

NEXT CHAPTER

Spotlight JALEESA

PRESENTED BY BLACK ODYSSEY MEDIA
INTERVIEWED BY CHARDAI POWELL



July 2026

Chardai: Hey Jaleesa, I'm so excited to talk to you! You are literally an OG in this space and one of the first creators I saw talking about Black books! What is your earliest memory of falling in love with reading?

Jaleesa: I've always been a reader, but I think the *first* time I fell in love with reading was when I read a book called *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* by Christopher Paul Curtis. I was in elementary school, and every time I had a project or presentation, I always tied it back to that book. That's probably the reason why I find books and am so keen on them because I'm like, this affected me so much.

Chardai: The taste started from childhood. Now, what was the book for you that changed the way you read?

Jaleesa: I think it would be *The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sister Souljah when I was sneaking and reading that in 8th or 9th grade. You know, I'm from the suburbs. I was reading about Winter like, I'm 13 and she was doing all this at 16. But I can pinpoint finishing that book and thinking, like, I need to read more. Thankfully, that was at a time where all the little Black girls were sneaking all our mamas' books that we were not supposed to be reading, but we were handing those things off at lunch. That nailed me down like, okay girl, you like reading.



**THE COLDEST WINTER
EVER BY SISTER
SOULJAH WHEN I
WAS SNEAKING AND
READING THAT IN 8TH
OR 9TH GRADE . . .**



Chardai: Oh, Ms. Winter. I'm sad I didn't discover her until college!

Jaleesa: And it's probably the only book I will never reread just because 13-year-old Jaleesa loved it so much. I cannot allow fully developed frontal lobe Jaleesa to ruin those memories. I want to preserve those memories.

Chardai: I love that. Maybe just leave it where it's at! Fast-forwarding to now, what is the reason behind your content creating?

Jaleesa: I got back into reading heavily in 2012, and from 2012–2016, what was available to me and the formats... it just wasn't us. I remember getting on Twitter and saying, I'm having a good time reading, but I wish I could read some Black contemporary romance because I'm a romance girlie at heart. Somebody was like, check out Christina C. Jones. So from 2016–2021, I was just reading and just posting on my personal Twitter, not even Book Twitter. I got on TikTok, and I would search Black romance books, and there were no Black romance books popping up. There were none. I remember feeling like, this is what I want to read. It's got to be out there. Then I found Black indie authors. I really wanted to be a space where people could come and know that Black romance books did exist. Reading has saved my life. I want to make sure that the people who need that anchor have somewhere to go. I just want to be a resource!

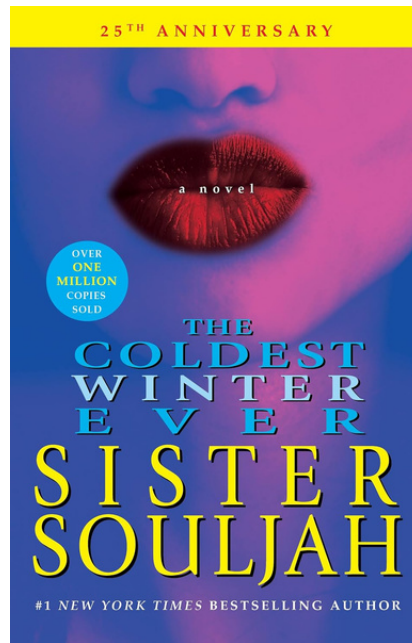
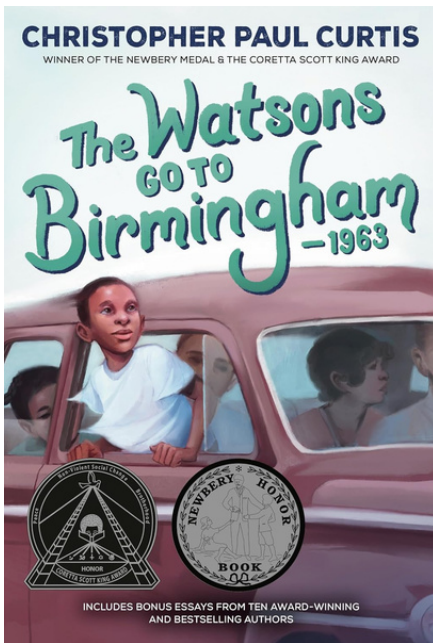
Chardai: Jaleesa, wow. Absolutely including that anchor line. What is something that has kept you going in this space?

Jaleesa: I will say seeing new content creators speak up and people who message me saying, "Oh, I'm nervous." And I'm nervous every time I turn on my camera. It's not a feeling that ever goes away, but you just gotta turn the camera on, and you have to post the content. Sometimes it's going to flop, but it will reach people eventually. What I want people to know is this work, the effort that we're putting in, is forever. *The internet is indeed forever.* There will be people 20 years from now who will be able to find, archive, and see what we're doing. Knowing that I had a part in helping build that space has helped me keep building this space.

Chardai: Jaleesa, I knew you were going to give me goosebumps with your answers! What would the version of you now tell younger Jaleesa?

Jaleesa: I think that it's okay to be a book nerd. It's actually really cool that you are able to escape into a book whenever you feel like it and fully immerse yourself in things. It's an awesome hobby, and don't let the cool people tell you that it's not.

Chardai: Because you are the cool person! Always have been, always will be! Now, you've done some top-notch interviews, from Ms. Beverly Jenkins to Ms. Wahida Clark, but what is something that an author has said to you that you've carried with you?



Jaleesa: Danielle Allen and I did an interview for *Plus Size Player*, and she said, “I’m just so proud of you.” I don’t think authors realize sometimes that they’re celebrities. I want your autograph. The fact that authors know my name, I’m like, how do you know *me*? So that’s been really nice to see unfold.

Chardai: I love Danielle! Who is a content creator that you would like to give your flowers to?

Jaleesa: There are so many, but I am going to say @mrsrcroney. That is like my book auntie. She spoke so much life into me in the hallway. I want to be like her when I get her age. I’m going to sit down and say what I want to say about these books, and I’m going to sit back and enjoy them. She just feels good and comforting, and I feel like we need to appreciate her more.

Chardai: What is a Black Odyssey Media title that you want to recommend or that has been on your TBR?

Jaleesa: I have both. On my TBR is *Silent Surrender* by Netra Antionette. One I would recommend—and it’s crazy to recommend because I didn’t like anybody in this book is *I Love You Too Much* by Jessica N. Watkins. That was such a good time, and I don’t know the last time I read a book and was like, I don’t like none of y’all, but it was a good time. Jessica knows she knows how to write characters I hate.

Chardai: Jaleesa, I truly loved this. I love talking to you because you’re so important in this space.

Jaleesa: Thank you, Char!

Chardai: Please connect with Jaleesa at @jaleesareads



Chardai Powell is a writer and digital storyteller who believes in the power of Black stories told with care. She is the Social Media Manager at Black Odyssey Media and a former lead bookseller known for uplifting Black indie authors and creating meaningful literary events. She is the founder of Dear Black Love, a community-driven event brand celebrating Black love and creativity, and is committed to using media as a tool for connection, visibility, and joy.



www.blackodyssey.net or www.blackodysseymedia.com



[@iambblackodyssey](https://www.instagram.com/iambblackodyssey)

creativeaffairs@blackodyssey.net