



SAN FRANCISCO  
*African American  
 Historical & Cultural Society*

**SAN FRANCISCO  
 AFRICAN AMERICAN  
 HISTORICAL &  
 CULTURAL SOCIETY**

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Al Williams, President  
 William Hoskins, Executive  
 Director

**FROM THE PRESIDENT**

*Society issues, goals &  
 What's in this issue*

- Al Williams, President

The Society is planning for the reopening of our library / gallery at the African American Art and Culture Complex (AAACC), 762 Fulton Street. We look forward to welcoming back our members and visitors. After all, everything the Society does is for our members and guests. Until then, I hope you will enjoy this issue of the *Praisesinger*.

To make your Society experience more interesting, productive and enjoyable, we've been improving the Society's organizational infrastructure. We also aim is to communicate more efficiently and effectively with members and the public. We would like to offer greater member benefits by collaborating with other AAACC-resident institutions. Any suggestions about how to do this would be appreciated.

Volunteers are diligently sorting and cataloging our archives. They've made progress and discovered some important historical resources. One of the challenges we must address in the future is how to make these resources accessible to scholars and others who are researching the history and culture of African Americans in San Francisco.

Check out the events (and photos on the bonus page) scheduled over the coming month, some Society-cosponsored. If possible, we hope you will take advantage of them. We may see you at some of them!

Planning for **2020 Black History Month Kickoff** and programs is underway. The 2022 theme is: **Black Health and Wellness**. Our programming will celebrate the history and contributions African American health care professionals, identify health and wellness challenges facing the community, including mental health, and shine a light on the continuing disparities and inequities in resource allocation for the care of African Americans. For a more relevant **2022 Black History Month**, we hope to strengthen and build collaborative relationships with other organizations, institutions and individuals.

None of what we do would be possible without the continued support of **our members and our sponsors**. With that in mind, in September, we will be launching a campaign to raise the funds necessary to support our programs, activities and operations over the next 15 months. We will need your renewed support! Please let me know if you can be a part of the campaign team.

Thanks again for your interest and support in the documentation and presentation of the history and culture of San Francisco's African American community.

Stay safe and take good care.

## THE BLACK FAMILY

- William Hoskins,  
Curator, Executive  
Director

**Black History Month** is behind us, but Black History year is still here. This year's Black History Month theme, "**The Black Family: Representation, Identity and Diversity**", is relevant now as it was in February. The virtual exhibit, "**The Black Family Through The Artist Eye**" is available for your viewing until the end of this year. It attempts to capture elements of the Black family as perceived by 18 Bay Area artists. Click on [virtual exhibit](#) or find it on the [Society's events page](#), click on the image.

During these challenging times, the importance of the Black family cannot be over dramatized. It is often the dynamics of the Black family that "the American dream to succeed against incredible odds" becomes a reality. The impact of being part of a Black family is often subtle and not recognized at first.

"Mrs. Givens, who lived at the end of the block was my confident. She always gave the same response as my mother to the question I raised, "Everybody else can stay out late, why can't I?" "Everybody doesn't live at your house, you do. Your mama and papa are looking out for you." And I thought, "If you all say so, it must make sense." I had no choice if it didn't.

This is an excerpt from a book written by James P. Comer, M.D., [Maggie's American Dream: The Life and Times of a Black Family](#). A Professor of Child Psychiatry at Yale University Child Study Center and Associate Dean of the Yale School of Medicine, Comer shares a compelling family history that shows how family values and education can change people's lives. The book includes the oral history of his mother, Maggie Comer, and the autobiography of James Comer, Maggie's son.

It is a family saga about an exceptional woman, Maggie Comer, whose American dream brought her from abject poverty in rural Mississippi in 1904, to being the mother of four outstanding achievers. Her husband Hugh Comer, an Alabama preacher's son, as near perfect a man as there could be, built a stable and sustaining family and raised four children. After his death, Maggie uneducated, unskilled, working as a domestic and an elevator operator, had to put her four children through college.



*Right to Life and Freedom*  
VirgiNia Jourdan

Under her watchful eyes, the four children earned a total of thirteen college degrees. The story highlights how important parental understanding and pride are for the self-esteem of the children. It also underscores the important relationships between family, church and education.

I highly recommend the book, [Maggie's American Dream](#) by James P. Comer, M.D., and, be sure to view the Society's first virtual exhibit, "**The Black Family Through The Artist Eye**".

Stay well.

**JOHNNIE BURRELL**  
Media Owner

"Johnnie Burrell is an independent internet television producer in San Francisco, California."

- Eldoris Cupp Cameron

On June 18<sup>th</sup>, I ran into **Johnnie Burrell** at the Golden Gate Park Band Stand at the **350 Ancestors Juneteenth Dedications** by master sculptor, Dana King. He was quietly engaged in photographing that event, which highlighted African American history and community, as he has done since 2006 in the San Francisco Bay Area. A San Francisco State University alumnus, he tells that story like a modern day *griot* through his photography and videos.



Johnnie Burrell in Golden Gate Park

As a continuous writer, photographer and videographer, Johnnie has recorded and broadcast notable people and events, i.e.; the Martin Luther King Center and Congresswoman Barbara Lee's Lecture Series event at Allen Temple Baptist Church, Powerful Black Women: Journalist Jerri Lange; Remembering Carolyn Ashe Stokes (Author, Educator, Activist); Rev. Jesse Jackson's TECH 2020 Series; and many more (posted online).

He has volunteered for *Access Adventure*, a non-profit wilderness, open space access program for people with disabilities *He is currently documenting San Francisco Mayor London Breed's term in office.* Johnnie shares the people and events he captures at:

[internationalmediatv](http://internationalmediatv.com)

He has over 55 years of experience practicing and teaching martial arts, winning numerous individual and team karate championships, including a Gold Medal on the U.S.A. Karate 'A' Team - Pan American Karate Championships in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He is a long-time **SAG / AFTRA** member, and appeared in Hollywood's legendary film director Sam Peckinpah's feature film *The Killer Elite* that starred James Caan and Robert Duval; Johnnie played the role of Caan's karate teacher. He also appeared in Ralph Ellison's *King of The Bingo Game*. Commercials were also in the mix.



MLK, III, interviewed by Johnnie Burrell

email: [jb@internationalmediatv.com](mailto:jb@internationalmediatv.com)

One cannot meet a more gentle, kind and engaging individual than Johnnie, and the San Francisco Bay Area is blessed to have such a talented gentleman in our midst.

**Go Johnnie Go!!!**

**SPOTLIGHT ON  
FRANKIE JACOBS  
GILLETTE**

*Patron of the Arts,  
Life Time Society  
Member*

- Ginger Smyly

Have you seen the article in the summer *Fine Arts*, the monthly magazine of the DeYoung and Legion of Honor museums? Lifetime Society member, **Frankie Gillette**, is featured as a Board member of the Trustees of the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco. Gillette advocated for diverse staff, noting the arrival of Natasha Becker, the newest curator at the DeYoung, as a “step in the right direction”. Frankie and Maxwell Gillette sponsored exhibits, supported access to museums for all, and encouraged the acquisition of works by African American and other artists of color. The Gillettes gifted the museum with a Jacob Lawrence screen print and have included a Catlett print as part of their planned giving.

Maxwell Gillette passed away late last year. Mrs. Gillette continues to survive and thrive, a patron of the arts and advocate for our community.

**TWO AFRICAN  
AMERICAN EARLY 20<sup>th</sup>  
CENTURY PIONEERS**

In a recent Society website posting, we included this story of 2 ordinary men and their families living in San Francisco around 1900

- Pierce McDonnell  
with additional  
material from GS

**Joseph Crutchfield**, a man in his sixties, ran a restaurant at 2845 Baker Street & Greenwich frequented by soldiers stationed at the Presidio and members of the local civilian community. The neighborhood was full of veterans and active military personnel because it bordered the Presidio military base.

Crutchfield was a Black man born in Jefferson, Kentucky, in the early 1840s. He had been enslaved, gaining his freedom at the age of 19 through joining the 18th United States Colored Infantry in Missouri during the Civil War. As a private in Company H, he saw combat multiple times, including the Battle of Nashville in December 1864. He moved West sometime in the 1870s or early 1880s.

After the war, he married a woman named Eliza in 1875, with whom he was married until his death in 1905. The couple did not have any surviving children. In 1888, Crutchfield appears in San Francisco city directories. In the same year, on October 13, he registered to vote.

He became active in the Grand Army of the Republic, a Civil War Union veterans’ organization, in a local chapter known as the James A. Garfield Post No. 34. While Union soldiers had served in racially segregated units during the war, as they would continue until 1948, GAR chapters were integrated. In 1891, Joseph Crutchfield was elected to serve as a delegate for the Army and Navy Republican League to the California State encampment, where he and other delegates worked to promote major political issues of the time. In about 1900, Crutchfield founded a small restaurant in the Cow Hollow neighborhood at 2845 Baker Street.

Unfortunately, Crutchfield's life ended in tragedy in October 1905, as he took his own life at the age of 65. His funeral was held at Third Baptist Church; he is buried in the National Cemetery in the Presidio, grave marker # 872.

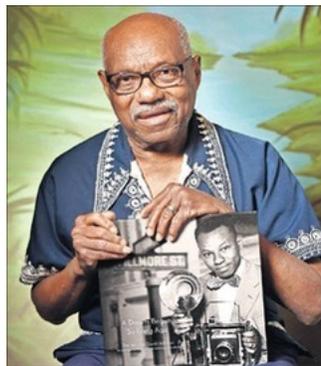
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DAVID JOHNSON

*David Johnson Photo Processing Lab – Harvey Milk Photo Center*

David Johnson, *a lifetime, devoted member of the Society was honored on June 26 with the Zoom dedication of the David Johnson Photo Processing Lab.* The Recreation and Park Commission approved the David Johnson Lab resolution in October 2019, but the pandemic delayed the official dedication.

**Beginning in the 1960's, David chronicled the lives of African Americans in San Francisco after serving in World War II and moving to San Francisco.** David was Ansel Adams' first African American student. While studying photography at the California School of Fine Arts, now the San Francisco Art Institute, Adams encouraged David to photograph what he knew best.



David Johnson with his book

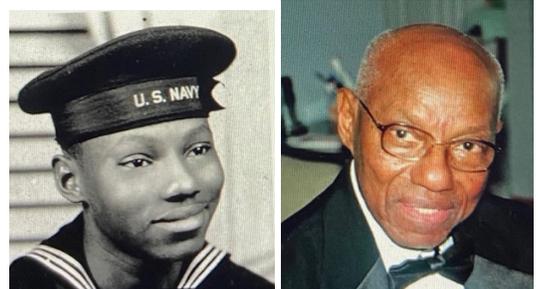
Book Signing Reception on November 11, 2012.

David Johnson celebrates his **95<sup>th</sup> birthday on August 1, 2021** with friends and family. The Society celebrates his life and contributions to our community and wishes him a **HAPPY 95<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY!**

- EC

**The Civil Rights Movement was captured in many of Johnson's photographs, including ordinary people and events.** Some of his works can be found in the Library of Congress and the Bancroft Library at the University of California. **A Dream Begun So Long Ago: The Story of David Johnson** by Jacqueline Annette Sue, his wife, captures many black and white photos: children playing, Victorian homes, local and national dignitaries, civil rights marches, and the club scene.

Note: The Harvey Milk Photo Center is located at 50 Scott Street, San Francisco 94117



Youthful David Johnson; as a sailor; a mature pose

David served as Society president from 1975-77. His works were exhibited at the Society's Ft. Mason location from June-September 2000. His **"African Americans in San Francisco"** exhibit/reception was on October 20, 2005. He gifted the Society with a **Past Presidents Perpetual Plaque** at the Photography/Lecture and

**STOP AAPI HATE**

We abhor hate and violence of any kind, but particularly racially-motivated hate and violence. Let's stand up against hate and violence of any kind and show our solidarity with others.

**BLACK LIVES MATTER! STOP ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER HATE!**

**DNA GENEALOGY WORKSHOPS**



Jeannette Fisher-Kouadio on ZOOM

On June 5, 2021, the Society hosted a DNA Genealogy workshop, featuring **Jeannette Fisher-Kouadio**, friend to the Society. In her own words, she described her journey taking various DNA tests, getting the results and what followed. Fisher-Kouadio visited Cameroon and was inducted into the royal family of her DNA tribe; she confirmed that the father she knew as a child was "honorary" only, and finally found her biological father and half siblings, uniting them with her two grandchildren, two children and herself.

**Alvis Ward**, President of the African American Genealogical Society of Northern California, joined the question and answer period, and promises to return in the fall to conduct a DNA Genealogy 101 for African Americans Workshop, which will be informative and transformative. More information will be coming soon. Thank you, Jeannette and "Dr. Ward"- GS

**DON'T MISS THESE IN-PERSON SUMMER EVENTS**

*Stay safe, wear a mask indoors even if you are vaccinated*

The Society is proud to co-sponsor/promote the following events this summer:

**Resilient Women, Resilient Colors, Historical Art Walk**, organized by the Maritime Museum, National Parks Service, **August 7-9**. The tour will feature art from the WPA period created by women. For more information and to register, contact Society friend, Noemesha Williams at [noemesha\\_williams@nps.gov](mailto:noemesha_williams@nps.gov)



**Flower Piano**, an annual program of the San Francisco Botanical Gardens, Golden Gate Park, welcomes Society friends, Elizabeth Pepin Silva and Lewis Watts for a presentation on their book, **Harlem of the West, The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era**, and a performance by another Society friend, Sam Peoples, Jr., native San Franciscan and "legacy" jazz musician and his friends, **Monday, September 20th, 3 pm**, Botanical Gardens Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. The **Society** for the first time is a co-sponsor of this event. Come on out and enjoy the gardens, the book talk and all that jazz!

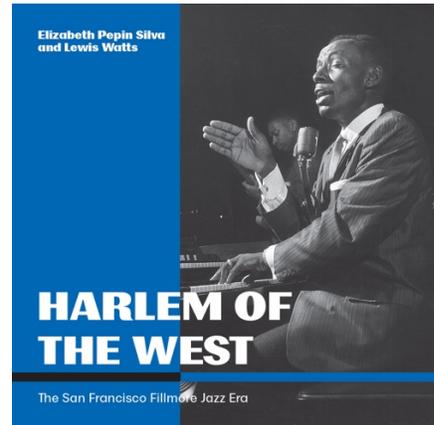
See photos on next page



Peoples rocking out



Sam Peoples and friends play at AAACC for the Society-AAACC launch of "Harlem of the West" exhibit, 2017



Cover of new edition of Harlem of the West, courtesy Lewis Watts

ARCHIVE UPDATE:

THE  
BLACK CULTURAL  
CENTER

Volunteer **Sandra Hudson** and I stood over one of the many boxes labeled, "AAHCS" and one by one, reviewed each folder within. A great many of the file folders were labeled "CAAAAC - Center for African and African American Arts and Culture", one of the former names of today's, "African American Arts and Cultural Complex". These files were to do with the Society's rental agreement; however, several files, contained information about the **Black Cultural Center**.

We discovered Redevelopment Agency architectural renderings of a plaza and a building, several proposals for its design, a statement of purpose and the records of a non-profit organization, the Black Cultural Center, made up of Society leaders. I deduced that this would be the embodiment of the Society founders' 1952 dream to establish a Cultural Center for San Francisco's African American community.

I had just read, Gateway to the Pacific, Japanese Americans and the Remaking of San Francisco, by Meredith Oda, the story of Japanese Americans after World War II. The Japanese American community fought for and against redevelopment. Oda describes how Japantown and Nihonmachi were established through the Redevelopment Agency and how the proposal for Chinatown was poorly executed. (If you are curious about Japanese American and African American relations during that period, read the book's last chapter.) In 1989, a Board of Supervisors' resolution was passed to support the sale or transference of the Black Cultural Center at 762 Fulton St. to the Society. We know that was never done. ...Yet another story.....

Volunteers continue to work in the archives, inventorying in detail its contents. Nearly 2000 individual items, documents, print materials, objects, crafts and art have been entered into the database. Want to support this project? Contact Ginger Smyly at [info@sfaahcs.org](mailto:info@sfaahcs.org). - GS

Cont. from pg. 4, TWO PIONEERS

**Zero Thomas** was likely born in Virginia, though family said he was born in Jamaica. He was either born free or attained freedom at an early age, and first came to California in the early 1870s. He and his first wife, Clara, had one son, James. Clara died at age 18. Zero and his young son moved to San Francisco around 1871-72. In 1876, he married Winifred Corbin; they had six children, settling in Cow Hollow, neighbors to Joseph Crutchfield. Zero Thomas was a member and trustee of Third Baptist Church and managed the church's legal and financial documents. Thomas was, also, one of the founders of an African American mutual aid society.

Thomas worked as a cook for a U. S. Geographic surveyor. He moved frequently around Northern California and Oregon, returning to San Francisco in 1886. The 1900 census showed at age 66 he was still looking for work. Zero Thomas' children attended public schools at a time when it was controversial for Blacks. Notable among his three surviving sons was the youngest, Zero, Jr., who may have been the first African American pharmacist in San Francisco.

See the National Park Service's Park Archives and Records Center in the Presidio which has a Zero Thomas collection, including photographs, letters, and financial documents.

These stories depict individual, family and institutional stories and illustrate that African Americans of all walks of life made it to San Francisco well before the mid- 1940s!

**Pierce McDonnell** was a student at Carleton College, MN, two years ago when he first contacted the Society with these stories. Since graduated, he is now working in Asia.

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL**

(Your annual membership term is January 1 through December 31.)

LIFE members, your donation is appreciated

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ CELL \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Please sign me up as a:

- |               |       |                      |       |
|---------------|-------|----------------------|-------|
| _____ Student | \$15  | _____ Organizations  | \$250 |
| _____ Senior  | \$25  | _____ Small Business | \$350 |
| _____ Adult   | \$50  | _____ Large Business | \$700 |
| _____ Family  | \$100 | _____ Donor          |       |

\*\*if you do not plan to be an active member, please make a donation

Donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Membership fees and contributions are tax deductible

**Make Your Check Payable/Mail To:**

**San Francisco African American Historical & Cultural Society**

762 Fulton Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
 San Francisco, CA 94102  
 415.292.6172

I am interested in serving on the  committee(s):

- |                           |                        |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| _____ Development         | _____ Library/archives |
| _____ Membership          | _____ Programs         |
| _____ Black History Month | _____ Communications   |
| _____ Volunteer/Reception | _____ Other            |

Date rec'd      check/cash      roster      thank you

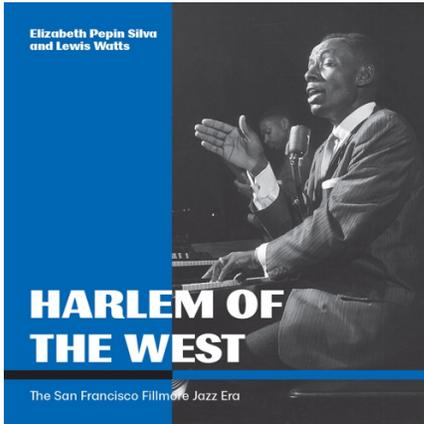
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PHOTO ALBUM / EXTRAS / PHOTO ALBUM / EXTRAS / PHOTO ALBUM / EXTRAS PHOTO /AIBU



Photo: Steve Jackson

Right: John Handy, Elizabeth Silva, Al Williams, Lewis Watts, standing; Frank Fisher, David Johnson, sitting



Cover of Harlem of the West, courtesy Lewis Watts



Photo: Wesley Johnson



Check out the Historical Art Walk:



Sam Peoples plays



Frank Fisher

**Links in the August Praisesinger**

If the links in this newsletter are not “live”, type these into your browser or email address line:

Page 2, The Black Family:

<https://sfaahcs-vs.org> or <http://www.sfaahcs.org/events.html>

Page 3, Johnnie Burrell:

<https://internationalmediatv.com> or [jb@internationalmediatv.com](mailto:jb@internationalmediatv.com)

Page 6, Historical Art Walk:

[noemsha\\_williams@nps.gov](mailto:noemsha_williams@nps.gov)