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Meet three African-American Denver Public School graduates from the same neighborhood who are educators at the same college

Lynn, Eric, and Jamal are one of the few African-American educators at the Community College of Denver - and they all went to Denver Public Schools and grew up in the same working class neighborhood of Montbello.



Lynn Wilson was born in San Antonio, TX but was raised in Montbello where he attained all of his K-12 education in the Denver Public Schools system. Growing up in a suburban, but gang-infested neighborhood was no cakewalk. It taught him grit, community pride, and mental toughness. With a lot of family support and high marks at Montbello High School (class of 1992), he earned a full-ride engineering scholarship. He would become a first-generation graduate from the University of Oklahoma, where he started a student club called MOTION that trained Upward Bound students and incoming freshmen personal development skills like learning Microsoft Office. After doing stints in telecommunications for startups and what would later become T-Mobile, he decided to leave corporate to become an entrepreneur. In the process of starting his first computer company, he obtained a Master's in International Business Administration from Nova Southeastern University in Florida. He would return to Denver later in his career after going bust as a real estate investor during the great recession in 2008.

What he noticed when he moved back to Denver was a deep division and lack of support for people of color in entrepreneurship and digital literacy. He explains, "We are in an economic boom in Metro Denver with \$5 billion of new construction and infrastructure on deck. Mayor Michael Hancock explained it as a cadence of development opportunities for the next 10 years. By 2050, 48 percent of the states labor force will be people of color. Today, however,

communities of color in Colorado are disproportionately low-income, face higher unemployment and poverty rates, and are more likely to live in affordable neighborhoods that are rapidly dissipating due to gentrification."

As a Sr. Tech Analyst in the late '90s and early 2000's, he knows the importance of technology and the opportunities that come with an understanding of using technology in productive ways. To level the playing field, he believes giving the underserved and the underrepresented access to college level training and opportunities right in their own backyard will help them to enter better paying professional workplaces sooner. His concern turned into a calling, and while teaching business courses during the day, he began to develop innovative programs for both adults and youth at night and on weekends. Starting with an innovation grant he wrote in 2017, he started BootUp Camps, where he facilitates a team of people who provide valuable and needed technical and soft skills in accelerated workforce training programs. In 2020, these digital literacy programs awarded 90 certifications to people from all walks of life. A vast majority were parents with children under the age of 13, seeking more opportunities to provide for their children, and achieve their career and life aspirations. With these certifications, some students have been able to double their income within 6 months of participating in a camp.

Currently, he maintains his duties and responsibilities as Program Chair of Business Administration & Economics at the Community College of Denver. There, he is in charge of 19 instructors who deliver over 50 courses to 1000 students.



Jamal Bowen was born in Washington D.C. and grew up in a neighborhood called Montbello in Denver, Colorado. Montbello and Denver Public Schools have shaped who he is today. It has taught him to be a leader and to be transparent. He attended DPS for all K-12 experience. He learned the importance of building relationships through networking, adjusting to new ways of life, and being a risk-taker. Jamal learned to have compassion and to be willing to listen to the needs of others. He has always had the passion to help his community grow and educate the next generation of leaders. He believes it is his obligation to give back and be part of that

change. Jamal graduated from Denver East High School in 2007 and commenced his collegiate career at Ashford University in Clinton, Iowa, where he competed in competitive Track and Field. Later, he transferred to and graduated from Colorado State University in 2013 with a Bachelor's degree in Ethnic Studies. After graduating with his BA degree, he continued his education to obtain his Masters Degree in Organizational Management with a specialization in Public Administration from Ashford University Forbes School of Business & Technology in San Diego, CA in 2016.

Following his collegiate career, Jamal was inspired to start a business called, "Empowering Community Entrepreneurs." In 2016, the vision of this program is to create events that encourage, teach, and mentor young adults to proactively generate business ideas and construct a plan of action to make them successful. The purpose was to train entrepreneurs with specific tools that would produce outward thinking to maintain a business of progression. Empowering Community Entrepreneurs (ECE) provides and creates opportunities for the youth and young adults to connect with others, through skills and services. ECE creates opportunities to assist educational experiences that help frame the mindset of the youth and develop leadership. Creating a platform to discuss issues, needs and available resources influence and guide the community. ECE also looks to provide and implement insights in other organizations, as well as to inspire individuals to become ambassadors and to produce a strong and diverse foundation. It is vital to recognize each person while gaining understanding of the developmental needs as they gain occupational careers.

He would get a major chance to inspire students at the Diversified Skills Training Academy (DISTA) in Paynesville, Liberia (West Africa) in 2017. The main purpose of his trip to Liberia was to help with youth development, leadership, and empowerment. Working on a curriculum that would teach and give students the necessary tools on entrepreneurship and other life skills. The DISTA family was delighted to receive Mr. Bowen, an inspiring "American / Liberian" who was visiting the country for the first time in many many years. Jamal was introduced to Rev. T. J. Spencer by Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Madam Olubanke-King Akerele, who in fact, recruited and employed Rev. Spencer in 2010 as a diplomat. During his visits to DISTA, Mr. Bowen told the students to set good examples as future leaders of the country.

Mr. Bowen currently serves as the First-Year Experience Coordinator and Chair of Advanced Academic Achievement (AAA) at the Community College of Denver. He also teaches Business and Entrepreneurship. Jamal is a member of the African Leadership Group (ALG) Business and Economic Opportunity Committee. He also serves on the Board of Directors for African Chamber of Commerce Vice Chair of Entrepreneurial Education. Mr. Bowen received the Post-Secondary Educator of the Year award from the Education Center on March 7, 2020.



Eric S. Hamilton was born and raised in Denver, CO (mostly in the Montbello neighborhood). As a product of Denver Public Schools he understands the challenges from growing up in a difficult environment and still realizing the dream of a secondary education. At the same time he learned the importance of community and being a positive contributor to that community. Eric graduated from Montbello HS in 1997 and went on to Tuskegee University where he studied Marketing. At Tuskegee he continued being community minded by mentoring young students, participating in student leadership and numerous community service projects. He was successful at matriculating through Tuskegee University with a Bachelor of Science degree conferred in 2001. He continued his education receiving a Master's Degree in Business Administration in 2006.

Having started his career in sales and marketing, Eric has worked for several companies including Phillip Morris, Eaton Corporation, Big O Tires, ADT and Fluor Corporation, the largest global engineering, procurement, fabrication and construction company in the world. Today, Eric serves as System Safety and Security Manager with Transit Safety and Security Solutions, Inc., a private system safety and security engineering firm specializing in hazard risk, severity analysis and mitigation. In this role, Eric is instrumental in the system safety and security certification of municipal transit projects in a number of major metropolitan areas including Chicago, Boston and Denver. He is one of a few in the world with this specialty and is highly sought after within his industry.

Although he has built a fulfilling professional career, Eric's passion continues to be paying it forward, always keeping in mind the individuals who had a hand in lifting him to a place to have opportunities and change the future generations of his family. He has participated and led mentoring programs in the Montbello area and beyond since 2003. He is also a talented football coach, leading a variety of youth football teams for the past sixteen years, several of which have earned championship recognition. Eric is also a proud member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. through which he provided resources and programs to facilitate betterment for the community in which he was raised, including Omega Leadership Academy and Project Manhood: Rights of Passage. Eric also re-chartered the Montbello High School chapter of Brotha 2 Brotha, a positive image program for young Black males.

Eric continued his mission to give back in 2019, becoming an adjunct professor at Community College of Denver in the Business Department. He considers it yet another opportunity to share

the knowledge and expertise that he has gained in his twenty-year career with students, many of whom have a similar background to his own.

Eric is the proud father of four: Eric, Jr., Yasmeen, Elijah and Emmanuel and resides in Aurora, Colorado.

Mr. Wilson, Mr. Hamilton, and Mr. Bowen are prime examples of educating the next generation and that you must be willing to overcome adversity. These men have a passion and believe it is their duty to give back to their community.

Mr. Hamilton went to an HBCU because it resembled the demographics and class size that he had become accustomed to. He wanted to succeed, and having that familiarity with his environment was important to him. Mr Bowen followed the college athlete route because he felt that was a way to success but later found out that his ideas could create wealth. Although Mr. Wilson lettered in sports throughout high school, he wanted to dispel the stigma about African-American men only being good athletes. He wanted to prove we can become scholars, too.

These three men want African American males to know that anything can be accomplished through Entrepreneurship and STEAM pathways. Mr. Hamilton added, "Our neighborhood made us into the individuals we are, but college helped smooth out the rough edges. However, you do not have to compromise who you are. Stay authentic and speak from the voice of your experience."

Mr. Bowen agrees, "Fate brought us all together, even though we all grew up in Montbello, the Community College of Denver is what connected us. Education is one thing that no one can take away from you, and your ideas can change the world. Take pride in where you come from and be proud to be a black man. Black minds are needed, and it is a must for you to succeed and pay it forward!"