

# The Black Star Journal



The Orbit Issue  
Issue #11  
April 30, 2025

## From Us To You

As the 2024-2025 academic year comes to a close, our leadership has spent time reflecting on the *Black Star Journal's* growth as a collective of individuals committed to the distribution of Black student voice. The BSJ has always been a space to reflect on the present, push us to acknowledge our past, and dream about the future. But with this issue, we wanted to do something different—we wanted to listen.

This print is special because it includes more than just our staff's voices—it includes yours. During this year's annual Black Appreciation Dinner (B.A.D.), we opened up the *Journal's* pages to the Brown community through reflective open-ended prompts that combined to form the B.A.D. Collective Zine portion of this issue. Each thought we received was powerful, beautiful, and brutally honest, highlighting the magnitude of your contribution to our 11th volume. We are so grateful to everyone who shared a piece of themselves with us.

With the semester ending, we don't know exactly what lies ahead, but we do know that rest is productive. Taking time for yourself, whether it's to heal or simply to be, is not only valid; it's necessary.

Wherever this season takes you, may you carry with you the reminder that your story matters, your presence is powerful, and we are so glad you are here.

From us to you,

Destiny and Sarah

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Destiny Birn".

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Shabazz".

# Blossoms: a collection of poems

Words by Nelsa Tiemtoré

## Growing Up

we, in constant bloom,  
dream up even bigger dreams  
seeds planted in love

## Dreaming of Daylilies

Practically indestructible, daylilies (*Hemerocallis spp.*) will flower profusely... (Better Home and Gardens)

if i could be flower, i would want to be a peaceful daylily  
my roots ever resistant to the tumultuous shifts in nature,  
the ruptures and erosions that come with time and change  
and the inevitable destruction that comes with drought  
i'd want to know that through it all, i'd learn to be still  
to take it all in, and to stand tall, withstanding it all

daylilies can bloom in practically any sunny spot,  
they find the light in every situation and dimension  
and are positively always taking up and holding space  
they command authority, but also bring vivacious joy

like daylilies, i come in a wide range of colors and bicolors  
i am consistently metamorphosing and evolving  
and as i continue to blossom as a person  
i am ever excited for the next bud and the next season  
because i know i can weather the storm  
and still come out smiling

## Roots

rooted in love, my ancestors give me wings  
to carry me higher than the human eye can see  
the only thing that remains is the top of a tree  
and its roots so thick and strong, and the trunk so long  
that it could never be cut down—this foundation  
its branches hold me fast and at last, i sit in the tree and laugh

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# The Girl Next Door

Words by Olivia Bendich  
Art by El Boveda

Girlhood has never been mine. Despite braces and bleeding and training bras, I became a woman the moment I was born. My body has always been a threat. My mother says that even at five years old, I had begun to develop curves. It is not necessarily my breasts or my stomach that mark me as dangerous, but rather my status as a Black woman. I cannot escape my sexuality. My fingers themselves are guilty, rendering indelible impressions along the contours of my skin, next to his and hers and theirs. It is not just hands that stain but words and eyes, too. Violence extends far beyond touch: it's in the accusation of my tone as too aggressive, the incessant questioning of my identity, the staring and the leering and ogling and the need

to know. So long as I am in this body, I can never access the unassuming, wholesome, cute, sweetness of the girl next door. She is everything I am not. She is my antithesis. She is who I become measured against, an unattainable, inaccessible standard.

Somehow, it is her excess of normalcy and plainness that allure. It is her inability to seduce that tempts, her assumed chastity that provokes desire. Though there is very little literature about the girl next door trope, those three words immediately conjure up a series of images. They are most likely all of a suburban type, middle class, young white woman or girl. Perhaps a specific character comes to mind, but whether she is faceless or nameless, she is surely and undoubtedly white. Black women have been effectively excluded from belonging to this category for centuries. The notion that "Blacks," especially Black women, possess and exude an overabundance of sexual desire predates the institution of slavery in the United States. These fallacies of insatiable sexual appetites were

used to justify the rape of enslaved women by their owners. The portrayal of Black women and girls as sexually promiscuous "Jezebels" continued throughout the 20th century and remains prominent in contemporary media. Memorabilia from the 1900s often portrays Black women and girls as highly sexualized, with large breasts and buttocks and full beckoning lips. The adjectives associated with this stereotype are singular and destructive in their focus: seductive, alluring, exotic, beguiling, tempting, and lewd. These words are never put near or against white women. They are safe, both as a romantic ideal and from the toxicity of a eurocentric, westernized standard that male desire valorizes.



Far too many of my peers hope to emulate the girl next door. This craving is not personal, nor individual, nor unique. It caters directly to a sense of validation secured solely through male attention and approval. Danger manifests itself within and among these desires, but the only perceived danger remains my body, my Blackness, my womanhood, and my sexuality. Even if I choose the bedroom that faces the street and leave my curtains open, I will have

nothing but my wants and needs. I cannot get rid of my breasts or my hips or my mouth. I do not know how to be quieter, more approachable, less sexy, less inviting, less me. The girl next door is a real person. She may be your neighbor, or three houses down, or across the road. It is not her existence that I vilify but rather the way we endorse her whiteness or inaccessibility to non-whiteness. It is the fault of our media and literature, and the corruption of what we consume, that we must condemn. I may only have my womanhood, but I shouldn't be left to hold this body with only my own softness.

# Finding a Sense of Self

Words by Mara Durán-Clark  
Art by Rita Beyene

I don't fully know who I am yet. I try on identities like pieces of clothing—this one is too tight, this one doesn't hug my hips quite right. Yet, while I struggle to define myself, everyone around me seems to have a set idea of who I ought to be.

Whenever I visit my grandpa, the conversations are familiar. He reminds me to save money, study hard, and prioritize family. Then, he tells me stories from the past—what it was like living under the rule of Trujillo and the things he sacrificed to get our family to the States. He worked tirelessly to get us here and give me access to all of the opportunities that were once out of his reach. In his eyes, that struggle comes with a clear expectation. Before the visit ends, he always gets serious, reminding me of who I'm meant to be. "And remember," he tells me for the hundredth time, "Don't be a teacher, or a nurse, or anything silly like that. Be a doctor or a psychiatrist like your father. That will make it all worthwhile."

"Of course, Papi," I assure him. "I'll make you proud." I don't tell him that for most of my life, I wanted to be a teacher. But that version of me feels far away now. My dreams morph into his dreams as I work to build myself the life that he always dreamed of but could never attain.

When I was younger, I used to tell my younger sisters what I wanted my life to look like when I grew up. I relayed the vision of my beautiful stone cottage in the woods with intricate patterns of green vines tracing through the grout. I told them that I would be a kindergarten teacher and that my husband would be a wonderfully talented writer. My dreams were heavily influenced by the old novels I so greatly enjoyed, but to this day, when I mention plans for anything else, they tease me, "But what about the cottage?"

I always shrug and say, "Well, my dreams are changing." They never seem convinced, seeing me as unchanged from the person I was ten years ago.

When I got to Brown, I expected self-discovery to come naturally. Here, away from home, I thought I'd finally be free to define myself on my own terms. Yet, I still find myself constantly contorting to fit the expectations of the people around me. Depending on the people I'm with, I decide whether I should be more outspoken or more quiet, funnier or more reserved. Having spent so much of my life trying to meet the expectations of others, I quickly realized that I haven't fully determined who I am outside of the perception of the people who surround me. My sense of self is still under construction, so I shift easily between personalities, turning character traits up and down like temperature settings, hoping that somewhere along the way, I'll find one that truly feels like me.

And, of course, just because I now reside on Brown's campus doesn't mean that the voices of my family have disappeared. Every day, I receive phone calls from each member of my family telling me about their hopes for my future. I'm desperate to make them proud, to show them that all of their sacrifices and hard work have been worth it. So, I listen. I take their dreams and try to mold them into my own. I avoid staying out late, work tirelessly to get the best grades, and try to set myself up for a promising future. But sometimes, I wonder—who would I be if the only voice inside my head were my own? Would my dreams be any different?

I've come to understand that I put more weight in the voices of others than my own. Among the various narratives in my head, mine is shoved in the back, hoping to one day be set free. But in moments of solitude, I begin to hear it. I've learned to love that time alone, slowly finding who I am outside of the perception of others. I write and write and write; I sing, I draw. I attempt to find myself within myself. I try to stop looking for myself in my relationships with others, instead searching for what truly makes me me.

More than anything, I sit and think.

I spend hours just lying down, letting my brain wander. I question everything—what is the purest form of love? What does it mean to be truly at peace? Which stories have shaped me, and which am I still writing? These solitary explorations are the beginning of my journey with myself. Rather than defining who I am through relationships or expectations, I've started to look inward. I finally allow myself the space to explore, hoping that this exploration and expression will teach me a little bit more about myself, day by day.



# I'm looking for Mr. Write

Words by Favour Akpokiere

Someone whose words flow like honey,  
the confidence in his voice  
making me get butterflies in my tummy.  
He won't just text—he'll compose.  
No "wyd?", no "gn", just prose that flows.  
Each word a promise, each line a vow,  
his love letters frozen in time somehow.  
He erases my insecurities and edits my doubts,  
exclaims his love, without needing to shout.  
Mr. Write, always knowing what to say,  
like a prince in a storybook saving the day.

Be my knight in shining armor  
in exchange for a true love's kiss,  
just as long as you can promise me this:

Write my name on your heart, Mr. Write.  
Hold on and never let go,  
so that our love can be a poem  
for the whole world to know.

I want our love to last forever  
not just written with this paper and pen,  
but a fantasy, retold over and over again.

If you're reading this  
and you think it true...  
...oh, my dearest Mr. Write,  
I'm here waiting for you.

- xoxo Favour

# *Untouched*

Words by Destiny Kristina  
Art by Rokia Whitehouse

so bored  
i find you  
on walls  
prints erased  
sitting on the floor wishing  
for something better

we are  
less and more  
i call you  
to answer

so scared  
they say that  
it will fade with time  
from make of want or need

not you  
i fear the way shadows walk  
they whisper on the wall of brick  
i sit upon the ledge

know how  
the moon turned around  
for privacy  
the sun closed its eyes and dimmed its light

and in the shadows  
on the brick  
near the ledge  
lay the truth

Will my soul fly  
To the past  
as the future?

Through the door of no return  
Where lavenders bloom  
And ghosts dance

Neon weeds move way  
And wash  
Crushed berries glowing blue like moons



# Don't Sit Too Close

Words by Sienna Amenumeay

We have all been told by our parents, "Don't sit too close to the TV" because our eyes will get hurt. We will not gain anything useful from the shows we stare at but a pair of glasses.

But, I never listened to my parents and in my opinion, I gained two things: glasses and a love for television (if you ask me, my bad eyes are genetic). For as long as I can remember, television has played an integral role in my life. I have always been fascinated by television shows and films that have characters and storylines that resemble myself and the people in my life. Growing up, I watched shows like *True Jackson, Codename: Kids Next Door*, and *Girlfriends*. Whether they were age-appropriate or not, on the screen I saw characters that looked like me. Though at the time I was not able to recognize how important this representation meant, I remember feeling seen. Soon after, I became aware of shows that didn't feature Black women and people. These shows exposed me to different views of beauty and the roles I could occupy in the world as a Black woman. Often, beauty is centered around Whiteness in the Western world. However, the media I consumed, for once, centered on Blackness as beauty. Shows like *Girlfriends* showed me how Black women could have very important jobs, interesting careers, and a great education. It didn't matter if I was being told differently by the rest of society. On my television, I saw Black women excel and I believed I could, too.

But the power of television was a double-edged sword. The same TV that was able to give me confidence by showing me the world in a positive light was also a place that was willing to caricaturize Black women. While media had such an important and positive influence on my life, I have also encountered media that showed negative representations of Black women. As I've grown older, I've been able to recognize negative depictions and tropes of Black women like the "Angry Black Woman" as depicted by Angela Bassett in *Waiting to Exhale*, the disposable girlfriend like Amber in *Invincible*, and the "Sassy Sidekick" like Leshawna in *Total Drama Island*. These tropes are all-too-common in media. Some people would say to ignore them; they aren't true, so they can't hurt you, but when you are dealing with so many stereotypes and tropes acted out on a screen, people start to believe it. It makes Black women feel like they aren't able to show the complexities of their emotions. These tropes pigeon-hole Black actresses and women in the real world into these stereotypes and make people believe that there are only a few ways to exist as a Black woman, which in and of itself is a distorted view of Blackness.

I also came to realize that there were problems behind the camera with the way that Black people are treated and the spaces we are allowed in. These depictions of Black women were so ingrained because of the lack of Black people behind the camera and the lack of Black people in writer's rooms and it hurt me. But it also inspired me to be a part of these spaces so that I could eventually be a part of projects and write pieces that allow Black people to exist and be represented as multifaceted people. To be more than just an angry face or a sassy comment. When I arrived on campus, it was really important to me to be a part of the student film organizations because of my love for the medium, but also because I felt like I have valuable insights and perspectives to share. As I grow and learn so much from the positions I've been able to be in, from an assistant director to now a producer, I hope that I am also creating a space that invites other Black people who are interested in media to feel like they're somewhere where they can join and help to craft creative narratives that are true and based in a reality to which they relate. So that they sit so close to the TV and become a part of it.



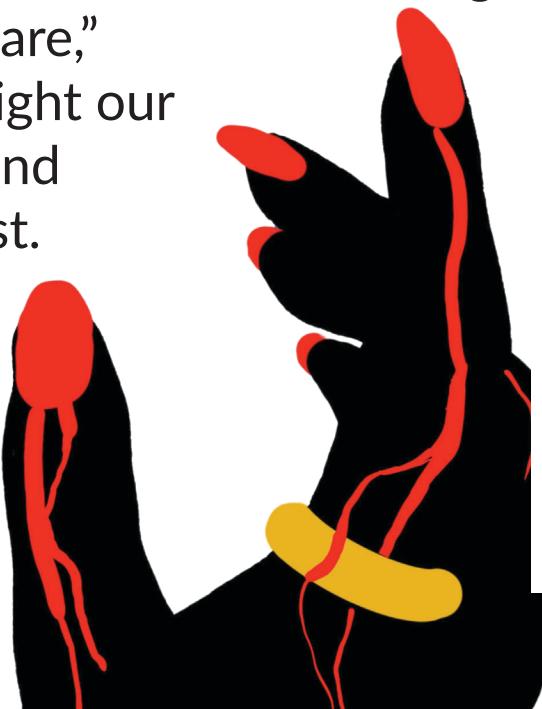
# B.A.D. Collective Zine

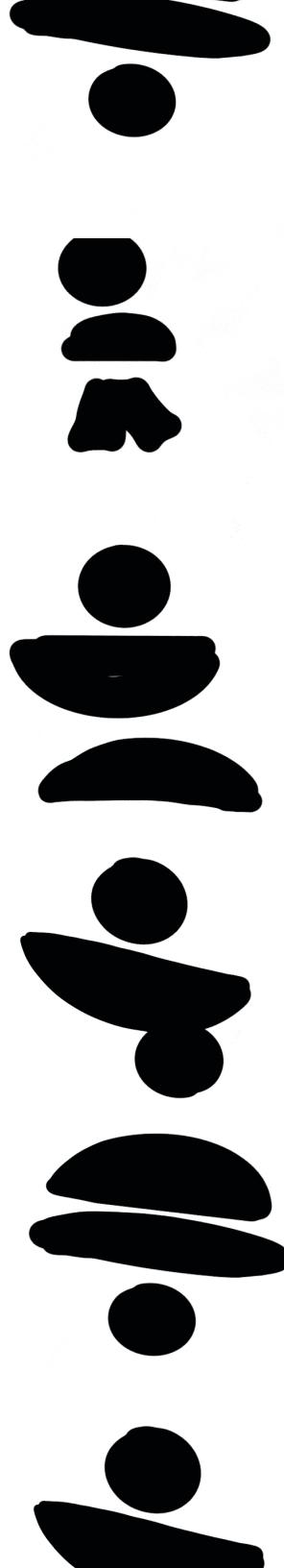
Art by Sarah Comlan

Rights, education, and civil liberties are being restricted across the country. From book bans to abortion laws to the rollback of DEI initiatives, efforts to control bodies and silence voices are escalating.

This zine is a space to reflect and uplift each other. Rooted in Ubuntu, meaning “I am because we are,” this zine will highlight our shared struggles and our efforts to resist.

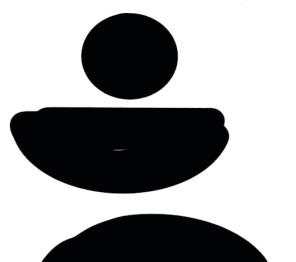
The next few pages are your responses.





People in my community who truly care.

I am hopeful for my life, the opportunities and allies I've been given. There will always be ups and down's



I feel hopeful when I see all the ways that the black community at Brown stands together. We manage to exhibit joy & resilience in the face of every obstacle. This gives me hope that no matter what the future holds we will stand together to face it.

Rachel Wilson



Hope, for me, comes from knowing that there's a community waiting on me, offering support, being there. This can be as simple as calling my family, knocking on my friend's door, or as extreme as having someone drive me to urgent care + feel hopeful knowing that this community is there for me, and I'll be there for it in the same way. No one was brought into this world to be completely alone, it's just not human nature!

Dane Forday

For me, it is always about staying up to date with current events and discussing with friends. It is important to be aware of

I spent time with my community and remember that we've been through worse and that we will overcome. It can be exhausting at times, so know that you don't have to carry the burden alone.

Lizzy D

Stay educated, speak out and surround myself with Black people.

Caleen Goldstein



I try to prioritize self-care which comes in the form of going to the gym, watching my favorite show when I have the time and spending time with friends. Also, I try not to talk about the things that are more depressing right now when I think dwelling on them will weigh on my spirit.

Dorothy

Definitely my spirituality and lessons from reflecting in life. Every experience both positive and negative I have important lessons I reflect on that keep me going and center me on my goals and what my overall mission is. So reflecting and being introspective as been a core part of my identity and experience at Brown as it really allows me to keep achieving everything I desire.

Arrissa

I do what I do for the next  
whose meager words may not mean more than  
their actions  
whose dreams may simply remain thoughts  
whose ideas wont enlighten our souls  
whose joy, surely too much to contain  
I do what I do for the next  
in hopes that I won't be the last

Rachel Adeyale

Love from friends & family  
music (especially insightful lyrics)  
endorphins that come from working out

My ancestors and the struggles they have been through. My family and their lovely spirits. Wonderful, exciting Black media that inspire me.

Commitment to ancestry &  
those who came before -  
The gift of life

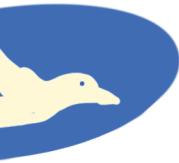
CJW RN



Art by El Boveda

Something that has kept me going in these trying times has been being in community. Being with one another is something ~~so~~ clear and precious to me. Even being in silence together is valuable. I hope to find community everywhere I go. It's what we need. It's how humans show love.

Nash Becker



I'm mostly concerned, especially about the lack of concern in the national scale.

Just hoping people learn from this to prevent this from happening again.

Allen Dufort



I feel scared. I feel like I was born in a unique period in time where there were systems in place to close the various inequality gaps in society. <sup>So</sup> to see somebody in a very high position of power not only ~~not~~ quickly dismantle those systems, but also work to disenfranchise already marginalized groups is nothing short of terrifying.

Morgan Omordia

Nervous, Scared, worried.

PB





"We must continue to succeed despite the country restricting us. This looks like uplifting another when they are down. providing each others with job opportunities. Introducing each other to people within the community. In this we will find strength. We need to stay educated because we will be the future leaders. and we that time comes we can no longer let history rhyme with the past."

Darshy Pont



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