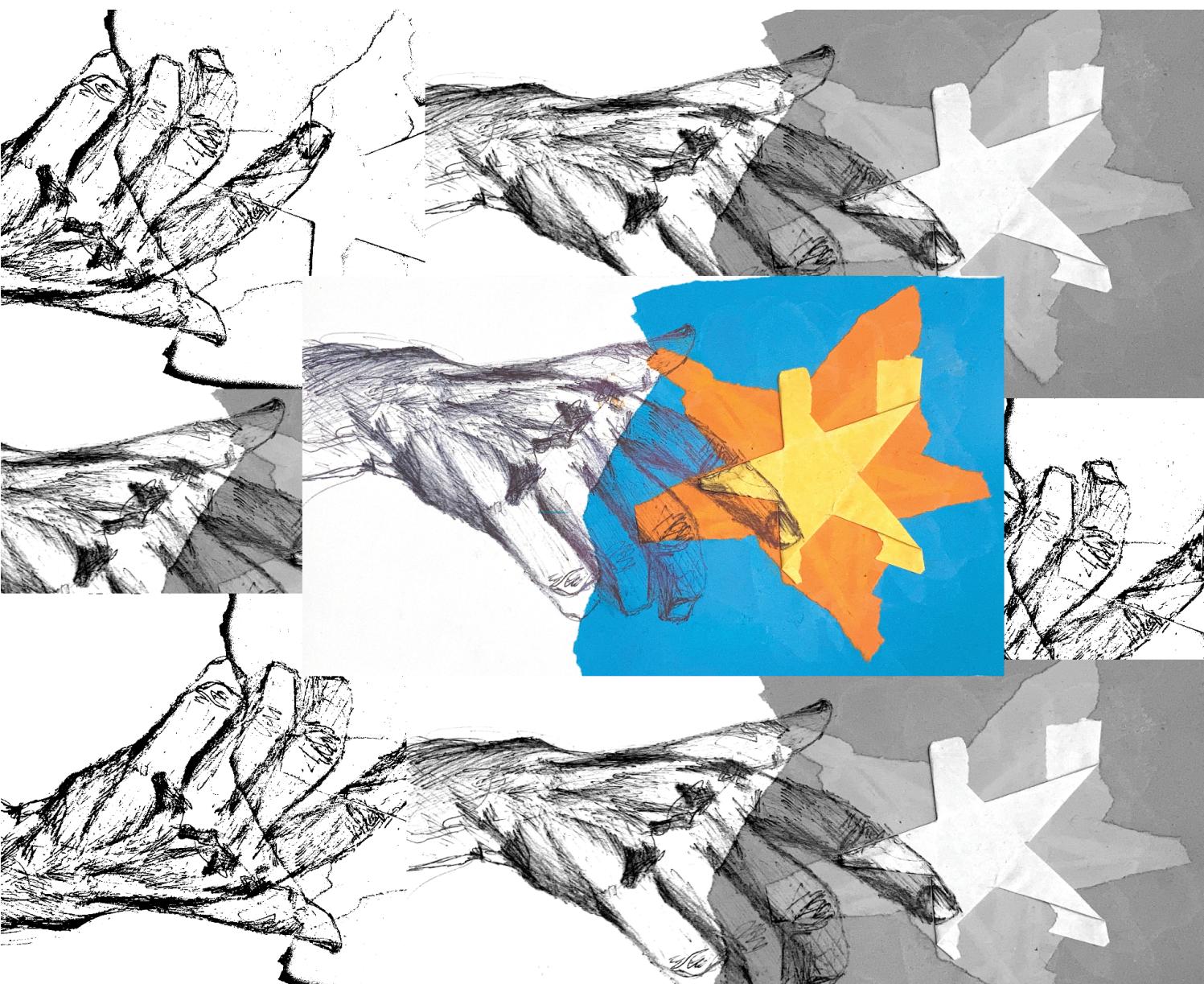


The Black Star



Journal



The Sankofa Issue

Issue #05

October 27, 2023

From Us To You

In the past weeks, we have all witnessed the horrific violence and suffering coming out of Israel and Gaza. The screams of innocent people, young and old, who have been killed in their homes and in the streets, deprived of essentials to live by siege, forced from their homes, and fear constantly for their safety and the safety of those they love have echoed around the world and have been heard and felt on our campus. We have also seen violence driven by prejudice spread in our own country and communities – from students being attacked on college campuses to the brutal murder of Wadea Al Fayoume, a six-year-old boy killed by his landlord in Illinois in what local police have determined a hate crime. In times like these, the need to affirm our humanity in the face of pain and terror comes into sharpest relief. We, as a group of writers and people who must condemn genocide, discrimination, violence, and hate every single time it happens, feel a deep responsibility to wrestle with the current political and humanitarian crisis and continued violence in Israel and Palestine. We believe that this incredible medium that all 62 of us have chosen as the vehicle for our voices holds a unique power to create a dialogue of free and brave thinking that moves us toward the ultimate goal of peace and human rights for all.

Due to the seasonal nature of our print cycles, we were not able to hold this necessary conversation in the pages of this issue. For this reason, the Black Star Journal will be creating a special issue to give our writers the opportunity to address this crisis in the best way we know how: by expressing our diverse

voices and perspectives in thoughtful, rigorous, and moving journalism and creative writing. This issue will also allow our writers to explore the geo-political dynamics that continuously drive destruction within the region. Through this additional publication, we will continue to provide avenues for Black students to share their wide-ranging experiences and free expression in the spirit and legacy of the Black press.

Today, we present the Sankofa Issue in tandem with Black Alumni Weekend, a celebration of the rich presence of blackness that has always existed on this campus. Though it does not speak explicitly about the current geopolitical moment, this body of work falls in line with the efforts of our alums who came together to cultivate the necessity and power of Black voices and creative expression before us. To our Alums: We thank you for building the tradition in which we ground ourselves, and we welcome you to the Black Star Journal. And to our returning readers: welcome back. Thank you for coming to hear our voices once more.

From us to you,

Naomi and Evan

*Naomi Umlauf
Evan Gardner*

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Onion song

Today I picked onions from the garden.
 Today I snuck into the sky and the sun beamed on me.
 The sack of onions I had picked dragged along next to me
 brushing the grass ever so slightly.
 The onions, those large spheres of love
 made no effort to untangle themselves from the blades
 of grass.
 They kissed mother earth over and over again across her
 hair.
 When I walked into the kitchen, Ma looked at me with
 her big onion eyes. Her onion eyes full of ardor.
 It's a common thing to refer to people as onions. At least
 in the sense of getting to know them.



I watch Ma tenderly tug at the smooth outside just
 enough for a layer to release out of its curved shell
 and balance in between
 the gravity of both wonder and pain.
 The thing about peeling onions is that even when it hurts
 you know you have to keep going.
 An unpleasant task required.
 I don't pay much mind to how exactly the
 aroma of ammonia
 wraps itself around me.
 How the pain in my eyes
 is a whisper
 I'm not sure I heard right.
 Every time I cut onions I try to convince myself I'm not
 drowning.
 I want to float like Ma.
 She hovers above the surface of the deep.
 I wonder what holds her so.
 The secrets her onion eyes harbor
 within their layers of life.
 How long did it take for her onion eyes to sprout from
 mere bulbs in the ground to
 entire words within?
 How long did it take for her to simply graze over the
 entanglement of my hair and bones knocking into one
 another?
 I must have looked messy, but she smiled at all of my
 tarnishes.
 An unpleasant task required.

Words by Yenee Berta
 Art by El Boveda

*i watched you walk across the
 aisle and it wasn't supposed
 to be spectacular but it was*

We're at the grocery store. White lights illuminate the aisles of cereal boxes in a way that is almost sterile. I've never liked the way I look in this light. My skin turns a washed out green mixed with muddy brown. The kind of brown on a not quite rainy day where everything but the dirt is unsure. I've never liked the way I look in this light. I look to you in a desperate attempt to project away the fear and contempt that has painted me so, but you are so beautiful it doesn't work.

Everything that touches you becomes art. The way you unfold paper bags is sacred. How your hand glides into them without a second thought. Along the crests of your ridges there is growth. The thickening of my skin has not hindered your bloom. The fresh fruit of your labor swells into rouge. A splendid juice creeps out from your pores. Running as the Red Sea. Your sweat is holy water and I am moses. And I am jesus. And you are god, even if he doesn't exist.

My trust has turned its wishes upon you even in the sterile light of the grocery store. Although the mud has accepted its fate. Although it tried to drag you in. Although I tried to drag you in. You germinated my soil and turned the white light of the grocery store into a brilliant sun in a moment.

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Issue #05
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the lemonade summers

Words by Destiny Kristina

i stand inside the time where lemonade stands
popped up on every corner,

inside the week of eighteen, the day the candle dims and the
sparkler starts to sputter to life, i exist on two planes, tomorrow and
yesterday, adolescent and ancient, before and after i began to Grow Up™.

the squelch of the lemon grows louder as my mother presses her hands into my
own, pushing the lemon down harder on the juice squeezer. i'm pushing down with all
my might, but my strength can only do so much, i can only do so much, i can only be what
i am: a little girl. my mother, taller, longer, stronger, winds her way around me and helps me
draw out the juice. i sell two full pitchers, maybe three. it's started to get blurry now.

every day is blurry now. every day is movement, every second is coexistence, every conversation
is the simulation of education and evaluation. the dichotomy, duality (i know big words—that's why
i belong here), i know everything, i see myself everywhere, i see the end of a dream before you even
close your eyes.

the last time i dreamed was too long ago. i dream now of times when i knew that i knew things, like the
feel of my grandmother's lap once i began to grow sleepy, or the way my dog would hum little snores
in her sleep when she was tired, or the sound of laughter and popping oil when it was a saturday night
and my family was all together, when i knew what it meant to be whole.

home is a place i have not been in a while now. people here have started to call it home, like they
can't help themselves, like the words slip out, push out, without their permission. it's a violation of the
tongue and a confusion of the heart. i have a home. it's in a pitcher made of plastic with seeds and
sugar at the bottom, full of liquid still warm, not yet placed in the fridge, but the best you'll ever have.

i have a home. it's in long nights staying up on the phone with your friends, giggling about
something you know isn't funny, trying to stay quiet so family won't hear you.

i have a home. it's in laughing so hard i start to cry—i want to cry, because now i must make a
new home, now i must start again.

i'm trying to make a family out of people who might be my friends, and i'm smiling
when i'm meant to, pouring in the sugar, stirring up the truth, blending it
together like a tapestry of time, thinking of my latest birthday and the
time that i was nine, thinking of the infinity between my every breath,
thinking of the hesitation, the nerves, the amount of first
impressions i have left, i'm thinking of everything i can think
to think of, and when it's too much, i stand inside a
different time.

the lemonade summers

the lemonade summers

The Feminist Fight Against Incarceration:

Black Feminist keynote panel articulates how far we have come as Brown University archives acquire Mumia Abu Jamal's work

Words by Kara McAndrew

"Archives make history. Losing a collection would be a purposeful act of historical erasure."

Professor Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve's words encompass the reverent but celebratory mood that enveloped the auditorium on September 26th, as a panel of leading activists and academics delivered a keynote address entitled "The Feminist Fight to Bring Mumia Home" in tribute to Brown's acquisition of Mumia Abu Jamal's papers and archival work.

Commemorating this historical acquisition, the panel included famed activist Angela Y. Davis, historian Johanna Fernandez, journalist Julia Wright, as well as moderator Trisha Rose.

Mumia Abu Jamal, an incarcerated activist and co-founder of the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Panther Party, has been behind bars for 42 years. Maintaining his innocence in the 1981 murder of a Philadelphia police officer, Abu Jamal was sentenced to death, remaining on death row for 28 years until 2011, where he is now serving a life sentence without parole. While incarcerated, Abu Jamal has produced an incredible wealth of information, including a collection that Brown now preserves in its Pembroke Center archives.

Abu Jamal called in from the Pennsylvania State correctional facility to deliver his reflections on the momentousness of the occasion.

"As we open the archives and thus print a new page in history, isn't it amazing how our languages are encoded with gender so much so that we're barely aware," said Abu Jamal. "For example, think of the word master and automatically, don't you think of a man? But words sometimes break through the bonds of tradition via the power of culture."

As the power of Mumia's words reverberated through the auditorium, it only underscored the importance of archiving his work and ensuring that his words would not be lost to the carceral state.

"Mumia has always deflected attention away from himself as an individual to

become the embodiment of larger issues so that we always also think about other people in the context of the world," said Angela Davis.

Echoing this sentiment, Julia Wright continued, "He is so self-effacing and that reminds me of why he's behind bars because the whole objective was to deprive us of our leadership. Mumia is our leader and our teacher and the whole intention of the state was to deprive us of our government."

years—most of it comes from scholars and journalists, and who better than to talk about the torture of imprisonment than the imprisoned themselves."

Reading Mumia's first-person accounts of his experiences in solitary confinement and on death row challenges the dehumanizing narrative that so often permeates discussions about incarceration. Through Brown's acquisition of his papers and artifacts amassed over more than 40 years in prison, the public will have unrestricted access to foundational work that can only further the fight against mass incarceration.

"The reason why the United States has been able to imprison so many people is because they've been able to depict the black and brown people behind bars as menaces to humanity," said Fernandez. "What bringing in the voice of the prisoner does is that it returns humanity to those our society has dehumanized, criminalized, demonized."

"I think that as people who identify with progressive and radical causes, we should learn how to stand up and defend what we're fighting for, and when we win victories, we have to recognize them and we have to learn how to immediately move on without waiting to be surprised by the inevitable backlash, and without waiting to be convinced that we really have relatively little power. I think that we really should have taken advantage of the fact that there was a period when the police were on the defensive all over the country," said Davis.

Heeding Davis' advice to recognize victories without losing sight of the cause is an important insight to carry into the continuing fight against mass incarceration and other injustices worldwide.

As we deal with the inevitable backlash to the Black Lives Matter movement and prepare for the 2024 Presidential Election, Davis' words provide a road map to the mobilization of Black voting power and grassroots organizing. As the world attempts to move on from a brief valuation of Black lives, we must demand systemic change louder, push our words to the forefront, and never yield to backlash. For no real change ever takes effect without a fight.

"Archives make history. Losing a collection would be a purposeful act of historical erasure."

Quoting a letter that she wrote to Fernandez about Brown's acquisition of Mumia's papers, Julia Wright read aloud, "We are so grateful because we have this narrative now and it's not only Mumia's narrative, it's our narrative that has been given back to us and this is something totally unexpected to me."

The importance of preserving these papers for the Black community within Brown and the larger community and country cannot be overstated. Mumia's work on incarceration over the past 42 years has been instrumental in mobilizing the abolitionist movement.

"Can you imagine a study of slavery without the slave narratives?" asked Fernandez. "There's been a lot written about imprisonment in the last 20 to 30

The water crisis in Flint, Michigan is what environmental activists consider an example of eco-racism, a form of racism attributed to the placement of landfills, incinerators, and hazardous waste disposal sites in communities of color. Flint has a Black population of 60% and has had the nation's highest poverty rate for cities of over 65,000 people since 2016. In an effort to save money, Flint switched their water supply to the Flint River, which resulted in its residents only having access to lead-contaminated water. This public health crisis has been the center of many race-related debates. According to an article in the Detroit Free Press, areas such as Flint and many other low-income neighborhoods of color have become known as "sacrifice zones," a term coined by environmental activists. The resulting product is long-term problems for the residents, ranging from park closures to terminal illnesses.

Is it fair to call our climate racist, or is environmental injustice just a product of biased governmental actions? In light of environmental injustice, I want to spotlight the disproportionate effects seen in African-American communities. We can see that predominantly Black neighborhoods are more likely to be situated in areas affected by climate disasters like flooding, extreme heat, or the effects of industrial pollution.

Old Smokey, officially known as City of Miami Incinerator #2, was a municipal solid waste incinerator strategically located in Coconut Grove Village West, a historically Black (predominantly Bahamian) and deeply segregated neighborhood in Miami. Back in March, Miami's Local 10 News published an article about outraged community members as new ground is being made on a 2017 case. In this case, ten residents filed a class-action lawsuit claiming Miami failed to warn residents about the toxic ash residue left by the incinerator. Village West sits just outside of Coconut Grove, the more affluent, white neighborhood. According to the City of Miami Planning Department, the median household income here is \$63,617.82 and 60.96% of the residents are white.

This is not a coincidence. Jim Crow segregation laws divided the Grove by race through the end of the 19th century, and by 1921, the Coconut Grove community was completely divided, leaving Black residents legally confined to the West Grove. The plaintiffs of the 2017 case grew up in Village West, and they claim that the city is still trying to avoid taking responsibility for Old Smokey, including trying to hide from the fact that Miami built multiple public parks on top of the dumping grounds of the toxic ash. The combination of the placement of Old Smokey and Village West's peripheral location to the larger city further highlights the intentional actions and policies that create environmental inequality in cities.

Director of the Center for Ethics and Public Service and its Community Equity Lab and Historic Black Church Program at the University of Miami School of Law, Anthony Alfieri, explains that "we didn't make the connections to environmental health and environmental racism as systemic phenomena because it wasn't part of our legal consciousness." Although he and others always bore witness to the changes, it was difficult to register the greater implications of them. "You're not able to translate what you're seeing; we weren't

trained to analyze what was in front of our noses."

Old Smokey burned trash for 50 years, and for 50 years, people breathed in the toxins emitted. Now, the older Black residents of Village West are seeing the effects of growing up with a waste incinerator in their backyards, as many are left relying on respirators to breathe properly and others have been diagnosed with lung cancer.

As the legal battles started to gain traction, Miami-Dade County's District 2 commissioner marched over to the law school and demanded that Professor Alfieri be fired, and his clinic be shut down. "I was put under surveillance," said Alfieri, which he says has significance when "the powers that be suppress information." Even though half a dozen parks in the area have now been closed due to toxic ash deposits in the ground, state officials won't take responsibility, claiming that there are no proven links between health conditions and the incinerator.

So, why is it that communities of color are disproportionately affected by environmental changes and disasters? Mother nature is not biased, so the answer must lie in the hands of policymakers and city planners. Segregation in neighborhoods, and practices like redlining, are age-old methods used by governing bodies to keep cities from being overtaken by the "other." This mentality is applied when cities are planned — planners wouldn't dare to place an incinerator in an affluent white neighborhood because this would inconvenience the white residents. However,

poor Black neighborhood already has limited resources and government funding, so putting an incinerator here follows an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality, creating the perfect conditions for these sacrifice zones to form throughout the country. Issues have only now started arising as more people of color are seeing the negative health effects that they have been subjected to because of where they grew up.

The residents of Village West have always understood the racial implications of being forced to live in sacrifice zones — how could they not know? While reflecting, Alfieri stated his take on the perspectives of those who lived by Old Smokey: "You know when the embers [of Old Smokey] are staining your clothing, and when you can't breathe. They knew perfectly well but couldn't do anything about it because they were powerless."

Whether it's having to wash dishes with bottled water because the tap is contaminated with lead or having to use a respirator to breathe due to the inhalation of toxic gasses, racially minoritized people are more vulnerable to health risks caused by environmental injustices because of government action, or lack thereof. Professor Alfieri wanted to end our conversation on a more optimistic note by saying "it takes so long for people to overcome differences — whether its class, race or ethnicity — and trust each other, [but] you can actually overcome differences, and you can transcend it." Students need to be reminded that they should stay a while to make a difference and gain the trust of community members and local activists. It takes work, commitment, and the ability to look at issues through a multidisciplinary lens, but it is possible.

1. Preface (verb): to introduce, precede, or herald

There is no set definition for forgiveness. No term she can marry and call her own. No context, no canopy of belonging, for the daughter of man calls no place home.

She is plain.

No beauty she could entice with.

She is mute and blind and writhing. No tongue to protest legacy; no eyes to perceive.

And yes, I say her because she must be a woman. Must be a barren sky. Must be a creature, puckered, hurting, and damned.

Forgiveness.

What is forgiveness to a worshiper king? To a diamond? To a God? To the ground and sky and Atlantic Ocean? You see, my lineage and I, we tried to learn her address. We stood on the corner of Love and Hardship street in the freezing cold winter of Family Inheritance and never crossed paths with her. Never caught her eye. Never caught her wrinkled brow.

See, she is old but I have heard her name since I was young. Since before we were diamonds. Since before David built the temple and Solomon was but a pillar of sand. Before wisdom came alive and shot right through me,

I learned she must be a woman.

Elusive and bearing curves and giving birth to new hope who could sprout and marry and see, but this word never had roots. Never had borders. Forever in between passes, and gestures, and words, and tears. It's never been but a change of heart.

Until,

One lowly night, I sat on the freezing cold end of Melancholy street and saw the word fly past my head; sightless, mute, mangled, and pregnant. And I tried to grab her when she flew past me but my arms couldn't reach high enough,

so I made a sling and took a rock from the ground and shot at a wing,

And it /Fell to earth like a /Shooting star/And we/ Wrestled till day break/ And I/ Felt my side come out broken /But it/ Put up a fight/ Until it/ Was then/ That /Forgiveness/Ended /With /Me.

A broken thing.

It attempted to fly away,

but was caught in the snares of memory.

Roots

Words by Naomi Nesmith

2. Family (noun): all the descendants of a common ancestor

(Part 1)

Your Grandma is a good woman. You have to believe her. She smiles and prays and swallows grief and presses it into diamonds. She holds her head high and her hips thin and can tell you a proverb like no other. Her voice is a medley, her words sharp like cheddar, sweet like wine. She never lies; only about true things. But it doesn't matter: her words are always classy.

Your grandpa's good too I guess in the way a candle is--warm, brief, orgasmic. He found Grandma and latched on like a snake does a desert mouse but she bore it all to term like a good woman. Married him like a good woman. Carried the world on her back for him like a good woman.

And that's the thing, see,

Think about how strong Grandma is -- to clean the house and dress the kids and work the job and smile, smile, smile. Never cry. All for her man. Everyone should praise her. Everyone should think her strong, should think her wise. Should fill the sky with little hers so that we could wish upon a star half as bright as her.

grandpa is unforgivable. Yes, really. Why? Because he was in love with her and couldn't stand it. Bought the house with a G.I. bill and contributed nothing else. Was a deadbeat alcoholic who crawled under the canopy of Grandma until he finally left and bore a child with some slut he found at a party.

Why did grandpa provide for the slut and not Grandma? He provided for the slut and her child because he didn't love them like he did Grandma. It's easy to be there for people you care nothing about. To play soldier away at Saigon. How strong the diamonds Grandma pressed out were, how unforgivably weak were Grandpa's crown jewels.

And you see that's the thing,

because Grandma was just fine without him. She made us shiny kids and furnished a nice house and gave us everything except herself. How lucky me and my brother were to have a mother who crushed us. Who taught us how to be diamonds; who are we if not pressurized coal?

Stop, ok, stop, listen—Grandma was a good woman. Grandpa was a drunk. Now stop asking questions.

3. Garrette (noun): brave; hardy; rules with the spear.

Dear God,

My father never cries. He smiles even when it hurts and gets passionate, not angry. My mother nods and agrees — he is good to her and this is true.

We aren't ever lacking; he makes sure everything is fixed and paid for around the house and we can be happy because of this.

My father is a worshiper because he can pick up any instrument he pleases and make it sing. He writes psalms to you, Lord. My father is David without a crown. I am never allowed to forget this.

Words are hard stones my father chuck's at us like what David threw at Goliath. We forgive him because it is our fault. We are not yet diamonds.

When I am sweet my father is glad. He doesn't like crying, unless it is because of extreme pain. He doesn't like that I cry often. I forgive this and cry alone.

My father's smile is the ivory keys of a piano that he plays into song and laughter. I like him okay. He is not at fault, after all, it is Grandpa.

My father respects my mother and is very transparent with her. He shields no words and this is love.

My mother protects my father and doesn't say many words. This is also love.

My brother does not like to listen to my father so my father gets a cave to pressurize him – to crush him until he shines with obedience. This is love; he must learn how hard the world is. I nuzzle into my father's arms and my brother does not forgive me for this. I wish to not care. I am a child who forgives because that is love.

I will be a good woman, God. I learn happy looks and quietness and this is how I am not Goliath. I am the ground he falls on.

“Our ancestor’s wildest dreams?”

Being black at Brown

Words by Milan Ndjiki

Every year as College Hill sings a silent peaceful song, hundreds of students grace the hill...but wait, these aren't any ordinary students—these are brown and black students joining the rush of their white counterparts on an upwards hill toward an unknown goal(?)

So, we start off the semester with OJA dance team tryouts, Shades of Brown acapella auditions, AFRISA feasts, and sprinkles of us among a mostly white lecture hall shopping classes that we quickly realize lack black and brown counterparts. While our presence may falter in the frantic glances for others who look like us in our computer science and economic lectures, the deafening silence becomes loud in the curly, kinky, or locked and braided hair swinging on the backs of heads of those with pens poised to learn and spread our knowledge of our history in Africana studies classes to making our culture heard in AFRISA meetings, harambe block parties, and BOX dance circles, filled with girls and boys grooving and shaking everything they got with an unsaid but known rhythm that joins all of us together.

In the face of these numerous dynamics, one question looms: What does it mean to be Black at Brown?

I went around asking that exact question to black students sprinkled amongst the main green, in Afrisa and BSU meetings, and even in STEM classes (telling them to use one word): This is a consensus of what I got back:

Being black at Brown is:

- “Hard”
- “Satisfying”
- “Freeing”
- “Painful”
- “Rhythmic”
- “Beautiful”
- “Rebellious”
- “Revolutionary”
- “Annoying”
- “Fun”
- “Funny”
- “Vibey”
- “Isolating”

Notice the trend here. As many “negative” adjectives were used to describe blackness at Brown, there were twice as many positive adjectives. When we are conditioned to believe that blackness is inherently challenging, painful, uncomfortable, sad, and regretful, we push aside the beautiful, notable, and significantly influential parts of our existence.

We see them in our dance, our speech, the long talks on BCSC couches and chairs, timid hands raised in mostly white lecture halls, the sideeyes given to those who want to speak on our experience yet don't want to

know our experience. But we also see them in faces on campus who we nod to, groups of us we don't look for around the main green but always seem to find. At first glance, we seem so finite and so small. Yet our limited population makes us infinite.

When asked to expand on their adjective, a student said, “I said funny because part of you remarks at the sheer amount of rich white people around you and how in the world you ended up here. Brown plopped us in here and was like ‘ok, thrive like any other white student here despite having a completely different background’ Yet, there's another part of me that finds places, moments, and people that make me feel like I was always meant to end up here.”

To go back into the history books, the University's namesake family, the Browns, like other members of their class, were slave owners. There are records of Captain James Brown, the brothers' father, purchasing slaves as early as 1728, and he left four slaves in his estate upon his death in 1739. By the early 1770s, the brothers owned at least fourteen slaves together (“Slavery & Brown”). Brown did not admit its first black students until the 1870s in a 99% white class. Despite the hostility faced, these black students excelled and a number of them went on to devote themselves to the education of others, some even having stellar careers in the Black colleges and universities of the South (Encyclopedia Brunoniana).

We see this determination for success, determination to mark our names in the ground, generations later in the current black classes at Brown. Black students operate in a moral paradox: We attend a university that only had us in mind in physically building its foundation, but never in reaping its benefits. And, although our minority is not as much of a minority as in the early 1900s, we still fight to keep and maintain our pockets of unity and spaces of belonging.

Our presence is “rebellious”, “vibey”, “beautiful”, “revolutionary”, “annoying”

Our experiences are “painful”, “hard”, “fun”, “funny”, “isolating”

Our hopes and dreams are “rhythmic”, “satisfying”, “freeing”

..and so many more adjectives than a simple list can contain.

At this year's Black convocation, Dean Sylvia Carey Butler said “You are your ancestors wildest dreams, I love you.”

So how do we make our ancestors' wildest dreams a living breathing reality? We don't just survive. We exist unapologetically. We make our presence known in whatever place we grace. We live to spite those who reduce our lives to mere stereotypes. We prosper.

Love Ethic in the New Age

Words by Jazlyn White
Art by Martine Niwe

on Gen-Z's burgeoning appreciation for bell hooks' *All About Love*

All About Love: New Visions, a New York Times bestseller, has perhaps become the item memorializing bell hooks following her death in 2021. The book is a cultural phenomenon: it is everywhere from indie to chain bookstores, online in digitized excerpts, in tote bags and lodged between fingers in coffee shops. Katja Vujić, an editor at *The Cut* magazine, said, "everyone has read this book or wants to read this book" in an article titled "The Best Books Cut Editors Read in 2022."

Its cult following has now extended to Gen-Z, making it the subject of numerous TikToks – tweets, Instagram posts, and video essays on YouTube too – and hooks' hashtag on the app has amassed 44.8 million views as of October 2023. Last winter during an academic semester at Brown, I walked into Books On the Square, an independent bookstore in Providence, simply curious to see if they had *All About Love*. Surely, I found it, clearly visible and on display. Then, months later, the book came up in a conversation between a friend and me. As Black women enduring their early twenties, we discussed our intentions to join the community of people loving more consciously and were drawn to hooks's voice specifically as a stepping stone.

hooks is a beacon to the – presumably impressionable and wounded – readers of *All About Love*; the book's contents a meditation on hooks' own journey to recovery. In the early chapters, she builds rapport with women her "junior." hooks, who was 48 at the time of the book's publication, noticed an absence of love in young adults of the early 2000s, writing: "I was saddened and appalled when I interviewed a well-known female rapper at least twenty years my junior who, when asked about love, responded with biting sarcasm, 'Love, what's that-I have never had any love in my life.'" This rapper is later revealed to be Lil' Kim. Although hooks connects with any and all readers of *All About Love*, Lil' Kim as hooks's inspiration reinforces her desire to write for people at the margins of society.

All About Love leads with gender stereotypes that exclude race, potentially contributing to its commercial success. The book strongly

dichotomizes men and women. hooks inserts herself into feminist discourse, repeating "patriarchy" and "feminism" and relating each chapter back to women feeling vulnerable at the hands of male dominance. In fact, I was perturbed to discover how small race's presence is in *All About Love*'s initial pages; the word "race" first appears on page 51.

Instead, race in relation to love is embedded into the text, emerging in a principle to empower both the individual and community. Chapter six, "Values: Living by a Love Ethic," proposes reinforcing community in American society – a space with rich white supremacist, patriarchal, and capitalist roots. Here, hooks coins the term "love ethic": "a love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well." A love ethic encourages us to let love guide our behavior; hooks asks readers to join her and incite change.

Love's absence is noticed in perpetually unfulfilling relationships and sex and in continuing generational trauma. However, only a marginalized, specifically Black, voice would reconsider the so-called emotion to be a privilege. Love's absence was especially noticeable to hooks because it represented all of the things society withheld from her, and other women like Lil' Kim. With hooks's various definitions of love, the introspection and personal development archetypical of self-help books also transcends into our real lives; love can be found outside of romance – in justice and in resistance.

hooks's love ethic went on to become part of the literary canon as ethnographic scholar Micah Salkind used the term "politically charged love ethic" as a framework to understand Chicago's longstanding house music scene. Its application to this subculture's ethics, pioneered by Black and queer folk, stresses that marginalized communities can come together in solidarity to resist a culture of (male) domination.

All About Love's presence on social media marks one way young folks are coming together and sustaining a love ethic. TikTok is a distinct social media platform that praises candidness, and thus vulnerability, with virality. It caters to the perpetual state of wistfulness and romantic yearning that hooks attributes to undeveloped young women, too. Across the countless videos on the app tagged "All About Love," its bright red book cover acts as a signifier for healing, embracing vulnerability, and reclaiming the love we have lost throughout our lives. There are even videos of people simply reading *All About Love* with background music. The book's ubiquity and widespread reception creates a touchstone for everyone, and, overturning the absence of love twenty years ago, young adults today are enthralled by it.



A Black Girl's Guide to Navigating Phrenology, Weird Tik Tok Trends, and her Innate Beauty

Words by Kalie Minor
Art by El Boveda

Growing up, I developed an appreciation for beauty that superseded nearly everything else. While I was taught to value traits like intelligence, compassion, skill, and I did, there was something about beauty that struck me in a deep and personal way, in a way that I still feel, though now I am much more conflicted. Beauty has always been one of the pillars of humanity. I think of the Birth of Venus and lead painted faces. I think of soft bodies and self-harm, women destroying and warping and changing themselves in the name of beauty. Some may say we are obsessed. I wouldn't disagree. I think of the most beautiful women I know and I think of Lauryn Hill and Sade Adu, of Lil Kim and my since-passed grandmother, her head smooth, free from hair, reflecting the liberation she embodied in every aspect of her life.

When I examine the past for evidence of beauty, I try and find these women and I fail. Because what the past tells me of beauty is that it exists in the thin, White body of a young White woman. She changes, shifting with the current trends and cultural tides, but her essence never does. She is reflective of this culture in the West and thus reflective of a society deeply entrenched in White supremacy. Founded on little more than the degradation of Black people, the American beauty ideal is the purest of White women. She is an angel, she is innocent. She is the antithesis of Black folk and she must be rescued and cloistered from our demeaning affect.

This early American myth of the innate difference between White and Black women engendered the pseudo-science of phrenology, the mathematical study of comparing skulls cross-racially. Petrus Camper, a Dutch anatomist, was one of the first scientists to assert this idea by measuring the cranial angle of skulls of those from a variety of races. The results of this 'study' showed "Europeans came closest to the sine qua non of racial beauty, and Africans were nearest to the ape" (Branson, 167). Though of shockingly poor methodology, this affirmation of race and beauty as scientific fact carried into the United States as the nascent country sought a way to solidify its power structures and uphold its plantation economy (Early American Studies, Branson, 2017).



Today, phrenology has lost all credibility in academia and we know there is no scientific basis to the difference between races; but scientific racism has left very real effects on the world in which we live. The aforementioned "racial beauty" possessed by Europeans has filtered into today's beauty ideals and mainstream media where there is consistent affirmation of the standards determined in the early days of this country. New frontiers of entertainment, such as social media, are not free from these conceptions, and typically reinforce traditional beauty ideals rather than subvert them.

Social media apps like TikTok often give me whiplash from the constant slew of opinions and commentary I am subjected to. I may be exposing something about the over-politicized algorithm I have built for myself, however I know I'm not the only one and I have IG Reels as my haven of pure humor. Recently, trends like 'canthal tilts' and 'witch skull versus angel skull' have caught my attention. What shocked me about these trends is their connection to a seeming resurgence of phrenological ideology as a way of examining beauty.

A "canthal tilt" is the angle at which one's eye sockets rest, an immutable piece of a person's face. Creators have created videos, theories, even filters examining this feature, denoting that an upward tilt is reflective of beauty and superiority while a downturned tilt is indicative of the opposite. The angel versus witch skull trend is an analysis of skull shapes, deeming one of sloped nose, prominent chin, and "full lips and a nose to match the proportions of the face" (@letestudio, TikTok), the 'angel's skull'; the beautiful and desirable one. Meanwhile the 'witch's' represents an ugly face, notable by a large nose and other features. Both of these trends use judgments of one's skull as a measure of beauty in an individual, which is the essential concept behind phrenology. The popularity of these two ideas circulating social media is alarming for the ease with which it introduces young audiences to the basic ideas of phrenology and 'scientific' beauty. By using a format familiar to young people, creators are making this ideology both accessible and normalized, allowing ample space for these messages to become internalized;

furthermore, it does not allow people to develop their own perceptions of beauty in the diverse way they may see it when allowed to think, feel, and see through unbiased lenses.

My mom often makes fun of me when I talk about the people I find beautiful. "I can never understand your type" she'll say, chuckling to herself. I don't blame her either, there is no set category of people who I find beautiful, no particular trait I can identify on every person. To me, beauty is very similar to love, it is a feeling, an understanding rooted deep within who we are as people and our outlook on the world. Though I have grown up with the privileges of colorism, my experiences in all-white spaces have hurt my own perception of beauty. There, like nearly every other part of this country, to be beautiful is to be thin and White. Straight hair, light eyes. White.

It took me years to grow into my understanding of beauty as a radical one, as an encompassing acceptance of identity and humanity. Because mainstream media refutes this idea with the easy, oppressive White standard of beauty, I still struggle to fully accept this understanding, but I find beauty is overwhelmingly everywhere for everything. I feel beautiful because I am kind, because I am smart, because I am Black. I find others beautiful because their hair is curly and kinky, because their skin is dark and glows in the sun. Black people are beautiful because they are Black, not in spite of it. Our joy, our love, our struggle, the pieces of our cultures and experiences, the ancestral knowledge of it all, allows beauty to flow into us as a people.

We mustn't allow the hateful and harmful ideologies of the past creep back into the mainstream. We must combat racist narratives of beauty and we must exalt the beauty that exists in Black people simply by virtue of being Black. Civil rights activists of the 60s and 70s got it right when defining "Black is Beautiful" as a revolutionary and radical act: it defies a system that upholds a White beauty standard for the purpose of diminishing our humanity; it emphasizes the love and connection we have as a people, for the two are so similar; it expresses the objective truth: that Black is Beautiful.

Where do I even begin?

Words by Favour Akpokiere
Art by Millicent Stiger

Would you be proud of the person I've become? It's been quite a journey.

I finally got a puppy. His name is Lucky, he's like the best ever. And yes, I got into an ivy league like we've always dreamed of as well. Oh, and about my hair—I took a leap of faith and did a 'big chop'.

But lately, I've been doing some introspection. I revisited the "guide to da best life ever" we crafted back in high school and it struck me that while material possessions can certainly bring a degree of happiness, they don't hold the power to solve life's deeper problems. I know, I know, it's cliche. I'm sure you were expecting some profound discovery, but it really is true. I mean, I checked off *all* 25 items on my high school bucket list yet somehow, I still felt that lingering emptiness inside. Life is more than a checklist. If you're too fixated on ticking boxes, you might miss the very essence of living. If you're anything like me you may spend a lot of your time chasing a goal you want and you don't get it *or* you achieve the goal and then you no longer know what you want anymore.

That was until I decided to completely revamp my perspective on life. I created a new list called the **Love-It-List**. The **Love-It-List** is supposed to be a list of life experiences that make you fall in love with life all over again everytime that you read it. This list isn't about accumulating/accomplishing things; it's about experiencing life to its fullest. **Instead of dedicating all my time to goal-chasing and wanting more and more material things, I'm learning to savor the beauty of the present moment.** I learned a new word that encapsulates my thoughts perfectly:

Qualia /'kwälēə/ (noun):

The qualitative experience of your conscious state. Your own subjective experiences of sensation.

Basically, it's how you experience all of the five senses in the world. It's the vibrant redness of an apple, the throbbing pain of a headache, the feeling of joy, the melting sensation of chocolate on your tongue. It's the way things seem to us. These experiences are unique to each person. Whenever I read through my "Love-It-List" I want to be able to feel like I'm back in the same location of whatever I jot down.

Now Let Me Ask You:

The Love-It-List

1. What makes you smile?
2. Who makes you smile?
3. What is something that you've learned about yourself recently?
4. When was the last time that you felt true genuine peace?
5. When was the last time you cried?

In college, there are times where it feels as if things are constantly spinning and there's no chance to feel a sense of calmness. With this in mind, I answered number 4 from the list:

The last time I felt true, genuine peace was this summer when I went out to the reservoir with my sister. We blasted our favorite tunes with the windows wined down and sang every lyric at the top of our lungs. The warm sand fell between our toes as we ran to the water. Neither of us knew how to swim so we settled for kayaking instead—except we didn't really know how to do that either. Once the kayak got on the water we felt it rock back and forth and every movement that we made caused us to start screaming hysterically. Once we got to the center of the lake, a beautiful stillness engulfed us. The sun kissed our skin as we closed our eyes and floated across the water, letting our imagination carry us wherever we wanted to go.



U n w o u n d

Words by Kourtney Beauvais

Art by Martine Niwe

I had a staring contest with the man in the sun.
I lost, so he polluted my view with splotches
of purple and blue.
I redirected my watery gaze
to the earth,
where my vessel remains bound
by an invisible, universal force... usually.
Today, a string, a thread, maybe a cord
lags behind me.
And so I am tethered,
yet unrestrained by the thread,
curling curiously and looping whimsically
until it fades from sight.

I sift through memories,
those close and distant, frantically,
trying to determine the when, why, and how
of my predicament.
I was so entrenched in reflection
that the present vanished.
My mulling became meandering.
Wondering became wandering.
Ruminating became rambling.
At some point in my venture,
the String disappeared from its place near my feet.
It now reached ambitiously
towards the man in the sun.

I thought briefly about how I might challenge him again.
Alas, I was too preoccupied with the String
to fantasize about impossible triumph.
I instructed my gaze to reunite with the String,
following it until I discovered its source,
a discombobulated, unfinished patchwork
folding, wrapping, knotting, and intertwining with itself.

Examining the woven piece further,
my eyes trace every line of String, frazzled and deliberate.

Lines of definition,
of borders delineated,
of paths crossed,
of hearts, etched,
of documents signed,
of sutures sewn,
of cords cut,
of names written.
Lines of connection,
heart to heart,
drawn hastily,
foolishly,
purposefully.
Lines of passion,
of graphite sketched,
of plaits practiced,
of stories written,
of stories told,
of tears fallen,
of branches snapped,
of gashes torn,
of scars traced,
of things erased.

I could feel my pulse in the String,
the very thing that brought me to life,
that fortified my being,
the wispy contortions of my essence.
Weights shifted and shadows bobbed
as the man in the sun chuckled.
And at some point or another,
the Spool was placed in my hands.



The Honest Tea: lost in space

Words by Nelsa Tiemtoré

The year is 2015.

reader: "If you ask me if I am happy, I'd say I don't know because middle school can be fun but at the same time things are falling apart...the kids are so unfriendly I cry when I get home and I feel horrible about myself...I hate it here but let me pretend that I like it so I can survive and make it out of this garbage can..."

the room is dressed with people
and decorated with colorful noise
my eyes light up at the dimpled steeple
and there are the girls and boys

i see them sitting in their seats
their minds elsewhere but their work
as they talk and listen to end meets
while their imaginations begin to lurk

among them, i sit, a peculiar outsider
often easily misunderstood and confused
without the courage to spread my wings wider,
my ego would too often be bruised and abused

my peers took advantage of my aloofness
in order to perform their ruthlessness
i sat a mildly pleasant quiet mouse
second-guessing every action and reaction
until my insecurity built me a house
full of shame, pain, and dissatisfaction

i did grow up during middle school, maybe i had a
little fun too
but i left that hell hole knowing that it had made
me blue
it was the prime place for most of my emotional
scars,
trapping me in fear, in a box, behind bars

so I left and went to high school...
and tried to be more "cool"
the oddball in the midst of a joyful frenzy
lost in space in a scary happy place

almost 9 years later...the reader reflects on these
moments...

my greatest regret of all is staying in my shell
choosing to hide myself to fit in a box
years later, I now know myself well
i'd rather be me or kick rocks

my current disillusionment with college
is the product of stress but also a
marriage between the fear of my past repeating
and the worry that i'm still not good enough

If the past becomes the future,
then the future becomes the past
so I have to fight for my dreams fast

lost in space in a scary happy place
i am slowly finding my way
pace by pace, with a smile on my face
i am slowly finding my way

how funny that my most recent identity crisis
stems not only from insecurity but from...
realizing that I'm constantly changing and shifting

growing, and molding, never folding or
compromising
but still in the process of forming

lost in space in a scary happy place
i am slowly finding my way
pace by pace, with a smile on my face
i am slowly finding my way

my brain is a ray of light that must glisten
and it dances to the music with all its might
the music of life...the rhythm that keeps me alive
and if my younger self had taken the time to listen
if I had believed in what I could achieve
if I had known that my insecurities
should never determine my capabilities
who knows where i might have been today?

and if only the current me would take her own
advice
I'm my own best friend, yet greatest vice
If the past becomes the future,
then the future becomes the past
so I have to fight for my dreams fast

lost in space in a scary happy place
i am slowly finding my way
pace by pace, with a smile on my face
i am slowly finding my way
and as i do i'm falling more in love with me too

dear reader,

even though your insecurities may have stemmed from the way in which your peers treated you when you were younger, do not let their words define you or dictate your view of yourself. changing your perception of yourself can be difficult, but it is necessary for your self-growth; a good place to start is by affirming positive things about yourself and highlighting the aspects of yourself that you do love, rather than the negative perspective you've internalized. surrounding yourself with people who support and uplift you and see the best in you also helps with this. once you begin to appreciate yourself and surround yourself with people who also appreciate you as you are, you begin to understand how much you have to bring to the world. it may be sad that it has taken this long to realize that, but the fact that the realization has now been made is a stepping stone. and when those insecurities resurface in your adult years, do not be afraid to start over and rebuild your internal self-image, sometimes that's the most healing thing you can do...

Tensions in the TWTP Program

Words by Clarissa Thorne-Disla

Third World Transition Program (TWTP). Third World. What comes to mind when you hear that term? If you thought something along the lines of suffering, underprivileged communities, you are not alone. The Corporate Finance Institute defines the "Third World" as "Countries that are poor or developing." While this definition may coincide with general consensus, Brown University holds a different perspective. Brown's pre-orientation Third World Transition Program held each year is meant to help acclimate students of diverse backgrounds into their first year of college. But how effective has it been this year in uniting historically marginalized peoples?

Brown first established this program in 1969 following the successful walk out staged by Black students seeking equal treatment to their white fellow students. Throughout this movement Black used the term 'Third World' as a replacement for the term 'minority' as they felt it indicated a status of inferiority on campus. Despite the negative connotations assigned to the term 'Third World' today, Brown students have decided to stay true to the initial demands of students whom we have to credit the existence of such programs to.

This year's program ran from August 25th to August 29th and was filled with various lecture-style workshops on topics ranging from classism to decolonization. As the program came to an end and the rest of the class of 2027 moved onto campus, there grew a sense of disharmony between people of color (POC) who attended TWTP and those who chose not to. This discourse may have been evident to all, or just a small minority, but it is worth analyzing.

In a poll sent to Black first-year students an overwhelming majority of respondents stated that they noticed the tension. When asked if they feel a bias exists against students who did not attend the pre-orientation program, students replied in various ways, saying:

"I think there's an unfair expectation among POC students that if you wanted to meet other POC you would have gone to TWTP, so right off the bat it made it harder for the POC who [newly] came during move-in day to connect with TWTPers." - Anonymous

"I think that POC friend groups were [already] formed and solidified so it was kind of hard for non-TWTPers to join them because we all already knew/recognized the people who went as safe" - Anonymous

"I think there are some references people who didn't go might not know, but no one I know has said anything about feeling truly excluded. Of course, I don't know everyone's opinions." - Anonymous

Based on these collected responses, the detected negative bias impacting students who didn't attend

TWTP seems to be bothering first-years in relation to their ability to connect with other POC or Black students. Since this form was transmitted about five weeks after all students moved onto campus, feelings of cliqueness can be appropriately defended. When the first mention of this stigma came to me, I quickly wrote it off, but seeing that students continue to make note of its impact emphasizes its significance. Another aspect of this conflict stems from the judgment some are facing for not attending the program. One student reported the impact of their lack of attendance saying "It definitely made the students who did not attend the program based on their race seem like they are "coons." The term 'coon' stems from one of the many anti-black caricatures spread throughout popular media in the late 19th century and early to mid 20th century. Referring to someone, or in this case, oneself as a 'coon' references stereotypes of Black people as lazy, slow, and self-deprecating. For this student, not attending TWTP imprinted a feeling so deep that they feel they've become associated with the slur and stereotypes. The use of the word 'coon' here establishes the presence of the negative bias which prompts a question: Where is the judgment from TWTP attendees coming from? Some feel there is no excuse for a Black student to miss out on such a program while others feel the only plausible reason that a Black student would not attend is they would rather form connections with white students. Whatever a person's reasons may be for holding grievances, it is clear that they come from close-minded viewpoints.

Students also reported feeling as though Brown lacked inclusive and identity-based activities during orientation to aid the transition. Funnily enough, students who attended TWTP and students who did not both agreed on the fact that this year's orientation could have used increased catered programming for POC. Regarding students unable to or unwilling to attend TWTP, their ability to feel the values of the Third World Program was limited.

The first orientation program offered on move-in day was an ice cream social where students lined up outside the gates to the main green and expected to navigate about 20 different lines for various ice cream flavors in the dark with limited guidance from the Bruno Leaders. Although it would be extreme to claim that New Student Orientation programs only went downhill from here, this event certainly set the stage for how first-years would view the rest of the program. Many first-year students attest to this event being extremely overwhelming and chaotic. When compared to the events held during TWTP, this first event was viewed as a complete letdown and a shame that non-TWTP attendees were unable to experience the joy, comfort, and community that radiated from the week before. The question now becomes who is at fault for the foreboding lack of events to acclimate POC?

Hey, Are You Going to the AfriSA Event?

Words by Fara Odunlami

The first time someone asked me that question freshman year, it was referencing what was going to be the fifth African event I'd already been to that year. A feeling dawned on me then, something deeply-rooted and warm, that as a second-generation Nigerian American, I had found a place of belonging at Brown University in a way I'd never suspected.

I'd never thought of myself as "Nigerian" before Brown, just "Black". I knew that I was Nigerian, of course, but being *specifically* Nigerian is never something people care about when there's only a few Black people in your high school, anyway.

As a consequence, I felt no need to delve any further into my identity. I knew that I was Igbo and Yoruba, and that my parents liked to joke that it made me "mixed", but I really did not see the significance of the difference in the cultures back then. Igbo food was simply "how Mom cooks" and Yoruba phrases were just "things Dad says".

It did not occur to me, not fully, that the two cultures were distinct. That realization happened because of the Black community at Brown.

For the past year I've been at Brown, I felt an almost immediate sense of belonging in the Black community as a Nigerian. It was a fact that the members of NSA and Afrisa overlapped almost entirely with the BSU. That every time you asked about a Black person's ethnicity, either them or their parents had immigrated from somewhere. It was so starkly different from where I came from, in a uniquely wonderful way, so different from being "Black" but not quite. I accepted it with open arms and little incentive to question.

There is, however, always reason to question the things that simply are, especially when it comes to institutions such as Brown. When I entered my sophomore year, I began to properly ask: why are there so many Nigerian students within the Black community at Brown? Why is that African culture and music and foods seem to dominate much of the social scene at Brown? Why is it that, when I think of the Black people on campus whose ancestors were enslaved rather than who are children of immigrants, I can only think of a few?

So I began looking at the statistics, and what I found was both complementary to what I'd been observing in my time at Brown and simultaneously not enough. A joint report from University of Pennsylvania and Princeton cited in 2007 that even though first or second-generation Black immigrants only make up 13% of the US's Black population, we make up over 40% of Black students in Ivy League schools. And they suggested that this number was only increasing as the population of first and second-generation Black immigrants in the US also continued to increase.

My first thought when I saw this was: so I wasn't imagining it. However, this data is almost twenty

years old, and there is a greater percentage of first and second-generation immigrants in the US now, almost 20%. The exact makeup of Black students at Ivy Leagues is no longer disclosed by the universities. But one can imagine that the numbers have only increased alongside the number of Black immigrants.

The study, interestingly enough, also cited evidence of admissions officers, who were mostly white, perceiving black immigrants as "more polite, less hostile and more solicitous" and perceiving Black Americans who descend from enslaved people in the opposite way. These biases are evidently problematic for a number of reasons, but the principal one is that it seems that this study suggests that admissions officers hold prejudices towards a certain subgroup of Black people during the admissions process.

Even with dated evidence, I believe that this is a topic that warrants discussion, one that I believe is ignored in fear of causing infighting in the Black community. It is wrong to insinuate that Black immigrants and children of immigrants are any less deserving of their spots at these elite institutions, but it is unjust to ignore the lack of representation in Ivy League universities that these programs were founded to serve. And this brings the question: how do we properly address what I believe is a decrease in students who descend from enslaved people in top private universities while not perpetuating animosity?

As a second-generation Nigerian-American, I've heard the countless stories of my parents dealing with the trials of immigrating to the US and navigating both the racism and xenophobia in a country that was very culturally different from their own. As a Black-American, I've discussed with friends whose grandparents grew up during the Jim Crow era, and who still feel the generational repercussions of slavery today. And although I am Black and Nigerian-American, I've had the privilege of experiencing neither.

As we approach the end of this semester, I have begun to realize: Blackness is different for everyone. And although I've heard this, in countless different voices and in countless different ways, I did not truly understand the sentiment until I felt it this year. I hold pride in my heritage and an eagerness to learn more that I did not embrace during my teen years. I have experienced the intertwine between race, ethnicity, and lived experience, as well as the stark differences. And I think of myself as not just Black now, not just Nigerian, but as a product of both Igbo and Yoruba cultures. Brown's celebration of African culture has made me learn more about myself and what being Nigerian is separate from family. I am only a sophomore, and I have no doubt that I will continue to make new realizations about my Blackness at Brown that I have yet to uncover. What I expect won't change, though, is that if someone asks me if I'm going to the AfriSA event, my answer will be yes.

Words by Nash Frias

Whilst scrolling on TikTok, you have probably seen multiple outfit videos of a black girl with locs wearing a stack full of beaded bracelets on her arm, with a maxi skirt, multi colored waist beads, and rocking a crochet top she probably made herself. This “earthy black girl” aesthetic has taken over the black community by storm. The distinct aesthetic not only influences fashion but the lifestyle of its participants as well. But what exactly is the “earthy black girl” aesthetic and how did it come to be?

Who is the

This style of fashion is nothing new. We have seen the “earthy black girl” countless times in Black media. The 80s and 90s saw many Black female characters with this style depicted in sitcoms. Some prime examples of this time include: Denise Huxtable from the Cosby Show and Freddie Brooks from Different Worlds. The 2000s saw Lynn Searcy from Girlfriends and Mona Thorne from Half and Half. Musicians such as Lauryn Hill and Erykah Badu are commonly associated with the “earthy black girl” aesthetic, not only for their personal style but also for the musical content they include in their songs. Modern artists with this aesthetic include: Solange, Willow Smith, Zoë Kravitz, and many more.

The start of the “earthy black girl” can be traced back to the 1960’s and 1970’s. During this time, the hippie and bohemian style in youth began to rise as a counterculture against American social norms. The carefree eclectic style was born out of opposition towards the Vietnam War, capitalism, and settled society. However, it is important to note that the style originated from the Romani people long before

its introduction in America. Along with the hippie culture, the Civil Rights Movement played a crucial role in the making of this aesthetic: the fight against segregation and racial discrimination led many African Americans to long for a return to their motherland. As a result, many African Americans reconnected to their African ancestry through their aesthetics. For example, many African Americans adopted natural hairstyles during the Civil Rights Movement. Rejecting the European beauty standards of permed and straight hair in favor of a picked out Afro became a symbol of resistance against oppression and discrimination.

Additionally, musicians such as Bob Marley had a large impact on the increased popularity of the aesthetic as well. He was known for his long locs, slouchy comfortable outfits with vibrant

outfit demonstrates one’s connection to their ancestry and opposes the eurocentric style that is often favored in society. The “earthy black girl aesthetic” can be seen as an expression for the idealized society we hope to see in America, where Black people are being heard and where systemic racism is dismantled.

Furthermore, the rise of spirituality during the pandemic has also contributed to the revival of the style. There are many stereotypical characteristics that the “earthy black girl” is linked to such as: carrying crystals around, aligning chakras, burning sage and incense, etc. However, the aesthetic is most associated with African spirituality as a way to counteract the post-colonial Christian norms present in our society. Along with the rise of spirituality, another component of this aesthetic that has seen increased popularity over the years is the loc’d hairstyle. Loc’d hair is said to heighten one’s spiritual intuition and deepen one’s connection to nature. Many members of the black community are turning to locs, not only as a protective hairstyle but also to begin a new spiritual journey.

“Earthy Black Girl”?

The combination of Black Lives Matter Movement with the rise of spirituality due to the uncertainty of the pandemic allowed for the rise for the “earthy black girl” that we see all over our feeds today. This modern iteration of the aesthetic honors its predecessors and will continue to grow substantially in the Black youth of today. The message of Black pride and solidarity conveyed through this subculture of fashion will hopefully inspire the current and future generations to challenge societal injustices and fight for the rights of our people.

Why the Scarcity of Black Doctors in This Nation Has to Change

Words by Natalie Payne

Scrolling through my TikTok For You page, I see a slew of relatable college and STEM-major videos. One trend in particular that grabbed my attention was the stream of videos using March Madness’s sample of Lil Baby’s Low Down. College students used the trend to allude to the pressures of different majors and choices in career paths, most notably that of pursuing a STEM degree, being pre-med, and being pre-law. After relating to just about all the videos about the difficulties of being a STEM major, dealing with pre-med classes, and all the importance of delayed gratification, I stumbled upon a video with the caption “When you’re tired, but you remember only 5% of all doctors are black.” I was stunned. I had always known that Black men and women didn’t comprise the majority of doctors, but five percent seemed too low.

After researching the percentages of doctors in this country, truly wanting TikTok to be wrong, I still couldn’t conceptualize it. From all the messages all over social media and all those I heard of being “the only one” during my college search, I expected the worst as I was set to take my first college STEM classes. Much to my surprise, however, I was never “the only one”. There were always other Black students in my STEM classes, and I found many to be Black pre-med students on similar paths as me.

Even thinking back to my childhood, I had been surrounded by Black students who wanted to be doctors just like me. I had a Black primary care physician, I had a Black orthodontist, I even had a Black dermatologist. Only five percent of doctors being Black simply did not click in my mind. Even ten percent seemed closer to the truth. As I tried to reconcile those facts in my mind, I realized my perspective was limited. I failed to acknowledge that there was

more to becoming a doctor than the simple desire to be one.

The path to medicine is quite a rigorous one with an aspiring doctor having to get through four years of undergraduate studies, four years of medical school, and additional years of residency and fellowship. These requirements are oftentimes coupled with systematic barriers for Black individuals and can signify the end of the dreams initially held by many. My perception over the years gave rise to the illusion that there was a plethora of Black doctors and doctors-in-training, but in reality there’s truly a lack of representation in the field.

When researching the deeper reasons for the lack of Black representation in medicine, it summed up to: a lack of support and access in earlier years, a lack of access regarding the medical school application process, and institutional barriers that govern the actions of the various medical schools.

This disparity, however, cannot continue to be a sustained trend, for the future of this country—especially for its Black population—rests on the increase of physicians from marginalized populations. Without more Black doctors in the field, we lose the opportunity to cater care to the individual, no matter one’s background. As long as the absence of Black doctors persists, we are directly contributing to stalling the solutions needed to help fight the health disparities that continue to plague our communities. As I continue down the road towards medicine, I stand with my Black peers around the nation who will be the trailblazers to not only change our physical representation in medicine, but also the manner in which we are represented in medical treatment and care.

The Problematic Black Artist

Words by Emmanuel Chery

The discussion of separating the art from the artist has been in the zeitgeist for the last decade or so, amid the rise in the popularization of celebrity scandals, or new information about people's beloved musicians coming to light. But for many, this discussion isn't as simple as a commitment to stop listening after the first report of controversy; there are several personal and communal ties one can have to an artist that makes holding them accountable more difficult. This decision grows even more complicated when one considers artists who have passed away, and therefore can no longer profit from the art they made, yet they remain symbols of the transgressions they've committed. Ultimately, exploring what it means to support an artist, in light of problematic actions, is an important reflection for the Black community to have and continue having.

The idea of separating the art from the artist is essentially that we as consumers of media are able to enjoy art created by artists with previous involvement in problematic scandals. On the other hand, by continuing to engage with the art said artist has produced, one is supporting an artist's career and income. This support of an artist despite their past actions is viewed by some as supporting their actions, however bad they may be- a situation which gets even more ethically difficult when the actions of the artist are ones that have affected one or multiple other people. In these cases, the continual support of an artist can appear to invalidate the negative things people have experienced at the hands of this artist. A look at some of the most famous black artists—including Michael Jackson and Kanye West—as well as hearing from some Brown University students can hopefully inspire one to begin thinking about the artists whom they support and whether separation of the art from the artist is even possible.

In thinking about separating the art from the artist, one inevitably thinks about a Black artist who has faced controversy and scrutiny: Michael Jackson. It seems like everytime there's a black family function one of the "oldheads" puts on at least a couple Michael Jackson songs, and it's the same music many grew up listening to and continue to listen to today. But the proclaimed "King of Pop," was someone who, for the last sixteen years of his life, was wrapped up in child sex abuse allegations. Though Jackson was acquitted in

2005, HBO released a two-part, four-hour posthumous documentary called *Leaving Neverland*, with testimony and stories from the two men who alleged they were sexually abused by Jackson as children (Tsoulcas).

Two important concepts arise when discussing an artist like Jackson, who had incredible musical influence, but also is now deceased. Firstly, there is a question of ignorance (willful or innocent) when it comes to knowledge of the scandals an artist has had; sometimes one's fame eclipses the potentially problematic actions committed, meaning people simply don't know that these things have happened. When the documentary came out, it was the first many people had heard of these allegations, despite the claims going back a couple of decades. Other times people are willfully ignorant: they have a vague awareness of the controversy, yet choose to look no further, finding bliss in their ignorance. This ignorance allows them to stream music by Jackson and other artists guilt free. While some argue that consumers have a responsibility to ethically consume media, to others it's simply "not that deep." In speaking to one Brown student, she said "I don't really know much about Michael Jackson's scandals, but everyone knows him generally. The black community puts him on a pedestal and he did so much for us; to take away from him is to take away from the black community" (B, 18).

However, it is also significant that Michael Jackson is dead. Streaming his music or engaging with anything associated with him doesn't bring him profits that he can enjoy, so it begs the question of whether support of his music is still support of him. Another Brown student said, "My mother cried when Michael Jackson died, and in terms of his music he's dead now... in a way it's almost like he's not a real person, but more of a symbol" (Y, 18). This example helps one to examine how and if one can continue enjoying music despite knowledge of alleged wrongdoing, and if the death of the artist changes that.

A look at an artist that is still currently entrenched in controversy gives us another example to consider when examining the potential separation between art and artist, and how that may shift if the artist is still alive.

Kanye West is one of the most famous rappers right now, if not for his multi-genre experimental discography and Yeezy brand, then for

the seemingly endless controversy he seems to find himself in. One might vaguely know about the infamous 2009 VMAs incident, causing forever tension between the Kanye and Taylor Swift fandoms, or his comment about 400 years of slavery sounding like a choice. More recently he has been wrapped up in a more serious discussion about antisemitism. In the wake of his appearance with a shirt saying "WHITE LIVES MATTER," he tweeted about "going defcon 3 on JEWISH PEOPLE". He doubled down in several unaired interviews going as far to say that he liked Hitler. These statements and actions received mixed reactions, with many condemning the artist and any who supported him, and others decidedly continuing to stream his music. One Brown student said, "I still listen to Kanye's music but that man needs to get help" (B, 19). In contrast to the previous case, Kanye West is alive, and thus listening to his music or buying his products directly correlates to the money he has, making this situation all the more complex. In his success, talent, and fame, Kanye has gained a global fanbase, many of whom are black; he is also credited for influencing many of the present sounds and artists in black genres as well, only adding to his legacy and admiration.

But, when Jewish voices and allies quickly called out West's antisemitism, the Kanye question became not just about the support of one artist, but about what it means to be an ally and supporter of oppressed communities. What generally complicates the discussion about separation of the artist and the art they make is sometimes not simply the specific community or people they affect, but the moral extensions of their actions onto a larger claim about society, and the broader implications individual supporters and fan bases are making with their continued support.

Looking at Michael Jackson and Kanye West, and thinking about several other examples of Black artists that come to mind may produce different amounts of support or disdain for each; perhaps it's a case-by-case basis decision, or maybe there is a connected established criteria for who to continue listening to and who to condemn. Not everyone is going to have the same opinion around certain artists and their art, but it's important to reflect on what it means to be a fan and how our actions, individual and communal, affect the real people artists may have harmed.

Melodies and Memories

Words by Sanai Rashid

In the weeks leading up to college, in between tying up the loose ends in my hometown and dreaming of the new life ahead of me at Brown, I thought to myself long and hard about what I wanted to take with me as I left the buzz of New York City for the hum of College Hill. I left my blueberry cow stuffed animal and brought my stuffed bunny with an “I Heart NY” shirt instead. I left my record player with The Fugees, Nina Simone, and Harry Styles vinyls and settled for the albums on my phone. I tried to make sense of the mosaic of a life I had put together piece by piece for the last eighteen years, staying up late at night to wonder if it would all fit in the tiny dorm I would now call home.

Then, one night I got an idea to make a playlist. I have long crafted the skill of making hyper-specific playlists to fit my various moods — from rainy day playlists to songs I want to play at my future wedding — but this one was different. I whipped out my phone, let Apple Music illuminate my eyes and made a playlist simply called “Songs That Remind Me of Mommy and Daddy” and put my favorite picture of my parents — a selfie of them smiling at my middle school honor society ceremony — as the cover. I knew that I was not really leaving my parents behind as I went to college, but I wanted a piece of them that no one else could quite share. I wanted to collect the songs that reminded me of them singing with a smile so wide that I started singing too, and the albums they would play on my car ride to school, sighing about the good ol’ days of hip-hop. I wanted music that reminded me that I was never too far from the parents who sang me lullabies, so I could rap their favorite 90s song fifteen years later.

For weeks, I would hear songs playing on the radio, in the grocery store, or from a car whizzing past me on the street, and realize it would make a great addition to my playlist. “Roll it Gal” by Alison Hinds played as I picked up roti in Queens with my mom. “The Story of O.J.” by Jay-Z bumped off a stoop in Brooklyn. “Wait For You” by Future played on our local radio station Hot 97, reminding me of all those dreary-eye mornings my dad would spend driving me two and a half hours to my high school in Manhattan, where the skyline of Midtown would greet us again as Future sang over a melancholy beat.

By the time move-in day arrived, I had amassed a collection of songs that each reflected a piece of my parents in all their different movements in life. Yet, as I looked at the diverse assortment of songs on my playlist, I also saw the fusion of stories from artists spanning decades, continents, and genres, with no particular throughline other than the fact that they stuck to my parents like a sticky note with words of impulse, rhythm and rejoicement coursing off the page.

From Soca to R&B, the majority of artists on my playlist are Black musicians, except for Billy Joel (my mom and I can not help that he just tugs at our stern New York heart strings). Just as there is no one way to be Black, all of these artists illuminate their own fragment of the diaspora in their songs, dipping into the stories which compel them with the hope that someone out in the world will find a pocket of warmth in their words.

Any artist’s dream is that their work will outlive them — that the joy their fans found in their songs on album release day will trickle down and suffuse the happiness of their children, and the future web of generations to come.

That is what Black music is all about — the invariable commitment to pass down our stories to preserve our culture in a way that only we fully comprehend. In a society that actively tries to erase our past by denaturing history books and ignoring our achievements, we have had to carve out places where we can exist unapologetically and sensitively, and be full of drive to craft a better reality for ourselves.

Though Black culture is passed down through such a variety of means — from writing, cooking, fashion, and beyond — music is truly unique from any other form of artistic expression in the world. For music you need no instruction — you need no recipe book or guide to understand how a song makes you feel. Once you hear a song that awakens a glimmer inside of you that you never knew existed, how you move about the world changes. In the three minutes of a song, there is a liberty the artist often captures, with ample permission to express their joys and desires that makes you want to go seek opportunities with a renewed sense of purpose. Music needs no explanation, but can offer a melodic illustration of what you cannot explain in plain words.

I think a lot about what I want to carry with me in the world. For so long the narrative fixed upon Black people is that at all times we carry with us what some see as the burden of being Black. While we do carry strife, we would not still be alive as people, still thrive as a community, if we did not also learn how to carry joy. If we did not learn how to do the Cupid Shuffle at every cookout, find the rhythm of Marvin Gaye’s (and now Beyoncé’s) “Before I Let Go” in our souls and our toes, and balance the push of our ancestors and the pull of the future beckoning us to let it all go.

Why does my mom always remind me that “No Scrubs” by TLC was the anthem of her day? Why does my dad tell me the story of when he gave Kanye West his demo tape as “Through the Wire” hums on the radio? After all, why do we share anything? What do we want people to think about when they think about us?

My parents do not have a story for every song that comes on the radio that they like. Yet, when they do take a moment, to lower the volume of a song playing, and tell me “I used to listen to this when I was your age,” it is for a reason. Sharing the music we love with others is a vulnerable practice, hoping deep down the ones we share it with love these songs that brought us joy, too.

Now, as I hear a song that reminds me of my parents in public, I think about what my parents want me to carry with me. I wonder what parts of me they hold onto now that I am far from home. What pieces of each other will we hold onto to find comfort in a world always moving, always humming a new tune.

Mental Slavery and the Reconceived Black Role Model

For nearly 250 years, African Americans endured the crudest form of slavery, followed by a century of countless civil rights infringements imposed by the Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, and the Ku Klux Klan's terrorism. Since then, the United States has taken broad strides to establish freedom and equality for African Americans, but pervasive vestiges of slavery still persist through systemic racism and a dominant white supremacist culture. These contemporary modes of oppression translate into what we now may perceive as "modern-day slavery" within the African American community. *Anti-Slavery International* defines *modern-day slavery* as "when an individual is exploited by others, for personal or commercial gain". For African Americans, the most overt form of modern slavery is mass incarceration. This phenomenon was largely initiated by the war on drugs, which filtered billions of dollars into the criminal justice system at the expense of the freedom of hundreds of thousands of black people. In her book *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander underscores the parallels between mass incarceration, slavery, and Jim Crow, writing, "Slavery defined what it meant to be black (a slave), and Jim Crow defined what it meant to be black (a second-class citizen). Today mass incarceration defines the meaning of blackness in America: black people, especially black men, are criminals." In this quote, Alexander touches on the fact that all forms of slavery are rooted in racist ideology. However, as prevalent as mass incarceration is, there is an abstract form of modern slavery stemming from this ideology that is even more ubiquitous. It is called psychological slavery.

The term psychological or mental slavery may be several decades old, but it has affected our people for centuries. Psychological slavery is defined as "when we are so conditioned by a person, a group, an idea or an ideology that we are unable to think for ourselves to the extent of being unable to distinguish right from wrong, and from acting rightly" (themindingcentre.org). This troubling mindset subscribes to the self-deprecating ideologies propagated by slavery's depreciation of black lives and white supremacist culture which reinforces black inferiority in the minds and media of society. One of the symptoms of psychological slavery is negative self image, which is received from media, religion, and education, and corrupts the way we see

Words by Kevin Carter

ourselves and our people. In addition, there is: an inferiority complex, which makes us feel as though we cannot succeed in this society due to our color; victim mentality, which provokes us to be counterproductive by complaining instead of acting; and myopic thinking, which impairs our ability to think and act on the future. Naturally, all of these symptoms of mental slavery constrain the freedom of the victim; but, what makes this form of slavery so pernicious is the fact that it traps black people in a perpetual state of socioeconomic inertia by extinguishing their confidence and ambition. If we allow these racist ideologies to corrupt our minds, we will soon find ourselves being controlled by them; it's like throwing in the towel of a long, tenacious freedom fight inherited by us from our ancestors. The only difference is the freedom we seek is no longer from physical chains. It is the freedom to dream, and not in the sense of an intangible fantasy, but in the sense of a feasible reality that lies outside of the scope of what is deemed possible by white supremacy. And so the question arises, how does one free themselves from metaphysical chains?

The first step towards this solution is to recognize that these chains are there. As a black college student, I believe an implicit symptom that many of us deal with is imposter syndrome; this is not to say that every person dealing with imposter syndrome is inflicted by mental slavery, but rather it presents an opportunity to self diagnose. If this imposter syndrome is the result of an internalized negative self-image that is reinforced by a lack of positive self-image, this may be a case of mental slavery. Being black at a PWI, a racial identity that makes up less than a tenth of the school's demographic spread, can cause you to question your sense of belonging as a person. You will find yourself in spaces where your black experience substantially sets you apart from everyone else. Personally, I've experienced imposter syndrome in the form of feeling insecure when I'm not well informed about the topic of discussion in a predominantly white space, and when I've isolated myself when doing work for certain classes in an attempt to prove my individual competence. While doing poorly and falling behind may not always be preventable, this way of thinking is. Once you realize that these thoughts are holding you back, restricting your ability

to excel academically and socially, the chains begin to reveal themselves. At this point, you can replace these negative thoughts with positive affirmations, such as "*I belong here because I'm intelligent, talented and qualified,*" and "*The reason I'm here is to prepare myself for the life I want to live, not the life anyone else wants or expects me to*". The most important thing to remember overall is that you are not in this alone. Korey Sam ('25), recalled his first experiences with imposter syndrome during his first Computer Science class, saying "*It felt like everyone was always ahead of me, forcing me to accept that I couldn't process information as well as other students. That feeling prevented me from seeking out help and acknowledging the advantage many of these other CS students had over me in terms of experience. I began to question if I deserved to be here*". However, in the midst of his struggles he found solidarity with fellow black CS students Kristophe Yen ('24) and Orlando Cedeno ('24), who helped cultivate his sense of belonging and competence within the CS department at Brown. Now, he admits to being glad that he stuck with it, and is well on his way to graduating with a degree in Computer Science.

Initially, my plan for this article was to write about black role models, and how they serve as "mental slavery abolitionists" by reinforcing a positive self image for African Americans—Black historical figures like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, and even contemporary figures such as Barack Obama and Oprah Winfrey came to mind. However, as I began to think about the positive self-image that reinforces itself in our daily lives, I felt moved to reconceptualize my definition of a black role model. Since the term evokes a sense of grandeur, we tend to gravitate towards the figures I previously listed when asked to identify a black role model. However, I would argue that the most impactful role models are the people we see and interact with everyday. The unique, brilliant, and talented black friends and family who demonstrate black excellence in a subtle, yet remarkable fashion. When we look around, these people are our reminders that we are not alone, that we are more than competent, and that we are free. Therefore, freedom from mental slavery does not require an amendment to the constitution or an underground railroad, because we are the ones who can help free each other, one chain at a time.

Words by Allyssa Foster

K l e p t o m a n i a c

P a r t 2

Before bed Mom would sneak me stories about Grandpa. She was too tired to tuck me in so most nights I knelt by her bed, leaving behind a yellow crack of light in the doorway. She would pat my head and sometimes that would be it, but most times I strained to catch every word of the tall tale from her tired smile over Dad's snores.

Grandpa painted houses for a living. He knew some painters who were also teachers, potato farmers, retirees, but Grandpa wasn't like them. He collected colors to keep in his pocket like everyday was autumn. He painted Mom's room a different color every season. His most prized possessions were buckets and buckets and buckets, a beaten ladder, resmask for lead, rollers and rollers, brushes, an outdated mixer, and tweezers for splinters. He spent thirty years as a work in progress, always brushed with some yellow, blue, red.

Grandpa had hands that should have been used for fine art, but he thought they looked better with calluses. When he wasn't painting houses he was hunting for color. He couldn't pull a color from his head — all a paint mixer would do in his idle hands was make browns and grays. He had his strange collection of colors that he'd used before, each button, thread, or snow globe had a note that could tell you what parts of what would coalesce into a color just as vibrant as the original. But Grandpa hated to reuse them. He just liked taking the time to admire the colors again, think about where he found them, and remember the house they birthed. So he strolled: he went to every street market available to him, he wandered into academic buildings on the campus Grandma worked at, he did touch-ups for friends and stayed for dinner afterwards. When he saw a color that inspired him he took it.

He entreated Mom to help him hunt before she could run. She would go to school with a little box in her backpack, and even though all the other kids wanted her to use the box to play she kept it safe. At first she always made sure to fill the box up before she went home, because it made Grandpa laugh. Cough Drops, wood chips, boogers, apple peels,

flecks of rubber from dodge balls, dried play doh, ants, rips of paper she colored with her Crayolas. She would show Grandpa all the colors and he would treat each one carefully, thinking long and hard or bursting into tears from laughter.

Some were successes, most notably the booger, but Grandpa could never convince her to be more selective, to wait for inspiration like he did. So he gave her a smaller box. The box itself was a brown so rich it looked like it was on fire with umber reds and clay oranges. Mom liked to feel the soft wood of it under her finger, just once under her teeth. It was her show-and-tell, the toy she hid in her hand to play with during nap time, and wouldn't let anyone else touch during recess. One day before lunch her eye caught something shiny hiding behind someone's lunchbox. The boy grabbed his lunch fast and rushed to get in line and Mom reached in quick after. She kept the small, rough, and sharp something in her pocket until recess. Then she took it out when she was safely behind the tree in the yard. It was an amethyst. She recognized it from the rock collection Grandpa had, but it wasn't quite like any purple she had spied. It might have been blue. She knew it had to go in her box.

Grandpa took it out and stared. First at the rock, then at her, and at the rock again. Mom got anxious and tried to take it back, but he picked her up with one arm and held the amethyst where they could both see it. She laughed at first, but realized he wasn't. Grandpa was more than serious, he was solemn. He told Mom to never stop searching for inspiration, no matter how old and tired she got. She opened one eye at me then to let me know old and tired were words I should never use when speaking about her.

Grandpa used it for their home, and even today that jewel-color sparkled. Mom put the rock back in the boy's cubby. She felt bad even though it had made Grandpa so proud.

I knew who Grandpa was. Everything about him made sense to me, like any fairy tale does to a child who wants to believe it. But one night I wanted to know if he felt bad about stealing, because I knew stealing meant jail for adults, and I wanted another story before bed. So mom told me about the evening Grandpa stole a bit of the sun so it could set.

My eyes were clenched closed, burning with colors I couldn't see. I felt Mom's fingertips push into my hair and something wet and plain fall onto the edge of my pillow.

She told me it was time for bed.

I got up slowly. Mom never told stories like this before, so I didn't know if it had ended or not. I wanted the sky to thank him for his help, I wanted him to go home with a handful of sunset and layer it over Grandma's kitchen. But I didn't know how to argue this, especially with Mom so quiet and the moon telling me her face gave no hint of a smile. So I bunched up the blanket and pushed it under the bed, gently placing the pillow on top before changing my mind and taking it with me.

I stumbled into the hallway and almost looked back into the room before I shut the door, but didn't. I was always aware of the light I let in when I came and went. I kept the pillow with me as I passed my room. The kitchen was dark but I didn't need so much light to take a glass from the dishwasher and fill it with water. When I passed my room again I dropped the pillow onto my bed. My feet were growing cold. I went back into my parent's room.

I set the water down on the floor where I had been, and leaned over my mom to give her a kiss goodnight. She was still. I quickly leaned over her more to land a kiss on my dad's shoulder, because I didn't like trekking over to his side of the bed where no light from the hallway or window let me see where I was stepping. Before I withdrew completely I saw Mom take a deep breath, her side blowing up and squeezing in, before sitting up to hug me tight.

She wished me good dreams. I told her the same.

That was the end of our tradition. I had decided that in the morning.

Words by Zahira Branch

Art by Millicent Stiger

Without
them
I
will
be
here



The memories leave a bittersweet aftertaste as time marches on.
There are no words to describe what continuous loss can do to a person.
The day will come when the grief becomes overwhelming, and I will wish I too was gone.

All the fun and all the achievements can cover the pain briefly, but I still mourn.
Grief can be a burden and intensify with time. It can be a poison!
The memories leave a bittersweet aftertaste as time marches on.

Because they're gone, I want to do nothing and everything all at once, I'm torn.
Life keeps changing with or without my consent, as if these changes have a reason.
The day will come when the grief becomes overwhelming, and I will wish I too was gone.

Remembering my time with them makes everything ache and I question why I was born.
The world seems dull without them. I no longer want to be in this melancholic condition.
The memories leave a bittersweet aftertaste as time marches on.

Sometimes the never-ending days pierce my side like a thorn.
This grief will continue and so will my attempt at controlling it, for this I am certain.
The day will come when the grief becomes overwhelming, and I will wish I too was gone.

Dreams of them or of the champion himself, death, leave my mind forlorn.
And no matter how many good moments there are, without them I am always broken.
The memories leave a bittersweet aftertaste as time marches on.
The day will come when the grief becomes overwhelming and I will wish I too was gone.

What
I
will
be
without
them

The Black Star Journal



The Black Star Journal