

EDGE Outdoors Welcomes New Generation OF HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED SKIERS & RIDERS

By Annette Diggs

My thirst to belong outdoors started early. In elementary school, I was bussed across town from one district to another in an effort of desegregation. I didn't know it at the time, but I lived in a redlined community. I noticed other

students didn't look or sound like me. They spent winters in places I'd never heard of, like Whistler and Mammoth Mountain. I grew up thinking these places were unattainable for people like me, and I later learned these spaces were out of reach by design.

Past discriminatory laws – including but not limited to the Indian Removal Act, Jim Crow Laws, redlining, and segregation – have systematically expunged the presence of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) from mountain spaces. Whether you're familiar with this dark history or not, you can see the evidence at your local resort as clear as day. The lack of racial and ethnic diversity is obvious at the guest level and even more apparent in the low rates of BIPOC as certified PSIA-AASI instructors, divisional staff leaders, and examiners.

I faced this reality the first time I stepped into a pair of ski boots in my early 30s. As a Black woman on the ski hill, I was isolated. I did not see myself reflected, and my presence was noticed and scrutinized – which continues to this day. The unsolicited slowing down of the chairlift, the redirection by others from a black run to a green run, and the harmful coded language used to identify my Blackness all confirmed that my Black body was not an

expected sight. I have faced insensitive, rude, and racist comments, called a “unicorn,” and otherwise “othered” in any way you might imagine – which is why I decided to become a ski instructor, earn my PSIA-AASI certification, and change the narrative of who belongs on a ski hill. No one deserves to be told they're “out of their element” simply for riding a chairlift.

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

As a PSIA-AASI certified instructor and recreational skier, I have witnessed and lived through the profound cascading effects of past discriminatory law across a multitude of resorts. This inspired me to establish EDGE Outdoors, a powerful snowsports initiative designed to address an overlooked segment of minorities: Black, Indigenous, and Women of Color (BIWOC), including Trans-Women of Color (TWOC). Our mission is to attract and retain BIWOC/TWOC in snowsports by building a supportive community. Our vision is to bring more diversity to the slopes, bestow equity to women of color, and promote the normalization of Black and Brown bodies on the hill, all while encouraging these women to take positions on the mountain as instruc-

tors or in other roles. It is our belief that these women will help promote more diversity on the hill by passing their passion for skiing and snowboarding on to their family, friends, and communities. This community experience is powerful.

Many Black, Indigenous, People of Color grow up without knowledge, access, resources, or role models who look like them and can show them that skiing is something they can do. EDGE Outdoors wants to change that for the next generation.

Our multifaceted scholarship program provides each recipient with mountain access, gear, and multi-week lessons in their chosen discipline from certified PSIA-AASI BIPOC instructors at Washington's Stevens Pass Mountain Resort. Because this program is BIPOC-led, we're able to create liberating learning experiences in which each recipient has the freedom to be authentically themselves in a judgment-free zone. This brave space gives them an opportunity to break free from the heavily embedded white culture at ski areas, cultivate their own experiences, and promote individual and collective healing from intolerance.

In the inaugural year of EDGE, we not only elevated and created opportunity for the historically excluded within our community, but also created space and opportunity for PSIA-AASI BIPOC instructors to connect, work together, and learn from other BIPOC colleagues from the start of their snowsports career. This monumental experience took decades for our instructors to experience, which gives more testament to obstacles that the BIPOC community faces within the ski industry. Disparities continue to echo within EDGE – most of our instructors only hold a Level I or maybe a Level II PSIA-AASI certification – and it's our vision to change this... in partnership with Olympic Gold Medalist, PSIA Alpine Team alumna, and elite coach Deb Armstrong.

SUPPORT BIPOC LEADERS

Since day one, Stevens Pass' leadership has stood behind my vision of equity, justice, and inclusion for marginalized communities. As a mountain family, we have held courageous conversations and sat in the reality of inherent inequity of our country

Stevens Pass Level I alpine instructor Annette Diggs and Level I alpine and snowboard instructor Humaira Falkenberg work with EDGE Outdoors participants on edging, inclination, and angulation.



PARKER TIKSON



PURPOSE BUILT FOR THE PURSUIT

The pursuit for freedom hides deep within each of us. A primal instinct where creativity and commitment collide as we seek out the perfect line. The perfect pitch; a long approach to the ridgeline; a tight alley weaving through the trees; an undulating apron of untouched snow, unfolding to the valley floor. Each of us hunts our own perfect line. But it's between the lines where the masses flock, that the M-PRO rider holds dominion.



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In becoming a PSIA-AASI-certified ski instructor, Annette Diggs seeks to change the narrative of who belongs on a ski hill.

and snowsports. I am immensely thankful for their support of my development and active engagement with EDGE Outdoors. It would be difficult to move mountains of inequity without them.

We have an obligation to the community and sport to elevate the historically excluded. So how does the ski industry and PSIA-AASI deepen their diversity, equity,

and inclusion (DEI) commitment amid the inherent inequity of our country?

Elevating organizations already doing the work is one way. This starts by taking genuine steps to establish respect, understanding, and value. Many BIPOC-led snowsports organizations have been teaching for decades with amazing BIPOC instructors; however, most of these instructors lack PSIA-AASI certification. By investing in these organizations, the industry is uplifting and developing historically excluded communities and increasing the presence of dedicated BIPOC PSIA-AASI-certified instructors within the industry.

Additionally, the ski industry and PSIA-AASI can invest deeper into the development of certified BIPOC instructors to increase the number of PSIA Level II and III instructors, and to address the apparent nonexistence of BIPOC division clinic leaders and examiners. To further establish equity and equality, we should develop BIPOC-specific trainings and scholarship

programs. For a successful programmatic effort, we must also integrate re-occurring anti-racism, cultural sensitivity, and anti-bias training. We also need to diversify the imagery in training materials and videos. These materials are virtually all white and do not embody the true essence of belonging.

Most of you grew up with the privilege of access, and some of you may have been unaware of the historical exclusion until reading this article. Now that you know, you can help these efforts by using your privilege and historical access to demand change. Support the BIPOC instructors on your hill, whether by mentorship for higher-level certifications, demanding anti-bias training and diversification of training materials, or by otherwise acting as an ally on the slopes. **32**

Annette Diggs is the founder of EDGE Outdoors and a PSIA-AASI-certified Alpine Level I instructor at Washington's Stevens Pass. Follow Annette's outdoor adventures and community-building efforts at linktr.ee/ALdiggs.



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