

BENEVOLENCE  
**IN BLACK**

A Celebration of Black People in Austin  
and the Contributions They Make

by **CHARLOTTE MOORE**

A PRODUCT OF THE  
BLACK BODIES PROJECT

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## **BENEVOLENCE IN BLACK**

A CELEBRATION OF BLACK PEOPLE IN AUSTIN  
AND THE CONTRIBUTIONS THEY MAKE

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This portrait book is dedicated to all the many great black Americans who have come before us, paving—in body, heart, mind, and soul—the way. We acknowledge you.

# Foreword

I met Charlotte Moore, founder of the Black Bodies Project, in 2018.

She approached me at Holy Cross Catholic Church on 11th Street in East Austin as I prepared to host a meeting on systemic racism.

Charlotte told me she'd heard of me and my work, and she proceeded to talk to me about her project, through which she'd already produced a full-length documentary called "Black Bodies," and through which she wanted to produce a portrait book called "Benevolence in Black."

I knew immediately I wanted to support her in this project, because our missions align.

I've made it my life's work to combat this issue of racism.

For the past twenty-five years, I have worked in and with systems and institutions, taking bold and courageous steps to create an anti-racist culture in systems—specifically those created to serve our children and families—which have a history of actually producing racially inequitable outcomes for black people.

My own professional work in this area began as a Child Protective Services (CPS) caseworker, where I witnessed rampant institutional and structural racism

and disparity. I saw first-hand how children and families suffered because of broken systems.

From a CPS caseworker, I rose to Assistant Commissioner of Texas CPS, then on to leader of the Center for Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. I was instrumental in creating unprecedented and historic Texas legislation requiring CPS to address racial disproportionality and disparities.

Today, I am CEO of Central Texas-based Joyce James Consulting. Around the country, we provide short and long term technical assistance, seminars, workshops, policy and program reviews, and other specially designed services focused on supporting and developing leaders toward a race equity analysis using data and racial equity principles. Our goal is to transform systems in order to achieve racial equity.

But, behind the data are real-life stories which bring us closer to reality and truth. There, we see the experiences of a people, as opposed to an abstract view of the oppressive nature of systems and institutions.

Charlotte's approach of capturing and sharing the experiences of black people, through their stories, is having a positive impact on white people and their willingness

to examine old attitudes, assumptions, and stereotypes which have shaped the lens of inferiority through which they have been socialized to see black people. Charlotte has chosen to not only educate herself through research, reading, and workshops, but also through collecting and documenting the actual lives and stories of people, who, in my opinion, are the absolute best source of this information.

I have shared the stage with Charlotte in leading discussions on the profound impact of racism on black people. She has a very powerful way of communicating that her work is emphatically and unequivocally about lifting up the racism that "Black Bodies" experience. Her style invites people of all races and ethnicities into the conversations so that minds and hearts may be forever changed, and so that the humanity of black people is recognized and acknowledged.

This collection of first-person stories is creative, informative, and inspiring. The response by people who identify as white inspires hope.

*Benevolence in Black* portrays the love, passion, and oppression which drive black people. The people in this book have given of themselves. And it is clear to me these efforts have the potential to not only affect positive change in the lives of black people, but all people.



photographed by: **CHARLOTTE MOORE**

**Joyce James, LMSW-AP**

CEO, PRESIDENT JOYCE JAMES CONSULTING

*JoyceJamesConsulting.com // Editor, "Addressing Racial Disproportionality and Disparities in Human Services" Columbia University Press 2014*

BENEVOLENCE  
**IN BLACK**

**This portrait book is personal.**

It developed out of a burning desire to acknowledge and celebrate some of the black people who live in my hometown of Austin, Texas—remarkable people who every day are making this community better.

This book also comes out of frustration.

Over the years, the various leaders of Austin—who have a voice—have all helped create this idea of our town as diverse, tolerant, and inclusive.

But, as a black woman, this is not what I see.

In Austin, black people account for only eight percent of the population. Between 2000 and 2010, Austin was the only fast-growing, major American city actually losing its black population.

That means something.

It means black people—our voices, our ideas, our very existence—are at risk of becoming irrelevant.

But, we are here.

And we matter.

This portrait book aims to have you, the reader, consider actually noticing and acknowledging your black neighbors, your black coworkers, your fellow black worshippers, the black people you run past on trail. In Austin, those black people are living vestiges, each day facing situations and circumstances which, likely, have no intentional positive effect on them.

But, they are there.

And they matter.

Within this book are photographs of and essays by thirty such remarkable black people in Austin who matter. They represent other black Austinites who are each day making a real difference in the lives of the people in their communities.

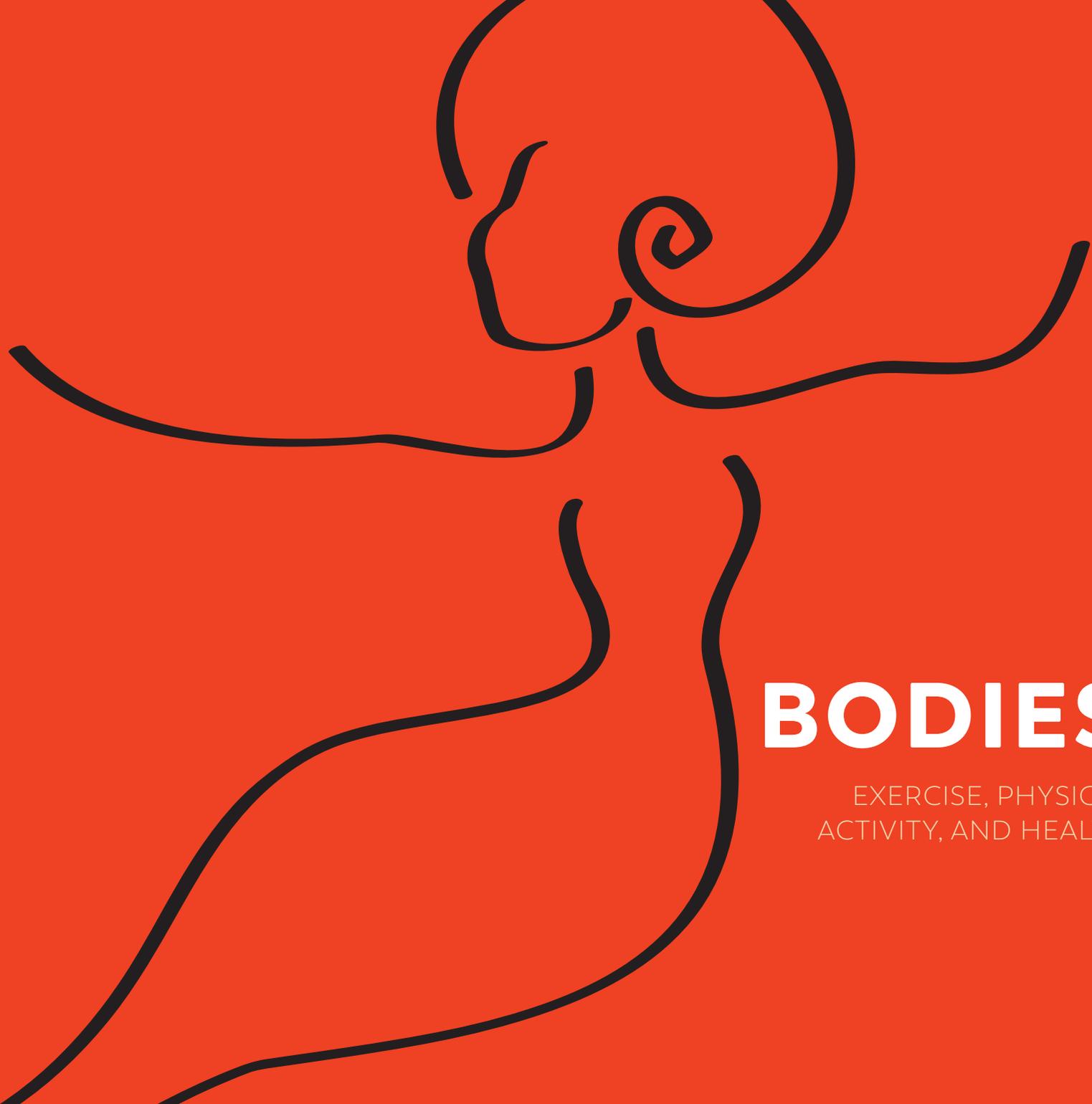
I hope you can see them as clearly as we see them.

**Charlotte Moore**  
FOUNDER, *BLACK BODIES PROJECT*

Each person you see on the following pages was asked to write a short essay describing what it means, for them, to be black in America, or to share some expression of their personal experience with blackness. They have been assigned to one of four categories based on the type of benevolent work they do to empower others within their communities.

“There’s not an American  
in this country free until  
every one of us is free.”

—Jackie Robinson



# BODIES

EXERCISE, PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY, AND HEALTH



## Jeremy A. Teel

INTIMATE HEALTH ACTIVIST

[www.JeremyATeel.com](http://www.JeremyATeel.com)

Jeremy works with a sexual health and wellness clinic dedicated to the treatment and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

*photographed by:* **BRIAN DIGGS**



## **Jeremy A. Teel**

I turned eighteen and got my first job as a server at a restaurant.

Within a few days, I get my first “big top” (that’s server-speak for more than four people at a table). At the host stand, the guest gave his information but he also mentioned, “I don’t want the colored boy to serve us.”

Never hearing such words uttered outside of a movie or television show, I was shocked and convinced he was joking. However, at that moment, I realized I could either brush it off or confront it head-on. It was time for me to speak up for all the other “colored” boys who didn’t get to turn eighteen, or get a first job, and even those boys who lived in a bubble which protected them from this sort of bigotry.

After I spoke to the gentleman, he said “I will do better next time, Jeremy. I apologize.”

Those words made me realize my blackness evokes opinions in the wider non-black public. How I choose to react to their views is on me, and I must remember those young men who didn’t get the chance to respond.

# Sadé M Jones

MOVEMENT ALCHEMIST

[www.sadeizm.com](http://www.sadeizm.com)

Sadé manages Ashé Arts, a community organization which focuses on the cultural arts and heritage of people of the African diaspora.

*photographed by:* **CHARLOTTE MOORE**



## Sadé M Jones

Growing up in extreme poverty and neglect, all I wanted to do was fit in. I just wanted to be “normal” like the white people in the movies who were “finding themselves” and coming of age.

This proved difficult, as I am a dark-skinned woman who is spiritual and highly educated. This made others uncomfortable. And, the more I stood out, the smaller I tried to be.

Until I met Edwin Robinson.

Middle school theatre. Brooklyn, 1997. I would hide myself behind a book, a light, a script—anything safe. Or, so I thought.

Robinson would talk to the class, always looking over my head, but projecting straight into my ears. He taught me about “Black Excellence” through the arts, and he dared me to hold my head down thereafter.

I learned from him if you are a black artist, it is your obligation to speak truth. Let it boom with power and drip with honey so even if it offends, it is undeniable. There is lightning in your soul.

It was the first time I wanted to be black.

I grew obsessed with Nina Simone, Zora Neale Hurston, and Lorraine Hansberry. I watched *The Wiz* every day, and my first CD was Quincy Jones’ “From Q with Love.”

Ask a twelve-year-old Sadé what she wanted to be and she’d say a psychologist and artist because arts heal people.

I think being black today has everything to do with identity; knowing who you are and from whence you came. This is (and has been) the tool for cultivating our power in a barren country.



“What the people want  
is very simple—they  
want an America as  
good as its promise.”

—Barbara Jordan



**HEARTS**

NONPROFIT, PHILANTHROPIC,  
OR PERSONAL GOOD WORKS



## Latreese Cooke

REENTRY COORDINATOR

*@me3ljcenter*

As founder of the Minorities for Equality in Economy, Education, Liberty and Justice center, Latreese helps previously incarcerated individuals reconnect with their communities.

*photographed by:* **CHARLOTTE MOORE**

## **Latreese Cooke**

Being a black woman is challenging, but why would I be anything else?

Being a black woman doing the work I've been chosen to do requires that I be the "ultimate" Latreese, which means I have to be me: focused, outspoken, fearless, able and willing to fight for those who are dubbed the "least of them."

I'm motivated to do this work because it is important that people have a fair and equal opportunity. And if they don't know how to obtain it, it's important they have an advocate who can help.

Every day, I insist that the city of Austin allows everyone full access to those things this city has to offer. The truth is, many more white people than black people are aware of the support available to them. It is my mission to ensure previously incarcerated people know their rights and have access to opportunity.



# Hope Green

MENTOR & ENTREPRENEUR

*@EmojisGrilledCheese*

When not manning her food truck (Emojis Grilled Cheese), Hope volunteers her time supporting homeless teens in the Austin area.

*photographed by:* **CHARLOTTE MOORE**





## Hope Green

Color is my superpower.

I'm reminded of my blackness in the faces of the homeless teens I mentor as they transition out of foster care onto a path of self-sufficiency. I'm reminded that I'm black as I train my daughter on how to navigate the world around us.

As a black entrepreneur, I've learned a critical tool in growing a successful business is networking. It is in these networking spaces where I am reminded that I'm black.

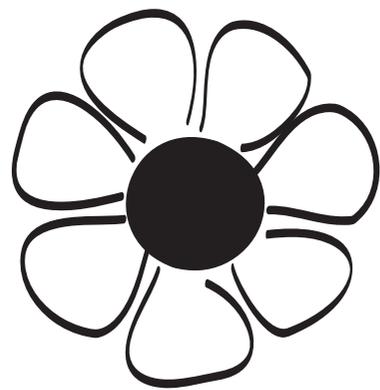
In conversations with white women, I am sometimes taken aback by the disparity of our experiences. Sure, they are my allies as we share similar challenges, but I've often found those challenges compounded for me because of the misconception that the media has imposed on black women and our community.

Due to my unique business concept, I've found my biggest fans don't look like me. I welcome the attention

from all the different faces attracted to my food truck, but I relish the challenge of educating the black community on how my food truck has elevated the comfort of a gourmet grilled cheese.

I'm also reminded I'm black by my circle of sister-friends who let me vent, cry, laugh, and heal. They remind me I'm not just black, but I'm the descendant of a people who have endured struggles I'll never know.

With that reminder, I walk away purposeful, resilient, grateful, emboldened, and BLACK!



## Acknowledgments

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And, to my mother.

**“Love lifted me.  
Love lifted me.  
When nothing else could help,  
Love lifted me.”**

**—James Rowe**