

unity



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Olympic gold medalist plunges into water safety



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Olympic gold medalist plunges into water safety

Four-time Olympic medalist Cullen Jones' swimming prowess wasn't noticed until he was 15 years old. At the time, people told him he had potential, but as a high school student in Irvington, New Jersey, Jones didn't know how to achieve it.

"I always heard," Jones says, "'he's a diamond in the rough.'"

Between 2002 and 2006, Jones developed his skills on the swimming and diving team at North Carolina State University in Raleigh while he pursued a degree in English. He started weight training, and after building muscle mass, his times dropped. Jones went professional in 2006, signing with Nike and competing in events such as the 2006 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, and 2006 Short Course World Championships in Shanghai, China.

In 2008, at the Olympic trials, Jones became the first Black American to hold a world record in swimming. In the same year, Jones won his first gold medal in the 4×100 freestyle relay in a world-record time of 3:08.24 with Michael Phelps, Jason Lezak and Garrett Weber-Gale at the Olympic Games in Beijing. At the 2012 London Olympics, he took home gold for the 400-medley relay.

At 24 years old, Jones began training with swim coach David Marsh in Charlotte, North Carolina. It was a turning point in Jones' career: Marsh introduced Jones to tempo, the rate at which your arms and legs move, something he should have learned in his younger days. Jones had always relied on trial and error to become smoother and more efficient in his strokes. He and Marsh worked together for 11 years.

"I was fast, but I was unorthodox," Jones says. "He taught me, at 24 years old with a gold medal, some of the things that core swimmers learn when they are 15."

Promoting safety around water

As an only child growing up in Irvington, Jones didn't learn how to swim until after an incident at a Pennsylvania water park. When his parents sent the 5-year-old Jones down a water slide in an innertube, he got trapped underwater when the tube flipped.



"What everyone did for me while I was racing, now I'm doing it for this next generation," says Cullen Jones. Photo by Pressely Smith Photography

"What I think is important to know is that I was fully supervised," Jones explains. "My parents were there. Lifeguards were there, and I was still able to go underwater on this ride."

Unfortunately, his lack of experience in the water isn't unusual. According to [USA Swimming](#), 64% of Black, 45% of Hispanic/Latino and 40% of Caucasian children have little-to-no swimming ability. Formal swimming lessons reduce the likelihood of childhood drowning by 88%, says the [National Library of Medicine](#). And drowning rates for Black children, ages 5 through 18, are significantly higher than those for Caucasians and Hispanics, says a 2014 report by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

When Jones saw similar statistics in 2009, he knew he wanted to change the narrative about Black people and swimming. He helped create USA Swimming's [Make a Splash](#), an initiative started in 2009 to teach adults and children about being safe around water. He serves on the Make a Splash board of directors and helps raise awareness by participating in an annual Make a Splash Tour through cities such as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Richmond, Virginia; San Francisco, California; and Tulsa, Oklahoma. "When I read ... African Americans were five times

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Country music singer discovers her voice



While Brei Carter's day job is sales manager for a medical sales company, she also spends time in her two recording studios in Nashville, Tennessee, and Edwardsville, Illinois. Photo by Artisan Imagery

A conversation with friends or remembering something from her past may spark an idea. She keeps a list of ideas she's brainstormed in the notes app on her phone. The heart and the feeling of the story are central to her songs - she'll spend time alone praying about it.

"I'm writing about friends or my life experiences," Brei Carter says. "I write about real life, about what people have endured or gone through, whether it's heartache or heart break."

Carter started her music career in 2014 after her biological father died. Although she'd always wanted to be a country music singer, she lacked the confidence. She prayed about it and reflected on her life and decided to go all in. "I knew it was what I was supposed to do," she says. "I have no regrets."

Music has always been a part of Carter's life. She sang alto in the church choir and played the bass clarinet and clarinet in the high school band. Now Carter splits her time between Nashville, Tennessee, and Edwardsville, Illinois, where she is the senior territory manager for a medical sales company. She has music studios in both cities. She's getting instruction from teachers and YouTube videos on how to play the guitar and piano.

In early 2022, Carter's song, "[Gave Him a Girl](#)," debuted at No. 78 on [Music Row CountryBreakout Radio Chart](#). It was also the first time one of her songs was played on the radio. The idea for the song came from Carter's father wanting a boy but getting a girl. He got the best of both worlds, says Carter. She was a cheerleader and a tomboy. The lyrics provide insight into Carter's personality, from driving a John Deere

tractor and fishing to wearing diamonds and pearls - and enjoying both. "The song got traction," she says. "People were enjoying it and the radio stations were spinning that song quite a bit."

When interviewed in 2022, Carter was scheduled to release an album that fall and a Christmas EP. Find her music on Amazon, Apple Music, iTunes, Pandora and Spotify.

When asked, "Why country?" Carter responds with, "Why not country?" From her viewpoint, she didn't choose country, it chose her. "I grew up in the church choir," she says. "The soul and gospel come through in my music. I grew up listening to Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton, Alabama, Tanya Tucker and Conway Twitty."

Cowboy boots have always been a part of Carter's wardrobe. She owns more than 100 pairs, some designer, others with bling and a few crap kickers, what she calls her thick-soled boots. Her favorite pair have been re-soled twice. "I just love these boots," she says. "It's something about them. Despite having boots that are much more fabulous, it's just some comfort I find in these boots. I can't explain it."

As a Black woman in a predominantly white male field, people expect a person singing country music to look a certain way and Carter breaks the stereotype. At times, she hasn't been taken seriously, but she's found that doors continue to open. She perseveres despite setbacks. "I'm living my truth," she says. "I think as long as you are living your truth, you are doing what you're supposed to do."

Her fan base is growing and crosses all ages and ethnicities. "I think you win people over when they know it's who you are," she says. "Country music fans are diehard fans. They grow up with you; they grow old with you; they die with you. They're not fair weather fans. They love you till death do us part."



Carter says country music found her. She grew up listening to Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton, Alabama, Tanya Tucker and Conway Twitty. Photo by Artisan Imagery

Sharing the Black perspective with the world

In 1926, historian Carter G. Woodson created "Negro History Week" as a way to emphasize the accomplishments made by African Americans, most of whom were only a generation removed from enslavement. Woodson envisioned this week becoming a standard practice in public schools nationally. It took a few decades for the idea to take hold, but the celebration became recognized as a full month to highlight African American achievement in 1975.

In honor of Woodson's hard-fought battle, for over 20 years, *Unity* magazine has profiled Black artists every February to illuminate the creative expressions of the community. Often, Black artists can be restricted to working in certain styles. However, Calvin Coleman, Tracy Murrell and Zerric Clinton – highlighted in this month's issue – use various modes of abstraction to express themselves and their communities.

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CALVIN COLEMAN

Artist Calvin Coleman uses exciting colors and dynamic brushstrokes in his work to draw the viewer in closer.

Although born in Hampton, Virginia, the artist grew up near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the nearby suburb of Swarthmore. Coleman began teaching himself to draw, paint, and create prints after graduating from college.

As the years passed, his abilities improved, and he embarked on the journey to create his business selling his art. Additionally, the artist finds creating art as a meditative practice that is beneficial for his mental and spiritual health. "My spirituality guides my internal thoughts and what I choose to put on canvas and how it's conveyed to the audience," he says.

When encountering Coleman's work, the viewer can identify with those ideas due to the soft, reflective nature of most of his subjects. In "Beauty of Knowledge," a beautifully dressed woman quietly reads a book while her head rests softly on her chin.

The artist paints a young child peering down at her shoe while holding a book in "The Student." The most abstracted work, "The Sharing," requires a careful eye to see the children sitting cross-legged while reading a book together.

These scenes especially suggest the "peace and tranquility" Coleman hopes to portray in his artwork.



"Beauty of Knowledge"
by Calvin Coleman



"The Sharing"
by Calvin Coleman



"The Student"
by Calvin Coleman

TRACY MURRELL

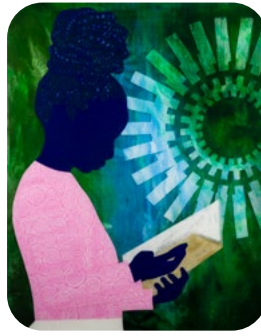
Tracy Murrell brings the feminine form to life with silhouettes and interesting patterns. The artist graduated from Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana, with a bachelor's degree in psychology before finding her way to Atlanta, Georgia, to work full time as an artist and curator.

When she first began painting, she found herself drawn to silhouettes as a way for the subject to be any Black woman, allowing viewers and the artist to see themselves or someone they know in the calming scenes.

"Her Mind Is Open" reflects a young girl with an afro puff reading a book. Murrell paints the background with a relaxing mix of blue and green to emphasize the scene as a welcoming environment for a child to learn in.

In the work, "I Got Your Back," a yellow sun shines brightly behind two feminine figures with their backs turned away from each other. Murrell poses them similarly to that of ballerinas standing high on their toes.

"Grace II" features a stately woman seated in an orange kaftan. The scene exudes the vibes of an extravagant vacation in a faraway destination. Behind her, Murrell carefully placed mother-of-pearl tiles to create a pattern resembling waves of the ocean.



"Her Mind Is Open"
by Tracy Murrell



"Sister, I Got Your Back"
by Tracy Murrell



"Grace II" by Tracy Murrell

ZERRIC CLINTON

Typically, people expect artists to use special materials like acrylic paint and canvas to create works of art. However, Zerric Clinton, Ph.D., applies tools familiar to all students: pen and paper.

With skill and attention to detail, Clinton produces works like "People at Crossroads" with endless zigzags, squiggles and spikes that visually excite anyone who sees them. In the maze of lines, the artist inspires viewers to "pay attention to things that many people overlook," he says.

In "Mother Protection 3," the artist's lines take on circular patterns, radiating outward like a pebble gently sending waves throughout a lake that create a warm and familiar feeling for the viewer.

Clinton showed interest in drawing from an early age and received encouragement from his parents and peers. He went on to Valdosta State University to graduate with his bachelor's in art education and later, his master's in educational leadership. He pursued his doctorate in art education from Florida State University.

For this artist, these new aspects reveal the more sinister hidden layers of our everyday world, but nonetheless, he seeks to "deal with difficult topics but always spin it into a positive light." The viewer receives that message through the bright contrasting colors present in "Chasing Dreams 4."



"People at Crossroads"
by Zerric Clinton



"Mother Protection"
by Zerric Clinton



"Chasing Dreams"
by Zerric Clinton

Soul food's accidental, satiated historian



Author Adrian Miller calls himself "The Soul Food Scholar."
Photo by Bernard Grant

Adrian Miller, a food writer and native of Denver, Colorado, once thought he wanted to be a U.S. senator for his home state.

He had studied international relations at Stanford University and earned a law degree from Georgetown University. Miller worked under President Bill Clinton's administration as a special assistant for One America, an initiative to close economic and social gaps, but when the term ended in 2001, Miller was left with a lot of time on his hands.

A visit to a bookstore in Washington, D.C., proved to be a turning point. When looking for books about cooking, "Southern Food: At Home, on the Road, in History," by John Egerton, caught his eye. Miller purchased the book.

Egerton's statement, "The tribute of Black achievement in American cookery has yet to be written," got Miller thinking. He reached out to Egerton to ask if he still thought the statement rang

true, 14 years after the book had been written. Egerton replied, "For the most part, nobody has taken on the full story. There's always room for another voice. So why not yours?"

Since 2013, Miller has authored three books about the influence Black people have had on culinary traditions in the U.S. "I got into all this accidentally," Miller says.

In the early years, Miller thought of this interest in writing about the backstory of Black cuisine as a side job. By day he worked at a progressive political think tank in Denver; later, he worked for Gov. Bill Ritter Jr. At night and on the weekends, Miller researched the traditions of Black cuisine.

With the help of the internet, Miller had more than enough for his first book, "Soul Food," which won the James Beard Foundation Award for Scholarship and Reference in 2014. With the additional material he wrote "The President's Kitchen Cabinet" and "Black Smoke."

Miller calls himself the "Soul Food Scholar" because of his academic approach to food. He spoke to hundreds of people and read thousands of newspaper and magazine articles. "I just started grabbing all the information I could on African American food," he says. "I read 3,500 oral histories of formerly enslaved people. I looked for all references to food."

From 2011 to 2012, Miller visited 150 soul food restaurants - including Colorado's Roaming Buffalo Bar B-Cue - in 35 cities throughout 15 states. "Because I care so deeply about my subject I decided to eat my way through the country," Miller says with a laugh. "That's the foundation that led to the 'Soul Food' book."



Adrian Miller sampled soul food fare such as this barbecue sandwich at the Roaming Buffalo Bar B-Cue restaurant in Denver while researching his books. Photo courtesy of Adrian Miller



Soul food is the coming together of ingredients, techniques and food traditions of West Africa, Western Europe and the Americas, says Miller. A menu with soul food would include an entrée such as fried chicken or fish, chitterlings, greens (collards or kale), black-eyed peas, candied sweet potatoes, macaroni and cheese, corn bread and hot sauce.

"I didn't know how much soul food was reconstituted African food traditions," he says. "You're almost taught African people came here as a blank slate and that the slavery experience is what shaped them. It's clear that Black people were not a blank slate and they did what any other migrant group does, even though this was a forced migration: You get to the new place and try to recreate home and assert your humanity the best you can."

Miller cooks at home and for small group charity dinners. One of his favorite dishes is mustard and turnip greens with smoked turkey. "Greens are good for you, especially when one consumes the pot likker, the broth created when the vegetables are stewed," he says. "The combination of flavors from the peppery mustard greens and the earthy turnip greens is habit-forming."

Minnie Utsey's 'Never Fail' Cornbread

Courtesy of adrianemiller.com

Minnie Utsey was one of my many "second mothers" in my home church. I honor her loving memory with this cornbread that lives up to its title. Do not use a substitute for the shortening; otherwise, your cornbread will be very crumbly.

Makes 8 servings

Ingredients

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/4 cups coarse yellow cornmeal
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1/4 cup vegetable shortening, melted and cooled

Directions

Preheat the oven to 425 F. Grease an 8-inch-square baking pan.

Sift together the flour, sugar, baking powder and salt into a large bowl. Whisk in the cornmeal. In a small bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk and shortening until smooth. Pour the egg mixture into the flour mixture and stir until smooth. Pour the batter into the prepared baking pan.

Bake until firm and the top is golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes. Serve hot.





Olympic gold medalist plunges into water safety

Continued from page 2

more likely to drown than any other race," Jones says, "I started thinking, 'This is a historical problem. This is a problem that goes way back to slavery. This is something we have to fix.'

"We're (Make a Splash) trying to break the generational issue and the thought process that Black people don't swim. Yes, we do. We need to be reeducated and make it a priority."

Make a Splash partners with the energy company Phillips 66 to bring water safety to neighborhoods around the country. As of 2022, 10 million people have been reached.



Cullen Jones, far right, and others attend a water safety and fitness session at Carrie Steele Pitts Life Learning Center on April 2016 in Atlanta, Georgia. Photo by Prince Williams/WireImage

Jones is an ambassador for USA Swimming and works as a senior manager of sports marketing and philanthropy with Speedo. He and his wife live in Charlotte, North Carolina, with their young son, who already appears to have an interest in swimming.

"I work with the athletes and the agents getting their contracts," Jones says. "What everyone did for me while I was racing, now I'm doing it for this next generation."

On the cover: Olympic gold medalist Cullen Jones. Photo by Pressely Smith Photography. Articles on pages 2, 3, 6 and 7 by Vanessa Infanzon. Article on pages 4 and 5 by Jade Flint.

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