

CELEBRATING BLACK EQUESTRIAN EXCELLENCE

# BLACK BOOTS MAGAZINE

## HALLOWEEN, HERITAGE & HORSES

*Black family traditions,  
African masquerade,  
therapeutic riding & more*

HAUNTS & HISTORY

*Black Riders, Stories & Community*

ISSUE 23 | OCTOBER 2026

# CONTENTS

- 14  
**DR. LONNIE BUNCH III**  
Keeper of our history
- 21  
**ANCESTORS IN MOTION**  
History of Egúngún and  
Black Masquerade

- 31  
**HAINTS, HAGS & HAIT**  
**BLUE: Black Halloween**  
folklore and superstition



- 41  
**FEATURE:**  
**Halloween Traditions, Lasting Bonds**  
Simple family moments that make  
Halloween memorable



- 23 | **KIDS' CORNER: HAPPY HALLOWEEN**  
Coloring, maze, and word games for young readers.

- 4  
**Editor's Note**
- 5  
**Life as a Black Equestrian**  
North Carolina Horseman, Jamarcus Moore
- 7  
**Pittsburgh's Mounted Police**  
From city patrols to youth outreach, Pittsburgh's Mounted Police carry a long equestrian tradition into the future.
- 9  
**Dr. Harmon Hines**  
Celebrating Dr. Deborah Harmon Hines and her lasting impact on medicine, education, and leadership.
- 11  
**Ricardo Chibanga**  
The pioneering Mozambican matador who made history in the bullring.
- 18  
**Tom Bass**  
Gentle genius of the show ring.
- 24  
**Ulonda Jackson**  
Still riding strong at 65
- 26  
**Healing, Heritage and Hope**  
The benefits of therapeutic riding.
- 35  
**William D. Davis**  
A patent that brought new ingenuity to horsemanship.
- 37  
**Black Horror**  
Black-led horror films to haunt your October.

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## Editor's Note

October arrives in a blaze of amber and crimson, bringing one of the loveliest times of year to be outdoors. The morning air is crisp, fallen leaves cover the trails in Keney Park, and our horses seem to feel the change, too, stepping a little livelier in the cool breeze.

Fall invites us to slow down, take in the beauty around us, and appreciate what a year of hard work has brought.

This season is also a time to reflect. Over the past months, our young riders have grown in skill and confidence, our community has come together in remarkable ways, and the stories of Black equestrians, past and present, continue to inspire us. Each achievement reminds us that legacy is built one ride, one lesson, and one act of kindness at a time.

As the holidays approach, we look forward to Halloween's fun, a moment to honor our veterans in November, and Thanksgiving tables filled with family and friends. These gatherings remind us of what matters most: connection, generosity, and a sense of belonging.

So pull on your boots, wrap up in your favorite sweater, and enjoy the golden days this season brings. Walk the trails, visit the barn, share a meal, and give thanks for the many blessings we share.

With warmth and gratitude,

Pat Kelly



# **LIFE AS A BLACK EQUESTRIAN**

**LASHAWNDA  
PHILLIPS**



At Ebony Horsewomen, LaShawnda Phillips brings passion, knowledge, and skill to every part of her work. A 2023 University of Connecticut graduate, she earned a degree in Animal Science focused on Equine Studies. She serves as Barn Manager at the Ebony Horsewomen Equestrian & Therapeutic Center.

Each day, LaShawnda oversees the care of 21 horses and other small animals while managing barn operations.

She is also a certified Riding Instructor, sharing her expertise with riders of all ages. In the show ring, her honors include Reserve Champion in Western Pleasure, Reserve Champion High Point Rider, and Regional Champion.



Dedicated and accomplished, LaShawnda embodies the next generation of horsemanship. Her work and example inspire young riders, who see in her a role model and a path toward their own success.

Follow their journey on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).



# Pittsburgh's Mounted Police



PITTSBURGH'S MOUNTED POLICE UNIT TRACES ITS ROOTS TO 1886 AND RETURNED IN ITS MODERN FORM IN 2017, FOLLOWING A FOURTEEN-YEAR ABSENCE. THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, MOUNTED OFFICERS AND THEIR EQUINE PARTNERS PATROL DOWNTOWN IN ALL WEATHER, SUPPORT PARADES AND COMMUNITY EVENTS, AND HELP MANAGE LARGE CROWDS.

The unit has used draft breeds such as the Shire. A 2019 report listed the horses at 16 to 18 hands and 1,400 to 2,000 pounds. Their size requires training, transport, and specialized equipment. They live at city stables on Pittsburgh's North Side.

In summer 2026, Detective Dorothea "Dea" Leftwich founded Riding Into the Future, a free youth program. Leftwich was the first Black woman to join Pittsburgh's mounted unit. In partnership with Penn State Extension 4-H and Sunni-Bell Stables, the program served 20 children from Pittsburgh, offering riding lessons, horse care, field trips, and leadership development.

It aims to build confidence and introduce young people to equestrian and agricultural opportunities. Through this work, Leftwich extends her community service beyond city streets and creates opportunities for Pittsburgh's next generation.





# Dr. Harmon Hines

Deborah Harmon Hines, PhD, is among Worcester Magazine's 2024 Women Making History. She retired in 2017 as vice provost for school services and professor of radiology and nursing at UMass Chan Medical School, after nearly 30 years of service. Hines established the Worcester Pipeline Collaborative with Worcester Public Schools to encourage students from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue careers in biotechnology, biomedical research, and the health professions. She also directed a summer research program and oversaw student enrichment and health careers programs.

In 2016, UMass Chan awarded her the Chancellor's Medal for Distinguished Service, recognizing her leadership in medical education and diversity. UMass Chan later named its commencement celebration for students from underrepresented groups in her honor. The recognition reflects a career devoted to opening doors for future scientists and health professionals.

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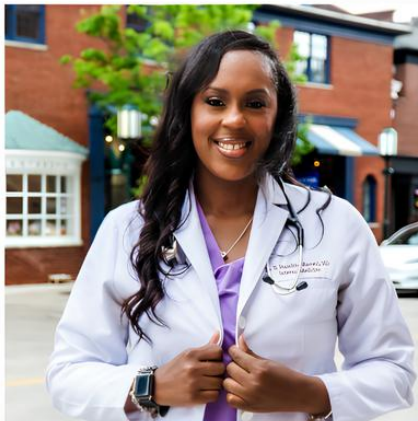
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## Ricardo Chibanga: *A Barrier-Breaking Matador*



Ricardo Chibanga was a Mozambican bullfighter and the first Black matador in 20th-century Spanish bullfighting. Born in Lourenço Marques, now Maputo, in 1942, he was one of seven children. As a boy, he distributed bullfighting posters near the local arena, drawing tourists while nurturing his ambition.

He traveled to Portugal in the 1960s, trained at a bullfighting school, and performed by decade's end. On August 15, 1971, he achieved matador status at Seville's Real Maestranza.



Admired for his daring style, Chibanga toured internationally. Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dalí were among the spectators who applauded him. After an eye illness forced him to retire in 1974, he remained in bullfighting as a promoter. He owned a portable arena and lived in Golegã, Portugal.

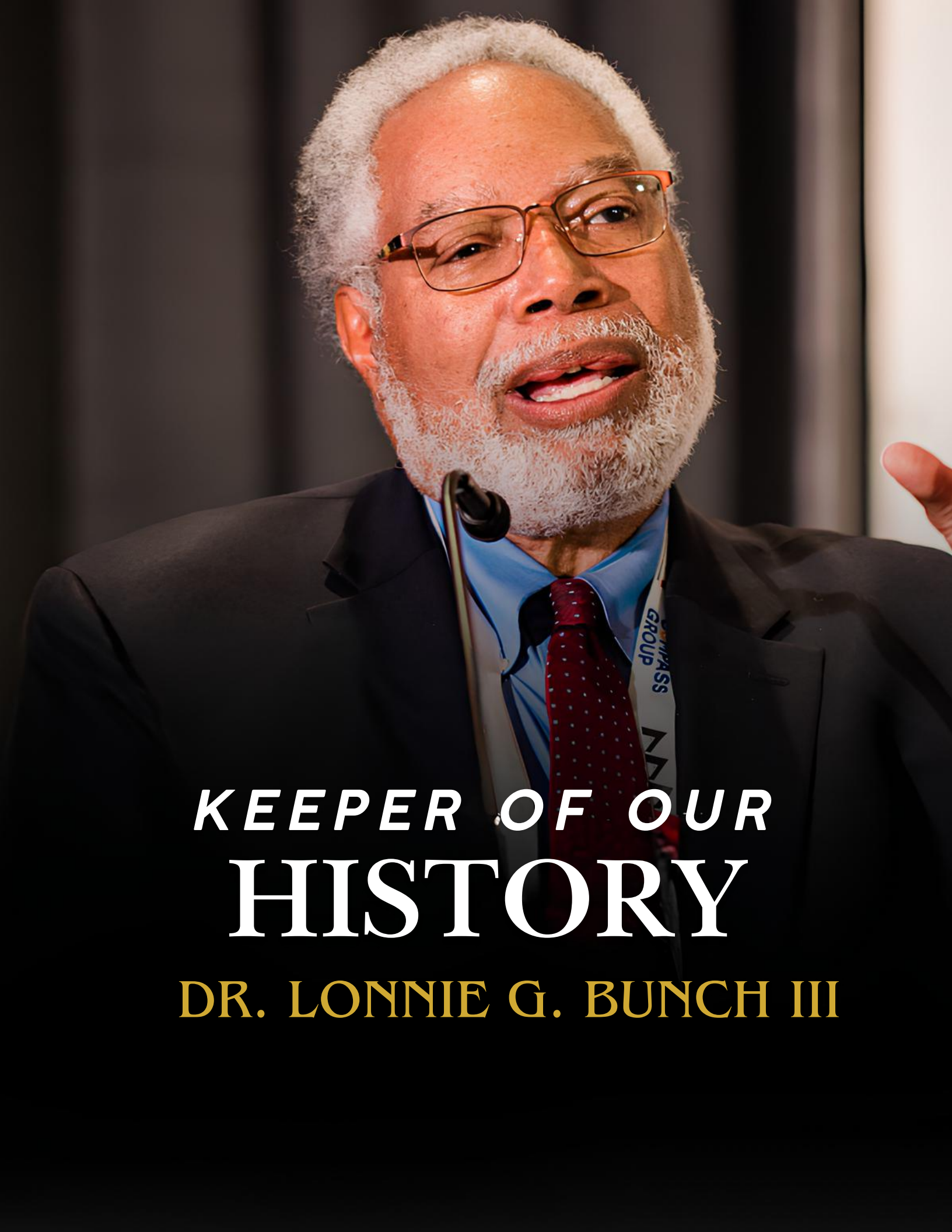
Chibanga died in 2019, leaving a pioneering, lasting cultural legacy in bullfighting history.



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*KEEPER OF OUR*  
**HISTORY**

**DR. LONNIE G. BUNCH III**



Born November 18, 1952, in Newark, New Jersey, Lonnie Griffith Bunch III is an American historian, educator, and museum curator whose work focuses on American history.

He is the Smithsonian's 14th Secretary, serving since June 2019 and set to retire at the end of 2026. He was the first African American and the first historian to lead the world's largest museum, education, and research complex.



His appointment marked a milestone, reflecting his commitment to making history accessible and inclusive for diverse audiences. Before becoming Secretary, Bunch served as president of the Chicago Historical Society (now Chicago History Museum) and held curatorial roles at California African American Museum and Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

In 2020, the American Philosophical Society elected him a member.





Dr. Bunch played a central role in creating the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. Named its founding director in 2005, he led the work of turning a long-standing national vision into a museum.

Alongside colleagues, donors, and community partners, he helped secure a site on the National Mall, build the collection, raise public and private funds, recruit staff, and shape the museum's partnerships and exhibitions.

Opened in September 2016, the museum documents African American history and culture as an essential part of the nation's story.

In September 2026, Bunch announced plans to retire at year's end. The announcement came during a period of heightened tension with the Trump administration over its criticism of Smithsonian portrayals of U.S. history, including slavery and racism. Bunch said the dispute did not drive his decision to retire, and maintained that decisions about exhibit changes belonged to the Smithsonian.



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# TOM BASS



The Gentle Genius  
of the Show Ring



Tom Bass was born enslaved on January 5, 1859, in Boone County, Missouri, to Cornelia Gray. His skill made him a celebrated horseman of his era. As a young man, Bass moved to Mexico, Missouri, where he worked as a stable boy and began building his reputation as a gifted horse trainer.

Bass became known for his gentle approach. At a time when harsh training methods were common, he relied on patience and humane handling and developed a bit designed to ease pressure on horses. Over half a century, he trained thousands of horses to prance, bow, curtsy, dance, and perform the cakewalk.

His best-known innovation reflected his concern for horses' comfort and welfare. He developed the Bass bit to protect a horse's mouth and help prevent training injuries. He chose not to patent it, and it remains in use today.

Bass trained the five-gaited Saddlebred stallion Rex McDonald and horses for Buffalo Bill Cody and Theodore Roosevelt. Will Rogers, his friend and admirer, later eulogized him.



Riding his celebrated black mare Belle Beach, Bass thrilled audiences at major shows. In 1897, he became the first African American to perform at Madison Square Garden and the first African American to exhibit at the American Royal.



# GREAT

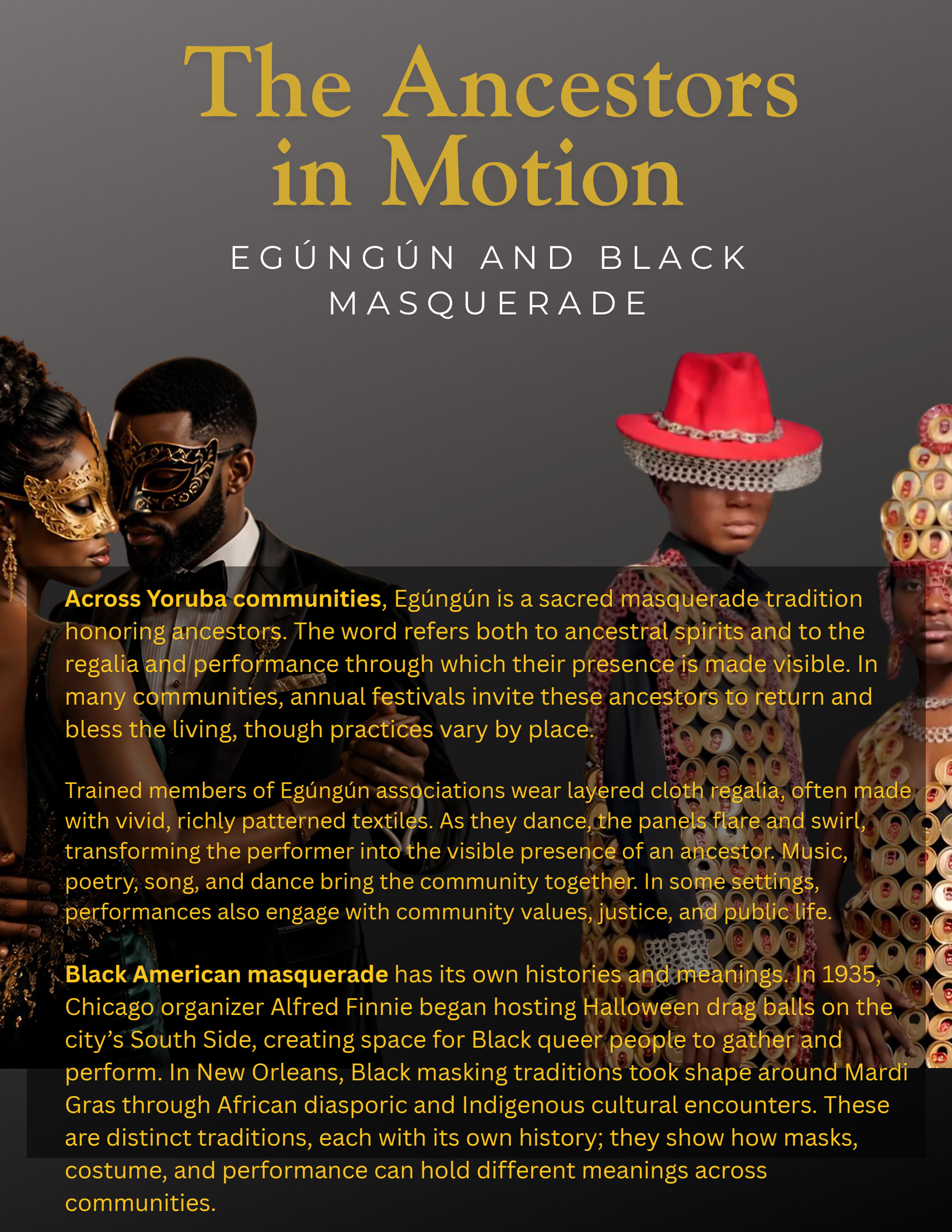
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# The Ancestors in Motion

## EGÚNGÚN AND BLACK MASQUERADE



**Across Yoruba communities**, Egúngún is a sacred masquerade tradition honoring ancestors. The word refers both to ancestral spirits and to the regalia and performance through which their presence is made visible. In many communities, annual festivals invite these ancestors to return and bless the living, though practices vary by place.

Trained members of Egúngún associations wear layered cloth regalia, often made with vivid, richly patterned textiles. As they dance, the panels flare and swirl, transforming the performer into the visible presence of an ancestor. Music, poetry, song, and dance bring the community together. In some settings, performances also engage with community values, justice, and public life.

**Black American masquerade** has its own histories and meanings. In 1935, Chicago organizer Alfred Finnie began hosting Halloween drag balls on the city's South Side, creating space for Black queer people to gather and perform. In New Orleans, Black masking traditions took shape around Mardi Gras through African diasporic and Indigenous cultural encounters. These are distinct traditions, each with its own history; they show how masks, costume, and performance can hold different meanings across communities.



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# Kids Corner

## HAPPY HALLOWEEN

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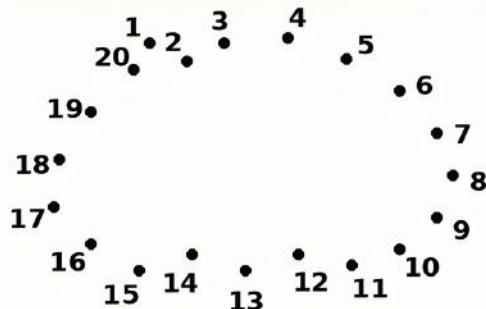
### SPOT THE DIFFERENCE!

Can you find 5 differences?



### CONNECT THE DOTS!

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### WORD SCRAMBLE!

Unscramble the Halloween words!

1. KMPUPNI \_\_\_\_\_
2. THGOS \_\_\_\_\_
3. DNYAC \_\_\_\_\_
4. HCTIW \_\_\_\_\_





# ULONDA JACKSON

## Still Riding Strong

At 65, Ulonda Jackson is still competing in ladies' steer undecorating, holding her own among seasoned rodeo competitors. The event demands speed and precise horsemanship: the rider races alongside a steer and pulls a ribbon from its back, working in coordination with her horse and a hazer.

Jackson's results speak for themselves. In Phoenix in August 2025, she won the Friday-night jackpot with a 4.56-second run. The following night, she placed second in the main rodeo, clocking 4.87 seconds. Her continued presence in the arena shows that experience and competitive drive belong at every age.

Follow her journey on [Instagram](#).





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Although riders may experience therapeutic benefits, therapeutic riding is not clinical therapy; only licensed health professionals provide treatment within their professional scope of practice.

Goals may include building balance, posture, coordination, strength, communication, concentration, confidence, emotional regulation, independence, and social connection. The instructor assesses each participant's abilities, sets individualized goals, selects a suitable horse, and adapts equipment, activities, and support.



The horse's rhythmic movement engages the rider's body, while learning to guide and care for the animal can encourage patience, responsibility, trust, and achievement.

For Black communities, therapeutic riding can reconnect participants with an overlooked equestrian heritage. Black Americans served as trainers, grooms, breeders, cowboys, cavalrymen, and jockeys.

Black jockeys won 15 of the first 28 Kentucky Derbies, but Jim Crow and racial exclusion pushed many from racing. Reconnecting with horses may support well-being and affirm heritage.





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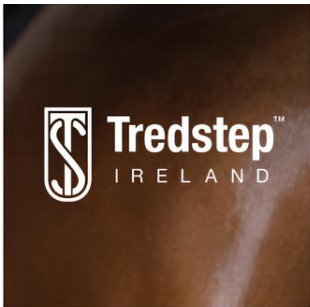
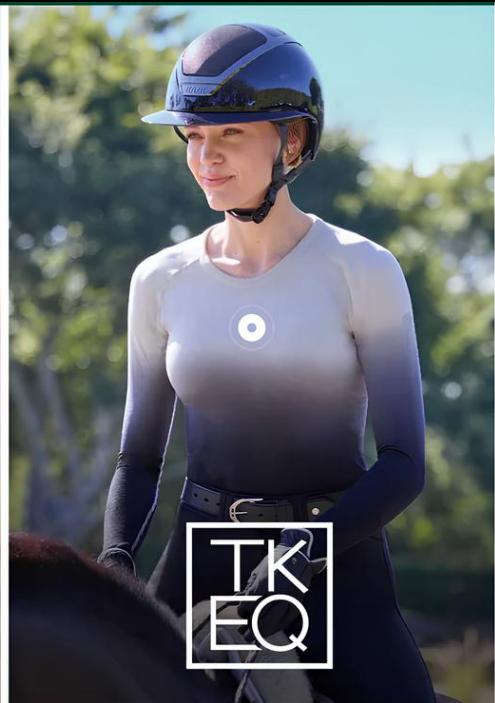
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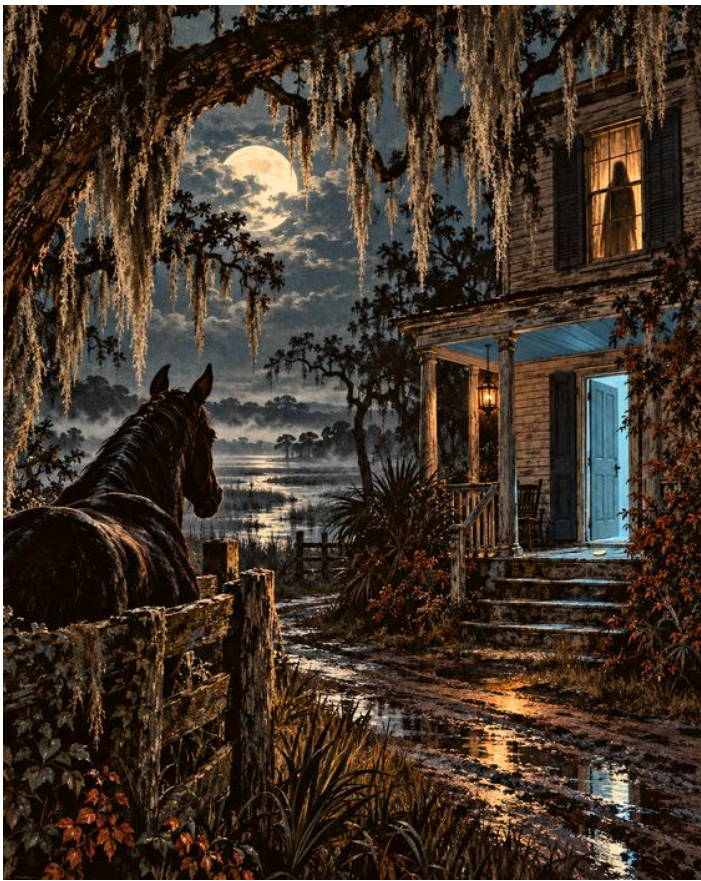
## A BLACK HALLOWEEN



Halloween brings costumes, candy, horror movie marathons, and a jump scare or two. But Black folklore offers another kind of thrill during October: stories that connect the living with ancestors, place, and community memory. Along the southeastern coast, Gullah Geechee storytellers have shared tales of haints and boo hags, giving generations a lot to talk about after the porch light comes on.

“Haint” is a Southern word for a ghost or spirit. In one Black American ghost story preserved by the Library of Congress, a man escapes a ghost by crossing water, which the story says a haint cannot cross. Such tales can frighten, amuse, warn, or stoke a debate about what really happened. They also carry local beliefs and family memories, changing a little with each telling.

The boo hag is one of the Lowcountry’s most notable figures. In Gullah Geechee folklore, this spirit sheds its skin at night, enters a home, and rides a sleeping person, draining breath or strength. The details vary by storyteller. That variation is part of folklore’s life: stories travel, adapt, and find new listeners. The boo hag may be Halloween-ready, but it belongs to a specific cultural tradition, not to every Black family or community.



Then there is haint blue, the soft blue or blue-green often seen on Southern porch ceilings. The practice is especially associated with Gullah Geechee culture.

Some accounts say the color tricks spirits into seeing the sky above or water below, keeping them from crossing into the home. Porch ceilings are the best-known use, while some versions of the story include doors, shutters, or window frames.

Today, people may choose the shade for its beauty as well as its cultural meaning. A blue door can be a warm welcome; in some homes, it also carries a protective story.

Hoodoo, also called conjure or rootwork, deserves more than a spooky sound effect. It is a Black American spiritual tradition rooted in history and place, and it continues in communities today. Its practices have included healing and protection. The National Park Service notes that silver dimes were used as protective charms, while other documented practices drew on plants, prayer, and carefully made conjure bundles. These were meaningful ways people sought care and protection, not Halloween props or one-size-fits-all “superstitions.”

That storytelling has a recorded history, too. The Library of Congress’s American Folklife Center preserves ghost accounts told by Black American narrators, including educator Eartha M. M. White’s account of a family encounter with a ghost. These archives remind us that such tales are more than seasonal decoration. They are part of everyday memory and oral history.

So this October, enjoy the seasonal frights, then ask who first told the story and where it came from. Share folklore with curiosity, give credit to the communities that keep it alive, and make room for each generation’s version. Around *Ebony Horsewomen*, we know a horse story can hold a crowd’s attention. Maybe that is why one final question feels right for Halloween: if a boo hag slips into the barn, which horse notices first?



HAUS OF

*Levi*

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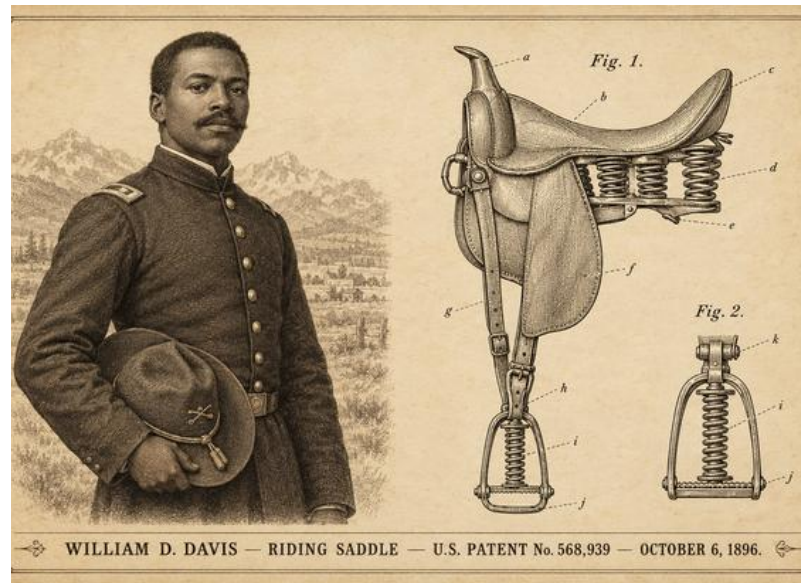
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# WILLIAM D. DAVIS

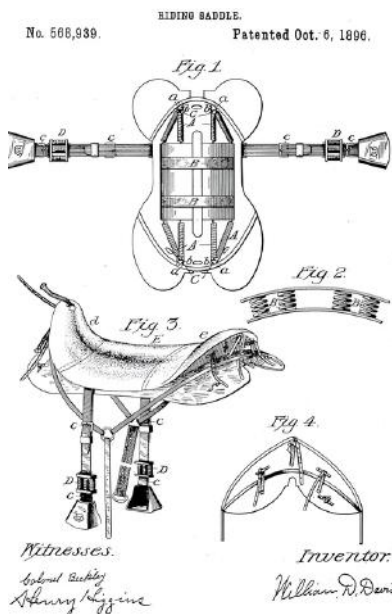
*Late in the 19th century, Black cavalry soldier William D. Davis developed an improvement to the riding saddle while serving at Fort Assinniboine, Montana. His work offers a window into the ingenuity of Black horsemen whose contributions often go unrecognized. Davis's design addressed the jolting riders experienced on hard-trotting horses during long journeys.*

Davis's 1896 invention, which he called a "Military Spring-Seat Riding-Saddle," combined springs beneath the seat with spring-equipped stirrup straps. The arrangement was intended to make riding more comfortable and reduce the pain and soreness caused by jolting. Davis did not invent the spring saddle; his patent described improvements to earlier designs. The U.S. Patent Office issued him Patent No. 568,939 on October 6, 1896, preserving his contribution in the public record.



His 1896 patent describes springs beneath the saddle seat and in the stirrup straps. Davis said the design would make trotting more comfortable, reduce jolting, pain, and soreness, and serve cavalymen and others traveling long distances on horseback.

Davis's achievement belongs within the broader history of Black horsemanship and military service. His patent offers a documented example of Black technical ingenuity in equestrian equipment, while reminding us that Black riders, soldiers, trainers, and other horse professionals helped shape America's equestrian traditions for generations.



Official U.S. Patent Office records preserve the exact technical illustrations of his 1896 breakthrough

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# BLACK HORROR

## 11 FILMS TO HAUNT YOUR OCTOBER



Black horror can be gothic, political, funny, stylish, surreal, or all of the above. These eleven picks feature vampires, aliens, haunted houses, and nightmares that hit a little too close to home. This is a watchlist, not a ranking, so queue up a double feature or save a few for a late-night Halloween weekend marathon.

**Blacula (1972)**, directed by William Crain

An African prince is cursed by Count Dracula and awakens in modern-day Los Angeles as a vampire. William Marshall brings Mamuwalde a striking mix of power, sorrow, and elegance. A landmark of Black horror with a bite.

**Ganja & Hess (1973)**, directed by Bill Gunn

After Dr. Hess Green is stabbed with an ancient blade, his life takes a strange and bloodthirsty turn. Gunn's hypnotic, unconventional vampire film is more art-house fever dream than straightforward monster movie.

**Def by Temptation (1990)**, directed by James Bond III

A divinity student visits New York and encounters a seductive supernatural predator. With Kadeem Hardison, Bill Nunn, and Samuel L. Jackson, this neon-lit tale mixes urban horror, faith, and temptation.

**The People Under the Stairs (1991)**, directed by Wes Craven

Young Fool sneaks into his family's landlords' home and discovers a nightmare behind its walls. Part home-invasion thriller, part class satire, it makes the house next door look mighty suspicious.

**Candyman (1992)**, directed by Bernard Rose

Graduate student Helen Lyle investigates a hook-handed legend haunting Chicago's Cabrini-Green. Tony Todd gives the figure an imposing, mournful presence, while the film ties its scares to racial division and gentrification.

**Tales from the Hood (1995)**, directed by Rusty Cundieff

This horror anthology serves up supernatural stories with sharp social commentary. Racism, violence, and political corruption all get their turn in the spotlight, with Clarence Williams III hosting as the unforgettable Mr. Simms.



**Blade (1998)**, directed by Stephen Norrington

Wesley Snipes stars as Blade, a half-vampire hunter with a sword, a mission, and very little patience for the undead. It's superhero horror with stylish action and unmistakable '90s swagger.

**Attack the Block (2011)**, directed by Joe Cornish

A South London teen gang, led by Moses (John Boyega), defends its neighborhood from an alien invasion. This sci-fi horror-comedy is fast, funny, and full of heart.

**Get Out (2017)**, directed by Jordan Peele

Chris visits his white girlfriend's family estate and realizes something is deeply wrong. Peele's sharp social thriller turns a weekend visit into a chilling story about race, control, and the Sunken Place.

**His House (2020)**, directed by Remi Weekes

A South Sudanese couple seeks a new life in England, but their assigned home holds a frightening presence. This haunted-house story folds grief, displacement, and guilt into every creaking floorboard.

**Sinners (2025)**, directed by Ryan Coogler

Twin brothers return to 1932 Mississippi to open a juke joint, only to face a supernatural threat. Blues, community, and vampire horror make this an atmospheric October pick.



FitSoul Apparel Co. is a new activewear and fitness lifestyle brand built on everyday movement and community support. Its slogan, "Rise Forward," describes a brand that sees itself as a movement for both body and soul. It designs athletic clothing for real life, whether that means running, lifting or simply moving through the day.



Creator and brand visionary Yinessia leads the company alongside Stacia, its business architect and strategy leader.

Together, they are building an inclusive fitness community where people focus on who they are becoming rather than chasing rigid standards of perfection.

FitSoul reminds us that wellness is a journey, and every step forward counts.



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# HALLOWEEN TRADITIONS, LASTING BONDS



Family traditions help create the memories children carry into adulthood.

For Black families, Halloween traditions, from carving pumpkins and baking treats to decorating, storytelling, and sharing laughter at dinner, can help express love, culture, belonging, and family connection and bring generations together.





Children today may carry stress from school, social pressures, concerns in their communities, and uncertainty about the future. Family traditions can offer comfort, connection, and reassurance.

Research has linked family routines and rituals with children's adjustment and stronger family relationships. Predictable routines can also offer stability during stressful periods. These traditions do not need to be costly or elaborate.

What matters most is spending time together. Carving a pumpkin with a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or family friend can become a cherished memory that lasts long after Halloween. Families take many forms, and children benefit from dependable moments of connection and joy.

As children grow up, they may look back fondly on these traditions and create new ones with the next generation. In doing so, they pass along more than a holiday activity. They share love, identity, resilience, and continuity. For Black families, creating these memories today can deepen family bonds and carry traditions into the future.





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