Auburn, Alabama, was shaped and influenced by the inspirational experiences of African Americans, yet these stories are not openly shared or available. The contribution of James Echols is one such story. Everyone in Auburn knows about Toomer’s Drugs famous lemonade. However, few know an African American man was responsible for making the lemonade world famous. The objective of the project was to increase the accessibility of stories like Mr. Echols’. Change starts with our youth, so the project focused on authoring and publishing a children’s book.

James Echols was known as “The Lemonade Man.” He worked at Toomer’s Drugs for over 40 years—beginning his employment as a delivery driver before Civil Rights and retiring in 1991. As a delivery driver, he refused to deliver to the back door of residences as was required of African Americans in the Jim Crow South. Eventually, he would work the counter at Toomer’s Drugs, where he would serve fountain drinks and his famous lemonade and coffee. Mr. Echols squeezed up to 200 lemons a day, tinkering with each glass to make it “perfect” for each customer who purchased a cup.

In 2001, the lemonade was listed as the first reason it was good to be an American by Esquire Magazine (Pierce, 2001).

The project continued the work of Kira Kingston and the research group rPAAST (Research to Preserve African American Stories and Traditions) under the mentorship of Human Sciences Lecturer Dr. Robert Bubb. Kingston interviewed James Echols and his children and wrote a manuscript for publication in an academic journal (Echols, 2018; Moore, 2018). The children’s book project uses the manuscript as a starting point.

After receiving the summer research fellowship, we reached out to James Echols only to be met by one of his children, who informed us that Mr. Echols had passed away two days earlier. We were deeply saddened by the news and timing, but the children of Mr. Echols felt that a children’s book about their father would be an excellent way to honor his legacy.
Kalandra Blake coordinated with the Echols family to write the manuscript for the children's book. After several revisions and edits, the manuscript was finalized in March of 2023. The finalized manuscript is 21 pages, including the cover and back page.

The James Echols Memorial Scholarship is awarded annually to a talented young adult in the local community who has similar interests in skilled trades as Mr. Echols. Skilled labor fields include carpentry, electrical, plumbing, truck driving, welding, cosmetology, nursing, the arts, and more. With a huge shortage in these types of jobs, the family thought this would be an awesome opportunity for a career that is both rewarding and pays well. In addition to the scholarship, the Echols Family Social Club offers mentorship and an extended family to the recipient.

Readers should contact the corresponding author of this Highlight at the email listed on the bottom of the first page if they are interested in making Donations for the Memorial Educational Scholarship.

**Statement of Research Advisor**

Kalandra Blake demonstrated initiative, leadership, and collaborative skills throughout the project. The publication of a children's book will not only honor the life and legacy of James Echols but will give credit and acknowledgment for his contribution to Auburn and the lore that surrounds Toomer's Corner and the famous lemonade sold at Toomer's Drugs. The book will also inspire and educate the next generation of children to the rich African American history that is seldom discussed outside of close community circles, but to which we all owe a great debt of gratitude.

- Robert Bubb, Department of Human Sciences, College of Human Sciences

**References**


Authors Biography

Kalandra Blake graduated with a B.S. degree in 2022 in Human Development and Family Science at Auburn University. She is the primary researcher and recipient of the Undergraduate Research Fellowship.

Aaliyah Lantgua is a senior undergraduate student pursuing a B.S. degree in Human Development and Family Science at Auburn University. She selected the illustrator and coordinated communication with the Echols family. She will finalize the details of the project.

Robert Bubb is a lecturer for the Human Development and Family Science Department at Auburn University.