



Youth Council for Positive Development & the Organization for Black Struggle

45th Commemorative Edition - 2025 Part II - YCPD Historical Overview

Evolving from the OBS Youth Group

The Youth Council for Positive Development started as a loose collection of youth, mainly the children of members of the Organization for Black Struggle. Initially it was referred to as the OBS Youth Group. It also included children of the neighborhood who were already drawn to the youth activities at the Rowan Community Center.

As the children grew older, they began to shape the organization, chart its direction, and select their own leadership. In short, they were internalizing their Youth Creed and the Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles of Kwanzaa). The YCPD focuses on character development, academic achievement and community service.

Over the past fortyfive years, thousands of young people have benefited from the programs offered by the Youth Council for Positive Development. The positive outcomes for children were especially evident among those who participated early in their lives, maintained consistent involvement, and engaged for longer periods. This participation enhanced their ability to become compassionate individuals and critical thinkers.

Ninetyfive percent of our Ma'at youth have successfully avoided the pitfalls of premature pregnancies, drug abuse, and incarceration. The Youth Council collaborates with parents, grandparents, and guardians to nurture and protect the wato-to (children). They recognize that it takes a community to counter the often detrimental cultural, social, and educational influences in their children's lives, including those from media and popular culture.

(continued to next paragraph)



YOUTH CREED

Youth Council for Positive Development

I will strive to be a role model in my community or wherever I go.

I will communicate & interact with other youth

By being respectful; by being responsible;

By promoting Black unity & pride; By practicing selfcontrol & selfdiscipline.

I will struggle to improve myself and life

By being open to new challenges & new ideas; by taking initiative;

By achieving academic excellence.

I will be obsessed with learning, promoting & preserving Black History and Culture.

I will be informed about community and world issues an events.

I will actively participate in making change in my community and the world.

I will fight for human rights, freedom, justice, equality, and peace.

(Created & Adopted by the YCPD in 1985)

We strive to daily practice the Nguzo Saba (the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa) and the Ma'at Principles.

The Youth Council Alumni affirm that the programs helped them find their voice, enriched their understanding of the world they would grow up in, and empower them to advocate for themselves and their communities. They acknowledged that the YCPD helped them develop their selfdiscipline and confidence, as well as their and critical thinking skills, which have enabled them to navigate life more effectively. Many admit that the experience had a lasting impact on their lives, and that they continue to practice the essence of the Nguzo Saba and the Youth Creed, which many can still recite from memory decades later.

Ma'at alumni are spread across the nation, pursuing a wide range of careers, including those in education, healthcare, music, aut industry, and more. Some have also become parents, and a few are even grandparents. The YCPD is preparing its third generation of children and youth for the 21st century. These young individuals will grow into adults who possess a better understanding of the world around them. According to their Youth Creed, they will "actively participate in making change" in their communities and the world. They are prepared to "fight for human rights, freedom, justice, equality, and peace" wherever they live and work.

We æ the Future!



Table of Contents

History.....	Front Page
Acknowledgments.....	P. 2
Living the Nguzo Saba.....	P. 3
Program Components.....	P. 4
Rites of Passage.....	P. 4
Ma'at Program	P. 5
Ma'at Program (cont).....	P. 5
Young Visionaries.....	P. 6
Movers and Shakes	P. 7
Ferguson Uprising.....	P. 7
Anniversary Celebrations.....	P. 8
Youth Cultural Theater.....	P. 12
Proud Projects.....	P. 13
Health & Healing.....	P.16
Student & Youth Organizing.....	P. 18
Fundraising.....	P. 19
From Mama Jamala.....	Back Page

Disclaimer on Photo Credits and Accuracy

To our movement photographers—Wiley Price II, Maurice Meredith, Erica Brooks, Bob Williams, Philip Dietch, Jamala Rogers, and others—we have lost the credit for many of the photos you generously allowed us to use. We understand the importance of your work, and we ask for your grace in this matter.

To our members and supporters, we acknowledge that we did not do a good job of dating photos or documents in the early days. The quality of our photographs has improved over time. If you feel that you should have been included in a particular project or campaign but were not, it may be because the resolution of many of the photos was too poor for us to use. If you notice any incorrect dates of events or names of people, please let us know as soon as possible. We can make corrections to the electronic versions that will be uploaded in the future to the websites of OBS and the Youth Council for Positive Development.



Some of the founding members of OBS were members of the Congress of African People who popularized Kwanzaa throughout the nation. Those members helped to organize the first Kwanzaa Celebration in St. Louis as a Black Value System. The Kwanzaa holiday is celebrated from December 26 to January 1.

Acknowledgments

The Youth Council for Positive Development is deeply grateful to everyone who has joined us on our 45-year journey. We honor the Mamas and Babas of the Village who were dedicated to our development. To the members of the OBS—both past and present, as well as those who have made their transition—we stand on their shoulders. In the spirit of Imani, we value their contributions to the freedom struggles.

We also extend our thanks to our supporters who have generously shared their time, ideas, energy, constructive criticism, and resources to continue our important work of youth development. To our steadfast partners and allies who have stood by us, and to our funders who believed in our vision and invested in the strengthening and expansion of our programs and campaigns, we are immensely grateful. To anyone who has supported our mission in any way, we acknowledge that our children are better human beings because of you. Asante sana (thank you very much).

Finally, we want to thank our Youth Council alumni who assisted with this newsletter by selecting and identifying photos and correcting the dates of our activities. Their vivid memories and touching reflections are also woven throughout the commentary.

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www.positiveyouthdev.com

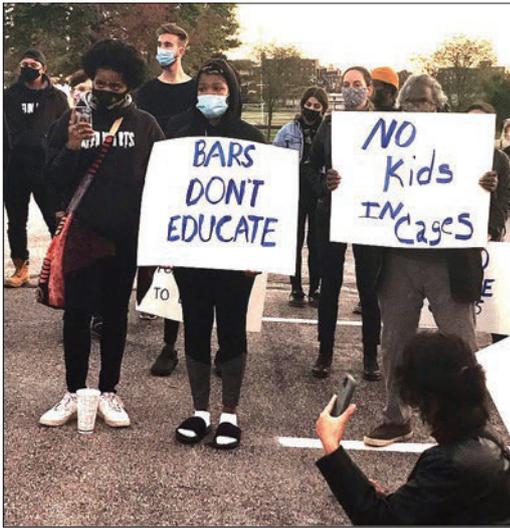


The Nguzo Saba is our Black Value System

Unity: to strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.



SelfDetermination: to determine ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves, instead of being determined and spoken for by others.



Ujimaa: to build and maintain our community together and make our community's problems our problems and to solve them together.



Ujamaa: to build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.



Nia: to make as our collective vocati n the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.



The Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles of Kwanzaa) is a cultural cornerstone that helps to inform social relationships and political conditions in our community. Although Africancentered in nature, they are universal principles.

The Mfuasi (the younger age group) must memorize the principles and be able to recite them. By the time they get to be Owusu, they should be able to explain what each principle means and how it can be practiced in their daily life.

During the Kwanzaa season (December 26—January 1), the children and youth are encouraged to talk about the principle assigned to each day with their family. At the Kwanzaa Karamu, once again the focus is on the principles as each candle is lit at the celebrations.

The Seven Principles are a measurable way to organize our communities around common values and a common vision for our collective future.

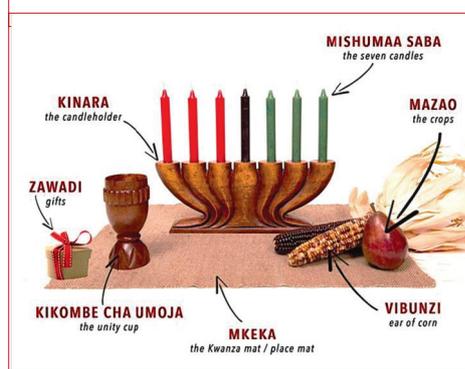
Kuumba: to do always as much as we can to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than when we inherited it.



Imani: to believe with all our hearts in our people and the righteousness and victory of our struggle .



The Seven Symbols of Kwanzaa



Youth Council Program Components



Rites of Passage

The Rites of Passage is an African ritual that symbolizes the passing from childhood to adulthood. Youth generally go through their Rites between 15 and 17 years of age. The process culminates in a ceremony that calls for commitment from the “Village” to be responsible for the youth’s safe passage into the adult world. The Youth Council component was so promising that former State Rep. Charles “Quincy” Troupe introduced it into state legislature for Missouri’s youth residential programs after our youth testified before a State House committee hearing. Above Mamas Carrie Byrd and Johari Kamili wrapped Africa geles on the young women as part of the Rites of Passage ceremony (1990).

Ma’at Saturday Program

The Saturday program is based upon the ancient African principles of Ma’at. These seven principles are Truth, Justice, Harmony, Order, Balance, Reciprocity and Righteousness. We integrate these principles with the Nguzo Saba to make up a value system to guide our lives with one another, with our community and with the environment.

The youth are involved in many activities including KiSwahili, Black History, Math & Science, along with Arts and Culture. Weekly field trips are a mainstay during the summer program. Youth learn to be leaders who are responsible for the protection and development of their families and their communities. (cont. next paragraph)



The program consists of two age groups: the Owusu and the Mfuasi. The Owusu means clearer of the way in Swahili. This group is clearer of the way in Swahili. This group is clearer of the way in Swahili. This group is made up of adolescents and teens, roughly 12-17 years old. They are role models and protectors of the younger group.

Mfuasi means follower in Swahili, and they follow the lead of the Owusu. The group consists of children from 4-11 years old.

Registration is \$1.00 per child (if families have it) and parents are encouraged to actively participate and support the Youth Council. This may mean chaperoning on field trips, assisting with lesson plans or helping to raise funds.



Ma'at Program (cont'd)



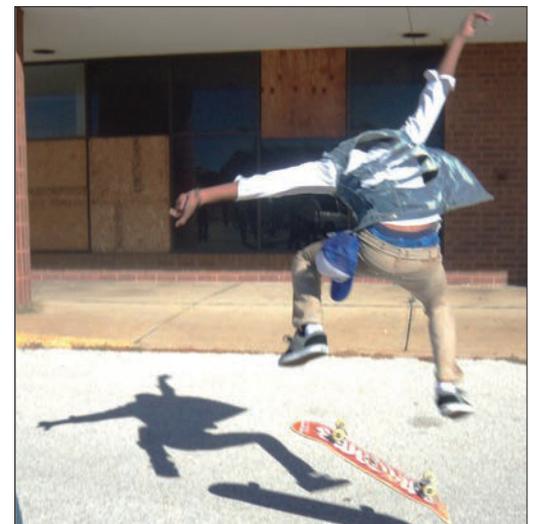
The Ma'at Youth Program was fortunate to have certified teachers among its volunteers. This meant that there were interdisciplinary lessons plans that were both instructive *and* fun. Above, an engineer teaches a basic physics lesson that calls for reading instructions and learning measurements to allow the children to walk on actual eggs without breaking them. (No eggs were harmed in this experiment!) Below, before a field trip to the St. Louis airport to see the "Black Americans in Flight" mural, the youth had to research the community struggle behind the mural. After researching an aviator, and writing up their contributions, they had to find the aviator on the mural.

Young people must know their civil and human rights so that they can fight to defend them— in the streets, in the legislative halls and in the corporate board rooms. The Ma'at program taught youth they will future decisionmakers; they need to better understand how their communities should be organizing for political and economic power. Whether its hosting a Know Your Rights workshop for young and their parents or by testifying at council meetings, the Youth Council is ensuring that young people are fully able to assert themselves as citizens, voters, and change agents to create the kind of safe, just and inclusive environments they deserve.

Upper photos. The YC participated in Kids Voting USA until the national program was phased out due to funding. Youth members joined protests with their parents who were organizing to make the community a place to thrive. Former St. Louis cop and racial justice advocate Redditt Hudson was part of a speakers bureau to train the community on their constitutional rights (especially when confronted by police).



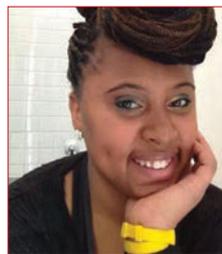
Staying active and healthy.



The Jamala Rogers Young Visionary Award recognizes and supports young adults who are working for racial justice, equality and human rights. The recipient helps to change public policies, impact a critical issue, create innovative models of service or strengthen an important community institution. The award is named after Jamala Rogers, one of the founding members of the Organization for Black Struggle. She has inspired thousands of young people over the years to use their passion, time and talents to transform their communities in meaningful ways.

The recipient's actions or project helped to change public policies, impacted a critical issue, created innovative models of service or strengthened an important community institution. Recipients have used the monetary award towards college costs, for community projects, for organizing training, to attend conferences, etc.

Jamala Rogers Young Visionary Award



Jessica Burns
(2008)



Simone Bernstein
(2010)



Jonathan Long
(2011)



Sharifa Taylor
(2012)



Rasheen Aldridge
(2013)



Jonathan Pulphus
(2014)



Khaila Jones
(2015)



Chelsea Mayo
(2017)



Antigone Chambers Reed
(2020)



My'Asia Meriwether
(2025)



Right The Youth Council alum were ecstatic that the First Young Visionary Award went to a YC member. They were especially supportive when Jessica Burns le² St. Louis as the first in her family to go to college where she majored in culinary arts. There were a lot expectations with all of those firsts.

Le² Chef Jessica continues to ensure her community is embracing healthy lifestyles. She came back to the Rowan Community Center to give a workshop on nutrition and creating healthy snacks (2021).



How are Visionaries giving back?

The Jamala Rogers Young Visionaries seem to be living up to the high standards of the award. For example, Simone's VolunTEEN Nation, which paired young people with volunteer opportunities, has served over one million youth since it started off as a website in 2008 and eventually became a youthled nonprofit. Rasheen is a twiceelected public servant. Jonathan is an activist author. Sharifa works for environmental justice in the Bay Area.



Previous Visionaries and Youth Council alum always show up to support the newly announced Visionaries, sometimes making the public presentation of the award.

“Building Character and Commitment to Community”

Meeting Community Movers and Shakers

The incredible organizing work of the Organization for Black Struggle has always connected with others on who share a vision of political power, economic justice and cultural dignity. Their roles are varied, but it is about uplifting the African American community to greater heights. The Ma'at Youth often had the opportunity to not just meet change agents, but interact with them in a quality manner. It is a living lesson as to how people use their skills, talents and positions to give back to the community. Commitment to our liberation struggle comes in many ways. Adults must model the lifestyle and behavior for youth.



A Ma'at Youth gets an autographed book from radical scholar, Angela Davis.



Darryl Burton shared his horrific experience as a wrongfully convicted person in MO; he was incarcerated for 24 years for a murder he did not commit.



Longtime supporter and architect Karl Grice shows Ma'at youth computer drawings of a building he designed. Because of the number of buildings Grice has designed in St. Louis, sometimes the youth went on field trips to get a closer look at his work.



Ma'at Youth were honored to have lunch with civil rights icon Percy Green at the Griot Museum of Black History. Museum founder, Lois Conley, gave them the grand tour which ended at Green's wax figure and exhibit.

Young people need to see how conscious adults respond to racial injustices. This is how their humanity gets validated and believe that Black Lives Matter. It is not just a chant, but a world view. Above the Smith Family participate in a "Diein" to protest the murder of young Michael Brown by a Ferguson cop.



Ma'at youth have always been taught that their lives matter. They understand the impact of racism and other forms of discrimination on them and their community. They have been involved in community activism such as marches and protests as part of the organized resistance of the African American community. It was natural that the Youth Council members and alum were/are actively involved in the Black Lives Matter movement.

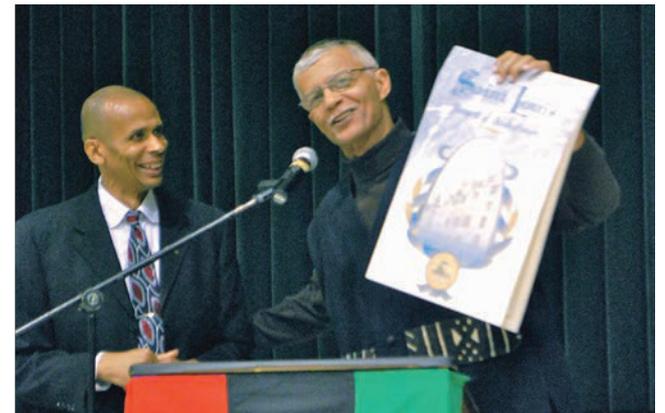


Above RightYCPD Alum Gerald Givens, Jr. led annual Dr. Martin Luther King March in San Antonio, TX (2015). Alum Jelani Brown served as protest marshal during Ferguson Uprising. Below Nile Imani was arrested for participating in a downtown peaceful protest.



The Anniversary Celebrations: Always looking back on the year

Year	Theme	Speaker(s)
1981	No the	Bennie Lenard
1982	"Year of the New Grassroots Movement"	Mary Ross & Kalimu Ende-sha
1983	"Black Consciousness in the 80's: The Struggle for Survival"	Jamala Rogers & Al Lumpkin
1984	"Reagonomics, Electi n '84 & Black Liberati n"	Amiri Baraka
1985	"Blacks, Politi s & Third World Solidarity"Freeman	Bosley Jr. & Dr. Tsegay Mogo
1986	"Africa - Caribbean US: One Love, One Heart, One Struggle"	Themba Vilakazi
1987	"Our Future is One - Youth on the Rise!"	Elizabeth Sibeko
1988	"Black Liberatio : Banner of Invincibility"	Rose Sanders
1989	"In the Tradi on: Malcolm, Martin & Mandela"	Lore
1990	"A Decade of Struggle: Forward Stil !"	Conrad Worrill & Sadie Sanders
1991	"The African Traditio : A Liberating Force Towards Empowerment"	Joy Lovelace
1992	"The Malcolm X Legacy & Black Liberati n"	a Ross (Jamala Rogers) Chokwe Lumumba
1993	"Building A New World Or-der"	Molefe Tsele
1994	"The New South Africa: Where Do You Stand?"	Eve Thompson
1995	"Black Empowerment: The Future Is Now"	Mayor Freeman Bosley Jr.
1996		Shafeah M. Bala
1997	"From Black Consciousness to Reality": Rebuilding the Road to Free-dom.....	State Rep. Lloyd Daniels
1998	"Beyond the Marches: Black Liberati n & Human Rights"	Jaribu Hill
1999	"Renewing the Black Freedom Agen-da"	Ajamu Dillahunt
2000	"Black Liberati n & Human Rights: A Vision for The New Millennium"	Lore
2001	"Educatio Not Incarceratio : Black Youth, Reclaim your Legacy!"	
2002	"Black Liberatio : The Struggle for Reparati ns, Justi e and Peace"	Adjoa Aiyetoro
2003	"Building A Black Fightback to the Bush War Ma-chine"	Bill Fletcher, Jr.
2004	"Black Liberatio , Selfdeterminati n, and the Fight Against Bush"	Ruki-ya Dillahunt
2005	"Torchbearer for Black Struggle: S II Building a Legacy for Liberatio"	Thandabantu Iverson
2006	"Katrina, from Outrage to Ac on: Democracy Under Wa-ter"	Sarah White
2007	"Prisoners of War, at Home and Abro ad"	Ron Sco
2008	"Homeland Insecurity: A Barrier to Human Rights and Peace"	So



Then Ald. Terry Kennedy presented a proclamati n to keynote speaker, Chokwe Lumumba (2011). Chokwe was then Councilman in Jackson, MS but went on to become the mayor of Jackson. He was also the AC speaker in 1992, and is the only twoti e anniversary speaker to date.

Anniversary Celebrations: The Planning Process

From the beginning, the youth have been an important part of the anniversary program. The skits performed by the Youth Cultural Theater focused on relevant themes and brought them to life in simple and sometimes humorous ways. These skits became a hit and soon became an integral part of the celebrations. The Ma'at program includes lesson plans designed to help youth better understand the themes so they can have input into the scripts and their respective characters.

When the Organization for Black Struggle held its first anniversary celebration in 1981 at the former Page Park YMCA, very few local community groups were hosting such dinner programs. This event is one of two major fundraisers for the organization, the other being the summer phoneathon. The anniversary celebration has since become a highly anticipated event for the racial justice movement in the St. Louis region.

The planning for the anniversary celebrations is taken seriously. Since the anniversary celebration takes place at the beginning of the year, it helps to set the political tone and direction for the movement. Significant discussions and reflections occur both within and outside (cont. p. 9)



9 Keynote speaker Valerie Ervin brought electoral strategies for a Black workers' agenda (2018). Cultural worker and organizer, Alice Lovelace, helped us celebrate the 30th anniversary as the keynote and cultural presenter (2010). Emcee Bernie Hayes posed with speaker, Shafeah M'Balía.



(cont. from p. 8)

the organizations to ensure that the theme is timely and relevant, and rooted in a political analysis of the current conditions.

Once the theme has been determined, the search for a speaker begins. It is essential that the speaker is connected to the struggle associated with the theme, demonstrating how various local issues relate to a broader national strategy. When examining the speakers and themes from previous years, one can see the recurring threads that connect workers to the geographic, social, economic, political, and international struggles.

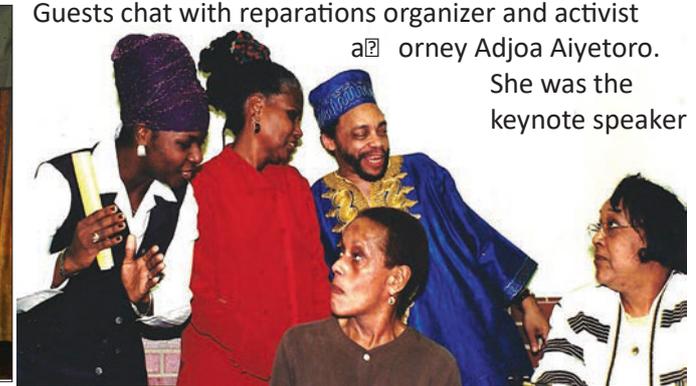
The Infrared Rockers reggae band has been a part of the entertainment lineup for years. Culture is a special part of the celebrations and includes local and regional talent. Several of the speakers were also cultural workers and presented spoken word, like Amiri Baraka, Jaribu Hill, Alice Lovelace, and Michael Simanga.

The programs are consistently held at accessible venues that represent workingclass interests, such as community centers or union halls. The event attracts forwardthinking community groups, organizers, students, elected officials, appointed officials, faith leaders, and union activists. Supporters of OBS and YCPD look forward to the anniversary celebrations, eager to hear the messages from keynote speakers and network with other movement allies.

Richard Dockett and Al Lumpkins, founding OBS members and General Motors auto workers, welcomed civil rights attorney, Rose Faya Sanders, as the keynote (1988).



Guests chat with reparations organizer and activist attorney Rose Faya Sanders. She was the keynote speaker

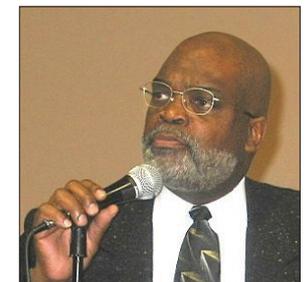
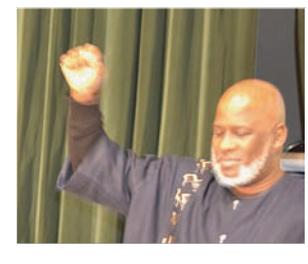


During the 35th Anniversary Celebration, a special ceremony was conducted to transfer the leadership of OBS from Mama Jamala to Montague Simmons. Ma'at youth Dana Warren held the Black Liberation flag, which Brother Simmons pledged his commitment upon. Judge Irene J. Smith presided over the ceremony, and the attendees bore witness to the intergenerational ritual. The ritual reflected the powerful intergenerational dynamics of the movement.

Below. AC speakers from top, left to right: Amiri Baraka; Maureen Taylor; Robbie Clark; Akinyele Umoja; Themba Vilakazi; Soledad Yah Elijah, Sarah White, Rukiya Dillahunt; and Thandabantu Iversson.



Before he was Newark's mayor, Ras Baraka spent a weekend in St. Louis. He was the keynote speaker, he visited several city high schools with positive messages, and he hung out with students from the OBS Chapter @ Forest Park Community College.



Scenes from the Anniversary Celebrations

Year of event is in circle at bottom of photo.



Scenes from Anniversary Celebrations

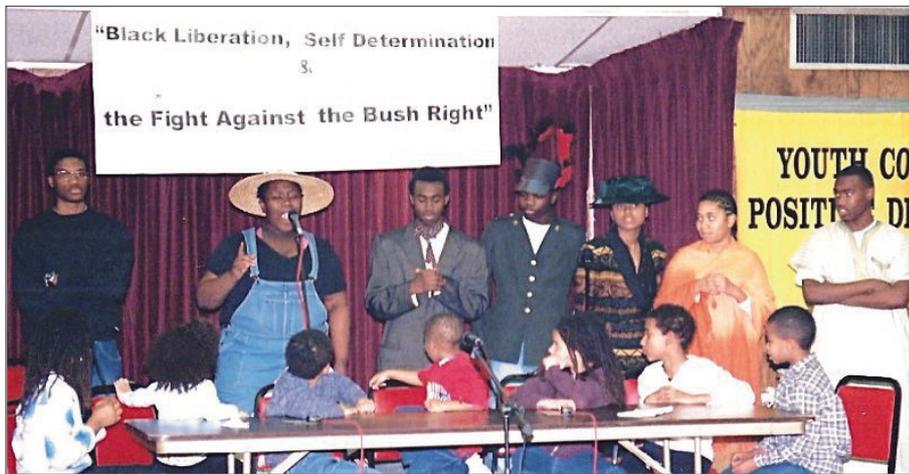
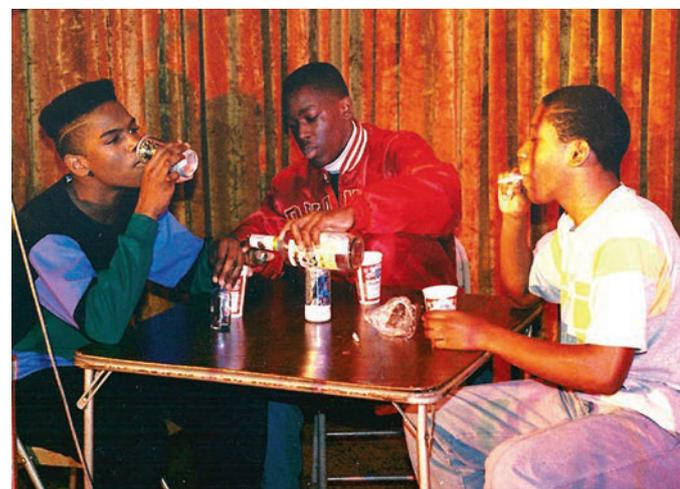
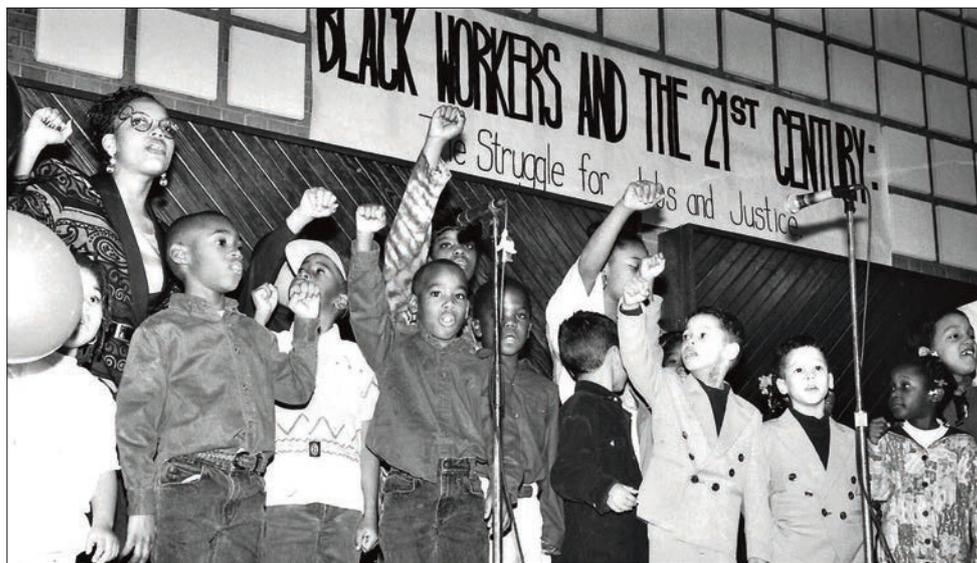
Year of event is in circle at bottom of photo.



Looking for Part I of the 45th Commemorative Edition?

Part I of the 45th Anniversary Commemorative Edition focuses on the Organization for Black Struggle, and its incredible history. It is available in print copy at the Rowan Community Center, and at area libraries and bookstores. You can also view the electronic version at obs-stl.org/45th-commemorative-edition-newsletter/.

Youth Cultural Theater Performances at the Anniversary Celebrations 12



A Few Favorite Projects of the Youth Council

13

Ma'at Youth often participated in Arbor Day, so it was no stretch for them to participate in the citywide Vontober tree planting event. The postFerguson Uprising event was to honor those killed by police. After hearing Carey Ball Jr.'s story, the Ma'at selected him to honor with their tree. Carey died after being shot 25 times by St. Louis police. At the time of his death, Carey was an honor student at St. Louis Community College @ Forest Park. Carey's mother, Toni Taylor (photo) posed in front of the tree and thanked the crew for their efforts.



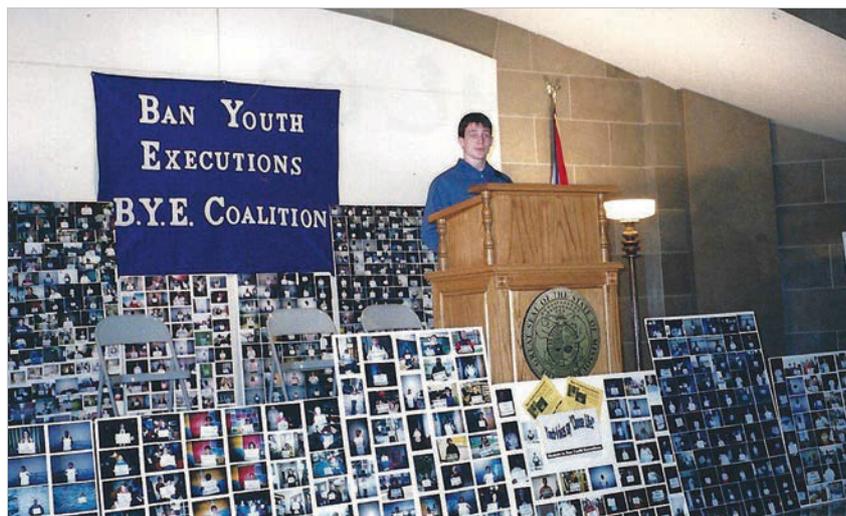
Resource Accountability Project

Track the Ferguson dollars targeted for St. Louis Youth



The Resource Accountability Project (RAP) was an initiative of Advocates for Youth. The Ma'at Youth, Good Journey and other area youth participated in the research project. There were news accounts of lots of money coming to help Ferguson youth after the murder of Mike Brown, Jr. by Ferguson police Darren Wilson. RAP organized youth to verify those claims by following the money that was supposedly designated for young people in the region after the 2014 uprising. In 2015, the youth presented their findings at a town hall and reported that there was a lack of accountability as to where funds were going and how they were being utilized. The youth also concluded that much of the money was not new funding, but merely renamed as Ferguson for public relations purposes.

RAP 

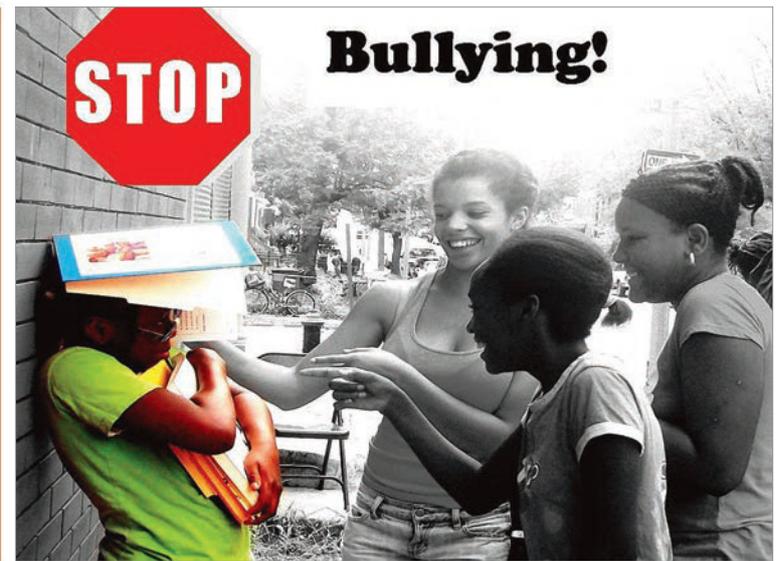
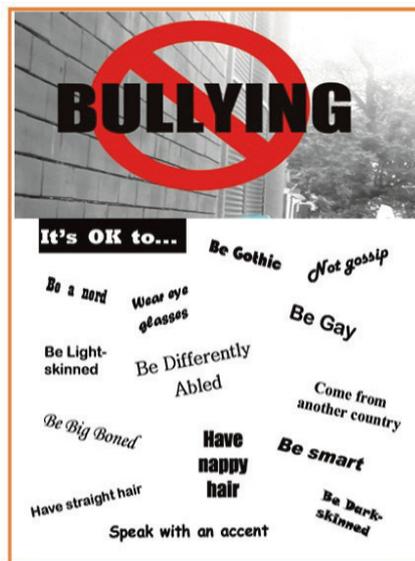


Many young people across the state of Missouri were engaged in the BYE campaign. Their assignment was to take a photo (like the photo to the right). Thousands of photos were put on poster boards and lined up at a rally at the Capitol Rotunda. State legislators were impressed.



The Youth Council has a long and proud history of opposition to the Death Penalty starting with the case of a Paula Cooper in 1986. Cooper became the youngest person on Death Row in the nation. The YCPD learned about the race and class bias of the death penalty. It joined an international movement seeking leniency for 15 yearold Cooper. Her sentence was commuted to 60 years in 1988 and she was finally released from prison in 2013. Sadly, Paula committed suicide two years after her release. The YCPD also added its voice to the Missouri case of teenager Chris Simmons. The group was part of the amicus brief to the landmark case. To educate the public, legislators and the courts, the Youth Council partnered with Amnesty International and other youth organizations for the Ban Youth Executions campaign. In 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Roper v. Simmons was unconstitutional, that juveniles could not be sentenced to death if they were under 16 years of age at the time of the crime. This validated years of claims by death penalty opponents that doing so was in violation of the 8th Amendment prohibiting cruel and unusual punishment. It was a historic victory.

Like most projects taken up by the Ma'at Youth, it starts with a discussion about the issue and what can be done to change it for the better. While none of the Ma'at Youth were being bullied, they certainly saw their peers being bullied. It was a stressful situation for all, especially if there was no intervention from the school administration. The youth created minipublic service announcements that could be broadly distributed. They set up and photographed several scenarios, then selected a couple for printing. The posters and hand cards became so popular that the Ma'at Youth were invited to youth events to talk about the campaign. It is disappointing to know that since 2011, bullying has intensified, with social media as a major contributor. It has resulted in more isolation, and even suicides, for youth. It now operates at the highest levels of our society, including the government.



COVID19 was the first U.S. pandemic in modern history. Initially, there was no information or misinformation. As a result, vulnerable communities were put at risk. Children and youth became statistics as schools became superspreaders of the virus. Schools experienced closings because of COVID19 breakouts. The Youth Council believed that young people could play an important role in the education of our families and communities. It sponsored a contest to create public service messages for the general public on the importance of accurate information and how to protect yourself. Contestants submitted posters and video messages. The winners were Jeremiah Hampton, Devon Williams, and Tia Mosley, whose poster won the 1114 yearold division.

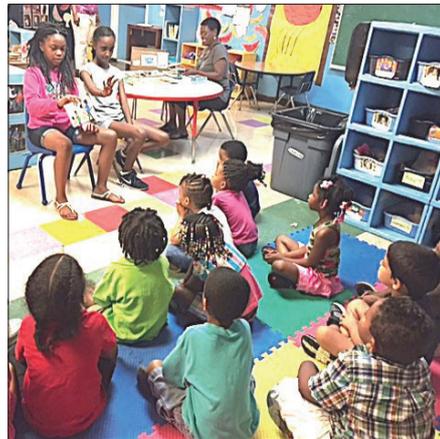


The Ma'at 's Owusu group decided to do more with the walls of this room beyond the red, black and green. Under the creative supervision of Ma'at alum Jelani Brown, the two walls were transformed into a tribute to three iconic figures of the Black Liberation Movement. The mural will serve a history lesson for all those who enter the room.



The mural graces the room used by the Ma'at's Mfuasi group and which sometimes doubles as the childcare space when there are events going on at the Rowan Community Center. The project is an expression of Kuumba and Imani, and a lesson in kazi (work) with a purpose.

The Ma'at Saturday Program has emphasized the importance of literacy. Adults read to kids and kids read to other kids. Good readers become good writers. The Youth Council has initiated and participated in many essay contests. It implemented the Love a Book project with the major goal of encouraging a love for reading. The group went to daycare centers, homeless shelters, and youth programs to read to captive audiences. Kids were able to select a brand new book of their choice to take home. The Youth Council also donated books to other community programs, as well as to area barber and beauty shops.



15



The Love a Book project also inspired Ma'at Youth to improve their own reading skills and boosted their confidence as they delivered a story. The reward was seeing the joy of the faces of their young listeners when they picked a book of their choice. The hope was that it would be the beginning of their personal library and a lifelong love affair with reading and learning.



In 1996, St. Louis was selected by Human Rights USA as one of four cities in the country to be a part of a special human rights education project. It partnered schools with a community group (OBS & the YCPD). The project was to raise community awareness and bring about coordinated action using the human rights framework with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) at the center. The project was also to plan for the 50th anniversary of the UDHR in 1998, and to "Bring Human Rights Home," home to St. Louis. It also issued a report card on the progress of human rights in the U.S.



The 2year project evolved into the St. Louis Coalition for Human Rights. For years, the December 10 program rallied the community around a theme that focused the student essay contests and panels. There was also the recognition of Unsung Human Rights persons, nominated anonymously by their peers. The panel in the left photo discussed voting as a human right. Panelists were Janis Mensah, DeMarco Davidson, and Rika Tyler. The Coalition ceased programming in 2021. The Facebook page is still up for viewing of past activities.



The Phoenix Project was a collaboration among the Youth Council, Washington University, the Alumni Broadcasting Association (ABA), and the St. Louis Agency for Employment (SLATE), funded by The Divided City. Its goals were to train students in recording and interviewing techniques while showcasing the oral histories of three African American elders from the Rowan Community Center area, historically marked by poverty and disinvestment. The project aimed to capture their inspiring stories and foster intergenerational and interracial dialogue to enhance understanding of our shared humanity. The phoenix symbolizes the resilience of these matriarchs and the ward's aspirations to soar to greater heights.

The elders selected for interviews were Bernice Jones, Cheryl Robinson Moore and Lovie Haynes (featured in top left photo). It was fortunate that Miss Lovey's story was captured as she made her transition a few months after the interview. The interviews can be seen on the Youth Council's YouTube channel.

Bob Hansman, an associate professor in architecture at Washington University, recruited several of his students to build the display units for the project and compile the interview questions. ABA served as the production team for the videotaping. The stipends for all of the participating students from the St. Louis Public Schools were paid by SLATE.





Violence in the U.S. is a public health issue. The view of OBS and the Youth Council concept was popularized by health care professionals and community advocates. The project was named Haki which means justice in Swahili. When the Black community and other communities placed in risk get justice, it will address the roots causes of violence and compromised health.

When COVID19 hit St. Louis in 2020, OBS was quick to take leadership based on the lessons it had learned from another virus that hit our communities in the mid1980s—the AIDS epidemic. OBS knew that being proactive with information was critical. It also knew that the systemic racial disparities in health made Black communities more vulnerable. It advocated the difficult act of sheltering in place, being tested, and to make an informed decision about taking the vaccine when it became available. The confident and timely community action got the attention of companies and funders. OBS received shipments of masks and sanitizer to distribute. New funds allowed it to take their COVID message deep and wide in neighborhoods most at risk.

Community Health and Healing

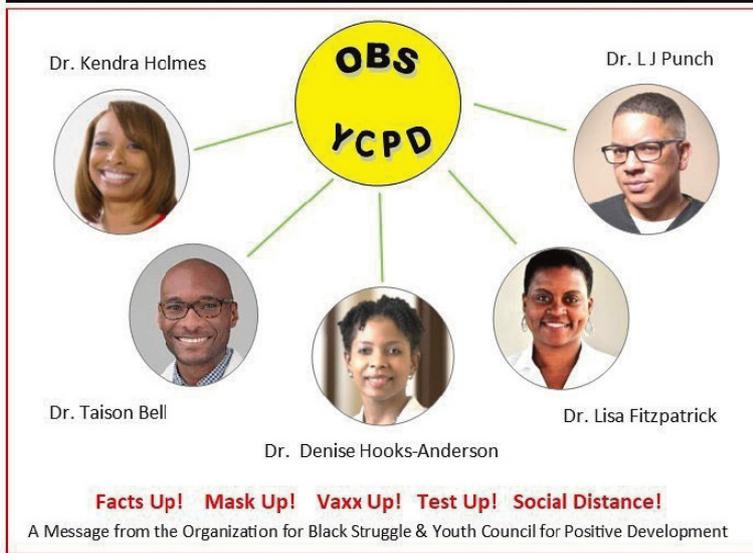
OBS and the YCPD believe that health care is a human right. They have always fought for that right, because it is truly about life and death. They actively participated in ballot initiatives like expanding Medicaid. The expansion made health insurance available to 275,000 more Missourians by eliminating the coverage gap between Medicaid and marketplace insurance. They have fought for the extension of the Affordable Care Act, earned paid sick leave and other policies that support working families in a system that puts profits over people.



Left photo above. OBS and Affinity Healthcare partnered to hold a press conference early in the pandemic in Ward 6, a ward which experienced high rates of infection. Dr. Kendra Holmes demonstrated the ease of taking a COVID test on Jamala Rogers to minimize the fears in the Black community.

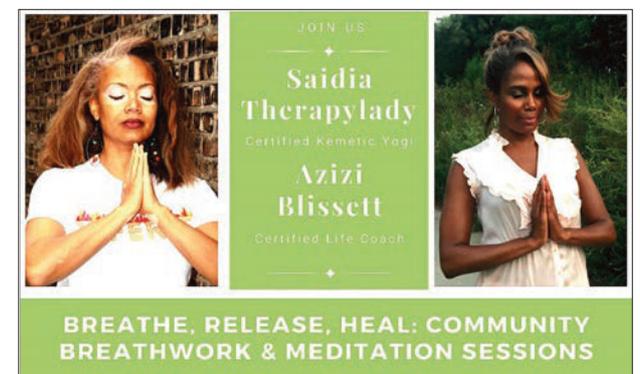
Right photo above. Attention was quickly and appropriately given to the safety of essential workers. These are workers who had little choice but to go to work based upon their job or their financial situations. Because OBS and YC members and their families are part of the working class, they were often featured in the public awareness materials distributed throughout the communities. This piece of literature highlighted one of its nurse members on the frontline of healthcare services.

Who's Your Trusted Messengers for COVID-19? MEET OUR BLACK BRAIN TRUST!



COVID19 encouraged the utmost creativity because it called for taking care of the mental, physical, spiritual and social needs of the community in the confines of fears and frustrations. OBS sponsored virtual concerts while people were sheltered in place. We launched a virtual breathwork and meditation series (see below) along with motivational messages on Wellness Wednesdays.

During the height of the pandemic, it was important to maintain a sense of community in such an unprecedented period of isolation. OBS spearheaded a block party in Wellston, MO with other community partners to bring food, fun and resources. Partners included the Black Repertory Theater. COVID testing and vaccinations were administered in a safe and caring environment.



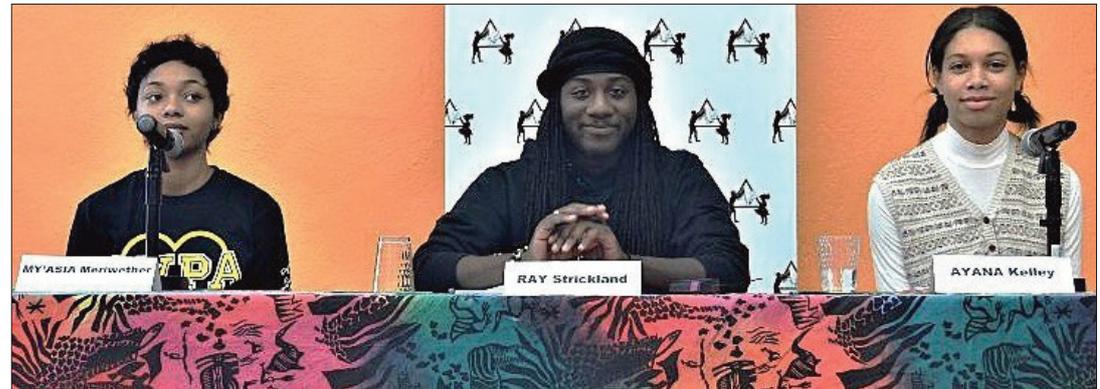
Community Health and Healing

In 2022, St. Louis was hit with its first school shooting. A former troubled student of Central Visual and Performing Arts school gained access to the building and opened fire, killing a beloved teacher and a vibrant student. We responded swiftly to the horrific scene to offer support. We have had graduates of CVAP, but more importantly, one of the Ma'at alum, Dr. Kacy Seals Shahid, was the current principal. The district did not handle the situation, and student voices needed to be heard. The Youth Council convened two of the student leaders who survived the attack and one of the Ma'at student leaders for a panel to discuss their fears, frustrations and needs. The video was distributed through the Youth Council's YouTube Channel.

We continued to the healing work with the school and community up to the first year anniversary. Community partners planned a day of fun activities and mental health resources. We partners with the Black Healers Collective to host a Healing House for area educators and school personnel who experience undue stresses associated with the school environment.



On May 16, an E3 tornado struck St. Louis, leaving a path of unbelievable devastation in its wake. OBS/YCPD joined forces with Dr. Punch and the 314Oasis team to provide support for tornado victims. We rallied the community to demand disaster relief from the federal government and targeted attention for the local government. We donated tents, tarps, sleeping bags, meals and other necessities for families impacted by the disaster. The Community Justice Coalition hosted a tornado update at St. Paul AME Church to get information and resources to struggling survivors.



Survivors My'Asia Meriwether and Ray Strickland were joined by Ma'at member, Ayana Kelley to express their concerns for future preparation and support for students should an active shooter situation arise.

The J5 were dispatched to CVAP on the day of remembrance in 2023, recognizing the first anniversary of the tragedy. Jamonny, Jayla, John and Janis were OBS/YCPD volunteers. (not shown was Mama Jamala).



We love Healing Houses because they are a way to show our care and compassion for our beleaguered community who has endured intergenerational forms of trauma. We count on the Black Healers Collective & 314Oasis to bring their tools, equipment and experience to help us heal together. Breathwork, acupuncture and the gravity chairs are essential to reducing stress.



Youth and Students: Learning, Researching and Organizing for Systems Change

Over the years, OBS and the Youth Council have received numerous requests from youth people across the country. Developing youth is a priority, so those requests are accommodated whenever possible. Most of them are interviews about organizing in general or about a particular issue. Student inquiries almost doubled after the murder of Mike Brown by Ferguson cop, Darren Wilson.

There have also been speaking invitations for campus programs or to classes whose syllabus requires authentic voices to make the subject come alive. OBS' expertise has been summoned when racial tensions erupt and students need community backup.

The mutual interaction between OBS/YCPD and students have been invaluable. The exchanges strengthen the passage of intergenerational knowledge. It brings the talents and fresh insights of youth people into radical synergy with institutional wisdom and summed up experiences.

OBS and the Youth Council have a deep commitment to public education and academic excellence. OBS has a long history of active involvement with candidate selection and elections of school board members. Both have fought against racist policies that disproportionately punish Black students, particularly in the form of discriminate school closings, and the removal of school police in favor of social workers and counselors. OBS is credited with the defeat of the white supremacist school board slate in 1991.

Opposition arose against the state takeover of the district when democratically elected board members were replaced with state-appointed ones to address the district's challenges. There were several battlefronts during this time, such as attacks on the unions, the outsourcing of services, and school closings. Students rose up to dominate one of those fronts. (continued on next page)

"...I will actively participate in making change in my community and the world." From the YCPD's Youth Creed



Left photo. Kalamazoo College selected St. Louis as part of a placebased learning project. Over a five year period, their delegation visited our city several times as part of their research. The program culminated in the 2025 conference at the college to showcase the exhibits from the inspiring community-led programs. Right photo. Students from Bryn Mawr College deepened their understanding of the role as change agents in a world of injustices and inequities.

Sometimes college instructors encouraged their students to volunteer with the two organizations as individuals. Other times, they have done so as a class project. Below African American history professor Jonathan Fenderson, supervised his Washington University students at the Rowan Community Center.



Harvard University students (above left) from Professor Walter Johnson were instrumental in jumpstarting the digitization of the OBS archives. Right photo. Malik Sediqzad (left in photo) was a Harvard student based in St. Louis who continued the digitizing and who was also able to support other OBS/YCPD projects. Tori Harwell (left photo), a Washington University student who found OBS on her own, helped with digitizing photos and documents. Tori also worked with the Ma'at Youth program. She went on to become a prestigious Rhodes Scholar.

Youth and Students (cont.)

19

When the lack of accreditation threatened the promise of college for seniors, they went into action. The students led a five-day sit-in at City Hall in protest of the takeover plan. The target was then Mayor Francis Slay who put the takeover plan into action after a school board slate he supported did not win. OBS helped to lead the support for the students locked in the mayor's office with food, water, sleeping bags and other supplies. The students won a major demand, that they would be allowed to graduate before the district officially lost its accreditation so that they would be accepted into colleges without academic consequences. Between 2003 and 2013, the St. Louis Public Schools endured devastating policies and actions from which it has never fully recovered.

OBS Chapter @ Forest Park Community College



At the urging of Halie Jackson, former OBS Advisory Board member and dean at the community college, OBS established a campus chapter in 2001. For almost a decade, OBS brought events to campus, like its Affirmative Action women's program in above photo (2006). It organized students to address issues on and off the campus. OBS made some impact that Jackson hoped for, but it was unsustainable. Because Forest Park Community College is a commuter campus with students juggling different lifestyles, it was challenging to create an ongoing, autonomous presence.

OBS: Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) and Fundraising



The two main joint fundraisers for OBS and the Youth Council have been the January anniversary event and the summer PhoneaThon. We rely heavily on our staunch supporters.

As a memberled organization with no staff, we were not seeking major funders. The first funder to make a grant to OBS was the Funding Exchange. Fundex no longer exists, but we are grateful for their support of specific projects in our early years, such as Black Liberation and Technology. It invested in a grassroots organization with minimal fiscal structure (but plenty of accountability) when others funders would not. Major funding came with the Ferguson uprising when a committed volunteer membership was insufficient for the needs, and paid staff was required. We are extremely grateful to funders such as the Deaconess Foundation, the HillSnowdon Foundation, the Radical Imagination Family Foundation, Borealis Foundation, Solidaire Network and others who consciously chose to invest in an organization with roots in the Black, radical tradition.

Money is always important and welcomed. Support has come in other creative ways such as ideas, cautionary advice, supplies, and intros to people connected to resources.

We are grateful for *all* of it.

In 2004, supporters who had made donations for the first ten years to the PhoneaThon were honored with certificates and souvenir t-shirts for their unwavering loyalty to OBS and the Youth Council.

YCPD: Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) and Fundraising

The Youth Council for Positive Development is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. It serves as the fiscal sponsor for OBS and cohosts the two joint fundraisers. However, it has its own budget and fundraising plans. The Youth Council has sold products, done toll roads, sponsored raffles, and other fundraisers—some more successful than others. In the photo above, the goal of the car-wash fundraiser was less about money, and more about learning how to plan, work together, and keep the books. When Ruth's Chris Steak House sponsored celebrity bartending, one of our members jumped on it and recruited family member Dawn Harper-Nelson, East St. Louis Olympian (see photo to right).

There are the surprise or unsolicited monies that come our way. The recording group, Moonchild, donated its concert proceeds to the Youth Council in 2019. Supporters have also designated the YCPD as a recipient in lieu of birthday gifts. Supporters have found many ways to give, including through their company's giving programs that doubles contributions. Proceeds from Mama Jamala's two books have gone to the YCPD, and it has sole rights to use her birthdate as an annual fundraiser.

It all adds up to loving support for our youth and the programs that nurture them. We humbly say, *Asante sana* (thank you very much)!



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From Mama Jamala Rogers

There was been no responsibility more rewarding than as the coordinator of the Youth Council for Positive Development. When parents and guardians entrust you with their loved ones, you almost become an extension of that family. Families understood what the program was about and how it could positively impact their kids if we worked together. We stood with them through the highs and the lows. The YCPD helped them work through family crises such as medical challenges, separations, evictions, and more. We partnered with them to resolve harmful school situations. The program was committed to the wellbeing and development of our youth, but they don't come to us in a vacuum.

I hope we inspired curiosity in our youth. We "poured" into them the values and coping skills needed to thrive in a racially hostile society, and provided loving arms when they stumbled or fell. I hope we gave them many joyous childhood memories as they grew into adulthood. I know I have plenty of stories that always bring me a smile!

I feel privileged that Ma'at alum stay connected and give back when they can. They know the Village is always ready to help them navigate through life issues. No matter how old they get, they will always be my babies.

