Uncover
- 70. Sacs of fluid
- 71. Pet nonprofit

DOWN

- 1. Waxes
- 2. Stitch’s bud
- 3. Tyler in “Fight Club”
- 4. When necessary
- 5. “I see”
- 6. Establish a professional relationship (with)
- 7. “Whoa!”
- 8. A “Love(r) Supreme,” maybe
- 8. Short part of EMT
- 10. “The Stranger” author
- 11. Wrapping for a sprained ankle
- 12. “Lady Day” of jazz
- 13. Number that gets added
- 21. Great Leap Forward leader
- 23. Innies’ opposite
- 25. Bass supporter
- 27. Org. led by Sophia and Tamar at BHS
- 28. “This might be helpful,” over text
- 29. Part of the road closest to a curve
- 31. Cable channel with vintage sitcoms
- 34. Chang in “Harry Potter”
- 36. Partner to id and superego
- 38. Layered vegetable
- 39. Like that of Orpheus and Eurydice
- 41. New Deal agcy.
- 42. Vietnamese holiday
- 44. Tesla et al.
- 46. Spanish town?
- 47. Not awake
- 49. “\_\_\_\_ Fun?” (Paramore hit)
- 50. U.S. rep. from NY’s 14th district
- 53. Pumbaa’s companion
- 55. Promises
- 57. GMCC (sorry y’all)
- 59. Leak through
- 60. Post-bath powder
- 61. First Lady of Song
- 64. Real ones

— Violet Kessler

## BLACK AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MIA BLATT

BY SORAYA JUNE BERENT  
staff writer

“Things Fall Apart” by Chinua Achebe

“Things Fall Apart” by Chinua Achebe tells the story of Okonkwo, a prosperous Nigerian man and his family, whose life is dominated by fear and anger. The novel, written in 1958, explains how his culture unravels and is permanently shifted due to European colonialism and gradual erasure of Nigerian practices and religions.

“Token Black Girl” by Danielle Prescod

“Token Black Girl” is a memoir of Prescod’s experiences as the only black girl in predominantly white communities, particularly as she pursues a career in the beauty and fashion industry, which has deep rooted patterns of racism and sexism. “Token Black Girl” examines themes of perfection and identity through the lens of a young girl living in a Eurocentric society.

“Americanah” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

“Americanah” tells the journey of a young Nigerian woman, Imefelu, who moves from military-ruled Nigeria to the United States in order to attend university. Obinze, her partner, isn’t able to join her due to the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001. This book has themes of homeland and belonging, centering around their experiences away from home and away from each other, one in the United States and the other in London.



# The Negro Major Leagues: A foundation of modern baseball

BY ALEX BOYLE  
staff writer

Black baseball leagues originated in the 1880s during a time of segregation where Black athletes faced brutal racism and were denied the right to play in Major League Baseball. The first professional all-black league — the National Colored Base Ball League — was founded in 1887. Although it had eight distinct teams, it failed after only two weeks due to low attendance. The first Negro National League was founded in 1920 by Rube Foster.

With their own league, Black athletes faced a variety of challenges. Berkeley High School history teacher Travis Walker explained that a major issue was access to services, and that the teams “were largely cut off from a lot of the same financing that would have financed the other major professional leagues. And as a result, would have all the downstream effects of being cut off from those same financial avenues,” Walker

said. Despite the hardship and struggle, Black baseball leagues persevered and evolved from 1920 to the late 1940s, with seven Negro leagues existing at various times. The most popular of the seven were The Negro National League I and II, the Negro American League, and the Eastern Colored League, featuring legendary teams and showcasing the top talent.

The Negro Leagues highlighted Black athletes’ skills in a time when they were being silenced and forced into the shadows. In respect to these leagues, Walker said, “They provided them (Black

a beacon of hope and built a rich community around the sport. “For the broader Black community, it gave an avenue of entertainment and community and gathering,” Walker said. The Negro Leagues ultimately paved the way for Jackie Robinson to break the color barrier on April 15, 1967 — playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

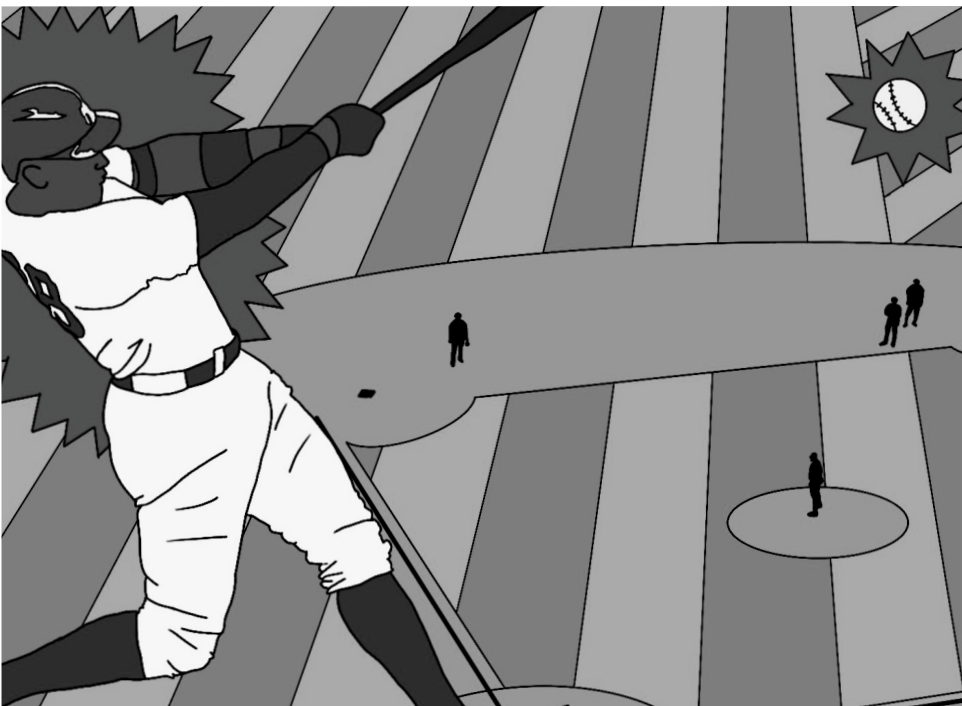
BHS senior Akanni Owodunni grew up watching the Oakland A’s, fell in love with baseball when he was two years old, and has played the game ever since. “I played other sports growing up, like (during) elementary school, middle school, but ultimately stuck to baseball,” Owodunni said.

This past summer, when in Alabama with his baseball team, Owodunni took a team trip to the Negro Southern League Museum (NSLM). He saw memorials of the players and learned about the history of the Negro Leagues, striking a deep interest inside of him. “As a Black athlete in a game that’s primarily white today... it’s

*“Now, especially with learning about these leagues and the history of it ... I’m proud to be playing (baseball) as a Black kid,”*

Akanni Owodunni  
BHS senior

athletes) with an opportunity to play a game, play sport that they loved, and to do so at a high level with other people who also wanted to compete.” While the leagues gave due recognition to the athletes, they also served as



SIENA LIBRIZZI

really just eye-opening that Black people were, like the foundation, and the game wouldn’t be where it’s at without people of color,” he said.

BHS senior Seddrick Henderson grew up playing baseball since he was young, and is committed to playing as a pitcher for UCLA, a Division 1 college for baseball. He played on the same team as Owodunni and also went to the NSLM. He is grateful for the Black Major Leagues and how they’ve allowed minority players to compete. “Thank you for allowing me

to play a game that I love,” is what Henderson would say if he got the chance to speak to a Negro League player. “They opened big doors for us minority players to play, (to) play the game professionally and at the collegiate level,” Henderson said.

When Owodunni was a younger athlete competing in a primarily white sport, he “kind of brushed it off or tried to fit in,” he said. Today, Owodunni is signed to play as a catcher for the University of San Diego — another Division 1 institution. “Now, especially with learn-

ing about these leagues and the history of it, I fully embrace that, and I’m proud to be playing as a Black kid,” he said. Owodunni commemorates the long journey of the Negro Leagues by honoring the players in his everyday play. “I feel like at the end of the day, those leagues are the foundation of how I’m playing ... I remember that I’m coming from those guys, and people that were overlooked, and they set a foundation and a path so that I can get recognition, and hopefully play in the MLB one day.”

# BHS wrestling team beats San Leandro to celebrate senior night

BY IDRA ELLIOTT  
staff writer

On Tuesday, Jan. 27, 2026, the Berkeley High School wrestling program hosted the San Leandro Pirates for the last dual meet of the season. This meet was also BHS’ senior night, marking an end to high school wrestling for BHS seniors.

Wrestling matches are won through scoring points from a variety of maneuvers — escaping a pin or taking another opponent down to the mat. On Tuesday, the first match ended with an unfortunate loss for BHS, but as the night progressed, BHS accumulated points through match wins, ultimately pulling through with a victory against San Leandro. This win was unexpected and well fought, considering a large portion of BHS’s team was out with injury.

Boys’ team captain and senior

Vincent Longmire was out for the meet against San Leandro because of a knee injury earlier in the season. Although he wasn’t wrestling, he still showed up to cheer on his teammates from the sidelines for the last time. After high school, Longmire has the opportunity to go to Eureka and wrestle in livestreamed matches here while still pursuing the career he wants.

He plans to stay in touch with BHS, whether that looks like helping out in the offseason, or showing up for tournaments. “You don’t really realize that it doesn’t last forever until it’s ending. I’m going to miss the whole team dynamic and spending time with all my teammates,” Longmire said.

After the meet, in honor

*“You don’t really realize that it doesn’t last forever until it’s ending.”*

Vincent Longmire  
BHS senior

of the BHS wrestling team’s graduating seniors, the team gifted each senior a poster collage featuring themselves, composed of pictures taken from various team competitions, matches and games, a team photo of the 2026 senior wrestlers, and a flower bouquet. This was followed by a few touching words for each senior player from Coach Benjamin Nathan and a prepared speech from the teammates who felt particularly proud and impacted by the seniors. Coach Nathan, who is also an AP Calculus and Advanced Math 2 teacher at BHS, said, “I talked to one of the other coaches and he said something that sticks with me a little more each time that I think about it. ‘As coaches we are the

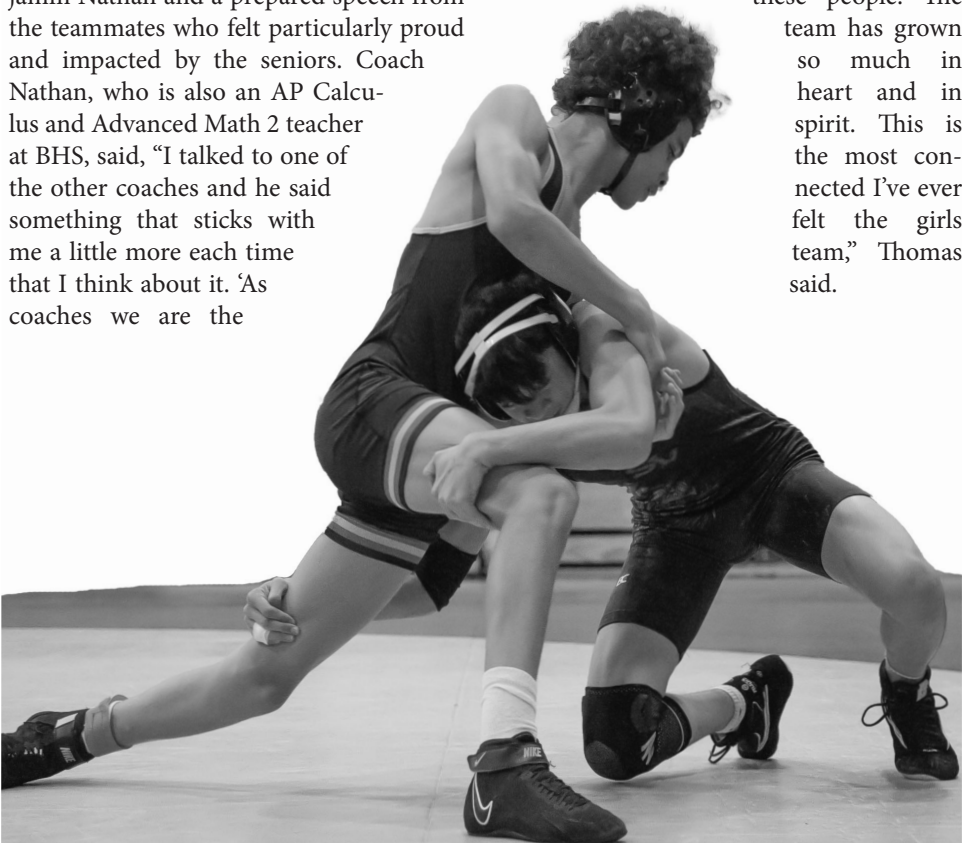
most necessary and least important part of the team.’ And it’s never been more evident to me than this year.” Coach Nathan added that the seniors this year have been amazing student athletes to coach and work with.

Girls wrestling team captain, senior Eloise Thomas, was also out with an injury for part of this season. Thomas was not able to make it to the majority of the last meet against San Leandro, only making it to wish her team good luck beforehand and celebrate the senior night win at the end. “This season was incredible. I am so lucky to have been able to wrestle with these people. The team has grown so much in heart and in spirit. This is the most connected I’ve ever felt the girls team,” Thomas said.



Yellow Jacket wrestler tackles opponent in match.

KIRAN VERCELLOTTI



Isaiah Fleischman matches up against San Leandro wrestler.

AUDREY CHEN



BY CEDAR GILMOUR &  
OSCAR  
BALASUBRAMANIAN  
staff writers

BLACK ATHLETE SPOTLIGHT

Quinton Hill



MAXIMUS LIBRIZZI

Introduced to baseball by his father, Berkeley High School junior Quinton Hill has been playing the sport for more than a decade. “He used to take me to the field and pitch to me all the time when I was little,” Hill said. What began as a shared interest with his dad quickly became a passion. The competitive nature and brotherhood of baseball are what he likes the most. “It’s not something you could just be naturally good at. It’s something you have to work hard for,” Hill said. Throughout his baseball career, Hill has dealt with mental challenges, such as coping with the pressure of feeling responsible for a loss. Hill manages these hard moments with mindfulness. “I meditate a lot,” Hill said, “My mom encouraged that upon me.” Looking ahead, Hill hopes to play baseball at the collegiate and professional level. “After that, I would love to give back to my community by sharing my knowledge,” he said, hoping to guide younger athletes along the path he is on.

Armana Aradom

Although BHS senior Armana Aradom did not start her athletic career running track, she eventually grew to love the sport. “I grew up doing gymnastics, and then I started playing volleyball a little bit in freshman year, but I dropped that really quickly after,” she said. Aradom got into track because of her friends and the very inviting community. “I think the coaches make an environment that’s really supportive,” Aradom explained. To prepare and focus herself, Aradom journals and meditates to gain calmness before a track meet. She also has to train very hard in the regular season and offseason to prepare. “We have practices five days a week. And we also do weight room training almost every day,” Aradom said. Being a senior, Aradom wants to finish off strong and enjoy her last moments with the team. Through track, she has also learned to keep going. “I’ve learned how to push forward when things get hard and to kind of keep going,” Aradom said.



GEORGIA PAULOS

Sarai Algere



MAREN MATTHEWS

Sarai Algere, a BHS junior, started cheerleading her freshman year. She was encouraged to try out for cheer by a group of friends. “Ever since, it’s been a big part of my life,” Algere said, “I was new to the Bay Area and didn’t really have a community, so when joining cheer and getting a big new family, I absolutely fell in love.” Starting out fairly inexperienced, Algere quickly improved and was able to step into a leadership role, and she is now a varsity captain. She credits her coaches as her biggest role models. “They saw potential in me that I never saw in myself and inspired me to reach higher,” she said. Similar to many athletes, Algere has faced challenges such as injury and balancing many responsibilities, but focusing on the positive aspects of her sport has been crucial to staying motivated. “The (BHS) cheer team’s dynamic is a fun, loving, family dynamic. We always stand 10 toes behind each other, and it’s amazing,” she said.

BORDERS BY AYLA CONWAY

Boys basketball takes on O’Dowd in closely matched game

BY MILES WISE  
staff writer

On Wednesday, Jan. 28, 2026, Berkeley High School and Bishop O’Dowd High School were all square heading into the fourth and final quarter, as a packed gym filled with passionate stu-

dent fans dressed head-to-toe in black clothing fueled the electric atmosphere for this highly anticipated and “blackout” rivalry battle. “Going into it we knew with no doubt it’s a really tough opponent. But we also know how good we are,” Henry Robinson, BHS shooting guard and junior,



LEO SMOCK

Henry Robinson takes a jump shot and scores against the Dragons.

dent fans dressed head-to-toe in black clothing fueled the electric atmosphere for this highly anticipated and “blackout” rivalry battle. “Going into it we knew with no doubt it’s a really tough opponent. But we also know how good we are,” Henry Robinson, BHS shooting guard and junior, said, “If we just play for each other, play within our system, then we would do what we had to do.” After climbing their way back from a seven-point deficit at half, Berkeley opened the scoring in the fourth with back-to-back three pointers from center Noah Miller and shooting guard and Donte Joseph, both BHS seniors, pushing the score to 41-37 in Berkeley’s favor. However, the momentum quickly shifted after multiple Berkeley turnovers and missed shots resulted in a ten point un-answered run for O’Dowd, stretching their lead beyond Berkeley’s reach. “I think we could have executed a lot better in the fourth quarter,” Miller said, “There were a lot of turnovers down the stretch that cost us. They just made more plays than us. But as a team we stayed together and didn’t dip our heads down if they went to run. We were like, ‘Let’s keep going, the game’s not over.’” Following tactical clock management and a lack of

shots from Berkeley, Bishop O’Dowd ultimately closed out the game with a 51-49 win, handing BHS a two point loss. Leading the scoring for Berkeley was Miller with 21 points followed by Joseph with 12 points. Both Miller and Joseph’s combined six clutch threes stood as prominent pieces that kept Berkeley in the game, but were not quite enough in the final minutes of the fourth. Two days following their loss to Bishop O’Dowd, Berkeley looked to bounce back at home against league undefeated Alameda High School on Friday, Jan. 30, 2026, earning a crucial 61-58 victory to bring their league record to 3-3. With the North Section Coast (NCS) playoffs quickly approaching, the Jackets have their sights set on two goals: winning the rest of their games left in the regular season and securing the highest possible seed for the postseason matches. “We gotta play for each other getting toward the end of the season. Let’s use this



Zachary Winslow lays up past a defender.

JAY TOMPKINS

loss and not think too much about it or let define us. We just gotta keep playing hard,” BHS senior and team captain Kavi Jivan said. “Our biggest thing is just trying to win out for seeding in the playoffs. We believe we can beat every team coming up and win the rest of our games.”