



*Say Ah! Symposium*  
**Racism & Health Literacy**  
*A free online March to Advance Health Equity*  
October 28-30, 2025  
3:30-5pm ET

## Overview

A three-part virtual series exploring how racism and health literacy interact to impact health outcomes – and highlighting innovative, actionable solutions to promote health equity.

- **Session I** explores racism's effect on the health literacy of patients, caregivers and communities of color.
- **Session II** highlights and amplifies anti-racist health literacy programs and practices.
- **Session III** features powerful stories of healing and provides tools to help participants *change the narrative*.

This symposium is part of Say Ah!'s ongoing call for a racially just health care system – one that addresses inequities in communication and ensures that patients and caregivers of color are seen, heard, and healed.

## About Say Ah!

Say Ah! is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their health. Since 2007, we've reached over 13,000 community members and trained 3,500 professionals through workshops, educational programs, and health literacy initiatives. Learn more: [www.say-ah.org](http://www.say-ah.org)

## Agenda

### Session I: Overview & Keynote

Tuesday, October 28 | 3:30-5:00 PM ET

**Overview:** *Tyree Oredein, DrPH, MPH*, [Left Turn Village](#)

**Keynote:** *Dr. Paris Adkins-Jackson, PhD, MPH*

Assistant Professor, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health

Dr. Adkins-Jackson will discuss how structural racism impacts aging, health, and trust – and how anti-racist interventions can drive systemic change. More about Dr. AJ can be found [here](#), and we recommend watching her conversation on data equity [here](#) to learn more about her perspective.

#### Session Agenda:

- 3:30: Welcome with Say Ah! Board President Derek McCracken
- 3:40: Overview of Racism & Health Literacy with Dr. Tyree Oredein
- 3:55: Reflection with Dr. Valerie Williams-Sanchez
- 4:00: Keynote with Dr. Paris “AJ” Adkins-Jackson
- 4:40: Q and A
- 4:55: Close and Evaluation

### Session II: Anti-Racist Health Literacy in Action

Wednesday, October 29 | 3:30-5:00 PM ET

A panel discussion showcasing real-world best practices, challenges, and successes in advancing anti-racist health literacy across communities and care systems. **Panelists include:** **Alex Bailey**, Founder and Executive Director, [Black Outside](#); **Gracie Benedith-Cane**, Advocate, [Inventor, Author](#); **Hailey Easley**, Executive Director, Austin Asian Community Health Initiative ([AACHI](#)); **M Greg Green**, Training Manager, Center for Community Health Alignment ([CCHA](#)); and **Kristi R. Mitchell**, Founder and CEO, Health Equity Outcomes ([HEO-US](#)), Founder and Principal, [ATLAS CLARITY](#).

#### Session Agenda:

- 3:30: Welcome with Say Ah! Board President Derek McCracken
- 3:37: Introduction to the Panel
- 3:40: Panelist presentations in order: Kristi Mitchell, Hailey Easley, M Greg Green, Alex Bailey, Gracie Benedith-Cane
- 4:30: Moderated discussion and Q and A
- 4:55: Close & evaluation

### Session III: Changing the Narrative

Thursday, October 30 | 3:30-5:00 PM ET

Moderator: *Dr. Valerie Williams-Sanchez, PhD*, [Literacy for Health™](#)

Speaker: *Heather Butts, JD, MPH, MA* "[Untold Stories in US Health Policy.](#)"

Endnote: *Nafissa Thompson-Spires, PhD, MFA*

Award-winning author and chronic illness advocate, Dr. Thompson-Spires, will discuss how health and storytelling intersect. More on Dr. Thompson-Spires can be found [here](#), and we recommend reading her essay [On Telling Ugly Stories: Writing with Chronic Illness](#) to learn more about her perspective.

#### Session Agenda:

3:30: Welcome with Say Ah! Board President Derek McCracken

3:37: Heather Butts on telling untold stories

3:53: Dr. Valerie Williams-Sanchez on literacy and health

4:00: Endnote with Dr. Nafissa Thompson-Spires

4:55: Close & Evaluation

## Keynote & Endnote Speakers

#### Keynote Speaker:

**Paris "AJ" Adkins-Jackson, PhD MPH**

Dr. Paris "AJ" Adkins-Jackson is a multidisciplinary community-partnered health equity researcher who investigates the role of structural racism on healthy aging for historically marginalized populations like Black and Pacific Islander communities. Her primary project examines the role of life course adverse community-level policing exposure on psychological well-being, cognitive function, and biological aging for Black and Latinx/a/o older adults. Her secondary project tests the effectiveness of an anti-racist multilevel pre-intervention restorative program to increase community health and institutional trustworthiness through multisector community-engaged partnerships. Dr. AJ is an Assistant Professor in the Departments of Epidemiology and Sociomedical Sciences in the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, an HBCU alumna of the psychometrics doctoral program at Morgan State University and a board member of the Society for the Analysis of African American Public Health Issues.

#### Endnote Speaker

**Nafissa Thompson-Spires, PhD, MFA**

Dr. Nafissa Thompson-Spires is an award winning author who, like some of her characters, lives with chronic illness. Her debut short story collection [Heads of the](#)

[\*Colored People\*](#) (Simon and Schuster, 2019), was the winner of the PEN Open Book Award, the Whiting Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Award for First Fiction, longlisted for the 2018 National Book Award, and a finalist for the Kirkus Prize and Los Angeles Times Book Prize.

She earned a PhD in English from Vanderbilt University and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and currently resides in Brooklyn, NY, where she is working on a new book.

### Speakers & Panelists in Alphabetical Order

#### Paris "AJ" Adkins-Jackson, PhD MPH

Dr. Paris "AJ" Adkins-Jackson is a multidisciplinary community-partnered health equity researcher who investigates the role of structural racism on healthy aging for historically marginalized populations like Black and Pacific Islander communities. Her primary project examines the role of life course adverse community-level policing exposure on psychological well-being, cognitive function, and biological aging for Black and Latinx/a/o older adults. Her secondary project tests the effectiveness of an anti-racist multilevel pre-intervention restorative program to increase community health and institutional trustworthiness through multisector community-engaged partnerships. Dr. AJ is an Assistant Professor in the Departments of Epidemiology and Sociomedical Sciences in the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, an HBCU alumna of the psychometrics doctoral program at Morgan State University and a board member of the Society for the Analysis of African American Public Health Issues.

#### Alex Bailey

Founder, Executive Director of [\*Black Outside\*](#)

From the fresh smell of mint leaves in his grandfather's garden to fishing trips with his grandparents on the Clear Fork river in Ohio; Alex's familial connection to the outdoors always inspired him to connect deeply with nature, particularly in life's hardest moments. This foundational love and connection to nature led him to envision a program which radically transforms outdoor spaces and programming to be a beacon of joy and liberation for Black youth--- later to be known as Black Outside, Inc.

Between 2018 and 2019, founder Alex Bailey embarked on a journey to observe and shadow summer camps and outdoor programs across the country to better understand the impact outdoor programming has on youth. He took those learnings and, alongside an amazing community of people, began building a culturally relevant outdoor program in the city of San Antonio which today collectively serves 150+ Black youth across central Texas.

Alex is a proud fellow of the [National Wild Gift fellowship](#), [The International](#)

[Echoing Green Fellowship](#), a [2019 TedxSan Antonio speaker](#) (Recolor the Outdoors), and currently serves as Executive Director of Black Outside, Inc.

### **Gracie Benedith-Cane**

Advocate, Inventor, Author of [What's Cool About Braille Codes School](#)

A Brooklyn-born Garifuna Afro-Latina and mom of three, Gracie Benedith-Cane was inspired by her visually impaired son, Wani, to found Braille Code Inc. She's the **author** of What's Cool About Braille Code School? and an **inventor** with two patents for inclusive print/braille left-right footwear labels that help blind/visually impaired, special-needs, and sighted kids dress independently. As a **speaker and advocate**, she supports parents navigating disability. With Wani, she visits schools to promote braille and white-cane awareness.

### **Heather Butts, JD, MPH, MEd**

Heather M. Butts received her B.A. from Princeton University. She was a history major, concentrating in American and African-American Studies. She received her J.D. from St. John's University School of Law, her Master's in Public Health from Harvard University and her Master's in Education from Columbia University's Teachers College.

Professor Butts is an Associate Professor in the Department of Health Policy and Management at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and the Faculty Course Lead for the Leadership Course at the Mailman School of Public Health.

Professor Butts is the co-founder of H.E.A.L.T.H for Youths, Inc. a nonprofit organization which focuses on college readiness and preparation. Her organization partners with 90 programs each year to help more than 7,000 students achieve their dream of going to college. During COVID-19, her organization has worked on dozens of projects to help the community including: turning little free libraries into food pantries; getting resources to under privileged families; organizing several community gardening programs to get fresh produce to those in need. Other projects the organization does include career preparation, public health projects, financial literacy, and job shadowing programs.

Her publications include: "Alexander Thomas Augusta: Physician, Teacher and Human Rights Activist" for the *Journal of the National Medical Association*, "Personality and Policy Perception: What Responses are Seen as Appropriate for COVID-19, Federal Agencies Continue Focus on Clinical Trial Oversight" (co-author), "Housing Bias and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder"(co-author). "Dr Alexander Augusta sought medical education in Canada but became a medical educator in America after the Civil War" with Dr. Nav Persaud and Dr. Alanna McKnight, and two books including *African American Medicine in Washington, D.C.: Healing the Capital During the Civil War Era* and *Healing Civil War Veterans in New York and Washington, D.C.*

## **Hailey Easley**

*Executive Director of the Austin Asian Community Health Initiative ([AACHI](#))*

As the Executive Director of the Austin Asian Community Health Initiative (AACHI), Hailey brings extensive experience in public health, focusing on grassroots-led community health solutions.

With over seven years at AACHI, she has successfully led initiatives to improve health outcomes and access for diverse communities. Hailey's expertise lies in fostering collaborative networks, with a strong commitment to health equity and social justice. As a second-generation Mexican Korean immigrant, her multicultural heritage enriches Hailey's perspective and drives her dedication to culturally responsive care.

## **M. Greg Green, CCHW**

*Training Manager, [Center for Community Health Alignment](#), Co-Founder [Transgender Awareness Alliance](#)*

M. Greg Green is the training manager at the Center for Community Health Alignment and a community health worker. He is the cofounder of Transgender Awareness Alliance, a nonprofit organization working to close the access gap for transgender and gender diverse populations.

With a background shaped by his experience as the 22nd Black woman to graduate from The Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina, Greg blends his personal resilience with a deep understanding of the value of empathy, compassion, and intentionality in his work. Having served in public service as both a police officer and firefighter, he has a unique perspective on the challenges of discrimination, particularly related to the intersection of ethnicity and gender identity. Greg's work is grounded in the belief that inclusion goes beyond ethnicity, advocating for a holistic view that recognizes all facets of a person's identity. He takes pride in utilizing his privilege to amplify marginalized voices and confront systems of exclusion, never shying away from speaking truth to power.

## **Kristi Mitchell**

*Founder & CEO, [Health Equity Outcomes](#); Founder & Principal, [ATLAS CLARITY, LLC](#)*

Kristi is a health services researcher who leads efforts to enable next generation health care delivery through innovation, value, and consumer engagement across multiple industries, including pharmaceutical/device companies, digital health, government agencies, and community-based organizations.

After 11 years, she stepped down as Practice Director, Center for Healthcare Transformation at Avalere Health, a DC-based advisory services firm to launch Health Equity Outcomes, a nonprofit to empower underserved communities to engage in the research enterprise to reduce racial disparities and advance health equity. Through

these efforts, she is dedicated to elevating the role of community-based participatory research as a mechanism to derive real world data that is community-centric.

At the same time, she also serves as Founder and Principal at ATLAS CLARITY, LLC an advisory services firm dedicated to improving the health and well-being of populations through patient engagement, strategic partnerships, and innovative data collection. Kristi is also recognized as a nationally recognized expert in the design and implementation of patient-powered data collection efforts. She currently sits on the MDEpiNet Executive Operations Committee and serves as chair of the National Kidney Foundation KidneyCARE Study Data Use and Publication Committee. Kristi is a member of Women's Business Leaders in Healthcare, as well as a Founding Member of CHIEF-DC, a private network to support and connect women executives.

A graduate of Brown University ('92) with a A.B. in human biology and public policy, she earned her Masters of Public Health in Epidemiology and Public Health Policy and Administration from the University of Michigan School of Public Health ('94)

### **Tyree Oredein, DrPH, MPH**

*Say Ah! Board Member, Owner & Principal of [Left Turn Village](#)*

Dr. Oredein is the owner and principal of Left Turn Village, a public health and social justice firm that develops and delivers health and social justice education and training to law enforcement, corporate personnel, health and social service providers, educators, among many others. She is an Assistant Professor at Montclair State University in the Department of Public Health.

In addition to Say Ah!, Tyree serves on the boards of What Makes You Feel Beautiful, an organization created to empower women, and the Wellesley Racial Justice Initiative (WRJI), an organization created by an independent group of Wellesley College alums engaging in anti-racism work. She has served as a Special State Officer on the Healthy New Jersey 2030 Advisory Council under the auspices of the NJ Department of Health. She earned her Bachelor's Degree from Wellesley College, her Masters in Public Health from Hunter College, and her Doctorate in Public Health from Rutgers University.

### **Nafissa Thompson-Spires, PhD, MFA**

Dr. Nafissa Thompson-Spires is an award winning author who, like some of her characters, lives with chronic illness. Her debut short story collection ***Heads of the Colored People*** (Simon and Schuster, 2019), was the winner of the PEN Open Book Award, the Whiting Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Award for First Fiction, longlisted for the 2018 National Book Award, and a finalist for the Kirkus Prize and Los Angeles Times Book Prize.

She earned a PhD in English from Vanderbilt University and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and currently resides in Brooklyn, NY, where she is working on a new book.

**Valerie Williams-Sanchez, PhD, MS**

*Say Ah! Board Member, Owner & Principal of [Valorena Online, LLC](#)*

Dr. Williams-Sanchez is the owner and principal consultant of Valorena Online, LLC, specializing in communication, cultural strategy, and strategic marketing & engagement solutions.

Through Valorena Publishing and her Cocoa Kids Collection® and Literacy for Health™ initiatives, Valerie leads research and creative development of books and programs that build cultural fluency, mental health literacy, and empathic emotional intelligence – inspiring learning that heals, connects, and empowers.

A Say-Ah! board member since 2017, she advocates for reducing health disparities among diverse communities through her health literacy efforts and activism. Valerie is a certified New York State Citizens Public Health Leader (Cornell University), a Project Management Professional (PMI), and holds degrees from the University of California, Berkeley; Columbia University; and St. John's University.