



Mona Vaughn Scott. Photo courtesy of Emil Guillermo.

COMMENTARY:

My Afternoon at the Black Repertory Theater

By Emil Guillermo

We live in the Bay Area, where the cost of living has gone through the roof.

Yet Trump dismisses the affordability crisis as a “Democratic con job.” Will he ever come to Oakland and say that? Maybe when PEN Oakland gives him a fake peace prize like the one FIFA’s World Cup organizers handed out the other day?

No one is holding their breath.

What people are thinking

about is community, diversity, and culture—values that were very much on display at the 36th annual PEN Oakland awards, which I had the pleasure of co-hosting at the Black Repertory Theater.

One of this year’s honorees was an Oakland ice cream parlor. Miharū Ice Cream received an award for its diversity and mix of flavors. The parlor was nominated by the late Oakland poet and PEN Oakland board member Jack Foley, who died last month.

Known for his long-running KPFA radio shows, Foley believed diversity works in Oakland—at least at his favorite ice cream shop.

That same spirit filled the Black Rep Theater, located in that part of Berkeley that bumps up against Oakland along Adeline. I was reminded what a resource the space is for the broader community: a large stage, lighting, a mic, and comfortable seating for several hundred people. It’s no surprise the local NAACP chapter, of which I am a member, holds its meetings there.

It was the perfect venue for PEN Oakland, the local chapter of the international organization for poets, essayists, and novelists. Founded by Oakland resident Ishmael Reed, PEN Oakland is known as the “working-class PEN.”

Several award recipients stood out to me.

The first was Carvell Wallace, honored for his memoir “Another Word for Love.” A longtime reporter covering culture, music, sports, and the arts, Wallace writes poignantly about growing up poor with a single mother. He describes their survival as being like “survivors of a shipwreck who had washed ashore onto a deserted island. We had made it, but for how long?” The book

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COMMENTARY:

If You Don’t Want Your ‘Black Card’ Revoked, Watch What You Bring to Holiday Dinners

By Wanda Ravernell
Post Staff

From the fourth week of November to the first week in January, if you are of African descent, but particularly African American, certain violations of cultural etiquette will get your ‘Black card’ revoked.

From Thanksgiving to Christmas to New Year’s Day, whether it’s the dining room table or the bid whist (Spades? Uno, anyone?) table, your card may be in danger.

It could take until Super Bowl Sunday for reinstatement.

I don’t know much about the card table, but for years I was on probation by the ‘Aunties,’ the givers and takers of Black cards.

How I Got into Trouble

It was 1970-something and I was influenced by the health food movement that emerged from the hippie era. A vegetarian (which was then considered sacrilegious by most Black people I knew) prepared me a simple meal: grated cheese over steamed broccoli, lentils, and brown rice.

I introduced the broccoli dish at the Friday night supper with my aunt and grandfather. She pronounced the bright green broccoli undone, but she ate it. (I did not, of course, try brown rice on them.)

I knew that I would be allowed back in the kitchen when she attempted the dish, but the broccoli had been cooked to death. (Y’all remember when ALL vegetables, not just greens, were cooked to mush?) My Black card, which had been revoked was then reattained because they ate what I prepared and imitated it.

Over the decades, various transgressions have become normalized. I remember when having a smoked turkey neck instead of a ham hock in collard greens was greeted with mumblings and murmurings at both the dining room and card tables. Then came vegan versions with just olive oil (What? No Crisco? No bacon, at least?) and garlic. And now my husband stir fries his collards in a wok.



The ‘aunties’ playing cards. iStock photo by Andreswd.

But No Matter How Things Have Changed...

At holiday meals, there are assigned tasks. Uncle Jack chopped raw onion when needed. Uncle Buddy made the fruit salad for Easter. My mother brought the greens in winter, macaroni salad in summer. Aunt Deanie did the macaroni and cheese, and the great aunts, my deceased grandmother’s sisters, oversaw preparation of the roast beef, turkey, and ham. My father, if he was present, did the carving.

These designations/assignments were binding agreements that could stand up in a court of law. Do not violate the law of assignments by bringing some other version of a tried-and-true dish even if you call it a new ‘cheese and noodle item’ to ‘try out.’ The auntie lawgivers know what you are trying to do. It’s called a menu coup d’état, and they are not having it.

The time for experiments is in your own home: your spouse and kids are the Guinea pigs.

My mother’s variation of a classic that I detested from that Sunday to the present was adding crushed pineapple to mashed sweet potatoes. A relative stops by, tries it, and then it can get introduced as an add-on to the standard holiday menu.

My Aunt Vivian’s concoctions from Good Housekeeping or Ladies’ Home Journal magazine also made it to the Black peoples’ tables all over the country in the form of a green bean casserole.

What Not to Do and How Did It Cross Your Mind?

People are, of all things holy, preparing mac ‘n’ cheese

with so much sugar it tastes like custard with noodles in it.

Also showing up in the wrong places: raisins. Raisins have been reported in the stuffing (makes no sense unless it’s in a ‘sweet meats’ dish), in a pan of corn bread, and – heresy in the Black kitchen – the MAC ‘n’ CHEESE.

These are not mere allegations: There is photographic evidence of these Black card violations, but I don’t want to defame witnesses who remained present at the scene of the crimes.

The cook – bless his/her heart – was probably well-meaning, if ignorant. Maybe they got the idea from a social media influencer, much like Aunt Viv got recipes from magazines.

Thankfully, a long-winded blessing of the food at the table can give the wary attendee time to locate the oddity’s place on the table and plan accordingly.

But who knows? Innovation always prevails, for, as the old folks say, ‘waste makes want.’ What if the leftovers were cut up, dipped in breadcrumbs and deep fried? The next day, that dish might make it to the TV tray by the card table.

An older cousin – on her way to being an Auntie – in her bonnet, leggings, T-shirt, and bunny slippers and too tired to object, might try it and like it....

And if she ‘rubs your head’ after eating it, the new dish might be a winner and (Whew!) everybody, thanks God, keeps their Black cards.

Until the next time.

NOTICE AND DIGEST

AN ORDINANCE: (1) AMENDING SECTION 8.62.100 OF THE OAKLAND MUNICIPAL CODE (“O.M.C.”) FOR THE PURPOSE OF REMOVING THE LIMIT ON PUBLIC STREET CLOSURES FOR RESTAURANT, RETAIL, CAFÉ, PARKLET, AND OTHER BUSINESSES TO CLOSE AND USE PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAYS TO ENCOURAGE PUBLIC SAFETY, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, AND HEALTHY OUTDOOR USE AND ENJOYMENT OF PUBLIC SPACES UNTIL DECEMBER 31, 2026 UNLESS FURTHER EXTENDED BY CITY COUNCIL AND (2) ADOPTING APPROPRIATE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT FINDINGS

This Ordinance amends Section 8.62.100 of the Oakland Municipal Code (O.M.C.) to retain the portion of the Flex Streets Program facilitating public street closures for restaurant, retail, café, parklet, and other businesses to close and use public rights-of-way to encourage public safety, business development, and healthy outdoor use and enjoyment of public spaces with a new sunset date of December 31, 2026 unless further extended by City Council. This Ordinance further finds that reinstating this portion of the Flex Streets Program is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”)

Notice of Publication

This Ordinance was introduced at the City Council meeting, Tuesday evening, **December 2, 2025**, and passed to print **8 Ayes**; Final adoption has been scheduled for the Special City Council meeting Tuesday afternoon **December 16, 2025, 1:00 P.M.**, at One Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, Council Chamber, 3rd floor, Oakland, California, and via Teleconference. Three full copies are available for use and examination by the public in the Office of the City Clerk at One Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, 1st floor, Oakland, California.

ASHA REED, City Clerk

NOTICE AND DIGEST

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING OAKLAND MUNICIPAL CODE CHAPTER 10.20 (SPEED LIMITS) AND ADOPTING APPROPRIATE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT FINDINGS TO REFLECT CHANGES IN OAKLAND’S STREET NETWORK AND TO MODIFY SPEED LIMITS ON BROADWAY AND INTERNATIONAL BOULEVARD

The ordinance amends Chapter 10.20 of the Oakland Municipal Code to update speed limits in alignment with recent changes to the city’s street network and California state law. It incorporates findings from Engineering & Traffic Surveys and provisions from Assembly Bill 43, which allow for speed limit reductions based on land use and roadside activity, including the designation of Business Activity Districts. These changes are supported by valid traffic surveys and are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under multiple qualifying provisions

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ASHA REED, City Clerk

A gift for the community!

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