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*“Even though I was little, my voice was just as important as everyone else’s voice.”*

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## AYANNA NAJUMA

**A** renaissance woman, visionary, civil rights icon and an award-winning journalist, **Ayanna Najuma helped change the course of history at the age of seven** as one of the original sit-inners at Katz Drug Store in Oklahoma City.

This sit-in was held several years before the sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina. She has continued to fight for equity and equality for many issues that impact one's ability to empower themselves and add value to society.

Ayanna traveled the country with Julia Clifford, a documentary filmmaker of *Children of the Civil Rights*, sharing her story as a participant in the civil rights movement in Oklahoma City, OK.

Ayanna was featured as the cover story, *Kids Fought for Change* in Scholastics. Millions of children around the world have been empowered by her story. She received 25,000 letters from students expressing their appreciation and desire to make a difference in their own communities. She was featured in the play, *Ayanna The Brave* in *Storyworks* and *Storyworks Jr.*, which is also published by Scholastics. Children today continue to read her story and are motivated to let their voices be heard.

She launched *I HAVE A VOICE NOW!* a movement designed to empower and encourage children to utilize their own voice for creating change in society, as well as educate them on the importance of activism and advocacy. Environmental justice became the topic for the children during the Covid-19 pandemic as they began to discuss and embrace the importance of creating a safe future in their communities. Ayanna is committed to helping children create their own future.

Ayanna believes that knowledge is power and when people have knowledge they are able to take action. She is committed to having an impact on society and hosted *WHAT LIES BETWEEN US* with Ayanna Najuma, a conversational platform on social justice. This platform allowed like-minded people to connect, learn from each other and act in creating change in the world. This platform hosted a community forum on bail reform and the launch of *MAKE YOUR VOTE COUNT*, a voter registration campaign designed to motivate residents to utilize their power at the ballot box.

In addition to being an advocate for creating a quality of life that allows one to take action and create their own destiny, she developed a range of creative skills. With 30 years of international experience in communications, she has been a principal with the

public relations and marketing firm, Lincoln-McLeod. She also worked as host and producer of WPFW's radio talk show, *Business World*. She launched the column, *THE BEST IS RIGHT NOW! Honor It! Embrace It! Live It!* featured on Retirement Living TV.com and in *The Oklahoman*, and gained knowledge and experience of the film industry at the Filmmakers Ranch. She is also a Public Art professional for the City of Oklahoma City.

She continues to write and discuss creativity and art and its impact on critical thinking, culture and society for numerous newspapers and magazines. She was a finalist for a Great Plains Journalism Award for her article on Covid. She writes for *Art Focus* magazine and contributed to the Spring 2021 issue commemorating the Centennial of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.

Ayanna is passionate about the health and well being of the underserved. She is committed to eliminating health care disparities in all healthcare areas. She delivered an eye-opening keynote address to administrators at the Oklahoma Public Health Association Annual Meeting on the importance of equity and equality and their responsibility to impact society. She invites the community to join her in becoming an organ donor. Ayanna donated a kidney in 2005. She is the director of *HATS OFF TO LIFE*, a national health and wellness initiative hosted by the Dr. Ruth Joyce Colbert Barnes Foundation.

Impacting the future of women, mind, body and spirit is one of Ayanna's greatest passions. She was a national board member of the Coalition of 100 Black Women and a former board member of the Washington, DC chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners. Additionally, she was selected to be the opening speaker for the Women's March in Oklahoma. She speaks nationally on health and wellness, community and economic development, business and education.

Ayanna was presented The Trailblazer Award by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Oklahoma Department of Corrections, Oklahoma Corporation Commission and the Oklahoma Historical Society for her work in civil rights. The League of Women Voters' of Oklahoma and Oklahoma City selected Ayanna as one of "100 Oklahoma Women Trailblazers" in celebration of the 100th Anniversary of Women in Oklahoma getting the right to vote. *The Oklahoman* featured Ayanna in its 21st Century Women "Outlook 2020" series acknowledging her for helping to lay the foundation for what is being used today to knock down the walls of inequality and inequity. She has been featured in numerous local and regional newspapers and magazines across the country.

She received a Bachelor of Arts degree from George Washington University and Master's degree in Urban Planning from Howard University both in Washington, DC.