

DEAFNESS AND BLACK HISTORY: ONE LEADER'S PERSPECTIVE

By Ernest E. Garrett III, NBDA President

THE DIVERSITY OF A COMMUNITY

The African-American community embodies a rich system of educational, political, and cultural supports that seek to ensure the visibility—and validity—of its community members within mainstream society at large. Paramount to this system is the presence of socio-political organizations that advocate for the needs of African Americans at local, state, and national levels of participation. Given that African Americans are the largest racial minority group in the USA, it would be delusional to believe that such organizations can serve the needs of every African American. The community itself is diverse, representing myriad variables of national origin, skin color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, and—most importantly for the sake of this article—disability. While the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and similar-minded political advocacy groups are progressive in their own right, Deaf African Americans envisioned the need for a national organization focused on the needs of Blacks living with the experience of a hearing loss disability; hence, the birth of National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) in 1982.

ABOUT THE NBDA



Though a relatively new establishment, NBDA is the oldest and largest consumer organization of Black Deaf people in the United States. It is a nonprofit, tax-exempt, consumer organization, supported by its members, partners, and allies who are interested in furthering NBDA's goals. The organization's mission is "to promote the leadership development, economic, and educational opportunities; social equality; and to safeguard the general health and welfare of Black Deaf and hard of hearing people."

The executive officers, in consultation with the board of directors, manage and supervise the affairs of NBDA in keeping with its mission, bylaws, and guidelines. For more information about NBDA, please visit our website: www.nbda.org.

NBDA & THE COMMUNITY

Despite the gains of legislative victories such as the ADA, IDEA, and other relevant social policies, Black Deaf Americans continue to experience gross deficits in access to education, economic parity, and social justice; second-class citizenship in terms of employment opportunities, fair housing, and sustainable relationships with banking institutions; and pervasive threats to the right to define ourselves—by ourselves and for ourselves—in a way that is empowering and culturally affirmative. NBDA continues to be a needed and cherished resource to assist its members, corporate partners, and allies with advocating for, with, and on behalf of Black Deaf and hard of hearing people.

In what ways does NBDA provide advocacy for equal access with regard to economic and educational opportunities, social equality, and health? NBDA chapters provide educational workshops and trainings, engage in fundraising activities to support chapter programs, and participate in regional and national conferences to network with other chapters of NBDA and conduct regional business. At the national level, officers and board members actively remain abreast of issues pertaining to chapters and are prepared to respond to situations when the opportunity presents itself. This can take the following forms: writing letters of support, joining with other national organizations to form a coalition of the willing, and developing partnerships with other organizations around advocacy issues.

LEADERS OF AND IN THE BLACK DEAF COMMUNITY

As with the African-American community at large, Deaf African Americans have prominent members of their own community who have made significant contributions to society. Such members represent the fields of administration and supervision, social work, vocational rehabilitation, education, and other important institutions within American society.

DR. GLENN B. ANDERSON, Ph.D. and CRC, is an assistant professor within the interpretation ASL/English department at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He also holds the distinction of being the first Black Deaf man to earn a doctorate degree. Dr. Anderson's accomplishments are too numerous to mention, but they include serving as the chairman of the board of trustees at Gallaudet University, an appointment as second vice-chair to the National Council on Disability, and member of the board of directors of NBDA.



DR. ISAAC AGBOOLA, Ph.D., is the dean within the College of Liberal Arts, Sciences, and Technologies at Gallaudet University.

ELIZABETH MOORE, Ph.D. candidate and MSW, is an assistant professor of social work and MSW program director at Gallaudet University.



MARVIN "TIM" ALBERT, MSW, is the former school social worker and current assistant director for residential services at the Georgia School for the Deaf. He is also a member of the administration team for the Deaf Youth Camp of Color, a program of the National Deaf People of Color Conference.

PATRICE CREAMER, MSW, is the project director for the National Development & Research Institute, Inc.





CLAUDIA GORDON, the first Black Deaf woman to obtain a Juris Doctorate, is a political appointee with the Obama administration. She was appointed as special assistant to the director of the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP). She is also a former officer (vice president) of NBDA.



PAMELA LLOYD-OGOKE is the bureau chief for the North Carolina division of Vocational Rehabilitation’s community services section, a member of the Gallaudet University board of trustees, and a past president of NBDA.

There are many other movers and shakers within the Black Deaf community and not enough space within this article to credit them for their contributions to not only to the Deaf Community, but also to American society. It is the hope of the NBDA that, through our youth, its Youth Empowerment Summit, and Collegiate Black Deaf Student Leadership Institute programs, we will continue to develop and prepare the next generation of Black Deaf leadership.

NBDA & DCMP

Last, but not least, NBDA is greatly indebted to the U.S. Department of Education, particularly its Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP), which provides valuable resources to enhance the educational success of our K–12 Black Deaf students and those who also experience varying degrees of vision loss. NBDA cannot do it alone; with programs such as the DCMP, we are confident that one day Black Deaf people can—and will—enjoy greater educational, economic, and social parity within mainstream society.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ernest E. Garrett III is a native of St. Louis, MO. He is a provisional licensed clinical social worker (PLCSW) and employed full-time with Special School District of St. Louis County as a school social worker with the Deaf and hard of hearing. Ernest is also an adjunct faculty member at Southwestern Illinois College. Ernest received an Associate of Arts degree (general studies) and dual Bachelor of Arts degrees (professional/technical writing and history) from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

He went on to earn an advanced academic degree in administration (MS) and an advanced professional degree in social work (MSW) with a school social work specialization, both from Gallaudet University. He is currently pursuing a research doctorate degree (Ph.D.) in applied management and decision sciences from Walden University. His area of specialization is in leadership and organizational change.