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# The Mathematically Gifted and Black Website

*Erica Graham, Raegan Higgins, Candice Price, Shelby Wilson*

**BHM** Mathematically Gifted and Black (MGB)<sup>1</sup> is a website to celebrate the diversity of Black mathematicians, highlighting their contributions to the mathematical sciences and community. First came lathisms.org, a website celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month. Next came the Academy Award-nominated film, *Hidden Figures*, which focused on three Black female mathematicians and their experiences at NASA. With such inspiration, we created a website for Black History Month, February 2017. We reached out to twenty-four Black

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mathematicians who are well known for their contributions to research, education, industry, government, academia, and outreach. We also selected an additional four “rising stars” contributing to multiple facets of the mathematical community early in their careers. (See Figures 1–4.) The response was overwhelming, with the website shared on Twitter, Facebook<sup>2</sup>, classroom walls, office doors, and even *The New York Times*.

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<sup>1</sup>[www.mathematicallygiftedandblack.com](http://www.mathematicallygiftedandblack.com)

<sup>2</sup>See the Facebook group “The Network of Minorities in Mathematical Sciences.”

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In selecting the twenty-four Black mathematicians, we relied heavily on our personal networks and on websites such as “Mathematicians of the African Diaspora.” Those featured on the website must have a degree in mathematics and use it in their work. To generate a well-rounded profile group, we sought leaders in research, education, industry, government, academia, and outreach. The academy is represented by professors ranging from research universities to liberal arts institutions. The highest ranks in the federal government are represented as well as business owners, military leaders, and innovators of technology. Higgins noted:



**Figure 1: Mohamed Omar, assistant professor at Harvey Mudd College, was featured on the website on February 4, 2017. Besides teaching his students, Omar spreads his love and knowledge of mathematics to all via [www.youtube.com/MohamedOmarMath](http://www.youtube.com/MohamedOmarMath).**

We found it very difficult to find people in leadership roles in academia with math degrees. There are very few deans, provosts, and college or university presidents that fit our criteria. But this was not much of a shock to us. We recognize that there are many barriers that Black mathematicians are still breaking down. What we hope is that we have highlighted some of the future deans, provosts and presidents, those that will break down those barriers.



**Figure 2: Talea Mayo, assistant professor at the University of Central Florida, was featured on the website on February 11, 2017. Mayo specializes in coastal ocean modeling, with a special interest in hurricane storm surge, work that definitely came in handy this hurricane season.**

A beautiful by-product of the website is showcasing the diversity of paths leading to a mathematical career. Some received degrees from Historically Black Colleges and Universities, while others had only attended predominately white institutions. Many felt that their paths were “nontraditional,” with diverse starting points and one or more hiatuses. Yet, consistent among these varied profiles was an underlying tone valuing good mentorship, provided by those who provided support along the way.

In one conversation about the 2017 profiles, Wilson shared:

One thing I noticed from many of these profiles is the idea that it wasn't a given that they would be good at mathematics, that it would be their career choice. For some, there wasn't this belief in their innate ability to do mathematics. They struggled and sought support, just as many of us do.

So what is next? While the website will continue to spotlight the contributions of a different Black mathematician every day in February, there is a plan to utilize the website in different ways during the rest of the year. We'd like to showcase programs like EDGE and SIAM WCD that support Black mathematicians and create strong research, social, and teaching networks. We'd also like to enhance the historical content on the website, emphasizing the contributions of Black mathematicians to research, education, teaching, outreach, government, and industry.

The power of the personal story is helping people better understand one another and shred stereotypes. The mathematicians spotlighted were able to tell their stories in their own words, to discuss their proudest moments, in mathematics and in life, and to include personal stories of struggle along with inspirational anecdotes. All were allowed to be themselves, unapologetically.



**Figure 3: Ryan Hynd, assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania, was featured on the website on February 18, 2017. This photo was taken of Hynd while he was visiting MIT as Martin Luther King Visiting Professor.**



**Figure 4: Chelsea Walton, Selma Lee Bloch Brown Assistant Professor at Temple University, in transition to the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, was featured on the website February 25, 2017. Walton was awarded a Sloan Fellowship in 2017.**

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Figure 1 courtesy of Mohamed Omar.

Figure 2 courtesy of Talea Mayo.

Figure 3 courtesy of Allegra Boverman.

Figure 4 courtesy of Chelsea Walton.

Photo of Erica Graham courtesy of Aaron Windhorst/Bryn Mawr College.

Photo of Raegan Higgin courtesy of Raegan Higgins.

Photo of Candice Price courtesy of USMA DPTMS.

Photo of Shelby Wilson courtesy of Shelby Wilson.



**Erica Graham**

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Erica Graham** does research in mathematical biology with applications to endocrinology. Current research includes reproductive hormone regulation and metabolic factors associated with ovulatory dysfunction.



**Raegan Higgins**

**Raegan Higgins's** research is in time scales; her interests focus on oscillation criteria for second-order dynamic equations. Currently, she is studying applications of time scales to biology. Raegan volunteers in Mentor Tech at TTU and serves as president of the Lubbock Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.



**Candice Price**

**Candice Price's** service mission statement is to create and contribute to programs that broaden the participation of underrepresented groups by focusing on strong mentoring and research networks.



**Shelby Wilson**

**Shelby Wilson's** research is in the area of mathematical biology and focuses on modeling with applications to medical sciences, immunology, and cancer. In her scant spare time, she loves to read, travel, and eat amazing food.