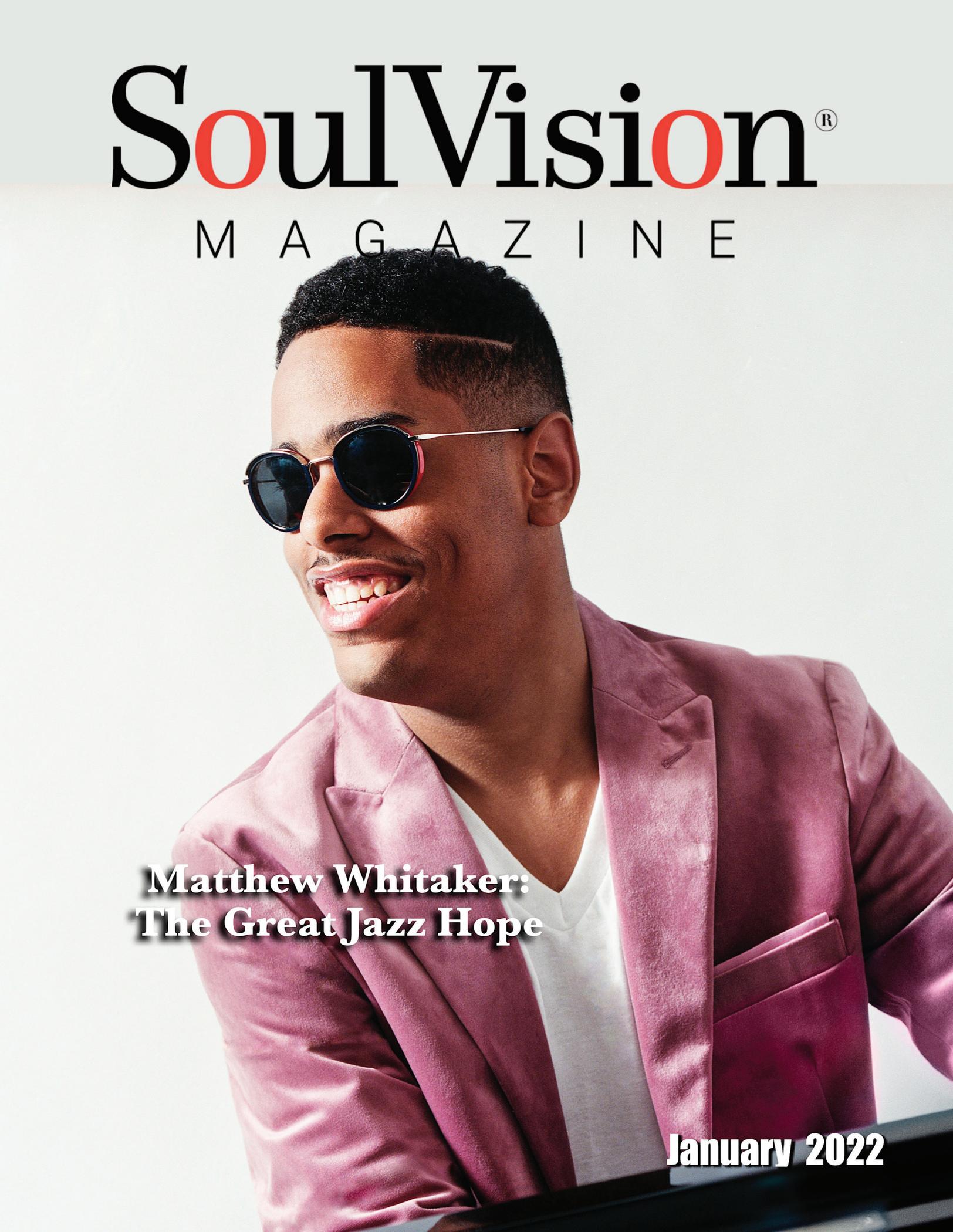


SoulVision®

M A G A Z I N E



**Matthew Whitaker:
The Great Jazz Hope**

January 2022

EDITORS NOTE

BK Fulton



Photo courtesy of BK Fulton

| “Be there for others.”

I recently read about a little girl who could not afford running sneakers for her school’s track meet, so she taped her feet and drew Nike logos on the tape. She went on to win gold in the 400 metres, 800 metres and the 1500 metres. That is an example of faith and action converging for miraculous outcomes.

Just like the little girl, we make things happen in life because we put in the work. Whether it’s running a race on a track or running the race of life, anyone can serve because any of us can become the best version of ourselves. Be there for others; it comes back tenfold. In fact, God will pour you out a blessing that you can hardly receive. We win not because we are great. We win because God is great.

In this month’s issue of SoulVision Magazine we continue our pursuit of human excellence with a feature on jazz prodigy and multi-instrumentalist Matthew Whitaker. We also share shorts on entrepreneur Javona Braxton, and Ben Tankard, the father of Gospel Jazz. In this month’s issue, we learn more about and get a recipe from Virginia Tech student Tahjere Lewis, chat with Dr. Jade Ranger about her first published book, and highlight the Boys Home of Virginia’s Playground Project. Finally, we honor celebrated sociologist and the eighth president of Morgan State University, Dr. Andrew Billingsley.

My prayer for each of us is that we become the best version of ourselves; if not for us, for our children. Bring all of you into 2022.

| “We win not because we are great. We win because God is great.”

Follow BK Fulton on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#). To learn more about Soulidify Productions, visit their website soulidify.com and follow them on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

CELEBRITY

Matthew Whitaker: The Great Jazz Hope



Photo by Jacob Blickenstaff

| “The music really speaks for itself.”

When 20-year-old jazz prodigy and multi-instrumentalist Matthew Whitaker takes the stage, audiences are in for a spectacle of improv, familiarity, and mastery. He was born three months premature, weighing 1 pound and 11 ounces. The oxygen that he needed to save his life damaged his retinas, rendering him blind. He is often compared to Stevie Wonder, but when asked how he feels about that comparison, he humbly says that “there is only one Stevie Wonder.” He hopes one day he will have the opportunity to collaborate with him. He was three years old when he taught himself to play the piano after his grandfather bought him a Yamaha keyboard. He was nine years old when he won the “Child Stars of Tomorrow” competition as part of Amateur Night at the Apollo. When he was just 10, he was the opening performer for Stevie Wonder’s induction into the Apollo Theater’s Hall of Fame. Because of these life-changing moments, the Apollo is a special place for Matthew. “I’ve been going back there ever since. It is always a good time playing there. They have really become my extended family,” Matthew says.

Matthew Whitaker: The Great Jazz Hope (continued)



Photo by Taylor Brandt

Growing up in Hackensack, New Jersey, Matthew spent time in New York City. “I always end up going back and forth from New Jersey to New York,” he says. “I’ve played a lot of venues and shows there. You never know what you are going to get into.” Even at his young age, Matthew is jotting down mentally what he has already learned. “I would say less is more, especially when it comes to playing music,” he says. “You don’t have to play everything that you know all at once. The music really speaks for itself.”



Photo by Jacob Blickenstaff

Last year, Matthew released his latest album *Connections*. The album connects the past to the current. It is an album that was created during the issues we are dealing with right now—the pandemic and the continued fight for social justice. The album also serves as documentation of where he is in his life. On songs “Stop Fighting” and “It Will Be Okay,” Matthew composes what sounds like reassurance in the midst of upheaval.

For this album, Matthew called on friends like musician, bandleader, and television personality Jon Batiste; violinist Regina Carter; drummer Alvester Garnett; trumpeter Steve Oquendo, and more to compose alongside him. He covers songs from musical forebearers Thelonious Monk, Stevie Wonder, and Duke Ellington, among others. “This album is very important to me, not only because I am paying tribute to my heroes but also the musicians who are on the album,” he says. “These are people who have been in my life for a very long time. Everyone is special.” When Matthew is in these sessions, he lets the music guide him. “The more you play the music, the more the ideas come out,” he explains.

When composing, Matthew loves the tactile feedback and control he gets when he plays the organ or keyboard, or drums. Particularly, he loves the experimentation the drums afford him. “You can put different materials on top of the surface. You can use brushes, mallets, multi-

Matthew Whitaker: The Great Jazz Hope (continued)



Photo by Rahil Ashruff

rods, and so on,” he explains. “There are so many possibilities. For me, it is always about the sound.”

For those who dream big, he has a few simple pieces of advice: “Continue to grow and be yourself. Trust your gift, follow your dreams, and always have fun,” he says. Just like his friend Batiste, Matthew is interested in creating film scores one day. He has already been tapped for a documentary with The WNET Group’s ALL ARTS, a multimedia platform devoted to engaging with numerous artistic genres. Matthew will be a part of their artist-in-residency program. He is billed with director Jonathan McCrory, multimedia artist Don Christian Jones, and interdisciplinary Le’Andra LeSeur.

There isn’t one medium that Matthew Whitaker limits himself to. He even rock climbs when he is free. When thinking about those who inspire him, he thinks of two particular figures who have been with him from the beginning. “My biggest inspiration would have to be my dad. He was the one who really made sure that I remained grounded,” he says. “But musically, before he passed away last September, my mentor Dr. Lonnie Smith was a strong inspiration.” Like the jazz greats before him, Matthew Whitaker is using his music to express the emotions we feel every day. Dr. Lonnie Smith would be overjoyed.

To learn more about Matthew Whitaker, you can visit his [website](#) and follow him on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).



Photo by Taylor Brandt

BUSINESS

Tahjere Lewis Plans for His Future



Tahjere Lewis created TTP Food LLC to bring his late aunt Carol Ann Morgan Scott's signature sauce recipe to life. Photo by Matt Gentry.

| “Widen your vision.”

Tahjere Lewis is in his senior year of undergraduate school at Virginia Tech. While he is working on completing his degree in building construction with a minor in computer science, Tahjere is working long hours to build two family sauce-related companies – TTP Food LLC and TTP Tech LLC. He hopes these ventures will be successful after graduation. He counts on his faith to lead the way. “I am faith-driven, technical, and a chef at heart,” he says. “I am a religious man and move through God’s graces.” It was in his sophomore year that Tahjere knew he wanted to be an entrepreneur. He felt there was a lack of networking on campus so he developed University Link, an app that promotes and connects university entrepreneurs and gives these entrepreneurs insight on incorporating their businesses, trademarking, patenting, and how to file taxes. According to Tahjere, the app currently has a total number of 4,000 user downloads and over 100,000 impressions on the App and Google Play stores combined.

Tahjere Lewis Plans for His Future (continued)



Aunt Carol's Sauce is an all-purpose sauce that can be used as a marinade, dipping sauce, or glaze for seafood, meats, and vegetables. Photo by Matt Gentry.

Tahjere's late aunt Carol Ann Morgan Scott made her signature sauce for years for his family. "I never knew she made it herself until I asked her where I could purchase it since I was headed off to college," he says. "I made a promise that she and I would sell this sauce after I graduated." She passed away during his freshman year of college. After her passing, Tahjere says he was determined to follow through with her dream. He created TTP Foods LLC to bring Aunt Carol's Sauce to life. "It's an all-purpose sauce and can be used as a marinade, dipping sauce, or glaze for seafood, meats, and vegetables. A lot of people love spicy food, so I created a version for those spicy lovers too."

Tahjere is also the founder of TTP Tech LLC, a software development company that develops mobile and web applications for individuals and other businesses. "We are



Family trying Aunt Carol's Sauce wings for the first time. Photo courtesy of Tahjere Lewis.

a team of four. The team is made up of intelligent and faith-driven Virginia Tech students," Tahjere explains. "We assist our clients in overcoming their most important technical and software challenges." One of Tahjere's biggest goals is to purchase and operate a food truck to sell specialty foods. Tahjere will be graduating with a job offer as a software engineer for CoStar Group. "My goal is to learn more about the workforce from insurance to IRAs and increase my stock portfolio," he says. "I can be a resource for large corporations and lead through my own businesses, offering opportunities to others."

Tahjere Lewis is the CEO of TTP Food LLC and TTP Tech LLC. To learn more about Aunt Carol's Sauce, visit their [website](#) and follow them on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

Dr. Jade L. Ranger: Thriving Through It All



Photos by Lindsey Lyons Photography

| “Communicate your emotions through the written word.”

Dr. Jade L. Ranger is the co-owner of The Prescription Shoppe, the first Black-owned independent community pharmacy located in Colonial Williamsburg. She recently published her first book titled *Mustard Seed Mentality*. She wrote *Mustard Seed Mentality* to help guide women, who do it all, to live healthy and balanced lives. “My journey to becoming an author began long before I wrote *Mustard Seed Mentality*,” Jade says. Her dad would read J. California Cooper books before bed. She remembers getting good grades in English class in high school. “Reading and writing have always been a part of who I am,” she says. “There is something special about being able to communicate your emotions through the written word.” When Jade was in her early 20s, she would drive to Barnes & Noble and pick out three books from three different genres. Her intention was to challenge her viewpoints and broaden her perspective. *Mustard Seed Mentality* blossomed out of Jade’s love for reading, but her life experiences are what is written on its pages.

Dr. Jade L. Ranger: Thriving Through It All (continued)



Dr. Jade L. Ranger recently published her first book titled *Mustard Seed Mentality* to help guide women, who do it all, to live healthy and balanced lives.

Mustard Seed Mentality is just the beginning of Jade's writing career. Jade also is a monthly columnist for *The Virginia Gazette*. The title of the column is *#ParentLife UnscRxipted*. Instead of writing about health and wellness, Jade wanted to create a column about parenthood. She says laughingly that because of her two boys (ages 4 and 8) she has so much material to cover. "My goal is for the column to be an insightful, funny, and relatable conversation on the joys and challenges of parenting," Jade says. "Getting paid to do what I love is priceless."

At the beginning of this year, Jade and her husband will launch a consulting business. "We've had several pharmacists reach out to us to inquire about our winning formula since we branched out on our own in March of 2019 when we first opened our pharmacy," Jade says. "Now, we plan to turn this opportunity into another business venture." Jade also has the ambitions to create a coalition of independent community pharmacies that are owned by young Black and brown pharmacists. "We are lifting as we climb, and the journey thus far has been nothing short of amazing," she says.



Photo by Rahil Ashruff

To learn more about Dr. Jade L. Ranger, visit her [website](#) and follow her on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

MEDIA-MUSIC-STAGE

Ben Tankard's Next Chapter



Photo courtesy of Ben Tankard

| “Let your faith guide you.”

Ben Tankard is considered the father of Gospel Jazz. “Technically, the music is the same,” Ben once said. “A Christian “C” note sounds the same as a non-Christian note, but as a minister, I feel that God releases His Spirit and power through me, and the music becomes a vehicle of salvation to carry God’s love, healing, and deliverance.” He has accumulated 16 *Stellar Awards* and is a Stellar Award Honors Hall of Fame inductee. Today, Ben lives near Nashville, Tennessee, with his wife and blended family. His talents have been extended to motivational speaking and reality TV.

Ben Tankard's Next Chapter (continued)



Ben Tankard with his wife, Jewel Tankard.

Photo by Kevin Goolsby.

After three seasons at Bravo, *Thicker Than Water: The Tankards*, Ben moved the show to the CJC Network. This time around, Ben is executive producer. He has full control of the show and for its fourth season, which premiered in 2021, Ben utilized his own music. “With more control over the direction of the show, we can include more of our lives that we couldn’t before,” Ben said in a press release for the season. “It was hard to do when we were with Bravo because they tended to lean more toward conflict-based storylines rather than music and creativity.”

The music machine is still up and running. Ben recently reached the top of the Billboard Smooth Jazz Radio chart with his song “Just Like Music.” It is a smooth jazz remake of the classic Marvin Gaye record. He also has music featured in the new Kevin Hart and Wesley Snipes Netflix show, *True Story*. His wishlist for future collaborators are Jill Scott and guitarist Earl Klugh. In 2022, Ben plans to launch the Smooth Life Network, which will play “smooth” music, movies, motivation, and more for 24 hours. It will be an app on Apple TV. Ben says, “a man who grew up in poverty and who used to work on a chicken farm now has the opportunity to reach millions with his words of positivity and encouragement.” That is something to celebrate.

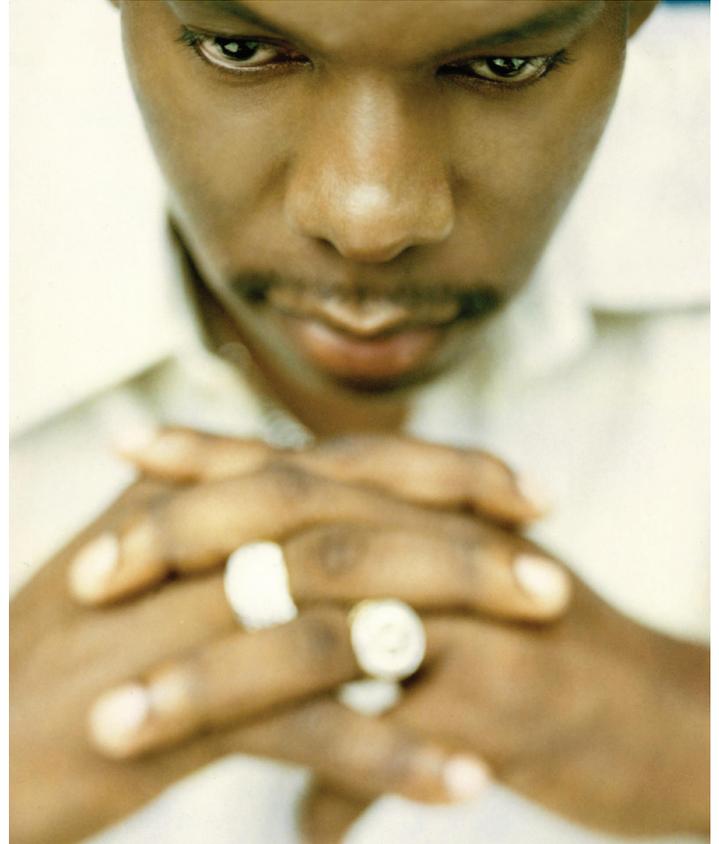


Photo by Kevin Goolsby

To learn more about Ben Tankard, visit his [website](#) and follow him on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

Javona Braxton: Belonging Practitioner



Photos by Courtney Jones

| “Live out your passion.”

Javona Braxton works full-time as a diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging practitioner. She primarily works for Citrix, a cloud computing and virtualization technology company based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. “I shape the future workforce and mindsets for organizations through strategic development and programming,” she explains. She also is the co-founder of Amazin’ Graze, a food lifestyle collaborative. She co-founded the business with Cocoa Paris. “Our focus as food stylists is on creating unique food experiences, through grazing, charcuterie, entertainment, and education,” Javona says.

Javona is a UVA alumna and a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. She continues to be a part of the UVA community. She’s been a member of the Jefferson Scholars Regional Selection Committee and chairs the UVA’s Black Alumni Weekend. She sits on the Board of Directors for the Ridley Scholarship Program at UVA and is the current scholarship chair. She also is an appointee to the UVA President’s African-American Alumni Council. In Richmond, Virginia, she is a trustee at The Steward School and a member of the Board of Directors for Partnership for the Future.

Javona Braxton: Belonging Practitioner (continued)



Working for Citrix, Javona is creating several programs for the companies to improve inclusion internally. “These programs will advance their success in creating more authentic and sustainable employee experiences,” she says. With a year of operating Amazin’ Graze under her belt, Javona is figuring out how to grow the business within the pandemic. “We all thought we would be out of the limited interaction phase with the impacts of COVID,” she comments. This past fall, Amazin’ Graze expanded to custom education classes and holiday packages that include home grazing tables. This year, Javona

will be launching her consultancy business. She will continue to do her diversity and inclusion work while helping with college access and early career preparation. Javona is appreciative of the opportunity to do what she loves. “I am lucky that I get to live out my two passions,” she says.

To learn more about Javona Braxton, follow her on [LinkedIn](#). To learn more about Amazin’ Graze, visit their [website](#) and follow them on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

CHEF'S CORNER

Tahjere Lewis



Photos courtesy of Tahjere Lewis



“These unforgettable wings will not disappoint.”

Aunt Carol's Sauce Wings

Course: Lunch

Cuisine: American

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cook Time: 50-60 minutes

Total Time: 80 minutes

Serving Size: 5

Ingredients

- Chicken wings
- Lemon
- Aunt Carol's Sauce (spicy or mild)

Preparation

1. Clean chicken wings with cold water and lemon.
2. Preheat the oven to 400° and place a wire rack over a baking sheet.
3. In a large bowl, toss chicken wings with oil and season with garlic powder, salt, and pepper.
4. Transfer to prepared baking sheet.
5. For 50-60 minutes, bake until chicken is golden and skin is crispy. Flip the wings halfway through.
6. In a saucepan, pour Aunt Carol's Sauce.
7. Transfer baked wings to a bowl and toss with Aunt Carol's Sauce until completely coated.
8. Return wings to rack and broil (watch carefully) until sauce caramelizes, approximately 3 minutes.
9. Serve with roasted potatoes and vegetables (preferably celery sticks).

Tahjere Lewis is the CEO of TTP Food LLC and TTP Tech LLC. To learn more about Aunt Carol's Sauce, visit their [website](#) and follow them on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

COMMUNITY

Boys Home of Virginia: A Cause for the Heart



Photo by Laura Robertson

| “A successful man has to start somewhere.”

By Laura Robertson

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.

Boys Home of Virginia is a nonprofit organization in Covington, Virginia, that serves young men ages 6-17 who need a second chance at success. Tucked away off Route 60, the 1,400-acre property has offered a welcoming home to young men in need since 1906. Families and guardians trust Boys Home to educate their children in a safe environment, made possible by a supportive and enthusiastic staff. The on-campus school offers K-12 education with a focus on trades as a viable option after departure from Boys Home.

Boys Home of Virginia: A Cause for the Heart (continued)



Boys Home of Virginia's playground has been in place since 1958. Boys Home of Virginia is currently raising funds for a new playground that will feature two swings, a stand-up merry-go-round, and a strength training set that will accommodate twenty boys at a time. Photos courtesy of Boys Home of Virginia (b&w/present photo).



Photo by Laura Robertson

Outside of the classroom, students are encouraged to enjoy as much outdoor play as possible. For children who have been traumatized, providing a place where they can play can also heal wounds and give them a sense of well-being and safety. The present playground has been in place since 1958, consisting of a swing set and a climbing apparatus. Playground equipment and installation is an expensive adventure, but one that Boys Home feels strongly about for the boys. A playground offers not only opportunities for physical exercise but is also a place where friendships can be deepened.

The updated playground will feature two swings, a stand-up merry-go-round, and a strength training set that will accommodate twenty boys at a time. The strength training set comes with a curriculum and can be used in physical education classes. The new pieces will then be bordered and made safe by proper surfacing. Ultimately, Boys Home wants students to recognize the importance of being a child. Boys Home desires for fellow students, staff and all visitors to see a new playground filled with laughter, joy, and hope for a brighter future.

To make an online donation, please click [here](#) and select 'Playground Project' for the type of donation. For a donation via a check, send a check to Boys Home of Virginia, 414 Boys Home Road, Covington, VA 24426. Be sure to write "Playground" on the memo line. To learn more about Boys Home of Virginia, visit our [website](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

LEGENDS

Dr. Andrew Billingsley

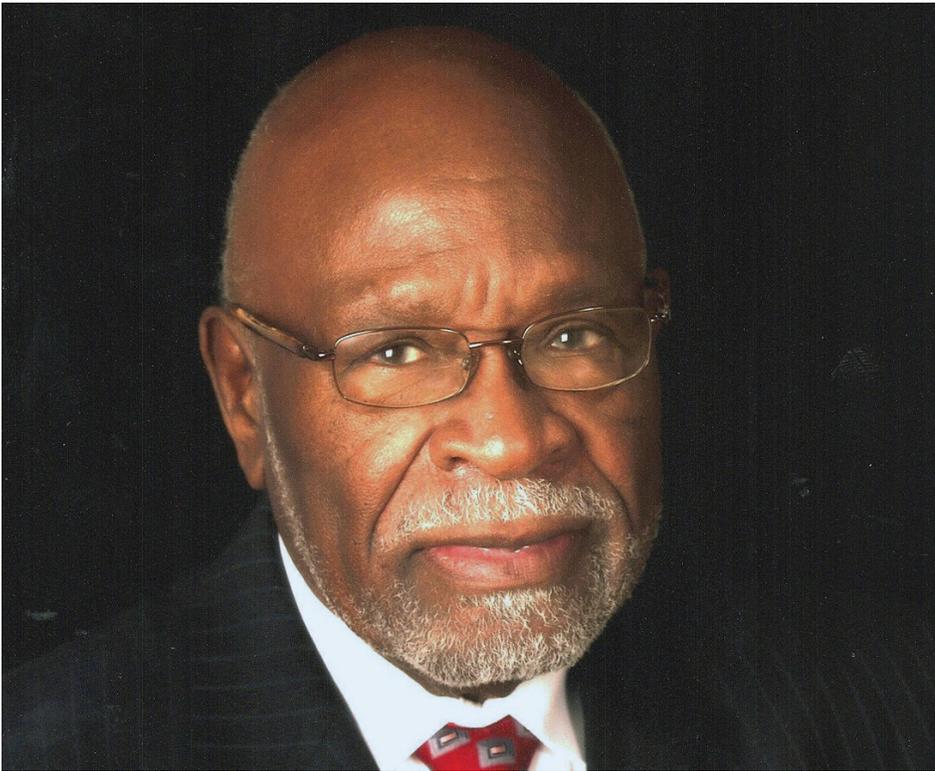


Photo courtesy of Bonita Billingsley Harris

From 1975-1984, Dr. Andrew Billingsley served as the eighth president of Morgan State University. Prior to becoming president of Morgan State, he was the Vice President of Academic Affairs at Howard University from 1970-1975. As a pioneering sociologist, author, lecturer, and college professor, Dr. Billingsley has enlightened the minds of our brightest young people at Howard University, University of California, Berkeley; University of Maryland, College Park; and the University of South Carolina.

Dr. Billingsley was born on March 20, 1926, in Marion, Alabama, to Silas and Lucy Billingsley, who were sharecroppers. He served his country in the U.S. Army during World War II and attended Hampton

Institute from 1947-1949. He then transferred to Grinnell College as part of a groundbreaking student exchange program, receiving his B.A. in political science in 1951. Billingsley was the first African American to graduate from Grinnell since Reconstruction. He went on to earn his M.S. degree from Boston University in 1956 and his Ph.D. from Brandeis University in 1964. In 1961, he married Amy Loretta Tate, whom he met at a co-operative camp in Michigan. They raised two children, Angela and Bonita.

In the field of sociology, his books, research papers, and academic publications brought much-needed attention to the life of the Black family. His monumental works, *Black*

Families in White America, and *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African American Families*, analyze the Black family with empathy and hopefulness.

In 2007, he published *Yearning to Breathe Free: Robert Smalls of South Carolina and his Families*, the first biography of Smalls that assesses “the influence of his families – Black and white, past and present – on his life and enduring legacy.” His most recent work, *Andrew Billingsley: Scholar and Institution Builder*, is a compilation of essays and tributes by his students and colleagues. Dr. Andrew Billingsley’s legacy is cemented among those in academia who break from tradition to expose the truths that were hidden in plain sight.

“My race needs no special defense, for the past history of them in this country proves them to be equal of any people anywhere... All they need is an equal chance in the battle of life.”

– One of Dr. Andrew Billingsley’s favorite quotes, originally attributed to former US Representative, the late Robert Smalls.