



“When I Look Back, It Is Hard Not to Feel Like I Was Failed.”

“We don’t talk enough about the heartache that comes with seemingly unrealized potential. Knowing I couldn’t live up to dreams and expectations that were set out for me, because the deck was stacked against me, hurts. Who could I have been now if I had only known sooner?”



I was recently diagnosed with ADHD – and I’m grieving.

Others who received and grieved an ADHD diagnosis in adulthood will tell you not to dwell on the past or to assign blame. But I’m finding this aspect particularly hard to reconcile. Why? Because it shouldn’t have happened to me. Growing up, I was surrounded by educators, and by people whose job it was to identify and understand ADHD and other learning difficulties.

When I look back, it is hard not to feel like I was failed — that I deserved more understanding and compassion than I was given.

I struggled a lot in school, but not in the typical ways. My teachers thought I had [dyslexia](#) or reading problems, but since my test results came back surprisingly normal, those suspicions were left at that. I was then referred for psycho-educational assessments. These tests showed that I was “a bright child” with a varying degree of abilities – puzzling everyone around me. They also revealed weaknesses in my [executive functioning](#) and [working memory](#). But again, it was left at that.

This struggle, of course, continued into adulthood. At my first professional job after college, I was a pure disaster. Prioritizing was extremely difficult for me, and I couldn’t make sense of what my boss wanted from me. The person before me had made the position look so simple – why couldn’t I just be like her?! What was wrong with me?

I’d find myself distracting others or getting lost in my own daydreams instead of helping clients. I’d often go to the washroom and cry, fearing that I would be fired at any second. I eventually left that job, but I vowed not to let the experience hold me back. Instead, I took a major leap and actually started my own business. Some time later, I stumbled upon some videos about [ADHD](#) – and it was like a light switched on in my head. The world finally made sense to me. The diagnosis was initially an amazing and terrifying turning point. Then the anger came.

How could I have gone this long without being diagnosed?



My behaviors and problems in school – unmistakably [ADHD symptoms](#) – were pointed out many times and documented in report cards since the first grade. Rushing to finish work, trouble paying attention, disorganization – it was there the whole time. How can I not feel jilted, especially when the answer was to put me down instead of finding solutions? What's more, I was often told there was no way I could have ADHD!

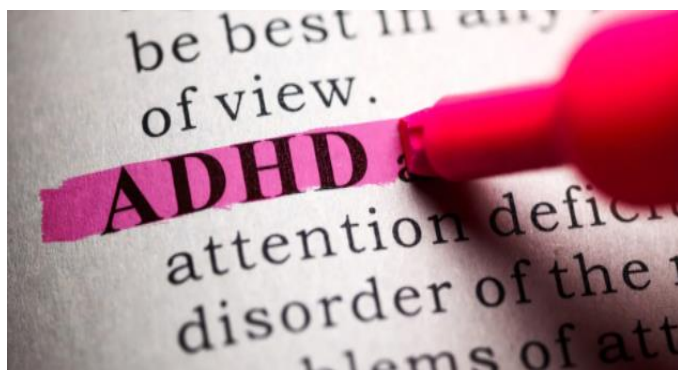
We don't talk enough about the heartache that comes with seemingly unrealized potential. Knowing I couldn't live up to the dreams and expectations that were set out for me, because the deck was stacked against me, hurts. Who could I be now if I had only known sooner? What would school have been like? Would I even be the same person?

We don't talk enough about the [shame](#) and humiliation that comes with constantly being told your behavior needs to change. The pain associated with feeling that the way you feel, think, and see the world isn't good enough. That you've failed at "normal" and at conforming to the functionality and views of those around you.

As the quote often attributed to Einstein goes, "If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid." A fish was not made for climbing trees, but for swimming. And that's where I feel like I was robbed – I was and am that fish, expected to climb the neurotypical education-and-work tree. I've wasted so many years trying to climb, when instead I could have been swimming and growing to my full potential.

I believe I can only let go and finally start swimming when I know that the other "fish" (i.e. [girls with ADHD](#)) won't have to go through what I went through. That somewhere in all my frustration, heartbreak, and pain there is a valuable lesson that may benefit others. That this wasn't pointless.

Before I and others can freely swim into the unknown, we need to build more awareness around ADHD in girls and their unique experiences. Beyond that, we need to uplift and celebrate the many types of brains that make our world vibrant and beautiful.



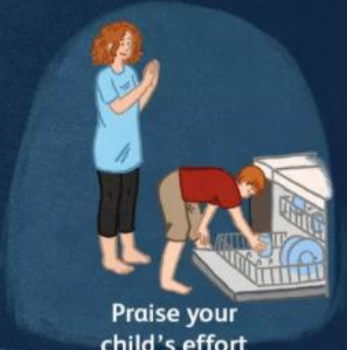
Parenting Strategies for Children With ADHD



Provide positive attention



Give effective instructions



Praise your child's effort



Establish rewards



Use consistent consequences

verywell

Parenting Strategies

Raising a child with ADHD can be stressful. Children with ADHD are more likely to be expelled from daycare and school and they may act out more in the home. It can also be a challenge to get them to do their homework and to comply with instructions.

Children with ADHD also tend to have higher rates of accidental injuries. They tend to get injured from falls off furniture after excessive climbing, falling or jumping out of windows or off decks, unbuckling restraints and standing up in the car or stroller, even accidentally drinking poison, which all result in more emergency room visits.

They often require constant supervision and more structure than other children. Here are a few behavior modification strategies that may be suggested if you engage in a parent training program to support your efforts:

- **Provide positive attention.** Positive playtime reduces attention-seeking behavior. And it will make your consequences more effective.
- **Give effective instructions.** Gain your child's full attention before giving directions. Turn off the television, establish eye contact and place a hand on your child's shoulder before saying, "Please clean your room." Give one instruction at a time. And ask your child to repeat back to you what he heard to make sure he fully understands.
- **Praise your child's effort.** Catch your child being good and point it out. Praise motivates children with ADHD to behave and frequent feedback is important.
- **Establish rewards.** Reward systems can be a great way to help kids with ADHD stay on track. Establish a few target behaviors, such as staying at the table during a meal or using gentle touches with a pet.
- **Use consistent consequences.** Placing a child in time-out, taking away privileges, and allowing for natural consequences can be effective discipline techniques.



Reasons ADHD goes unrecognized in some girls

Difficulties with sitting still, paying attention or controlling impulsive behavior are some of the initial signs or symptoms of ADHD in children. These signs are often stereotyped as typical of behavior of young boys. It's reported that boys are three times more likely to be diagnosed than girls.

Between not being included in ADHD research and the societal gender norms of female behavior, it has been a challenge to pinpoint this disorder in girls. Here are some reasons for this difference in diagnosing girls with ADHD.

Perception of 'personality traits'

The symptoms of ADHD in girls present differently than boys and are most times thought of as characteristics of their personality. Daydreaming and shyness are common signs for inattentiveness that are missed, while being talkative or crying easily may be a version of impulsivity, but instead these signs may be overlooked and written off. Due to the conflicting portrayals, it's difficult for parents or teachers to decide if something is a personality trait or a symptom.

Lack of inclusion in research

Females were never studied exclusively in ADHD research. It wasn't until 2002 that two long-term studies were completed on ADHD in girls.⁴ While there appears to be an abundance of information available, more research on gender issues in ADHD is needed to help raise the awareness of the needs of girls with the disorder.

Stigma of labels

As ADHD goes undiagnosed and may be dismissed as a personality trait, girls in their formative years can be burdened with labels of being a crybaby, lazy, careless or talkative, which can lead to low self-esteem, underachievement, anxiety or depression. The sooner parents and teachers identify ADHD, the greater chance for girls to be free of the stigma of these damaging labels that can follow them into adulthood.

Girls never measured up

For years doctors have used boys' symptoms as the guide for which girls should be measured. The current diagnostic criteria are more

appropriate for males as they present more problematic ADHD behaviors that are easier to identify. Some even believe this disorder does not occur in females at all. This calls for more accurate, gender-specific screening tools to adequately recognize and treat ADHD in girls.

Overachievers and overcompensation

Since school age, girls are groomed to be more socially conscious and understand the need to do well in school. Many times symptoms of ADHD are missed not only because they may be different than those seen in boys, but also due to girls masking the signs with coping strategies. Perfectionism is another common characteristic seen in girls and by putting forth so much effort and concentration on things they may be good at, parents and teachers won't think of ADHD when there is an issue with inattention.

The first step to diagnosis is for parents and teachers to acknowledge what they may be seeing at home and in class may be symptoms of ADHD and not rule them out. While ADHD is a common and treatable medical disorder, only a doctor or other healthcare provider can diagnose ADHD.





10 Rules for Life Crystallized by the Pandemic: ADHD Lessons Learned

1. Routine is anchoring.

Of the 1,903 adults who answered the ADDitude survey, 65% said their ability to stick to a routine has worsened due to the pandemic, which destroyed daily guardrails like office jobs, gym classes, and social commitments. For children with ADHD, morning and evening routines have worsened for 44% and 48% of respondents, respectively — largely due to strange new remote learning schedules.

“Structure and routine need to be a priority,” wrote a young adult with ADHD from North Carolina. “Everything else hinges on this: mental health, productivity, emotional management, interpersonal dynamics, keeping the abode livable. When **routine** falls by the wayside, everything else tumbles down after it.”

“I need structure to live my best life,” wrote a California native with ADHD who lost her job in 2020. “Without it, I feel invisible... **the days blur** into each other and my stress level is high.”

2. Honest communication is healthy.

More than 60% of caregivers and 62% of adults say emotional dysregulation has worsened during the pandemic. Frustration is turning quickly to anger. Anxiety is manifesting as rage. And fear looks like extreme sadness. This emotional minefield is ubiquitous; those who have navigated it best are the 20% to 23% of respondents who say that communication with family members has improved during this time.

“We’ve learned that we need to be **open and honest** about what is going on with each one of us,” wrote the parent of a 7th grader with ADHD. “An open, nurturing environment leads to a close-knit family.”

“I will remember the importance of communicating with my family about how I feel, even if it’s awkward, because doing so allows me to **avoid bottling up my feelings** and exploding in outbursts later,” wrote one young adult living at home with her parents during the pandemic.

3. Less is more.

Nearly 12% of ADDitude readers lost their jobs in 2020. Many more have lost clients and income and motivation. Discretionary spending is tightening, and you are saving money by cooking at home, cutting entertainment, and resisting impulse buys. By and large, the “stuff” is not missed — and neither is the busyness of rushing back and forth to stores, practices, social gatherings, and the other obligations that once filled our calendars. Less stuff — physical, mental, and emotional — is liberating. “We can live with a lot **less ‘stuff,’**” wrote the mother of a child with ADHD in Nebraska.

“Over-extending our schedule has been a coping mechanism for our family,” said a mother of four — two with ADHD and two with learning disabilities — in Alaska. “When we were forced to **slow down**, we were able to spend time working on the emotional and relational difficulties of ADHD, which had been neglected due to busyness.”

“In the future, I hope we schedule less stuff to do,” wrote the parent of a high school senior with anxiety in Ohio. “I hope we don’t allow the not-missed ‘shoulds’ to return. I hope we retain the slower pace of life and spend **more time ‘being’** with each other.”

4. Empathy is strength.

Three-quarters of ADDitude readers are feeling overwhelmed or exhausted; 70% of you are feeling worried or anxious; and 56% are sad. The reasons for this unprecedented mental health strain are no mystery; 45% of you told us you are more worried about the pandemic than ever. And these survey results came in more than a week before the terrorist attack on the United States Capitol on January 6.

Many emotions are bubbling beneath the surface. This is true for adults and children — with and without ADHD and comorbid conditions — and it requires a new level of understanding and empathy. Nearly 28% of adults with ADHD say their empathy has improved during the pandemic and 17% of parents say their kids’ empathy has expanded during this time, contributing to a kinder, gentler family environment.

“Empathy is so important — remembering that we’re all struggling in our own ways has helped us to cope with the new world,” wrote the mother with ADHD who also has a 1st grade student with ADHD in Washington. “We are sad and disappointed with how the quarantine has played out, but we know other people feel this way, too. **Emotional dysregulation isn’t just unique to us, at the moment.**”

“I have re-learned the lesson that we truly never know what’s going on in people’s lives,” wrote a young adult with ADHD and mood disorder in Virginia. “I have to be **more empathetic** to other’s situations and give as much love to them as possible.”

5. Learning is personal.

Half of all children with ADHD are now doing remote learning; 17% are learning in a hybrid model; and only 24% are learning in person at school every day. According to the ADDitude survey, school motivation has fallen for 63% of students learning at home, and it’s fallen for 45% of those still physically going to school. The majority of children and teens with ADHD are struggling; others are actually thriving.

Some students are benefiting enormously from the ability to move their bodies during the school day, to bypass social drama, to pursue personal interests, and to follow more relaxed schedules. These students have not tapped into some elusive remote school secret; they just learn differently. And watching how different students react to today’s circumstances reminds us that learning is personal; every mind brings its own unique gifts and perspectives, and the education system needs to better recognize this.

“The public school system is broken,” wrote one mother of a 10th grade student with ADHD who recently transferred to a private school due to inadequate 504 Plan accommodations at her Texas public school. “**Standardized testing has destroyed public education** since it began 80 years ago.” “I have learned that **we can do school differently** and better,” wrote one school counselor with ADHD, anxiety, and mood disorder in Rhode Island. “We can use more outdoor classrooms and spend more time building stronger communities. We can teach empathy and compassion for others and their struggles.”

“Distance learning has actually been great for my 7-year-old daughter with ADHD,” wrote the mother of a 2nd grader with ADHD in California. “She doesn’t have to ‘sit still’ all day long. She has movement breaks when she needs to and fewer distractions... I am shocked, but actually I think she is learning much *more* in distance learning than she did in the confines of a traditional classroom!”

6. Movement is centering.

If ever there was doubt about the focusing, calming, and healing properties of exercise, this pandemic has eradicated it. ADHD brains require physical movement daily. This is not optional, and it is not debatable.

“Emotional regulation and impulsivity are improved by exercise,” wrote the mother of four children in Minnesota. “The **canceling of sports** has increased impulsive and emotional behavior but having more downtime to address it has greatly increased our ability to respond well and make improvements.”

“Being **outdoors and active** is important,” wrote an ADHD professional in California. “Being sedentary, alone, and on screens makes life harder.”

7. Saying “No” is smart.

Not everyone or everything deserves our time. We are not demonstrating weakness by saying “No” to new responsibilities or obligations; we are demonstrating strength and strong prioritization skills.

“I really hope the rest of the world remembers how nice it can be to say ‘No,’ **cancel something**, do something virtual, and mostly have less to do,” wrote the parent of two children.

“The things that we thought were important actually aren’t,” wrote the parent of a 5th grader with anxiety and a 10th grader with ADHD.” We now understand how to prioritize our time with things that actually matter, and that **it’s OK to not attend every function** that happens every weekend (pre-pandemic).”

8. Emotional health is no less important than physical health.

More than half of children with ADHD have experienced worsened emotional regulation, motivation, outbursts, and patience, according to their caregivers. Emotional health is also precarious for adults, 62% of whom report worsened emotional regulation and 42% of whom report more outbursts and explosions. The emotional and mental scars may be largely invisible, but that doesn't make them any less impactful.

“The emotional component to ADHD is just as important as the behavioral component,” wrote one woman with ADHD, anxiety, and mood disorder in Minnesota. “I spent most of my life focusing on ways to stay organized, focused, and performing well in school and at work, but I neglected spending the same amount of energy on addressing emotional dysregulation. While it's been really challenging, the pandemic really helped me realize what was missing in my ADD treatment.”

“I learned to **not sacrifice my own mental health** for the rest of my family,” wrote a West Virginia mother. “Every part of the family needs to be healthy and working together or it doesn't work.”

9. Energy is wasted on worry.

This one is very simple: Investing time and energy on things you cannot change — like whether strangers adhere to public health guidelines or vaccine distribution is fair in Florida — is not productive or healthy. Instead, focus your energy on things within your control. “Find the thing that is triggering your anxiety, despair, sadness, and talk about it,” wrote the mother of three adult children in Tennessee. “We may not be able to fix what is causing your pain, but we can **look at it squarely in the face** and figure out a way to make adjustments. For instance, I can't help that all our usual Christmas parties are not happening this year, but I can get a kid from the angel tree and focus my attention on making their Christmas better. I can't let myself get in a funk and live there; I must constantly think of what I need to do to keep my head above the water and do it.”

“Be OK with not being OK and try to put your energy into things **within your control**,” wrote a parent with ADHD in Canada.

10. Racing brains need more slow time.

Overwhelmingly, ADDitude readers report that slowing down has helped their ADHD brains and kids to process, regulate, and regain control. For many over-extended, over-booked, over-committed ADHD families, this was a revelation — that their busy, buzzing brains were actually screaming for a pause but we could never hear them over all the yelling.

“The pandemic has **slowed down our lives** and made me realize that a lot of the frantic elements of our lives were not necessary,” wrote the parent of three children with ADHD. “I’ve learned to cherish the quiet times.”

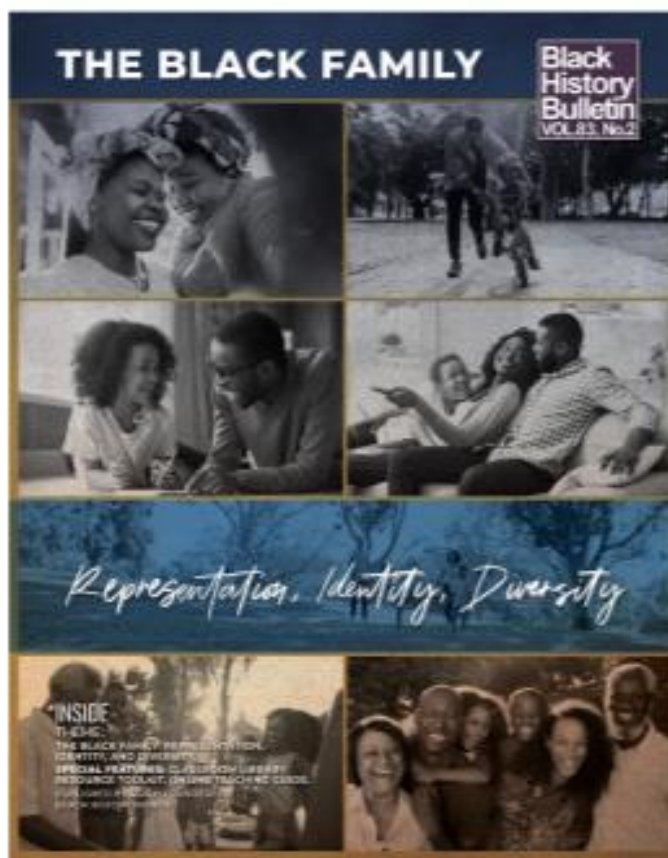
“We were **doing too much** before this started, and we need a balance between home (down) time and activities with friends or other things to look forward to, both together and separately,” wrote the mother of two teens in Colorado.

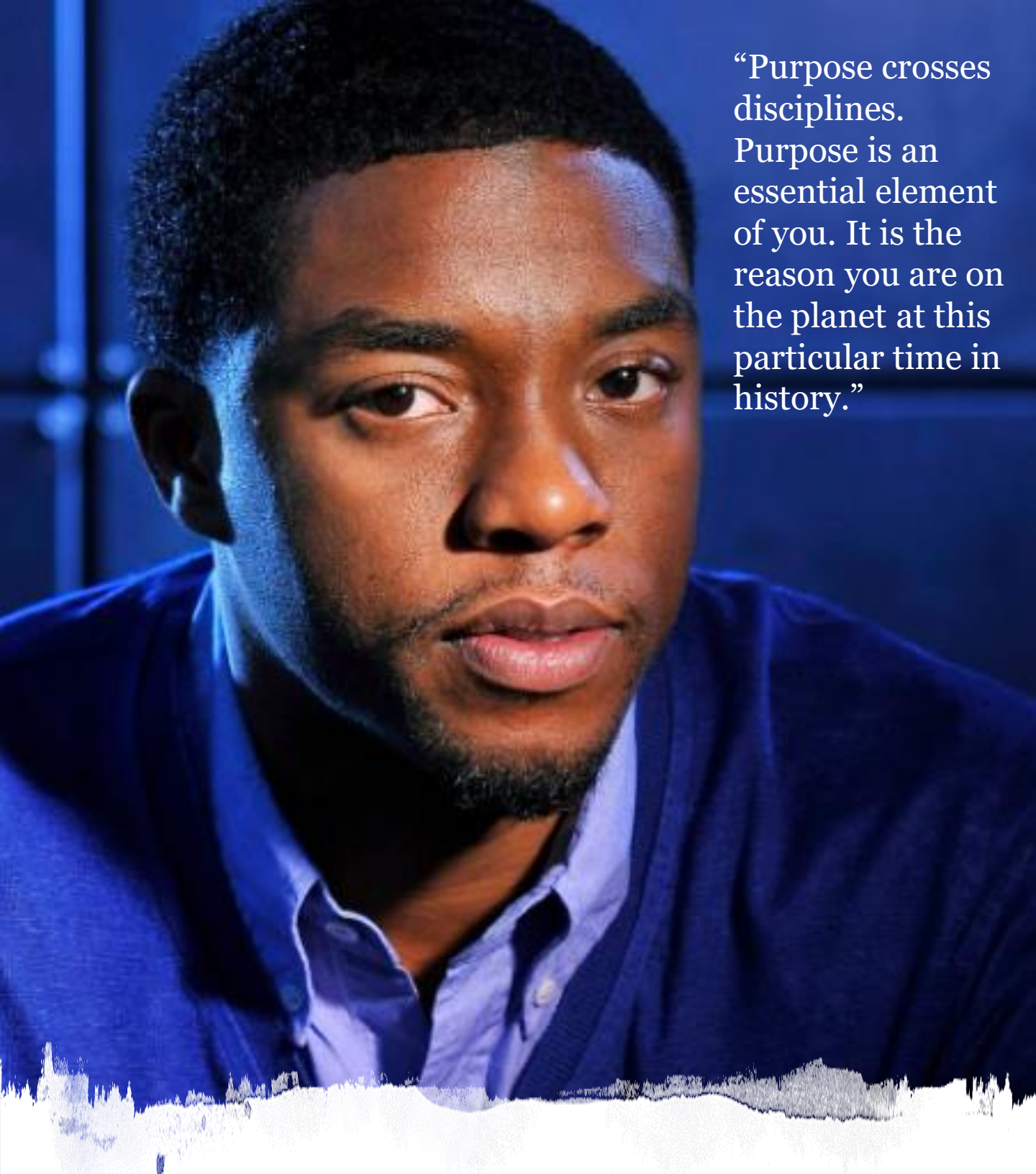
“I’ve always felt like what happens at home is not ‘real life’ since I’m an extrovert and not a homebody,” wrote an adult with ADHD and two teenagers. “I’ve learned that what happens at home is ‘real life,’ and those relationships must be carefully tended. It’s made us all appreciate the importance of a change of scenery, the inspiration we can take from new experiences, and the **fragile and strong nature of humans.**”



2021 BLACK HISTORY THEME: THE BLACK FAMILY: Representation, Identity, and Diversity

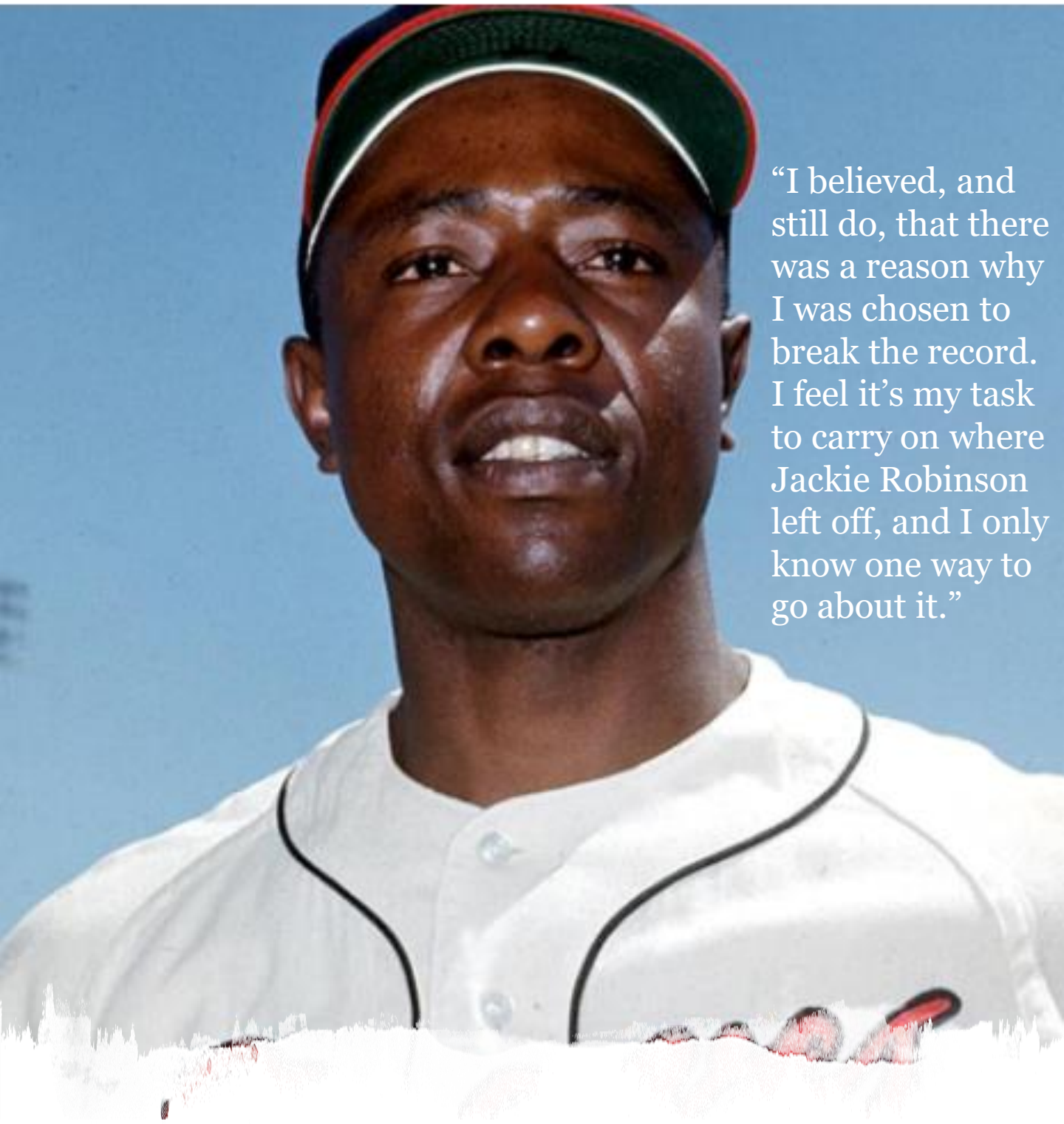
The black family has been a topic of study in many disciplines—history, literature, the visual arts and film studies, sociology, anthropology, and social policy. Its representation, identity, and diversity have been revered, stereotyped, and vilified from the days of slavery to our own time. The black family knows no single location, since family reunions and genetic-ancestry searches testify to the spread of family members across states, nations, and continents. Not only are individual black families diasporic, but Africa and the diaspora itself have been long portrayed as the black family at large. While the role of the black family has been described by some as a microcosm of the entire race, its complexity as the “foundation” of African American life and history can be seen in numerous debates over how to represent its meaning and typicality from a historical perspective—as slave or free, as patriarchal or matriarchal/matrifocal, as single-headed or dual-headed household, as extended or nuclear, as fictive kin or blood lineage, as legal or common law, and as black or interracial, etc. Variation appears, as well, in discussions on the nature and impact of parenting, childhood, marriage, gender norms, sexuality, and incarceration. The family offers a rich tapestry of images for exploring the African American past and present.





“Purpose crosses disciplines. Purpose is an essential element of you. It is the reason you are on the planet at this particular time in history.”

Chadwick Boseman



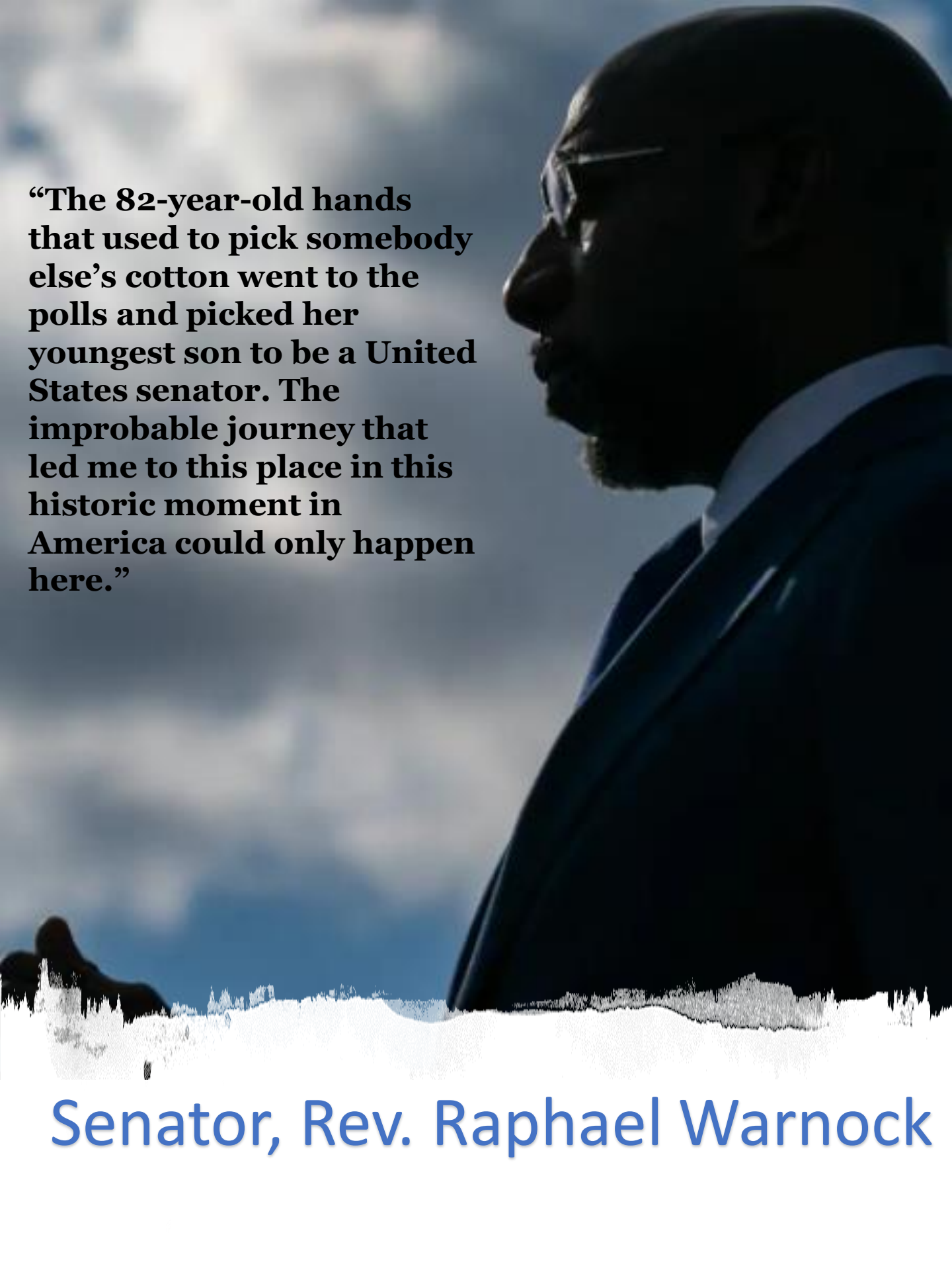
“I believed, and still do, that there was a reason why I was chosen to break the record. I feel it’s my task to carry on where Jackie Robinson left off, and I only know one way to go about it.”

Hank Aaron



“On this night of celebration, a Black woman was not last. She was not the least of many. She was at the center of it all.”

Madame Vice President Kamala Harris



“The 82-year-old hands that used to pick somebody else’s cotton went to the polls and picked her youngest son to be a United States senator. The improbable journey that led me to this place in this historic moment in America could only happen here.”

Senator, Rev. Raphael Warnock

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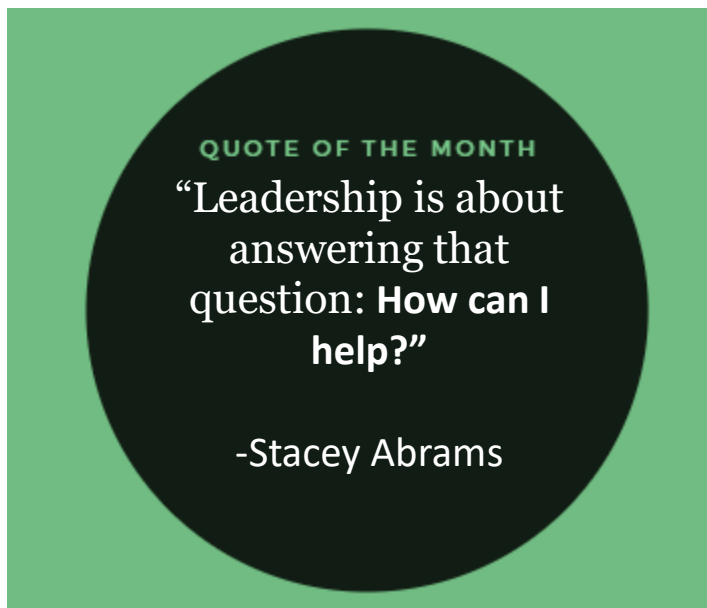


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