

A Baldwin Miracle
Kenya Zarate

Introduction

[Kenya Zarate, Host]: Hello, everyone! My name is Kenya Zarate, your host of this episode of the South Texas Stories. Today, we will be listening to A Baldwin Miracle, the story of Jeremiah Baldwin.

<<Intro Music>>¹

Introduction

[KZ]: In late May 2020, the death of George Floyd shook the whole world and sparked many protests in the United States. As a non-Black person of color, I recognize that I do not share the same hardships as Black people in the United States do, however, I want to do whatever I can to spark change by educating others and myself. A big part of this education is through the Baldwin's Reading Club. The Baldwin's reading club was created by Jeremiah Baldwin, a young Black man from Corpus Christi, Texas, in which the main focus of the reading club was to explore the readings of Black authors and intellectuals. This is not the only way that Jeremiah has educated myself and others, as he has used his social media presence to spread awareness of the Black experience through sharing posts and creating Black Talks, a weekly live stream in which he and guests shared their Black experiences. Jeremiah Baldwin is a history maker, from high school to his college career, he has made a change in Corpus Christi.

<<Transition Music>>²

[KZ]: I actually met Jeremiah in 8th Grade at Flour Bluff Junior High School. We met in our Pre-AP Science class in which I and many other students remember Jeremiah always going beyond the standards to complete assignments and projects. Not only would he do this in the classroom, but also going out of his way to bring change in the school. During high school is when I recognized Jeremiah's passion for making a difference. In our freshman year of high school, Jeremiah created a cultural awareness club in which he wanted to spark reform in our school as it was not as diverse as others. In the 2017- 2018 school year, Flour Bluff High School had an African American student population of 3.6%, which is about 65 students, and therefore, Jeremiah definitely saw the need for a cultural awareness club.³ I recently interviewed Jeremiah about his work and this is what he told me.

[Jeremiah Baldwin]: Yeah, so, um, as you know we're both in Corpus Christi so, Corpus Christi has a Black American population of only 4 percent. So that's a reality that myself as a Black American here in Corpus Christi has come to that realization. So, I wanted to create a club that

¹ Setuniman, "Intro 1L72," 25 May 2015, freesound.org/people/Setuniman/sounds/274787/.

² Ibid.

³ "High School Profile." Flour Bluff High School. <https://hs.flourbluffschoools.net/about-us/high-school-profile/>.

not only allowed me to learn about my culture but I wanted to include other cultures as well. Um, so that's why I called it C.L.U.B., Cultural Love Unraveling Bigotry, because through multiple cultures coming together, we'd be able to unravel bigotry.

[KZ]: Historically, the African American population of Corpus Christi has been underrepresented. As stated in the Caller Times, there is no Black representation on the City Council nor is there representation in the Nueces County Commissioner's Court.⁴ Hillcrest, a neighborhood in the northside Corpus Christi, is a predominantly black neighborhood and has recently received much attention due to its fading community. As stated by Marlon Griffin to the Caller Times, the city has “erased an entire history of where African Americans lived in Corpus Christi, the neighborhood is gone.”⁵ This further demonstrates the importance of Jeremiah’s actions for change as not only did he create an environment in high school for people of different backgrounds to engage, but also in the community of Corpus Christi. Jeremiah states this in the next clip.

[JB]: Throughout high school I mainly participated in clubs. But, I did participate in some other organizations as well. But after high school, I worked on a few initiatives in Corpus Christi. I helped with the formation of the Juneteenth celebration. Juneteenth is a holiday that celebrates the freedom of Black slaves here in the United States specifically in Texas, and throughout this festival I've been able to learn so much about our community here in Corpus Christi and how to engage with different cultures.

[KZ] As I stated earlier, a big part of my own cultural awareness and education on the Black experience has been due to Baldwin's reading club. I became intrigued with the reading club as the first reading from the club was “Still I Rise,” by the famous African American poet, Maya Angelou. I think this is because, as Jeremiah stated during the reading club, it allowed me to understand that there is dignity to oppression as throughout these hard times, we will rise and fight unjust treatment. Another reading that allowed me to understand the Black experience was reading Baldwin’s book, *Something Out of Nothing: A Baldwin Miracle*. As someone who knew him personally, this book allowed me to have an insider perspective to his story and it really resonated with me. In this next clip, I ask Jeremiah about the reading club.

[JB] Yeah, so I created the Baldwin’s reading club because I wanted to use my knowledge, use my understanding of things to help other people learn about the contributions of black literatures, essays and poets. And so this reading club is something that I did over the summer, where I hosted one hour really show on each Saturday, and it was a really amazing experience because I got to not only share my experience, and share my understanding of the readings, but I also got to learn from other people.

⁴ Rodriguez, Alexandria. "It's Been 100 Years since Corpus Christi's NAACP Began. How Much Has Changed?" Caller. February 24, 2019. www.caller.com/story/news/local/2019/02/19/naacp-black-history-month-texas-corpus-christi-leaders-school-where-change-begins-desegregation/2812567002/.

⁵ Ibid.

[KZ]: Within education, African American students in Corpus Christi have experienced many challenges and obstacles. This is due to the negative stereotypes often associated with different cultures. To further detail this, a study by Donald Stewart stated, young children learn about negative stereotypes through social media, television, and family influences. Each medium outlet is sending several messages daily about the ideals and characteristics deemed important in society. Other stereotypes are witnessed and practiced in public. Public perceptions and attitudes directly affect the practices in place in American classrooms. The classroom is an area that African American males identify as cross ethnic and stereotype threat.⁶ Donald Stewart's study concluded that African American males in South Texas often face challenges caused by negative stereotypes.

[KZ]: Jeremiah states in his book, *Something out of Nothing: A Baldwin Miracle*

[JB]: "The first time I recognized my Blackness was in elementary school. I attended a predominantly white elementary school where I was the only Black student in the entire school."⁷

[KZ]: This is a reality that many African American students in South Texas have faced. In the Corpus Christi Independent school district, there is a 3.7% African American population.⁸ Students in an undiversified environment experience many challenges and obstacles. In Jeremiah's book, he details some challenges he faced throughout his education. In the next clip, Jeremiah talks about this quote and some other challenges he faced during his academic career.

[JB]: Yeah, I think the main challenges that I found is something that I wrote about in my book is academic racism. So I've experienced it, fellow students, parents and faculty. But I think one thing that remained the same throughout everything is the faith that I've had in God throughout the course of my academic career, and it's really allowed me to see the light of the tunnel and really provided me an opportunity to show how great someone can be in spite of obstacles.

[JB]: That's one thing that's always kind of playing in my mind a little bit. I've always encountered instances where people say, "Oh, boy, you talk white," or "Oh"—they're just little microaggressions that black people shouldn't be in academia or whatever. And that's always like okay like they think that I can't do something, I'm going to show them that I can and I can do to a better extent that they can, they can do something. And I think that it's not so much

⁶ Stewart, Donald L., Jr. "African American Males' Descriptions of Stereotypes in Classrooms: A Phenomenological Study." Order No. 10266029, Liberty University, 2017

⁷ Baldwin, Jeremiah E. "*Something Out of Nothing: A Baldwin Miracle*." Independently published, 2020. P. 43

⁸ Murphy, Ryan. "Corpus Christi ISD." *Texas Public Schools*, 5 Apr. 2019, schools.texastribune.org/districts/corpus-christi-isd/.

about the narcissistic or bragging about yourself. It's just showing people that I can be qualified I can be successful, despite what you think about who I am or people that look like me.

[KZ]: From being elected the first Black male regional president of Business Professionals of America to graduating college before receiving his high school diploma to writing a book at 18 years old, one is able to see how Jeremiah has had many unique accomplishments for someone his age. As you read his book, you can definitely see how, despite the obstacles, he was able to overcome and persevere. A quote I'd like to highlight is,

[JB]: "My blackness was used against me for many years, but it turned out to be the greatest victory of my life."⁹

[KZ]: When I first read this quote, I felt that it held great power. I was in awe of how this statement shows perseverance and overcoming obstacles. I asked Baldwin to further explain what meant by this quote.

[JB]: So, what I mean by saying that my blackness has been used against me for many years but it turned out to be the greatest victory of my life. It's just mainly that as the first part of the listening says it was used against me for many years so through academic racism, through people discriminating against black people, things like that, and how it's turned out to be the greatest feature of my life is because despite my dark complexion, God has shown such a powerful light in my life and he's been able to show other people that. Okay, there's not one way for a black person to exist in the world but there's so many different facets there's so many different mediums that they can explore. And it's so beautiful that God has been able to use me to show that there's so many different ways for a person to be blocked there's not just one way. There's not just one specific place that they should inhabit you know that they can do so much more in what they've often been granted.

[JB]: I think it really speaks volumes to what I was trying to articulate with the book. I'm just talking about how people have marginalized communities specifically black people have been deprived so many rights, and how I believe that God has used my life to show other people that okay well, this little black boy is just as qualified as the little white boy or the little Hispanic boy, or little Asian boy so that's really what I was trying to articulate with my book, and I hope that it resonated with people and impacted their lives is, as I hope to do.

⁹ Baldwin, Jeremiah E. *"Something Out of Nothing: A Baldwin Miracle."* Independently published, 2020. P. 64

[KZ]: I would like to thank Jeremiah Baldwin again for sharing his story, The Baldwin Miracle, and thank you for listening. Once again, this is Kenya Zarate for the South Texas Stories, thank you for listening.

<< Outro Music >>¹⁰

¹⁰ Setuniman, "Intro 1L72," 25 May 2015, freesound.org/people/Setuniman/sounds/274787/.

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