

Black History Month Community Voices: County Manager Eric Brown

I grew up in southeastern Virginia. My mother and father ran a kindergarten for the children of professional people of color. If you were African American, at that time, you couldn't send your kids to the public kindergartens. I was in the last graduating class. When I came along, the schools were desegregated and we could go back to public schools. I remember those experiences, and they had a profound impact on my life in terms of knowing what it's like to be marginalized and not able to have the same opportunities or resources that some other people did. My parents always taught us that we didn't get upset about it: you just had to work harder and rise above, and that's what we did.



Washoe County Manager Eric Brown.

I was about 8 years old when my father got a job working in West Africa and we went to visit in the summer. We got to see the beauty of Africa but also the challenges of poverty. My parents gave us the gift of travel from a young age, and that exposed us to other cultures and languages. We learned that the bigotry and racism that we experienced in Virginia exists in some form all over the world. It puts it in perspective for you. And at a certain level, it helped me understand that it wasn't my problem, it was the oppressor's problem. I had to rise above and find a way to have grace.



Manager Brown competing in a relay race for UCLA.

I went to UCLA as an undergrad, and that was like moving to another country because of the amount of diversity that was and still is represented there. I learned a lot about other cultures, other religions, other ways of thinking. It really changed my life in terms of opening up my mind to what a diverse world this is, how everybody doesn't think the way I think, and to appreciate that.



This poster's content is adapted from the Black History Month episode of the Washoe Life podcast. To listen to more of County Manager Brown's story, search for the podcast online or scan the QR code.



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Over the course of my career, in which I've had the privilege to lead multiple organizations, diversity has always been one of the things that helped set my organizations apart from other organizations. It makes you more competitive, better able to meet the needs of your community. It just makes sense to have a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community we serve.



County Manager Brown presenting story time at the Downtown Reno Library.

One of the hallmarks of my career has been being able to look across the spectrum of diversity in the communities I've served and be able to communicate effectively with those various aspects of the community, whether that's communicating by language or understanding some of the cultural nuances.

My observation here in Northern Nevada is that although it's not the most diverse community I've lived in, people are fairly open...to learning about other cultures. I think one of the reasons for celebrating Black History Month is that it gives us a chance to educate folks on Black history and what's unique about that culture, as opposed to cultures that they may have grown up in. And I hope as we go forward that the county will continue to celebrate other cultures. There are so many different aspects of our community that need to be celebrated.

There's always an opportunity to approach some of your coworkers who come from a background you're not familiar with and, in the right way, ask them about their experiences. I think the more we learn about each other and our cultures and rituals, that's the path to better understanding.



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