

THREESIXTY JOURNALISM



EVAN FROST • ThreeSixty Journalism

Reporter Georgia Fort has experienced racial bias and isn't afraid to air her views about the challenges that people of color face.

For her, it's personal

By FAAYA ADEM
Fair School Downtown

How Georgia Fort is documenting stories through a different lens at BLCK Press and on KMOJ.

As a Black woman in the TV news industry, Georgia Fort has experienced discrimination firsthand. She has felt alienated over her hair, speech, mannerisms and other traits.

For example, Fort described the hours she spent straightening — and ultimately damaging — her natural hair.

“When you get a contract in TV news, you have to agree that they basically control your image. So when I was hired as a TV journalist, I was hired with straight hair,” she said. “Historically speaking, news anchors have been required to have one image and to maintain that image. And if you change that image, you have to have permission.”

She left one TV station because of what she described as discrimination when it denied her maternity leave. With almost 15 years of broadcast experience and two Emmy nominations, she was offered jobs elsewhere in the country, but she struggled to find a job in Minnesota. Meanwhile, she saw a TV station hire a white college student with much less experience as a weekend producer.

That is why founding BLCK Press and being a lead reporter for Racial Reckoning: The Arc of Justice is important to her. BLCK Press is an online site based in St. Paul that publishes news and other content about the Black experience in America. Racial Reckoning is a journalism initiative created by Ampers, KMOJ and the Minnesota Humanities Center to enlist journalists from BIPOC communities to cover the trials of Derek Chauvin and the other former police officers involved in George Floyd's murder, and other issues.

“For me, Racial Reckoning is very personal because it's not just about what we've seen unfold in the criminal justice system. The disparities in Minnesota are ... it's hard to even describe,” Fort said.

Racial Reckoning does not have hard deadlines, nor does it rush to be the first to report on an issue. That is because it is prioritizing accurate, factual reporting.

“Not to say other news organizations don't have that, but I think when your project

is titled ‘Racial Reckoning,’ you're making editorial decisions from a different lens,” Fort said.

During Chauvin's trial, weekly recaps were made in Hmong, Somali and Spanish to reach communities underrepresented by mainstream media.

Fort is also mentoring the up-and-coming BIPOC journalists who are working for Racial Reckoning. She says mentoring and influencing the next generation of journalists is the most fulfilling part of her work. But she notes that even as more BIPOC journalists are being hired, newsrooms are struggling to retain them.

“You can recruit all you want, you can make great hires, you could find the best of the best of the best journalists of color to fill your newsroom, but if you don't address the culture in your newsroom, you will fail to retain them,” she said, adding that addressing culture outside the newsroom to these recruits matters, as well.

“What happens when they go to the grocery store? What

happens when they go to church, what happens when they're driving, while still just being Black? What happens when they're going for a jog? What happens when they're just living their life in Minnesota, while being Black, or any other ethnic background?” she said.

Fort, Racial Reckoning and similar groups are hoping mainstream media in Minnesota will hire from this cultivated group of journalists instead of outsourcing from other areas of the country. People from local communities can provide important nuances and context for complex stories, along with local connections, she said.

“You lose that when you're outsourcing people who are not from this community,” she said.

Fort also thinks citizen journalism plays an important role in media coverage — notably Darnella Frazier's video of Floyd's murder, a citizen video that spread around the world and helped hold the parties involved accountable.

“The power of documenting media ... can be used to cause harm, and it can be used to cause accountability or used to create positive change. It's a powerful tool.”

Podcast is a voice for local racial reckoning

Freddie Bell aims message at the BIPOC community.

By PAUL MALLOY
Minnetonka High School

Freddie Bell has a voice made for radio, but he didn't always plan on becoming a broadcaster. That changed when he was in college at Creighton University in Omaha. One night he got lost on campus and found himself at the bottom of a staircase.

He glimpsed into a glass room full of vinyl records and microphones and asked a nearby student, “Do they have a campus radio station?” The student gave him a look that said, “Of course.” In Bell's words, “My career changed radically at that point.”

Decades later, he is still going strong in the radio broadcasting business.

“Now it's me standing at the bottom of the staircase helping others who are trying to get into our business,” he said.

Bell has been involved at KMOJ, a small, community-owned station, since 2014 and has served as general manager since 2016.

In 2020 Bell was named Broadcaster of the Year by the Association of Minnesota Public Educational Radio Stations, an award he accepted with humility.

“To get an award for this job seems weird,” Bell said. “I just want to do my work, communicate effectively and help people.”

As Bell sees it, he has three duties: protect the station's license, train broadcasters and give the community information they can use to make rational decisions.

In 2021 Bell and KMOJ partnered with Ampers, the Minnesota Humanities Center and other groups and foundations to create Racial Reckoning: The Arc of Justice. It is a news podcast aimed at changing problematic racial narratives in mainstream news and helping the local community form educated opinions.

For Bell, the need to tell these stories to the community started with Jamar Clark's death at the hands of Minneapolis police officers in 2015.

“That story was one that impacted the people in the core area where the station was physically situated,” Bell



PAUL MALLOY • ThreeSixty Journalism
Public radio host Freddie Bell says we hear the story differently from a voice like ours.

said. “I felt, in my opinion, that it was important to tell that story ... until they reached a logical conclusion.”

Bell felt it was his duty to keep the community informed during tumultuous times.

“We're not a newsroom, we're not an insert,” he said. “To not tell these stories ... was a miss for a community radio station that aims to give people information to make decisions.”

Bell said it's important for the community to be able to relate to the person telling the stories.

“I think it is important to have young journalists from our BIPOC community tell stories that impact us. Even though it may be word for word the same as our white counterparts ... I'm hearing it through a different lens.”

Bell added, “I've got some good friends in the broadcast business ... a lot of them don't look like me, don't have the kind of experiences I had.”

Bell thinks the community has responded well to Racial Reckoning.

“They don't care about the name of the project,” he said. “They care about the information we're sharing. That's the goal.”

Bell is not doing this project for the recognition. Instead, he is doing it for the greater good of the community. Moving forward, Bell has many aspirations for Racial Reckoning.

“I want to see it continue in perpetuity for as long as our radio station is able to operate,” he said. “I am hoping that we can continue to be the platform for aspiring journalists ... to get the training they need.”

Bell's next project aims to get young students involved in broadcasting and Racial Reckoning.

Nonprofit cultivates leadership

Its mission is to get young people to read and lead.

By IVAN RAHOUSKI
Eden Prairie High School

While a student at Hamline University, Artika Tyner was determined to be a high school English teacher.

“I think for me the biggest inspiration was related to literacy,” Tyner said. “Even when I was doing student teaching, seeing that the basic phonics and some of the building blocks of reading were missing for far too many children.”

Ultimately Tyner became an attorney and a clinical professor. Now she's the director of the Center on Race, Leadership and Social Justice at the University of St. Thomas. In 2014 she founded Planting People Growing Justice.

“Planting People Growing Justice is a nonprofit organization that focuses on promoting literacy and diversity in books with an ultimate goal of inspiring leadership and social change,” Tyner said.

The organization publishes and distributes books from authors of color to teach the importance of social change through education, training and community outreach. The hope is that kids will be more interested in reading when they see themselves in the story.

To date, the organization



Courtesy Artika Tyner

Artika Tyner inspires children of color through her nonprofit and her book, “Justice Makes a Difference.”

has donated 7,000 books to schools, and Tyner hopes they can get books into every school and inspire students to be leaders.

One of the first stories published by Planting People Growing Justice was Tyner's own book, “Justice Makes a Difference.” The story is about Justice, a young girl who, through her love of books and conversations with her grandma, learns about important men and women who changed the world, like Ella Baker and Ida B. Wells. Tyner was inspired to write the book because in her childhood there were few stories written from the perspective of African American children.

“The win would be seeing the ‘Justice’ books in all schools and libraries,” Tyner said. “When you see the red cape, you know that you can soar to new heights and you can be impactful.”

Tyner also hopes “Justice Makes a Difference” will lead to readers exploring their cultural roots, as she did during trips to Ghana. Her first was

in 2019, when Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo sent an invitation to the world in a United Nations address. The year 2019 marked the “Year of Return,” the 400-year anniversary of the first Africans being taken to America as slaves. Akufo-Addo hoped the invitation would allow people to “honor humanities” and “reclaim [their] history.”

In Ghana, Tyner got a rich experience of cultural legacy and identity. She believes reading inspires children to be involved in their communities and recognize their roots.

“If we study our history, it takes people to get involved to create infinite possibilities.” Tyner takes pride in an e-mail she received from a parent who bought “Justice Makes a Difference” for their child. The child told her father, “Daddy, that's me,” when she read it. And that's exactly the impact Tyner hopes to have.

“I wrote ‘Justice’ for every Black girl, Black boy, every child of color, to have that mirror to see themselves more clearly.”

Bringing diverse voices to radio

Tiffany Bui tells the true stories of people of color at Racial Reckoning: The Arc of Justice.

By KENNEDY RANCE
Patrick Henry High School

As a Vietnamese American raised in Minnesota, Tiffany Bui felt her cultural identity was left out of the media entirely.

“I come from a different background, in which people live [differently], eat different foods and speak a different language,” she said.

This separation has led Bui to become more empathetic to those denied entry into majority white spaces. Bui understands what it's like to be dismissed and misrepresented. Bui, a University of Minnesota student, has worked in journalism for four years. Bui spent her time in newsrooms as an intern, as well as a managing editor, confronting the lack of diversity in her workplace and in the stories her colleagues reported.

Now she is a radio reporter at Racial Reckoning: The Arc of Justice. According to its website, Racial Reckoning is a journalism initiative covering the trials of the former Minneapolis police officers who were charged in connection with the murder of George Floyd, as well as the community's response and the changes needed to create a more just society.

At Racial Reckoning, Bui does not have to push for a wide range of perspectives



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Tiffany Bui strives to highlight voices of color in a positive way.

— her story assignments align with her purpose to highlight diverse narratives.

“There's no way to tell the truth fully and accurately without including the voice of people of color,” Bui said.

During the past year, Bui has reported on the Derek Chauvin trial and social unrest, all amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of her most recent reporting focused on the death of Leneal Frazier, Darnella Frazier's uncle. Darnella Frazier is the teen who recorded Floyd's death on her cellphone.

While pursuing a robbery suspect in July, a Minneapolis police officer crashed into Leneal Frazier's car at an intersection, killing him.

While covering Frazier's death, Bui didn't pull out her microphone to record or videotape the family. Instead, she listened to Frazier's cousin as he mourned and spoke to broadcasters.

In those moments, Bui

felt his pain didn't need to be documented. He needed to be seen and felt.

“As a journalist, you're there to bear witness and tell the story,” she said. “I never learned what to do when there is grief unfolding in real time.”

As Bui covers these stories, she said she's empathetic to the raw emotions of the families and communities she's reporting on.

Due to Bui's lack of representation growing up, she strives to highlight voices of color daily. To Bui, narratives of people of color go far beyond being a part of a singular news story. “Diverse narratives,” she said, “are a fundamental part of journalism.”

Bui hopes listeners of Racial Reckoning find its stories “more relatable and applicable to their lives ... and those [stories] are told in ways that are more humanizing than they would usually see in mainstream media.”

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Hennepin County helps teens transition to adults

Resources aimed at jobs, stress at school and home.

By MANEEYA LEUNG
Eden Prairie High School

Unlike many 17-year-olds, Godwin Kasongoma, a Columbia Heights High School senior, isn't working the drive-through window or in customer service this summer. Instead, she works for the Hennepin County Transition Age Team.

The Transition Age Team is one of the many initiatives by Hennepin County that aims to improve the well-being of youth transitioning into adulthood. The team strategizes solutions to help youth ages 14 to 26 navigate homelessness, the foster care system, juvenile justice, parenthood and personal life.

Godwin is one of eight youth interns and volunteers on the team. Step Up, a career resource program, connected Godwin to Hennepin County. As an intern, she gets to pay it forward. Godwin writes e-mail blasts, which include resources and job openings, that reach young people through youth action boards. She wants to give other youth the same connection to new jobs.

"It's important because there's many opportunities out there," Godwin said about providing job resources to other teens. "It can excel you or be an ascending ladder to you."

"I'm very passionate about helping youth," Godwin said. She wants to study immigration law. She values the writing experience she's gained and the mentors she met during

her internship.

Jobs are only one milestone of the journey to adulthood. The Transition Age Team also worked to extend opportunities for foster youth during the COVID-19 pandemic and give them cash stipends for immediate needs, as well as help get them vaccinated.

"It's about first chances and second chances," said Lexi Prah Martin, coordinator for the Transition Age Team. "How can we make sure that when you get into that first house and first apartment that you never have to experience an eviction?"

The county also partners with mental health programs, such as Change to Chill, to get resources into more schools. Change to Chill, created by Allina Health, gives high

school students strategies on improving their well-being. Students learn to identify stressors and find ways to cope. Prah Martin finds the work necessary because she thinks mental health plays a role in every life choice.

This summer, Godwin became a high school ambassador for Change to Chill. She wants to create help within her school and reduce the stigma around mental health issues.

From Godwin's experience, high school students struggle with their GPA, expectations for their future, developing into adulthood and managing family. She noticed that students disregard mental health as an issue in these struggles.

"For example, say they were failing their classes. They won't directly connect

it with mental health. They'll think, 'Oh, maybe I'm pretty dumb.'" As she creates pathways through Change to Chill, Godwin hopes the well-being of high schoolers can improve.

Prah Martin works to ensure that all teens have access to resources for any struggle they might face during their transition to adulthood. The resources are compiled on hennepin.us/youth, covering topics such as sexual health, emergency housing and scheduling a driver's license exam.

Prah Martin emphasized that these programs rely on young people in the community to make decisions.

"Honestly, most of the time, I just need to stop talking and listen," she said, "because usually they have the best insights."



CHRISTINE NGUYEN
Lexi Prah Martin is coordinator for the Hennepin County Transition Age Team.



CHRISTINE NGUYEN • ThreeSixty Journalism

Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio supports a community garden and nutrition classes.

CLUES supports Latino community

Nonprofit grows garden of healthy cultural food.

By ABIGAIL HATTING
Washburn High School

Jennifer Peña, an intern at the Latino nonprofit Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio, used to grow food in a community garden on the East Side of St. Paul, an area predominantly made up of people of color, but then sold the produce to white neighborhoods.

"It just goes to show that most of the time, healthy food is catered to white and rich people. And a lot of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) don't live in high-income areas," she said. "We don't have access to good food."

A nonprofit organization created by and for Latinos in the Twin Cities, CLUES was founded in 1981 with the goal of supporting Latino individuals and families by providing needed services. In addition to many programs, such as classes and food distribution sites, CLUES is actively enacting change through a newly established community garden. After a series of conversations in Ramsey County

about health, wellness and access to food, the desire for a garden specifically catered to Latino families was brought up again and again, and so the project was born.

"One of the best ways to build power and build community is through green spaces and gardening, because everybody has some kind of connection to food, regardless of your background or cultural traditions," says Abigail Hindson, community garden coordinator at CLUES.

On the East Side of St. Paul right behind the CLUES office, Jardín de Armonía y Acción, or Harmony and Action Garden, was built in 2020 amid the pandemic with a three-year grant through Blue Cross and Blue Shield. Fresh produce such as tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini and jalapeños are grown.

Gardener Reyna Lopez has seen a large sense of community growing at the space.

"I've met a lot of Latinos there, people from my country I've never met before," she said. "It's just amazing."

Hindson spoke passionately about how, historically, people of color have been kicked off land and not allowed

to grow their own food.

"Agricultural workers in Mexican and Central American communities had a lot of rich agricultural traditions and agricultural knowledge coming here [to the U.S.]. And because of immigration status, not being able to start their own businesses and instead being relegated to work on white-owned farms for really, really low wages. And then, the whole process for starting urban farms or community gardens or rural farms [is] really complicated."

"There's loan discrimination," she continued. "There's all kinds of barriers in terms of the processes you have to follow; the permitting, the language access. And the amount of capital you have to have to start a farm or business, and then who you can sell the food to. Like Jennifer said, you're mostly catering to wealthy white people instead of communities that are already experiencing not being able to afford high quality food because of all the systems that are in place."

In the future, CLUES hopes to create an additional garden, either on the East Side of St. Paul or at its South Minneapolis office.



CHRISTINE NGUYEN • ThreeSixty Journalism

Ben Waltz and Cathy Lawrence are reaching out to Black families with Habitat opportunities.

Developing new ways to own a home

Habitat for Humanity is refining its core mission.

By MEGAN CORNELL
Benilde-St. Margaret's

In the Twin Cities, Habitat for Humanity has primarily constructed single-family homes for immigrant families. But after the murder of George Floyd, the organization has decided to radically redefine its approach to affordable housing.

In a conversation on the University of St. Thomas campus, Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity's chief development officer, Cathy Lawrence, said the nonprofit had critically overlooked a group that needed their help: what Lawrence called "foundational Black families," or direct descendants of African slaves.

"There are generations of Black Americans who have never owned a home," Lawrence said.

Part of working with these communities involves listening to the specific housing needs of each client. Previously, Habitat built single-family homes on empty lots dispersed throughout the Twin Cities. But now, there are five new ways that fami-

lies can buy a house.

They can buy a newly constructed single-family home; buy a "next generation home" that was previously owned by another Habitat client; buy a starter home that was pre-purchased by Habitat; work with a real estate agent to buy their own house; or pick a house for Habitat to remodel. No matter what plan clients choose, Habitat will give them the "affordability gap" mortgage — mortgage payments set at 30% of their income.

As well as working with new clientele, Habitat is hoping to scale up its operations. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Habitat traditionally built about 50 homes a year. This year, it is planning to close on 120 mortgages.

"The plan is to scale [operations] about 20% or more a year; on top of that we'll keep scaling, but the primary focus is on racial equity," she said.

Lawrence attributes these changes to a shift in mentality at the nonprofit. Instead of acting as a savior, Habitat for Humanity aims to be a partner.

"We are going to call it out in our strategic plan that we are going to do our partnerships differently. We are going to do a lot of listening

and then acting in partnership with the folks we serve," Lawrence said.

This year, when the housing market boomed, Habitat acted quickly. Staff proactively bought starter homes across the metro area, knowing that prices could inflate. This flexibility allowed them to more specifically cater to their clients' needs, especially clients who preferred to live in first- and second-ring suburbs instead of the inner city.

Habitat plans to continue building unique homes to service clients' needs; Lawrence said the next plan "will be higher density housing. We might build vertical condos... some families may want their first house to be a condo because they prefer that style of living."

Habitat hopes listening to these communities will allow it to better address the racial inequities in affordable housing. Providing homes to foundational Black families will help give those families generational wealth, security and community.

"We want to go from an organization that cares about equity to an equity organization," Lawrence said. "We are really excited about that work."

About this project

These stories were created by ThreeSixty Journalism's summer 2021 News Reporter Academy high school students in partnership with the Minnesota Humanities Center and the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross Blue Shield.

ThreeSixty Journalism

ThreeSixty Journalism is leading the way in developing multicultural storytellers in the media arts industry. The program is a loudspeaker for underheard voices, where highly motivated high school students discover the power of voice and develop their own within ThreeSixty's immersive college success programming. Launched in 1971 as an Urban Journalism Workshop chapter, since 2001 the program has been part of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas. To learn more about ThreeSixty Journalism, visit threesixty.stthomas.edu.

Leading the challenge for racial equity in health care

Data, life experiences come together to inspire change.

By CAROLINE SIEBELS-LINDQUIST
Great River School



Vayong Moua of Blue Cross Blue Shield says racism in public health won't go away overnight.

Vayong Moua wears his heart on a T-shirt that reads, "Racism is a Public Health Crisis," his confidence showing through his eccentric exterior.

For Moua, his T-shirt is more than a fashion statement. As a Hmong American refugee, he connects his life experiences and identity to his work at Blue Cross and Blue Shield, fighting to bring awareness to how social factors like race can affect the health system and working to legally classify racism as a public health crisis.

Moua was barely a year old when his parents fled Laos. He grew up surrounded by Hmong culture.

"It really has this deep imprint on my life," Moua said.

His family settled in Eau Claire, Wis., where Moua

started school. He attended English-language learners courses with his siblings and helped his parents learn English at home.

Years later, Moua attended St. Olaf, where he studied philosophy, anthropology and Asian studies, much to the surprise of his parents.

"We didn't cross the Mekong River for you to think deeply about being unemployed," they told him. He went on to receive a graduate degree in public health from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

His mother worked at the public health department in Eau Claire for 25 years, and his father worked at Eau Claire City Hall.

"I was forged out of civic engagement and public

health," Moua said.

His views came together by the discrimination he witnessed. When his father, who has a strong Hmong accent, would try to help people find housing, he was told the properties were no longer available.

"I would call in a perfect Midwestern accent, and they would say, 'Oh, you can come by anytime you want.' But if I disclosed my name, they said, 'Oh, sorry, it's taken.'"

Moua said an intentionally designed racist system has led to discrimination. Now as the director of racial and health equity and advocacy at Blue Cross and Blue Shield, he is in a position to help change that.

He said it's important to legally classify racism as a public health crisis. He is working on doing so with Minnesota Reps. Ruth Richardson and Rena Moran, and with Gov. Tim Walz's administration.

Moua described the social determinants of a health framework, which says only a

small percentage of a person's health is determined by direct health care at a clinic. Another small amount is created by genetics or physical behavior.

"The majority is the social factors, so that's your education, where you live, where you work, your gender, your social experience," he said.

He points to COVID-19 as an example of how race, gender, ZIP code and income affect people's access to health care, saying that it has only escalated existing social inequities.

"For somebody like me who has been deep in this work for a long time, of course this is going to be exacerbated by COVID-19. And if we have pre-health conditions, COVID-19 is going to exacerbate them. The hope is that it shines a sustained, concentrated light on racism, which then will cut across multiple issues, not just health. It's embedded ecologically in our society."

Moua describes how he is often the only person of color

involved in key decision-making processes and how that must change. There are now more people of color at the table — and creating their own tables, he said.

"We're trying to ... say, 'I don't like your rules, I'm not here to fulfill something for you,'" he said. "We're here to decide upon things together."

He leads policies designed to reduce commercial tobacco use and food insecurity and increase physical activity. And when Moua isn't actively calling and meeting with policymakers and community members, he is working on plans to design transportation for everyone in area communities.

Through his upbringing and profession, Moua can distinguish how current racial health system inequities are upheld, and he tailors his work to address them. "It is preventable, avoidable and unjust, and these inequities are not natural," Moua said. "They did not happen out of thin air."