

# The Black Star



# Journal



The Black History Issue

Issue #04

February 24, 2023

## From Us To You

It has been a year since The Black Star Journal's inaugural publication. As we celebrate this accomplishment through the works of art included in this edition, we want to honor those who have made this possible. This paper is an extension of a long line of Black students, professors, artists, community members, and writers who have occupied Brown for years before us. Because of previous Black publications and collectives on campus, this paper exists. Because of student activists on campus who fought for Black students at Brown, this paper exists. We strive to forge space in the university for Black students to comfortably express themselves through creativity.

In a year, our staff has grown tremendously, and we have welcomed new members that grow the BSJ's vibrant community. With this anniversary we celebrate the beginning of this publication while committing ourselves to continue and leave a legacy of joy, art, and culture as we grow.

As you read the Black History edition, please enjoy the art and words of our staff, and celebrate with us the beautiful history of Blackness that we aim to honor and commemorate.

From Us to You,

Enjoy

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# The Honset Tea: the looking glass

Words by Nelsa Tiemtoré  
Art by Praises Amponsah

*reader: "Looking back at these past few weeks, I can barely recognize myself... Why did I trust that person? Why do I constantly give my love to people that will not appreciate me... I feel pretty damn lost right now. How do I find myself again?"*

as I walk up and down the path of life  
the world shakes up and down  
side to side and back again  
thoughts pour out of my head rapidly  
with a certain strength and brutality  
a warpath marked by 3 opponents  
me, myself, and I  
which  
will  
win?

as I walk up and down the path of life  
the world shakes up and down  
side to side and back again  
a web of fears blocks my view  
who knows what's ahead, what's true  
grief rips through the foundations  
that serve as my aspirations  
and I fight the urge to let it all consume me

as I walk up and down the path of life  
the world shakes up and down  
side to side and back again  
confusion creeps closer and closer  
like a spider ready to trap its prey  
i can see it approaching clear as day

the reflection in the looking glass  
the person i see in the glass  
they do not look like me  
they're a zombie  
a slave to their fears

as I walk up and down the path of life  
the world shakes up and down  
side to side and back again  
i notice something obviously wrong  
in my life's janky keys and morbid song  
i have become the negative influences  
that i surround myself with  
individuality looks like a myth  
yet in the horizon sits a sign of hope  
a furnace of light and warmth kaleidoscope  
calling to restore my dreams and aspirations  
a force reminding me that good still exists  
that at all times i should still persist  
but then the light dims and darkness engulfs me

the reflection in the looking glass  
the person i see in the glass  
they do not look like me  
they're a zombie  
a slave to their fears

as I walk up and down the path of life  
the world shakes up and down  
side to side and back again  
it's in these moments that I realize  
the only reason I let people treat me this way is  
because i don't think I deserve any better  
it's time for me to gain a sense of security  
in knowing my worth and to surround myself  
with people who value me

why wait for someone to heal me  
when I was never broken to begin with?  
kendrick lamar said "I grieve different"  
and I feel that to my core  
i dream of so much more  
because...  
validation is simply a consolidation  
of irrelevant people's opinion  
and often it's their misinterpretation  
of myself that i allow to affect  
my perception of who i am

in the struggle to know what is real and what is not  
the looking glass aids me to reflect  
and in these moments  
i can decipher friend from foe  
know who is who  
and who i should actually trust

the reflection in the looking glass  
the person i see in the glass  
they start to look more like me everyday  
they're a work in progress  
slowly freeing themselves from the shackles of fears

as I walk up and down the path of life  
the world shakes up and down  
side to side and back again  
when the dust settles...  
i will know my true self.

dear reader,

*please protect your peace because by doing so, you protect your soul, your heart, your mind, and your autonomy. you deserve to be surrounded by people who care about you and will fight for you in the same ways that you will fight for them. do not settle for less than what you deserve and always remember that there are people rooting for you. remember your worth and do not be discouraged on your journey to achieving your dreams. There are times in which you will struggle, but struggle plays a role in your success...*

# The Black Star Journal

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# Black Nationalism to Orthodoxy: The Evolution of the NOI Brother

Words by Grace Ermias

In the late 1970s, Adam Abdul-Hakim\* was a college freshman faced with an important question about cake. Stan X, a friend of Adam's roommate, asked Adam: "Why is a white, bright sponge called angel's food cake, and its culinary opposite, a decadent chocolate sponge, called devil's food cake?"

Adam said he did not know. He had never considered the subtle oppression of desserts. Stan X, however, had. The nomenclature is no coincidence, Stan argued. In fact, it is a psychological tactic of the "white devils."

Adam knew Stan X was a member of the Nation of Islam (NOI), a religious and political organization. The NOI was founded in Detroit in 1930 by W.D. Farad, a peddler of mysterious racial and ethnic background. Influenced by the mythology of Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temple, Farad had declared that Black people were descended from the earliest humans—the Tribe of Shabazz, a lineage that was innately divine. White people, on the other hand, had been created by an evil scientist, Yakub, and were violent devils.

The teachings of the NOI identified responsibility for Black suffering: white people. After W.D. Farad's strange disappearance in 1934, Elijah Muhammad took over the organization. Alongside Malcolm X, Muhammad expanded the NOI beyond its original theology into a powerful movement for Black uplift. Through the NOI's diligent followers, like Stan X, this radical message reached Adam and Black Americans across the nation.

Waleed Muhammad joined the NOI in 1964, following his older brother into Boston's Temple Eleven. Waleed was a news compositor at The Providence Journal, arranging photos and text for the newspaper. He was the only Black person on staff. Working in the composing room one day, Waleed listened to a white colleague. The white man talked about hearing Malcolm X on the radio. Malcolm X had called white men "the devil." This white man turned to Waleed, a newly minted member of the NOI.

"He asked me if I agreed," Waleed remembers. "I said yes."



Eighteen-year-old Waleed, third from the left, with his family

Today, both Waleed and Adam are orthodox Muslims. The journeys of Waleed and Adam--through the racialized theology of NOI to the universal teachings of orthodox Islam--are uniquely Black and uniquely American. Although he longer believes "the white man is the devil," Waleed says the NOI spoke to something that no one else could, that no one else knew. "If it had come any other way to us than it did to us in this country," Waleed says, "we probably would not have accepted the religion. People coming from other countries wouldn't know what we came from."

Adam never joined the NOI. But after a charismatic Sunni Muslim named Khalid moved to Adam's

neighborhood, Adam began learning about orthodox Islam. Khalid's door was open to anyone curious about Islam. When asked about something he didn't know, Adam says, Khalid would report back a few days later with an earnest, considered response.

"It wasn't so hard to convince us that it was true," Waleed says about NOI theology. "We were catching so much hell."



Waleed at the Islamic Center of Rhode Island

Elected to the Boston School Committee in 1961, Louise Day Hicks insisted she was not racist. Later called "the Bull Connor of Boston," Hicks was a vocal opponent of desegregation in schools. "I have guarded your children," Hicks said as she announced her mayoral candidacy in 1967, "I will continue to defend the neighborhood school as long as I have a breath left in my body." These words echoed in the racial slurs and rocks thrown at Black students entering their new schools.

In search of better healthcare for his brother, Waleed's parents moved from the Jim Crow South to Roxbury, Boston, in the 1960s. Like many other Black migrants, they were looking for a better life. But the terrifying racism of the South took its own forms in the North. In Roxbury, Waleed says "the police would always make trouble for you." When he was a teenager, Waleed's brother, Yusuff was badly beaten by the police. The officers told the boy's mother that he had fallen down a flight of states. "My brother told us that wasn't true," Waleed says. "My mother didn't believe that that was the story anyways."

As young men, Waleed still a teenager and Yusuff in his early twenties, the brothers became student ministers in the NOI. Part of Waleed's job was to prepare audiences at Temple Eleven for teachings and lectures. "I remember being nervous," Waleed says.

Before Louis Farrakhan, the controversial leader of the NOI, began his weekly teaching, Waleed would ask the audience: "Please listen with an open mind." He was so nervous that his knees knocked behind the grand podium.

Off stage, however, Waleed was not easily intimidated. As a member of the NOI, he received military and self-defense training. One day, as he walked along a hall in his high school, Waleed felt a sharp slap on his back. He turned around and saw a hulking white football player, a smug smile on his face, glaring at him. Waleed uncoiled his arms and launched his finger into the football player's

eyes. On another day, Waleed was standing with other NOI members on a street corner. Robbers approached; one of them flashed a jagged, broken wine bottle. Without a word, Waleed and his NOI brothers lined themselves up in a defensive karate stance. The robbers fled.

In the 1970s, Waleed quit his job at The Providence Journal and moved to Chicago. There he became a writer at the NOI's newspaper, Bilalian News (previously Muhammad Speaks, now called the Muslim Journal). "It was like a reverse experience," Waleed says. "I went from an all-white to an all Black staff." Sold door to door by the Fruit of Islam, the security and disciplinary wing of the NOI, the newspaper shared local and national news through the lens of NOI's radical theology.

Stan X often brought Bilalian News to Adam. In the hands of the NOI and other earnest members, the newspaper spread the NOI's message to thousands of Black Americans.

By 1975, Malcolm X had long separated from the NOI. In his absence, the NOI continued to affirm W.D. Farad's original theology. However, when its leader, Elijah Muhammad died, the group experienced a major fracture. Elections were held to replace Muhammad. His son W.D. Mohammed ultimately won. Working on a security post on the day of his election, Waleed watched as Mohammed was triumphantly lifted on the shoulders of his NOI brothers.

Controversially, Mohammed steered members from Farad's theology towards orthodox Islam. Louis Farrakhan, Waleed's old minister, rejected this change and created a group of members, who are known as the NOI today, in opposition to Mohammed.

But to Waleed, this was a welcome change. He explains that the old theology was a relic of racial hatred, and leaving it behind gave him a sense of relief. Malcolm X, shortly before his assassination, also felt this relief. In 1963, a year before Waleed joined the NOI, Malcolm traveled to Mecca to complete the Islamic pilgrimage. During this pilgrimage, Malcolm wrote:

"Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this ancient Holy Land... On this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced has forced me to rearrange much of my thought patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions."



Waleed and others on their pilgrimage to Mecca

"I experienced that, [too]," Waleed says. During his own pilgrimage, Waleed visited the Kaaba, the Islamic center of the world. Standing amongst thousands of other pilgrims, Waleed says he felt connected to a world of Muslims. Today, at seventy-seven, Waleed believes that "the other thing was short-sighted."

\*Anonymous source, name changed for privacy

On October 31st, the Supreme Court heard two cases brought by Students for Fair Admissions against Harvard and University of North Carolina. Students for Fair Admissions argues that racial consideration is a detriment to white and Asian college applicants for the sake of admitting other minoritized students.

The Supreme Court made its very first ruling on affirmative action in 1978 with *Regents of University of California v. Bakke*, stating that race could continue to be used as one of many factors in college admissions to foster a diverse learning environment. Given the Supreme Court's current conservative majority, it is possible that race will be eliminated from the broader definition of affirmative action. But what exactly is affirmative action in the first place?

According to the Legal Information Institute at Cornell Law, affirmative action is "a set of procedures designed to; eliminate unlawful discrimination among applicants, remedy the results of such prior discrimination, and prevent such discrimination in the future." While affirmative action is applied in a variety of settings and considers many different factors of an individual's identity, debates about affirmative action largely center on race in college admissions.

If affirmative action is so far reaching, why is there such a strong focus on race? The general consensus on using race as a factor in college admissions is that it gives an unfair advantage to otherwise unqualified students simply because of their race. This especially hinges on myths about students' academic abilities

according to their race. These myths foster arguments that race conscious admissions are particularly harmful to white and Asian students. In this case, Black students are seen as essentially stealing spots in college from more deserving applicants, implying that Black students are less academically capable than their peers.

On February 8th, Brown's Education department hosted a panel discussion-featuring Professor Tracey Steffes, Professor Lindsay Page, Dr. David Rangel, and Provost Logan Powell-on the past, present, and future of affirmative action in light of these Supreme Court cases. All panelists expressed worry about the ramifications of overturning race considerations in admissions, particularly at selective institutions like Brown. Provost Powell said, "The more selective you are, the greater the losses in diversity, potentially, you experience."

The focus of Students for Fair Admissions on race as opposed to any other factor reveals that their biases are specifically held towards non-Asian students of color. They believe that colleges should not even be made aware of their applicants' race-this, however, would mean that colleges can still make considerations regarding gender or socioeconomic status, for example. While socioeconomic status has been suggested as a potential race-blind proxy for maintaining diversity on college campuses, Professor Page pointed out that "the distribution of race in this country is not the same as the distribution of socioeconomic status in this country." That is to say there is no other method of obtaining

# The Future of Affirmative Action

Words by Karma Selsey

the same racial diversity levels without using current affirmative action practices.

The key question in these two cases is whether the current admissions policies of Harvard and University of North Carolina are in violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment as well as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson pushed back on those claims in the University of North Carolina hearing by scrutinizing military service and legacy considerations, which are common sections on college applications. Why should those students continue to receive special consideration, but not others? Other liberal Supreme Court justices raised points about what an overturn of *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* could mean for the country at large. Given that a college degree is often the pathway to one's career prospects, creating an additional barrier for students to access college would lead to a further lack of diversity in other institutions.

The outcome of both cases is expected sometime in 2023, and based on October's hearings, it is likely that we will see race considerations in college processes done away with. It is deeply concerning that an over 40-year-old decision could be undone entirely because of unfounded stereotypes regarding

what certain students are capable of achieving. There is no evidence that suggests Harvard, University of Carolina, or any other universities are giving away enrollment slots to undeserving students simply because they fill a diversity quota-racial quotas in college admissions were in fact ruled unconstitutional in 2003. Furthermore, as stated by Professor Steffes, race-conscious college admissions policies must pass the strict scrutiny test as a result of the *Bakke* decision, meaning that these institutions have to provide a "compelling governmental interest, and must have narrowly tailored the [policy] to achieve that interest" (Cornell Law).

What will this mean for the future of post-secondary education in the United States? While this answer is unknown, President Christina Paxson released a statement on September 2nd reaffirming Brown's commitment to race consideration in admissions in light of these Supreme court cases: "Because of the profound importance of student body diversity, Brown joined with 14 other colleges and universities over the summer in an amicus brief supporting race-conscious admissions decisions." As of now, applicants to Brown will remain protected, but the same cannot be said for college applicants across the country at large.

## A Conversation with Zanagee Artis'22 and Marie Chase

Words by Sarah Ogundare

2022's UN Climate Change Conference (COP27) was held in Egypt from November 6th to the 18th. Many have lauded this as the first conference to promise the 'loss and damages' fund that countries in the Global South have been demanding for decades. However, many believe this will join the growing list of existing 'placebo funds,' which were never sufficiently funded or connected to any admission of responsibility on the part of Global North countries.

Simultaneously, Zanagee Artis questioned what the loss and damages fund will be made of. Artis was in Brown's Class of 2022 and is the Co-founder of Zero Hour - a climate justice oriented, youth-led organization. He also highlighted the dangerous implications of providing loans and grants to already-impacted countries such as Indonesia as they shift to renewable energy - a framework which "allows the nations which have caused climate change to continue to profit off of the transition." Zanagee emphasized that the very act of requiring countries to pay back reparation funds makes them "a tool of modern colonialism."

Another contradictory outcome of COP27 was that, while more Indigenous Peoples were in attendance, this COP remained inaccessible to many without the resources to get there. For those who did, they were also being paid performative 'lip service,' according to Jennifer "Jing" Tauli Corpuz - a member of the Kankana-ey Igorot People of Mountain Province in the Philippines. There was more recognition of scientific evidence affirming "that Indigenous Peoples are the most effective guardians of nature," but a continued unwillingness to make space for Indigenous peoples' voices.

Marie Chase is a Rights and Equity Associate at The Nature Conservancy's Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities team. Chase recognized that it is often Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color who hold groups, places, and people in power accountable. And, while this is important,

facilitating the accountability of large corporations can also be depleting.

The burden should not be placed on those experiencing the most harm to also fully resolve and account for this harm. At the same time, the belief that institutional channels will resolve inequities has historically created more disappointment than inclusivity. Chase was wary of these spaces of concentrated power, saying that when the people who "most closely have relationships with different landscapes and biodiversity ... are not in those rooms, I don't want to be a part of that." These issues brought to light by Chase ask us to consider: where do the solutions truly lie?

For Artis and Chase, these personal solutions were an outgrowth of their own early activism. In other words, their personal solutions started in their local communities.

Artis grew up on the coast of Connecticut in an activist household with parents who sued the state (and won) for same-sex marriage equality. His long standing interest in the ocean led to a campaign to eliminate plastic waste at his high school, which, while important, also realized that "global warming is not an issue that just affects wildlife and our oceans." Now, he does more "people-focused" organizing through Zero Hour.

Zero Hour has been a space where Zanagee can help to uplift BIPOC voices and emphasize that for "anyone who is not involved who does not hold a marginalized identity, it is a privilege not to be involved in environmental justice."

Zanagee reflected: "There are so many People of Color across this country who don't have a choice, who live in places with the most severe pollution... and that was a deliberate choice by industry, by our

government... I felt like it was my responsibility to get involved because people who look like me across this country are dying earlier because of [that choice]."

Marie does work surrounding gender equity, youth empowerment, Indigenous knowledge, methodologies, and lenses - on topics from mental health and healthcare to how Indigenous women have been impacted by oil extraction. She is affiliated with The Pascua Yaqui Tribe currently, and, in the Indigenous tribes she worked for and grew up with, Marie extends this work to seeking reciprocal relationships with her communities, rather than extractive ones.

Both Zanagee and Marie find encouragement in seeking connection with others and the ways they can influence the spaces they already work in.

For Marie, hearing other women's stories makes her "pause and reflect and come back down to earth." This storytelling and relationship building has been important for her not because it fuels her projects, but because our communities and cultures are "where it started."

"Don't get lost in this big work," Marie said, passing on advice given to her. She emphasized that maintaining reciprocal connections to your communities is just as important as the action you are taking. Though it's challenging while working within large institutions, doing work for her thesis with a tribe she was affiliated with or creating a trustful space for tribal youth in the tribe she grew up with in Tucson has kept her grounded.

Going forward, Zanagee recognized the importance of forming alliances while recognizing our differences. "For people who aren't involved, now is the time to start learning about what's happening in this country to people who might not look like you... [because] the environmental justice movement can only succeed with empathy and solidarity."

# Are YOU Happy?

Words by Favour Akpokiere

I asked Brown Students the same question and here's what I found out....

"I'm content...currently...stressed, but okay"

"I'm just living. Not happy. But not not happy. I'm just there"

"Yeah I would say yeah"

"I'm happy as I could be considering the circumstances that I'm under. I could be happier"

On a scale of 1-10, the average score was a 4.

**So why is it that Brown, which is considered the “happiest ivy”, has responses like this?**

**Pluralistic Ignorance (n):** *a phenomenon which occurs when people mistakenly believe that everyone else holds a different view than their own.*

Believe it or not, this happens a lot more than you think. For example, a student might be severely depressed but instead choose to conceal it because they believe that everyone else is doing just fine. This contributes to the ever growing pressure to be happy and to always have one's life together. This pressure can be like an elephant on a glass surface. There is only so much weight that this surface can support, and one wrong move could cause everything to shatter into pieces.

Society tends to focus on the concept of conditional happiness — “oh, if only I had this, or if only I looked like this, I’d be happy”. For me, a huge majority of my high school experience rode on the belief that when I got to college, things would be so much better. When the time finally came, I anticipated to be met with beaming rays of sun, low academic pressure, and, simply, never a dull moment.

Those experiences never came.

In my first semester alone, I was sick every other month, got an eye infection, and found myself constantly doing homework. My mental health was at an all time low, and I couldn't help but compare myself to all the other freshmen that seemed to be pros at “this whole college thing”. Little did I know, a lot of other freshmen were going through struggles of their own during this adjustment period. Flash forward to many months later (and various hard lessons learned), it feels as though I've finally unlocked the secret to happiness...

There isn't one.

There isn't a set in stone calculated formula that is guaranteed to get rid of sadness every time it comes about. A solution that has worked previously, may not work the next time. However, I do have a few tips and tricks that I've picked up along the way throughout my 19 years of experience:

1. **Understand that you're not alone.** We are all going through stuff behind closed doors, so don't be afraid to ask for help. Share your struggles & your successes, because your words of wisdom could help someone else avoid a lot of heartache. Personally, If someone would've been there to warn me not to read every assigned reading from the textbooks, I would've saved myself a lot of tears and a lot of time.
2. **Do mental health checks with yourself and others.** Ask someone close to you how they're feeling, and take a moment to listen to them. Sometimes all it takes is a listening ear to turn someone's day around. By taking that time to listen, you are letting them know that their thoughts & feelings truly matter to you.
3. **Spread love. Share love.** It costs \$0 to be kind. A simple kind gesture like buying coffee for a stranger could be something that an individual remembers for their entire life. Your words/actions have power, so use them for good!
4. **Don't let your happiness depend on your happenings.** You can't choose what happens to you, but YOU CAN choose how you respond. This doesn't apply for all things, but when life tries to get you down with minor inconveniences, surprise yourself and respond with positivity. Don't allow a situation to have the power to ruin your entire day.
5. **Spend time doing things you love.** Who knows, you could be the next Michael Jackson. You'll never know if you don't actively put time into exploring your passions.

Coming to a close, I don't just want this to be something you put into the back of your head, forgetting all about as time passes. That's why I challenge you to take action.

## Take Action (and start with your calendar)!

Add a yellow section of time (time for you) to your calendar everyday so that you don't forget to do the things that truly make you happy. This yellow section of time can be as simple as watching your favorite show, taking a walk, or eating your favorite meal. Just make sure that you're making time for you.

Happiness can look and feel different for everyone. No matter what you decide to do, just remember that “life doesn't have to be perfect to be beautiful”.

xoxo,  
Favour Akpokiere

# Brazil Must Address Historical Inequalities to Avoid Climate Catastrophe

Words by Mehdi Epee-Bounya

The recent Brazilian presidential election pitted leftist Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, known as Lula, against the far-rightwing incumbent named Jair Bolsonaro. Lula emerged victorious by a very small margin – 50.9%. In his previous tenure as President of Brazil from 2003 to 2010, Lula made climate change reduction a cornerstone of his policy. Consequently, deforestation decreased by 80 percent. Bolsonaro, however, destroyed these policies to promote economic growth in the region. Deforestation rose as a result. In fact, Brazil lost over 12,000 square miles of the Amazon jungle from 2019 to 2021. Born and raised in São Paulo, Brazil, Lola Aguiar, 25', suggested that Bolsonaro's extensive deforestation efforts were as "if an even crazier Trump had [the] Amazon in his hands and was just [destroying] it for the interests of foreign capital and private companies."

Lula, however, stands firm in his vow to protect the forest. About 150-200 billion metric tons of carbon are locked away in the Amazon, and as explained by Lula, "Brazil and the planet need a living Amazon."

The present implications of climate change are disastrous for people of color all over the world. Aguiar says "Climate change will affect people based on social inequality and... populations in places that lack infrastructure will suffer a lot more." To this end, Lula has promised to safeguard the indigenous land of the Amazon from this change. Nonetheless, Indigenous activists are calling for more representation throughout the Lula administration. They are also exercising their own political agency by running for government positions. In 2022, 186 Indigenous people ran for elections in 2022, 40 % more than in the last election in 2018.

Furthermore, the stark racial wealth gap makes many Black people globally susceptible to the consequences of climate change. Black Brazilians are no exception. These inequities find their origins in the nation's history. Centuries ago, formerly enslaved people found safe haven in rural communities called quilombos, primarily located in North-east Brazil. Forcibly removed from their homes and stripped of their humanity, formerly enslaved peoples in Brazil had to exercise agency to survive in a foreign and brutal world. Some did this

by escaping slavery all together and establishing quilombos as their homes. As Quilombolas (residents of quilombos) had to hide to stay alive, they often settled in remote areas away from big rivers. Today, these communities are simultaneously threatened by abandonment by the state government and a global climate crisis. For example, Quilombolas in the present suffer from the lack of access to water as these isolated lands are undergoing a process of desertification.

Historical inequalities on the nexus of race, ethnicity, and class mean that historically marginalized peoples in Brazil bear the brunt of the disastrous impacts of climate change says Marina Adams, who is originally from Porto Alegre, but lived in the capital, Brasilia, from age 8:

"We cannot ignore the connection between race/ethnicity and class in Brazil, which means that Black and indigenous peoples in Brazil have been historically marginalized and denied access to education and economic opportunities. So today, when you have a climate event like floods in Bahia and Minas Gerais, the houses that usually get washed away belong to lower class Black Brazilians"

Nonetheless, Bolsonaro's loss in the election provided some hope for the future. Aguiar maintained that "Bolsonaro represented the apocalypse for climate change." The apocalypse has been averted – the Amazon Rainforest will not continue to be mercilessly chopped down.

Nonetheless, Lula and the Brazilian government still have a lot of important work to do. They must simultaneously enact large scale anti-deforestation efforts while providing opportunities to the people in industries that benefit from deforestation. However, climate change reduction efforts in and of themselves are not sufficient. If Brazil is to lead the world in global climate change reduction efforts, their work will have to be intersectional and conscious of historical inequalities. Brazil and the rest of the world must recognize Indigenous and Black peoples' humanity, land, and calls for representation to achieve significant progress in potentially saving the planet.

# Stronger in Solidarity

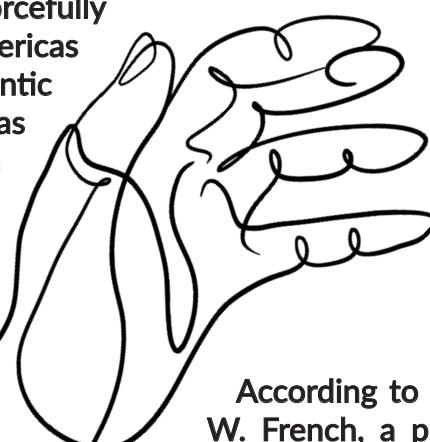
Words by Madelyn Amoo-Otoo

The Black community is incredibly diverse and dynamic. We are composed of multifaceted people who speak many different tongues, come from all over the world, and are multitalented. Our differences are a key factor in the reason why the Black community is so beautiful. These differences, however, have also driven wedges between members of the Black diaspora.

A concept that is often not discussed in regard to racial tensions is conflict within the Black diaspora. Racism in terms of those socialized as Black or White has been taught in schools and is familiar to most people in the United States. Less touched upon are rifts within the Black diaspora, specifically between African immigrants and African Americans in the United States.

African Americans and African immigrants face similar struggles of being Black in America; both groups experience racism, are stereotyped, and often have to work twice as hard to prove they deserve to be in certain spaces. Nevertheless, there is often friction and resentment between the two groups. What most fail to realize is that this friction has been fueled by the roots of slavery, racism, and the imposed assumptions and stereotypes White America has put on them. Unfortunately, both groups have let the ignorant stereotypes and misconceptions of racism seep into the Black community and cause division.

One would think, "Aren't we all Black? Why would there be so much tension and animosity?" Let's take it back to the roots of slavery. This divide first began in the 17th century when millions of Africans were stripped from their home countries and forcefully brought to the Americas through the transatlantic slave trade. This has caused many African Americans today to feel disconnected from Africa and their ethnic backgrounds.



According to Howard W. French, a professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism,

"For a very long time in the twentieth century, during the Jim Crow years in particular, African-Americans were encouraged to shun the idea of a connection to Africa, to think poorly of Africa—to celebrate traits in themselves, which supposedly distanced themselves from Africa, in other words, to think of themselves as more cultured, more Christian, more White, more civilized than Africans and therefore to look at 'Africanness' as a matter of shame or a kind of taint that needed to be avoided."

This animosity towards Africa was simply a survival tactic that was forced upon them by White America during the Jim Crow era to fuel animosity between Black diasporic groups and maintain white supremacist ideals in the United States.

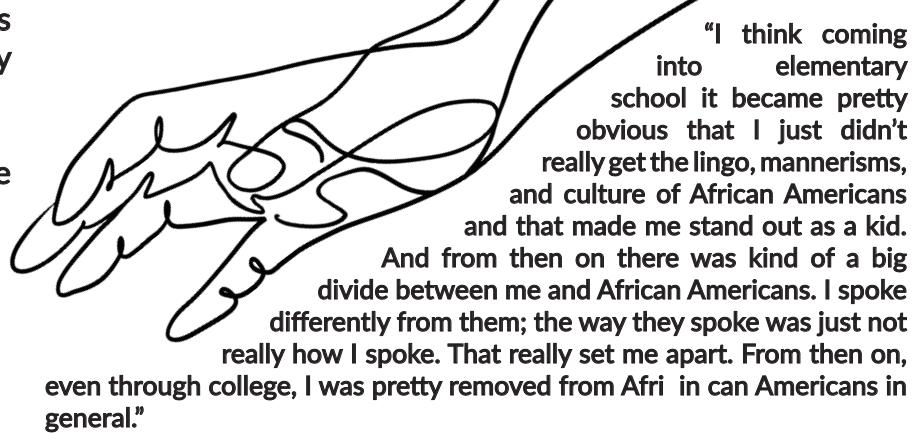
Tensions have run deep between these two groups for decades. African immigrants often view African Americans as lazy, jobless, and violent, and African Americans think African

Art by Nathaniel Scott

immigrants are pompous and ignorant of racial tensions between Black and White people. I interviewed two students at Brown University who preferred that their identities remained anonymous. During an interview, an African American student at Brown University '25 shared his experiences when asked about his knowledge of Africa while growing up in Georgia:

"I know this sounds so silly, but I previously did not have a very developed perspective of what Africa really was like. I liked the 'white people ideology' of 'Africa is desolate and there is a lot of poverty.' You know, a lot of those ideas that white people kind of push on you, like everyone living in huts. For a lot of time, that is what I believed because nobody really told me otherwise. And because I was around so much of an African American influence, none of us really knew better. I had no idea that places like Lagos were so developed and nice."

I also interviewed another student at Brown University '23 who immigrated to the southern United States from Nigeria as a child. He shed light on his past growing up in the United States and on his experience as an African immigrant:



Lack of knowledge and awareness is also to blame for ignorance amongst both groups in the diaspora. Western media has portrayed Africa as a "Dark Continent" where all people exist in destitution, live in huts, and act like wild animals. For years, it would be rare for one to see Africa portrayed as the flourishing and vibrant continent it is in the media. Similarly, African Americans have also been portrayed in a negative light, with the media commonly associating them with guns, drugs, violence, and poverty.

One tactic racist White people have used to justify their claims that racism and white supremacy do not exist is by comparing African Americans to African immigrants who are often able to immigrate to the United States and acquire wealth and success. This is ludicrous and incomparable since racist structural tactics and policies such as redlining, mortgage market discrimination, school segregation, and mass incarceration were implemented in order to keep African Americans in a state of being "second-class citizens" and thus bar them from achieving the multi-generational wealth that so many White Americans have the opportunity to enjoy.

White America has worked hard to divide the Black community because they know that we are stronger together. Internalizing the racist ideologies White people have imposed on us further drives this divide. We all stem from the same place and face many similar struggles. There needs to come a point when differences within the Black diaspora are celebrated and learned about instead of being a point of contention.

# Black Bodies, In Life and Death

Words by Tope Adetunji  
Art by Praises Amponsah

On November 1st, the world was notified of the sudden and unfortunate news of Takeoff's death. Part of the hip-hop trio Migos, Takeoff was one of many other Black rappers who have been killed due to gun violence. In fact, since 2018, gun violence has taken the life of at least one popular or up-and-coming Black rapper per year. Examples of these rappers include but are not limited to XXXTENTACION, Nipsey Hussle, Pop Smoke, King Von, Young Dolph, and PnB Rock.

One thing these deaths have in common is that they were all homicides. The publicization of the deaths of Black people is nothing new, especially given the number of videos that have circulated of unarmed Black people being killed by police on social media. A very popular example of this is the death of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man who was murdered by Derek Chauvin, a White police officer. We have come to a point in society where there is a desensitization to such videos and images of Black people, which subsequently leads to a lack of remorse for or minimization of murders perpetrated against them. The minimization of the deaths of Black people reduces them to Black bodies.

"Black Body," one of Nigerian author Teju Cole's pieces, is a direct response to James Baldwin's essay "Strangers in a Village." In "Black Body," Cole concludes that Black people are merely seen as bodies due to their being dehumanized

in predominantly white societies. He states, "You are a black body first, before you are a kid walking down the street or a Harvard professor who has misplaced his keys." The notion of Black people

death of a lot of these Black rappers. Black rappers are often seen as commodities, with their value only being the music they produce for their listeners. This has been made evident through

to be spread in real-time; however, it has also increased the documentation of violence and atrocities. While rappers are not unique in the experience of having their deaths broadcasted on social media, their profession makes it easier for society not to sympathize with them. Because rapping is not deemed with the same level of professionalism as other genres in the music industry, they serve as vessels for money and often lose their autonomy over their artistry. This reinforces Cole's argument about Black people being seen as bodies rather than human beings. The promiscuity and violence often featured in these deceased rappers' lyrics prompt many to treat their deaths as inevitable or as a product of their world. Listeners assume that they live the type of lifestyle they rap about or are involved in such a lifestyle one way or another.

The exploitation of Black rappers' death speaks to the dangers of social media consumption, especially for Black men. Concerns about engagement and reach perpetuate carelessness toward Black rappers and Black people overall. The Black man who entertains millions of people across the globe nor the average Black man going about his day can get due respect when murdered. Death should not be seen as online "content" and is a societal failure in the United States. Black people are more than just "bodies" and should be treated humanely, both in life and death.



Praises Amponsah

being treated as disposable and not respected is not a new one. Black bodies in America have been seen this way since slavery. While public lynchings were more common during the 18th and 19th centuries, the 21st century has seen more cases of "torture porn" that has permeated the digital landscape.

I believe this is representative of how society views the

the clear lack of respect displayed towards the deaths of rappers like Takeoff and PnB Rock, whose final moments were displayed on social media. Whether the person is a regular civilian, like George Floyd, or a public figure, the media's attention toward those who have passed remains insensitive.

The growth of social media has allowed more voices to be heard and information

# Canceled: Pushing an Agenda or Education?

Words by Helena Evans

The week before classes started for the semester, I was bombarded by a string of texts from some of my Brown friends, home friends, and family members. Ron Desantis has banned AP African American Studies from being taught in Florida. Sadly, this news was far from shocking – it's Florida after all. The headline didn't initially catch my attention; being from Florida, I am rarely surprised when I see bizarre events on the local news. Professor Nowlie Rooks, the chair of Africana Studies at Brown, however, already had a sense that things were going sideways. The first article I read explained how Florida's governor Ron Desantis was arguing that the course violated state law and that it ultimately "lacks educational value". Now, how could this be? How could the history of an entire people in this country not have educational value? How could he ban an entire curriculum for the state? Given Florida's right wing nature, this erasure of Black history doesn't come as a surprise.

AP African American Studies is a pilot course, expected to launch by August 2024. This past summer, the College Board announced the launch of the pilot program in 60 high schools across the country for the upcoming 2022-23 school year. As put by the College Board, "the course is designed to offer high school students an evidence-based introduction to African American studies. The interdisciplinary course reaches into a variety of fields to explore the vital contributions and experiences of African Americans." Many critics of the College Board's Euro-centric history are welcoming the APAAS, as more than 200 high schools around will offer the class. So why are Florida politicians taking issue with the curricula?

On January 12, 2023, Governor Ron Desantis sent a letter to the College Board saying the course was "inexplicably contrary to Florida law and significantly lacks educational value." The Florida law Desantis may be referring to is the Stop WOKE Act, which stands for Stop the Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees Act. Shocking, right? According to the First Amendment Encyclopedia, these "wrongs" are ideas entirely related to race and sex.

Florida politicians are trying to "cancel" any rhetoric of the so-called liberal agenda from classroom discussions across the state. Vox defines being canceled as being "culturally

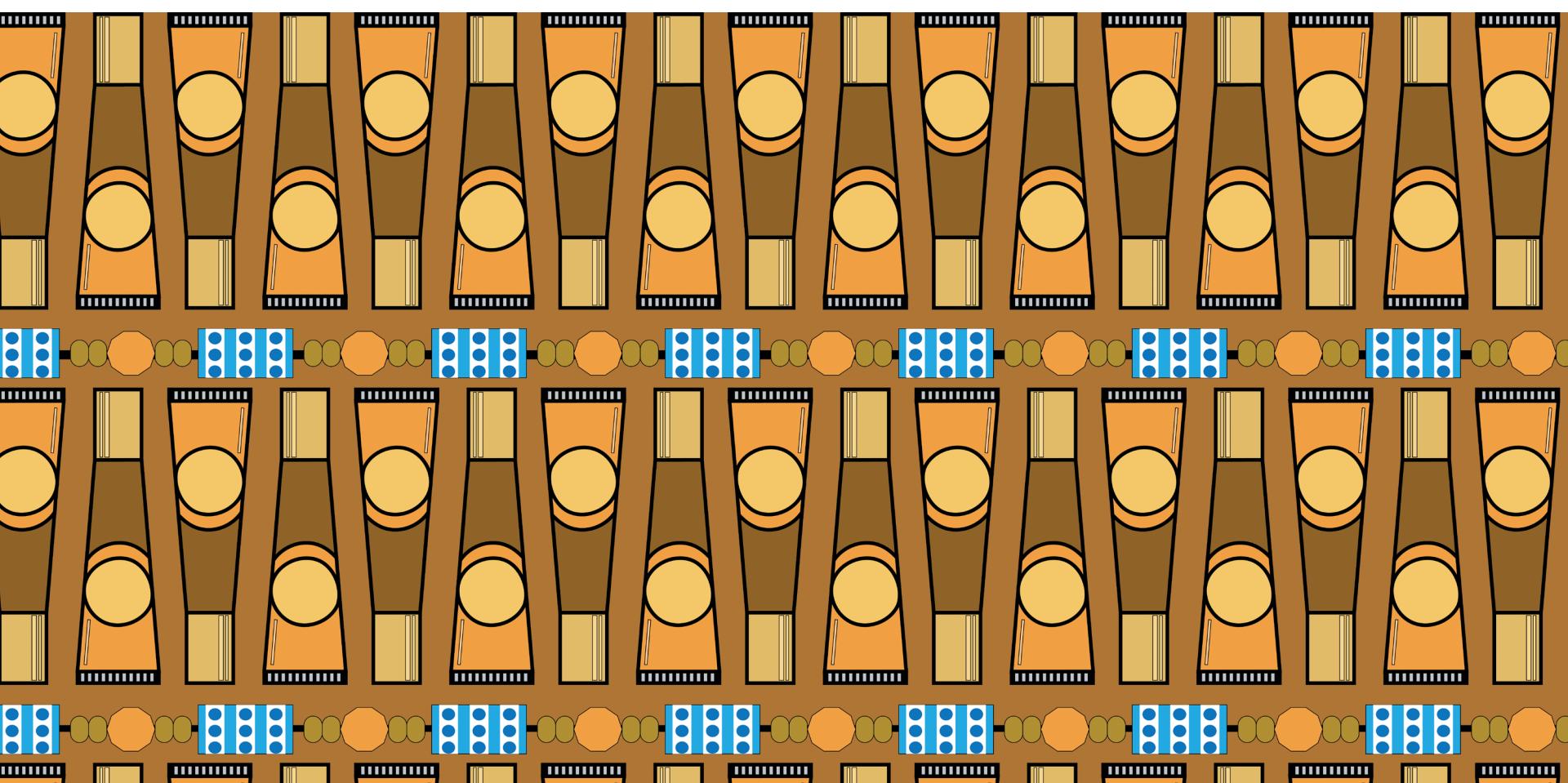
Art by Praises Amponsah

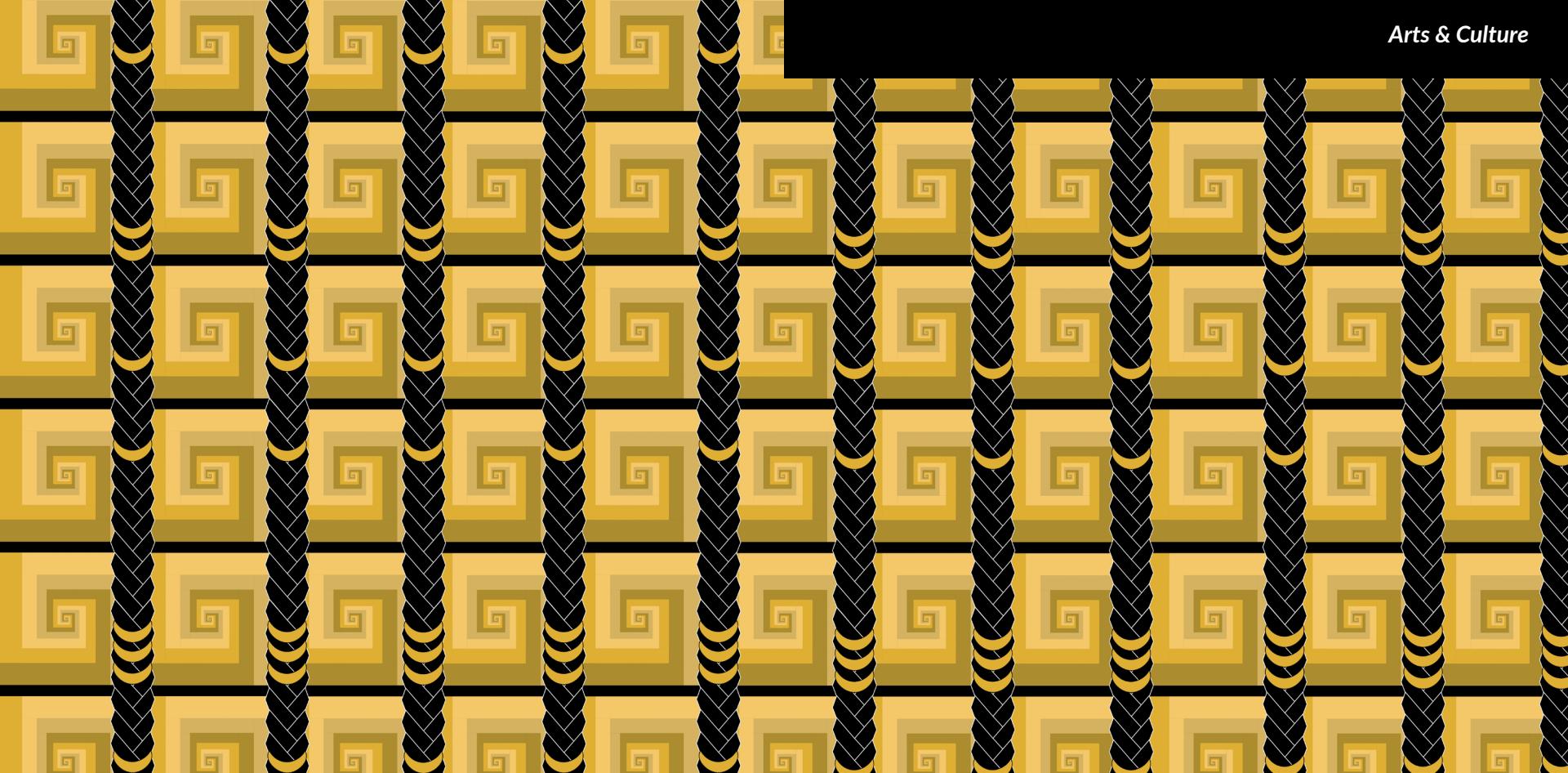
blocked from having a prominent public platform or career." Cancel culture has become politically polarized; Governor Desantis and other right-wing politicians complain about cancel culture, berating people on the political left for being overly sensitive. The irony is that "cancel culture" is not unfamiliar to right-wing republicans. In a way, politicians like Desantis are being raised to a higher pedestal by their voters because of their recent actions in canceling woke rhetoric. By banning APAAS and supporting the Stop WOKE Act, Desantis and his army of Republicans are "canceling" a part of our country's history.

A New York Times article about Desantis' year-long stint as a high school teacher recounts a video where Desantis is heard saying: "The Civil War was not about slavery! It was about two competing economic systems." This erasure of slavery from national history reflects the need for insightful and critical education such as the APAAS. Black and white students alike deserve to know the truth about the legacy of slavery and how it has shaped our current government. "Black history is American history," emphasized Professor Rooks, "and an educated populace should know its history."

Carl Rachelson, a former Florida teacher, recognizes discomfort as a part of a new national education. "Although it could be better, I think that many public school teachers and curricula address these topics sincerely and with increased diligence. How can horrible historical events NOT make good people uncomfortable? This is precisely the point: become uncomfortable enough never to repeat these things," added Rachelson. Conversely, Professor Rooks points to a survey done by the Zinn Education Project regarding the teaching of Civil Rights history, where they said "it was only studied in depth in about 20 percent of schools." Regardless, Professor Rooks remains hopeful that the supporters of the APAAS will "organize themselves to fight back."

If AP African American Studies "lacks educational value," is the truth, then, invaluable? There is still the potential that Black history will be canceled from the Florida high school curriculum. "He might succeed because so many people are falsely stirred up by misinformation and are easily manipulated," says Rachelson. "On the other hand, he'll never be able to erase the truth."





# *Are we comfortable?*

Words by Fara Odunlami

My younger sister has always had better hair than me. The kind that is long, thick, and always growing. Mine was short and never grew. She wore her hair straightened and silk-pressed, I wore my hair in braids and twists. I remember feeling distraught about this fact at the young age of 10, and crying to my mother. She told me that it was just how we were made: I was tall, my sister was short. She had beautiful hair, I did not.

And that was the difference in our hair: hers was considered beautiful and mine wasn't. It was in the little comments about how my hair was 'breaking', even more so than last time, and I hadn't done anything different than her. The way the hair braiders would look at my hair like it was a challenge. It was in the ads on television and the sides of hair products and gels: the women always had long hair like my sister's. I'd learned to accept that the two of us were different in this way.

However, our hair had one key similarity: neither of us ever considered wearing our hair natural back then. No matter how long or short, natural hair was 'unkempt'. It was always tucked away or maneuvered in some way to become more socially acceptable.

And as I got older, I grew to love the many different ways I could style my hair. I grew more comfortable with myself and started to take extra special care of my natural hair, hiding it away and hoping that one day I'd be able to show off my natural hair and not feel like a spectacle.

As a first-year Brown student, I immediately noticed that Brown's Black community was everywhere, present and loud and creatively beautiful in their fashion in a way I'd never seen before.

Here, I constantly see protective styles, braids and passion twists and long locs, stretching far down people's backs. I see wigs, melted and styled to perfection, in blacks and reds and platinum blondes. And, I see afros.

The cultural shift to natural hair in our society was gradual, so gradual I didn't notice it until I was in the thick of it at Brown. Natural hair is now everywhere. 'Nice' curls have long dominated the black natural hair movement, which is, in other words, the idea that Black people need to have perfect, springy curls for their hair to be appropriate to wear out. As afros of all textures and coil patterns have begun to regain their popularity, I see people beginning to shed that idea, slowly but surely.

There are positives and negatives that come with this emerging natural hair movement.. Non-Black people tend to see black afros as some sort of all-encompassing symbol of the Black experience. Because of this, people tend to perceive you and your existence as a Black individual as a political statement. However, the rise of natural hair also is seen as a 'movement' by a powerful force of Black people refusing to continue normalizing white beauty standards as the norm for Black people. Sometimes, it is art: I've seen a multitude of paintings of a Black woman with her hair big and thick and curly, unafraid and free. She represents Black joy and freedom. And other times, especially in less-POC dominated communities like the one I grew up in, afros are seen as 'other'; as if our hair is alien, unknown, something to be deemed 'unprofessional' or even something you prepare yourself for others to see.

It was around the fifth week of the

Art by Praises Amponsah

semester where I noticed it- as the leaves began to brighten thick autumn colors and crisp to the ground, I saw Black people, everywhere on campus, wearing their natural hair. Not as any kind of statement or sign or symbol, but Black people just existing.

Black people have not been given the liberty to simply exist. It always seems to be an uphill climb just to achieve a version of a 'normal' where society isn't still harming us as a people, a version of society that often seems like an impossibility.

It is an unspoken gem of Brown that I've always appreciated, seeing so many people show up around campus in their post-protective-style afros. To me, it is beautiful.

I saw a friend of mine sitting on the Main Green one day. Her hair was incredibly long and thick, the kind that seemed to grow effortlessly. Just like my sister's. I've always wanted to wear my natural hair out like that, and I told her that. My hair is still too short, which is what I've always said about my hair. *My hair is too short and I don't want the judgment.*

"Considering the way society sees Black women and their natural beauty, you'd think having my natural hair out would make me feel insecure," is what she said. "But I'm comfortable with my natural hair."

And, I suppose that's all it takes. Letting yourself feel comfortable. One day, maybe I'll feel comfortable wearing my hair out like hers, and like others. One day, maybe far in the future, hopefully someday sooner, it won't even be something we need to think about.

Words by Millicent Stiger

These days i'm insatiable

Subtle perversions  
soak into my  
every thought,  
Jammed  
and buttered.  
Spread

Coffee  
with a splash of  
cream. Even  
breakfast cinnamon  
rolls are  
abundantly glazed

These days i'm insatiable

# TOP FOODS FOR BETTER SEX!

Imagining impossible scenarios,  
a thought:  
"if I weren't  
allergic to shellfish,  
I'd like my shrimp  
with head!"

a thought  
of what it's like  
to knead dough  
squeeze gently  
pound it out.

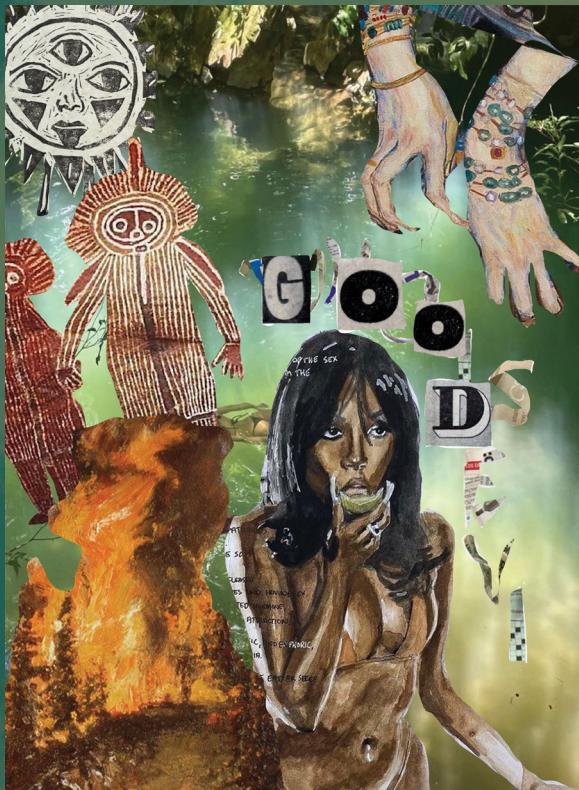
Giggling to myself  
It's silly and crude,  
I know  
butt  
It would seem,

These days i'm insatiable



## Water Gets No Enemies

Art by Grace Mugo



# Long Awaited *The Best Man: Final Chapters* Comes to Peacock

Words by Natalie Payne

The Best Man movie series directed by Malcolm D. Lee has been one of the most iconic movies of all time, since its debut, garnering much success including several NAACP Image Awards. The first movie follows the domino effects of writer Harper Stewart's unpublished book "Unfinished Business" as he gears up to be the best man at his best friend Lance Sullivan's wedding. Throughout the movie, we see how the manuscript significantly shifts both Harper's romantic relationships and friendships, especially the friend group dynamic on which he based his book. The sequel *The Best Man Holiday* brings the gang back together again for their biggest challenge yet: loss. After finishing both movies, I anxiously awaited the promised third installment, wholeheartedly expecting a third movie. Until one day, while scrolling on TikTok, I saw an ad for *The Best Man: Final Chapters*, a close to the storyline in the form of a miniseries that was to stream on Peacock.

After finishing the miniseries in two days, experiencing the comedy, heartbreak moments, and beautiful scenes I knew all too well from the previous movies, nostalgia and bittersweet feelings crept in. It marked the end of an era, the last piece of *The Best Man* series.

The miniseries complements the movie series, drawing on the foundations of the previous two movies while also introducing new elements to the storyline and placing the movie into a modern context. It was especially exciting to see all the original

main characters back on screen, living in the times most familiar to us right now. This modern context allowed for the inclusion of new characters who added to the dynamic between the original cast while not taking away from the storyline.

The miniseries carried on the themes most prevalent in the original movies. As each character struggles in love and relationships, family and friendship, and in the day-to-day struggles of work-life balance, we get an understanding of the growth of each of the characters. While the group is still close as ever, they struggle to stay as involved in each other's lives with the responsibilities of work and family. Relationships are shifted, old and new, as the characters grow and change in what they want out of life. We witness Lance grow as a person and a father, as he struggles through grief and learns how to open his heart again, while recognizing the hurt his loved ones were also experiencing. Harper and Candace explore how much they are willing to do for their respective passions, as it continues to put strain on the other areas of their lives. Harper and Robin's relationship is tested as the two realize what they mean to one another. Throughout the eight episode miniseries, we see the trials and tribulations of everyday life through the lens of the group's new perspective as older and seemingly wiser people.

Overall, the miniseries provided a relatable end to an all-time classic. As it appears to be the final installment, *The Best Man: Final Chapters* ties the entire series together and we receive closure on a series that touched the hearts of many watchers.

doc, do you believe in mermaids?

Words by Ryan Jones

My feet are planted too firmly for mystics  
and my mind's foundation is too slippery to build skyscrapers  
I'm skeptical.  
When I'm finally reclining in my inner atrium,  
I'll search for the soul next.  
That's just in my wiring,  
my neural pathways,  
the scorpio supposedly in me,  
the birthmark on my forearm.

I remember learning  
the myelin sheath protects the circuitry.  
Sometimes it fails.

My nana used to grab my face,  
lick my forehead,  
take a taste,  
and insist someone was talking behind my back.  
I thought she was naive then.

Lately, I've been finding the soul in the funk.  
I've been improving through the improv  
striking a chord  
in me and my minor progressions.

maybe I'll pick up alchemy

Beloved Memphis rapper Gangsta Boo passed away on January 1, 2023. Born Lola Chantrelle Mitchell, the talented artist is known for her association with famous rap group Three 6 Mafia (which she joined at only 14 years old) but her standalone legacy as a pioneer for Southern female rap will not be forgotten.

In a 1998 interview with host Big Tigger on BET's *Rap Radio*, Tigger asks Gangsta Boo where she fits in the grand scheme of hip-hop, to which Gangsta Boo earnestly responds:

## Remembering

Have you heard of the saying 'a closed mouth won't get fed'?... If you don't open your mouth and say what you want, you ain't gon' get it. And so what I'm doing is opening my mouth, telling people what I want in the industry and [through]out the whole world, you know what I'm saying. Get it while the getting's good, get it while you can, instead of on some commercial stuff. Straight out *thuggin'*. Ghetto queen with mine. You know what I'm saying? Comin' from the hood with it.

In this statement, Gangsta Boo expressed a desire to come up authentically and resist commercialization as a musician. Her talent and passion for rap drove her to make music, rather than just build a capitalistic enterprise. In the same interview, she noted that Atlanta female rapper Da Brat was a major inspiration to her growing up. Because of Gangsta Boo's legendary music, she has also gone on to inspire many female rappers from the South and beyond. Princess of the iconic early 2000s Atlanta rap group Crime Mob said in an interview with BHighATL last month, "If it wasn't for Gangsta Boo, I wouldn't be here. When she stopped rapping, I stopped rapping." We can hear Gangsta Boo's influence on the girls of Crime Mob on their hit crunk anthem *Knuck If You Buck*. Princess' verse on the song opens, "Yeah we knuckin' and buckin' and ready to fight/I betcha I'ma throw them thangs, so haters best to think twice." Her delivery is reminiscent of Gangsta Boo's cadence and

hardcore bars, which is wholly spotlighted on her first solo album *Enquiring Minds* (1998). On songs like *Kill, Kill, Kill, Murder, Murder, Murder*, with production that sounds like the score to a slasher film she aggressively raps about the dark side of gangster life on her side of town, threatening anybody who dares see what she's about: "Now it's time to get you/come with me/so you can see the dark side of niggas/claimin' hard/be left with body parts in the yard." But on songs like *Where Dem Dollas At* featuring DJ Paul and Juicy J, Gangsta Boo stretches her rhymes like rubber bands over a smooth bassline to showcase her charisma: "What you see in me/nigga roll is what I meant to be/Sippin' on Henn and grinning in your face/ Tryin' to get your cheese, why you be's/ Sayin' I'm doggin' you out but still pagin' me."

This "lady pimp" persona which Gangsta Boo proudly claims is likely to have directly influenced Houston rapper Megan thee Stallion's use of the term in her own music, who cites Three 6 Mafia as one of her influences and has explicitly named Gangsta Boo as a femcee who paved the way for her. In an interview with CR Fashion Book, Megan is quoted as saying: "There is no Megan Thee Stallion without Salt-N-Pepa, Queen Latifah, Trina, Gangsta Boo, Missy Elliot, Lil Kim, Eve and so many others."

## Gangsta Boo

Words by Nia Sampson

Despite Gangsta Boo's resistance to the total commercialization of her craft, *Enquiring Minds* peaked at #46 on the US Billboard 200 and #15 on the Billboard Top Rap/Hip-Hop Charts- an incredible achievement that reflects her reach even before the era of streaming services. Her second album *Both Worlds \*69* (2001) features one of her hit songs "Hard Not 2 Kill," which was sampled by upcoming New York alternative rapper CLIP in her 2022 song "FALLBACK". Gangsta Boo has since collaborated several times with young female rappers who grew up listening to her, like Junglepussy and Memphis' very own GloRilla. Because of Lady Boo's commitment to her authentic Southern gangster sound and her investment in the new generation of female rappers, her impact will never be forgotten.

# An Interview With Mary Enoch Baxter

Words by Amiri Nash

PROVIDENCE, RI - Mary Enoch Baxter (she/they) is a Philadelphia-born artist and activist who wants the world to reflect on The Carceral State, Blackness, life outcomes, inequality, and reproductive justice through her art and lived experiences. In 2007, nine-month-pregnant Baxter was on her way to completing the tender and emotional journey of pregnancy when she was arrested, and just days after her arrest, she went into labor from the inside of a small cell. After a painfully grueling 43-hour labor and a cesarean section, Baxter introduced her newborn son to the world while shackled to a metal hospital bed. *Mary Baxter gave birth inside of a prison.*

Since the birth of her son, Mary Baxter, *also known as Isis Tha Savior*, has gone on to create art and media that reimagines her birth, and the relationship between prison and motherhood. Particularly, her powerful music video/film, "Ain't I a Woman," (2018) does exactly that through powerful music, lyrics, and visuals. This film was a part of the exhibit "Marking Time: Art in the Era of Mass Incarceration," which was displayed at Brown University in September-December 2022. She received a \$20,000 grant to work on the project from Right of Return, USA, the first national fellowship led by formally incarcerated/incarcerated artists dedicated to supporting formally incarcerated/incarcerated artists. In "Ain't I a Woman" (2018), Baxter shares media interpretations of her birth story and interactions with The Carceral State. In parts of the video, she wears a striking orange jumpsuit and brings viewers back to those critical moments of becoming a mother. Despite her intense artistic reflection, art did not begin for Baxter in prison - she has been creating art since their childhood.

Born and raised in North Philadelphia, Baxter was brought up in a tight-knit community that she watched "unravel as the war on drugs progressed." Her mother struggled with a debilitating mental illness, resulting in her placement in the Department of Human Services from ages 11-17. Although she did not have the support to nurture her artistic talents, Baxter first received recognition for her art in the 6th grade when she won a city-wide competition to design the holiday windows for a popular Philadelphia department store. "Art has always been my North Star, and my savior in more ways than one," she said. Years later, her art serves as a force of change to the American landscape and the structural issues buried within its soil.

Through her artwork, Baxter aims to situate the state-sanctioned violence surrounding her birth and the carceral state at large within a larger historical context of anti-Blackness and racial subjugation in America. "Giving birth in shackles was the very real reality of enslaved women," she says, "and the fact that I gave birth in shackles all these years later. The long fight for bodily autonomy continues as long as people are giving birth in shackles." Baxter's weapon of choice in the fight for an equal world is art.

Baxter's art has impacted people across the country from policy-makers to those who have experiences that resonate with the extremely personal and traumatizing topics she shares in her pieces. But aside from impacting others, for Baxter, art is also a practice for processing life. "Art has helped me process the things I do not have the language for," she said. "It's allowed me to see Blackness in different ways and reimagine Blackness." The process of reimagining Blackness through history has allowed Baxter to survive and make sense of the events that have occurred in her life.

The creative process required intense reflection. "I really had to think about my life," she said. There were many layers of intentionality in "Ain't I A Woman" (2018) that represented depths of violence in prison. Before the video, the only art she had created about her birth was a poem that she "briefly" wrote. The lines of her flowing rap in the video speak directly to the violent history of prison in America. "The prison system just' another version of the plantation / seventeen cents an hour can't even purchase top ramen." But at the same time, she speaks to the powerful and unbreakable spirit of love that is a testimony to the ability to survive oppressive systems of power in America, "Nothing could ever come between a mother's love and her offspring / I mean they had me cuffed to the thing for 43 hours." The dynamic range of emotions in her lyrics represents the complexity of being alive in the present with a racial history balancing on her shoulders.

The video was filmed in Eastern State Penitentiary, "America's first true penitentiary." When the prison first opened in 1829, all incarcerated persons were held in solitary confinement, a detail that was important to Baxter as she reworked her own experience. After she gave birth, she was placed in a small and dark room in solitary confinement for five days "for her own protections," due to the fact that her birth required a cesarean section.

Baxter says that reflecting on her life and creating the piece was essential. She believes that stories like hers need to be told in an authentic way to seek justice and help others going through similar situations.

A lot of media in American society glamorizes and romanticizes prison life and the carceral state. Television programs such as Beyond Scared Straight, which shows groups of youth entering prison for an extended stay to "correct" their behavior, dehumanize incarcerated people, and make prison life seem like a vessel for mainstream entertainment instead of a structural flaw. On the other hand, police shows push propaganda that reinforces ideologies that police "save the day" instead of perpetuating harm.

Baxter says instead of pushing harmful narratives about prison in the media, people need to spend time and energy "funding communities and getting reparations." After the project was released, town halls about legislature and screenings for women were held with hopes of inspiring others and creating real changes to existing policies that allow tragedies in prison to be legal.

The art that Baxter creates serves as an authentic representation of incarceration and serves to inform others about her struggles, triumphs, pain, and hope for the world that waits before her. In the future, she wants to continue to create art that illuminates issues in our society, specifically adultification bias in young Black women, reproductive rights, and the "prison to prison" pipeline.

To Baxter, authentic representation is critical to achieve social change. "What we need to do is undo," she said. She continues to work towards abolition and equality whilst fighting inequality through her art and media. They believe that one day people will be in shock at the way the prison system treated, and continues to treat incarcerated people. She wants those who see her art to make the choice to make a difference. She ends "Ain't I a Woman" (2018) with a hopeful message and call to action: *All we got is us.*

# Kleptomania

## (Part 1)

Words by Allyssa Foster

One night I asked Mom if Grandpa ever felt bad about stealing.

She had been laying in bed with her eyes closed, a faint smile on her lips, telling about the time Grandpa painted the entire courthouse screaming red. I was laid down on the floor with the pillow and blanket I kept under her bed, and Dad was snoring as always. After five heavy, labored snores from Dad, I sat up to see if she had fallen asleep. But her eyes were open now; she was looking out the window over my legs. On anyone else her face would look sad, but I knew she was just putting a tale together.

Grandpa, she told me, gave more to everyone he's ever known than he's ever taken.

It was times like these that reminded me everything I knew and understood about Grandpa came through the stories she sneaked me before bed.

One day Grandpa walked home from work, which had always been his preference. He liked to wander as he strolled, taking the time to look under park benches and visit old jobs. He was constantly improving the durability of his paint and checked on its progress, sometimes catching a friend to chat with in the process. Sometimes he just stopped to watch the wind run through everything, feeling his hands tickle for a pencil instead of a brush. Grandma hated how long he took. Mom and her would stay on campus after Grandma's shift and sit in the library when students were at dinner. Or they would get their dinner from Grandma's friends in the dining hall and eat outside as the sky got darker.

That's where they were when Grandpa saw the sun get caught between two buildings. Just stuck.

I looked at Mom to see if she was sleep-talking. Her eyes drifted down to me for a moment, then back to the window. I wasn't sure anymore that she wasn't sad.

She closed her eyes but kept talking. The sun was candle lit orange, caught in a backdrop of pale yellow. The orange was blushed with peach. He wanted to scoop it up like ice cream and pass it out to all the kids on the block. But he also wanted it to set again tomorrow so that he might be with his daughter as it did. Or maybe tomorrow he could pull out the thick paper Grandma kept on top of the refrigerator and the thin brushes he'd given to Mom and capture it just as it was for Mom, Grandma, and everyone he let see it.

His fingers twitched. There was peace in that idea where there wasn't in much else. More often than not he accepted the things he could not have. But Grandpa didn't look away; the problem was paint that wouldn't dry. It was like he first saw it, the buildings kept the sun trapped so that it couldn't paint the sky with its descent.

He stepped off the sidewalk and into an alley. Alone, he cleared his throat and set down his bucket of brushes and began to bargain with the sky. I had to let my own eyes close to picture it.

He asked if it was aware of the traffic that would try and fail to haze it, of the squares of yellow and white that began to pop into the dusk. He asked after its star and what it was up to at this time of evening. Evening. Afternoon. About the smells that wafted up as far as they could. Dinner cooking. Kids coming out of their nonsense world, taking the screeches

and laughs they throw into the atmosphere with them. The other stars slowly began to wonder why they couldn't see their friends.

At last, upon hearing the tinny voices of whining stars, the sky picked up on the man's droning. It didn't bother speaking to him, but saw the issue of the sun in plain sight. The sky tugged on a few clouds nearby to circle the buildings. The clouds couldn't find a loose part to wiggle themselves into, so they pillowed underneath the sun and tried to push up and out. For a moment all was dusk, like it was supposed to be, until the clouds were only wisps.

The sky sighed. It took its attention back downward to the man who was complimenting the lovely feat. Grandpa was getting tired. But he couldn't go home with the sky like this — with the sun stuck and night never to fall again. It was impossible to tell that he had the sky's attention at that moment so he had to decide that he did.

Grandpa could go into the building and scoop at the edges of the sun until it was narrow enough to slip through. It would fall to the bottom of the horizon where a great big Cumulus cloud would catch it to slow it down. Grandpa would run down to meet it before it disappeared and pour the molten light back in. It would only work if Grandpa could touch the sky, and only the sky could let him do that.

The sky's permission felt a lot like its attention, so with a breeze, the wisps of clouds traced a jotted path in the direction of the offending buildings. Grandpa lifted his bucket and ran.

Elsewhere everyone paused. It seemed they finally noticed how bright it still was, gasping at the time as they walked their dogs, leaning out of windows in the middle of dinner. Some began to point at the sun.

Breathless, Grandpa reached the building and rested for a moment before he went inside. His body was filled with a familiar rush of excitement and anxiety. He walked into the lobby of what must have housed a hundred offices. There were only a few people, just then leaving for home. He took the elevator without a glance at them and got out at each level and went to the nearest window, checking his progress against that sheer light.

Finally he made it.

The window wasn't exactly made to open but Grandpa made do. He emptied out his brushes on the linoleum floor and found a few small empty trash cans too. With the edge of his metal lipped bucket to the sun, his eyes closed and his hands cold, dry, and shaking in the air, Grandpa put a little faith into the sky and scooped up, like he was drawing water from a lake in the air. The sun was supposed to burn, but the sky lent its wind to his hands, tricking the heat into letting him be.

Still Grandpa had to set down the bucket as quickly as he could, the handle rattling as he all but let it drop. He couldn't look directly into the bucket, but the few escaped droplets could have startled the entire earth. With a kiss to the red, raw finger that absorbed a speck of sunlight, he filled the rest of the bins.

Miles and miles away, on lush grassy ground with empty paper plates and used plastic forks at their feet, his wife and daughter saw the sun fall.

# Not For Sale

Words by Olivia Bendich  
Art by Praises Amponsah

My body is not my own. I mean this in a very literal sense, but also in the sense of the word: belonging, possession, relation. I do not have ownership over this skin, this "beautiful mixed skin." Although I may not find myself mounted upon a wooden pedestal for examination and subsequent bidding, I am nevertheless a commodity.

My ambiguity only augments my commodity value. What is she? Where is she from?

The simple answer is that I am other. I am a new delight, more intense and more satisfying. Whatever craving requires satiation, I fulfill with my ethnic spice and my ability to season the monotonous tones of mainstream white culture.

We have been given one month, 28 days really (occasionally 29) to subvert this adverse reality. Thanks to Carter G. Woodson, a scholar dedicated to celebrating the historic contributions of Black people, Black History Month now exists. Originally launched as Negro History Week in the second week of February, Woodson wanted the dates to coincide with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. What does this mean contemporarily? That for four weeks the largely overlooked achievements of Black Americans finally have recognition? That I can post my Venmo and make money solely off of my Blackness? That the commodified commodify themselves?

I once received 20 dollars for reparations. It wasn't February but it was the type of heat that left your sweat sticky and biting. His intentions? I still have no idea, though I certainly hope they were not for me to later receive the label of a liar and a thief. I certainly hope he did not intend for me to endure racial harassment for months, especially not on the basis of reparations (because how does that make sense?) I know he thought I was beautiful. I know he thought this was a positive act, affirming even, in its blatant disrespect. I tried to deny the money. I didn't need it, nor want the cash. He insisted though, and what do you say to the white boy who wants to do good by Black people? Especially a Black woman?

What do you say to the white boy who (perhaps subconsciously) loves to physically and mentally abuse the Black woman only to ultimately blame her for his own transgressions?

Sometimes it just feels so goddamn good, in the simplest of terms, to be desired; nothing compares, especially, to that (genuine) reciprocal desire which is so rare for the Black woman.

Black women internalize one of two truths: that their bodies exist merely for sexual consumption, or that they are sexless, undesirable objects. Our value has evolved contingently to our sexual and reproductive economic worth. Slave women considered most capable of producing children commonly gained the title of "breeder" and were thus bought and sold based on their reproductive efficiency.

What about her brain? What am I besides a vessel or a container to receive projection? My body is not my most striking tool but as the most influential, it is what first encounters perception and hence judgment. I beg of you - no - I dare you to engage with me otherwise.

I am exhausted and overwhelmed and I want to fall asleep knowing that I am more than flesh amongst sheets. I am more than a month. I am a Black woman but I am not a commodity. I am not for sale and never again should a price tag bear any attachment to a human being.

# Are You Alive?

Words by Kourtney Beauvais

*Awake*

*The light shines through my eyelids*

*Orange*

*The sun is far too bright*

*Orange*

*I turn around to escape*

*Black*

*But the day persists*

On days like these, I find myself ruminating over the question of what it means to be alive. Beyond the scientific, how do we distinguish the growth of the conscious, nebulous self from the development of the individual concocted with the fruit of predetermined circumstances? What does it mean to exist with a fervor that only rests when you do? To embrace a state of being that transcends the absence of death or restrictive morbidity? What does it mean to be alive?

As first-years are the youngest university students, their philosophical disposition is likely the most recently formed. So, I interviewed three members of the Class of 2026 to gain insight into the first-year perspective of this existential inquiry.

Juliana Esteban '26 replied, "I feel most alive when I know that I am being more true to myself in the sense that I can express myself in a way that isn't necessarily for anyone else, just for me... I like being able to explore my identity in multiple different ways and I think that that kind of exploration makes me feel alive because it makes me realize that I am human."

Self-expression without the watchful eye of the other often relieves us from the internal and external inhibiting confines of judgment. The freedom to explore our identities, as Esteban describes, allows the self-validation of our humanity and inherent imperfection which is integral to feeling "alive".

Ilana Nguyen '26 responded that she feels alive when "having deep conversations with people and realizing that...every single person has all of those complex thoughts going on in their inner lives and then catching a glimpse of it... I guess it makes me feel alive to see the life in other people."

Nguyen offers an outward, observational perspective on what it means to "feel alive". The confirmation that one is not only part of a group, but also intrinsically

connected through shared human experiences is important because it affirms one's own existence within the mechanisms of life. Not only can we ignite this feeling when we deeply feel through ourselves and others, but also through creative expression.

Dre Boyd-Weatherly '26 said she feels most alive when she is "dancing...or doing ballet... it's like when I'm doing it... I'm just in the moment. And I feel like the first thing people think of is happiness, like what makes you happiest, but ballet does not make me happy all the time. I feel like that's a big part of being alive, just knowing that life is not perfect... ballet gives me like all the emotions."

Life, the experience, is not stagnant, but in a paradoxical state of flux and synchronicity. Life is plump with contradiction. It is enduring, yet fragile. Beautiful, yet ugly. Chaotic, yet blissful. Generous, yet indifferent. Life is not alive, but you are. You are unique in that you inherit life's complexity and can experience its fullness.

We, as humans, navigate and experience life through the vessel of the self. Our selves interpret our experiences into emotions that exist in every possible wavelength of light. Encountering these colors grants us the capacity for empathy in which we can truly see others. Consequently, the feeling of being alive emerges from selfishly pursuing exploration and expression of the self, embracing the oscillation of emotion and the imperfection of life, and witnessing the depth of the human experience beyond oneself as Esteban, Boyd-Weatherly, and Nguyen expressed, respectively.

Being alive is being present in the turbulence of life, where endings come before beginnings. It is the acceptance of distorted and paradoxical perfection. It is discerning the stories yet to be told and the stories forgotten. Or not. It is skipping, cartwheeling, and skating toward death because the length of life's road is fixed. Or maybe it isn't. Who knows?

Words by Kevin Carter

# *Soul of the storm*

There is nothing on this island that matches the euphoria I feel when I'm on the beach.

I go there at night, when nobody will notice my absence, to indulge in my secret hobby—wave watching. Time no longer exists when I watch the relentless waves oscillate upon the beachfront, approaching with an electrifying ambition as if being pulled by a magnetic force, then slowly retracting in defeat, leaving its silky print in the sand. I can fall in love with the sudden crescendo that emerges from the tides, the thunderous sound of the waves crashing like symbols, then fizzing like a can of soda. My heart drops from anticipation seconds before dozens of cold droplets collide on my skin and remind me of the intimate proximity we share. But we can never get too close.

That is what causes me to remember this is all a tantalizing facade.

No matter how far the sea stretches, it will never offer a drip of clean water to combat the water scarcity our island faces. And no matter how peaceful it appears, it doesn't take away from the threat of its volatile temper. Our island is still healing from the wounds left by the hurricane that struck us ten years ago. This is what helped me realize why the colonists teach us that the ocean is sinister. "Nothing good comes from the sea," my mother always reminds me in a resentful tone. "Only pain."

Her words echo in my mind as I study the somber expressions on my family members' faces as we sit in a bus headed downtown, towards the hurricane shelter. After ten years of moderate peace, Hurricane Sedna, the most severe storm of the century, is on her way to remind us of the ocean's disregard for human temporalities. My mother holds tight to my little brothers, while I hold on to the hand of my younger sister. As the older siblings, we tend to be more composed during these situations, but I can sense the mutual feelings of consternation boiling within the both of us. My brothers are anxious and unusually quiet, a melancholy sight to see given they are usually the life of the family. My mother's face is grim, cold enough to come off as expressionless, but I can spot the emotion stirring beneath her composed act. As we turn the corner into the downtown area, the pitter-patter of the rain against the window evolves into fierce pounding. Dark gray clouds swallow up the sky above us, leaving it blankly overcast. The winds gust erratically, bending trees and launching debris about. I catch myself letting out a sigh of relief as we approach the community shelter. The shelter, which is one of many, is about the size of a basketball court. It resembles two massive cement blocks slapped on top of each other, with one sturdy steel reinforced entrance and no windows. Our bus parks in front of it, and instantly people begin to usher us into the shelter. Before long, my family and I are secured inside the building, packed shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the evacuees. Within minutes of our arrival, the building has reached maximum capacity. Several men seal the entrance shut, briefly alleviating the tension in the room.

In the arms of my mother and the presence of my siblings, I feel safe and sound. But the storm isn't finished. Intense winds clobber the shelter's structure. Water begins to leak from the ceiling, and the shout of thunder foreshadows our impending doom. People around us grow frantic, spreading a panicked ruckus within the crowd, while officials rush around and guards stand by restlessly. A strangely familiar sense of terror fills my stomach. "Attention, my people!" Heads turn and an eerie silence rises within the crowd as the indigenous figurehead of the island addresses us from the front of the building. Whatever he is about to say is likely a message from the colonizers. "Do not panic! The hurricane resilient technology is in full affect, you will be s—"

BOOM!

A loud crack signals the compromise of the shelter. It is followed by an ear-splitting tearing sound as the entire facade of the building is ripped off and in an instant a violent combination of wind and water comes surging in. The air is filled with pandemonium, and our hearts swell with fear. My ears start to ring, and my head begins to throb. I feel myself getting dizzy, the threat of unconsciousness lingering dangerously close. But these feelings are all subdued once I look over at my family, then back again at the storm surge rushing at us. Suddenly, my body starts to move on its own. My mother wraps us behind her, trying to shield us with her body, but I break free from her grasp and run in front of her. I spread my limbs as if I can absorb the entirety of the oncoming storm and close my eyes, accepting my tragic fate. By the time I open them, I will no longer feel pain.

But this is not the case. The pain hits me with unimaginable force, so excruciating that it takes me a while to realize that it isn't physical. And yet, it is so deep that it brings me to my knees.

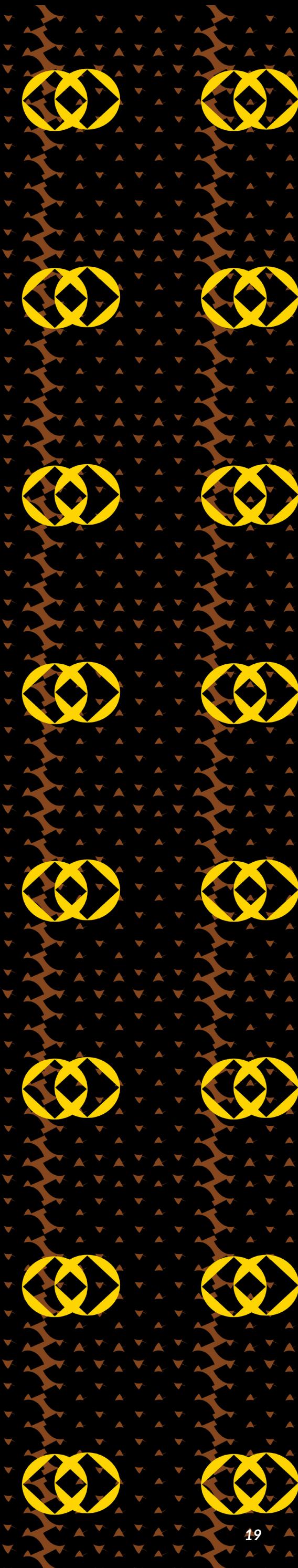
In what seems like a matter of seconds, I see a thousand vivid images of the colonizers overtly dumping toxic waste and discarding myriads of trash into the ocean, and I can feel the chemicals burning my skin, the plastic choking me by my neck. My vision turns blindingly white, and suddenly I begin to make out the face of my mother. I feel her hands on my cheeks, which are wet with tears. All I can hear is the sound of dripping water. Everybody is in the same place as they were when I closed my eyes—nobody had been hurt. Just like that, the storm had stopped in its tracks, leaving everyone staring at me like I'm a ghost. My mom's eyes are flooded with tears, but they seem to be of joy and not grief.

"Kai" she cries. "You stopped the storm."

I briskly turn away from her and back to the hole in the shelter from which the storm had intruded. I still feel the pain in my body, although it is starting to subside. Even more so, I feel the dots beginning to connect in my head. It's all starting to make sense. Through their direct rule, the colonizers brainwashed our people into trusting and thinking like them, to inhibit us from detecting their true intentions for our island. Everything we thought we knew about the ocean was a lie. It isn't antagonistic—it's retaliatory. Grappling with this revelation, I turn back to my mom, who is practically in shambles.

"The ocean isn't pain," I whisper to her. "It's in pain."

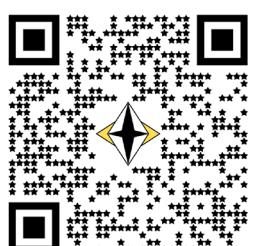
TO BE CONTINUED



# The Black Star Journal



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