

While learning about the significant contributions of Black and Brown people is important year-round, Black History month is a great time to honor the impact Black Americans have made while acknowledging the adversity and systemic oppression they continue to face. According to the Jews of Color Field Building Initiative, 10-15% of North American Jews are Jews of Color and one in seven Jewish families include at least one Person of Color. Black Jews continue to help shape our society, emerging as social justice leaders, writers, chefs, actors, and more. I hope you'll enjoy learning about these Black Jewish influencers whose intersectional identities have influenced their work.

## **1. AARON SAMUELS**



was born and raised in a Black and Jewish household in Providence, RI. He says that his early exposure to intersectional communities is what inspired him to be a writer, spoken word artist, and entrepreneur. Samuels channeled his love of storytelling and strategy into co-founding and serving as the COO of Blavity, a Black Media company for millennials and Gen-Z. He also wrote a collection of poetry, "Yarmulkes & Fitted Caps," which was published in 2013.

Samuels's accolades include being a Forbes Under 30 list member and a Cave Canem fellow.

## 2. MICHAEL TWITTY



Culinary historian and chef Michael Twitty converted to Judaism at 25, though he recognized he had a Jewish soul at age 7. Twitty, inspired by his intersectional identity, has created a fusion cuisine that combines African-American and Jewish food traditions: KosherSoul. He also founded afroculinaria.com, which is dedicated to the preservation of historic African American foods and foodways.

Twitty has conducted over 400 classes and workshops; was profiled in the Washington Post, the New York Times, Jet Magazine, reformjudaism.org, and other periodicals; and has given presentations at the Smithsonian, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, the Library of Congress, Oxford University, and the Nosher's Jewish Food Festival. Twitty has also authored several cookbooks, including "The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South," "Rice: A Savor the South Cookbook," and "KosherSoul: The Faith and Food Journey of an African American Jew."

### 3. NAOMI WADLER



Naomi Wadler first gained national attention when she was 11 years old. Her activism began when she helped lead a walkout protest of 200 classmates at her school on the one-month anniversary of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting. Ten days later, Wadler was the youngest speaker at the March for Our Lives rally in Washington, D.C. She has appeared on the Ellen DeGeneres show and been profiled in Teen Vogue and Elle. She has also been awarded the Disruptive Innovation Award at the Tribeca Film Festival, the Indigo Design Award, the DC Children's Advocacy Center's Cherishing Childhood Award, and the BBYO Stand UP Award.

Wadler is of Ethiopian Jewish descent and spoke about the discrimination she faces for being Black and Jewish in an interview with JTA.

#### 4. YAVILAH MCCOY



Raised in New York in an Orthodox family, Yavilah McCoy has dedicated her career to advocating for Jews of Color. She is the CEO of the diversity consulting group Dimensions, Inc., a nonprofit that serves clients in the educational, philanthropic, and social justice fields. McCoy is a pioneer of the Jewish diversity and equity movement and is an advocate for the empowerment of Jews of Color around the world. She was an inaugural Joshua Venture Fellow through the Spielberg Foundation, an inaugural fellow of the Sojourner Truth Leadership Circle, and was named one of the "16 faith leaders to watch" by the Center for American Progress.

McCoy also took to the stage by writing, producing, and performing the Jewish Gospel production "The Colors of Water," which celebrates the musical traditions passed down to her through three generations of her African-American Jewish family.

After reading about these emerging leaders, perhaps you've been inspired to find a new book to read, play to see, recipe to make, or cause to get involved with. These are all great ways to begin centering Black Jewish voices. By listening to the experiences of those in our communities with intersectional identities, we can help uplift voices that have been historically marginalized as we continue working to build communities of belonging for all people.

[4](https://reformjudaism.org/blog/meet-four-black-jewish-leaders?utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=email&utm_content=2/20/2025>EmailJobID-9244277</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

Crystal Hill is a copy writer/editor for the Union for Reform Judaism. She holds an M.A. in Rhetoric, Composition, and Literature from Northern Illinois University, with a Certificate of Graduate Study in Professional Writing. She lives with her husband, son, and cat in the Greater Chicagoland Area.