

# Dr. Bendalonne Thompson-Griffith: Giving her all to the cause of justice

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When asked how people will remember her, Dr. Bendalonne Thompson-Griffith replied, "I will be remembered as Congressman Bennie Thompson's daughter."

However, she proclaimed, "I'd like to be remembered as a person who gave her all for the cause, and as someone who gave every effort I had to give on every project." If that sounded like a political stump it wasn't. Bendalonne, age 35, is an educator.

Her family is full of school teachers and trailblazers. Before Congressman Thompson entered politics, he and his wife London were high school teachers in Franklin County, Mississippi.

"My parents were college sweethearts, who met and fell in love at Tougaloo College," she said with pride and conviction.

Bennie Thompson is a native of Bolton, a small town which roughly 600 people call home, 20 miles west of Jackson. London was born in Mound Bayou, an independent black community formed in 1887 by former slaves and Isaiah Montgomery (the only Black elected representative at the 1890 Mississippi Constitution Convention).

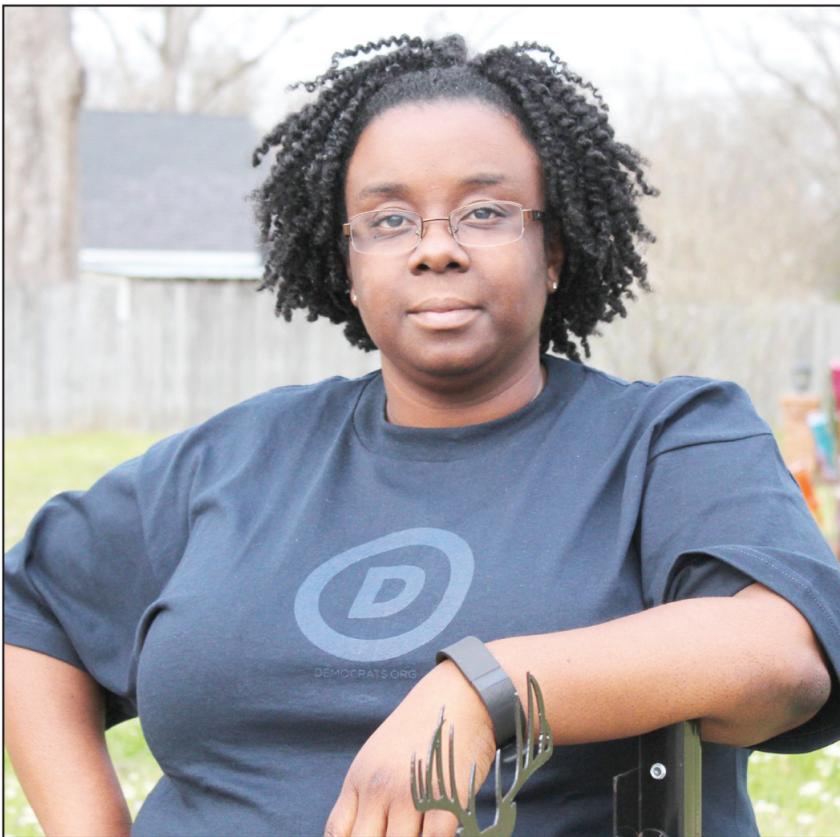
Thompson was the former mayor of Bolton, and is now a high ranking Mississippi Democratic congressman serving his 11<sup>th</sup> term in office; he was first elected to congress in 1993. Bendalonne grew up in Bolton. She described her parents as practical, loving, and conservative. "I had a very normal childhood. My parents were grounded and as real as

they come," she declared. "I had chores and was taught that nothing is given to anyone," she added. She pointed out that her dad drives a 1997 Chevy pickup truck and her mother sports a Toyota.

"My parents made sure I knew I was loved and taught me I had unlimited potential," she proclaimed. "We are a close knit family. I didn't have to look far for people I should be like when I got older," she professed." Her mother and grandmothers are the most influential women in her life. The Bolton Public Library is named for her paternal grandmother, Annie L. Thompson Jeffers who was an elementary school teacher during the segregated south at V.L. Reuben Junior High in Bolton. Her maternal grandmother, Olevia M. Johnson was a public school teacher at Bob Woods Elementary in Gunnison, Mississippi, and a Head Start director.

Thompson-Griffith is a divorced mother of two. Her daughter, Jeanna, is a senior at St. Andrews Episcopal School in Ridgeland, and her son, Thomas Gordon, a fifth grader, attends school at Mt. Salus in Clinton. She said warmly, "They are my reasons for striving to be better. All I do, I do for them." Jeanna plans to attend Howard University next fall. In Washington, DC, her grandfather will be able to introduce her to a world full of possibilities.

Bendalonne is employed as an assessment specialist for the Jackson Public Schools. "Education is the cause that is most dear to me," she stated. She believes too many parents are uninformed and lack an understanding of their rights. Others



Dr. Bendalonne Thompson-Griffith

lack resources. She would like to work with committees and organizations designed to disperse equitable platforms for public school pupils who often face multidimensional disciplinary challenges.

Speaking of parenting styles, she advocates, "There is no one size fits all model." She believes parents should spend extra time with their children by talking to them. She is convinced it is important for Black males to be exposed to reading during their early elementary years at home because reading is connected to all subject matters and reading comprehen-

sion helps students advance academically.

She considers obtaining a quality education the first step to success. She believes it is vitally important for parents to be involved in their child's education. "Youth must be reassured that they are more than capable of being successful," she proposed.

Bendalonne is fiercely independent, and she was taught good work ethics. Her strength is her ability to adapt to people and situations. She contended, "Leadership is the ability to get others to look within, to see the best, and uplift others for the

advancement of the organization." She declared that listening is an important step to win people over. "I make an effort to hear people out before making suggestions," she asserted.

Dr. Thompson-Griffith said with great pride, "My town is small but we have a very strong sense of community." She added, "Everyone is always willing to lend a helping hand." She was happy to say that her entire church family attended her graduation reception last year when she obtained her doctorate degree, Ed.D from Mississippi College. She considered their at-

tendance significant because it helped reinforce the African proverb *it takes a whole village to raise a child*. While she loves the strong bonding ties of her small town, she is disappointed it has fallen into the trap like other towns of remaining stagnant.

It must have been a great moment for this educator and her father when he had the grand opportunity of serving as the commencement speaker at her graduation from Mississippi College last year. Perhaps the event was one of the perks of being the only child of a powerful politician.

She believes the biggest challenge Black Mississippians face is the lack of access to resources. She strongly believes this lack of access has kept Blacks uneducated and impoverished. "The refusal of our state lawmakers to make education a priority tops my list of issues and concerns," she stated.

She defined a perfect union as one where all people are accepted for their differences. "I would like for my children to live in a society where race does not factor into their safety and their ability to make a living," she noted.

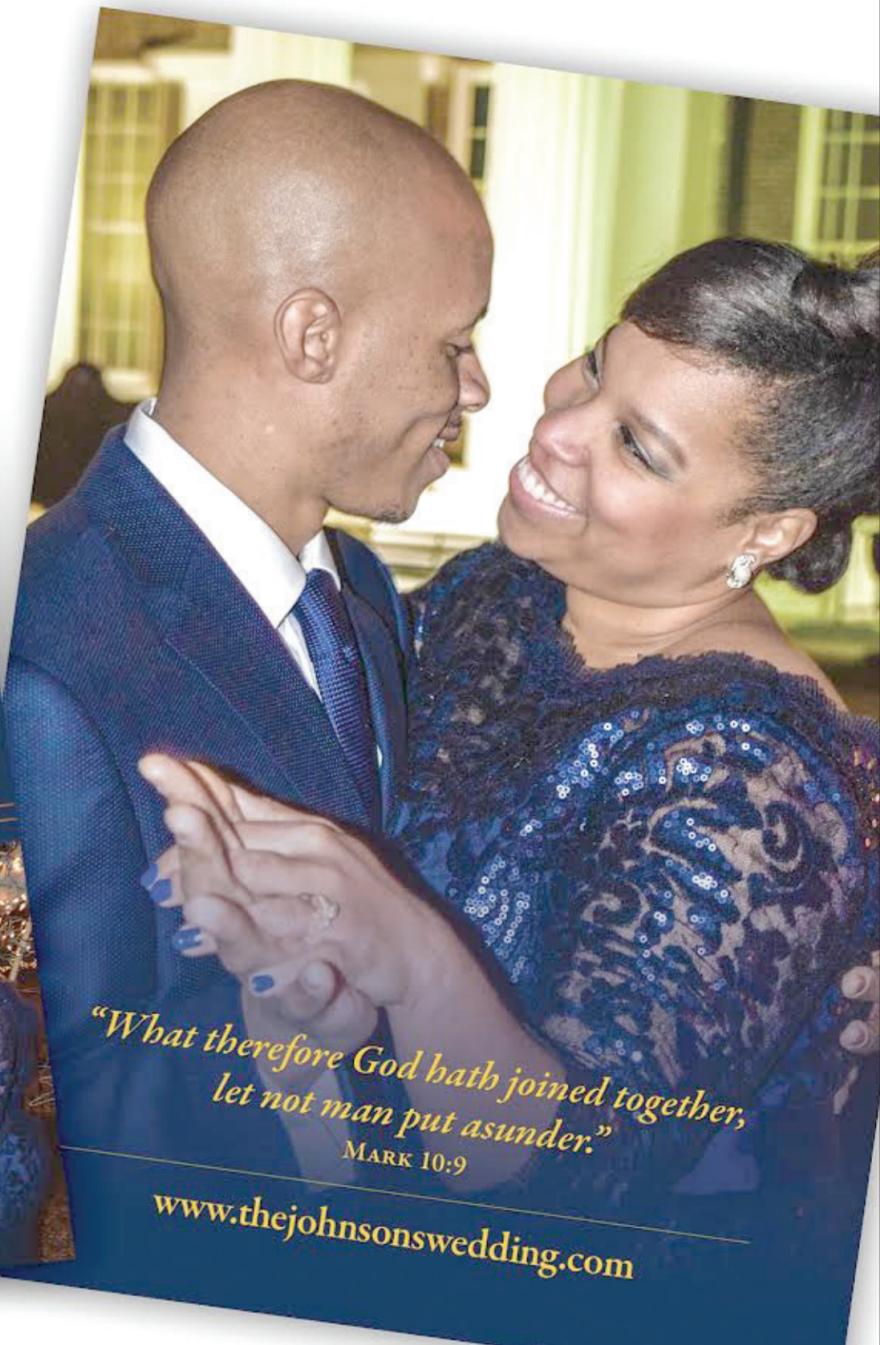
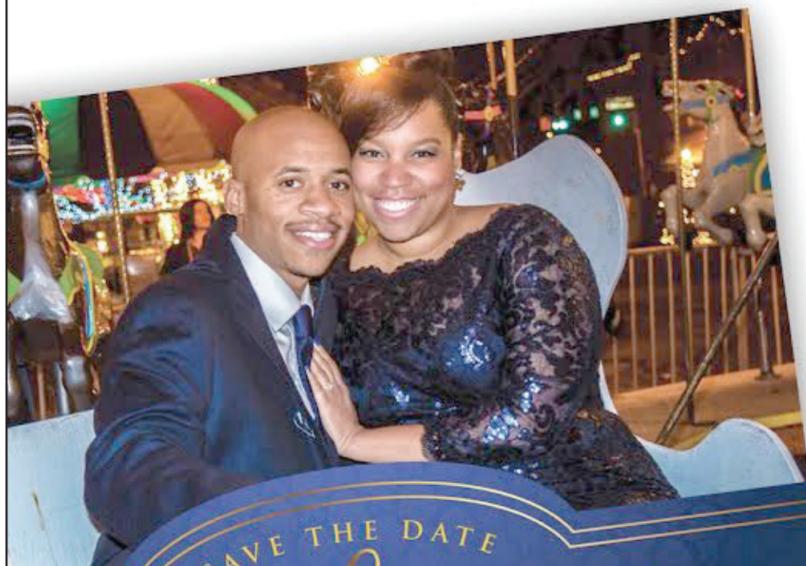
In December, she achieved her short-term goal of completing a doctorate degree. She recalled her father asking, "What's next?" She plans to pursue a career in child advocacy. "I am now looking to the future," she concluded.

Dr. Bendalonne Thompson-Griffith, is a third generation Mississippi educator, who is being honored by the Jackson Advocate for her outstanding service to the public. This tribute is the genesis of many other milestones.

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MARK 10:9

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