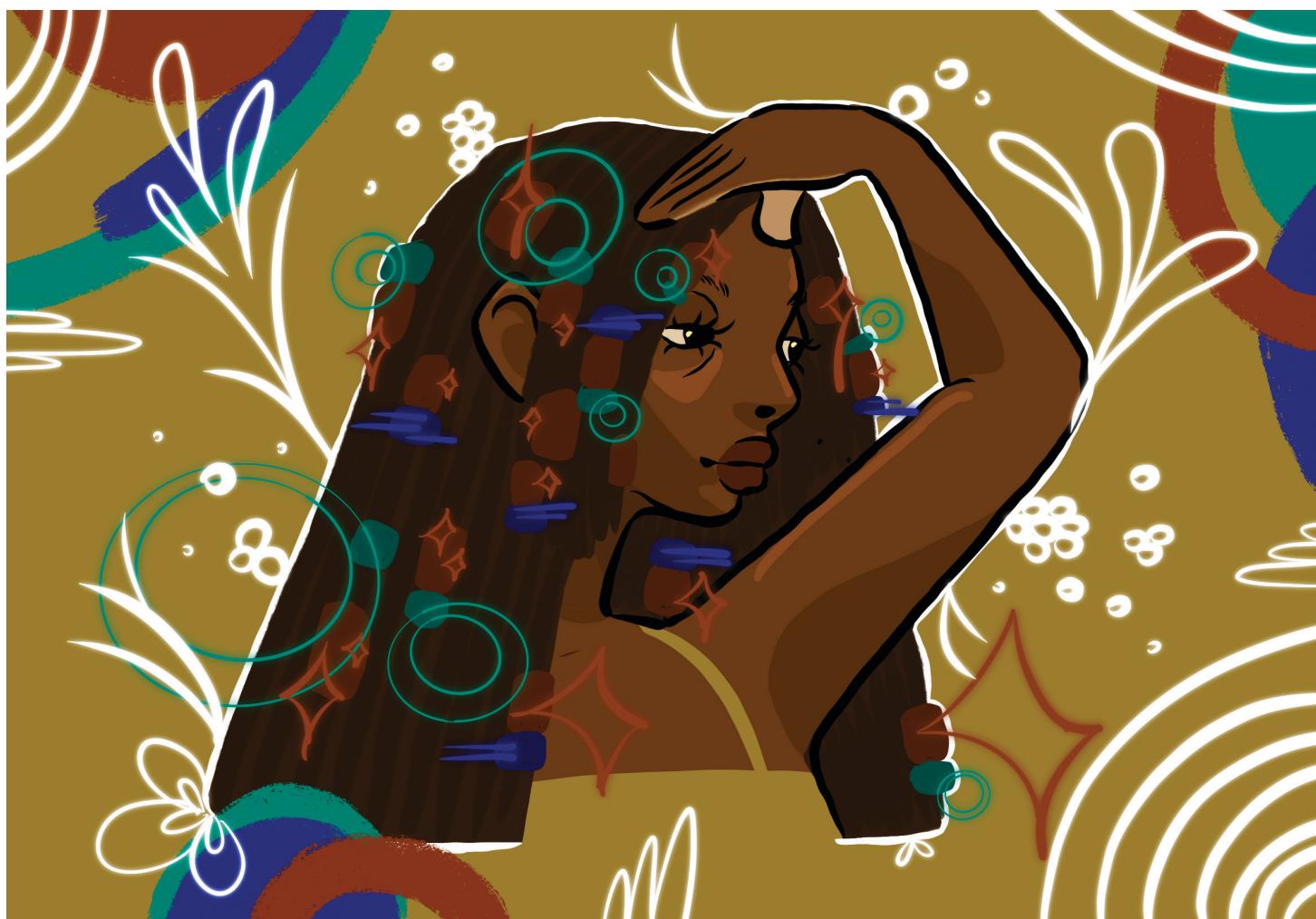


The Black Star



Journal

The Choral Issue

Issue #12

October 24, 2025

From Us To You

As we reflect on the current state of the world—its ever-changing unsteady nature and the uncertainty we're facing—we want to highlight our community's resilience through it all. This is a pivotal moment in history as the university, academia, and the country as a whole grapple with the political and rhetorical distortion of affinity spaces. It is important for us as a publication and representation of the black student body to illustrate the strength of our community, provide a safe space for self-expression, and uplift Black voices on campus and beyond. It is our honor and privilege to continue this paper's legacy. We hope that as you read this issue you immerse yourself in Black creativity and joy and that you know that we're still here. Our words are echoing through time and space; hence the title of this issue. We're a choir of souls blending together to make this beautiful community.

Nelsa Tiemtoré

BSJ Staff

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Nelsa Tiemtoré
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boat song

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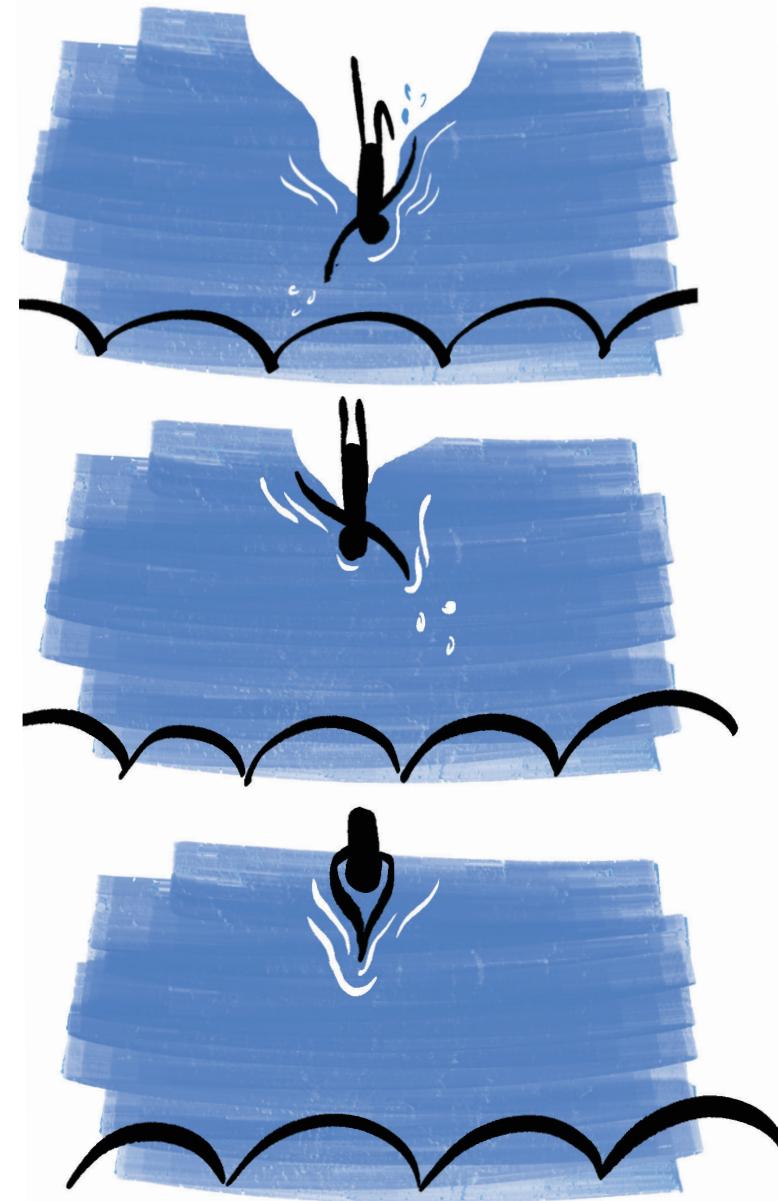
groaning and
wrenching and winding
cough out a name
date
a symbol

shaky fingers draw
the wiles of the mother and the sun
who is the moon lassoed from behind
a Century of stars

Can the lights dim or die
In my mind bright and free
laughing as they twinkle

Music of the dying soul
Ringing and interrupting conversations
Birth and death blend
in the cycle
Circle eclipse ellipses

Wrapped and rolled and hung and heated



She is a

v
e
s
s
e
l

A car a boat a country
She is a body
No soul no eyes no mouth

A symbol
too much at stake

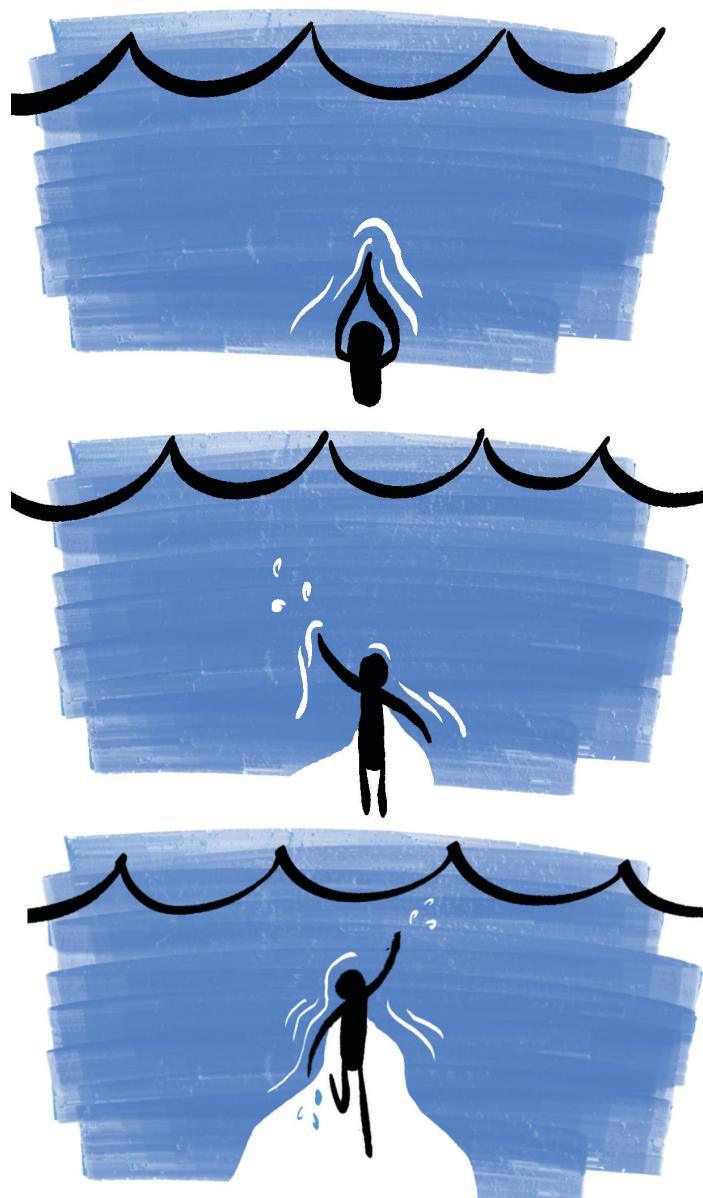
She is a future
She is a hero

She is the past and present
She is the clock
She is a piece of a piece of a piece
She is flesh and blood and bone
Full lips and hips perfect
For bearing what must be born

She is a buoy sinking
She is a set of legs
silky and
sheathed
under
stockings not her
shade
runs on the thighs
Run down the street
Like a little girl
With berets in her hair
Chasing after a truck full of ice cream
Melting on the pavement

Sticky to touch
Forbidden to lick
She is, she is, she is

What the stars twinkle for
When the night comes



The Black Star Journal

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Cowboy Carter: Is Country Worth Reclaiming?

Words by Chanel Baxter
Art by Marie Auguste

With names like Queen B, Sasha Fierce, and Mother, it is clear that Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter's impact on pop culture cannot be overstated. Debuting in 1997 in the hit group Destiny's Child, before making her solo debut in 2003 with her immensely successful album, *Dangerously in Love*, Beyoncé is undoubtedly cemented into music history. Over the course of her nearly thirty year career, she has amassed a slew of accolades spanning across music, film, and humanitarian work.

Despite spending the majority of her career as a R&B and pop artist, Beyoncé has recently embarked on a journey to redefine her sound across new genres. As speculated by members of the BeyHive (the affectionate name given to her most dedicated fans), her most recent albums *Renaissance* and *Cowboy Carter* are a part of a three-act album release with each act intending to break and redefine genre "lines."

The first of this three-parter, *Renaissance*, was released in the summer of 2022 and drew inspiration from her love of her "Uncle" Johnny, her mother's nephew who was instrumental in her upbringing. *Renaissance* was Beyoncé's homage to him for exposing her to 1970s ballroom culture's house and disco music, and his unfortunate passing due to complications from AIDS. Detaching herself from her traditional R&B and occasional hip hop sound, the sound and the following tour showcased elements of ballroom through voguing, extravagant costuming, and references to the Black and Queer communities—the backbone of ballroom. *Renaissance* had significant, and seemingly uncontested, acclaim as it arguably brought house music at the forefront of 2022.

The second release of these three-acts, however, has struggled in achieving such uncontested acclaim. *Cowboy Carter*, Beyoncé's take on country (I say "take" as Beyoncé has emphasized that "This ain't a Country album. This is a 'Beyoncé' album.") has left many "traditional" country fans upset. The promotion and performances of the album draw on traditional western themes and references; namely to the cowboy aesthetic of spurs, banjos, Levi's jeans, hoe-downs and juke-joints, and big, bleach blonde hair. This album also draws on the emotional themes behind country music: economic hardships and a love for one's country (or rather history) while mixing it with R&B and trap influences. This fusion has, ironically, left a bad taste in the mouth of Post Malone and Morgan Wallen enjoyers.

Historically, country music has been a melting pot genre, drawing performers and inspiration from the South. Emerging in the Appalachian Mountains in the early 20th century, the genre draws on both white folk, bluegrass elements as well as on Black blues elements. Ultimately, country has truly belonged to marginalized people and their experiences across class, race, and gender lines. With the release of *Cowboy Carter*, however, Beyoncé has been getting more pushback from those that occupy the largely white country scene today with the implication being that she is attempting to cash in and pop-ify a genre while ignoring its traditional roots. Regardless of her documented incorporation and celebration of her Southern heritage throughout her career, this reaction was an expected one given their reception of her performance of "Daddy Lessons" from *Lemonade* at the 2016 CMA awards. Although she was accompanied by a "traditional" country band, The Chicks, she still received backlash from those in attendance and their fans. Rather than focusing on the semantics of who does and does not belong in country, I would rather focus on the critiques arising from the BeyHive itself, specifically their questions: what does it mean to reclaim a Black space within a white terrain (country music) and how can we love a country built on our pain?

Throughout the years, Beyoncé has reaffirmed and proudly showcased her Blackness. Her branding has always incorporated her Houston heritage and her familial roots in Alabama and Louisiana. Her Southern and Black heritage has always been implicit in who "Beyoncé" is and initially served to explain her

bubbly personality and her country twang, but in the latter half of her career, these roots have become essential to her music. Many have traced this transformation from pop star to conscious pro-Black icon with the release of her album *Lemonade* with the SNL skit "The Day Beyoncé Turned Black" serving to show how white society, with some creative liberties, has reacted to this change. The *Lemonade* era set a precedent for Beyoncé implementing "political" stances on Blackness in her work, as seen with the release of the "Formation" music video, the *Black is King* visual album, *Beychella*, and her song "Be Alive" for the movie *King Richard*.

Critics within the Black community and within the BeyHive have pointed towards a sort of performativity that underlies some of these works. Behind this critique of performativity is her "disconnect" from "true Blackness" due to her immense wealth making her and her husband, billionaire Jay-Z, poster-children for Black capitalism and as such inadvertently spreading the myth that Black failure is due to one's dedication rather than systemic pressures. Key moments that have been cited as performative/misinformed include her collaboration with the Tiffany jewelry brand wherein she wore a "blood" diamond that was sourced from a colonial mine in Kimberley, South Africa, in 1877; the release of *Black is King* and its postcolonial themes that position Africa as a spiritual fantasy land; and more recently, her controversial Buffalo Soldiers tee that intended to honor the historical role that Black male soldiers had in the west on the *Cowboy Carter* tour. On the back of the tee was a questionable quote: "Their antagonists were the enemies of peace, order, and settlement: warring Indians, bandits, cattle thieves, murderous gunmen, bootleggers, trespassers, and Mexican revolutionaries." These instances and the criticisms that follow them are valid and point toward a need for more research, awareness, and a firmer stance on the beliefs that one profits from. These divergent opinions are important and attest to the fact that the Black community is not a monolith incapable of voicing their concerns, thoughts, and feelings concerning Beyoncé's actions.

All these criticisms aside, the "ifs" and "shoulds" still linger in the air. At this point in time where histories are actively facing erasure, many are beginning to question how "moral" it is to sing the national anthem and wave the American flag. Is now the time to highlight the contributions of Black people, past and present, in a genre whose culture is so tied to actively perpetuating anti-Blackness? Can Beyoncé herself, as someone removed from the country lifestyle and the societal negative status of Blackness by her immense wealth, be the one to reclaim pro-American music? Is Beyoncé just turning a cultural trauma into a commodity? These are all loaded questions that, I argue, bring us further and further away from the point as there are no "right" answers or conclusions to be found.

Yes, Beyoncé's position as a near-billionaire rightfully begets this level of questioning behind her true intentions. And, yes, there is always some level of commodification when discussing Blackness in art, but to write off *Cowboy Carter* because of ill timing is reductive. It is a fact that there are Black people in country music and that Beyoncé does highlight their presence—as seen by her inclusion of Tanner Adell, Brittney Spencer, Tiera Kennedy, Reyna Roberts, Shaboozey, and Willie Jones on the album. There are elements that overly romanticize the Americana aesthetic, yes, but to ignore the emphasis placed on remembering one's roots in spaces that pretend as if the roots were never there is simplifying Beyoncé's intentions. Debating whether or not country is a space worth reclaiming is understandable, but I find that continuing to take up space does more harm than good in the long run. These small forms of protest, disregarding the complex motives behind them, I believe, get us closer to understanding America's problem and closer to viewing *Cowboy Carter* as traditional genre lines' requiem.

Snapshots

Words by Zahira Branch
Art by Marie Auguste



Gone

Each step sent an empty echo throughout the house. Voices are still trapped in the ceilings, and smells are still imprisoned in the countertops. She doesn't understand why there is something comforting about the structure in its current form. Chipped wood and faded color bring back memories long forgotten. She turns a corner and runs into her little brother chasing her upstairs while her parents are cooking for the holiday. The image fades. The pool in the backyard, now emptied and rusted, is better that way. The names of the members of the house remain etched into the living room doorframe. She scratches out each name, including her own, as red liquid slides down her arm, and it becomes harder to continue. Stairs barely standing contain the step of each person. She sits on the stairs to be closer to them, and her fingers remain wet with guilt from the erasure of names. The house was demolished; set for demolition just as she entered. As it went, so did she. The house is no more, and all of its occupants are no more.

Locked

He cried. He cried uncontrollably. Every attempt to stop resulted in more tears. He cried at work, so he was sent home. He cried while sitting in the park, so much that he scared the adults, but not the children. He cried at night. He cried in the morning. He cried and cried and cried some more. The doctors told him he was dehydrated, and he continued to cry. He didn't want to cry; in fact, he had never cried before. While he was looking in the mirror, she took his hand and told him to breathe. For the first time in a long time, he was no longer crying.

Warmth

Rays of sunlight are reaching out to sprinkle warmth on my face, but they miss me. The wind ruffles through my shirt and tries to take me with it. I could reach out and touch the birds if I wanted to. Quiet is hard to find, but up here it exists in excess. Feelings usually pour out of me when I am near this building. Instead, everything is hollow. I want to feel something and fill the space. I suspect if I could feel something, I would change my plans. I have been still for a while, and this plan changes that. I won't let the sunlight miss me again. This time, I will reach out and grab it; this time, I will feel the warmth, but someone else will feel my coldness.

Brown v. Harvard: Is Football Really the Main Event?

Words by Rashaun Bertrand
Art by Jessie Owusu



The notorious Brown-Harvard football game has been hallmarked as one of the most contentious yet important social events for Brown students. Whether it's your first or last year on campus, the days before the game are filled with anticipation, anxiety, and ignoring the schedule you finalized on Google Calendar. When the game is announced to be occurring at Harvard Stadium, student excitement is markedly different from when it's happening in our own backyard. The transitory experience of the train ride to Boston alongside fellow Brown students dressed in school colors becomes an unforgettable one. However, this heightened sense of engagement isn't only due to the popularity of American football. Across campus, students are particularly interested in finding events held before, after, or even during the game's runtime. After a long summer away from the Brown friendships you cultivate, it seems only natural to explore every opportunity to make up for lost time. The diverse Black community at Brown has consistently created spaces on campus that inspire new bonds to form, with the festivities and unique approach they had towards the football game proving to be no different.

Although the outcome of the 2025 game was undoubtedly quite disappointing, the Black community at Brown turned this negative into a Pinterest-worthy photo opportunity. These pictures were intended not to feature the shortcomings of the football team, but rather to showcase the creativity of Black people—more notably, Black women on campus. The vast array of DIY t-shirt dresses, hairstyles, and cowboy boots was a sight to behold, both in person and online. In every group photo, there's undeniable joy and authentic self-expression that radiates from each person present. "Sometimes, taking the photo [with your friends] becomes the main event," says Eugenia Bamfo, a third-year student reflecting on the various pictures she took throughout the day. Although it's impossible to properly capture the nuanced emotions of a day as hectic as Harvard-Brown through social media, simply seeing moments like these can serve to remind Black students that they aren't alone and that community exists.

The Melanin Mixer provided an atmosphere unique from the traditional tailgate, which bridges the general student bodies at Brown and Harvard. The event's environment catered to Black culture and set the tone for Black joy to thrive.

For the average Black student at Brown, the mixer served as a necessary precursor to the already jam-packed day, providing a sense of comfort and community. While the tailgate can definitely provide some form of entertainment, day parties like the Melanin Mixer facilitate an alternative method of socialization. "It was a necessary space [for us to have]," garnering a strong turnout for Black students craving familiar activities like line dancing, which helps blend culture with the college experience. Black students at Brown, in many ways, open the door for meaningful connections and memories through intentional event planning. This effort provides distinct outlets for Black joy across campus, making social gatherings like Harvard-Brown a more individualized experience for the Black community. When a day is fully stacked with highly anticipated mixers and after-parties, the actual football game becomes increasingly less relevant. Upon recalling the events of Harvard-Brown in Boston, the highs and lows of the day tend to highlight aspects unrelated to sports. Finding a good function at Brown can sometimes be a monotonous endeavor, with an even more underwhelming outcome. As the 2025 game day approached, the pressure on the Boston party scene seemed to grow as students' desire for a well-balanced party atmosphere increased throughout the semester. One highly anticipated Black event was a collaboration between the Caribbean student groups at Brown and Harvard. When discussing plans for the red-letter day, the party became an integral part of the conversation. Despite the general excitement, the event, which was stationed in Harvard's campus center, turned out to be quite underwhelming for many Black students at Brown. Major complaints ranged from bad setlists to disjointed dance circle efforts, turning this hot-topic event into a forgettable one. "If [the event hosts] aren't leaving their post to bump to the party music, why should I?" says S'Naya Hightower, an attendee of the Caribbean student event. Still, the party success of a Black organization may not be a difficult problem to solve; it just may require a more receptive DJ and better setlist curation.

The high turnout levels in events hosted by Black students and conversations reflecting Harvard-Brown day suggest that there is something more meaningful to look forward to than just football. Although some party aspects definitely need some improvement, they also allow Black students to engage with one another, offering positive memories to look back at fondly. During a time when authority is calling Black presence and individuality into question through government mandates, the events made for us by our community are more necessary than ever. Even if the all-Black function has a DJ who is undeniably lost in the sauce, experiencing events together as one unit makes for a memory far more special than anything a disappointing football game can provide.

Buoy/Anchor

Words by Riki Doumbia
Art by Jessie Owusu

Buoy

The soul-crushing force of surging water pressure. When the words spill out, I shut my mouth for fear of drowning others. I don't think they can float in what I say. The woes are too thick to swim through. As tears flow, I want the ocean to be the sole salty water that coats my skin. And as the waves fold in and come for me, I think I have thrown a lifesaver to others when, actually, I have tossed out my only lifeline.

I realize there, lying deadly still in the water, that I have made a martyr out of an avoidable drowning.

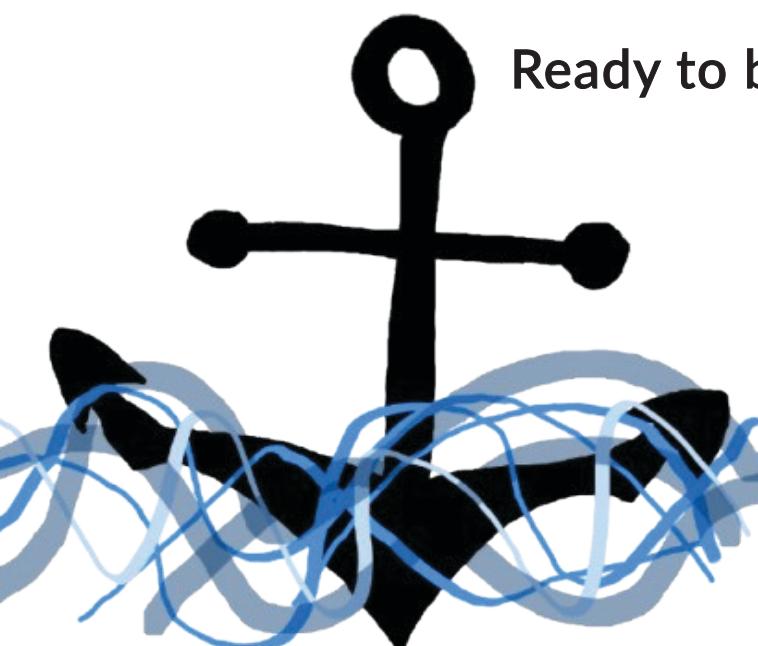
Floating out on the open water.

Anchor

Finding myself ready to drift off and struggling to set roots in the loose ocean floor, I comb the sand for answers—for a foundation. But those may be treasures hidden deep below where I am willing to dive—or sink. Diving. Sinking. What draws the difference if not a line in the sand? A tattered sail fighting to keep winds in its folds, and a broken compass spinning endlessly to locate direction. Beside the deck and outside of my hands lies what stops currents and slows winds. Below deck, there are chains made up of links that band together. Forged connections.

Ready to be deployed when needed most to place its grounding weight to sand.

Stable and strong. Supportive at sea.



Stay afloat, my loves <3

A Lesson From History

Words by Sonam Shulman
Art by Marie Auguste

Today, we face existential struggles. From assaults on democracy to systemic racism, they are urgent and require unified movements for justice. Yet, is this moment in the United States unprecedented or even surprising?

Black history in the United States has always been one of struggle. Any small step towards racial equality in the country has brought equally committed counterforces. Takeschooldesegregation. Six-year-old Ruby Bridges marched to the shouts of an angry white horde as she joined all-white William Frantz Elementary School in 1960 (Kelly et al., 2). No part of school desegregation was easy or achieved without resistance. It did, however, make a world of difference for Black students and their educational, career and life outcomes (Johnson, 2). But, this is not the end of the story.

As UC Berkeley economist and professor Rucker Johnson highlights, school desegregation in the U.S. has regressed since the peak of integration in the late 1980s. For example, only 23.2% of Black students in the South attended majority-white schools in the 2010s (down from 43.5% in 1988) (Breslow et al., 1). Instead, the proportion of Black or Hispanic students in “intensely segregated schools” (meaning over 90% of the students are minorities) has been rising since the 1990s. (Orfield et al., 3). Opportunities for Black students in higher-education have similarly come under attack by the Trump administration (Moore, 2).



How do we persist in the face of these attacks? The history of desegregation shows us that the fight for justice is not steady or without setbacks. As Black Americans, we have grappled for centuries with a system steeped in our oppression. We face a bipartisan system that neglects our livelihoods at best and aggressively attacks us at worst. Yet, these struggles are not new. History has shown that those in power will never negotiate in good faith with those they are trying to oppress. As Frederick Douglass observed, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Power concedes nothing without a demand...It never did, and it never will” (Douglass, 1857). Indeed, rather than feel demoralized in this dark moment, we must keep fighting for justice despite the setbacks, despite rabid attacks from the status quo. For through community, through coalitions, through unity, we will prevail.

Untitled

Words by Rohey Jasseh
Art by Marie Auguste

I often feel myself falling to gravity. Like water, my body, mind, spirit fall into spaces left open. In an attempt to ground myself, I have tried to deliberately feel with the moment without being lost to it or misshapen from the experience. This world is always moving, it grabs and pulls at us until our memories are no longer ours, until we always feel so little from nothing. The short poems below were written quickly, with the wind and the world. They detail my immediate responses to the world I inhabit, they are archives of my mind, of my making. In reading these, I invite you to work with me in this process. Feel with me.

– 09/11/25
breathe deeply with me

**hold each part of yourself sacredly
each picked nail**

Or
plucked eyebrow hair
remains a whisper of
something you-like
not yet gone but still
arriving
here

- 08/26/25

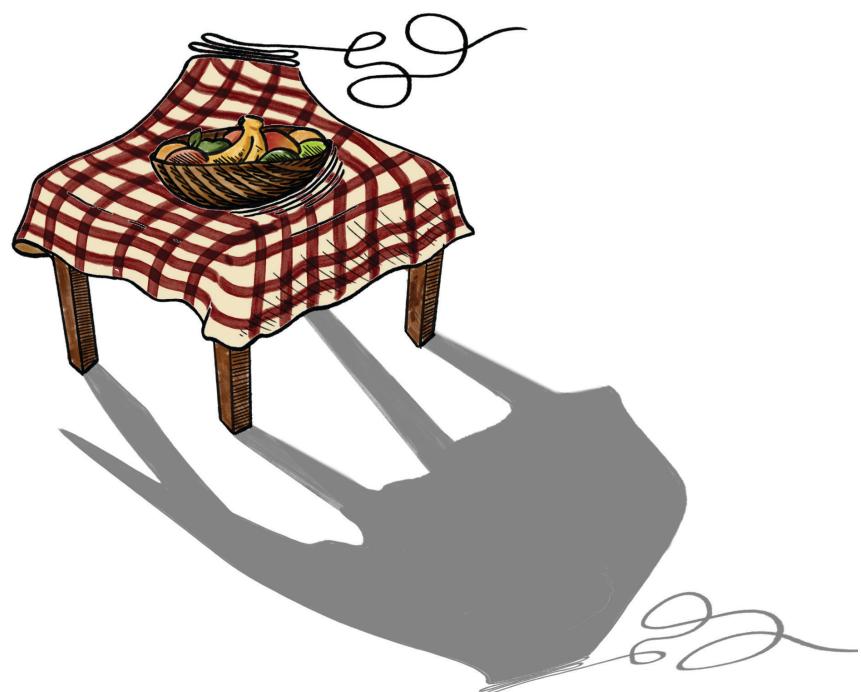
Move
Move, move
with or
against
Move
as i Move

water glides
through my fingers
curled over wrinkles
over time
it bleeds
and bleeds

Moving
Moving, Moving
through or on
now

what stays here
nestled in the ground
out of sight
from the world
this, becomes a home
to lure me back

i walk, dreaming Movement memory



my homeland tastes
bitter on my tongue
an excess of what i never wanted
nor needed
too hot. too cold

it does not feel like mine
it does not feel like home

wild, long, & winding
taught, dead, & twisting,
we chain
chain anything we can see,
we can't hear

This land
I do not own
But I can feel, deeply,
I can feel

my heart beat life into this home
drums swallow my eyes as they dream
burn my feet as they wander
hold me tightly to these walls
pull me back
here

The Place of Race in Higher Education

In the opening weeks of the semester, amidst piling cardboard boxes from all locales and giddy first-years wrapping up NSO, the Brown Daily Herald's highly anticipated demographics poll hit Brown student inboxes with remarkable velocity. After a sharp drop in the percentage of Black students in Brown's Class of 2028, 2029 rebounded significantly, increasing from 7.7 percent to 12.0 percent year-to-year. Even if short of the Class of 2027's 13.1 percent, the change has Brown's Black community buzzing.

Brown has yet to drop the official numbers, but the year-to-year increase is encouraging for first-years and returning students alike. For MPC Peer Counselor Isaiah Mars, '26, the rise has been a source of joy; compared to one year prior, the Class of 2029 has represented "a complete 180 turnaround." Even through the early weeks of the semester, "[campus] has definitely felt a lot of energy from the vibrancy of the Black and wider POC community."

Among first-years, Brown has been viewed as an especially attractive school compared to institutions with similar academic reputation, in large part due to the various Black organizations and affinity groups on campus. Take Jainisa Baudin, '29, for whom Brown presented a unique opportunity: "Seeing groups like the Black Student Union and SOCA and programs like TWTP through Instagram played a huge part in my decision, especially compared to other Ivy League schools and T20s that did not offer as many Black resources."

To students like myself, Brown's greatest strength comes from its ability to draw from diverse perspectives and experiences. This is seen in the interdisciplinary opportunity offered by the Open Curriculum, the dialogue across identities offered through programs like TWTP, and the diverse range of students matriculating at Brown each fall.

Lately, however, that range of perspectives has been under attack from many angles, most significantly from the federal government. In 2023, the Supreme Court ruled against affirmative action, effectively outlawing the consideration of race when reviewing undergraduate applications. This singular decision had cascading impacts on POC representation, evident in the percentage of Black students at Brown being nearly cut in half one year later. With the rise of the Trump administration, Brown has been targeted multiple times, from funding freezes to federal agreements to even the most recent invitation to sign a "compact" with the president.

All of these actions attack a fundamental idea about Brown's identity. Evidently, our administration believes it can retain critical funding while avoiding sacrificing the values that lie at the core of our university. However, Brown, in its current iteration, stands on a foundation irrevocably linked to diversity and diverse voices.

Brown loves to talk about the history of TWTP and the almost mythical story behind the establishment of the open curriculum. A lesser-known fact is that both programs were founded within the same academic year. The 1968 Walkout, conducted by Black students who campaigned for the creation of TWTP, took place on December 5, 1968, and the faculty vote that laid the groundwork for the open curriculum occurred in May of 1969. It's important not to conflate the two different causes, but the spirit that drove both of them is essentially the same.

In the 1960s, Brown made a commitment to serve students. That service is found in the opportunity for individuation that the open curriculum provides just as much as is found in the vibrant communities and affinity groups across Brown. To discredit or neglect one aspect of that service is to fail the entire mission. The open curriculum provides numerous benefits, but if Brown is afraid of promoting "unlawful DEI goals" (See July 30th agreement) to allow for spaces where academic excellence can translate into meaningful social change, what is it really

worth? The same sentiment applies to admissions. If Brown will not consider "personal statements, diversity narratives, or any applicant reference to racial identity" in its admissions, then how will students acquire the experience necessary for drawing out unique paths of study from the open curriculum? Making the most of a Brown education requires a certain degree of individuality. If Brown only caters to the people with the best test scores or the most resources available to them in high school, our campus will begin to look a lot less colorful.

"The second that Brown stops acknowledging diverse voices and gives in to federal policies, Brown's culture as a whole will change," says Baudin '29. "If you take out the aspect of diversity, you don't have Brown University anymore."

Despite the losses felt in higher education and at Brown in the last few years, there is a way forward. Black voices have championed progress for years at Brown, and have a role to play in resisting the backslide the federal government is trying to impose. Black students led the 1968 Walkout,

and played important roles in the 1987 Divestment protests, leading to partial divestment from apartheid South Africa. They were on the frontlines of the 1992 University Hall Takeover, leading to need-blind admissions practices. Regardless of the cause, we have a responsibility to fight for equity and freedom.

To discredit or neglect one aspect of that service is to fail the entire mission.

"Activism and reform are rooted in the POC community at Brown," Mars, president of Beta Omega Chi and Black Men United, declares. "They manifest differently for different people, whether through leadership roles, documenting history, or voicing support," but they are an integral and important part of every POC's experience at Brown nonetheless. The world's eyes are on Brown, and its Black community, now more than ever, should be proud and prominent in the face of injustice.

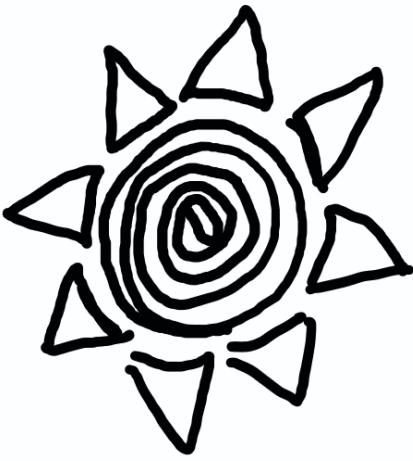
Words by Izu Obialo
Art by Jessie Owusu



We Are Still Here!

Words by Natalie Payne

The histories of islands like Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket serve as a reminder of the importance of remembering and celebrating the heritage and contributions of those before us, while working to keep their legacies alive.



At the end of August, right before the semester started, I had the opportunity to take a day trip to Martha's Vineyard (MV). The visit marked my first official time on the island, though I was no stranger to its unique and multifaceted history as a safe haven for many African Americans. As a kid, my mother always talked about her college experiences visiting the island with friends who summered there. Though my trip was toward the end of August, after the popular festivities of the African American Film Festival (AAFF), I was still excited to make

my own memories with the island.

That day, my friend and I hopped on the Commuter Rail to journey to Boston's South Station, where we would catch our Peter Pan bus to Woods Hole, a village on Cape Cod. Since our bus to Woods Hole was stuck in traffic, we found ourselves making a run for it to make our desired ferry to Oaks Bluffs, the town most closely tied to MV's historic African American community. Bustling with anticipation, we took in the crisp ocean air on our journey across the sea, arriving some 45 minutes later to the island. Upon disembarking from the ferry, I couldn't help but notice how the water sparkled like a bed of blue jewels, while the sun beamed brightly from above. Taking in all the natural beauty, we were ready to make the most of the six hours we had on the island.

Our first stop was Biscuits, a well-known Black-owned restaurant located in the heart of Oaks Bluffs. Much to our delight, we were seated in front of a "Do The Right Thing: 35th Anniversary" banner signed by Spike Lee. After some good food and new digi photos for keepsake, our next stop was the famous Circuit Ave. Strolling up and down the notorious street, we took in the beautiful artwork and goods located along the long span of storefronts. I found myself especially enamored by the clothing and art collections available in the Island Life Studio, owned by fifth-generation islander Nya Clarke. Window shopping until we couldn't anymore, we made our way to Inkwell Beach. Vibrant scenes displayed in the coming-of-age classic The Inkwell and the countless videos on my TikTok "for you page" played out in front of my eyes. The island was still bustling with Black families and friend groups of all ages: shopping, strolling down the streets, and hanging out at the beach. By the time we were back on the ferry returning to Woods Hole, I was already planning my Fourth of July trip to the Vineyard, another popular time to visit outside of the AAFF, an annual acclaimed festival celebrating Black excellence in film.

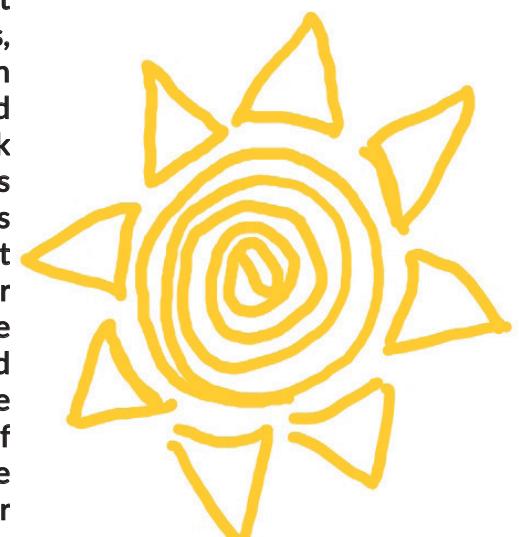
Almost two months later, I took a trip to Nantucket with some friends, another island located right off of Cape Cod. This trip took a bit longer, with the ferry taking a little over two hours from Hyannis, Massachusetts, another city on Cape Cod. We were pleasantly surprised to find the weather was still relatively warm and sunny, despite the recent decline in temperatures. We first tried Black-Eyed Susan's, a popular restaurant on the island, for a late brunch. The rest of the day was spent exploring, much like my adventure to Oaks Bluffs. We walked around Downtown

Nantucket, window shopping and taking in views along the Nantucket Harbor. My favorite part of the trip was our visit to the historic Sankaty Head Lighthouse on the other side of the island where we also walked the scenic 'Sconset Bluff Walk. Being that it was my first time seeing a lighthouse up close, it was the perfect background for a photo op. The beautiful baby blue sky complemented the lighthouse's striped structure. Exhausted, we decided to end our grand tour with some homemade ice cream from the very popular Juice Bar before hopping back on the ferry.

Throughout our excursion, we were constantly greeted with smiles and warm hellos by every person we came across, not much unlike my experience at the Vineyard. However, unlike at Martha's Vineyard, I had noticed only a handful of other Black people among the crowds. Not too familiar with Nantucket's history, and wary of the timing of my two island visits, I was hesitant to make any assumptions about the reasons behind the noticeable shift in the Black population.

However, as I researched the history of Nantucket, I found more that suggested a long chronology of African Americans on the island. According to research done by Jared Muehlbauer, after the abolition of slavery and during the boom of the whaling industry between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, many African Americans had the freedom and resources to purchase property for themselves. This resulted in a thriving community, known as New Guinea, which would come to include spaces like the African Meeting House, where residents hosted general gatherings, church services, and school sessions. While I was able to find more information about the community's residents during this time period, less information became available regarding the time period after the height of New Guinea. Research from Laura Paisley and others suggest that the New Guinea community declined in response to the dwindling whaling industry and the onset of summer tourism.

As I consider Nantucket's history, I find myself encouraged by changemakers such as Captain Absalom Boston, the first Black captain of a whaling voyage, who would become a leader in the community's continued fight for racial equality. Reflecting on the resilience of residents of the island to obtain land and flourish in community despite obstacles of prejudice and racial discrimination, I am continually inspired in the face of the challenges experienced by African Americans today. While Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard face different demographic changes, their stories remain united by the thread of collective Black resistance. The histories of islands like Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket serve as a reminder of the importance of remembering and celebrating the heritage and contributions of those before us, while working to keep their legacies alive.



Art by Jessie Owusu

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