The Black Star Journal

The Blooming Issue

Issue #02

April 29, 2022

From Us To You

Blossoming: growing, changing, coming into the self, is not an action that a flower, lotus, rose, or lily, performs without the help of its ecosystem and the surrounding environment. That is to say, a flower cannot bloom without the help and history of its community. You see, the bees pollinating the sweet buds, the birds dropping seeds that will come alive later in the warmer hours, the squirrels burying their sacred fruit, and the simple pitter-patter of rain are all essential to this process. History is the soil in which we plant our dreams. That soil contributes to the formation of something remarkable – the bloom of a flower.

When we think of blossoming in terms of something coming to life that is new or unique, we must acknowledge the community that contributed to its growth. Nothing is born in a vacuum.

We want to acknowledge the enormous amount of community support that was planted in the years before us. We grew from the decades of Black writers, poets, artists, and creators at Brown that came before us and cultivated the framework for this newspaper.

We want to acknowledge previous Black publications –The African Sun, Blacks on Paper, OBSIDIAN, Uwezo, and other collectives of all shapes and sizes –and the role that they have played in the Black Star Journal's creation.

We want to acknowledge the Black professors, current and previous, that have allowed us to bloom in our own way.

We want to acknowledge Black students at Brown, current and previous, for their creativity, fearlessness, wisdom, and hope.

We want to acknowledge that without all of these forces, there would be no Black Star Journal. We are an extension of these dreams.

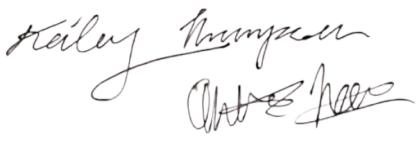
Like ecosystems, communities are interconnected. We need each other to grow. We have the privilege of being able to shape the pieces of hope left by previous Black people on this campus into something like The Black Star Journal. The Black Star Journal is just beginning to bloom. We blossom from our roots.

As you read The Blossoming Issue, we want you to think intentionally about how these words, images, and statements from our staff are a collection that bloomed from a living history of hard work, struggle, joy, and triumph on this campus from the Black people before and around us. We grow because of this community. We blossom from this community. We also want to remind you that these pieces are to be read and viewed with respect, as writing, especially for the Black writer, is sacred.

By the time you finish this paper, we want you to think about how you can begin to honor those around you and start to blossom too. From Us to You, we want to thank those around us who have allowed for us to see how colorful flowers can be when generations of people have been watering and tending to them.

From Us to You,

Enjoy the Blossoming Issue. We are just beginning to bloom.



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The Proximity of Water and Blackness

Words by Reihan Abar
Art by Grace Wairimu

Entering the main green, I'm slightly overwhelmed by the sheer amount of people around me. I stop in front of campus center and look around for an explanation for the large crowd, and notice large tour groups, students, and numerous club tables set up for visiting ADOCH students. After taking it all in, I walk past a tent set up for the outing club and think to myself, how many, if any, Black students were involved in this particular club? The odds are, not many.

Reflecting on it later, I asked myself why my first instinct was to assume that there wouldn't be many Black students in that club. Growing up, I've always wanted to try outdoor activities such as swimming, hiking, camping, etc but never got the chance as it wasn't common in my community to do such things – things we often viewed as 'white'. So, why do many of us associate outdoor activities and activities related to water with 'whiteness'? Why is there a lack of Black representation in such activities?

Once upon a time, Atlantic African societies thrived by the water. By oceans, lakes, and rivers. Possessing superior maritime skills, once upon a time, we were the best swimmers, divers, sailors, and fishermen. Beyond the physical world, water had a central role in many spiritual and religious practices such as connecting to spirits and ancestors. Once a symbol of strength, spirituality, and beauty, how did water turn into a symbol of violence, and trauma?

Aquatic violence began with the trafficking of Black bodies for slavery. The ocean represented the journey many were forced into, a journey of hardship, diseased bodies thrown overboard to their deaths. It is well documented that over 80% of Africans who survived the journey to the Americas could swim and utilized those skills to escape when they could. Subsequently, they were then banned from teaching their children to swim. Back home on the continent, communities who lived near the water grew wary of it, with many parents warning their children away from water for fear of entrapment. What was once beloved, now represented danger, weaponized and turned into a depiction of violence.

Such violence has persisted into recent decades. Water represented death, from bodies mangled by hateful lynch mobs dumped into rivers and streams, to the exclusion and segregation of Black Americans from pools during the Civil Rights era with racists dumping bleach and acid into pools when a Black person entered. Water as a tool of systemic oppression is ongoing today, with the government failing to adequately protect Black communities. From the failure to rebuild predominantly Black communities after natural disasters such as Katrina, to the failure of providing clean tap water in Flint, Michigan. Water is life they say, life which is consistently withheld from us. Stolen.

Today it may be hard for many to get involved in swimming and other recreational activities if one isn't in close proximity to bodies of water, a high likelihood due to historical segregation of Black Americans to urban areas where pools may not be common. Waters' role in structural racism birthed the stereotype that Black people don't swim, a stereotype I subconsciously internalized and believed that day on the main green. The dark history of water–based violence and its relationship with Blackness is deeply ingrained.

Despite its history, water holds much positive broad cultural and religious significance today through ongoing beliefs and practices such as water spirits, libations, and ablutions. This is why it's so important to reclaim water and empower our communities, so we can take back what was used to hurt us. Destigmatizing participation in outdoor activities and swimming is a good place to start, as it is estimated that 70% of African Americans lack basic swimming skills, with Black kids 5.5 times more likely to drown. Survival skills learned through camping and increased exposure to nature can also quite literally save Black lives. Though there are many barriers and reasons that may prevent active participation such as fear of water, and worry over hair care and maintenance, it's important and rewarding to confront the unknown which can facilitate the learning of new life skills.

Of course, the lack of participation in outdoor and water activities doesn't apply to every Black person but rather is perpetuated on broader cultural levels. Representing a tool of oppression, the reclamation of water will empower us all, remind us of our formidable roots, and will serve as a form of rebellion against a system designed to hurt us. Our once upon a time can become our present reality.

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THIS ISSUE

Is Racism Part of the Reason Why Russia's Assault of Ukraine is Such a Big Deal?

Words by Mehdi Epee-Bounya

Every week in my Africana Studies class we have group discussions among students about the assigned readings. A couple of weeks ago, the topic of the discussion was the enduring legacy of U.S. imperialism and militarism. Yet, somehow the conversation found its way to current events, specifically the ongoing war in Ukraine. A classmate of mine named Riley Schornak, 24', asked a perceptive question that inspired this piece: Why has the Russian assault of Ukraine garnered much more attention than other recent conflicts?

Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine stunned the world. The war that has followed has stripped countless Ukrainians of their homes, families, and lives. In response, the West has rallied together to support Ukraine by placing economic sanctions on Russia and by sending weapons to aid their defense. The world is outraged by this war and the senseless murders that have occured as a result—and understandably so. This war has gripped the American media and political climate. This is evidenced by major American newspapers such as the New York Times and the Washington Post displaying the atrocities of the war on its front pages and having an entire section dedicated to the conflict, respectively. While the Ukrainian War deserves all of the attention and support it is garnering, the international outrage to Russia's unprovoked attack of Ukraine dwarfs that of other wars such as the U.S. war in Afghanistan. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this phenomenon. Firstly, the U.S. war in Afghanistan and the war in Ukraine are intrinsically different. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia represents a state vs. state conflict in which Russia blatantly violated Ukraine's sovereignty. Thus, Russia's invasion of Ukraine seems to present no moral quandaries. I recently interviewed visiting Professor at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs Lyle Goldstein and he shed light on the "moral clarity" that characterizes Russia's assault on Ukraine. Professor Goldstein held that it is unequivocally clear that Russia launched an unprovoked attack on an internationally recognized nation with sovereign borders. On the other hand, the morality of the war in Afghanistan is viewed as significantly more murky. Because the conflict was a civil war rather than a country invading another, perhaps the war in Afghanistan did not strike the same cord with many people because the "good" and "bad" guys in the conflict could not as clearly be identified. Oftentimes, xenophobia plays a role in who we decide to name as the "bad" guys. Secondly, this disparity in international outrage can partly be attributed to geo-political logic. The United States' gaze more firmly rests on the war on Ukraine—Europe has for a long time played a key role in U.S. foreign policy because as Professor Goldstein keenly points out, "Europe is where the power is." Although these two factors undoubtedly play a role in why Russia's military attack on Ukraine has attracted enormous attention, these reasons are just scratching the surface of a myriad of existing structural issues. Racism is the third, and perhaps more subtle, reason for the disparity in attention to these two wars. In some ways we are used to seeing people of color around the world engage in conflict and bloodshed. Prince William, for example, displayed this racist disposition in an interview about the war in Ukraine: "The news every day, it's just, it's almost unfathomable. For our generation, it's very alien to see this in Europe." In other words, Prince William has accepted the existence of this type of conflict in non-Western nations but it is "alien" and "almost unfathomable" for him to see it in Europe. The normalization of conflict in non-western nations speaks to a racist notion that white people are more civilized or above violence.

Racism forms the very fabric of our society. It is so pervasive that we often do not realize how deeply nestled it is into our collective psyche. Thus, we must recognize how it reveals itself in covert and overt ways. One of these overt ways is the treatment of Syrian refugees just a couple years ago compared to that of Ukraine refugees now. The Syrian refugee crisis that started in 2011 due to internal conflict in the nation led to the displacement of 3.7 million Syrians by 2014. At the time, many countries in Europe did not welcome refugees with open arms. Nonetheless, Ukrainian refugees as of now have been embraced by the international community. It is clear then that race plays a role in this difference in treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

Ultimately, there are a myriad of reasons why the international reaction and outrage to the war in Ukraine has greatly surpassed that of other conflicts: firstly, Russia's clarity of assault; secondly, geo-political logic that focuses on Europe due to international power dynamics; and lastly, racism. These factors undoubtedly play a role in why the reaction to Russia's aggression on Ukraine has garnered so much outrage. That is not to say that we should not be outraged by Putin's senseless war of aggression. Rather, this piece simply aims to illustrate how society has in some ways rationalized and normalized the existence of wars in Africa and the Middle East due to racism. People of all races and backgrounds are deserving of receiving attention and support when they are fighting for their humanity. We must have a more inclusive perspective as we recognize these conflicts around the world.

Things Have Only Gotten Worse: An Update on Eric Adams

Words by Karma Selsey

For the inaugural issue of the Black Star Journal, I wrote about New York City Mayor Eric Adams and the problems with people's current focus on representation that his election emphasizes. Unfortunately, Adams does not represent the Black community well because his policies and values ultimately cause harm to Black New Yorkers. Since that issue's release two months ago, Adams has since used his time in office to criminalize his marginalized constituents in a variety of ways.

Earlier this month, there was a mass shooting on a train in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. The police were unable to prevent this shooting, even with the large increase in the allocation of officers to train stations throughout the city in recent years. The NY Police Department (NYPD) also did not catch the shooter; instead, that credit goes to a Syrian immigrant named Zack Tahhan who works at a smoke shop in the East Village, along with other anonymous tips from people in the city, who led the police to him. Despite this, people are congratulating the NYPD and praising their bravery and skill. Eric Adams is, of course, one of these people, while simultaneously faulting low-income New Yorkers of color for experiencing the effects of systemic oppression. His goal is to bolster the NYPD through exaggerating the supposed dangers of acts as small as fare evasion when in reality, people are simply attempting to navigate life in a city that is not particularly easy to live in-be it a high cost of living, a segregated school system, or otherwise. His harm knows no bounds.

Eric Adams has recently decided to start cracking down on homeless encampments-groups of tents, tarps, and other forms of temporary shelters in the street where houseless individuals live-under the guise of giving them some "dignity." He says that even though people technically do have the right to sleep on the streets, it is illegal to build encampments there. The supposed dignity he is trying to instill for the unhoused NY population comes in the form of sudden encampment sweeps that are often sudden with the individuals in question having very little time to pack their things and figure out what to do next. Videos circulating on social media show NYPD officers forcefully tearing away tents from their inhabitants—which does not seem to me like a practice that is providing anyone with dignity or respect.

Adams' plans regarding the daily sweeps are to place houseless people in "safe havens and stabilization beds," a.k.a putting them in homeless shelters. However, many New Yorkers have been pointing out for years that homeless shelters throughout the city are usually far from high-quality and have been especially difficult to live in since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Additionally, Adams' current proposal for the city's fiscal year 2023 budget would cut funding for the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) by 20%, while the NYPD is allocated over $10 billion per year. Further, according to 2022 data from the DHS so far, Black people make up over 50% of those in NYC homeless shelters. Even without accounting for those on the streets, it is abundantly clear that homelessness disproportionately impacts Black people, and Adams bringing police into the mix at such a large scale only exacerbates the current dangers they already face.

In addition to the introduction of homeless encampment sweeps, Eric Adams has also helped facilitate the crackdown on fare evasion. Today, the price to ride public transportation in NYC is $2.75. When I was born, the fare was only $1.50, and I even remember taking the train during the time of $2.00 fares. While $2.75 may seem like a small price to pay for a single train ride, it adds up if you're using it as a daily commute for the majority of the year, like many New Yorkers. Others who are staunchly against fare evasion love to point to the Fair Fares program that provides reduced price Metrocards to those who qualify, but fail to expand on what the actual eligibility requirements for the program include. If you are not below the federal poverty line, you most likely do not qualify for Fair Fares. This requirement fails to take into consideration how NYC, being such an expensive city, offsets these numbers. Additionally, it does not account for people who are just marginally above the poverty line and still face hardships with paying the full fare. Even with all of these barriers-and the fact that fare evasion isn't some evil crime, especially when compared to the literal mass shooting Brooklyn just faced-Adams is calling on district attorneys across the city to begin prosecuting fare evaders again. He has also continued the Bill de Blasio-era increase in police presence in subways to deal with the issue. I have seen countless videos of people, usually young Black men, being tackled, punched, and tased over less than $3. Is it worth it? What does this criminalization of poverty display?

It is abundantly clear that Eric Adams is dead set on strengthening the power and influence of NYPD despite his previous statements acknowledging the corruption within the institution. At the end of the day, he's a former cop. He has their best interests at heart. As much as he claims to care about Black people, he continues to put his own selfish priorities above our safety. Call me crazy, but imagine if he put some of the NYPD's funding into the MTA and DHS to prevent the very "crimes" he is so against. We all know why he's not doing that. To put it bluntly: Eric Adams sucks. As I said back in January, he is a prime example of how representation can so quickly become meaningless.

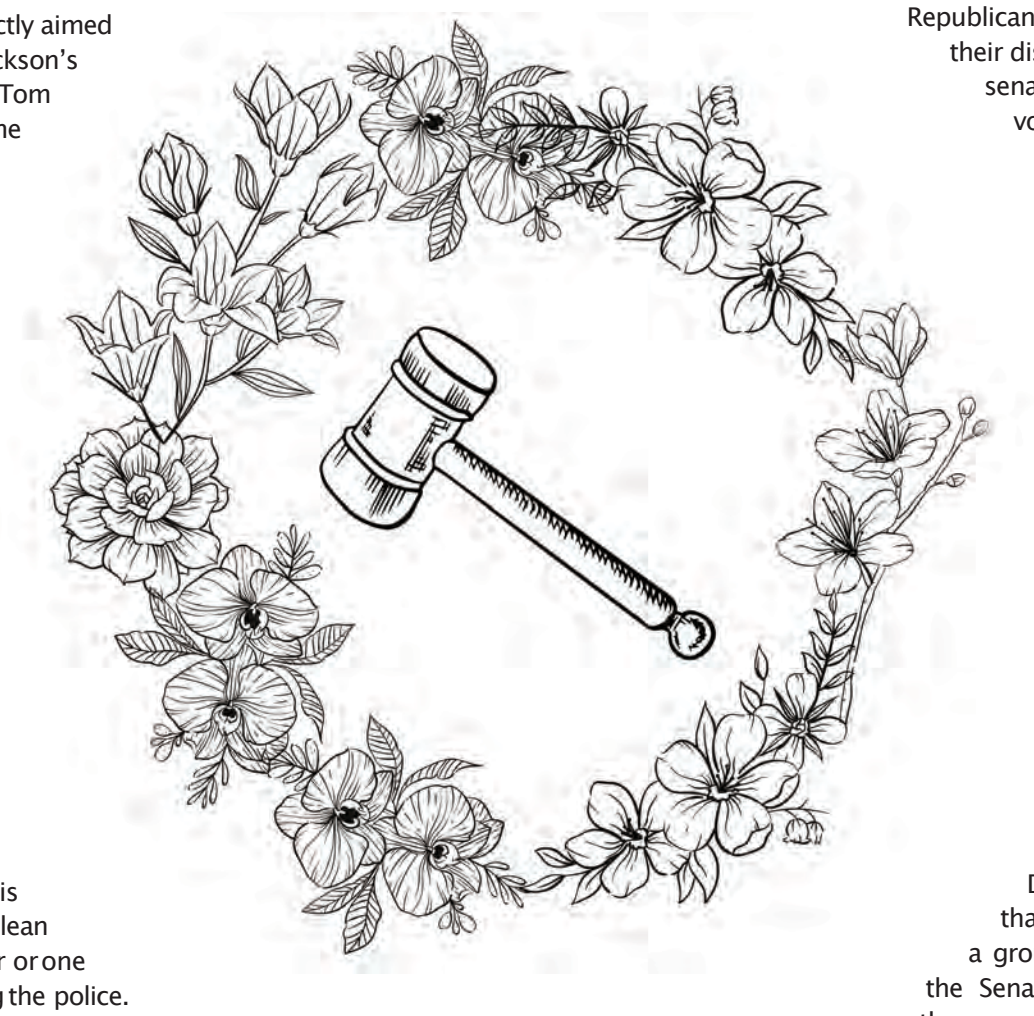
Making History: What Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson's Confirmation Shows Us about Representation and Race in America

Words by Kara McAndrew

On April 7, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson was confirmed by a vote of 53 yays and 47 nays to be the 116th Supreme Court Justice. While a Black woman joining the highest court in the land is intrinsically groundbreaking, her appointment and subsequent confirmation were not straightforward symbols of progress. They instead reflect the racism and sexism embedded within both conservative and liberal approaches to racial equality.

From the very first day of Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson's Senate Judiciary Committee confirmation hearing, she was bombarded with blatantly racist questions from senators that tried to stoke conservative, white Americans' racial fears about having a Black woman on the Supreme Court. Forced to entertain the ridiculous and irrelevant questions posed by Republican senators, Jackson was made subject to the micro-aggressions that Black women face every single day, revealing the realities of misogynoir on a national stage.

In a line of questioning directly aimed at emphasizing Judge Jackson's race, Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton asked, "Does the United States need more police or fewer police?" revealing his lack of civic knowledge. Almost all United States police departments are locally funded and run, relying upon local taxes, traffic fines, and more occasionally state and federal grants. An elected official in the Senate should know this information, which makes his question all the more provocative, because he is trying to make a point about race politics and insinuate that because Judge Jackson is Black, she will presumably lean in favor of Black Lives Matter or one of its key tenets—abolishing the police.



Black people in any position of power will be criticized twice as harshly regardless of how qualified they are to be there, and as a result, many politicians of color moderate their policies in order to negate the assumption that their policies will be more liberal. When Barack Obama was president, he faced enormous pressure to both be a symbol to Black Americans of racial progress and also prove to white Americans that he would not let his race bias his actions. This overcompensating in order to offset white perceptions of Black politicians impacts their views and policies, and according to a 2011 poll, Obama was regarded as a moderate by 40% of respondents.

Therefore, when Judge Jackson is asked "Do you think we should catch and imprison more murderers or fewer murderers?" by Senator Cotton, his question reflects a racialized assumption that he would not propose to a white candidate vying for the same position. Cotton is trying to alienate Black Americans by demonstrating that Jackson is not liberal enough, and also to scare white Americans by invoking ideas around the abolishment of prisons and police. This fear tactic serves to do nothing more than paint him in a negative light, as his question not only reveals his lack of decorum but is also easily answered. Judge Jackson provided an elegant rebuttal, saying that she believes "it's very important that people be held accountable for their crimes."

Senator Marsha Blackburn echoes this not-so-subtle racist sentiment when she asked "what personal hidden agendas do you think other judges harbor?" Blackburn, a Republican from Tennessee, verbalizes the white fear that Black people in power hold hidden agendas to upend the institutional racism that the U.S. government was literally built upon. The idea that because Judge Jackson is Black she holds a certain set of views further perpetuates the monolithic stereotypes of Black people and the ways non-Black people believe them to be true. These inappropriate questions continued, with Senator Lindsay Graham from South Carolina asking "On a scale of 1 to 10, how faithful would you say you are in terms of religion?" Not only does this question violate the separation of church and state, but as Judge Jackson replies, "there's no religious test in the Constitution under Article 6, and it's very important to set aside one's personal views about things in the role of a judge."

Even in the voting process, once it became clear that Judge Jackson was poised to be confirmed as the 266th Justice to the Supreme Court, multiple Republican senators found ways to convey their disrespect. Rand Paul, a Republican senator from Kentucky, delayed the voting process by at least a half an hour without explanation, arriving late to the chamber, and remaining in the Senate cloakroom to cast his vote "no" because he arrived without wearing the tie required to enter the Senate Chamber. Senator Graham also cast his vote from the cloakroom, arriving in a quarter-zip and blazer despite being pictured wearing a tie earlier that same day. The blatant disrespect and inability to cast votes from the Senate floor in appropriate attire denotes the racism that pervaded the entire confirmation process.

During the standing ovation that accompanied the final vote, a group of Republicans walked off of the Senate floor, cementing their place on the wrong side of history. In 2022, the confirmation of a Black female Justice to the Supreme Court should not be shocking; in fact, it is well overdue. The behavior exhibited by Republican senators throughout the entire process is indicative of the racial tensions woven throughout America, as white Americans are still vehemently opposed to Black people in power.

However, it is not just Republican politicians that deserve criticism throughout this process. The performative liberalism that Biden engaged in by announcing that he would nominate a Black female judge to the Supreme Court is tokenizing. His set intentions patronize Judge Jackson, providing a platform for her opposition to critique her extensive qualifications under allegations of affirmative action. Using Judge Jackson as a symbol of racial progress, while not actually addressing racial inequalities within the U.S., perpetuates the use of Black women for political capital while leaving them vulnerable to a barrage of micro-aggressions, as we witnessed in Judge Jackson's confirmation hearing. Ultimately, this nomination brings to bear important nuances about race and identity politics and clearly demonstrates: multiple things can exist at once. Judge Jackson can face disproportionate treatment by Republican Senators and be tokenized by Democrats who claim they want to fight for racial justice.

As Supreme Court nominations and confirmation hearings lose their bipartisanship, personal bias weighs more heavily upon senators' voting decisions. In particular, Judge Jackson's confirmation process reveals how divided this country gets as we attempt to move towards progress.

Seeking Environmental Justice and Art As a Pathway to Counteract Colonialism

Words by Sarah Ogundare

For most of Generation Z's living memory, global warming has been a universal concern. Hundreds of articles have emphasized personal responsibility – encouraging us to take shorter showers, set washing machines to cold, or to take public transportation more often. However, as of 2017, 100 mostly western companies were producing 71% of total global emissions since 1988 – highlighting that our efforts should be directed towards structural climate action. This is especially vital when, in the span of our lifetimes, we are now "on a fast track to climate disaster," according to UN Secretary General António Guterres.

The damning sixth IPCC report released on April 4, 2022, stated that, without a drastic change in how climate change policy is proposed and enforced, staying below a 1.5°C increase in temperature will be "impossible." One necessary drastic shift regards how climate justice policy has been inattentive to existing vulnerabilities of African nations as a result of colonialism – exacerbating them as a result. This is especially relevant when this is the first report that explicitly mentions "colonialism as a factor in beginning and worsening climate change." Thus, it is worth examining how colonial hierarchies reproduce in discourses of African nations' climate change policy.

Often, western nations push for African nations to divest from fossil fuels while ignoring the reality that economic reliance on fuels only occurs because of european colonizers' large-scale mining and robbing the land of its natural resources. This intentional dependency of African nations is further perpetuated
by a continuous extraction of wealth through "corporations repatriating profits [from exportation of natural resources and] … by costs imposed by the rest of the world through climate change" for example. After accounting for 'aid' received and wealth extracted, this totals in a wealth disparity of over $41 billion that the African continent lost in 2015, according to Global Justice.

Experts such as Rwandan climate scientist Mouhamadou Bamba Sylla and Kenyan climate activist Kaluki Paul Mutuku expressed that, in the context of increasingly dangerous levels of rainfall, it is unacceptable that western nations promised $100 billion in climate financing per year in 2009 (which is still $200 billion short of what's needed), and have still failed to deliver over a decade later. One important framing of climate financing, though, is the emphasis on "return[ing] some of Africa's looted wealth" as a form of reparations. This is in addition to the funding needed to fund emission-reducing projects and to repair the severe and disproportionate damage its nations are already experiencing as a result of the climate crisis. Therefore, for climate policies to be equitably implemented, the condescending, decontextualized narrative that African nations must simply "'do much more' to ease the climate 'burden'" cannot be repeated – as it was by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Rather, global discourse surrounding climate policy must take into account the wealth hemorrhaging from the African continent, and the wealth redistribution necessary to seriously addressing the climate crisis.

Simultaneously, examining climate change in the u.s. through a lens of environmental justice reveals the extent to which Indigenous and Black people are disproportionately impacted despite contributing the least to global warming. Exemplifying this, one 2021 study found that the two million deaths (mostly in the Global South) resulting from the burning of fossil fuels comes from "consumption of goods and services by the world's major economies." Given that any report on climate change would be incomplete without uplifting the experiences and voices of Indigenous people, a closer look at island countries like Tuvalu is particularly telling. After a 2017 data study revealed that Tuvalu could become uninhabitable within the century, cyclone recovery and reef conservation work are finally being properly implemented. Therefore, redirecting funds and research away from the existing emphasis on western countries and towards historically disregarded nations is one way to obtain more genuine environmental justice. In the wake of Earth Day on April 22nd, substantial implementation of anti-colonial climate policies is a crucial part of shedding light on Black and Indigenous communities nationally and globally.

It is no coincidence that the report to finally discuss the role of colonialism in climate change has been the most inclusive one so far; it includes "indigenous people… scientists of color, and women scientists." Though marginalized communities like ours experience the most systemic violence, we also have unique ways of processing these experiences. While structural changes by nations and corporations is a significant part of reaching environmental justice, the artistic expressions of Black creators can be a method of healing others, as well as the artists themselves. Whether through songs like Marvin Gaye's "Mercy, Mercy Me," LaToya Fraizer's Flint is Family photo collection, or Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower, Black artists continue to balance expressing the frustrations of environmental injustices with the empowering nature of their creatively-driven climate advocacy.

Thus, a necessarily drastic shift in our approach to climate change policy regards reckoning with colonization's continual impact on the climate crisis. Doing anything otherwise would allow colonialism to be the silent, systemic driver of a global, not-so-dystopian climate disaster. But, by uplifting the voices and experiences of Black and Indigenous artists and activists, we can rewrite our narratives – advocating for our communities, our land, and our collective healing in the process.

Note: In this piece, I chose not to capitalize the words 'western' or 'u.s.' I thought about activists like Vanessa Nakate while writing, and how, after being cropped out of a photo with Greta Thunberg and other white activists, she commented: "You didn't just erase a photo. You erased a continent. But I am stronger than ever." Taking inspiration from Audre Lorde's decapitalization of words like 'america,' I wanted to challenge the often assumed superiority associated with words like 'western' by uplifting those who have been historically "cropped out" of the narrative. I wanted to further highlight how de-emphasizing the western oriented narrative makes space for honoring the visibility and value of African climate activists and voices.

NBA Youngboy vs Lil Durk: The Patriarchal Destruction Wrought by 21st Century Rap Beefs

Words by Evan Gardner

The global violence of the Ukrainian conflict is inescapable in contemporary media. However, an infinitely smaller and lower stakes conflict has also taken over headlines: the beef between NBA Youngboy and Lil Durk. The beef began with Youngboy and King Von, a close friend of Durk's. Youngboy's associates allegedly assassinated King Von in Atlanta on November 6th, 2020, and ever since, Durk has deliberated his response. This beef is not the archetypal gangster rap beef of the 90s designed to sell hip hop records and garner fans, or the annual substanceless beefs of Drake. Through their lyrics, NBA Youngboy and Lil Durk are engaged in a form of modern warfare. As Youngboy himself says in his song, I Hate Youngboy, "I don't give a fuck about this rap shit I'll bust [shoot] at you".

From the beef's inception, social media has been integral. After the passing of King Von, Youngboy's Instagram comment sections were flooded with commands-often coming from faceless accounts or suburban pre-teens-for Durk to "slide for Von," meaning avenge his death. Now, NBA Youngboy has posted several Instagram pictures with messages written in hundred dollar bills to Durk, the first reading: "You n****s gon die" and "stay safe." Durk retaliated with a money message of his own, but within days the threats had been corrupted by meme accounts and became trendy.

In the 21st century, social media is nothing new. What makes this beef really unique, however, is its grounding in war rhetoric and imagery. In rap beefs, the anger and lyrics are typically directed at one person. NBA Youngboy scoffs at this tradition. In "Bring the Hook," he yells, "These bitches throwin' up green flags," with the flags representing NBA Youngboy and his crew. In response, Chicago's O Block, the neighborhood that was once home to King Von, burned green flags. The burning of a flag symbolizes the takedown of a nation, not merely a fellow artist. Youngboy exemplifies this in Bring the Hook, with his choosing of sides when he attacks O Block as a whole: "O Block pack get rolled up/Murder what they told us/Atlanta boy got fold up… Clean up on aisle O n let that choppa blow". Durk quickly gathered allies in this lyrical warfare by featuring on countless other rap albums. Consequently, Youngboy attacked everyone associated with Durk, rapping, "Every n**** did a feature, slime [Durk] out to get em," and "gonna die from choosing sides tho." He even terrorizes Durk's staff: "your security get busted at too." At this point, any alliances drawn threaten to yield deadly consequences; the music industry becomes a battleground, where a hit single could cost you your life.

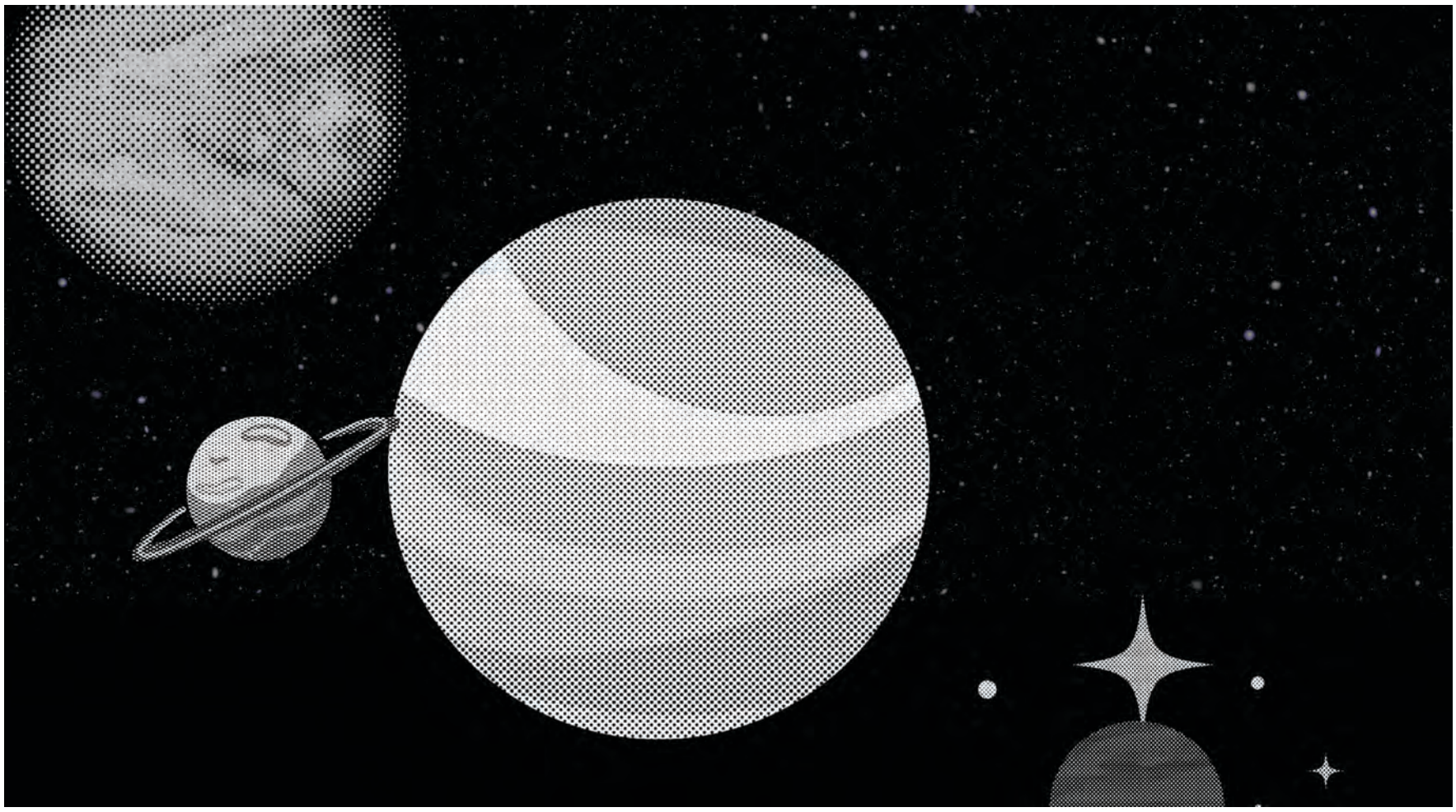
When one invokes war imagery, as Youngboy does, these are the gender politics that follow: wartime often triggers some of the most violent forms of patriarchy. As scholar Brittney Cooper writes about the Vietnam War, male veterans, "demoralized by wars both at home and abroad, took possession of the one thing that was left--the women, treating us as their own kind of trophies, pretty objects that bolstered their social capital while commanding or compelling no responsibility from them for, and to, us." In a Tik Tok framing the Ukrainian violence in terms of Durk and Youngboy, the user claimed that there would be no real violence in the beef until India, Durk's wife, was harmed. Sure enough, Youngboy attacks India directly in his lyrics: "He call me a bitch/that be India, your hoe." While she is merely an innocent bystander, India is roped into Youngboy's attack on Durk with blatant misogyny.

Women are not the only marginalized group endangered by this lyrical war. Both the rap industry and the hometowns of Durk and Youngboy are largely Black spheres; as a result, Black lives are the ones at stake should this beef's violence manifest. Everything from Youngboy's lyrics to his costume incites Black rage. Even the delivery is angry; the first thing that jumps out to any listener is the palpable rage in Youngboy's patented screams. However, in today's discourse, rage is often viewed as a productive and cathartic force for the Black community. For example, in my Religious Sciences class we are currently studying Malcolm X. Malcolm embraced his gangster past and his Black rage and used it to fuel his activism. NBA Youngboy is far from an activist; but, he too is a gangster with a national platform. And Unlike Malcolm, though, Youngboy has no positive goals. With this beef, the only action he incites is destruction. He summons Black rage to promote the extinguishing of Black life. Recently, Lil Durk went on the podcast, MILLION DOLLAZ WORTH OF GAME, hosted by Wallo and Gillie's show to promote his album. Wallo broke down in tears, begging Lil Durk to get out of this beef. Wallo lost his brother to street violence, so he knows first hand the lives that glorified violence can take. The suburban white teens shouting "slide for Von" and the public figures posting trivial messages written in money don't see the tears of people like Wallo or King Von's mother.

One might argue that beefing is merely rap culture, and it should not be expanded into the context of global and domestic oppression. However, popular culture shapes our consciousness in the most subtle ways. Movements like the Harlem Renaissance used Black art to change the way whites thought about Black humanity. Today, however, we are witnessing the opposite. Youngboy vs Durk is not entertainment; it is a war waged through 808s and adlibs. People's lives are at stake. Delete your Instagram comments. Delete your money messages. Culture does not exist in some isolated sphere-it is teaching our 9 year olds to sing about brutalizing Black men and women, preparing them to perpetuate racial and patriarchal oppression.

Get Into It, Yuh: Afrofuturism in Doja Cat's Planet Her

Words by Samantha Buyungo



"Get into it, yuh."

From hardcore stan to occasional listener, this refrain is well known amongst anyone familiar with American rapper, singer, and songwriter Doja Cat. At the 2022 Grammy Awards, Doja and American singer and songwriter SZA took home the Grammy for Best Pop Duo/Group Performance for their collaboration on "Kiss Me More" from Doja's most recently released album, Planet Her. The 2021 album, titled after a fictional planet of her own creation, is a charismatic, psychedelic, and playful artistic work that transports listeners into outer space. Countless elements of Planet Her, from the lyrics to the vibrant, futuristic music videos, create a beautiful picture where Black people, especially Black women, can thrive in a world alien from our own.

These qualities touch on the idea of Afrofuturism — a term coined by American author and cultural critic, Mark Dery in 1994, which describes "a cultural aesthetic combining science fiction, history, and fantasy to explore the African American experience." Afrofuturism acts as a dialogue and a reimagining of history that allows Black people to reflect on the past while also creating a future. Much of the origins of Afrofuturism reside with Sun Ra, an American jazz musician and intellectual recognized for paving the way for Afrofuturism in music through the release of his 1973 album Space is the Place. The album was later transformed into a film in 1974 which cleared the way for Afrofuturism to permeate other artistic mediums. Octavia Butler's literary works (such as Kindred) often follow young women forced to grapple with racial issues rooted in today's society (such as slave narratives) with sci-fi twists (such as the ability to time travel). American singer Janelle Monáe's android-inspired Afrofuturism touches on the role of sexuality, gender, and technology in popular culture. And of course, Marvel's Black Panther, which features the futuristic fictional African nation of Wakanda, has made Afrofuturism more visible than ever before. As a result, Afrofuturism's return to the forefront of pop culture has contributed to a wave of new-age Black psychedelia that enables Black creatives to illustrate their own futures. This notion of Black individuals crafting their own futures -especially ones that exist outside of whiteness- is a key element of Doja's Planet Her. Visually, the accompanying music videos incorporate futuristic themes that serve as a map to the planet of her own creation. The first song on the album, "Woman," has a tropical, reggae style with an afrobeat feel that showcases her skills as a rapper. The lyrics touch upon themes related to femininity and seek to deconstruct the societal idea of the "strong Black woman." In particular, the lines, "You need a woman's touch in your place, just protect her and keep her safe," speak to a reality where Black women are seen as soft and worthy of protection. The adultification of Black women and the pervasive "strong Black woman" stereotype, force Black women and girls to exhibit fierce self-sufficiency and emotional restraint. This stereotype, which denies Black women and girls the delicacy of their femininity, is challenged throughout this song as Doja juxtaposes the "softness" of femininity with the "strength" of communal womanhood. In the music video, Doja assumes the role of a mythical creature tasked with helping the queen of the kingdom reclaim her throne from the men threatening it. Over the course of the video, Doja's hypnotizing and rhythmic movements successfully stop the men from dethroning the queen. It is interesting to note that by playing with female sexuality and womanhood, Doja interacts with the male gaze in an untraditional way. Instead of using her sensuality to vie for male attention, she weaponizes it. Her femininity, instead of being an object of male desire, becomes a tool to defend and protect her community of Black women.

The lush, neon-synth sound of "Need to Know," the album's 5th song, is a perfect example of how Doja incorporates classic science fiction into her music. She introduces comic book, video game, and cyberpunk imagery to create a psychedelic masterpiece. The music video showcases Doja as a teal-colored alien woman on an interplanetary "night out" in space. The lyrics are flirtatious, with her telling her unknown lover, "wanna know what it's like, baby show me what it's like [...] I just been fantasizin', and we got a lotta time." Though her lyrics are explicitly sexual, they are refreshing and serve as a means to empower Black women to unapologetically own their pleasure and imagine themselves as powerful, sensual, and otherworldly.

The Grammy Award-winning lead single, "Kiss Me More," combines Doja's smooth flow and SZA's chill attitude into a beautiful pink and purple pastel-colored music video. In the video, Doja and SZA are characterized as playful goddesses on Doja's fictional planet and are more interested in playing video games than entertaining men. In the media, Black women are often forced into roles that hypersexualize them-portraying them as craving any kind of male attention. However, "Kiss Me More" refuses to play into this hypersexualization. Conversely, towards what the media would expect of these Black women, Doja and SZA show no desire to compete for the man's attention and are, in fact, bored by his presence. Through this video, Doja is able to imagine a colorful utopia that celebrates a form of Black feminine freedom that exists outside of the male gaze.

Throughout the album, Doja hints at the otherworldly, sexually liberating, Afro-futurist potential of Black individuals that operate outside of the context of whiteness. She challenges the idea of what a "strong Black woman" should look like, deconstructs the hypersexualization of Black femininity, and paints a beautiful image of Black people happily owning their power and existing in space. However, perhaps the crowning moment of Planet Her has nothing to do with the lyrics or the music video, but rather the beautiful cover of the album itself, which encapsulates the essence of Afrofuturism: a young woman fearlessly claiming her place among the stars.

The Politics of Spring Weekend

Words by Nathanael Perez

All images and quotes included have been taken from Sidechat, a social media app connecting Brown students

First established in 1950, Brown's Spring Weekend has sought to unite and entertain Brown students by bringing promising and popular musicians for half a century. Today, Spring Weekend is not only a respite for burnt-out students before brutal final exams, but has become a projection of the developing music landscape and its social implications. For example, while Ella Fitzgerald would perform in 1964, appearances from The Isley Brothers, Bob Dylan, and James Brown amongst other top names marked shifts from jazz to rock and funk in the nation's music tastes. Similarly, the setlists of the 1990s, which showcased A Tribe Called Quest, Coolio, Grandmaster Flash, and Boogie Down Productions verify the influential emergence of Hip-Hop and rap in the decade. Finally, performances by Snoop Dogg, Young Thug, Kendrick Lamar, and Chance the Rapper through the 2010s have substantiated rap as the genre which dominated the past decade, a reality that remains true today. Together, this portrait of progression painted throughout Spring Weekends illustrates interesting narratives and uncovers potential correlations about our society that would fascinate any local anthropologist. With this, I would like to focus on the discourse surrounding this upcoming Spring Weekend.

On March 25th, the BCA dramatically rolled out the 2022 Spring Weekend lineup announcing that Amaare, Flo Milli, Tems, Ari Lennox, Maye, and Smino would be headlining the festival. I had no expectations for the lineup as I really didn't have much of a standard of what Spring Weekends had looked like in the past. Nevertheless, at the moment and even now after looking at the University's previous lineups for the concert, I'm pleasantly surprised by the amount of talent the BCA was able to coalesce for this year's Spring Weekend, despite my sparse exposure to the artists beforehand. However, my sentiments were not entirely shared throughout the school's student body.

With the Spring Weekend's lineup release welcomed by a frenzy of Instagram story reposts, it was clear many students were elated or at least accepting of the lineup. Whether it was "finding out Columbia has Rick Ross and Rick Ross only" or wanting to "shake some ass to Flo Milli with the boys," there was much to be satisfied with regarding this year's lineup. Either way, everyone in favor of the Spring Weekend lineup recognized "any lineup would have some people complaining."

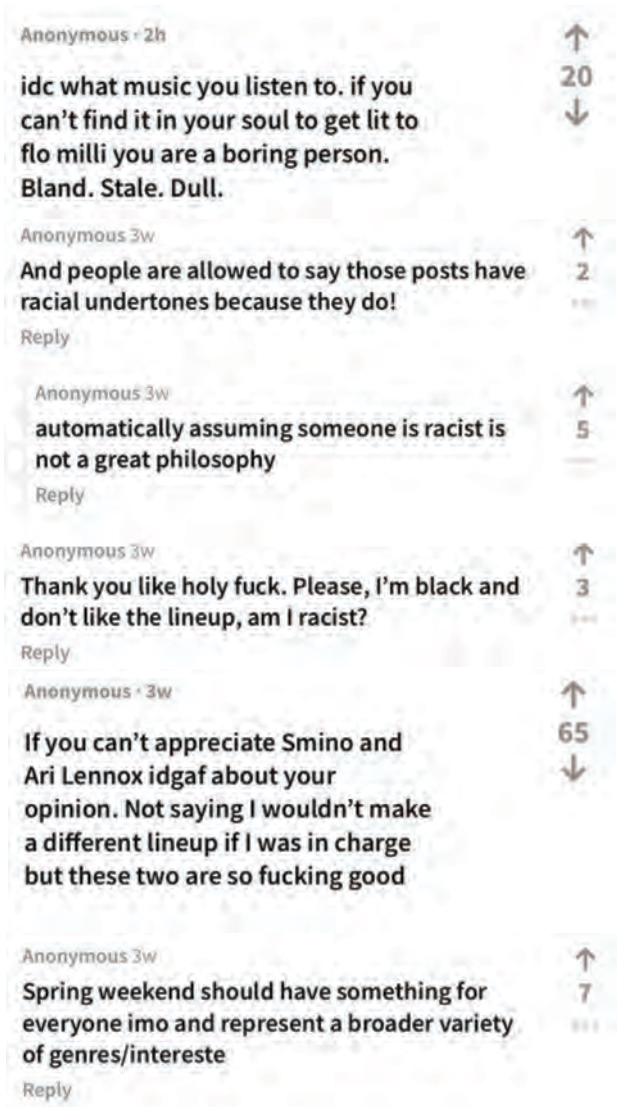
Meanwhile, others were dissatisfied. Some would claim "Spring Weekend's free because otherwise, nobody would be going," while others declared "they could've done better by picking three artists randomly from a Spotify Daily Mix."

However, the lineup's reactionary backlash soon became so overwhelming that over one hundred students jokingly agreed "we need a witness protection program for BCA members." It would escalate to discriminative levels as one claimed the BCA "looked way too proud of themselves for that bullshit" while another condescendingly compared Rap, R&B, and Afro Beats to "blue, teal, and green" in relation to a rainbow. And with this fervent opposition, discussions of whether racism was at play began to emerge with Uncle Ruckus even making an appearance.

While some of the arguments against the lineup may be somewhat valid regarding the relative lack of musical diversity or inclusivity of the lineup and are not necessarily racist in content, it is the overwhelming amount of earnest frustration and expression of hate that establishes and verifies the previously unverifiable racial undertones of the oppositional comments. Though it is unfortunate to see the true colors of a PWI present themselves regarding the Sping Weekend lineup, I think it is even more important to remember and celebrate the fact that this is an inexplicably huge accomplishment for BIPOC, particularly for the Black community at Brown and in the industry. On another note, regarding the backlash, I believe the outlook should be partially shifted so that more attention is paid to the misogynistic and patriarchal undertones of these complaints and how race amplifies them.

Out of this lineup, all of the individual performers are Black except for Maye and all are women except for Smino. Amongst Black artists in the lineup, everyone has incorporated some extent of R&B into their discography aside from Flo Milli. A rapper, a fact some are forgetting as they request that rap be included in the lineup, she and Smino are the only musicians in attendance who will perform a rap. This layout, coupled with my understanding of the current music industry serves to highlight the current patriarchal gendering at play within Black music.

With the transition from R&B to Rap as the mainstream genre in the United States at the turn of the 2010s, we would also see the misogyny of the Rap industry pollute and influence the rest of the surrounding music industry. Comparable to previous mainstream genres of the past, Rap's come up to begin the previous decade was established around patriarchal standards as male rappers would spearhead its emergence. However, unlike in previous iterations where female counterparts would exist in the same genre and experience their own success, female rappers have found it much harder to encounter significant mainstream success in the rap game, exclusively focusing on rap, aside from a few outliers such as Nicki Minaj, Cardi B, and Megan Thee Stallion. From the endless slander rappers like Coi Leray have received regarding their appearance and music to the lack of recognition those like Flo Milli have been faced with, many women have steered away from Rap and toward alternative genres, particularly R&B, in the effort to have more successful and less strenuous careers. Hence, this patriarchal masculation of Rap led to the subsequent feminization of R&B; the already great female R&B artists would remain prominent within the genre during this transition while an influx of women would join the industry through the 2010s making R&B almost synonymous with femininity in today's context. Comparably, male R&B artists would become affected by this sudden feminization of the genre. No longer could a Black man maintain his masculinity while exclusively performing R&B with its new feminine connotations. To compensate for this alteration many men who wish to engage in R&B while maintaining their masculinity have adopted styles and sounds that incorporate Rap, Hip-Hop, and/or R&B. This complex is blatantly seen amongst artists like the Weeknd, Anderson.Paak, Brent Faiyaz, and Spring Weekend's very own Smino. Depending on their appearance and popularity as much as on their musical talents, it is interesting to see how some Black, male artists have adopted music that suits their musical preferences but establishes and maintains their socially perceived masculinity in order to maintain a safe and successful career. Unfortunately, the hypermasculinization of Black men in society has denied Black, male artists the same privilege as their non-Black counterparts to navigate through relatively traditional or contemporary feminine spaces and still be viewed as masculine by both men and women. R&B is feminine. Rap is masculine. As a result, we find ourselves in an era today where Black music dominates the music industry but exudes concerning symptoms of patriarchal and racist foundations, all of which underlie Spring Weekend's lineup and the conversations around it.



Reimagine

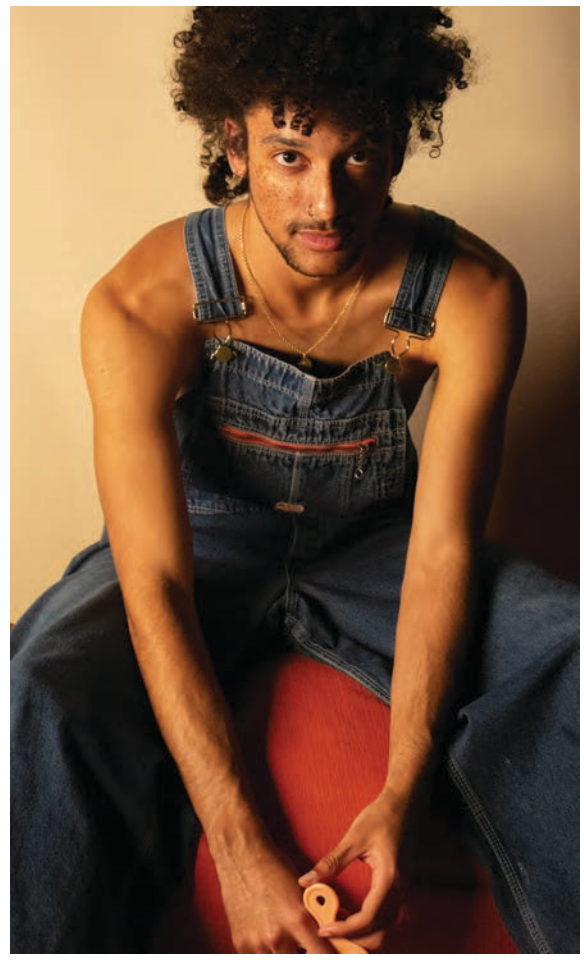
Art & Words by Dori Walker

Dori Walker is a member of the class of 2024, double majoring in Modern Culture and Media and Economics. Her ultimate artistic goal is to build vibrant, new worlds and re-imagine pre-existing ones through using media and visuals to amplify the beauty of diversity, inclusion, and self-expression. In particular, Dori's work aims to center on blackness and explore the ways in which we can shed radically transformative light on the black identity. This series of photos come from four works entitled our present is future, they're heaven, his divinity, and boy and his pick. More of Dori's work can be found on her Instagram @doriwithacamera.

our present is future

his divinity

they're heaven



boy and his pick

THE SPACE CADETS

Art & Words by Lyric Johnson

Lyric Johnson is a photographer and visual artist from Gary, Indiana. She dedicates her free time to the pursuit of art, with a focus specifically on capturing the softness, vulnerability, and joy of black people in a way that is not often seen in media. This culmination of photos created by Lyric has been given the name "the space cadets" as a homage to the otherworldly subjects that are typically seen in Lyric's visual artwork. You can find more of her work on her Instagram @lyrictakesphotos.

The photos featured in this spread are all from a single shoot conceptualized in a sudden spur of creativity shared by both Dori Walker and Lyric Johnson, two Black independent photographers at Brown. The inspiration for this shoot was exploring afro-futurism and aesthetic manifestations of black futurity. This concept was brought to life with the help of Millicent Stiger through hair, makeup, and styling, without which this wouldn't have been possible. Works form the shoot feature Brown students Aida Sherif (2022), Dylan Lewis (2022), Ashley Vamparo (2024), Delena Alemayehu (2024), Helena Bates (2024), Keiley Thompson (2024), Ryan Jones (2024), Aubrey Parker (2024), Teniayo-Ola Macaulay (2025), and Riyan Campbell (2025).

Outlooks on the Month of April

Words by Octavia Rowe

Aries

This is the month where you should be unafraid to be your whole authentic self: active, unapologetic, determined, and above all, honest. Work. You're working towards something and will soon achieve it. Let it serve as a reward for all that you've been through. Let it reassure you, and keep it up.

Taurus

Expect the unexpected this month. Strange pairs is the name of the game that you're playing. Try a new food combination, go out with someone new, make a new friend (or return to an old one). With the housing lottery looming, it's time to consider where you will be living next year. Maybe the best place for you to be will be where you were in the

Cancer

You're going to need all the luck you can get this month, because someone or something within your field of choice is going to cross you. A week or so from now, you may make what you would consider major progress on whatever situation sits at the forefront of your mind. It is a false front, don't believe it.

Gemini

Not much new this month is coming your way. Only old problems and, from thence, consequences. The age-old problem of the gemini: the inability to make a decision. You need to grow up. Be indecisive when it comes to ordering food, not when it comes to your concentration or housing next year. Next, look into your own natal chart and consider what you see compared to the patterns you go through now. What needs to change?

Virgo

Look for something happening in the second week of April. Have you been trying to impress someone? Either for the sake of a new friendship, internship, or recommendation letter? Well, it's been working! But try not to lose yourself in the

Leo

The theme of this month for you will be excess, with particular focus on coveting the wrong things. Really think about what will be best for you instead of what you think will be best for you. And on a deeper level, past appearances, what has helped you out of negative patterns in the past?

Scorpio

You open the month strong. You make an effort and really dedicate yourself to balancing your relationships with your career or service work. What's holding you back is the inability to escape what you have already done. Change doesn't happen overnight, and you fall back into old patterns of codependency, lies, and selfishness. You betray yourself by seeking the intensity that consistency just cannot capture. Be prepared to find yourself in the same place you

Libra

You've been sent into near reclusion working recently. Go outside and plant your feet back on the ground. Your friends miss you. You may win that award or receive an interview from that company you applied to, especially if things will be decided or announced in the second week of

Capricorn

You will find yourself going through cycles without any real introspection, ignoring the internal work needed to actually grow. Instead, by running through the same lines of struggle → work → 'overcome' to present the appearance of change. Somehow, you will need to break that cycle with yourself, your work, and your family.

Sagittarius

You will come to the middle of the month and find yourself presented with a choice that forces you out of your comfort zone. You will have to deal with the emotional implications of choosing between something that challenges your beliefs and draws you in many directions. Initially, you may not know how to handle it. My advice is to embrace your emotional ability over pure reason and logic.

Pisces

At the end of the month, you will find yourself on the precipice of a well paying job, award, grant, or some other highly sought after opportunity. Which is great, after all, but you will need to contend with the fact that it will take you to places out of your comfort zone, and you will need to flex some skills that you have underdeveloped, like effective communication, public speaking, or shirking unnecessary responsibilities.

Aquarius

Have you been bored with yourself, your style, your room? Now is the time to change it. If you look at your wardrobe and you're not inspired, donate it, and move on. Draw some inspiration from people you look up to through history, in the media, or even on social media. Avoid throwing yourself too fully into things without planning, or you may find yourself doing laundry every other day.

It's pronounced "eye-sha"

Words by Aicha Sama
Art By Praises Amponsah

When I walked into one of my classes my freshman year of high school and saw that there was a substitute teacher, Mr. Smith, standing behind the desk, I knew I was in for a ride.

Once Mr. Smith started going down the list of names to take attendance, I got a very familiar feeling of dread as he inched closer and closer to the "S" last names. Suddenly, he paused, his face scrunched up in confusion, and he opened his mouth in a half-hearted attempt to pronounce my name.

After a few seconds of awkward silence, he muttered, "Um, is it Ikea? Ikea Sama?"

From then on, I was Aicha by day, Ikea by night. I often joked that the new Ikea store being built 10 minutes away from my high school was my new home. I even welcomed my friends and peers to use this new nickname to address me.

At the end of the day, being mistakenly called "Ikea" gave me a funny anecdote to use in quirky college essays, during awkward icebreakers, or as an opening to a Black Star Journal article.

However, there is a larger issue at hand with the way that non-white names are treated in American classrooms.

A not-so-fond memory of mine from my freshman year at Brown is the semester I spent trying to get my Political Science professor to say my name correctly. During the first day of class, she butchered my name, as expected, and I simply corrected her with a polite "Oh, it's actually pronounced 'eye-sha.'"

Assuming that she would make a note of the correct pronunciation of my name on her attendance sheet, I did not think much of her mistake and moved on. The next week, this professor managed to mispronounce my name in a different way. Again, I corrected her on the appropriate pronunciation of my very simple, two-syllable name and went on with my day.

Three weeks later and three more incorrect pronunciations of my name later, she called on me to answer a question and incorrectly addressed me as "eye-E-sha."When I corrected her for the sixth time that semester, she boldly asked "are you sure? I'm pretty sure you told me a different pronunciation of your name last week."

The only two words that could come to mind at this moment were "the audacity." To insinuate that someone does not know the correct pronunciation of their own name is absurd. This speaks to a larger disregard for non-Western names and individuals' refusal to give them their due respect.

By the time finals rolled around, she never learned how to say my name correctly. I found this hard to understand, given that we both have five-letter, two-syllable names. The only striking difference is that the professor's name is a traditionally white name, while mine is not.

There is a clear discrepancy in the way that non-white names are treated, particularly in predominantly white spaces. Many try to argue that the mispronunciation of one's name is "not a big deal" or "just an honest mistake."However, properly addressing someone is a clear sign of respect. Putting no effort into learning someone's name after they've corrected you multiple times is, at best, disrespectful, and at worst, indicative of deeper biases against non-white people.

When simple ways to show respect are disregarded, like misspelling someone's name in an email when they clearly spelled out their name in their sign-off, it illustrates a lack of willingness to promote a comfortable environment for everyone. Specifically, when non-white names are consistently mispronounced, it indicates a lack of willingness to even attempt to create inclusive spaces.

My story is representative of a larger phenomenon. In 2015, Duke professor Jerry Hough shared his opinions on "non-American" names through a racist comment he wrote in response to a New York Times article about systematic racism and segregation in Baltimore.

Hough stated, "I am a professor at Duke University. Every Asian student has a very simple old American first name that symbolizes their desire for integration. Virtually every black has a strange new name that symbolizes their lack of desire for integration."

Here's what I think:

Expecting non-white Americans, particularly non-white immigrants, to choose names that have no significance to their culture or background for the purposes of assimilation is a clear indication that Hough, and people who think like him, believe that "simple white names" are superior to "strange black names." Further, this logic reveals that non-Black people who think in this way have no real desire for integration since they cannot even accept names that are unfamiliar to them. They seem to think that Asian and Black people should work to make themselves more palatable to white people instead of… you know… encouraging white people to not be racist or discriminatory.
"every black"? How about Black people? Black students?
"strange new name"??
WHO asked Jerry for his thoughts???

Hough went on to say that, despite Asian-Americans "experiencing discrimination as bad as blacks in America, they didn't feel sorry for themselves, but worked doubly hard."

Not only does this view unfairly discourage people of color from rightly speaking out on issues of race in America out of fear of being perceived as people who are just "too lazy to pull themselves up by their bootstraps," but it also helps fuel the model minority myth and the deep divide between Asian and Black Americans. By convincing people that there is a way people of color can succeed by simply ignoring racism, white ways of being and governance reign supreme and become heralded as the most significant.

Asian-Americans and Black Americans deserve the same respect that white Americans receive, whether or not they decide to adopt "simple old American names".

To refuse to show respect to names that are a little more unfamiliar than "Emily" and "James" is ignorant, and clearly indicates a refusal to receive and understand non-Western stories, ideas, and attitudes. Addressing someone correctly comes down to basic respect—and we are all deserving of that.

We circled around each other, in close proximity but never got too close
Like orbits, the gravitational pull kept us in check, kept us grounded
I can't quite pinpoint the moment where gravity seemed to dissipate
When collisions and intersections were an everyday interplay

Here for me, he heard me, see for me, he saw me

Circles breached, lines crossed, hearts fractured—
but that's too soon
Let me not get ahead of myself because I never intended too
I sought refuge in his voice that matched my tempo
A harmony but a foreshadowed decrescendo

Here for me, he heard me, see for me, he saw me

In open rooms of bright light and melodies
Our eyes met in the polished glass
Tenacious souls, sparked zeal, warm laughs
Energies and wavelengths and vibrations and rotations
The closer it seemed our worlds came,
feelings exchanged
Gradual pores made in sturdy wooden walls, fixed with too many layers

Here for me, he heard me, see for me, he saw me
I asked myself how this could have ever found it's way to me
As if it was not something I hadn't laid my palms together for
as if it had to be worked for
Something I didn't even know I wanted and yes, I wanted
My give-and-take, my mutual, my compromise

Hear me, See me

Words by Manuella Talla

Here for me, he heard me, see for me, he saw me

Was it too good to be true? Is that still a thing?
A cinematic affair crawls into my reality but only for so long
Too perfect the image of two-with flaws gnawing at the corners
Amidst a fog of white light, his fingers tiptoed to reach mine

Here for me, he heard me? see for me, he saw me?

It was the warmth but also the pins and needles
It was the familiarity,
but the possibility of everything dismantling
It was the desire, but the itching fear
Of not wanting to be strangers,
But wanting it to last forever
Can we make this last forever?

Here for me,
but he hadn't heard me

See for me,
but he never really saw me

Black Business Highlight:

Stages of Freedom

Words by Amiri Nash

PROVIDENCE, RI – Down the hill from Brown University, nestled between the Providence River, Brown, and RISD, sits Stages of Freedom. Founded in 2016, the organization aims to inform through art, community engagement, empowerment, and social justice practices the value of Black lives in Rhode Island and nationally. Stages of Freedom is a living museum.

Walking into Stages of Freedom, you immediately become surrounded by history and culture. The building is filled with a wide variety of donated artwork, books, maps, postcards, and knowledge. It is the only African American museum in Rhode Island. Directed by Robb Dimmick and Ray Rickman, Stages of Freedom is far from the beginning of their journey. Working against anti-Blackness has been a lifetime commitment for both of these trailblazers.

"Ask me for any book, any author, any subject, we got it," Rickman said. "We have philosophy, mathematics, poetry, anything – you name it." This expansive and impressive collection of books, antiques, artifacts, and more, has been building up for years. Rickman lives by the philosophy that people do not need to be afraid to ask questions about Black topics or history. I asked one myself: "What do you want to come from all of this?"

He explained to me that the proceeds and sales from the donated books and art go towards the Stages of Freedom swimming lesson program. African American youth drown at five times the rate of white youth. This is due to the complex history that Black people have with water. Swimming pools were segregated during the Jim Crow era and those policies still have an impact on cultural behavior to this day. The free-swimming lesson program aims to combat the impact of anti-Blackness.

In terms of support, Stages of Freedom needs Brown, RISD, and the wider Providence community's help. "I mean, we're just asking people to come take a look around the store. Buy a book once a month. Learn something new. There's so much here," Rickman said. The convenient location – between Brown and RISD – is the perfect opportunity for students to come and support the justice-based organization. Since initially meeting Rickman, I go down to the store whenever I am in need of inspiration. I purchase maps, postcards, and books. Every time I go, I learn something new. Stages of Freedom is a never-ending vault of knowledge just steps away from my dorm.

Supporting Stages of Freedom is not just a simple, proactive way to learn more about Black history, culture, and accomplishments, it is a concrete way to fund and support swimming lessons and eliminate racial inequalities amongst Black youth. I encourage all of you, especially Brown/RISD students who are just a short walk away, to make time to visit Stages of Freedom soon.

Alumni Involvement

If you are a Black alumni / know of a Black alumni that would be interested in being interviewed/ featured in an issue of The Black Star Journal, please email theblackstarjournal@gmail.com.

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Signet and Shape

Words by Abani Neferkara

With this set of poems, I wanted to consider both how the narratives and ideas people are told can change someone's worldview and, in turn, the impact they then have on the world. Often, hate and bigotry stems from people believing in a convenient narrative that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, resulting in blind hatred towards another group. We see this scapegoating often in our world today, whether it be financial strain on the white working class feeding into anti-Black racism, or the pandemic stirring conspiracy theories with extreme anti-Asian racism. However, we must not only consider the communities who are harmed as a result of these beliefs, but we must also critically analyze the process by which people perpetuate and benefit from these narratives.

I: The Wicked Signet

It is the allure of
An impossible dream, a fantasy
That calls out to your deepest desires

The story it tells
Is seductive in its simplicity
A blinding flame
Kindled with half truths and what ifs

Your mind is softened
By the warmth of its fabrications
Melted to hot wax
Before the wicked signet
Engraves its designs upon you

The cruel contortions in its metal face
Pierce malleable cognition as it descends
Molding a pliant heart into
Foreign shapes

When the unseen hand
Withdraws its crushing regalia
You are left there in perfect deformation
Pressed into the shape of submission
And born again in the image of someone else
The dream that brought you here
Now long forgotten

II: Broken Shapes

I find you a terrifying beauty
Now a body of swirling metal,
Flowing like water and hard like ice
You gleam in the sickening sunlight
I would call you monstrosity
But I don't know your shape

You may be twisted and bent into the chains that strangle my freedom
Lashing together the cuffs that cut into my wrists
Stringing together the keys that lock me up and hide the sky
Coiling around my windpipe with chattering links that silence my last breath

You may be melted and pressed into shining coins
Weighing down the pocket of those who've looked the other way
Enough to turn weakness into wickedness
So dear and treasured, what is a life even worth?

You may be hammered and forged into the barrel of a rifle
Pointed at an enemy you're told is aiming right back
Heavy fingers grip your featherweight trigger
Eager to deliver an emissary of devastation, speaking of salvation

Perhaps you may be carefully plied into the shape of a ring
Painted in the false gold of righteousness and cut with jagged insignia
To adorn an unseen hand
Whispering of a thousand impossible dreams
Just to crush them too
Into broken shapes like you

Brown without Black Inventors

Words by Nneka Kendra Ezeama

My grandmother sent me a package and it should be arriving today at Page–Robinson, but when I woke up to check my phone, I didn't get an email.

It was unusually cold in the morning so I went to turn on my heater, but you see, a Black woman named Alice H. Parker invented the central heating system in the early 1900s. So, I grudginglygot out of bed and began to layer up and get ready for the day.

But I couldn't: The clothes I put in the washer the night before had finished, but I couldn't put them in the drier because there wasn't one– George T. Samon, a Black man, invented the modern day clothes dryer. Wearing dampclothes whilst cold, I struggled to brush my teeth and freshen up. As I was approaching my shoe–rack,I found that all my shoes were gone. Because of Jan Matzeliger's creation of the modern shoe, I couldn't find my sneakers. I was forced to wear my slides.

Before leaving the dorm, I had checked my email and still had not received an email on my package arriving.

Looking haggard on my way from Harambee House to class in Pembroke Hall, it was time to cross the busy street connectingThayer and Waterman Street. To my surprise, there were no cross–traffic lights to coordinate the cars on the roads, along with surrounding vehicles malfunctioning because Garrett A. Morgan, a Black man, invented the traffic light and Black engineer Richard Spikes invented the automatic gear shift. As other students gathered around the chaos, I continued onto Thayer Street, until I reached Pembroke Hall running a few minutes late.

As I opened the door,I looked for the elevator to get to the top floor to save time. Where the elevator stood was an empty wall because Black inventor Alexander Miles created its patent in the late 80's.

After running up the stairs, I had finally approached my classroom. Before entering, I quickly checked my phone for an email about the package, but my inbox was empty.

When I opened the door, the room was dimly lit with candles because the filament in the light bulb was created by Lewis Howard Latimer, a Black man.

"Brown University alumni Lisa Gelobter, a Black woman, graduated with a degree in Computer Science and Entrepreneurship and went onto create the animations for GIFs you see in media. Black inventor Philip Downing invented Street Letter Mailboxes for a more efficient postal system. These are just two of the many Black inventors that have improved our daily lives. I say this not only because you should not take these inventions for granted, but for you to understand you are just as capable of amazing discoveries.
Black inventors are a crucial piece in human history and continue to be, regardless of societal efforts to subdue its existence."

My alarm went off. I woke up to a heated room and basked in its warmth. I checked my phone and saw that a package had arrived.

Paper–Mâché Boat

Words by Kendall Williams

Her storytelling is what guided me through the rainy nights. During these nights is when we could live the most. She would tell me to close my eyes and just listen, so I did. We traveled through the world, through new dimensions and worlds through her voice. She crafted us our own ship made out of paper–mâchéwith both of our names on it–S.S. Vincent Maria.

When the sun was out we had to hide the boat, our mothers would never allow such dreams to fester, especially not when those men came around. I would be told to stay in the kitchen, and read oth–er stories while replaying Vincent Maria's. Everyone in the town would gather their children and push them into the house when they heard the tires approaching. I'd ask if those men were mon–sters that talked to the devil, but Maria never answered. I never saw their faces, but I'd always hear "I'm here to collect your payments."

Rainy days were few and far between, but with the rain came mud, and no truck in this place could withstand that terrain.

When Vincent Maria would sail, I would lay my head on the ground watching the boat float on the horizon, behind, as if she were the moon pushing the waves, was Maria; her sun–kissed skin and long black dress. She told me that this boat could sail us to the island, where we didn't have to hide, where the magic inside of us could be realized.
She never told me what magic I would have.

Maybe my magic could help my mother. Maybe then we could go to the island. But without the island, there was no magic and with no magic, there could be no island. I dreamed that one year it would rain so much that the town would flood and a river would transcend from the precipitation, leading us to the island.

When the moon was the only light in town, we would meet at the pond and watch the boat float and I would lay down on her dress. I traced my fingers over the intricate designs of her dress and lis–tened to her stories. The slow cadence of her voice was just above a whisper so as to not wake our parents. She would drag her delicate fingers across my hair as we sailed on our little boat. Our boat had been to so many places it was hard to keep track. I liked traveling with Maria. I just wish I had the chance to really see the world with her.

She told many stories about the places we would visit, but none were as compelling as that with the Iron Lady she said there, on that island our dreams would come true. One time she told me stories of people from our town who went to the island and used their magic powers. A man could turn everything he touched into gold, so he became extremely rich and built a house that was brighter than the sun. Finally, there was Maria's dad who left many years ago. Maria said it was for the better because he was very fast now so someday he'll come back when the men do and fight them off but he'll be so fast they'll only see a quick flash and then they'll be gone.
"When will we leave this place and go to that island?"
"We can go right now if you'd like."
"No, I want to go, really. I want to leave and never look back. I want my powers."

Maria's face turned white, the blood drained from her face. She always would go quiet when I asked about leaving, so I would just lie back down watching our little boat float to new lands while I remained in this one.

On days when it rained, mother allowed me to go over to Maria's house. But the fear that the clouds would dissipate and unleash the sun scared me so I always ran, even though she lived right next door. As I caught my breath, Maria would grab me some wa–ter. It was almost like clockwork, how routine it all was. I wish I could run next door and have one more cup of water with her–I'm so sorry, Maria.

She sat in that house all day and decorated dresses. I still have some, you can feel the love she sewed into them. When I wear them, it's as if she's with me sitting on the wet grass, telling me a story of the island. She didn't need to come to the island though, she was always magical, but maybe that's why she never came.
Ten years since I first heard of this island from her lips and her voice that carried a boat thousands of miles in a pond no big–ger than our bed. It has been ten years since I was given hope that I wouldn't have to hide in the kitchen at the sound of large tires on days where mother nature had cursed us with sun and no threat of showers. Tenyears since I've dreamed of those great floods that would sweep us and our boat to that island, but now I'm on a boat without you. Ten years since I hid in the kitchen from those men, and now I run from new ones. Men in suits come to the door, rain or shine, but my mother is not here to protect me from them. Now, I realized those stories of the people who gained powers merely gained a minimumwage. But it's been only a few since I came to the Iron Lady only to realize we never left our little boat and the Island didn't make my dreams come true and the only magicI had was really you, Maria. I'm sorry we never truly left. I made it to the Island, only to realize it was just a pebble in our pond.

No Beginning, No End:
You and Me and Curly Hair

Words by Olivia Bendich

I'm not sure where to start. If I were to start at the beginning this would become something like a history lesson and we'd all be bored and sitting here for hours, possibly even days. I could begin with myself, but this isn't necessarily my story and I'm afraid you might think me presumptuous. It's not that I don't have the words or that my mouth has gone dry, I just don't know where I should begin. You told me this was a story about your hair and ambiguity and fear and ignorance. You told me I should be the one to write it and I'm going to try to do that. So, I shall start with myself and I will start with Hawaii and I will start with you and I will end with what comes next.

I think I was born crying. I know I was born prematurely and with all sorts of stomach issues and I was much lighter than my mother and my curls were a 3a and hers were a 4b. I know that you understand because you also look exotic and different and no one can quite place you though they love to try. They love to touch and question and project their own insecurities and lack of understanding. Do you remember what you told me about that first night in Hawaii? You were leaving the club and it was sticky and warm and beautiful and then that man approached you. You said it felt urgent like if he didn't ask you he might die or combust. And he didn't just ask if you were American, he told you he and his friends had a bet going. It wasn't just some questioning of identity and belonging, but a complete fetishization of your appearance and your otherness.

He didn't ask about your hair, but he didn't have to.
He didn't ask what you were, but he didn't have to.

And it's not that you're insanely proud to be an American or that you want to be perceived as one. It's the whole idea of what and who an "American girl" is. Hawaii isn't even outside of the United States and yet you're not white and blonde. You don't have long hair and long legs. You're beautiful, but you're not the prototype. It's always been like this, and trust me I get it. Too white to be black and too black to be white.

Your second night in Hawaii is when things got really interesting. I know interesting is the holy grail of non-descriptive words, it's a filler word, a purposefully non-elaborative word. But what should I say instead? Should I say things got really awful? Fun? Funny? Dreadful? You knew from the moment you walked into that house party what kind of night it would be. Next time you'll leave. Next time you won't hesitate. It only took five minutes for some girl to ask, "how do you get your hair like that?" You left her with a gaping mouth and confused eyebrows as you simply answered, "I was born this way." It only took five more minutes for a different girl to stroke your hair and announce, "curly vibes!" to the whole party. In the next five minutes, five different people told you how unique your hair was and how much they loved it. You tried to sit outside and claim one of three chairs as yours for the rest of the night, but your friends needed you to dance with them, needed you happy, needed you to be having the best time ever. Why do white people always want you to make them comfortable?

He didn't ask about your hair,
but he didn't have to.

He didn't ask what you were,
but he didn't have to.

And maybe it wouldn't have been such a big deal for someone else. But you've told me how people profile you. You've told me how you've had "curly hair" screamed at you, like it tasted bad, like you smelled, like you were something to get rid of and that was how to make it happen. You've told me how those white boys would single you out solely because of your hair. You've told me and I've experienced it too. I get it. It hurts. I know I said next time you wouldn't hesitate. But I think there doesn't even need to be a next time. Of course, we're currently existing in a predominantly white space where microaggressions and ignorance are unavoidable, but you know what rooms will make your skin itch. You know which rooms will make you sweat.

And I've realized that sometimes it's better to be alone. Sometimes I'd rather be alone. To be the only black person in a white space, even with skin that's closer to theirs (except that mine has melanin and they probably don't know that and they probably don't care), is to be isolated. And this is so much worse than being alone. But what do you do when most of your friends are white? What do you do when your school is mostly white? What do you do when most of the world you exist in is white?

I don't have anywhere near all of the answers but I do know that we are the ones in control of our choices and our decisions and our lives.

I hope I remembered everything correctly. I hope I told it right. I hope one-day white people realize our curls were made for our heads and not for them to do whatever they please. I hope one-day white people forget their entitlement, abandon and neglect it entirely – purposefully. I hope one-day white people don't touch and question and feel without asking permission, without a second thought of how their actions impact the targets of their curiosity.

MF DOOM: *Master of Poetic Sound*

Words by Gustav Hall

During the sixth week of my introductory poetry analysis class, I was tasked with reading excerpts from Christian Bök's Eunoia. The topic for that week was sound: ways in which poets manipulate rhyme, assonance, alliteration, consonance, and a host of other sonic phenomena to evoke attentive response from readers. The excerpts from Bök's work certainly reflected this attention to poetic sound in a remarkably unique way.

Spanning across 5 poems, each piece is written in univocalic form (using only one vowel throughout an entire poem), and aptly named Chapter A, E, I, or U, based on the vowel used. For example, Chapter A would be composed of lines such as, "Awkward grammar appals a craftsman". This, of course, resulted in remarkable amounts of assonance (repeated vowel sounds), and Bök's ability to combine this assonance with a flurry of rhymes fostered an exceedingly pleasurable reading experience (especially when reading out loud).

My first response to reading Bök's work was, however, not one of unequivocal surprise at the exposure to a new sonic experience. Eunoia was certainly a wildly enjoyable testament to the creative ways in which poets can bend the English language to their will, but I could not, for some reason, shake the feeling that I had heard this unique sonic deliverance somewhere else. It did not take long for me to recognize where this feeling of familiarity was coming from. The colorful assonance, the surprising rhyme schemes, the unique sonic imagery; reading Eunoia felt, to a tee, like reading a verse from the late rapper MF DOOM.

Although I have been a fan of DOOM's unprecedented poetic capabilities for a while now, seeing the blatant similarities between the mind-bending univocalities of Eunoia and heavily assonance filled work of DOOM nevertheless forced an even greater recognition of the late rapper's skill upon me. In DOOM, we see a rapper who was able to seamlessly mesh classic poetic sound devices into captivating and colorful storytelling. To be certain, there are an amalgam of rappers who implement these same sound devices throughout their musical work. I'd argue, however, that there are few who are able to consistently use these sound devices as a means of both complementing the lyrical content of their work and providing pleasing musical substance as well as DOOM (especially when it comes to his use of assonance).

An example of DOOM's poignant use of assonance comes on the song "Rhinestone Cowboy" (from the album "Madvillainy") when he raps, "Known as the grimey limey, slimy- try me blimey! / Simply smashing in a fashion that's timely / Madvillain dashing in a beat-rhyme crime spree / We rock the house like rock 'n roll / Got more soul than a sock with a hole". Remarkably, almost every word used throughout these 5 lines contributes to assonance through either the long i (grimey, limey, etc.), short a (smashing, fashion, Madvillian, etc.), long e (beat, spree, we, etc.), short o (rock, got, sock, etc.), or long o (roll, more, soul, hole, etc.) vowel sounds. Within five lines, DOOM manages to create assonance with four out of the five vowels in the English language.

Another keen example of the way DOOM extensively plays with assonance comes on his song "Rhymes Like Dimes". DOOM writes, "Yo, yo, yo, y'all can't stand right here / In his right hand was your man's worst nightmare / Loud enough to burst his right eardrum, close-range / The game is not only dangerous, but it's most strange / I sell rhymes like dimes / The one who mostly keep cash but brag about broker times". Here, we see him utilizing the short a (can't, stand, hand, etc.), long a (game, dangerous, strange, etc.), and long i (right, nightmare, etc.). Additionally, he is able to implement this extensive use of assonance without it ever getting in the way of the general flow of his lines. He is able to seamlessly maneuver his way from rhyme to rhyme with a pleasing eloquence in the repeated vowel sounds.

DOOM spent almost the entirety of his career as a distinctly "underground" artist, purposefully branding himself as a mysterious figure and dodging the appeals of the main-stream. Nevertheless, his ability to smoothly incorporate large amounts of sound devices into his lyrics proved extremely influential to a number of artists of our current generation. Most notable of these disciples is Earl Sweatshirt. Earl, on multiple occasions, has expressed just how greatly the work of MF DOOM has affected his own style of writing. It is no surprise, then, when we see his use of densely assonance filled flows. This is perhaps best exemplified in his verse on Frank Ocean's "Super Rich Kids". He raps, "Alright, close your eyes to what you can't imagine / We are the Xanny-gnashing / Caddy-smashing, bratty assy / He mad, he snatched his daddy's Jag / And used the shit for batting practice". I highly recommend checking out the entire verse, as it is riddled with these long a (caddy, bratty) vowel sounds from start to finish (he keeps it up for eight more lines after the lines quoted above). This heavy use of DOOM-esque assonance is a clear representation of the gravity that DOOM has held in influencing modern underground rap acts.

DOOM was, by all accounts, a master at bending poetic sound devices to his will. Although I placed emphasis on his use of assonance, a deep dive can be taken into the ways in which he utilized phenomena such as alliteration, internal rhyme, cacophony, and many, many more devices. Almost all poets search for ways in which to grasp audiences with keen sonic deliverance. Emphasis is placed on nearly every syllable, in hopes of finding just the right collection of words to elicit a response in readers or listeners. To that end, DOOM, almost every time he touched the microphone, brought a mind-bending approach towards manipulating the English language in the most colorful, lively, and poignant of ways.

Juice Wrld: Breaking the Stigma and the Silence

Words by Kevin Carter

"Part of the underlying stigma is the silence. The silence that allows the muting of conversations surrounding practices grounded in mental health treatment"
-Joel L. Daniels

When reflecting upon the life and legacy of the prodigious late Chicago artist Juice Wrld, mental health is the preeminent topic that emerges. Juice, aka Jarad Higgins, suffered from several mental health issues including anxiety, depression, and addiction, which he consistently mentioned in his songs. "Ring ring, phone call from depression, you use my past and my memories as a weapon. On the other line, I talk to addiction." Anxiety is probably the most referenced illness in his music, and the effect it had on him was nearly palpable. "My anxiety the size of a planet". Sadly, his struggles with drug addiction were just as severe, if not worse, than how he described them to be in his music. Even as he began to commit to rehab and taking steps towards sobriety, the cumulative damage was already too great. On December 8th, 2019, less than a week after his 21st birthday, Juice Wrld died from an overdose that was ostensibly provoked, or at least very likely expedited, by the encounter he and his entourage had with law enforcement, who'd anticipated his arrival to detain him and search his jet for suspected contraband. This event shocked the world, bringing a cruel reminder of the fatal consequences that come from drug abuse and the deleterious combination it makes with mental health problems.

As vulnerable as Juice Wrld is in his music, his mental health message is often overlooked because of his brazenly explicit delivery. As an artist, Juice Wrld distinguished himself in the industry by being authentic and candid, and this allowed him to evoke a sentiment of community amongst listeners. Creating music wasn't just an outlet for him to vent and express his emotions. It was also a way for him to construct a safe space for his listeners where they could receive consolation and empathy from lyrics that vividly described thoughts, feelings, and experiences that resonated with their own mental health struggles. In this sense, songs that may seem depressing can be counterintuitively uplifting because Juice reassures listeners that they aren't the only ones feeling what or how they may be feeling. With this approach, Juice transcended hip-hop norms, but he didn't shy away from its notorious subject matter of drugs. Consequently, many saw him as just another artist feeding into the recycled topic of drug glorification, but this critique comes from a popular misconception of Juice Wrld's music. He provides clarification of his intention behind these superficially toxic themes in several of his interviews. Juice once said: "Even if I'm talking about something that's negative, I look at it as putting my mistakes out there for people to learn from it." When asked about his music during an interview with Billboard he responded, "There's no confidentiality-I put it out there for people to receive, reevaluate and learn, grab my hand and walk with me through whatever they may be going through." Whether or not this is the best approach to initiating a conversation about mental health within the Black community is debatable, but this should not depreciate the commendable courage it takes to do so in the first place. Besides, he does conform to more conventional ways of being uplifting by directly incorporating sanguine words of hope and encouragement in his songs. "I made it this far. If I can, then you can too" These lyrics convey the way Jarad spoke to his listeners, delivered like a therapist behind euphonious instrumentals and cathartic melodies. After becoming one of the biggest and most prominent stars within the music industry, Juice Wrld was cognizant of his influence, and claimed an obligation to support his fans through their mental health challenges. He shows this in lyrics like "I was put here to lead the lost souls" and "I watch the crowd and crack a smile, I have a job to lead them out". Frankly, Juice Wrld's music isn't the first time this issue has been acknowledged. Mental health is such an important topic for the African American community because it is often dismissed or delayed. This, however, can be attributed to the poverty experienced by an overwhelming majority of African American folks that makes proper treatment inaccessible, and a history of mistreatment that has built distrust towards the health care system. "More than 80% of Black Americans are very concerned about the stigma associated with mental illness, which discourages them from seeking treatment". Truthfully, it is the very experience of being African American in the U.S. that makes our mental health something that deserves to be prioritized. Because of the hardships we are exposed and susceptible to, like poverty and violence, we develop mental health issues that are exacerbated by things like racism and police brutality, which are prevalent in our society. In addition to these problematic conditions, African Americans are more likely to have a disregardful attitude towards mental health diagnoses, internalizing the notion that we are supposed to be resilient because of our inauspicious predisposition and history of overcoming oppression. "One study showed that 63% of Black people believe that a mental health condition is a sign of personal weakness. As a result, people may experience shame about having a mental illness and worry that they may be discriminated against due to their condition."

Juice Wrld interrupts the silence sustained towards mental health in African-American spaces due to the internalization of these stigmas with his music. Because of his courage to share his struggles with the world, a fresh attitude has fostered within the young generation towards mental health that may change the way these issues are handled not only within the black community, but within the entire world.

Exploring Caribbean Culinary History through Recipes: *Accras de Morue*

Words by Helena Bates

When I cook traditional Caribbean food, I am transported back to my grandparents' kitchen in Martinique. The fragrances of roasting chilis and burnt coconut sugar ignite fond memories of helping my grandfather shuck coconuts and fry saltfish fritters. These nostalgic aromas of my grandfather's kitchen are pungent reminders of the legacy of the peoples and cultures that coalesced to form Caribbean cuisine –a cuisine that is a mélange of African, French, Indigenous Caribbean, and South Asian traditions. The recipes reflect a complex and rich history of cultural heritage on the island. The currents of the Caribbean sea are filled with vibrant cultures and traditions, and this medley of lifeways and foodways forms the multicultural web of Caribbean cooking. The canon of these recipes emerging from descendants of the African diaspora has therefore amalgamated into a valuable lens through which to view the exploration of Caribbean heritage and culture.

Carnival is one of the most celebrated traditions in the Caribbean because it represents the coalescence of various cultures within the islands, serving as a reminder of the strength of the Caribbean people. With the legacy of colonization, the scars that need to be healed are not only those of physical brutality, but also deeper gashes from the deprivation of traditions and the eradication of cultural memory. As such, Carnival serves as both a vessel for the celebration of the rich cultural heritage of each island, and as a place to honor the peoples and cultures decimated by colonial exploitation.

Within Carnival, food serves the crucial role of commemorating the historical context of the event and bridging these sundry cultures together. Native foods of each island are plentiful during the festivities, and the dishes emerging from each culture are both similar and uniquely their own. In the Carnival traditions across the islands, different variations of savory fritters are probably some of the most celebrated and integral dishes of the celebration. The origins of fritter can be traced back to West Africa, and were originally made from black-eyed peas. There are various types of fritters with other names: "accras" in Trinidad and Tobago, "stamp and go" in Jamaica, and "accras de morue" in the French West Indies. The accras de morue in Guadeloupe and Martinique are commonly made from salted cod. Having been brought to the Caribbean in the 16th century by European colonizers, salted fish in general is a significant part of many Caribbean cuisines. As such, fritters, or "accras de morue", are emblematic of the various cultural influences on Caribbean islands.

Accras de Morue - Codfish Fritters

"Accras de Morue" (codfish fritters) are a staple and celebrated delicacy in Martinican cuisine, and are representative of the culinary history of the island.

Ingredients

1/2 pound salt cod

1 cup parsley stems removed

3 scallions cut into 1" pieces

1/2-1 scotch bonnet pepper (seeds and stems removed)

3 cups self rising flour (you can make your own by combining flour, baking powder, and salt)

2 cups water

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

Instructions

In order to prepare the dried salt cod, it needs to be rehydrated. Place the salted codfish in a medium pot and cover with water. Let the fish soak in the water for at least 12 hours or overnight (change the water at least once). Drain the water from the fish and cover it again with fresh water. Put the pot on the stove and bring the water/codfish to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for 15 minutes. Lastly, remove from heat and set aside. In a food processor or blender (if you don't have one then you can finely chop the ingredients) add the parsley, scallions, and a small scotch-bonnet pepper (or any other spicy pepper you have on hand). Process your ingredients until they are finely minced. Transfer them to a small bowl and set aside. Drain the water from the codfish. Use your hands to break it apart into large morsels. Transfer fish to the mini prep and pulse until the fish is finely shredded. Set aside. In a large bowl, combine the flour and baking soda. Dissolve the salt in the water. Make a well in the flour and baking soda mixture. Add the water a little at a time until you have a thick batter. Stir in the vegetables and flaked cod, and mix well to combine. Heat oil in a medium sized pot to 350-375 °F. Use a small spoon to portion out the batter. Use the back of another spoon to scrape the batter into the hot oil. Cook for a minute or two, then flip the piece and brown it on the other side. Cook for another minute or two until golden brown on the outside, but completely cooked inside. Use this tester fritter to judge the temperature of your oil and your timing. When you've got the temperature and timing right, add 5-6 spoonfuls of batter into the oil and cook until browned. Scoop up the accras and drain the oil away. Transfer the accras to a baking sheet covered in several sheets of paper towels to drain. Continue making accras until you've used up all the batter.

A Review of Small Planet by Dylan Lewis '22

Words by Grace Ermias
Art by Praises Amponsah

As I watched Small Planet on its final night, I felt what playwright Dylan Lewis '22 describes as a "blooming" in my chest. I watched as four Black femmes, Erielle, Dee, West, Jade, and Corey dreamt up, workshopped, and avoided creating a new world. Tasked with presenting a pitch for a new world at a leadership conference, these femmes work within themselves and alongside one another to imagine a world beyond their own. Entirely white with silver adornments, the costumes in Small Planet, designed by Mali Dandridge '22.5, complement the afro-futuristic mission at hand. As the characters work on their pitches, the costumes seem to question the place of whiteness in their imagined worlds. Together the femmes play, fail to be productive, bicker, and reveal their own unique subjectivities and desires. In the playwright's statement, Lewis describes their friends that inspired Small Planet, writing: "We were (and sometimes still are) extremely unproductive but we were (and definitely still are) raucous, overjoyed, and brimming with aliveness." Just like Lewis's friends, the characters indulge in spontaneous bits, conspiracies concerning the schemes of the world, and in one another.

Played by Teniayo-Ola Macaulay '25, Jade is a leader, a self-elected one, but a leader nonetheless. Struggling to focus the group, Jade at times gets lost in their daydreams herself, ultimately presenting an impassioned monologue about The Bachelor as her pitch. Based on a close friend of Lewis, Dee is an optimist, bringing pure joy to the stage as they rap their earthly gripes and innermost interrogations. Dee is brought to life by Millicent Stiger '24, who pairs their musical talent with poignant reflections on the selfhood of gender-expansive Black femmes. Like Dee, Erielle, played by Aida Sherif '22, is playful and desires a calm world to kick back and experience life as it comes. And yet, Erielle is neither childish nor naive. Liberated from the respectability politics, Erielle rejects that she is unserious, affirming the desire of Black femmes to experience life outside of obligation and expectation. Played by Sonna Obiorah '22, Michelle is a facilitator at the leadership conference and condemns Erielle for her playfulness. In the words of Lewis, Michelle serves "respectability politics realness." Ultimately, even Michelle chaotically frees herself from these expectations in a spontaneous and humorous dance number. West, played by Dori Walker '24, is guarded, and at times a cutting, expression of Black femmes' subjectivity. Unlike the other two, West seems afraid of interrogating her own observations and grievances with the world, almost in fear of it may unlock. Constantly in conflict with West, Corey is pensive and shares her random reflections with the group in monologues like "Thomas Motherfucking Jefferson." Lewis identifies this pensive reflection to be the central conflict between Corey and West: "Corey is always moving but West is just trying not to think about things. Corey is buzzing, humming, and that just irritates West."

The characters' imaginative journey is punctuated by the stomps of a mysterious, veiled blacksmith, seemingly setting their actions in motion. This blacksmith, played by Faith Hardy '23, is later revealed to be God On earth and edits the world as it progresses. The edits of this dissatisfied creator set the plot in motion as she hands Erielle a note simply saying "connect."

This command triggers the communal, introspective journey of the characters. When I asked Lewis about this deceptive character, they simply said "I love a good trickster." Alongside the stomps of the blacksmith, are dances that seem to complete this small world of Black femmes, articulating a specific corporal condition through affective movement. These dances, however, were not originally written into the script. As explained by Lewis, the dances came out of one rehearsal: "We were just stretching and listening to music and I played the song "Get Free" by Mereba. I told them to move to the song and Dori took center stage and started dancing her ass off. and I was just like oh you get a dance number. And other things just layered themselves in from there."

Similar to the dances, some of the most striking moments in the play were improvised. One of these moments was first articulated by Stiger in rehearsal, where they explained how they feel like a Black woman, but not a woman. In the play, as all the characters lay daydreaming on the floor, Dee shares this wisdom. At this moment, West affirms Dee, telling them that she understands. When I asked Stiger about how they had come to put this identity into words they said: "I think the vibes around that particular part of the play really helped me to place words to my feelings. I'm surprised how many people said that they felt the same way because I feel like my explanation was so vague, but it really is the best way to explain how I feel right now in terms of my identity."

While the final product came together beautifully, playwright Lewis was dissatisfied with the original script, feeling that the world she had created had fallen flat. Ultimately, Lewis chose to disrupt this world, weaving their own life into Small Planet. After a phone call with a friend, Lewis realized that the world she had created was void of her own subjectivity, specifically concerning her mother's cancer diagnosis. Not wanting this to overtake the plot, Lewis reserves this subjectivity for West's final monologue. Here the audience finally begins to see the complexities that shape West's hostile disposition. This monologue came to Lewis unexpectedly: "West's monologue came to me in the middle of the night at 2 am and it all poured." This, however, is not the only ending of the play, the second being an epilogue where Lewis addresses the crowd. Lewis partly did this simply because they "love a good trick." More importantly, Lewis "wanted to tell people that this is not just pretend and this is not just make-believe. Black girl magic is real. The longing, the sadness we feel is real. This play is not solely for the imagination; it comes from feeling." This feeling Lewis describes was felt most strongly when the actors asked the Black femmes in the audience to raise their hands. After raising my hand, I received a purple carnation from Obiorah. In this exchange, they reminded us all that the other-worldly magic they created on stage was one we always carry, create, and sustain as Black femmes.

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