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# February 2021 Newsletter

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The Today Show • Community Highlights • Featured Plant

Friday, February 26th, 2021

## Black History Month

Thoughts from our Media Director.

## Community Safety First

A word on local attacks

## Thanks for Applying to TYY

We're excited to review your applications.

## PJ Staff on *The Today Show*

Rasheed shares his story.

## Featured Plant

Try some delicious New Zealand Spinach.

## Good News!

Our first community highlight is here!

## Connect With Us

 **TODAY**



[Click to watch Rasheed's Today Show interview](#)



[Read about a new member of the PJ community in our "Good News" Section below!](#)

# Hi, PJ Community!

## *Black History Month and the Environmental Justice Movement*

It's often said that Black History is American history. I believe there are few statements that ring more true. Unfortunately, Black history is often relegated into niche territory: forced to the back of the proverbial bus, segregated from the general narrative, picked up and dropped off with irregularity—except during February. While it's beautiful to have an entire month reserved for learning about the history of Black people in this country, for as long as I can remember, Black History Month (BHM) has also been a source of frustration. All of a sudden, people who never talk or think about Black people are interested in repeating quotes from Black leaders and memorizing Black history facts without context, most of which will be forgotten by the time spring rolls around. The rich stories I grew up hearing from family members are rarely included in the observances of BHM. Triumph, achievement, community unity, successes, ingenuity and innovation are rarely the topics of discussion. And for far too many people, BHM starts and ends with the month of February.

If Black History generally sits in the back of the bus until February rolls around, then the chronicles of Black people in the environmental and food justice movements are often left at the bus stop. It's no wonder today that most people don't associate Black activism with environmentalism, even though it was [the actions of a Black community](#) that sparked the creation of the national environmental movement. I find this erasure devastating, as environmental justice opened the door for deeper exploration and understanding of all Black history for me. It has the power to do so for everyone, but not if we leave it in the past.

Environmental justice requires that we examine the relationship of people with land. Any study of Black people's connection with U.S. land will inevitably reveal a powerful history of organic resistance and resisters, incredible narratives of survival. Stories often left behind. The medicine people who treated my ancestors with native roots and herbs when no one certified as a doctor would. The unnamed cooks who slipped just enough of a powerful leaf into a meal, sedating the right person, aiding in escapes. The women in the 19th and 20th centuries who wrapped fish, cake and bread in brown paper for those headed on the journey North. The cook, [Georgia Gilmore](#), who organized a group brilliantly named The Club From Nowhere, secretly funding an alternative community transportation system which allowed the Montgomery Bus Boycott to become the longest citizen-organized economic sanction effort ever in the United States. Medicine, fuel, power, care and a subversive network that created financial agency—all sourced from nature. How incredible is that? Few may have labeled them activists in their days but I can't think of more powerful examples that illustrate what is possible with access to land and food than those that have used it to empower and free others.

The lens of environmental justice also gives insight into the unique experiences of Black people forcefully migrated to lands across the globe. The groundbreaking studies of [Robert](#)

[Bullard](#), who is known as the Father of Environmental Justice, explore the correlation between pollution, environmental disasters and government responses and race. His early work paved the way for community-based solutions that also hold decision makers responsible for the damage they cause the earth and the people. Without his work, we'd most likely approach the tragedies of Hurricanes Katrina and Maria and the Flint Water Crisis only as natural disasters, not failures of leadership. Studying the relationship between Black people and the Earth also allows for the examination of both past and present relationships to land, labor, yield and capital—work pioneered by people like [Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor](#): food griot, anthropologist, journalist and a Geechee-Gullah land-rights activist. Echoes of her influence can be seen in essential work happening across the nation today: the land right efforts of groups like [Soul Fire Farm](#), the evolutionary cooking of chefs and food historians [Mashama Bailey](#) and [Michael W. Twitty](#) and the cultural archival and linguistic preservation work of the [Geechee Experience](#). So much has been made possible by those whose names are often left behind. As this year's Black History Month comes to an end, it's my hope that you will be compelled to learn more about Black justice workers of the past and present. It's my hope you'll be inspired, as I have, by sharing these stories with you, to help carry those legacies into the future, long past February.

*Ashley Yates, Media Director*

## Community Safety & Justice

The recent attacks against Asian communities in San Francisco and Oakland have rocked the Bay Area and reverberated throughout the nation. We strongly condemn this violence and offer our solidarity and support to those impacted. We recognize this as a time to come together, and Oakland has: folks have held supportive rallies, formed community safety teams, and held safety trainings. Some have tried to use the fear this violence has created to sow division, to encourage militaristic solutions that create violence, and to argue that we cannot trust our neighbors.

We don't believe that.

We believe in our community leaders and in each other. We support the leadership of community organizations like [Asian American & Pacific Islander Women Lead](#), [Asians 4 Black Lives \(@asians4blkives\)](#), and [AYPAL](#). These organizations have called for properly funded community ambassador programs, first responders that are not police officers, and community task forces charged with reimagining public safety and moving supportive policy forward. We believe initiatives like these move us closer to safety: closer to a world where we don't seek to solve violence with more violence. That's the world we want to live in.

To learn more about how you can support these organizations, visit their websites and follow them on social media.

### **WHAT WE CAN DO**

- Continue to learn + amplify issues about all forms of violence against Asians and Asian Am. communities
- Check-in with the elders in your community; ask them what they need
- Hold each other accountable
- Work to end ableism
- Make demands that we are fully resourced communities so that **everyone** thrives
- Work to end white supremacy, anti-Blackness, xenophobia, poverty, police violence and the violence within and against our communities
- Support + volunteer with + amplify + learn from community-based groups who are organizing on the grounds around the needs of elders + community safety
- Continue to build cross-racial solidarity



#InSolidarity



*Images from Asian American & Pacific Islander Women Lead*

## **Thanks for Applying!**



Thank you so much to all who applied for our open TYY positions! We've received an overwhelming amount of interest in all of our positions, and we're looking forward to reviewing your applications and welcoming some new folks into the PJ family.

Please be patient with our hiring process, as we are moving slowly and intentionally in order to give each application the attention it deserves. If you have applied and haven't heard back from us yet, do know that we will be in touch when we are ready. Thank you for your interest and support in our work!

## **PJ Staff on *The Today Show***

"My interview with *The Today Show* was more than just an interview to me. This was not only a chance to share my story and the work I do with Planting Justice, it was also a chance to represent the thousands of people with experiences like mine: people entangled in the prison system whose entire lives could be

changed with only one word: opportunity.

I opened my world up to *The Today Show*. I showed them Rasheed as a child, shared my experiences within the prison system, which started when I was only 15, and spoke to them about how I overcame systemic barriers.

Getting the opportunity to change my story is rare, but it doesn't have to be. There are 2.3 million incarcerated people who just need the right opportunity. I hope that in sharing the opportunity that changed my life, others will be encouraged to be more generous with giving opportunities to folks like me."

*Rasheed Lockhart, Fundraising Team*

 **TODAY**



GOOD NEWS

Rasheed Stanley Lockhart pays forward mentorship and lessons learned while incarcerated

## New Zealand Spinach



While not a true spinach, [New Zealand spinach](#) produces leaves that are very similar in flavor. This variety has a high Vitamin C content and can be grown in a range of climates, producing leaves throughout the summer without bolting. In moderate climates, this sprawling, low-growing plant will easily reseed itself. A great food forest plant for year-round production.

[Click here to get New Zealand Spinach from our online store!](#)

## Good News!

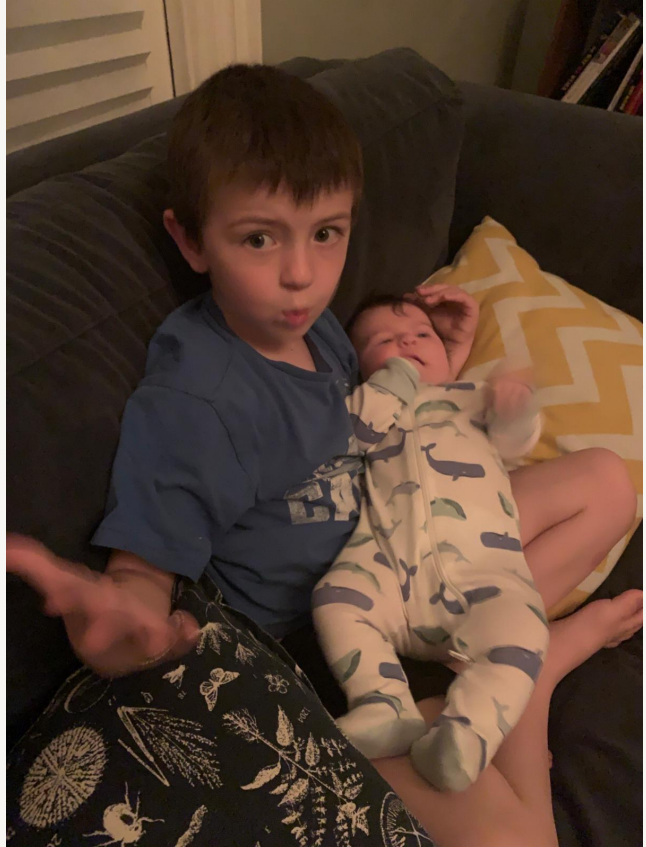
We have our first community highlight, woohoo!

This bit of good news comes Meagan:

*In late February of 2020, we found out we were pregnant. A few weeks later, everything changed.*

*It didn't occur to me that I might not get to share my baby girl with my friends and family — I assumed the pandemic would last a few months at most. Now, almost a year later, we are still separated; sheltering, learning, cooking, grieving, and planting in place.*

*We've been working to transform our yard (with PJ's help!) since August. We knocked down an old, rotting garage, broke up and recycled 1000 square feet of concrete, spread 20 cubic yards of wood chips, and put up a swing set.*



*River Mae was born in late November, and during his time off work, my husband built three beautiful raised garden beds. We planted seeds with our sons (ages 3 and 5) in an egg carton and have been eagerly watching them sprout. We now have dozens of seedlings and a chubby, cooing baby to admire.*

*In a few months, our kids' grandparents will be moving in downstairs from us, as eager as we are to lavish attention on the tiny humans and the tiny plants.*

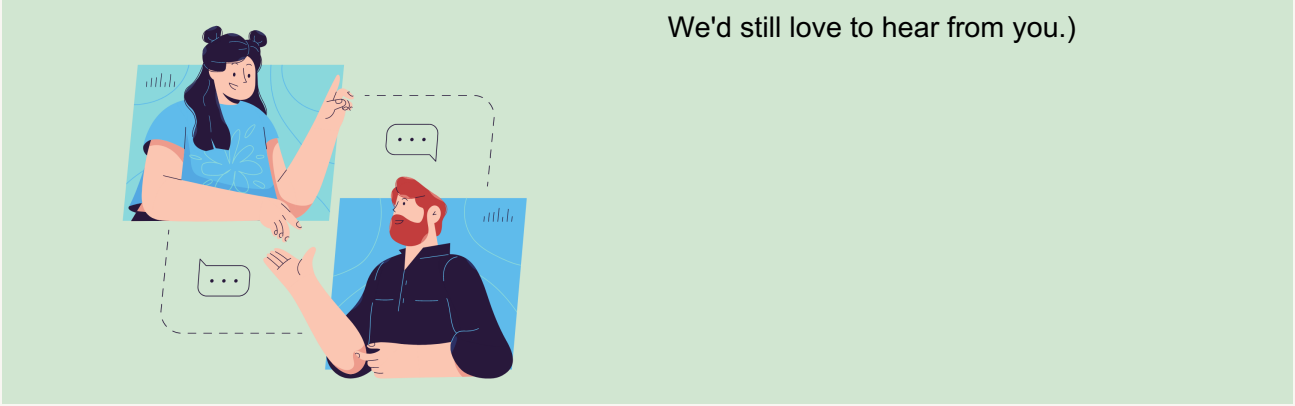
*In our yard, like in our country and in our hearts, there is still so much work to be done...but things are looking bright!*

Thanks so much for sharing your story, Meagan!

## Connect With Us

Getting married? Adopting a pet? Starting a garden? Let us know! Send your story and a photo to [press@plantingjustice.org](mailto:press@plantingjustice.org) with **"Good News"** in the subject line, and you may be featured in our next newsletter! (If you'd rather not be featured, that's fine too!

We'd still love to hear from you.)



Planting Justice | [plantingjustice.org](https://plantingjustice.org)

