



RAISING LOUISIANA

By Natori Green
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Natori Green is an artist who explores race, gender, and family through works spanning a wide range of media. Her solo exhibition "Magnolia Mirth"—a mixed media exhibition that examines the process of a closed-loop system and producing zero-waste garments—opens at Second Story Gallery on October 9. In 2020, she formed The Language Immersion Advocacy Association (LIAA) to serve as a supportive community for families, educators, and community partners to advocate and openly discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion. LIAA has monthly virtual meetings and is expanding to include cultural outings.

THE ART OF PARENTING SOLO

I feared being a single parent. When my daughter was born, I did not give her my last name despite not being married. I was hoping things would work out, even though all the signs that it wouldn't were staring me in the face.

My daughter does not share my last name and she has not questioned why yet. I wonder when she will. I brace myself during Father's Day or when any family-focused days are near because she knows she does not have her biological dad in her life. She only remembers bits and pieces about why not.

Almost all of my friends who are parents are married or have a partner. Hearing other children talk about their dads has not emotionally affected my daughter yet. As a single parent, you have to prepare for the day your children realize their family structure differs from the standard societal norm of a nuclear, two-parent household.

Community Matters

I was 22 years old when my daughter was born. The decision to become a mother deeply impacted my life—more than I had imagined it would. Honestly, I was naive and didn't have a clue about the responsibility I would take on. I didn't think about the logistics of parenting. I didn't think about the fact that I was a full-time college student working a minimum wage, part time job with no savings.

When I returned to school as a visual communications major, I kept my head down and did not participate in anything creative or extracurricular at all. While taking a 2D design course in 2015, I was offered an internship position at The Front Gallery. My daughter was one year old. I was not technically an art major, and I was the quietest person in all of my classes. There were so many childless students without any baggage who my professor, Iman Djouini, could have chosen. But she chose me! That offer was life-changing. It affirmed that I could achieve my dreams despite being a young mom. I was able to help with gallery installations, meet incredible artists, and exhibit my artwork in a public setting.

My professor Tedd Walley also let me bring my daughter to class, which was so helpful. Thanks to the support of these educators, I was able to gain confidence in myself and my creative abilities. And it just really made my life less depressing. I can never thank them enough for all that they did.

In addition to this support, I had my parents in my corner. I also had a wonderful babysitter, Miss Delores, who would watch my daughter on occasion. These days, my community is even larger. I have two female mentors who guide me in parent advocacy and graphic design. Both of them are mothers and New Orleans natives.

Ronicka Briscoe advises me on matters of parent advocacy. Her Legacy Inventive Solutions for Schools and Legacy Leadership Academy for Girls build sisterhood through service, leadership, and empowerment.

My graphic design mentor Tasheka Arceneaux-Sutton of BIPOC Graphic Design History highlights BIPOC graphic designers. Having the support of these mentors fuels my passion to achieve as a single mother, because I see all that they pursue and how they impact other females of color.

Additionally, I have sought out supportive spaces in which to raise my daughter. I participate in family-focused programs like the Nurse-Family Partnership, New Orleans Family Justice Center, The City of New Orleans Civic Leadership Academy, and Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) Cohort 7 (where I was one of the only single parents but received a lot of great information on parenting).

Raising my daughter as a multicultural child was very important to me because of her Afro-Cuban heritage (I am African American and her biological dad is Afro-Cuban). Multicultural experiences indelibly shape a child's experiences and outlook on life. Attending a Spanish-speaking church, reading bilingual books, placing her in a multilingual elementary school, and attending local programs have been a blessing.

At these outings, I am sometimes assumed to have a husband and have to correct that assumption. I do not show any signs of having been married, such as wearing a ring or talking about a partner. People assume when you have a child that there is usually another parent involved.

Honestly, going into spaces as a single parent where she has an opportunity to learn a new language or engage with people of diverse cultures has gotten less intimidating over the years. I am aware of the stigma children of single-parent homes face and want to combat it.

When dealing with the stigma of being a single parent, I cling to the advantages of our family dynamic—like being the sole decision-maker. I appreciate our small family but am thankful for the support we receive from our larger community.

I'm Every Woman

As a single parent, you are the only one at drop-off and pick-up. You are the only one attending parent-teacher conferences. You are the only one helping with homework (which is further complicated when your child is enrolled in a language immersion school). I carry the full weight of the financial, custodial, and emotional responsibilities. It is a challenge and achievement I process every day.

When it comes to working as a single parent, we have so many barriers to get through. COVID-19 only added to the struggle. It's just the two of us. If I need a break, it is hard to come by. I also cannot afford to get sick, much less die.

The truth is this: I can't afford to *not* work. I have only worked part-time jobs and have no employment benefits like paid time off or sick time if anything were to happen. I am very fortunate now to have a flexible work schedule which allows me to have my daughter with me while I work or do community outreach. I am also fortunate to work with strong women—some of whom are mothers, which is so encouraging.

As a working single parent, I have heard bringing your child along is distracting and unproductive, but I challenge that negative point of view. I would rather have my daughter alongside me doing something positive than have her glued to a screen. Finding spaces that welcome the presence of children has been one of the greatest challenges I faced in pursuing an artistic career while parenting.

I enjoy having my daughter along with me as I pursue my artistic career, though she participates in the same programs as me, so she is getting an early start exploring her creative interests. She is learning to confidently interact with adults. I believe all children should have opportunities to learn and display their developing talents.

While I still feel the stress of not having a break from childcare responsibilities, and wonder about coronavirus if something were to happen to me, I have more peace about our situation now. I am in a position in my life where I am less intimidated about being the unmarried single mom at outings with my child in tow.

Honestly, I think if I had a partner at this point, I would be less ambitious, because everything wouldn't fall to me. So, as I see it, being single is in many ways an advantage that is positively affecting her childhood. Her formative experiences are serving as a great witness to her that single parenthood is not a tragedy or something to be pitied.

Reimagining Our Reality

Being a never-married single mom can be tough, but also very empowering because I am parenting alone. It was not how I imagined our life would be. It was not what I had envisioned when I became a mother. But seven years in, I am extremely grateful for the family we are.

I see the world as my daughter grows, eliminating the stigma of single parenthood and being more inclusive of single parents who work outside of the home. To raise my daughter alone is the greatest achievement of my life. Her childhood is built on a supportive, multicultural, creative foundation that I feared was not possible as a single parent. Every day, I am grateful to be a single parent—and not ashamed.



Resources

- Nurse-Family Partnership**
Two year nurse and first time mom parenting program.
nursefamilypartnership.org
- New Orleans Family Justice Center**
Trauma informed support network.
noffc.org
- The City of New Orleans Parent Leadership Training Institute**
Parent-centered anti-racist organization.
nola.gov/office-of-youth-and-families/signature-programs-initiatives/parent-leadership-training-institute
- The Material Institute // Fashion Textile Design**
Arts Center in the 9th Ward.
materialinstitute.org
- Delgado Community College Single Mom Success Program**
Two-year student-centered support network.
eddesignlab.org/project/singlemomssuccess
- Legacy Leadership Academy for Girls**
Girl and young mother support network.
legacyinventivesolutions.com
- BIPOC Design History**
BIPOC-centered design history courses.
bipocdesignhistory.com/Black-Design-History

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