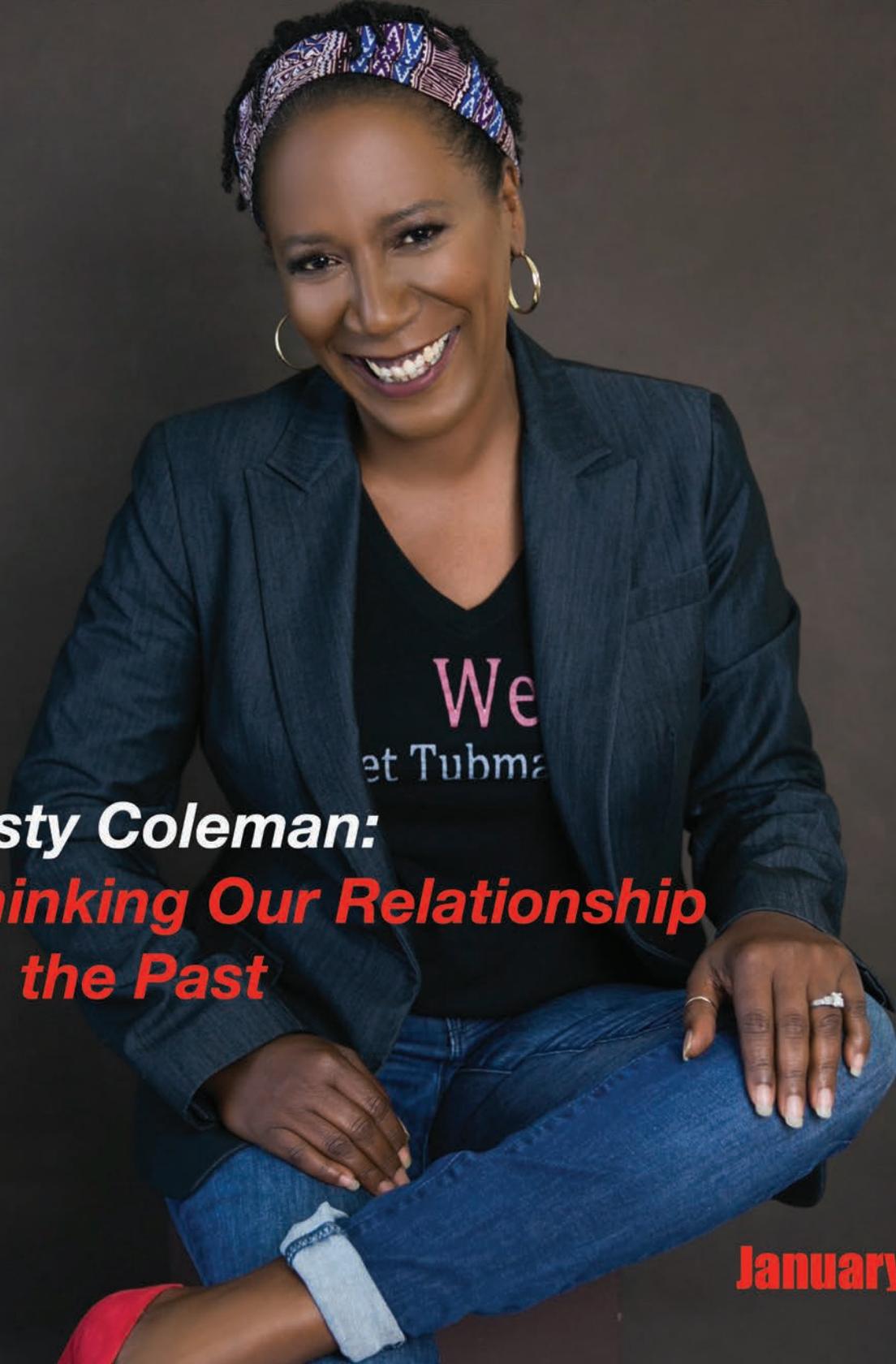


SoulVision[®]

M A G A Z I N E



Christy Coleman:
**Rethinking Our Relationship
With the Past**

January 2020

EDITORS NOTE

BK Fulton



Photo by Jessica Knox Photography.

| “Thoughts come before things.”

Welcome back for another year of SoulVision Magazine. We kick off 2020 with the amazing story of Christy Coleman, incoming leader of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation and former leader of the American Civil War Museum. Christy was named one of the “31 people changing the South” by *Time* magazine. She is a pioneer and reminds us of the irony that “history is about how we are living in the present.”

As we were putting together this issue, I was reminded of what I had to let go in order to be where I am today. Before this uplift I had to go through the process of an upshift. My habits, friends, actions and faith all had to change for the best me to become what God intended for me to be. I AM grateful for my journey.

As we begin another fruitful year, it is important that we give our youth a fighting chance. If they don’t learn, we did not teach. Thoughts come before things. Assemble the youth and show them how to turn their dreams and ideas into their tangible equivalents. We are the way. Become the change you seek one race: humans. One reason: LOVE.

| “If [our children] don’t learn, we did not teach.”

CELEBRITY

Christy Coleman: Rethinking Our Relationship With the Past



Photos by Kim Brundage

| “Inevitably, history is about how we are living in the present.”

Christy Coleman is one woman with the knowledge and expertise to help us build a more inclusive nation. Her passion is history. She lives and breathes it. It is a result of a knack for resourcefulness and a determination that many adults in her youth found inspiring enough to open the doors of opportunity for her to walk through. Like many African-Americans of her generation, Christy grew up in the church. A place that she credits for building the foundation for the values she carries with her today. “Of course when you are a child growing up in the church, you not only learn to sing and learn the word, but you also learn how to comport yourself publicly and how to share ideas respectfully,” she explains.

Christy Coleman: Rethinking Our Relationship With the Past (continued)

She grew up in Williamsburg, Virginia, a place rich in the history of the beginnings of our nation. “Colonial Williamsburg was literally in our background, five minutes away from where I grew up,” she explains. “So, I remember my church family and school friends who had parents that worked there in a variety of capacities. I got to see history behind the scenes on a daily basis and it helped cement my love for history and museums.” She references a master printmaker named Willie Parker, who worked at the Book Bindery. He was an African-American man who was a “master of his trade.” For Christy, her love for history never began with dates and facts, but it was what Coleman calls a “living experience from people like Parker and others.” “The connection between what people do and what they are and how they interacted was brought to life for me pretty early,” she explains.



Christy’s parents also played a positive and critical role in her upbringing. “My parents taught me the power of using your mind. They taught me to stand up for myself,” she says. They were fearless and brave in how they stood up for my well-being, even in the face of systemic discrimination. When Christy scored exceptionally well on her standardized test but was not put in a gifted program, her parents advocated for her education and made sure their daughter was not pushed out of places where she would be able to blossom. She credits their approach to them being young and having a lot of energy. “My parents led the way for our family in addition to working every day and making sure we were cared for. We were able to do what we needed to do to be contributing members of society,” she says.

Dr. Rex M. Ellis, who was the Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs at the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), was the man who gave Christy her first museum job at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. She applied for the job at the age of seventeen (a fact Dr. Ellis was not aware of). He hired her as a living history character. She would portray a young slave girl. After finding out she was still in high school, they worked around her schedule until her June graduation. After graduation, the museum gave her the opportunity to continue to work. “Dr. Rex M. Ellis has been a mentor, a friend, and a colleague for 35 years,” she says. “Watching his grace, passion and power was inspiring. I will always be appreciative of the care that he gave to us in providing a safe space in a really emotionally unsafe environment.” She credits him for helping her understand the work that they were doing was more than just a job. Even when they didn’t agree, he was still supportive. “His example has led me to try to be the same kind of mentor to young museum professionals, particularly those who are black,” she says.

As Christy went about her career, she learned the importance of using her voice. “I understood there

Christy Coleman: Rethinking Our Relationship With the Past (continued)

was a special lens that I could look through and question the past to bring about new answers and a deep understanding of the past and that there were stories I wanted to share,” she explains. “It allowed my creativity to really shine because I wasn’t trying to do the work from someone else’s lens.” She learned to be prepared. In her work, people will always question what you know or what you are thinking. “You have to be twice as good. Always be prepared because inevitably—whether by my gender or by my ethnicity—there will be people that will question my place or try to define my place,” she says.

“My parents taught me the power of using your mind. They taught me to stand up for myself.”

When asked if she has made it, Christy Coleman looks at it a little differently. “I believe I’ve reached a point in my career where the impact that I had hoped to have in my field is, in fact, coming to fruition,” she says. “Am I impactful? Am I making a difference?” She refers back to 25 years ago when she became the director of public history for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and as part of an estate sale, executed a reenactment of a slave auction. The response from other museums made it all worth it. “They would say, ‘my god, if you guys could pull off such a powerful program that gave pain a face and helped us understand the intersection of our early republic and its connections and its paradoxes, the least we can do is get more research and just talk about enslavement and what it did in our location,’” Christy Coleman explains that in her role at the American Civil War Museum in Richmond, Virginia, she continues to think about the impact of her work and what role history plays in contemporary life. “Inevitably, history is about how we are living in the present and the issues that we can confront and our desire to understand their genesis,” she explains.

We asked Christy about her view of Richmond and the conversation surrounding the Confederacy and monuments. “What is remarkable is that the conversation has expanded,” she explains. Christy Coleman remembers the time she first came to Richmond to run, what was then called, the American Civil War Center. One of her first tasks was to go out and introduce the Center to the funding and grants community. While everyone was polite, there was one member of a foundation who was more direct and honest with his opinion. “He said to me, ‘Listen, I’m going to tell you, we are sick to death of dealing with the Civil War in Richmond. We don’t know what to do with it. It’s a mess. It’s divisive. We don’t want it. We will not be funding anything related to it.’ I greatly appreciated his words because it helped me understand what a heavy lift I had,” she says. Christy’s hard work did not go in vain. Today, people of all ages and ethnicities have walked through the doors of the American Civil War Museum. “I could not have asked for better,” she says.

Christy emphasizes that to say it is “just a Confederate story” neglects the story of so many others. “There are people of every hue who lived through that crisis. People of every ethnicity and religious background and gender identifications which you can imagine have been impacted by our collective past. Yet, the story of our past has traditionally either been told as a military or a political one, when in fact it is so much more,” Christy explains. Christy acknowledges and is grateful for the changing dialogue surrounding the Confederacy and monuments in Richmond and around the country. “How are we going to reconsider what we have allowed to be venerated? Do these things or places reflect our values now? Those are really powerful conversations, and though I don’t really have the answers myself, I think every community needs to decide those issues for itself,” she says.

Christy Coleman: Rethinking Our Relationship With the Past (continued)



As the public marvels at Kehinde Wiley's *Rumors of War* statue as it stands proud in front of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), Christy references the role of art in our lives and in history. "The unveiling of *Rumors of War* is a really interesting statement about the power of art," she says. Christy co-chaired The Monument Avenue Commission, which was formed to recommend what to do with Confederate monuments on Monument Avenue in Richmond, VA. She references one of the recommendations for the community to "align with the artistic community to look at ways to reframe what already exists." "That was one of the suggestions people often forget about, but it is absolutely one of the suggestions that we made and to see that come

to fruition is a beautiful thing because it is sparking conversation and you couldn't have a better artist than Kehinde Wiley whose whole series of work has been about getting us to reframe our images, particularly of black men," she says. Christy believes the museum has done its job in providing resources to communities that will allow them to understand how nuanced and complex the Civil War period was.

"How are we going to reconsider what we have allowed to be venerated? Do these things or places reflect our values now? Those are really powerful conversations, and though I don't really have the answers myself, I think every community needs to decide those issues for itself."

Days after the unveiling of *Rumors of War*, it was announced that the "Honor the 14 Foundation" is planning to raise money to erect a statue to commemorate the 14 Medal of Honor recipients from the United States Colored Troops at the Battle of New Market Heights. "These fourteen men received the Congressional Medal of Honor for valor by pushing back Confederate forces outside of Richmond. Several of them were Virginians; several of them formerly enslaved men who had run off to find their freedom and to display their own valor," she emphasizes. "It is an extraordinary thing."

Beyond her professional life, Christy calls herself a "big ole fan girl" of movies, music, graphic novels, and comic books. "I escape to fantasy and sci-fi," she says. She is also an avid reader of fiction and nonfiction books. "Losing myself in a wonderful book is always fun," she says. When asked what has been the biggest blessing

Christy Coleman: Rethinking Our Relationship With the Past (continued)

in her life, Christy says it is the two people who call her mom. “Even though I know they are independent, free thinkers learning from their own mistakes, I’m still learning how to give them the freedom to be and discover even when they fall and mess up,” she says. “So, I’m waiting to see what happens and what kind of people they become in adulthood. I just love and adore them.”

When we spoke with Christy in December, she gave us the news that after almost 12 years, she will be leaving the American Civil War Museum to become Executive Director for the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation in Williamsburg, VA. She begins her new position in late January. As a professional in the history and museum space, Christy Coleman advises young people who want to work in museums to not be afraid to take a chance and to let what truly interests them lead them. “Don’t feel like you need to be on a strict plan because some of the best things happen unexpectedly,” she says. No matter what path Christy decides to take, she will always push the boundaries and make us rethink our relationship with our history as a country.

ART

Turning Point Pen Co.'s Special Gift to Kehinde Wiley



Rumors of War pen uncapped. Photography by Michael Hyland.

“Let those who inspire you know your appreciation for their craft.”

Michael Hyland is the owner and designer at Turning Point Pen Co. He’s from Richmond, Virginia and is a proud Lebanese-American and James Madison University (JMU) grad. Recently, Kehinde Wiley unveiled his *Rumors of War* statue at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), its permanent home. Michael was so inspired by Kehinde’s work that he created a custom fountain pen for the artist to commemorate the historical moment.

After learning that Kehinde Wiley’s *Rumors of War* would be permanently stationed in his hometown of Richmond, Michael knew he wanted to add value to this event in a way that only he could: by creating a custom writing instrument inspired by the statue. “Every part of this pen bears significance to the *Rumors of War* statue and its related message of progress and mindfulness through the social and historical lens of race, equality, and humanity,” he explains. “From the custom cast shoelace clip to the viewing window with soil from historically significant locations around Richmond, and the African horse hair-wrapped center band, everything has a meaning and a connection.”

Turning Point Pen Co.'s Special Gift to Kehinde Wiley (continued)



Michael Hyland crafting *Rumors of War* pen in his workshop.
Photography by Michael Hyland.

The soil suspended inside the pen, one of its most popular characteristics comes from local historical sites like Lumpkin's Jail, Leigh Street Armory, the J.E.B Stewart statue (where Kehinde took inspiration for the statue), and soil from the VMFA plot where *Rumors* stands today. The pen also holds symbolic significance in its craftsmanship. Michael says the swirled black, white, and brown resin represents the intertwining of different races and ethnicities. The pen is uncapped to reveal a red grip section that represents inclusion and equality. "It speaks to universal brotherhood and the fact that, no matter how different people look on the outside, we are all the same color on the inside," Michael explains.

The *Rumors of War* pen project was a collaborative effort with local businesses and organizations in the Richmond area, a detail Michael is very proud of. "The community really rallied around this project and its significance. Organizations like The Human Connection, the Social Enterprise Alliance – VA, and most notably Walker and Son Jewelers, who hand-cast and carved the custom sterling silver pen facets, were integral in the completion and presentation of this project," he explains.

After three grueling months of designing, making connections, and plenty of calls and emails in the hopes of presenting the pen to Kehinde Wiley in person, the



Michael Hyland crafting *Rumors of War* pen in his workshop.
Photography by Michael Hyland.

day finally arrived. "All of the angles played and contacts made culminated into an invitation to the banquet after the unveiling ceremony," he says. At the banquet, Michael found himself in conversation with Kehinde's mother when the moment he had worked for occurred. He had the \$2,500 handcrafted gift under his arm. That's when Kehinde walked up and shook Michael's hand.

"It was a surprisingly natural and pleasant conversation. We joked briefly about his mom's sweet and inviting nature, and I told him I had something special to give to him," he says. Kehinde opened the elaborate box and immediately examined the pen. He made it known that he thought the pen was beautiful and suggested they take a photo together. He thanked Michael and suggested they keep in touch. "I think it's safe to say that we both went about our nights after that better off than before," Michael reflects.

Turning Point Pen Co.'s Special Gift to Kehinde Wiley (continued)



Michael Hyland (right) presenting *Rumors of War* pen to Kehinde Wiley. Photography by Kaleb Lamb.

Michael would like for his business to continue to grow and expand in order to create significance for more people and situations through their writing instruments. He is also planning to give Turning Point a “public space” in Richmond soon. He remembers creating his first commemorative pen. It changed the person’s life positively; the pen added value and excitement to their life. “The goal is to make people feel special, whether they are celebrities or support staff,” Michael says. He hopes that he will have the opportunity to create pens for other inspirational figures in the future, like *Aquaman* actor Jason Momoa. Momoa inspires Michael with his cool demeanor, strong messages, and positive outlook on life.

“For our community, my hope is that the story of the *Rumors* project is one that will inspire people in the belief that even small businesses and artisans can make a big impact, both in places as focused as local communities and as vast as the world.”

As our conversation ends, Michael reflects on his gift to Kehinde and what he hopes will be taken from it. “I hope this gift will allow Kehinde to feel the impact of, and appreciation for, his work every time he uses it,” he explains. “I hope he can proudly feel that there are people in Richmond who understand the *Rumors of War* message and are inspired by it,” he continues. “And for our community, my hope is that the story of the *Rumors* project is one that will inspire people in the belief that even small businesses and artisans can make a big impact, both in places as focused as local communities and as vast as the world.”

To learn more about Turning Point Co. and the *Rumors of War* pen project, you can visit their website turningpointpenco.com and follow them on Instagram [@turningpointpenco](https://www.instagram.com/turningpointpenco) or Facebook [@turningpointpenco](https://www.facebook.com/turningpointpenco). Follow Michael Hyland on Instagram [@mphabibi](https://www.instagram.com/mphabibi).

BUSINESS

Parween Mascari's Case for West Virginia's Creative Community



Parween Mascari outside her Charleston shop. Photo by Joel Bennett, Aronfield Agency.

| “Find your creative outlet.”

Parween Mascari is a judge by day and a retail shop owner by night. She's half Afghan or as she calls it, “Halfghan,” born in Parkersburg, West Virginia. She spends her days traveling her state as a Deputy Chief Administrative Law Judge for West Virginia, hearing unemployment compensation appeals from all over the state. She admits her job isn't glamorous, but she loves it because she gets to hear some very interesting stories. “I tell my kids my job is basically to serve as a ‘human lie detector’ and I take very seriously my obligation to listen carefully to both sides of the story, apply the law to the facts, and write a fair decision,” she explains. Before she became a judge, she had over a decade of experience working in a private law practice representing both plaintiffs and defendants. She also spent five years as a lobbyist for small and large businesses.

Her retail shop, WV Market Gallery, is where she can let her hair down a little and be creative. “I love working with so many talented artisans, including glassmakers, potters, painters, jewelry and textile artists, as well as farmers, value-added food producers, and brewers,” she says. She also hopes to expand collaborations with some of the smaller farm wineries around the state. “I love showing off the talent we have here in the mountain state to visitors, from our state's capital city—Charleston, to the Village of the state's largest ski resort—Snowshoe Mountain Resort,” she says. “I also sell jewelry that I make in my shops, and I hope to continue to grow that part of my business.”

Parween Mascari's Case for West Virginia's Creative Community (continued)



*Tree in Parween Mascari's Charleston shop.
Photo by Kristen Fridley.*

In the long term, Parween would like to expand her artistry and create a jewelry brand with her three daughters. “It will be called Sultan’s Daughters as a tribute to our Afghan heritage,” she explains. Her three daughters have caught the creative bug as well. Her youngest daughter Sophia is an amazing pencil artist whose drawings are sold at their Snowshoe shop. Her middle daughter Isabella, a pre-med student, rummages through piles of clothes in the thrift shop for the perfect fashion pieces to embroider. She also upcycles and creates new fashion styles in her dorm room at Shepherd University. They both run an Instagram account for their fashion inspirations [@mistakentwin](#). Her eldest daughter Chanel runs an Instagram account where her cat Maya reviews local brews around Pittsburgh, called [@brewswithmaya](#) and also [@southparkcatfriends](#), a page dedicated to the neighborhood cats of her childhood community. “I’m proud that they understand the importance of artists and makers and supporting folks in our local community,” Parween says.

“I love showing off the talent we have here in the mountain state to visitors.”

Parween is using her free time to help her beloved West Virginia. She serves as a board member of the Snowshoe Foundation and as a Trustee of the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation. “I would like to continue that work and renew my focus on tourism, downtown revitalization, creative placemaking, and supporting entrepreneurs and small business owners,” she says. “I would additionally like to increase my efforts in helping to tackle gender and diversity and inclusion and equity issues with groups such as the Girl Scouts of Black Diamond Council, West Virginia Forward, Philanthropy West Virginia, and the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce.”



Parween Mascari and daughters Sophia and Isabella (from left). Photo credit – Kinship Goods Photo Booth.

Parween is looking to get into e-commerce soon. She would like to set up an online shop so that people around the world can see the creativity and beauty of Appalachia, and more specifically, West Virginia. She also has some ideas for a book that she wants to start writing. She would love to share the story of what it was like for her and her sister Rena to grow up Halfghan in Appalachia. “Maybe it will be so good that they will make a movie about it,” she ponders.

Parween Mascari's Case for West Virginia's Creative Community (continued)

“I would like to continue that work and renew my focus on tourism, downtown revitalization, creative placemaking, and supporting entrepreneurs and small business owners.”

To learn more about WV Gallery, you can visit the website thewvgallery.com or follow them on Instagram [@wvmarket](https://www.instagram.com/wvmarket) and Facebook [@wvmarket](https://www.facebook.com/wvmarket).

BUSINESS

Lara Paparo Celebrates Diverse Authors With Owl Publishing



Photography by JWC Portraits.

| “Seek out the stories readers want to hear.”

Lara Paparo is a lover of literature and books. She started her own publishing house, Owl Publishing, in 2015 to “empower authors and create engaging books for readers of all ages.” She was born and raised in Philadelphia and currently resides in rural Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. “I get to enjoy the best of both worlds since I work in the city, but live in the country,” Lara says. Owl Publishing has two offices: one in Philadelphia and one in Lancaster County. Along with Owl Publishing, Lara is the associate director of the Penn Literacy Network (housed in the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education). Penn Literacy works with educators and school districts to promote literacy and numeracy programs across the United States and internationally.

Lara Paparo Celebrates Diverse Authors With Owl Publishing (continued)

Seeing children's enthusiasm towards reading is one of the reasons Lara set out to create her own publishing house. "I love seeing children excited about a new book, and love using my own children (ages 7 and 10) as beta-testers of new books. I get to be really selective in the authors I work with, so that is also a great privilege," she explains.

Owl Publishing had a successful 2019, publishing more than 15 books, seven of which include the *Mr. Business* children's book series by our co-founding editor and founder, BK Fulton. "These stories are an absolute joy to publish and have authentic, relatable stories that shine a light into BK's childhood," she says. "They have amazing, vibrant illustrations that speak to children of all ages." 2020 is looking to be an even more successful year.

With changing demographics, Lara and Owl Publishing have developed a bilingual literacy initiative and are expanding it for 2020. "Bilingual literacy is near and dear to my heart," she says. "The initiative will continue through our imprint company, Creo En Ti Media." Creo En Ti Media publishes bilingual children's books written and illustrated by high school students. Lara says during the summer, they will host their second annual bilingual literacy festival that celebrates newly released books. No matter what Lara and Owl Publishing put together, readers will know it will be worth their time.



Lara Paparo teaching a class on literacy for middle and high school teachers in China.

To learn more about Lara Paparo and Owl Publishing, visit their website owlpublishinghouse.com or follow them on Facebook [@owlpublishinghouse](https://www.facebook.com/owlpublishinghouse), Instagram [@owlpubhouse](https://www.instagram.com/owlpubhouse), and Twitter [@owlpubhouse](https://twitter.com/owlpubhouse).

Everyone Is Welcome at Will Herring's Crossroads



Will Herring, owner of Crossroads Coffee & Ice Cream. Photography by Queon "Q" Martin.

| “Make your guests feel like they are at home.”

At Crossroads Coffee & Ice Cream, people from Richmond and beyond come together to share ideas and unwind seven days a week. The owner of Crossroads, Will Herring, is a big guy with an even bigger heart. He's formed great relationships with his customers over the seventeen years he's been in business and is looking to evolve the business in the next decade. “I am from Richmond, Virginia. I grew up and lived on the Southside most of my life,” he says after being asked how long he has been in the area. “With Crossroads I am able to host a dinner party that runs all day long, every day of the week and enjoy it. We take pride in our hospitality.”

One of the biggest rewards Will says of being a restaurant owner is the many people who make it known to him that they feel welcomed and relaxed when they stop by for a coffee or a quick bite. “I strive to make Crossroads feel like home for everyone who walks through our doors. It's rewarding when people who are visiting from other cities or have been displaced from their homes tell me they feel like Crossroads is their second home,” Will says. At any time of the day, you will find Will talking to customers, telling stories or making wisecracks.

Everyone Is Welcome at Will Herring's Crossroads (continued)

Will and his wife, Amy are proud parents of their almost one-year-old daughter, Ruth. He is proud to be called Dad. Will is also looking ahead to the 20th anniversary of Crossroads. He has some exciting plans. "I am working on some projects for Crossroads that won't change the feel but will make us better heading into our 20th anniversary in three years. The refresh will include live music, DJs, bands...and an overall improved experience that our customers will enjoy," he explains. He says they bought the building a year and a half ago. They are looking to do some renovations in the near future. No matter the changes, Crossroads will continue to be an inclusive place for everyone to have fruitful conversations, exchange ideas, and most importantly, take their mind off of work and have a good time.

*When in Richmond, Virginia, stop by **Crossroads Coffee and Ice Cream** located at 3600 Forest Hill Ave for some of their appetizing coffee, food and desserts.*

CHEF'S CORNER

Chef Will Herring



Photography by Queon "Q" Martin.

“Something comforting and simple for a chilly winter day.”

Ultimate Grilled Cheese and Winter Vegetable Soup

Course: Lunch/Dinner

Cuisine: American

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cook Time: 55 minutes

Total Time: 1 hour

Serving Size: Varies (1 sandwich, lots of soup)

Ingredients

Ultimate Grilled Cheese

- 2 slices sourdough bread
- oz. sundried tomato dressing
- 2 oz. feta
- Two slices cheddar cheese
- 2 slices tomato
- 2 slices Swiss cheese

Winter Vegetable Soup

- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 cups onion, diced
- 2 cups celery, diced
- 2 cups carrot, diced
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 bunch kale, chopped
- 1 bulb fennel, chopped
- 1 15 oz. can tomato paste
- 1 15 oz. can cannellini beans
- 12 oz. mushrooms
- 1 quart vegetable stock
- 1 tsp. each of fresh thyme, dried oregano, basil and rosemary
- 2 tbsp. soy sauce
- 2 tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste

Chef Will Herring (continued)

Preparation

Ultimate Grilled Cheese

1. Prep entire sandwich by putting all contents on panini bread.
2. Microwave sandwich for 1.5 minutes.
3. Brush oil on each side of bread.
4. Place sandwich on panini grill or hot frying pan and grill for 2-3 minutes, flipping once until golden brown and cheese is melted through the middle.

Winter Vegetable Soup

1. Sauté onion in olive oil until translucent.
2. Add celery, garlic, and carrot and cook for 7-8 minutes.
3. Add kale, fennel, tomato paste, cannellini beans, mushrooms, vegetable stock, thyme, oregano, basil and rosemary and bring to a simmer.
4. Cook until veggies are tender and then turn off heat.
5. Add salt, pepper, balsamic vinegar and soy sauce to taste.

Restaurant Information: *When in Richmond, Virginia, stop by [Crossroads Coffee and Ice Cream](#) located at 3600 Forest Hill Ave for some of their appetizing coffee, food, and desserts.*

COMMUNITY

Kehinde Wiley Reveals New Vision of America at VMFA



Rumors of War by Kehinde Wiley. Photography by Queon Martin.

| “Things change.... Culture evolves.”

Each month we highlight a community program that aligns with the values of SoulVision Magazine. We believe engaging with one’s community is critical to fostering positive change in the world. In early December, many stood on the grounds of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) to witness the spectacle that is Kehinde Wiley’s *Rumors of War*. Kehinde Wiley, a member of Generation X and a wildly successful and celebrated artist, stood in front of thousands in Richmond, Virginia, dressed in black Converse sneakers and a bright suit that was inspired by his Nigerian roots. As he stood at the podium, Kehinde spoke to the crowd about art, our shared history, and most importantly, the progress of culture. “There is something moving in the culture and there is something changing in the winds,” he said.

Kehinde Wiley Reveals New Vision of America at VMFA (continued)

Kehinde Wiley was born in 1977 and grew up in South Central Los Angeles, California, in the late 80s. He has studied art since the age of 11. To protect her children from the streets, his single mother sent Kehinde and his twin brother to an art conservatory on the weekends. He eventually developed an interest in painting self-portraits. He also frequented the Huntington Library and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art where he would observe portraits of noblemen. What fascinated Kehinde the most was what led these noblemen to make these all-important portraits of themselves. As he went on to receive his BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute and his MFA from Yale University, Kehinde began to create portraits not of himself, but of the people of the world and the community he was a part of. Specifically, he often depicted black men in America who looked like him.

“It’s not about black men, it’s about all of us. It’s about a society that can include all of us. And in that sense, we should all be proud about what our America looks like.”

27 feet tall, 25 feet long, 15 feet wide and made of bronze, *Rumors of War* represents the changing tide of our country. The man on the statue is a black man who could be from any urban area: dreadlocks, Nike high tops, and a hoodie. A figure who is often still seen as a menace is now up on a pedestal. According to Kehinde Wiley, he was inspired by the statue of Confederate General J. E. B. Stuart which sits on Monument Avenue. In his speech, he referenced the Confederate statues on Monument Avenue with awe and a little bit of irony. “When I came to Richmond all of those years back and I saw Monument Avenue, and I saw some extraordinary sculptures. People took a lot of time to make something powerful and beautiful and elegant. And menacing,” he said.

Before the big reveal (that took longer than expected due to the tarp getting caught in the dreadlocks of the man on the statue), Kehinde pointed out the connection this work of art has to all of us. “It’s not about black men, it’s about all of us. It’s about a society that can include all of us. And in that sense, we should all be proud about what our America looks like.” After his speech was long over and the tarp was still lingering on the horseman’s dreadlocks like a “bridal veil” (as one onlooker referenced), the crowd stayed put. After a local firefighter set the statue free, the crowd cheered as the statue finally was unveiled in all its glory. They finally had the opportunity to take their first glimpse at a representation of “America 2.0.”

To learn more about the statue and the VMFA, visit vmfa.museum/about/rumors-of-war/ or follow the VMFA on Facebook [@myvmfa](https://www.facebook.com/myvmfa), Instagram [@vmfamuseum](https://www.instagram.com/vmfamuseum), Twitter [@vmfa](https://twitter.com/vmfa).

LIVING LEGENDS

Jamel Shabazz



Photography by Greg Adams.

Jamel Shabazz's photography tells the story of life, particularly black life, in New York City in the late 20th century. Deeming himself a "conscious artist," Jamel's photography celebrates the "street style" of urbanites. He perfectly captures their swagger and uniqueness, but most importantly the value of their life.

Jamel's work beams with the visionary brilliance of his influences: Leonard Freed, James Van Der Zee, and Gordon Parks. His father was a photographer and an avid reader of socially conscious writers. When a young Jamel discovered his father's copy of Leonard Freed's *Black in White America* (1968), his perspective on America and his own life changed forever. It was the foundation for developing his social awareness and love for his people.

During his high school years, he set out to be a beacon of hope for his community. He used his camera to document his peers and other young people. When flipping through his photography, it is clear that Jamel treated his subjects with empathy and care. They were no longer just problem children in the streets, but kids who had hopes and dreams and a willingness to survive. Jamel's perspective grew as he was serving in the U.S. Army in West Germany in the late 70s. As he looked through the photographs of family and friends back at home, he began to understand his true purpose: to document Black people's history and culture to inspire young people to be excellent. From street style to hip-hop photography, Jamel knew and identified with the youth of his time.

Jamel Shabazz (continued)



The Gathering by Jamel Shabazz

In 2018, Jamel Shabazz received The Gordon Parks Foundation Award. According to The Gordon Parks Foundation, the award is “given to individuals who have enriched our lives in ways that reflect Parks’ ideas and goals by using creative means to inspire the next generation.” Jamel Shabazz’s work has uplifted a generation and beyond. For Jamel, “art is a global language” and it is up to those artists who are conscious enough to take a stand in addressing the issues that plague our society in order to make a better future.

“As I look at the world around me I see wars, rumors of wars, poverty, hate and a planet that is on the verge of self-destruction. Politicians and religious leaders seem ineffective in addressing these ever-growing problems. With art as a global language, I feel that conscious artists of all genres need to come forward, take a proactive stance and use their talents to address these issues while we still have time.”

– **Jamel Shabazz**

Check out Jamel Shabazz’s excellent photography on his Instagram [@jamelshabazz](#), Facebook [@jamelshabazzofficial](#), and his website [jamelshabazz.com](#).