

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

May 28 - June 3, 2021

LET THE BOONDOGGLE-BUSTING BEGIN! – Part 2

Amanda Gorman, then 22, native of Los Angeles, the First National Youth Poet Laureate, delivers her poem at the Inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris at the U.S. Capitol on January 20, 2021:

THE HILL WE CLIMB

(Excerpt)

*... When day comes we step out of the shade,
aflame and unafraid,
the new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it,
if only we're brave enough to be it.*



WHICH OF THE TWO NATIONAL BLACK ANTHEMS MOST MOVES YOU?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

TYING the first anniversary of George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to local boondoggle-busting might seem a stretch. If, however, the metaphor "home is where the heart is" qualifies as "mindful homelessness" for those whose homes lack loving heartfulness, a valid definition transcends the Floyd tragedy of May 25, 2020.

By becoming a martyr to systemic racism, George Floyd attained "iconhood" for people who've suffered the painful isolation caused by being made to feel like social underdogs, as minorities are wont to be.

George Floyd was Black.

He was arrested for suspicion of trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill.

During Floyd's arrest, white police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck for nine minutes and 29 seconds. An autopsy revealed Floyd's death was a homicide. Chauvin's trial concluded April 20, 2021. He was convicted of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter. On March 12, 2021, Minneapolis agreed to pay \$27 million to settle a wrongful death lawsuit brought by Floyd's family.

Because of Floyd, the slogan "Black Lives Matter" became the New National Black Anthem. This time, it might stick longer, stronger, and deeper than did its predecessor - "Black is Beautiful" - which rose from the ashes of the Watts era of 1965-1968, and is still true today.

Anthem Number One: "Black is Beautiful"

The Watts Riots of August 1965, produced the slogan that struck terror in whites' hearts, hope in Blacks' hearts, and curiosity in mine: *"Black is Beautiful!"*

I slung my Yashica twin lens reflex around my neck, loaded my two-year old son in my VW, and ignored warnings we might not emerge from Watts. Investigating the truth of the new slogan was the best thing I could have done to attain my goal to be a writer. I had to do it! Why?

From the "Burn Baby Burn" to the "Learn Baby Learn" riots of August 1965, I bloomed by photographing teak-skinned kids chalking pink and purple flowers on sidewalks, curbs, and streets; ebony artists painting gold portraits; mahogany bards singing pale green praises to life. Black was, indeed, beautiful!

The gracious creative souls of Watts invited me to be the first white artist-in-residence at their new storefront Studio Watts Workshop, where new friends included Workshop founder James Woods, and Kwanzaa founder Ron Karenga. I was their second aspiring writer named Wanda. Dramatist Wanda Coleman went on to become a famous actress and poet.

Art magazines published my photo stories, giving me a portfolio of published works. The world's largest publisher of Black literature, Johnson Publications of Chicago, Illinois, engaged me as a stringer for two years before they learned I wasn't Black. And then, the Hearst Corporation hired me, and I became the snoopy-nosed journalist nicknamed "Peeper Parrott" who writes this weekly column at age 86.

Anthem Number Two: "Black Lives Matter"

Last summer, America's first National Youth Poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman, now 23, of my hometown Los Angeles, appeared at a Black Lives Matter rally in Seaside. She reminded me of the positive influence the Studio Watts Workshop had on youth of my generation. Amanda's self-confidence, dignity, and poise were later reflected in her appearance as the youngest poet to ever appear in an inaugural day ceremony on January 20, 2021, following the racist uprisings that culminated in the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6.

I realized that, here in Seaside, the Black Is Beautiful movement still thrives in the spirit of The Village Project, Inc., where not only Black lives matter, but the lives of all who need help count. I nominated 501(c)3 TVPI as a recipient of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula's monthly Shared Plate and am pleased to announce that during the month of June, 2021, TVPI will receive half of all donations received from the church (www.uucmp.org).

This is perfect timing, as June 1 marks the date The Village Project doors will reopen for in-person gatherings after more than a year of online workshops, classes, and therapy sessions.

The Village Project

The Village Project, located at 1069 Broadway, Suite 201, Seaside, CA 93955, helps sculpt the spirits of today's young people, much as The Studio Watts Workshop did when I was young, by giving them a sense of belonging, self-confidence, and conviction that will hopefully enable them to transcend the tragic sense of homelessness young people can suffer if or when home is where the human heart is not because of prejudice that includes racism.

One of its outstanding projects is the "Young Ladies of Empowerment Teen Leadership Program," a monthly workshop designed to create a positive, uplifting, and educational outlet for adolescents between 13 and 18 dealing with everyday challenges.

The goal is to facilitate empowerment, healing, wholeness, and increased opportunities for success. Participants will be helped to learn the importance of decision-making from a female perspective, including how social norms and expectations influence decision-making, both positively and negatively.

The facilitator, Mrs. Danielle A. Rice, holds a Master of Science degree in Human Services and a Master of Arts degree in Marriage and Family Therapy. She will delve into how education and success are intertwined, and ways in which self-esteem, relationships, and social media can impact our emotional, physical, and social behaviors. The co-founder and program director of "Brand New Teens" (empowerment for adolescent girls located in Seaside) is in the final stages of becoming a Licensed Clinical Therapist and Doctor of Clinical Psychology.

TVPI was founded by Mel and Regina Mason following the 2004 passage of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) by California voters. It placed a tax on millionaires in the state to fund special programs so historically under-served and unserved communities could access mental health services. For more information, call 831-392-1500, or contact www.villageprojectinc.org, village@villageproject.org.

Perhaps it seems bold for me to define two three-word slogans as anthems, but the definition of an anthem is: A song or hymn of praise or gladness. And isn't shouting out a form of singing? While deciding which of the two Black National Anthems is your favorite, may this excerpt from Amanda Gorman's inaugural poem inspire you to give generously:

. . . *We . . .*
the successors of a country and a time
where a skinny Black girl
descended from slaves
and raised by a single mother
can dream of becoming president
only to find herself reciting for one. . .

Incidentally, recent DNA testing revealed I have an unknown West African ancestor who entered my family bloodline between 1640 and 1790. I love all our American anthems equally!

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