

Department of Languages and Literature

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Lincoln University
1570 Old Baltimore Pike
Lincoln University, PA 19352
(484) 365-7571
www.lincoln.edu

Questions or comments about this publication can be emailed to: simbaa@lincoln.edu

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WINNERS

2024 Poet Laureate Contest

First Place // Jaylon Dell, "Lincoln University: Our Beacon of Black Hope"

Second Place // Grace Quiah, "All People Are Geniuses"

Third Place // Aaliyah Edwards, "I Wish"

9th Annual Guy A. Sims Short Fiction Competition

First Place >> Macy Deininger "Babylon Said You Loved Me"

Second Place >> Cody Gibbs, "A Lesson of Kindness"

Third Place >> Barack Y. Dodoo, "The Shark of Crestwood High"

3rd Annual Writing and Reading Center Essay Contest

First Place ## Oluwaseyi Abiodun, "The Black Community and Racial Trauma"

Second Place ## Timothy Akor, "Word of Mouth"

Third Place ## Madison Hill, "Overcoming Blindness in *Invisible Man*"

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CALL YOUR MOM

I should tell her that I love her more.
She's done a lot for me and still does more,
From sleepless nights to mundane chores,
She's done all those things and plenty more.
She gave me life and some of her issues,
Her authority over me, at times she's misused,
But whenever I leave her, I'm genuinely missed,
And I miss her, too.
We search far and wide for love that's unconditional,
At times forgetting it's right in front of you.
I'm blessed to know her,
And I'll never be able to show her enough appreciation,
But at the very least...
I should tell her that I love her more.

LONELY LILY IN THE VALLEY

Lonely Lily in the Valley
Is all alone and no one can reach her.

Lonely Lily in the Valley
Sees time as a blur.

Lonely Lily in the Valley
Is losing her sense of mentality.

Lonely Lily in the Valley
Can't get a grip on reality.

Lonely Lily in the Valley:
Is this her finale?

Lonely Lily in the Valley...
Is it really a valley, or is it an alley?

Lonely Lily in the Alley
Is stuck there sadly.

Lonely Lily in the Alley:
If she's Celie, can she find her Nettie?

Lonely Lily in the Alley,
You still have shadows haunting you,

And yet you're brave and true.
In this alley you will find your hue.

THE BLACK COMMUNITY & RACIAL TRAUMA

Racial trauma refers to emotional and mental distress caused by racist experiences. Racial trauma can be experienced in different ways, such as racial discrimination, stereotypes, prejudice, and more. Racial trauma has a significant impact on the development of African Americans. It can impact an African American's physical health and cause low self-esteem and PTSD (Belgrave & Allison, 2019).

African Americans experience racial trauma in different forms. One way this community experiences trauma is through a direct experience of danger and violence related to race. For example, in a study comparing the relationship between police encounters and mental health, men were asked about their mental health in regards to police interactions. "Eighty percent of men were racial or ethnic minorities. PTSD symptoms were especially high when intrusion levels were high" (Belgrave & Allison, 2019). During these intrusive interactions, the police threatened or used physical force (Belgrave & Allison, 2019). This study revealed the significant impact racial trauma can have on minorities. Typically, black men in America are more likely to get stopped by the police. In a study comparing how often black, hispanic, and white drivers get stopped by the police, it was shown that black drivers were more likely to get stopped for both non-moving and moving traffic reasons (Belgrave & Allison, 2019). This alone demonstrates the questionable inequality black people face. As the study stated, PTSD symptoms can be a result of intrusive interactions. Unresolved traumas such as harsh police interactions can lead to physical distress as well. It can increase chronic stress and decrease immune system functioning (Smith, 2010). This proves the strong impact racial trauma can have on an individual's overall wellbeing.

In addition, racial trauma can cause African-American men to be hypermasculine. Hypermasculinity is an exaggerated form of masculinity characterized by physical and emotional toughness, aggressiveness, and an emphasis on wealth (Belgrave & Allison, 2019). Hypermasculinity is used as a coping mechanism for threats to black men's safety. It is most commonly used in urban neighborhoods with elevated rates of violent crime. Moreover,

research suggests that young black men use hypermasculinity to hide the vulnerability and fear that emerges when living in dangerous neighborhoods. “Such fear, if unrelieved, may elevate to the intense outward expression of anger, or aggression. This possibility may apply to Black males in inner cities, who may need to chronically inhibit fear to earn and maintain respect from peers in their dangerous neighborhoods” (Cassidy & Stevenson, 2004). This can be detrimental to black adolescents. Individuals who experience trauma are more likely to develop unhealthy coping mechanisms when they are older. For example, they may seek drugs and alcohol as a support system. This can be abusive because they may develop an attachment to the substances, not only harming their mental health but also their physical health. In addition, those who exude anger often may have higher stress levels, which may hurt their physical health.

Erik Erikson’s psychosocial stages theory states that individuals experience eight stages throughout infancy to adulthood. Throughout these stages, the individual experiences situations that influence their identity development. During the adolescent stage, identity formation is emphasized, and questions like “Who am I?” begin to form. Psychologist James Marcia added on to Erikson’s theory and applied it to the development of racial identity for African-American adolescents. Marcia adds four stages to Erikson’s theory: identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion (Belgrave & Allison, 2019). Throughout these four stages, it is reiterated that the individual does not explore their identity. There may be confusion about their identity, or there may be no commitment to an identity (Belgrave & Allison, 2019).

The development of racial identity for African-American youth connects to racial trauma because often blacks who experience racial trauma participate in problematic behaviors. This can also create obstacles in youth stage development. Often, young African-American men who are raised in dangerous neighborhoods participate in violent, crime-related activities, or feel the need to protect themselves. According to research, strong racial identity lowers the possibility of blacks participating in activities such as drug use, crime, and violence. High ethnic (racial) identity provides an alternative to curb poor behaviors and a more appropriate way of resisting negative forces that lead to problem behaviors (Belgrave & Allison, 2019). Overall, a strong racial identity lowers the chances of engaging in problematic behaviors in response to racial trauma.

There needs to be a better understanding of the influence racial trauma has on the psychological well-being of African Americans. Many African Americans experience racial trauma without awareness, or they continue to have unrelieved racial trauma. Within the African-American community, particularly for African-American men, this is a generational issue. It can be targeted through education, especially through Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs) such as Lincoln University. HBCUs need to implement courses that discuss racial trauma. By doing this, HBCUs will encourage African-American students to work on their mental health and utilize the free mental health services available on campus. If Lincoln University is to implement courses about racial trauma, it will increase the use of the counseling services and the free mental health app TimelyCare. This will help students recover from racial trauma and, overall, create a significant shift in the mental health of African-American students in their colleges and communities.

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OUR CROWN

The title that we hold is unimaginable.
The blood we sweat through our hands and feet
Can't compare to the strength that we have.
We are amazing,
We are women.
The tears we shed embrace us into
The essence of self-motivation and self-worth.
Through the puddles of society
We captivate the true meaning of We Can Do It, if not better.
Time and time again
The slippery rocks try to stumble our balance,
Causing us to fall.
We are determined,
We are women.
As we stand and walk through the muddy soil,
We mark our footprints on the ground,
Leaving the framework and guidance of
What empowerment truly is,
What unity truly is,
What sisterhood truly is.
For what past women have worked for,
For us as the future,
We have a right to continue breaking barriers of
Society's expectations of us,
Because we can and will
Rise as one.

BEAUTY

Beauty.

B-E-A-U-T-Y.

What is *beauty*?

Well, it is a noun. A pleasing person, place, or thing.

Some may even describe it as the quality of attraction.

Beauty has been mistaken for charm, the ability to arouse admiration.

I can look at you and say that you are beautiful because of what I can see.

Beauty has been mistaken for appearance,

The way that someone or something looks.

Well, beauty is difficult...

Why? Because she keeps changing,

Not necessarily by herself, but by the people who think

They oversee telling her who she is.

These people have set standards for her since she was born,

Revising her based on how they feel or think she should be.

Beauty has never gotten to define herself,

Or set her own standards.

Altered, modified, distorted, misrepresented,

Mistrusted, different, overlooked, distinct, unique, set apart.

Beauty begins to sound familiar.

How come it is that whenever there is an outcast among us,

One who does not look like us, behave like us, is new to us,

We take it upon ourselves to make them *feel* like an outcast?

To make them *feel* like they are less than,

To make them *feel* like they could never be “us,”

To make them *feel*...

I need to apologize to *beauty*

For calling her difficult,

Because it is not necessarily her that I oppose,

But all the people who have taken it upon themselves

To change who she is because of how they *feel*.

But the truth of the matter
Is that hurt people hurt people.
Now does that justify how they treated her?
No!

They mocked her. They spit in her face.
They called her names. They tripped her on the playground.
They tore up her math homework. They played hot potato with her dignity.
They cut her hair. They cursed her out.
They took advantage of her. They stripped her naked and molested her.

Beauty begins to sound familiar.

Why?
Because *beauty* is writing this right now.
And she's reading it.
And she's listening to it.
And she's imagining it.

Now I hope you didn't mistake *beauty* for a person.
You see, the thing is, there needs to be a standard set for beauty.
And I'm not talking about by the ones who've changed her,
I'm talking about by the *One* who **IS** *beauty*.

Grace Quiah

I WISH I MET YOU SOONER

I wish I met you sooner.
I wish I met this part of you that doesn't care about what others think,
This part that loves every part of you with every fiber of your bones,
This part that doesn't search for your good side in pictures or videos,
But this part that always remembers your worth,
This part of you that doesn't settle for less, but always invests in yourself.

I wish I met you sooner,
To tell you that your smile brings beauty to this world,
That it is okay to be a work in progress because nobody is perfect,

To tell you that confidence isn't finding validation from others
But rather moving and living fearlessly as you are,
To tell you that you're not your past, to live presently, making better choices,
That life is what you make it, regardless of the circumstances,
That self-love matters because you matter.

I wish I met you sooner, to tell you that
Being hard on yourself doesn't make life any easier,
To remind you to show kindness to yourself and trust your gut,
And leave it all to God.

I wish I met you sooner,
To tell you that just because someone's cup is half-full
Doesn't make them any less than you,
Or if someone's cup is full, it doesn't mean that they have it all figured out.
I wish I met you sooner, to tell you that love is enough,
To choose love above all hatred, comparison, competing, and coveting,
Because you have choices and chances when things change.

I wish I met you sooner, to tell you that it's okay to ask for help.
It doesn't make you less smart when you reveal
Your authenticity and express vulnerability.
It's okay to say no.
I know you are scared of disappointing others,
But wouldn't you rather hold them accountable
For their co-dependency towards you?

It's okay to want something for yourself when all you do is serve others.
You are truly Devin, and you have a unique spark.
It's okay to want what you want because this world necessitates daily.
It's okay to live for others without losing yourself;
It just means that you have to know
The chemistry of maximum massing and consistent self-care,
Because it's okay not to be okay.

I wish I met you sooner, to tell you all this,
But I, too, have to figure it out if I want to become
The best version of myself.

ALL PEOPLE ARE GENIUSES

I believe that all people are geniuses.

We are like aspen groves, and due to that, we are the universe.

We do not only live in the universe—we are it,

The very being, meaning, and soul.

We are the reason life flows, harmoniously,

In a way that is pleasingly together,

Magnificently based on our own creation.

We can do anything because we are the universe,

And everything around us is free and tunefully grounded;

If you listen to the right sound, you can mastermind the world,

Just like the Aspen Grove's shapes, roots, and stems.

Magnificent, isn't it?

We all are the same in our knowledge, talents, and gifts,

But we must know how to use our roots to spin larger, bigger, and wilder.

We must know the right move, the right way, like listening to a fight song,

Or using the right ear to hear all the sounds in the air.

And I think that the Aspen Grove hears every

Harmony, polyphony, and euphony in the air,

As it is rooted together, growing tall, stems protruding,

Everywhere as a single root system.

You do not have to know mathematics or become a scientist.

Your individual genius is core because you have wings to spread

Wilder, higher, taller.

However, everything doesn't come so quickly.

In life, you must give and take.

But how are people geniuses?

By now you might be wondering.

Is it everyone, or is it just some people?

I would have made it clear if I thought it was just some people.

But still, you wonder: How do people become geniuses?

May I remind you that not even scientists

Know the exact answer to that question.

However, self-mastery does.

In our everyday lives, self-mastery unfolds a path,
A track laid down for walking, singing, and dancing.
A course of action, a route of success,
A procedure of divine direction,
A line worth crossing, a trail worth leaving,
And a destination worth approaching.
Self-mastery takes place in the journey of becoming
Conscious of who you are, awareness in responding to your
Gifts, talents, and even the things that you do not know yet.
The best part is that they are all surrounding you.
As I mentioned before, you just have to listen
To the right songs to mastermind the world.
You are the universe; everything flows around you.
You just have to grab the right ones when they come wandering around,
Because you might be surprised when you find yourself inside
Something you never thought you'd find.
As the saying goes, "Anything is possible,"
Because life is entirely feasible.
We are the universe and all are geniuses,
Because our life is an interior that determines the external of our lives' sails,
Which only progress when we are willing
To control and discover the wonders that "anything is possible."
Due to believing you are a genius, you become the universe.
That the universe is alive is because you are ALIVE.
REMEMBER THAT.

FALLING IN LOVE IS A PRAYER REQUEST

When you are falling in love,
It's time to say your prayers:
“Lord, please let this one not break my heart;
Let this one be the last;
Let me not fall too hard,
So when I drop, my whole heart is not cut in half.”
In life, our hearts rush to fall fast.
We can't control our hearts.
There's no limit to where they can go, from low to hard.
If there was a low or common love, it would be our ticket to slowing it down,
But when we find “the one,” we can not hold back,
But love hard, and fall deeper,
Than we intended when we first began to love.

— *Grace Quiah*

BABYLON SAID YOU LOVED ME

Zainabu awoke to a calm ray of sunshine splashing across her groggy eyes, crusted with the debris of a good nap. She looked to the side, her vision still blurry, at her wife, who was sleeping soundly. Her wife could not be more different in appearance. Manga was a Lunar woman, tall, pale, and fragile due to the lack of gravity. A bulky exoskeleton sat in the corner of the room, waiting for her to pilot it around planet Earth. Zainabu was, in juxtaposition, a native of Earth, a woman with deep brown skin and black freckles. Being an Earthling, she was much stronger than Manga, and could, and often did, wake her up with a strong embrace.

Manga gasped, staring at Zainabu with wild eyes. Her shock turned to a smile as she spoke to her. “Good morning, sweetheart.” Manga’s mouth did not match her words. In fact, it was not Manga’s voice at all. Zainabu heard the voice of Babylon, who spoke for people. Zainabu read an article once about a man who died a few years back, the last man to speak a language in the old way, without Babylon. Zainabu and Manga were speaking entirely different languages, but Babylon made sure they understood each other perfectly. That was Babylon’s job. It was the linguistic pattern-mind.

“Wakey, my love,” Zainabu chirped back to her.

Manga would hear Babylon too. They never heard each other’s words, but they could hear thoughts and intentions, and that would suffice for them. Zainabu leaned in and kissed Manga softly before standing and stretching. She made a brisk motion towards the bedroom door, threatening to leave her wife in bed.

“No!” Manga feigned terror but was smiling. “Come back here!”

Manga was a morning person, once awoken. Most Lunies did not have a sense of time and needed to be awoken by someone to start the day. Now that she was awake, she began wriggling helplessly on the mattress, barely able to sit up. Zainabu knew, however, that this was a ruse by her bastard wife, and in turn came to scoop her up.

Zainabu steadied Manga onto her thin legs and walked her to the metal contraption. It clicked around her love’s limbs, holding her up against gravity

and the universe. Manga took a deep breath as it clamped around her waist and chest, allowing her to breathe freely as though she was not being pressed by a giant rock.

With her newfound strength, Manga did not hesitate to swipe the stronger Zainabu off her feet, lifting her up. “Now it is I who does the lifting here!” Manga chided her, poking the woman on the nose.

Zainabu grunted, chuckling, “I ought to take that suit of yours and throw you like a pole. You would stick somewhere a mile away.”

“Ah, ah, my dearest,” Manga wagged her finger at her, walking them both out to the living room with only one arm. “Who would make you the eggs in the morning?”

“Not you, I hope!” Zainabu laughed but was interrupted by Manga tossing her onto the sofa with a resounding thud. “Oof!”

“You will eat the eggs and be healthy. No more skipping meals, you!” Manga turned into a small corner of the large living room, which had an open-air kitchen with a counter segmenting it off.

Zainabu did not object to this, for she was the one who left for the city for work. Ironically, she was a linguist herself, one who learned Old Tongues to make sure Babylon translated ancient texts correctly. It usually did nowadays, but it was good to have a human backup. Zainabu had learned in college that she naturally spoke an Old Tongue, a popular, trade language from the land once known as Africa. She also learned Navajo and Martian Russian for good measure.

Manga cooked the eggs, for she was in no rush to go anywhere. Zainabu worked a boring university job, while Manga somehow scored online work for a company that was a money-laundering scheme, meaning she did too little work and made suspicious amounts of money. Zainabu pried herself from the sofa on which she had been unceremoniously tossed and returned to the bedroom, getting her nice clothes ready. She always dressed her best to impress all the dusty books she reviewed and cataloged.

She stepped back into the living quarters where a nicely set table with a traditional, American meal of bacon and eggs was cooked. Manga always said she was American, though most Earth Americans didn’t really claim her. For instance, the eggs and bacon were synthetic, grown from carbon machines, while Earth Americans still preferred their eggs live. Zainabu had

both, and would argue that they tasted different, but Manga would not have it, so they opted to talk about more family-friendly matters at the breakfast table, like politics. They never talked long, though, because Zainabu had places to be, while Manga worked in her pajamas, the lucky bastard.

Zainabu stood up and made a beeline for the front door.

“My love.”

She stopped and looked back at her wife, sitting pretty in her robotic contraption, giving her a small smile.

“Have a good day,” spoke Manga.

Zainabu walked over, leaning in to kiss her. “Have fun,” she whispered, “but not too much till I get back.”

Manga chuckled, plucking Zainabu in the head with her pointer finger. “Sorry, but I was planning to eat all of the jambalaya today.”

This caught Zainabu off-guard, and she scrunched her eyes while her jaw opened slightly. She laughed incredulously. “Manga, stop saying the craziest of things. You know it’s too spicy for your weak self.”

Manga laughed, pulling herself up off the chair to kiss her once more. They bid farewell as Zainabu made it out to her car. The car was a small, sleek design, perfect for transporting one or both ladies from their home to the nearby city of Base. Though it sat behind mountains, it was still visible due to the great space elevator, one of dozens across the world. Zainabu reclined into her memory foam chair, closing her eyes for a moment.

“Amsterdam.”

From behind her eyelids, she could see a faint orange light. A robot voice responded, “Yes, Ms. Nyambura?”

“Set course for North America University, then park car at nearest lot.”

Without response, the car slowly drifted forward. It was electric, and a hover vehicle at that, so there was little rumbling from the machinery. It smoothly and quickly sped across a thin magnetic rail, driving her to her place of work. Zainabu eventually sat up to look out the window, glancing at the various mountains and trees which surrounded the rail, but always seemed well-trimmed by the nature drones. She chose a quiet sector, beyond where the old suburbs once were. Suburbs were rare now, as people opted to either pack in or get out. Old white picket fences could still be seen, rotting

and overtaken by foliage. They had suburbs on the Moon, and Zainabu asked Manga about them, but Manga would often mumble something about homeowners' associations and Zainabu asked no further. She did have some questions, however.

"Alexandria."

"Yes, Ms. Nyambura?"

A blue light appeared on the dashboard, this time with a softer robotic voice than Amsterdam.

"What is the price of jambalaya today?" Zainabu said, stifling a chuckle.

"This depends on whether you are ordering from a restaurant or a store. Ordering from Fran's Coastal Cuisine will cost approximately \$13.35 including tax per bowl. If you are purchasing from the supermarket, the ingredients are as follows: shrimp, varied price. \$2.53 for..."

"Enough," Zainabu chuckled to herself calmly. "Good bot."

The blue hologram disappeared, leaving her in the car alone.

That Manga, silly fool, she thought. Your jokes will be the death of you. She shook her head. She would have to wait to see Manga's face when two bowls of the spiciest food in town showed up at the door. For now, she merely sat back in her chair, letting the rays of sunlight play across her face as it broke through the native foliage.

The car pulled into Base, a small city of approximately 52,853 individuals, according to Alexandria at least. It was definitely important, but no more important than anywhere else. The name was uninspired, the infrastructure was lacking, and everyone minded their own business. Paradise. The small vehicle joined a queue of vehicles nudging their way through the streets. The town, though new, was modeled to look like a standard American Earth town, with red cobble streets and bright buildings displaying various ethnicities that converged on this very spot. The different architectural expressions were fascinating to Zainabu, and it was this thing that drew her to settle in this part of the world.

The car slowly came to a stop outside a Greco-American looking building, a small university which was set up to serve the local populations. Despite being named after the whole continent, North America University only attracted the local area, with the most exotic peoples being the odd foreigner and those who lived on the platforms of the space elevator. Many of the peo-

ple living on the space elevator would travel to and from Earth often, so they did not have to wear mech suits like Manga did.

“Thank you, Amsterdam,” Zainabu said as she exited her vehicle. She did not have to think too hard about the students, for she was a curator. People looked around her, and some of the faculty were pleasant, but she spent most of her time in the library, the locked part, alone and in her element. The vehicle slowly inched away towards a parking lot as Zainabu climbed the steps. She entered the great halls of North America University, students walking to and fro as small cleaning robots swept the floor on a consistent basis. None of the students knew her, and some of the faculty merely waved. As someone who worked alone, she mostly kept to herself.

She made her way down a great staircase into the basement section. She passed a man named Charlie, who often sat at his desk doing nothing, collecting paychecks until some student or another came down to examine some of the older texts. She never really spoke to Charlie, but he seemed all right. She brushed her hand over a back door that opened for her and began her work. She went over some Martian Russian texts that had been transported from the space elevator. Most of them were complete, and Babylon translated them perfectly, but Zainabu had to look over them anyway. She would tap behind her ear twice, turning Babylon on and off, reading the page naturally and then with tools. In her five years of work, she had never once made a mistake in translation. She often sat and pondered what her point was, and why she spent so much time learning something that was done automatically by machines. Were humans pointless in the modern day?

She sat there for a few hours, reading, reviewing, reading, reviewing. After a while she got sick of it and just started reading one of the texts front to back. The Martian Bible was a strange amalgam of various religions, most Abrahamic, some not. She had read many versions of the Bible, as that was the most common book people wrote over the Pre-Space Era. She read it with Babylon turned off so she could work her brain, to add a little extra challenge to it. And because of this she did not realize that, in a facility in high orbit, where the first true AI models were developed and spread across the world, in a castle amongst the stars, there was a small flashing light that blinked for only a second. And in that moment, for reasons still unknown, Babylon killed itself. And Earth cried out immediately.

Zainabu would have been one of the few people in the human domain that did not realize this. She simply read her book, raw and in its original

form, oblivious to the worlds above her crashing down. At one point Charlie came down, looking panicked.

“C̣ḥ-ḍḥ-ịc̣ ~ṃṛẹ/ṣḥṛịṣ/ẹ́~ṛ/ịṇ” he screamed.

Zainabu tapped the chip behind her ear. “*Bà b'í-ṣ̄ Ṣ̄́ s̄́ n̄́ ñ̄ ó/n̄́ ò
ñ̄́ ò- í-ḡ-í-ŷ.*” She blinked, then pointed to her head for Charlie to turn on his chip. He threw his arms down and ran.

Zainabu sighed and stood up, calmly walking to the terminal. Oddly enough, it too was gibberish. It was her own chip that shorted. She reached down and pressed a small red button, which accessed an emergency panel with clearly marked images. She selected Babylon's symbol and pressed her hand against the screen. Sure, it produced a big red X, signaling her chip was faulty. She ran a repair program but there was an odd text box on the screen. She tried twice more but nothing worked. Taking a deep breath, she went topside to see what was going on.

Immediately she could see students running, making a break for the exit. She only spent a moment on the ground floor before someone pulled the fire alarm. She walked towards the hallway, and outside a window she could get a clear view of the absolute chaos unfolding. People in the streets rushing to and fro, people attempting to activate their vehicles, only for the voice commands to be broken. Some cars did start, driving to completely random destinations. People were attempting to break into manually controlled vehicles to get home, and the owners of said vehicles opened fire on them so they themselves could get home. Acts of heroism and treachery were occurring in seconds, and Zainabu understood she had to move.

Zainabu pulled out a small screen which she had on her wrist. It was blowing up with notifications, panicked texts. Her heart sank. Manga. No time to think. She could not read but she knew where the app to summon her car was. She took a turn, bolting out a side door into an alleyway, calling the car to her. Sure enough, it was not too far. The map showed it a block away. She ran down alleyways, passing panicked people doing the same thing as her. One stopped her, trying to shout something, but it made no sense, so she simply ran. She turned a corner to where the only exit was into the street. A firetruck blitzed down the road, piloted by a small ragtag team of volunteers who were spraying down fires and people shooting each other. Some people took shots at the truck, but it simply kept moving. Zainabu made a dash across the street, taking cover behind parked cars. She passed a person trying

to break in, but they only checked to see if she had a gun. She did not so she passed without incident.


After making it to her car, she slid her hand across the handle, opening it. “Amsterdam.”


A small orange screen appeared once more, but this time there was no voice. Only a staticky noise. The screen displayed only numbers. “01000101 01010010 01010010 01001111 01010010 01000101 01010010 01010010 01001111 01010010 01000101 01010010 01001111 01010010 01000101 01010010 01001111 01010010 01000101 01010010 01001111 01010010 01000101 01010010 01001111 01010010...” It was useless. Zainabu hopped out of the car. Someone ran up to it, looking in and seeing the numbers, and ran. Automatic cars were done for. She looked back at the university, then at the road she had driven down, then she ran.


Zainabu ran and ran until her legs could not carry her further. Some manual cars sped down the magnetized road, but the forest around Base was mostly desolate. She slowed to a light jog and then to a walk. She could hear the sirens and gunshots in the background, so she kept walking. She walked until something stopped her. It was a fence. A white fence. A white fence with vines. It was Old Cold Rock, the shining suburb of a bygone era, back when suburbs were a thing. What would those people think of her now, unable to speak, the world turned on its head? In the past, people thought the world would end if the powers did not talk. They strung a big red telephone from Washington to Moscow so they would not blow each other up. They were right, in a way.

She passed by old houses overtaken by moss. There were bees and elk in the houses. The elk looked shocked, for a while, for they could hear the commotion. But after a while, the further she walked, the less nervous they seemed. And when she was in the forest, there was no reason to speak, and it was like everything was normal again. This type of peace was why she moved to Base in the beginning. She wanted to get away and live amongst trees and be grumpy. She met Manga in the city, though. She wasn't thinking of Manga, not yet. She knew what would happen when she got home. For now, there was deniability. The car crashed. The road was not magnetized properly. Funny story, but the world did not just end. It was all just a brief outage of a machine that never failed and was designed to retake devices when it did. Babylon was dead, the world felt its absence. Zainabu walked until the sun set, not caring about what was going on millions of miles away. And when the

Zainabu awoke to a harsh ray of sunshine splashing across her groggy eyes, crusted with the debris of a rough nap. She looked to the side, her vision still blurry, at her wife, who was sleeping restlessly. She gave her a squeeze, and Manga opened her eyes timidly.

", " she said, hesitantly. It sounded strange and alien. But it was also pretty. Babylon did an excellent job of mimicking Manga's voice, but she was making noises that Zainabu didn't think possible. Maybe... maybe if she were a better wife and learned her lesson, Babylon would make her sound normal again. Or this was just it. This was just them now. Manga's face softened with the realization that they could not speak still. She looked over to her suit and began reaching for it and Zainabu, in her stupor, defaulted to routine. She picked Manga up and placed her in the suit.

Manga stood solemnly and went to the little kitchen they shared. They still had to eat. She opened the fridge and stared blankly inside for a long while. She then took out an egg carton and held one of its contents in her hand. Then, when Zainabu happened to look at her, she tossed it in the air and caught it. Zainabu flinched, and Manga laughed. This was something she did sometimes, and it always made Zainabu nervous. She opened her mouth to chastise her prankish spouse, but closed it, then opened it again to laugh too. Manga pointed to it and said simply, “.

And Zainabu realized in that moment the future they would have together. If Babylon wasn't coming back, then speech would be like it was in the old way, back before computers and castles, back when tigers used to smoke. Back in the times when two women, much like themselves, wanted to speak. About a basket. About a needle. About a . And they would make words beautiful and crass, and someday they may speak again. They would speak again of stupid things. They would spit wisdom and share revolutionary ideas. They would, on some distant day, express love, gratitude, hopes, dreams.

WORD OF MOUTH

There's an old saying that goes, "The tongue is powerful," but in today's society, are we subliminally taught that certain tongues hold more value than others? Before social media, word of mouth had always been the number-one method of spreading information. The language you speak today is just one way to communicate with others. According to the Linguistic Society of America, there are about seven-thousand unique languages spoken throughout the world. In the passage, "Three Ways to Speak English," Jamila Lyiscott exposes three distinctive ways to speak English. Each way differs not only in the use of slang and pronunciation, but also in regard to her audience, which drastically differs in each instance of language use. While one demographic might call for the use of slang, another might need a more straightforward type of English. Presently, minorities are taught to "code-switch" in order to fit the standards set up by society and culture. Each accent, slang, and slur holds its own meaning within a community or demographic of people and is valued differently depending on said groups.

In the first few lines of "Three Ways to Speak English," Lyiscott demonstrates an uncommon form of English different from what we regularly speak today. Lyiscott expresses, "So when my father asks, 'Wha' kinda ting is dis?" which to sum might seem like a typo, it is just another form of English called Broken English (11). Broken English comes in many forms and is spoken and altered differently depending on your geographic location, ethnicity, and culture. Lyiscott's Broken English is a connection to her family and heritage. She writes, "I know that I had to borrow your language because mines was stolen/But you can't expect me to speak your history wholly while mines is broken" (53-54). Not everyone can speak or understand Broken English. Within the accent are hundreds of years of cultural, racial, and social struggle, and the purpose of Lyiscott speaking in her native tongue isn't to confuse you, but to highlight the history buried within her language.

Another form of English that Lyiscott often uses to express herself is slang. Slang, much like Broken English, often represents the area you grew up in. The community around you often develops and passes on a word or phrase, and if it is said enough, it becomes a common attribute in your vocab-

ulary. Lyiscott demonstrates the use of her slang by writing, “And when I’m on the block I switch it up just because I can. So when my boy says, ‘What’s good with you son....’” it differs from her tone and accent when speaking her Broken English (14). The value of her slang is meant to show where she grew up and how she talks to her friends. Even though she’s both proficient and comfortable with speaking Broken English or slang, that barrier exists to respect the relationships with each party. Lyiscott revises her language to connect with people she knows, but what about when she’s talking to someone she doesn’t really know?

Minorities today often have to develop skills to communicate professionally. Lyiscott code-switches mainly because she’s often around other minorities. When in the presence of the majority demographic, she, as well as many other minorities, may feel the need to speak a bit more standard. When in a public or professional setting, she talks about how her language switches up. Lyiscott writes, “I use the other one in the classroom,” which highlights that she is forced to use just Standard English when she’s at school (48). Her classmates and teachers aren’t familiar with her Broken English and slang, and as a result she has to revert back to an English that is understandable to them. This not only is essential to communicate, but it’s a skill many other minorities have to adopt to in order to succeed today.

Code-switching provides a method of communicating with different ethnic and demographic groups. It’s important for people to know who exactly code-switches and why. Often, minority groups feel a necessity to code-switch in order to either fit in or be accepted by other communities or groups. Within each switch, the language holds a unique value depending on who they’re speaking to and the setting they’re in. Whether you’re talking to your teacher or your parents or your school friends, the goal is to be articulate. For Jamila Lyiscott, being articulate just depends on perspective. If you’re using slang, Broken English, or a more standard version, being articulate depends on your audience at that moment. Code-switching exposes the true value of language and requires adapting your language to connect with a multitude of people.

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ADRIFT

The wicked wind creeps from behind in silence
As it curses everything it touches.
Hiding from its unforgiveness,
With fear of the unknown becoming,
You take the plunge into an endless bliss,
Hoping one day to never rise,
Then the cycle starts again...

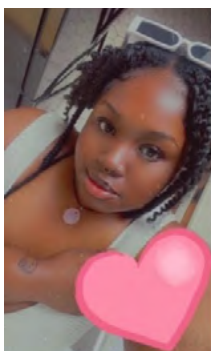
EVERYTHING AND NOTHING

Heavy is the weight on her heart,
Unchained to the mind as she yearns to see the sun rise,
Weeping for yet another day,
Possessed by the thought that takes a toll on her body.
Not knowing
Not seeing
Not hearing
Not listening.
To believe in the me that believes in you,
The me that has confidence in confidence alone,
Confidence in sunshine,
Confidence in rain,
And with each thought, I am more uncertain.
Heavy is the weight on her heart,
Heavy is the weight on her soul,
Destroying the balance between mind and body,
No longer in harmony as they often dispute one another,
Feeling everything and yet nothing at the same time.

— *Amani Adams*

Personal Interview: Mental Health

Over the past ten years, there has been an increase in mental health awareness, especially among teens and young adults. College students in particular are at higher risk of depression and anxiety due to the stress of schoolwork and being separated from home and family. Staff member Kaliyah Greene interviewed two students for their thoughts on the relationship between mental health and academic performance, lingering taboos about mental health in the Black community, and ways that Lincoln can improve its therapy and counseling services.



Denaeya Moore

Growing up, was mental health discussed openly among your friends and family members, or was it a forbidden topic of conversation?

Growing up, mental health wasn't really talked about, but it's mostly on my part. I kept to myself and didn't want people to see me as vulnerable.

Since coming to college, have you struggled at all with your mental health? If so, please describe how the experience affected your academic performance at Lincoln.

Since coming to college, I would say it's like another layer of stress and it affects my mental health even more. I have a lot going on in my personal life, and since school is in the way, it's hitting me like a rock.

When you were having mental health issues, what support services did the school offer, and were they rendered in a culturally sensitive manner?

The school offers counseling services, but I'm not sure if they were rendered in a culturally sensitive manner.

What can the school do to raise awareness about mental health? How can it overcome some of the Black community's resistance to newer forms of therapy and psychiatric care?

One way the school can do that is by organizing workshops or events that focus on mental health education and destigmatization. They can also collaborate with mental health professionals to provide resources and support for students. As for overcoming resistance in the Black community, it's important to promote culturally sensitive and inclusive approaches to therapy and psychiatric care. Building trust, providing information, and addressing any misconceptions can help foster acceptance and engagement.

How are you currently dealing with your mental health issues? Medication, treatment, mindfulness? Moving forward, what is your hope for yourself as you recover and heal?

I'm currently dealing with my mental health issues by doing the hobbies I love, like gaming, doing nails, and other things that involve creativity. I hope that my anxiety and stress levels could be maintained better.

Anonymous

Growing up, was mental health discussed openly among your friends and family members, or was it a forbidden topic of conversation?

Mental health was never talked about when I was growing up. If that topic would have come up, then my family would have just called it being crazy.

Since coming to college, have you struggled at all with your mental health? If so, please describe how the experience affected your academic performance at Lincoln.

Since coming to college I would say that it made me more aware of my mental health and what work I needed to do for myself to get better or better understand what I'm going through. My mental health has stopped me from doing my best, as I am always tired and intoxicating myself to cope.

When you were having mental health issues, what support services did the school offer, and were they rendered in a culturally sensitive manner?

I was told to go to counseling services by my advisor to see a counselor/therapist and they would help me from there. My first time there I was able

to pick my therapist and times. I feel like that helped because I could switch therapists anytime I wanted if the previous one wasn't much help.

What can the school do to raise awareness about mental health? How can it overcome some of the Black community's resistance to newer forms of therapy and psychiatric care?

Lincoln should continue to have events and posters around campus so people know that counseling is available when needed. If it was talked about more, then more students would get on board with being able to talk about mental health freely and break that cycle of it being put behind us like it's not important.

How are you currently dealing with your mental health issues? Medication, treatment, mindfulness? Moving forward, what is your hope for yourself as you recover and heal?

Currently, I am on medication and doing outside therapy four days a week. I'm doing my best to keep myself uplifted and motivated to do better for myself. I am keeping my mind on how I want to feel in the next month, so keeping my mind busy doing work and hobbies I enjoy helps.

A LESSON OF KINDNESS

“Don’t look at me, don’t talk to me, don’t touch me,” Jackson thought as he walked into school. He marched through the front doors with tunnel vision. Eyes downcast and forehead scrunched. Snarl on his face so nobody smiles at him. Students sensed his energy and moved out of the way. The halls parted like the Red Sea as he made his way to first-period class. He sat down in the only empty chair and stuck his face in his phone.

He thumbed through Instagram as his classmates strolled into class. Class started and the teacher announced, “We have a new student in today’s class!”

Jackson nearly walked out when he heard this.

“Would he like to introduce himself?”

Still in his phone, Jackson felt the curious eyes of two-dozen students settle on him. He slowly perked his head up and sighed at the teacher, “No,” he said.

“Jackson, I insist. Please stand and tell us about yourself and where you’ve come from.”

Reluctantly, Jackson rose from his desk and sighed a deep sigh. “I’m Jackson. I moved here from New York. This is my first day of classes.” He sat down in a hurry and buried his eyes in his desk.

“Thank you, Jackson, it is nice to meet you. It must be a major adjustment moving from New York to Texas. We are happy to have you. Can everyone say, ‘Hi, Jackson!’”

The class responded, “Hi Jackson!!”

Jackson groaned and put his head down. This was the fourth school Jackson had moved to this year. His Pop was in the military so they moved around frequently. He loved his Pop to death but they were lucky to see each other once a year. Because of the instability, Jackson was a year behind in school. He enrolled as a freshman at Buckforce High School in Arlington, Texas. He was tired of being the new kid.

Jackson was tall for his age, with broad, sunken shoulders and a coarse afro topping his head. He had an athletic build from when he played football at his old school. When you looked at him, you were met with a stern, seasoned

face, like he was always thinking about something.

The rest of the day went similar to first period. Jackson reluctantly introduced himself at the start of each class, sulked through the lecture, and stormed to the next classroom. In the hallway, people tried to make friends with him but he brushed them off.

At lunch, he sat by himself and ate the PB&J sandwich his mom had packed him. He scrolled through Instagram to escape the social atmosphere in the cafeteria.

At one moment, he looked up from his phone, glancing around the room. It seemed like everybody knew somebody. People were playing cards, cracking jokes, debating sports, or enjoying each other's company. The nerds sat with the nerds, the class clowns sat with the class clowns, and the jocks sat with the jocks. But everybody had somebody. He was the only one sitting by himself.

Alone in a room full of people.

Jackson's self-awareness kicked in and he opened his phone back up to escape reality. He scrolled for a few minutes when a girl tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hey," she said with a wave.

He was sitting down, but the girl was still only at eye-level. She had curly black hair down to her shoulders and a blue headband to keep it in place. She dressed comfy, sporting loose sweatpants, a baggy sweatshirt, and white Air Force 1s. She was cute. Her voice was raspy but full, her tone delicate but confident.

"Hey," Jackson responded, still halfway in his phone.

"I uhh.... heard you're the new kid. We have a couple of classes together."

"Yeah."

"I heard you're from New York. What's it like?"

"Cold," he mumbled.

"Ha ha, that's where my parents went last year for their 15th anniversary."

"Oh, must be nice," he snarled.

"Yeah, it was nice! They stayed in the city for two whole weeks and saw the Rockefeller tree on Christmas Eve. They had a great time. They bought my siblings and I those white and red I love NY mugs! When they came back

they couldn't stop talking about how cold it was. They couldn't imagine living in New York."

He wasn't sure if she had ignored his sarcasm or hadn't picked up on it.

"This girl is like a mosquito, she just won't go away," he thought. Jackson was taken aback by how much she shared, having just met him. He didn't know what to say. Searching for words, he jarred, "So you think New York is a cold and unbearable state to live in, huh? Then why do you have an I love NY mug? You've never even been there and your parents were just tourists, overcrowding my city!"

"You said it was a cold state first...."

"That's not what I meant," he snapped back.

She blinked three quick times and pursed her eyebrows together.

"Well, I'm sorry if that upset you. I was just trying to make conversation."

"Whatever."

They stayed in silence for five seconds, just matching each other's gaze. Jackson broke eye-contact and jumped back into his phone. The girl stood there ignoring his disregard.

"My name is Angie by the way. See you around, I guess..."

The weeks went on as they always do. Jackson mean-mugged his way to class, kept to himself, and denied anyone who tried to be friendly. He sat by himself at lunch and ate the PB&J his mom made him. Alone.

But like clockwork, each lunch period Angie always came to say hi. No matter how distracted Jackson acted around her, she engaged with him. Annoyed at first, Jackson met her questions with typical one-word answers and dismissive non-verbal signals. But when one week turned to two and Angie kept coming to see him, he started to open up. With every interaction, she broke down the barrier that he put up between him and other people. Pretty soon, that barrier fell.

They talked about everything: their childhoods, hobbies, fears, and school assignments. He even told her about Pop and how they used to play pickup basketball back in New York. Jackson trudged through each day with a mean face, but he lit up when Angie sat with him during lunch. He stared at the clock in anticipation for lunchtime. The time when he could talk to his one friend in the whole school.

The girl with the blue headband.

Angie.

Today was Pop's birthday. It had been more than a year since he'd seen him, as he served in the military overseas. Pop was the biggest role model in his life. He taught him how to shoot a basketball, build a fire, and fight. Pop's birthday was Jackson's favorite day out of the year. They had a tradition of speaking on the phone the morning of his birthday and Pop always made himself available to talk. They caught up on life, sports, school, and Pop's military status. The conversation never got dry; they could talk all day if Jackson didn't have to go to school.

The morning came and Jackson eagerly dialed Pop's phone number like he did every year.

But Pop didn't pick up the phone.

Jackson dialed and redialed the phone a dozen times. The empty rings of the phone teased him. The voicemail they created together repeated each time: *"I'm sorry I couldn't come to the phone. If you hop three times, spin three times in a circle, and say your name after the beep, I'll get back to you when I can."* Adolescent Jackson's laugh echoed in the background. They created it as a joke when Jackson was little and he never changed it.

"Maybe he overslept," Jackson thought.

After the third voicemail, Jackson got desperate. Nine more times he dialed the phone and each time followed the instructions in the voicemail. After the twelfth voicemail, Jackson sunk to the floor in a heap, dizzy and sweaty.

"Maybe his phone has no service," Jackson reasoned.

He brought the house phone into his room, in case Pop called while he was getting dressed.

But Pop never picked up the phone.

The school day started and Jackson didn't speak a word to anyone. His deadpan face dared each teacher to call on him. Not acknowledging anyone or anything, he barged his way toward the cafeteria, bumping shoulders and stepping on the toes of students in the hall. Upon entering the cafeteria, he made his way to his usual lunch table in the corner. There was someone in his seat.

Already ticked off, Jackson sharply said, "Get up."

The person turned to him. It was another freshman boy, short and chubby.

"Get up, tubby," Jackson repeated.

The boy stood up with a mouth full of food. Jackson grabbed him by his shirt collar. Bits of food shot out of the boy's mouth onto Jackson's face.

"MmsorryIdidntmeanto..." the boy muffled.

"Ew! You slob. What are you doing!"

"You grabbed me!" the boy added.

"Shut up! Every day I sit in the same spot. Why do you think you can steal my seat!?"

A crowd formed around the table. At this point, Jackson was fuming. His ears got hot and sweat beads collected on his forehead. Still gripping him by his shirt, Jackson got face-to-face with the boy.

"Don't you ever sit in my seat again, you hear me?"

"Mmyeasorrymahhbad..."

Chewed-up grains of corn sputtered out of the boy's mouth and stuck to Jackson's face.

"You freak!" Jackson headbutted the boy and shoved him to the ground hard. Jackson furiously wiped corn off his face. He grabbed the boy's metal lunch tray and tossed it behind him. The crowd gasped as the tray smacked a girl in the face, knocking her to the ground.

Green beans were strung through her hair, mashed potatoes smeared the side of her face, chocolate milk dribbled down her shirt. Gravy rolled down her neck. Corn kernels lay across her lap. The metal lunch tray clattered along the floor and everyone came to a silence when they saw who got hit.

The girl with the blue headband.

Angie.

The color left Jackson's face. He ran to help Angie but she ignored his gaze. Tears streamed down her face. Jackson's mouth was glued shut. He stood there frozen, embarrassed and uncomfortable. The girls from the crowd comforted her, helping her to the bathroom to get cleaned up. The boys from the crowd picked the chubby freshman off the ground and guided him to the nurse's office.

With the crowd gone, Jackson finally got his seat all to himself. The security guards and administration took him away.

Jackson marched through the front doors of his new school with eyes wide, looking for a friend. Everyone's head was down as if to say, "Don't look at me, don't talk to me, don't touch me." They had tunnel vision and raced to class with urgency. Their eyes were downcast and their foreheads scrunched. Snarls shone on each face so nobody smiled at them. The faces were so off-putting that he moved out of the way so they could pass.

In class, he sat down in the only empty chair and put his phone in his bag. He surveyed the classroom. No one was talking. They were thumbing through social media, avoiding one another's presence. Even the teacher was having a staring contest with their phone. No interaction. No engagement. Silence.

Jackson thought to himself, "What kind of school is this? Everyone is so dreary and unconcerned with each other." He nearly spoke to the person next to him but their body language screamed, "Don't talk to me!"

"What kind of school is this? The teacher has no enthusiasm to get the students engaged. How are we supposed to learn that way!" Jackson thought.

He sat through hours of monotone lectures and walked from class to class, waiting for someone to make eye contact with him. "They're not gonna introduce me as the new kid? How am I supposed to feel welcome in the school!" Jackson said to himself.

When it was time for lunch, he found a table in the corner all to himself. But this time he wasn't the only one. Every single person was sitting alone and glued to their phones. The only murmur of noise bouncing off the walls was from the lunch ladies asking students for their pin numbers. Barring this, it was silent. Each person in their own little world.

So Jackson took out the PB&J sandwich that his mom packed for him.

Put his phone in his bag.

And ate lunch.

Miserable.

Alone in a room full of people.

HAPPINESS

Something so easily said
And so easily written
Can be easily broken.
It comes as a high
And leaves at my lows
And is not again spoken.

Not having no money,
Not having a friend,
No one to claim.
My mind and energy are lost:
It's gone,
Down the drain.

I search for that dopamine
In the clubs and the bars,
I search within family and friends,
And yet,
I find only temporariness
And hoping this ends.

I've talked to Mary Jane
And drank with Don
And still nothing to come,
But I've discovered something
Blissful and peaceful,
Something that's one.

Something stronger
Something forever
Something that's real:
God, only through God was my
Happiness sustained and steel.

He's helped me through pain,
Tears, and being alone,
To being happy with myself,
Knowing he's there
In my heart of home.

RELIGION IN HARRIET JACOBS'S *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

On this subject the Church and the State are alike. One will tell a lie, and the other will swear to it. The State says, 'That which the law makes property is property.' The Church says that 'organic sin is no sin at all;' both parties having reference to slavery. With a few exceptions, their politics and religion are alike oppressive, and rotten, and false.

— Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

The religious experience is Janus-faced in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Whilst the author's alter-ego, Linda Brent, remains faithful to Christianity and finds strength in her faith despite the multiple hardships she endures as a slave woman, the author-narrator disparages how religion has been instrumentalized to support the institution of slavery. Jacobs posits that the Church has been perverted by slavery and offers her own reading of the Scriptures. This renewed interpretation of biblical texts feeds her abolitionist agenda and enables her to use the same weapon of the oppressors to better defeat them and expose their hypocrisy.

Linda Brent's first realization that white slaveholders are not in tune with their religious principles takes place with her first mistress. Brent loved her dearly as a kid, and learned from her the pivotal Christian commandment to "love thy neighbor as thyself." However, when her mistress died, she did not manumit her. Instead, she was sent over to the Flints, who tormented her for years. Brent concluded the following: "But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor" (10). This quotation shows that slaves were excluded from the religious sphere because they were not considered humans. While this comment seems to be innocent and neutral, the author-narrator progressively becomes angrier about the hypocrisy of religious slaveholders as she narrates the physical, psychological, and sexual abuses she undergoes at the hand of the Flints. Of an abusive slaveholder she heard about, she writes: "He also boasted the name and standing of a Christian, though Satan never had a truer follower" (55). By comparing him with a follower of Satan, Jacobs implies that religious slaveholders are trying to deceive God, just like Satan did. This demonization of slaveholders and the biblical intertextuality enables Jacobs to take a powerful stance against slavery that

appealed to religious people, especially white women in the North.

This hypocrisy is also embodied by churchmen like the former slave Reverend Pike, who Linda sees and makes fun of when she attends his services in the local Methodist church. The latter selects passages from the Bible and interprets them to justify slavery: “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ” (76). This part of the book shows how slave preachers actively participated in the justification of slavery following the Nat Turner Rebellion, which fragilized slavery as an institution.

However, this overwhelming hypocrisy among slaveholders and preachers does not prevent the author-narrator from being a believer herself. Linda constantly refers to the Bible to condemn slavery but also to overcome adversity. When she has an affair with Mr. Sands and gets pregnant, her grandmother strongly disapproves of it because her core religious principles lead her to value chastity. Following a dispute she has with her grandmother, Linda thinks: “God alone knows how I have suffered; and He, I trust, will forgive me” (181). Thus, when the author-narrator feels abandoned by everyone, she resorts to religion.

When Linda hides in a tiny space under the roof of her grandmother’s roof, her mental and physical strength begin to decay, and she starts doubting her own faith: “Sometimes I thought God was a compassionate Father, who would forgive my sins for the sake of my sufferings. At other times, it seemed to me there was no justice or mercy in the divine government. I asked why the curse of slavery was permitted to exist, and why I had been so persecuted and wronged from youth upward” (137). However, when her grandmother becomes ill and manages to survive, Linda starts believing and thanking God again: “God is merciful. He has spared me the anguish of feeling that I caused her death” (138). Therefore, her faith is something that follows her in the end, even when she is profoundly depressed.

Religion in Harriet Jacobs’s memoir, and, more broadly, in many slave narratives, is a complex theme. As aforementioned, religion has been used to justify oppression, but it has also been a way for slaves to cope with the plight of slavery and to deploy abolitionist arguments. Being full of religious references, Jacobs’s account of slavery appealed to northern readers by making them realize that the religion they were affiliated with was wrongfully instrumentalized and served the needs of impious people.

Works Cited

Jacobs, Harriet A. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. New York, Penguin Books, 2000.

SECRETS

The elusive threads of fate
Held close to the heart
Dance on the edge of truth,
Veiling the wounds that ache to be discreet,
Guarding mysteries that make us whole.
In the depth of our souls,
They find a place to call home,
Praying they don't find a place to roam.
Weighing as a burden, hearts gently beat,
An echo of secrets bound to compete.

CAVY'S BIZARRE ADVENTURE

Fresh out of “Sphere School of Arts” and straight to a cubicle job like her sphere peers, Cavy thought her art career would kick off. Two years had passed since college, and it was eight hours in and eight hours out, day after day, a perpetual cycle. As she made her way to work, a heavy rainstorm erupted. Since the weather was bad and work was slow, she began doodling in her old sketchbook containing all of Cavy’s ingenious, out-of-this-world designs. She began sketching a mouth with imperfect teeth, flowers, mushrooms, and a bitten apple. Behind these pieces were line patterns mimicking their shapes, creating a trippy effect. Once she did the outline, she began to fill the paper with vibrant and dark-toned colors that complemented each other. Cavy’s eyes began to get low, falling into a deep slumber, making her face-plant into the art piece.

As Cavy fell deeper and deeper, she began envisioning her designs coming to fruition. She fell from the sky and landed on a zen-tangled, echoing path, giving a rainbow effect. Cavy jumped up and saw her surroundings filled with nothing but a dark, starry sky. She began walking, the pathway lighting up with each step she took. As she followed the path, levitating out of the darkness was the imperfect mouth that she had drawn, but it was larger than life. It appeared to be alive and said, “Hello, I’m Archie.”

Without even acknowledging him, Cavy focused on her escape and immediately questioned, “Why am I here?”

The mouth named Archie responded, “It appears that you have a creative block.”

Cavy tried to calm her anxieties and asked, “So how do I get out of here?”

Archie said, “In order to break free from the creator’s block, you must internalize the information you get along the path in order to create a key.”

Slightly irritated, Cavy asked, “Well, how far is the path?”

Archie replied, “Just trust the process, but I’ll give you the first piece of the key to start your journey. Imperfection is true perfection. Don’t get so wrapped up in trying to make it perfect, when the flaws show true perfection.

You are not perfect, so why try to make something you are not?"

Once Cavy heard that, she took it in and interpreted it, and something inside her changed for the better. The mouth wished her luck on the rest of her journey and disappeared into the darkness.

Cavy felt like she had been walking for miles when a mushroom named Ungi (Un-Gshi) levitated out of the path, about the size of a tree. The head of the Ungi was an ombre of greens, and its gills were a yellow-orange. The stem shades were light and dark blue, having an edgy stripe effect on the eye. Cavy was so mesmerized by this piece that she created, and could only wonder what message she would receive from it.

She greeted Ungi, "Hello."

Ungi, so bubbly, said, "Hi, Cavy. I am Ungi. I'm so glad you came! I can't wait to share my message with you!"

Cavy, still flabbergasted, responded, "Please, the floor is yours!"

Ungi delightedly said, "You have always been an oddball, but that's because you always perceive things on a different, introspective level than everyone else. That's the best part, because you share with us what you see. So don't ever conform to the world's basic norms, because they don't conform to you."

Cavy was at peace with that message, reminiscing on the past times when she had to deal with people and their basic normalities. Receiving this message, she gave Ungi a hug until it evaporated into thin air.

As Cavy walked with grace, each interaction started to make her feel whole again. Cavy looked down at the footsteps lighting up, fascinated by the colors. Cavy tried to look further down the path when she was met by the head of a flower named Fuja, its bud dark-green and its pedals light-brown. It levitated with no stem, and its aura gave a light- and dark-green effect. Cavy, never seeing a flower like this, took in the beautiful thing that she created.

Fuja said, "I'm so glad you came; you're right on track."

Cavy, with gratitude, said, "Well, I'm glad to be here."

The flower said, "This message I have for you comes from wisdom. You have come such a long way. Cherish and take in those moments. It's okay to graduate from your past. It shows all the progress that you have made and that you have the will to keep going. Don't be afraid to bloom and step out of

your comfort zone.”

Cavy took that in and instantly thought about the past artwork that she had done. She said in her mind, “If this isn’t the truth, then I don’t know what is.” Taking a deep breath, she felt a part of the key being added. Fuja flew away into the darkness.

As Cavy continued walking, her walk was a little different. She approached the end of the path, but it seemed to be a three-way stump. She looked at the center of the three-way stump and saw the half-bitten apple she had drawn. The apple, named Apiza, had a zen-tangled line pattern, echoing the shape of the apple from the inside. Radiating shades of orange and red, Apiza peeled itself off the ground and began levitating.

“Greetings!” said Apiza. “If you made it this far, you have gathered everything except for this piece that will help you on your way out. Seeing how far you have come, you have taken a bite of knowledge. The final piece is that you need to use the knowledge you have gathered to break this creator’s block. All you have to do is use your experience and wisdom. You have everything you need; just do it.”

Cavy was confident and sure of where she wanted to be. She now had the key to unlock her future.

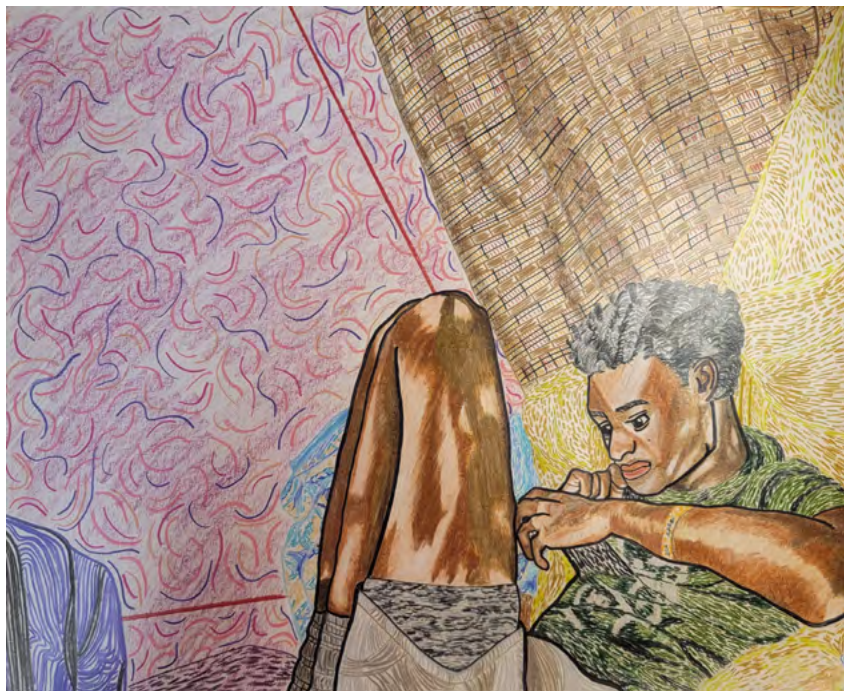
“Trust your intuition, and don’t let contaminated thoughts define your knowledge,” came out of the Apiza’s mouth as it burst into fireworks, setting the starry sky aflame.

Cavy wished Apiza the best of luck and walked to the left, instantly waking back up. Everything was still the same; she was still in her cubicle and it was still pouring at the same pace as before, but after that experience, Cavy didn’t care about the job or the rain. She wanted to jump back into her craft now.

Cavy put in her two-weeks notice and started her own illustration company, making peace with the new life she chose.



Sai-Aja Bradley-Cross/*Deranged Color*



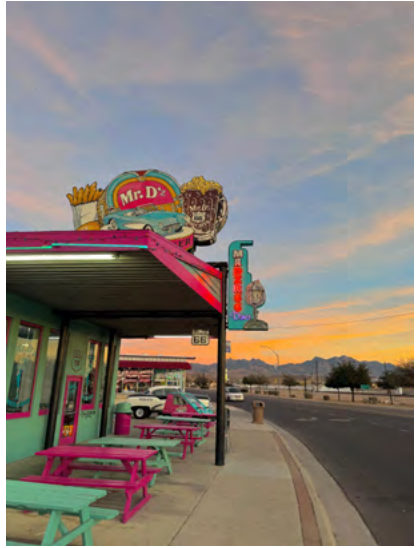
Jayana China/*Living in His World*



Jayana China/*In the Morning*



Rebeca Tamara/*Echoes of Sandstone*



Rebeca Tamara/*Sunset Glow*



Lakyah Young/*Untitled*



Darnell Neely/*Untitled*



Darnell Neely/*Untitled*



Jaden Harrell/*Walker*



Jaden Harrell/*Freddy*



London Banks/*Untitled*



London Banks/*Untitled*



Mustapha Muhideen/*Untitled*



Sa'Lece Reeves/*Untitled*



Simone Hanner/*Untitled*



Simone Hanner/*Untitled*



Deborah Neal/*Untitled*

LEARN, LIBERATE, LEAD OR SEGREGATE, SEPARATE, SEVER?

Dear Lincoln,
Am I not black enough for you?
Is my “B” not capitalized at this HBCU?
I find it so funny when I get the “Where are you from?”
No, but where are you *from*?”
The looks I get when I reply, “I don’t know where I’m from
Or where my people originated.”
It’s something I noticed rather quickly here at Lincoln.
How does one feel “not black enough” for their HBCU?
I’d laugh if it wasn’t so sad.
“I came here to get closer to my people.”
I can’t even say it with a straight face, knowing how far I feel.
My grandmother never told me stories of the islands
Or tales of her time in the motherland.
I am not from Philly or Jersey, but I am *black*.
I’ve experienced the hate and the looks.
Hell, I’ve been called “too dark” my entire life!
However, it is not my struggles that define my blackness.
You see, I may not know my roots, but I know they are planted
Just as firmly as my feet are planted on the ground.
And believe me, I’m standing on business!
I *will* lead my family down a brighter path.
I *will* prepare my little sister for all she will face as a black woman,
And those who question my blackness will *not* shake me!
It is my *drive* that defines my blackness,
It is my *strength* that defines my blackness,
And it is my *blackness* that will break generational curses.

LINCOLN UNIVERSITY: OUR BEACON OF BLACK HOPE

In the heart of Pennsylvania's gentle embrace,
Lies a beacon of knowledge, a sacred space.
Lincoln University, where dreams take flight,
Guiding souls towards wisdom's light.

Amidst the whispers of history's breeze,
Stands a legacy woven with hopes and dreams.
Founded in courage, in faith, in love,
An orange and blue sanctuary below the heavens above.

Oh, Lincoln University, alma mater dear,
Your halls resound with stories sincere
Of pioneers who dared to believe
In the power of black knowledge and the strenght to achieve.

From Ashmun's vision, a flame was lit,
A flame of resilience that refuses to quit.
Through trials and tribulations, you've stood tall,
A beacon of hope inspiring all.

In your embrace, generations find
A sanctuary for hearts and minds,
Where barriers crumble, where spirits soar,
In pursuit of wisdom's endless shore.

From dawn's first light to twilight's embrace,
Your legacy shines with unwavering grace.
A testament to courage, to truth, to art,
Lincoln University, forever in our heart.

CHRISTIANA RESISTANCE FOR AFRICAN LIBERATION

The primary location for the Underground Railroad in Lancaster County for African warriors traveling from Maryland and Virginia seeking liberation was the town of Christiana. Lancaster County is one of several counties in Pennsylvania that borders Maryland, and its southern border is a part of the Mason-Dixon Line that separated both states geographically, morally, and politically in relation to Africans and enslavement following the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 (McDaniel, 2009). This separation would culminate in what some historians mistakenly call the Christiana Riot and others more accurately refer to as the Christiana Resistance. The federal government viewed the resistance as an act of treason and indicted 34 African men and five European American men on 117 separate counts of treason. According to Thomas P. Slaughter's *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North* (1991), it is the largest mass indictment of treason in the history of the United States. However, all charges were eventually dropped due to political pressure and weaknesses in the prosecution's case. The Christiana Resistance helped to highlight opposition towards the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, and foreshadowed the coming of the Civil War ten years later, with a headline from a local newspaper, *The Lancasterian*, that read, "CIVIL WAR, THE FIRST BLOW STRUCK" (Slaughter, 1991, p. ix). The Christiana Resistance also made the front page news of the first issue of *The New York Times* on September 18, 1851 (Forbes, 1998).

Edward Gorsuch was a European-American farmer who oversaw Retreat Farm in Baltimore County, Maryland. On his farm, he enslaved 12 Africans that included George Hammond, Joshua Hammond, Nelson Ford, and Noah Buley (Slaughter, 1991). On November 6, 1849, these four African warriors took a substantial amount of grain from Retreat Farm. After taking the grain, the four African warriors attempted to sell it in order to raise money and liberate themselves. However, they decided to flee in possible fear of being discovered after an attempt to sell the grain. They travelled together either by train or foot, depending on the source, northbound to Lancaster County (Slaughter, 1991). Those who were enslaved did not necessarily consider it stealing if they were denied the basic necessities of survival such as food and clothing. For two years, Edward Gorsuch pursued the four African

warriors and came up empty-handed until a European-American informant, William Padgett, tipped him to their possible location in Lancaster County on August 28, 1851 (Slaughter, 1991).

William Padgett was a well-known assistant to kidnappers in the Lancaster area. By trade, he was a clock repairman, which allowed him to learn information from his customers through conversation, especially amongst the African community. During the fall months, he pretended to collect sumac tops to dye morocco that was used to disguise his true intentions of surveying Africans to be abducted by the infamous kidnapper Deputy Marshal Henry H. Kline (Forbes, 1998). In addition, Padgett was a supposed member of the terrorizing group known as the “Gap Gang,” “Gap Hill Gang,” or “Clemson Gang” (Forbes, 1998, p. 84). Along with the kidnapping of Africans, the Gap Gang also committed crimes that included beatings of enslaved Africans, highway robbery, horse stealing, murder, and property damage (Forbes, 1998). To combat the kidnappings by the Gap Gang and other groups that took place every two to three weeks in the area, William Parker and other Africans created the armed resistance group known as the Lancaster Black Self-Protection Society in 1841 (Jackson, 2019).

The exact age of William Parker at the time of the Christiana Resistance is not known because his enslaver, like many others, did not keep a record of birth dates for enslaved Africans. However, it is believed that Parker was around the age of 29 when the Christiana Resistance took place. Therefore, it is possible that Parker was born around 1822 (Slaughter, 1991). According to his own account, he was born in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, on a plantation named Rowdown (Parker, 1999). Parker does not elaborate on who his father was, but it can be suspected he was a European-American man or even his enslaver, Major William Brogden, because Parker was considered a “mulatto” (Slaughter, 1991, p. 47). Major William Brogden passed away when Parker was young, and he became enslaved to Brogden’s son, David “Mack” Brogden (Parker, 1999, p. 156). William Parker was raised mostly by his grandmother after his mother, Louisa Simms, passed away at a young age (Parker, 1999).

At around the age of seventeen in 1839, William Parker and his brother Charles Parker liberated themselves from Rowdown following a dispute with David Brogden. William Parker and Charles Parker shared the same mental attitude that enslavement was wrong, and no person should be subjected to inferiority. Prior to liberating themselves, William Parker bought a forged travel pass from a friend but destroyed it along the journey to liberation with

his brother because Charles Parker did not have one. Eventually, the Parker brothers traveled to Wrightsville, York County, where they met a female acquaintance before journeying by boat at night across the Susquehanna River to Columbia, Lancaster County, arriving there before daybreak (Parker, 1999). After spending some time in Lancaster County, it would be at Bart Township where William Parker met a familiar acquaintance, Frederick Douglass (Parker, 1999). William Parker had met the African warrior Frederick Douglass at a young age when both were enslaved in Maryland. Douglass would later refer to Parker as “a sober, well-behaved, and religious man of color,” as well as “the Preacher” in Christiana (Forbes, 1998, p. 28). When Parker saw Douglass and Garrison in Bart Township, he was thoroughly impressed with the oratory skills of both, which had a lasting impact on his life. Later, circa 1846, William Parker met and married his wife, Eliza Ann Elizabeth Howard, who was also an African warrior.

By the time of the Christiana Resistance, William Parker was one of more than 3,000 Africans residing in Lancaster County (Delbanco, 2018). Parker had been living there for 12 years where he rented a home from his European-American Quaker employers, Levi Pownall and Sarah Pownall, which was used as a part of the Underground Railroad to assist African warriors in gaining liberation. On September 9, 1851, Edward Gorsuch obtained four warrants in Philadelphia for the detainment of George Hammond, Joshua Hammond, Nelson Ford, and Noah Buley. Edward Ingraham, the enslavement commissioner, advised the well-known kidnapper Deputy Marshal Henry H. Kline to assist Gorsuch in his capture. Two police officers, John Agan and Thompson Tully, were also advised to help Gorsuch and his associates. However, both officers would not participate in the kidnapping at the last minute. Edward Gorsuch brought along with him from Maryland Dickinson Gorsuch, a nephew named Dr. Thomas Pearce, a cousin named Joshua Gorsuch, and two neighbors named Nathan Nelson and Nicholas Hutchings. Although the large group of kidnappers did not initially travel together towards Lancaster County, it was discovered by an African from Philadelphia named Samuel Williams, an informant for William Parker and member of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, which had been spying on Gorsuch’s posse since their coming to Philadelphia, that the kidnappers were approaching the area (Slaughter, 1991, pp. 52-53). At the time, the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee was led by the liberated African William Still. Upon learning that Gorsuch’s posse was approaching Lancaster County, Samuel Williams traveled from Penningtonville (modern day Atglen), Pennsylvania, to nearby Christiana and relayed the information to William Parker

(Parker, 1999). At 1:00 a.m. on Thursday, September 11, 1851, Edward Gorsuch and his cohorts were led by a paid concealed informant to Christiana. The informant is suspected to have been William Padgett, but the identity of the individual is not known because he disguised himself well to protect his identity (Slaughter, 1991).

In William Parker's account of the Christiana Resistance, he states that he had knowledge of Gorsuch and his approaching kidnappers on September 10, 1851, but he was not concerned by the news. Within the Parker household were himself, Samuel Thompson, Joshua Kite, Eliza Parker, Eliza's sister, Hannah Pinckney, her husband, Alexander Pinckney, and Abraham Johnson. Joshua Kite and Samuel Thompson were two of the suspected African warriors Edward Gorsuch sought to kidnap who had renamed themselves after gaining liberation; however, different accounts of the story fail to accurately identify the enslaved names of the two individuals. According to William Parker, Joshua Kite informed the Parker household of the approaching Gorsuch kidnappers during the early morning hours on September 11, 1851, after seeing Edward Gorsuch and his posse coming towards the Parker house as he was heading to the home of Joseph Pownall and Phoebe Pownall, which is where Kite was living at the time (Parker, 1999). Upon seeing Gorsuch's posse, Joshua Kite came storming into the Parker household to alert those inside, who were already prepared for armed resistance against Edward Gorsuch and his group (Parker, 1999).

The details of what took place at the home of William Parker vary. What is known is that members of both groups were armed with guns. It is not known which group fired the first shot; however, it is suspected Edward Gorsuch and his group opened fire first after Eliza Parker blew a horn from an upstairs room to alert neighbors and members of the Black Self-Protection Society to the kidnappers' presence (Slaughter, 1991). Not knowing the meaning of the horn, but suspecting it was a warning to the surrounding community, it is believed that the Gorsuch posse then began to open fire on the upstairs window where Eliza Parker was blowing the horn down on her knees. Eliza Parker was unharmed because the house was made of stone, and the windows were deep. William Parker leaned out the upstairs window and was fired on by Deputy Marshal Kline. In response, Parker grabbed a gun and intended to kill Edward Gorsuch, believing he was the one who instructed Kline to fire at him but was stopped by Alexander Pinckney (Parker, 1999). The gunfire ceased, and William Parker asked Edward Gorsuch to identify who he was looking to kidnap. He asked if it was himself, to which Gorsuch responded, "No," then did the same for Alexander Pinckney and

finally Abraham Johnson (Parker, 1999).

Within several minutes of the horn being sounded, several neighbors, both African and European American, arrived armed to the Parker household and surrounded the kidnappers, including the African warrior who liberated himself from Edward Gorsuch, Noah Buley (Slaughter, 1991). Seeing the amount of European Americans responding to the horn and being talked to by Deputy Marshal Kline to assist the kidnappers, Alexander Pinckney panicked, thinking the Africans inside the home were outnumbered, and suggested to William Parker that he would surrender to the kidnappers. William Parker immediately told Pinckney that if he attempted to surrender he would blow out his brains, emphasizing, "Don't believe that any living man can take you. Don't give up to the slaveholder" (Parker, 1999, p. 286). Eliza Parker backed her husband's position, threatening to use a corn cutter to cut the head off the first person who decided to surrender (Parker, 1999). Eliza Parker was 21-years-old at the time of the resistance and had three children with William Parker, as well as other family members in the area who were also African warriors, and she didn't want to risk losing or never seeing them again. To protect their children from the kidnappers, Eliza Parker and Hannah Pinckney's mother, Cassandra Warner, watched after them at a safe location (Slaughter, 1991). It is estimated that between 25 to 150 African men and women arrived at Parker's home after Eliza sounded the horn. They came individually and in groups, on foot and by horse, and were armed with clubs, guns, scythes, shovels, and swords (Hine, 2014).

After the confrontation, William Parker and the men inside his home came to the front door and stood in the doorway, stating their intentions of defending themselves. The African men then came outside to where the kidnappers stood and continued their defiance, which prompted Dickinson Gorsuch to refer to William Parker as a "nigger" (Parker, 1999, p. 287). William Parker responded that if Dickinson Gorsuch said that again he would knock his teeth down his throat. Dickinson Gorsuch then fired his pistol at William Parker and missed. According to William Parker, he knocked the pistol out of his hand, and a second pistol dropped to the ground when Dickinson Gorsuch attempted to run to a nearby field. Alexander Pinckney countered with his double-barrel gun and shot Dickinson Gorsuch twice (Parker, 1999). Remarkably, Dickinson Gorsuch would survive the near-fatal gunshot wounds (Slaughter, 1991). Samuel Thompson, one of the Africans Edward Gorsuch sought to kidnap, twice struck Edward Gorsuch in the head with Alexander Pinckney's gun, causing it to bend and not be able to fire (Parker, 1999).

The kidnappers then began to shoot at the Africans, who, in turn, rushed the kidnappers. The Africans were too close to the kidnappers to shoot. Instead, the Africans used their guns to deliver blows to the kidnappers, which caused them to run. Three or four other Africans then attacked Edward Gorsuch, and he sustained gunshot wounds and lay on the ground until the African women completed killing him, according to William Parker (Parker, 1999). Although William Parker does not say how the women killed Edward Gorsuch, it is theorized they beat and hacked at his body with corn cutters (Slaughter, 1991). The women then supposedly took three-hundred dollars out of the coat pocket of Edward Gorsuch and divided it amongst themselves, according to one account. Another account of the role of the women in the death of Edward Gorsuch goes even further, stating that they severed his penis ceremoniously. The severing of the penis was never reported in accounts of the Christiana Resistance in the North, but was widely believed in the South as factual (Slaughter, 1991).

Following the two-hour incident of the Christiana Resistance, William Parker and his family hastily devised a plan to leave Lancaster County for Canada. He decided the best option for a safe escape was for him to travel ahead of his wife and children to decrease the chances of being discovered. William Parker fled with Abraham Johnson and Alexander Pinckney, while the African warriors enslaved at Edward Gorsuch's Retreat Farm escaped together safely towards liberation in Canada (Slaughter, 1991). William Parker's group made the 500-mile trek north towards Rochester, New York, by foot, train, and horse carriage, to the home of Frederick Douglass on Alexander Street (Blockson, 2001). The home was well-designed for assisting African warriors to Canada because it was located on a hill with a private road, and inside was a complex network of secret closets and panels for hiding (Anadolu-Okur, 2016). The African warrior and businessman William C. Goodridge is also believed to have assisted the Christiana Resisters, using special railroad cars he owned to transport them. In *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881), Douglass writes about William Parker's group, stating, "I could not look upon them as murderers. To me, they were heroic defenders of the just rights of man against manstealers and murderers. So I fed them, and sheltered them in my house" (Jackson, 2019, p. 57).

According to Nilgün Anadolu-Okur's *Dismantling Slavery: Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and Formation of the Abolitionist Discourse, 1841-1851* (2016), the European abolitionist from Britain, Julia Griffiths, also assisted William Parker's group in escaping to Canada from Rochester, in collaboration with Douglass. Upon Douglass's instruction, Griffiths guided Parker's

group to the landing on the Genesee River after speaking to an African agent there who allowed the group to board a British boat headed for Canada (Anadolu-Okur, 2016). Douglass waited with the three men on the ship before takeoff towards Kingston, Canada, at 8:00 P.M. (Parker, 1999). Before undocking, Parker expressed his gratitude to Douglass by handing him the pistol of Edward Gorsuch that fell from his hand when he died; it was a gesture that was greatly appreciated by Douglass (Slaughter, 1991). As the boat undocked, a friend of William Parker's onboard pointed out kidnappers looking for him and his group on the shore. William Parker stated the kidnappers looked like fools, and he yelled to a friend on the shore to write to Deputy Marshal Kline that he was in Canada, where the boat arrived in Kingston at 6:00 A.M. on September 21, 1851 (Parker, 1999).

Abraham Johnson, Alexander Pinckney, and William Parker arrived in Canada safely and settled in Ontario, where they were welcomed by the African warrior Henry Bibb and his second wife, Mary Bibb. Parker's group went from Kingston to Toronto, where William Parker was reunited with his wife after two months of separation. Eliza Parker and her children, Cassandra Parker, John T. Parker, and Maria L. Parker, had a more difficult time escaping to Canada. Eliza Parker was apprehended twice during her journey but escaped, and after the third attempt to catch her, she decided to leave the children behind with her mother, Cassandra Warner (Slaughter, 1991). Cassandra Warner was harassed heavily by European Americans seeking the whereabouts of Eliza Parker and William Parker, as well as others involved in the Christiana Resistance. According to Thomas P. Slaughter, Warner became distraught, depressed, and hopeless because she was not informed where they had gone. Then, in desperation, Cassandra Warner submitted herself to her former enslaver. She never saw her family again and lived the rest of her life in Maryland (Slaughter, 1991). However, Ella Forbes interprets Cassandra Warner submitting herself back to enslavement as a form of protection for her children and grandchildren, because it was something she had done previously for her two daughters and sons, according to an article in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, published on October 16, 1851, reprinted from the *Independent*. Eventually, William Parker was reunited with his wife and children after he reached Canada, where they resided in Buxton, home of other African warriors from Pennsylvania like the Shadd family. They lived the rest of their lives there, liberated from the horrors of kidnappers (Slaughter, 1991).

In Canada, William Parker became a farmer and the Kent County reporter for Frederick Douglass's newspaper, *The North Star*. This was significant because reading and writing were forbidden when Parker was enslaved,

but he learned how to do both while in Canada (Anadolu-Okur, 2016). It would be Abraham Shadd, along with Abraham Johnson, Joseph Shadd, and Osborne Anderson, who assisted William Parker in March 1858 with the story of his life. Entitled “The Freedman’s Story,” it was published in two parts in *The Atlantic Monthly* in February and March of 1866. William Parker came back to Pennsylvania temporarily in 1872 to speak at a political rally for African Republicans of Chester County and Lancaster County, and stayed in the state from June to August, visiting friends. The Chester County *Oxford, Pennsylvania Press* reported William Parker also attended the Lincoln University graduation ceremony held on June 19, 1872. After 1872, there are no records of William Parker, but the Buxton property was transferred to Eliza Parker in 1889, an indication, perhaps, of when he died, though he is not buried with her in Buxton (Forbes, 1998).

Although found not guilty, the 39 individuals indicted for the Christiana Resistance accrued large lawyer fees during their defense that put them in debt. To relieve the debt, African vigilance committees from Philadelphia, New York City, and Rochester paid the fees for the Africans, while the Sadsbury Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends in Lancaster County paid the fees for the European Americans (Slaughter, 1991). The resisters were imprisoned for 97 days under harsh conditions, such as lack of heat and ventilation, but the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, led by William Still, provided clothing for the Africans indicted and funds for their families (Forbes, 1998).

The Christiana Resistance was an occurrence the South never forgot and wanted revenge for during the Civil War. If the Confederate Army had won the Battle of Gettysburg, then the plan was to burn Christiana to the ground out of vengeance for the killing of Edward Gorsuch, but this did not happen since the Confederacy lost that battle (Slaughter, 1991). As the Africans involved in the Christiana Resistance were being released from prison in December 1851, two incidents in Chester County took place involving the kidnappings of the African sisters, Elizabeth Parker and Rachel Parker, that would continue the fight for African liberation. William Parker and the Christiana Resistance not only had an impact regionally in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, but also throughout the United States, as a display of armed resistance against enslavement. As stated by Henry Bibb in *Voice of the Fugitive*, William Parker deserves admiration akin to other great leaders of African liberation such as Toussaint L’Ouverture (Delbanco, 2018).

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Personal Interview: Cultural Tension

As America's first degree-granting HBCU, Lincoln has long been a destination for students from Africa and the Caribbean. International students are culturally different than their African-American counterparts, and this tends to create an underlying, often unacknowledged tension between the two groups. In an interview with staff member Grace Quiah, Brandon Frierson talks openly about the possible roots of this tension and steps that Lincoln can take to foster a more culturally integrated environment on campus.



Brandon Frierson

Based on your own experience, describe the cultural tension between African-American students and international students at Lincoln University, and provide an example of how this tension manifests itself.

In my personal experience, I wouldn't say that there's necessarily a tension between the American and international students here at Lincoln, but rather a cultural distinction. We have similarities as brown people, but differences in terms of sub-culture, I'd say.

What specific cultural biases do these two groups of students have toward each other, and where do you think these biases originate?

Again, I'm just speaking for the campus and not the topic in its broadness. I think there's a lack of awareness on both sides rather than a bias here on Lincoln's campus. Both sides don't know the fullness of each other's culture. African culture is more than what is presented to Americans, and black culture in America is more than what is being presented to Africans or even Caribbean.

For a good part of its history, Lincoln has been home to many students from Africa and the Caribbean. In 2024, are these international students still welcome on campus? Does the school still make them feel like they're part of the Lincoln family?

As far as I know, Lincoln is allowing international students from the Caribbean and Africa to attend campus still. I don't see anything that'd make me say otherwise. Everyone here for the most part is brown and that's the first thing that connects us, so I'd say they are still welcome.

Do you think that faculty and administration favor students from either group, either consciously or unconsciously? Are they themselves guilty of certain cultural biases?

I haven't noticed any clear cultural biases from faculty, personally, so I'd say no.

How can Lincoln foster an environment that allows for the integration of both cultures?

If Lincoln wants to foster an environment that is conducive for both cultures, then promote the groups in their entirety. The Caribbean is more than just Trinidad and Jamaica, and Africa is more than Nigeria and Ghana. No disrespect to any of the countries mentioned, but if you want to make an environment as mentioned, talk about more history within the region and make sure it's specific to the people. Caribbean and African people have made contributions to the country that can be mentioned on a much larger scale, I'm sure. Not as much as black Americans, I'd say, but there's definitely something. Host more concise events and cultural diversity events, and I don't mean a whine city or dance hall event. There's more to our culture than booty-shaking music and slang. Be intentional with making more of the cultures known and for the right reasons

AFRICAN-AMERICAN POEM

From shackles we became free.
From slavery to poverty, up rise our legacy.
Hated for our skin color and hung from trees.
Hatred in their blood that only leads us to believe.
Our spokesmen were forever shutdown;
That had us thinking: would we truly be free?
We marched and protested to protect our peace,
Decades of fighting and being pushed to the ground,
Treated like animals to just barely human,
We need to come together and be in union.
We deserve to be heard, but we were silenced.
We deserve to learn not fight; we strive for guidance.
Lit up our legacy, we created our own fire,
Continuing to step up to the power, hopefully we inspire.
Never backing down, we're tearing down the empire.
We came a long way, in time, our dim light became brighter.

BITTERSWEET JUNETEENTH

If you had asked me before the Pandemic, what Juneteenth was, I honestly couldn't have told you. I didn't learn about it in high school, and, if my parents ever mentioned it, I must not have been listening. My family and I didn't start celebrating Juneteenth until June 2020. This was following the killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breanna Taylor, which had all occurred within the past 6 months. These racially motivated murders sparked a change in the minds of millions of Americans. It flipped a dormant social justice switch that was hiding in the background of our psyche. It took filmed killings of innocent black people and a nationwide Black Lives Matter movement for me to understand the meaning of Juneteenth. *Our* Independence Day. However, I've been celebrating the Fourth of July since I was a child, an Independence Day that my ancestors were excluded from.

Formerly known as Freedom Day, Second Independence Day, Emancipation Day, and Jubilee Day, Juneteenth is African-American Independence Day. It commemorates the emancipation of enslaved people in the United States. More than two years after the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery took effect, slaves in Galveston, Texas were finally informed of their liberation on June 19th, 1865. I can only imagine the rage that my ancestors felt after finding out that the legislation to abolish slavery had been passed two years before they were informed. I imagine that this rage was immediately met with a sense of relief and fear. Relief because the torment of chattel slavery was over. Fear because they were about to be thrust into an unfamiliar world where they were unequipped to succeed.

It is bewildering to me how not even 200 years ago, African Americans could only dream of going to college, let alone attend a college made specifically for black people to release their inhibitions and embrace their culture. I have the rare opportunity to attend a learning sanctuary surrounded by like-minded individuals who I can grow and develop with. I am immersed in an educational community headed by administrators and professors who are invested in my future and well-being. Jobs, research opportunities, and internships are shared regularly to enhance my personal and career development. Lincoln University is a diamond in the rough, a small HBCU rich in opportunities for students to take part in. Juneteenth, for me, is a chance

to reflect on my life and the opportunities that I've been blessed with here at Lincoln. I am grateful to live in this day and age, where education is so attainable. As the African proverb goes, "I stand tall because I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors." It is my duty to take advantage of this unique opportunity and make the most of my college experience.

As an HBCU student, I especially have a duty to practice responsible citizenship within my community. Coming from a majority-white high school, I never had a black teacher during my entire primary and secondary education. As such, I never learned about Juneteenth in school. But by attending an HBCU and learning the rich history of Africans and our triumphant overcoming, there's no excuse to be uninformed about Juneteenth.

Unfortunately, the academic calendar doesn't run through June, but if it did, I would love to see the campus come together to celebrate our Independence Day. I can imagine the June sun complementing our skin as we spend the whole day outside celebrating with food, music, dance, and service. It would be the ultimate sign of unity and cohesiveness within the Lincoln community. Just as the rest of America is patriotic and makes a whole weekend out of July 4th, we can do the same, if not more, for Juneteenth. As an HBCU student and future graduate, it is my obligation to not only celebrate Juneteenth but educate young black children about it. July 4th isn't **our** Independence Day. And while it's important to celebrate the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the birth of the United States, it is no secret that that document didn't include us. Therefore, we need to celebrate our Independence Day unapologetically and pass on this tradition to future generations.

Becoming a federal holiday in 2021, Juneteenth is a recognition of the end of our ancestors' enslavement. However, we don't need this country's permission to celebrate our independence. My hope is that one day, just like the 4th of July, Juneteenth will be observed by all Americans. Every American needs to be informed of this country's past, not to place blame, but to educate and prevent cruelties of the past from reoccurring. To me, Juneteenth is a bittersweet commemoration marking both the end of oppression in the form of slavery and reminding us of the atrocities that this country has committed against black and African people. Above all, it is a celebration of **our** independence, liberty, and freedom.

I WISH

My eyes are drowning in disbelief,
Watching as his blood seeps through the concrete,
As his hollow breath ceases,
Laying there as if asleep,
But he's no longer a living being.
I wish.

I wish I wasn't in a gunman's world,
Where peace is an unrealistic concept,
Especially in my community.
Majority of Black people's deaths
Are no longer by natural causes,
But by the hand...homicide and suicide:
Our worst friends.

Disagreements are no longer solved with words or a fist,
But by how many shots you can fill a person's body with.
Overkill is the term, I think.
Teenagers are behind the triggers.
Where does their future lie?
Behind bars,
Victims of their own crime?
How did it get like this?
Everyone's favorite answer is
"They are simply products of their environment,"
But I refuse to believe death is the only card black people can hold.
Tired of seeing our youth on CNN news,
Their cause of death is the only time their story has ever been told,
And when it's not Us inflicting the pain,
White people are killing us to continue their imaginary "Reign."

Loss has become normalized,
Grief has become faint.
We are no longer unable to sleep for weeks,

Our appetite has not decreased.
We are able to move on so easily,
It's as if we have become immune to tragedy.

This world is continually in violent agony.
Small countries taking each other's life and food supply,
With their machetes, rifles, and big bellies,
Continents taking over territories with their tanks and aircraft missiles.
Is it worth it all? One Don rises as the next one falls.

6,675 miles away, war has been declared,
Lands are being torn away,
Bombs displayed, bullets sprayed,
Palestinian parents and children dying in vain.
Gaza Police are useless, Israel soldiers are ruthless.
Gaza is dying with no allies to help them keep trying.
No country wishes to help;
Well, at least not the losing team.
Loyalties are misplaced:
How are you supporting the ones who are inflicting the pain?
God, please give them grace.

PEACE, the five-letter word we all seek,
Yet life has shown us time and time again
It's at a height we'll never be able to reach.
The Bible tells the tale of Revelations,
And I guess the great paradox is slowly taking place,
So, as I make my wish, I know it's just
A trick of my sub-conscious.
I hope for a different fate,
Because the one written leaves me
Paralyzed with fear,
A heart filled with despair,
And eyes drowning in tears.

OVERCOMING BLINDNESS IN *INVISIBLE MAN*

Black voices have been silenced for many years as white people have decided to create their own image of African Americans and how they look, act, talk, etc. For centuries, many Black writers, artists, and performers worked hard to amplify the need for rights and for all voices to be heard equally. In Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the unnamed narrator goes through a series of experiences and encounters, ultimately leading him to discover his own identity and calling out to society for its choice to be actively blind. Despite being invisible, he never loses hope and in a way uses it to his advantage. In our current society, there have been multiple cases where black voices are silenced or go unheard, and where White people stifle the African-American community to the point where feeling invisible can still be seen to this day. *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison speaks to our contemporary society by recognizing how being invisible can be ambiguous to African Americans, while, on the other hand, being blind to race hurts them as a whole.

In Ellison's *Invisible Man*, he says, "A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes which they look through their physical eyes upon reality. I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen..." (258). In this quote, he explains how people's souls and beliefs are what they will see in reality. White society is blind due to their personal beliefs and stereotypes about the African-American community. Knowing this, he concludes that invisibility is, of course, a disadvantage, but it can also be used as a strength. For example, the narrator lives rent-free in a section of an all-white building that was shut off and forgotten. Thus, being a small victory, it is still a home for him. This place plays an important part in the story because it gives him a light that helps, in his words, to "confirm his reality." The narrator says, "Without light, I am not only invisible but formless as well; and to be unaware of one's form is to live a death. I, after existing for some twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility" (258). Despite the frustration that comes with being invisible and feeling ignored, his invisibility sparks his journey to self-discovery and creates a picture for himself that is not backed by stereotypes. His invisibility

is double-sided, and he has found advantages and strengths in what may be seen as a weakness.

The ambiguity of being invisible can be recognized in our current society. In the real world, sometimes African Americans wish to be invisible and hidden to protect themselves because, when seen, it is usually as a threat. Being invisible can act as a shield to protect us from being stereotyped or racially profiled, which is why this invisibility still has a double meaning, and can be as helpful as it is harmful. In an article published by *The Week*, the author discusses how Black people's feeling of invisibility is common: "When you are a black woman in the US, sometimes you want to be invisible because being invisible means you are safe..." This is a great example of African Americans, more specifically Black women, using invisibility as a form of protection rather than seeing it as an obstacle. This is more relevant today, since many Black men have been killed or attacked after being racially profiled. Ellison pointing out the dual nature of invisibility speaks hope to the current day African-American community, as it shows us how the Black community can use society's blindness as a form of safety, while also actively working to break the invisibility caused by stereotypes, as the narrator did throughout his journey.

In the prologue to Ellison's novel, he says, "I am invisible...simply because people refuse to see me" (258). This quote tells the reader that society is actively choosing to be blind, specifically towards black people, and that choice to be blind causes him to be invisible. Blindness is the cause of the invisibility because society is choosing to be "sleepwalkers," as Ellison puts it, forcing African Americans to try and escape the stereotypes created within white America's "inner eyes." In Chapter One, the narrator goes to an event under the impression he is going to be giving a speech. However, he is instead put in a boxing match. During the match, all the men in the ring are blindfolded and instructed to fight and then grapple for money for the entertainment of a white audience. Shortly after, the white men allow the narrator to make his speech, during which they laugh and interrupt him the entire time. This scene illustrates how blindness is a danger to society and hurts physically and metaphorically. In addition, it shows how the white audience ignores the man's humanity and instead just uses it for the audience's pleasure.

To this day, many white people still diligently decide to act like African Americans are nonexistent, or, in other words, remain blind to the race. On Michelle Obama's podcast that is streamed on Spotify, she says, "White America acts like black women don't exist." She talks about experiences she

has had where people didn't even look her in the eye or treat her as a human being. She recalls going to get ice cream when a white lady cut in front of her to order. She says, "The woman didn't apologize, she never looked me in my eye, she didn't know it was me. All she saw was a black person or a group of black people, or maybe she didn't even see that. Because we were invisible." We cannot grow together if white America continues to be blind toward race because this blindness causes a lot of division and ultimately hurts us. African Americans feel unseen to this day because no matter how much we protest and try to gain support against police brutality and the mistreatment of black people, these abuses continue, creating the feeling of invisibility throughout our community despite our ceaseless attempts to be seen.

In another article, Rebekah Fenton talks about instances she has had where people have accidentally mistaken her for another one of her black co-workers, despite not looking like them at all. She says, "Their mix-ups implied, there can only be one of you here. Our individual names and the uniqueness of our faces and personalities were invisible to the bias that only recognized a black female face." This current-day blindness strips the identity of each African-American person. If we do not recognize the division that has been created by disregarding an entire race/community, then we are ignoring the problem, which does more harm and does not help to solve it. If society could make progress and escape the blindness that has gone on for so long, it will help improve our society, which is what Ellison so strongly emphasizes in his writing.

In conclusion, Ellison's *Invisible Man* speaks to our current society because it emphasizes how being invisible can be used to its advantage despite its downsides; however, blindness hurts humanity and divides us. If society could make progress to see everyone equally as humans rather than see them through the lens of race, it will curb the division in our communities. The blindness in America has led to a very unaccepting culture, despite our country being very diverse. In *Invisible Man*, the narrator works through his invisibility and forces people to see him and hear him, working to break the blindness. This is exactly what needs to continue to happen and is happening as Black people riot, protest, and are active in the media to the point where you can't be blind. Continuing to do this, we can, over time, break the invisible barrier and help to heal the racial division in America.

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SALEEM WEST

Leem you was 16 you had a good life
So much ahead of you, damn man, why did they have to strike?
They took you away from us in just one night
Hanging out with ya mans, thank God he got his life
You would play ball and light up the day
Hit a 3 and make that shot in ya own special way
We knew you would cheat and change up the rules
Make jokes with ya friends and just always stay cool
But now we're stuck with memories for the rest of our days
I pray to God that he will take this pain away
Your smile would light up the room and we would know you were there
But now we're stuck in doom because we know you're not here
We know you can't come back and that's a fact
Wish you would, though, so we could forget all this crap
Why it had to be you? I mean, you always seemed chill
To take your life, I mean, this shit can't be real
You had so much ahead with basketball and Prime
With a birthday so close, they were doing the most
They threw 17 shots (bang, bang, bang, bang)
You got shot by one and I wish it was none
You were the sweetest guy we knew, but they killed her son
I can't believe my eyes, this is such a surprise
To know that you're gone and we'll never be the same
God, I can't stand all this pain
It will never be the same, I'll always remember your name
You was a good friend to know for sure
To the smiles and the laughs that would make us gasp
You'd always find a way to make us laugh
I remember when you was younger, always making jokes
Saying "slickhead, dickhead" in ya goofy voice
We wanted to be around you and that was our choice
But you always stayed focused and got on by
So now we trying our best to keep your name alive

We gonna march and fight to keep your memories safe
You'll always have a big piece of my heart in its special place
Wish life dealt different cards and kept you here with us
So we could focus on you becoming a pro athlete
Meeting LeBron and beating him at his own game
Making LeBron buckle his own feet
But I'm lost in defeat to know you're gone, Leem
You're a part of God's big angels league
I love you, baby boy, keep watching from above
We'll see each other again with the folks that I love.

THE GRIM REAPER COMES WHEN LEAST EXPECTED

“Death is a challenge. It tells us not to waste time. It tells us to tell each other right now that we love each other,” said Leo Buscaglia. Some may say death is a part of life and some may say it’s an unfortunate event. Honestly, I’ve never been scared of death, but it is one of the thoughts that has kept me up at night, wondering what happens after death. Does one go to heaven, is it just a long sleep, do they have outer-body experiences, do they look upon those left behind? All these questions and yet no answers besides what one believes. In 9th grade, about a month or two before quarantine, I had a friend pass away due to drowning. His death cast a gloomy cloud not only on students and staff, but also on my household.

Gabriel Rice, a 16-year-old junior, attended the High School for Construction, Trades, Engineering, and Architecture (CTEA). He had played on my dad’s varsity basketball team since he was a freshman, and he was very good at what he did. He had a bright future in basketball and was from a basketball family. He had a beautiful Hispanic girlfriend named Nicole who played softball. He had such a beautiful soul, was sweet and smart, and made everybody smile when he walked in the room. In October, he and two friends decided to go to Rockaway Beach, one of the well-known and available beaches in New York City. Rockaway Beach has always been known for its strong currents and harsh, dirty waters. On this fatal day, Gabe wasn’t the only one who lost his life. Gabe and Adeydayo ran into the ocean trying to save their friend who couldn’t swim and was being taken away by the waves. Eventually, the waves took them away farther from shore, and their friend went home in complete disarray without them, hoping there was a chance they were still alive, somehow, somehow.

Three days after this tragic incident, Adeydayo was found in Breezy Point about 25 minutes from Far Rockaway Beach. Adeydayo’s family had gotten their closure, but Gabe’s hadn’t. I had prayed, prayed, and prayed that whoever found Gabe would find him soon, and when they did, he would be hurt, probably, but, most importantly, alive. A little crazy, isn’t it, asking for someone to be found hurt instead of perfectly fine? I understand things like

this don't happen without some kind of injury, so I thought if I asked for him to be hurt rather than perfectly fine, he would show up alive. The four days after Adeydayo's body was found were the most fearful and distracting four days I've ever experienced. No matter what I did, all I could think about was Gabe.

One dreadful night after practice, my dad picked me up. I remember this night clearly. It was around 9:15 when practice ended, and I was sweaty and still wearing my practice leotard because it was too hot to change. The sky was a midnight navy blue color, the stars were out in the pouring rain, and the watchtower light was circling, shining bright like it always does. I got into the passenger seat of my dad's silver Infinity and shivered a little from the cold rain. My dad pulled off as we were going down the long airplane runway to exit onto the highway. He started the conversation.

"So, they found Gabe," he said, slightly monotone.

As soon as he said those words, my world stopped. My mouth got dry and the couple of seconds of silence felt like hours. I didn't know what to say or how to act.

"Really? Where did they find him?" I said calmly.

"They found him over here in Brooklyn. Right by your gym," he said.

At that moment I was speechless. I said nothing afterward and stuck to myself. The rest of the 45-minute ride home was quiet besides the radio playing softly in the background. I did not cry nor did I shed even a single tear. I just looked out the window towards the sky, asking God why my prayers weren't answered and why he had to take away someone so kind.

Going to school the next day was dreadful. I was moping around in the morning, and it felt like a gloomy cloud was cast over everywhere I walked and went. The car ride to school was speechless and eerily quiet, and walking into the school building and attending my first class felt weird. There was something about knowing he was gone but not truly believing it, and being in denial thinking he would randomly show up and appear somehow. As the day went on and it was around lunchtime, I went to my dad's office to eat lunch. As soon as I went in, I was immediately hit with the heartbreaking, gut-wrenching sound of cries from his girlfriend. She was bawling her eyes out and couldn't stop crying no matter what we did to try and comfort her. After being in there for a max of five minutes, I couldn't stay any more. Her

cries broke me down even further than I thought I could go and made me realize that the way I felt was not even half of the emotions and sadness she was feeling. I was utterly distraught and in complete shock and speechless to do anything for the rest of the day. I went to my classes, but I was never mentally there and couldn't finish the day without feeling the depressed feelings that were going around the whole school building.

During one Saturday practice, the sunlight was shining through the big glass panels and I was moping around that whole day. My coach stopped and asked, "What's wrong?"

I proceeded to look at the floor for a minute, trying to gather my thoughts and feelings before I looked up at her and said, "My friend drowned and was found in these waters."

My coach never knew what to say. She looked down at the floor and then at me with pity and said, "Oh. I'm sorry."

"Thank you," I said and continued practicing as if nothing ever bothered me. I hate feeling other people's pity towards me and I hated the way she looked at me because I knew no matter what I said she could never truly empathize with what I was going through unless she was there herself. And this I would never wish on my worst enemy.

On the day of the funeral, it was pouring rain. I took this as a sign that God was crying. He probably didn't want this to happen and the wrong people got taken at the wrong time, way too early in life. He was crying with the rest of us and feeling the same pain we felt. We left school right after it ended to attend the funeral, and for the first time in a long time I saw my dad cry. The man that has ten tattoos, big muscles, a hard demeanor, and no excuses, broke down in a matter of seconds. Tears slowly trickled down his face under his black sunglasses until he had to take off the sunglasses and wipe the tears away. Again, I did not cry or shed a single tear, but all I could think about was how life isn't fair. Someone so precious was taken away and brought to the heavens with the rest of the angels.

To this day, I hope he is enjoying life up there in the clouds and is living a better life. He suffered when he passed away, and that is the worst way to go. May Gabriel Rice and Adedayo Adewale forever rest in peace and live happily in the afterlife, for they only lived a little while on this earth.

LOVE

If anyone was to ask me about love,
I would tell them about you.
Your touch,
Your affection,
Your purity,
Your mindset.
I could name anything,
If they were to ask.

But your love for me wasn't enough to stay.
My love for you only grew,
Even without you.
I dwell on ache and what could be,
When, in reality,
It's never going to be.

Love is a losing game,
With nothing to lose
but a broken heart,
With no medication
To go through.

Had to re-up on your love
As if it's a drug,
But you're not my plug,
So why act like a thug
When we can just make love?

Your touch shivers on my body like goosebumps.
I love your hands:
Kind, sweet, gentle,
Pleasurable,
Memorable,

But forgettable with someone new,
Even though I only crave you.
So, what are we gonna do?

Your love is ivy; I'm envious,
But prone to the poison
It brings.
My eyes are pumping blood,
But I feel green,
Looking to remain in the trees.

When you look at me,
I can't make eye contact.
I feel butterflies in my tummy,
I get nervous in your presence.
I don't want you to look into my eyes,
And see my past scars,
Because then you'll see the real me.

Love doesn't boast but glows.
Love doesn't envy but craves.
Love doesn't intimidate but meditates.
Love doesn't run; it grows.
Love, yours.

I AM NOT IN LOVE

I am not in love,
But when you text me
I feel happier.

I am not in love,
But each glimpse you give me
Makes my heart dance.

I am not in love,
But I cannot breathe
When you're not here.

I am not in love,
But I don't get tired of your body,
And I want to melt into you.

I am not in love,
But when I cradle your neck in my hands,
My heart expands

I am not in love,
But we're like currents of air that dance
And wait for the big collapse.

I'm not in love,
But when you laugh,
I think you are the one.

I am not in love,
But I want to make sure you feel safe
When you are around me.

I am not in love,
Because I don't dare tell you
That I am in love.

IF I TELL YOU I LOVE YOU

If I tell you I love you, what would that change?
The way you're on my mind makes me feel deranged.
I can't think straight and it's because of you,
But I wouldn't dare say anything for fear of what it'd do.
If I tell you I love you, would it tear us apart?
Who knows if it'd douse the flame or ignite a spark.
I've tried countless times but whenever you look my way,
I get all tongue-tied and jittery and don't know what to say.
If I tell you I love you, what would it mean?
Does it turn into a nightmare or a never-ending dream?
My heart will always beat for you, through and through,
So, if I tell you I love you, what would it do?

OCCAM'S RAZOR

My name is Isaac Winters. I live alone in an apartment in Hell's Kitchen, Manhattan. The rent is a bit high, and the space is a bit cramped, but it has four walls, a roof, and a landlord who isn't a complete dick, so I guess it's not too bad. As for my job, I work at a mom-and-pop restaurant called Frank's Pizzeria. It wasn't exactly my first choice, but there's only so many career paths you have available when you're an ex-con. Luckily for me, the owner of the joint still decided to interview me and put me through a few "tests" to see if I was cut out for the position. I ended up earning my spot as a delivery driver. The work isn't too difficult, just a bit of driving around, carrying out orders, and dealing with different customers on the way, nothing too difficult. Although, that's only if you're not mentioning the "Special Orders."

See, Frank's Pizzeria has a bit of a "history." It's been around since the early 1940s and has never run out of business or even run into any financial trouble. This is thanks to its original owner, Frank Columbo, who was the boss of the Columbo Crime Family. Over the span of his career as a mafia boss, he could see that times were changing, technology was advancing, and the law was becoming a lot more resourceful, so he needed to find a way to adapt as best he could. Hence the opening of Frank's Pizzeria. It was the perfect cover. As a legitimate business, it was a damn good one, and still is actually. We'd get plenty of different kinds of customers. Hell, even police officers and the occasional fed would stop by to grab a bite to eat every now and then. And while they're enjoying their meals, money's being laundered, drugs are being trafficked by delivery drivers, and hits are being ordered in the form of "Special Orders." Thankfully, I never had to worry about getting any blood on my hands since hits aren't my responsibility. They're typically reserved for throwaways, the people who aren't directly related to the family like me. The only difference is I don't have any experience in snuffing anyone out, but because I'm such a good driver, all I gotta worry about is making my deliveries on time to the customer.

"Richie, we got a request for a special," Frank Columbo Jr. said as he hands the receipt to Richie. Frank Jr. was the son of Frank Columbo and currently the acting boss of the family since the death of his late father. Un-

der his leadership, the family had lasted for quite a while and still managed to stay relatively organized and manageable despite how slow things were moving in comparison to the golden age of the reigning families. While many would respect him and even admire him, he hated the life he lived and hated his father even more for thrusting such an unwanted responsibility upon him.

“Really? Man, it’s been ages since someone ordered one of these,” Richie said as he carefully slid a pizza dish into the brick oven behind the counter. Richie was the firstborn son of Frank Jr. He stood at 6-feet-tall and had an athletic build he gained from being in the Marines. He also had long black hair that would cover a long scar on the side of his temple.

“There’s been a lot of guys turning out to be informants so there’s been a bunch of people getting whacked lately it seems,” Maria said as she flipped through her magazine and sipped from her bottle of Sprite next to the cash register behind the counter. Maria was Richie’s younger sister and Frank Jr.’s only daughter. She had short blonde hair, unlike her brother, and was a bit short. Maria was more reserved and quiet, as she spent most of her time reading her beauty magazines when she was not busy working. Surprisingly enough, though, she was actually a people person once you got to know her,

“Yeah, it’s an ugly truth that no matter how much you think you know someone, you can never be completely sure as to who they are or what their motives may be. Luckily, we don’t have that problem,” Frank Jr. said.

“Couldn’t have said it better myself,” Richie replied as he took off his apron and put on his brown leather jacket. “Isaac, I just put a pie in the oven. Think you can watch it for me?”

“Yeah, no problem.”

“Oh, and tell your girlfriend I said hi.”

“For the last time, we’re just friends.”

“Hey, that’s how it always starts,” Richie teased before exiting the restaurant.

Richie was the type of guy people could rely on for almost anything. He wasn’t exactly book smart, but he wasn’t dumb, either. He was the type of guy that could find any solution to any problem. You just had to hope that his means of finding it would be conventional.

“Well, well, well. Look at whose ‘friend’ just walked in,” Maria chuckled as she nudged me and pointed at the entrance.

There stood Florence Montgomery. She was wearing her red Harvard University hoodie along with her ripped jeans and her off-white sneakers that matched her messenger bag. She and I are pretty close friends, but I'd be lying my ass off if I said I didn't want to be anything more. Her midnight-colored hair swayed slightly as she looked around with her emerald eyes to see which booth she'd sit at. I already knew which one: she always sat at the booth that's closest to the window and next to the wall mural. As usual, she sat down and motioned for me to come and join her.

"So, anything new in the life of Miss Florence?" I said playfully as I sat down across from her.

"Sort of. I've really just been focusing hard on my studies since it's my last semester," she said before briefly shooting a revolting look at Frank Jr. "But I've also been doing quite a bit of research for my next article, too."

"Nice. I see you're still on track to trying to become the real-life 'Lois Lane.'"

"Yeah, that's right," she chuckled. "Normally, most of my articles are pretty bland in my opinion, but that's only because I gotta follow the agenda of the newspaper company I've been interning at. But about a week ago, we got our new assignment, which basically gives us complete free reign and allows us to write an article about anything we choose, and honestly, I stumbled onto something big. Like, '*New York Times*' big."

"Oh, really? What is it?"

"I'd love to say but it's a bit crowded here, and you'd be surprised to know the lengths some people would go to just to swipe a good story off another person. Think you can come over to my place tonight?"

"I don't think I..."

Before I could even get the words out of my mouth, Maria deliberately bumped into me and began to speak on my behalf. "Oh, I'm so sorry," she said to me in a jesting tone. "Florence! It's so nice to see you again! I love what you're doing with your hair by the way." She smiled at Florence. "Isaac, Frank says we're closing early tonight so make sure you clean up everything and lock up before heading out on your date."

As I rubbed my temples in embarrassment, I looked up and saw Florence smiling and blushing at me.

"So, I guess I'll see you tonight at 11?" she asked as she threw her mes-

senger bag over her shoulder.

"I guess so," I smiled back.

With that, she left and I got back to work. After working for a couple of hours, Richie returned. He walked into the shop exhausted, clutching his side, and slumped down at an empty booth.

"How'd it go?" I asked as I sat down at the booth.

"Not too bad. The son of a bitch put up one hell of a fight, though."

"I can see that," I said as I looked him up and down.

"You gonna be alright?"

"I've been through much worse. After a couple beers and a nap I should be peaches and cream."

"Look, I've been meaning to ask, and feel free to tell me to shut up, but does it ever bother you? Y'know, the hits? The killings?"

"Not really. I been at this for a while."

"You mean, like, during your military days?"

"Way before." He laughed. "If I'm being honest, I actually like what I do. I can't really explain it but the feeling it gives me has always been euphoric."

"Is that why you're normally the one who carries out the special orders?"

"Pretty much. Typically we'd use throwaway guys so it can't be traced back to the family, but I'm just so good at what I do I usually take care of it. Besides, you know the saying, 'Find a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.'" He stood up. "I'd love to chat a bit longer, but I have a warm bed and cold six-pack calling my name."

"Alright, see you around," I replied as I got back to work.

Closing time came a lot slower than usual. I was excited to see Florence, don't get me wrong, but that conversation with Richie really shook me. I always knew I had to be careful working here, but now that I knew for sure that my co-worker was a sociopath, I really had to keep my head on a swivel. At closing time, I cleaned up the shop carefully and meticulously and also made sure that everything was in order before locking up and leaving. The last thing I'd want is to be called back to work for something minor. Just as I was about to leave, I was stopped by Frank Jr., who handed me my car keys that I had almost forgotten.

“Thanks, Frank.”

“Yeah, no problem. Quick question before you leave, though. That girl you were talking to earlier today, what was her name?”

“Uh, Florence Montgomery. What makes you ask?”

Frank Jr. let out an exhale and rubbed his eyes. “Listen, I need you to promise to let me know if this Florence girl happens to know anything about this place, and I mean anything at all. Got it?”

“Sure, but I highly doubt she’d know anything at all. I mean, not even our regulars know about the operation.”

“She’s smart, ain’t she? A journalist too, right? Those types can become a real fuckin problem faster than you’d realize.”

“Alright, fine. I’ll keep an ear out. I promise.”

“Thank you. You have a nice night.”

“Yeah, you too.”

After that I got into my car and drove over to Florence’s apartment. While driving, I couldn’t stop thinking about why Frank Jr. was so focused on Florence. The way he spoke even sounded off. He seemed like he was frustrated and maybe even a bit scared. After driving for what felt like hours, I finally arrived. She lived in a charming Midtown East apartment complex. It looked like one of those places you’d see on shows like *Friends* or *Frasier*. After I parked and got out of my car, I headed over to the intercom and announced my presence. She buzzed me in and then I headed over to the elevator and made my way to her room. Once at her door, I knocked three times and waited. During the wait, passersby would shoot judgemental looks at me through their designer glasses and say things under their breath. It felt like I was a peasant knocking on the palace doors of royalty.

“You made it. Come on in,” Florence said as she opened the door.

“Nice place,” I replied as I walked in. Her room was really nice. It was the polar opposite of mine. It was spacious, clean, and it even had a built-in fireplace instead of a rusty radiator.

“Can I get you anything? Ginger ale? Coke? Rum? Maybe Coke and rum?” she said gleefully.

“I’ve never had Coke and rum so I think I’ll try that,” I replied.

She went behind the kitchen island and poured glasses for the two of us, then handed me one and sat next to me on the couch. We talked for hours, sharing stories and laughs throughout the night. At this point we had a buzz; we weren't drunk to the point of blacking out, but we were still coherent enough to share our thoughts and make sense of what we said. As we finished our last glass of liquor, Florence grasped my hand and began to speak.

"I think it's about time I show you the piece I've been working on. Follow me."

She stood and pulled me up from the carpet. She guided me to a locked room in the back of her apartment and stopped shortly before revealing what was inside.

"Isaac, I trust you, a lot. I'm sure I don't need to ask, but I just gotta cover my bases. Do you think you can keep this a secret?"

"Yeah, of course," I replied.

"Ok, I knew I could trust you," she said shortly before opening the door.

Upon entering the room, she flicked the light switch, revealing a large and extremely detailed investigation board centered around the different crime families of New York. But the one that she seemed to pay the most attention to was the Colombo Crime Family. There were a bunch of different notes about the operations they were running and their business partners, too. There were also photos of the cops that were on their payroll under a section labeled "Dirty Pigs." She even had the pizzeria I work at marked as "Headquarters." In the upper-right corner were a set of photos of Frank Jr, Maria, and Richie labeled "Main Suspects."

"Holy shit," I said as I stared at the board.

"Now you see why I was being so secretive about this."

"Yep."

"Look, I know this seems like a lot and I really don't want to scare you or anything, but I'm pretty sure that the people you work with have some serious ties to the mob and even use Frank's Pizzeria as a cover restaurant for their ill-gotten gains."

Florence was one of the few people to care about doing the right thing and preaching the truth even if it was detrimental to her. She was damn near incorrigible, but on top of that she was as stubborn as a mule. Whenever she

started something, she always saw it through no matter what. All I could think about now was the promise I had made to Frank Jr. before I got here. But even then, if I didn't do anything then someone else, or someone worse, more than likely would.

"Wow, that is crazy!" I replied, trying my hardest to feign bewilderment and awe.

"You don't seem too surprised," she replied as she looked me up and down.

"Look, if I'm being honest, it seems a bit ambitious. Like, how do you know your info is right? Where are you even getting your evidence from? I don't wanna overstep, but I think you may be a bit in over your head."

"Everyone said the same thing about my father when he was alive, but he's still the only one who's ever gotten closest to taking those scumbags down."

"Ok, so your dad's mission was to bring them to justice and he fell a bit short. Sometimes that's just how the cookie crumbles. Is there a particular reason you're so obsessed with them other than getting a story?"

She waled over to the framed picture of her and her father and picked it up and stared at it for a few seconds before responding. "My father was a detective investigating the Columbo Crime Family for years. He led a bunch of different raids and operations against them in hopes of putting them all behind bars. During one of his operations, he and his team managed to apprehend Frank Columbo. But this did much more harm than good. Despite his incarceration, Frank was still leading his family behind bars. One of his first orders of business was to get rid of those who had stormed his home and arrested him. Day after day there was a news report about a different cop or detective being killed. According to most of the killings, the assailants were a mix of hired guns and members of the Columbos. But once it came down to my father, Frank took it upon himself to kill him personally. Since then, I have been continuing my father's investigation in secret, gathering as much intel and evidence as I can to finish off the Columbos for good."

"Damn, I never knew you were dealing with something like this."

"I know. I just wanted to make sure I knew that I could trust you before I said anything."

"Florence, you can always trust me. I'm here for you," I replied as I looked into her opal-like eyes. We hugged each other tightly then she finally

asked the question that would change the trajectory of any life I had planned.

“Will you help me?”

“Help you what?”

“Take them down. For good,” she said as she gently clasped my face.

Dilemmas, especially the moral kind, were never really an issue for me. I’d just separate myself from the subject entirely. Sure, some people I was around might have done unsavory things, but I wasn’t them. They could lose sleep over their actions but my hands were clean since I never dirtied them. But this was different, this wasn’t something I could turn a blind eye to even if wanted. If I helped Florence, we were probably both as good as dead. If I told Frank Jr. everything, then Florence was dead. If I did nothing at all, Florence would assume I was with the Columbos and Frank would think I was just another rat since I didn’t keep my promise. God, my choices were slim, but there had to be some other way I could sort this out. I just needed time.

THE SHARK OF CRESTWOOD HIGH

On a sunny Monday morning, inside the prestigious Crestwood Girls High School, a group of 38 students eagerly focused their attention on a tall and impressive individual in front of them. Professor James Ransford was just appointed as the new Physics professor. His presence exuded both authority and charm, combining his youthful energy, towering stature, and striking attractiveness. He effortlessly navigated the intricacies of Physics without relying on notes or reminder papers, displaying a mastery akin to that of an experienced conductor. He effortlessly performed complex calculations, which are often considered challenging. His ability to recall information looked limitless, as if he were drawing from an endless reservoir of memory. In just one month, his exceptional intelligence and captivating presence earned him a moniker: the Shark. His immense self-assurance, comparable to the vastness of the ocean, along with an irresistible charm, captivated the hearts of the girls, who became deeply infatuated with the fascinating mystery that their Physics teacher embodied.

However, as the months dragged past, it became obvious to everyone at Crestwood Girls that the young man in question had no eyes for any of the students, and this generated a lot of speculation about him. Many of the students had noticed that he always wore a silver ring and this, coupled with his lack of interest in any of them, made them believe it was an engagement ring of some sort. If this was so, then it meant that there was a lucky young woman somewhere in the shadows. But this assumption did not deter some who wanted to catch his attention at all costs. The Shark dressed immaculately all the time, yet rumors had it that he was from a very poor home. According to the numerous stories that did the rounds in the girls' dormitories, he was supporting his widowed mother who was bedridden, and three other siblings in school. The Shark had brushed those rumors aside. The silly little girls did not know how close they were to the truth, he had mused.

When his father died about four years ago, he had just gained admission to the university. He was devastated. For even while alive, his father's meagre teacher's salary barely kept the clothes on their backs. So, when the breadwinner passed away, he expected their living condition only to get worse. What was more devastating was the fact that he would have to abandon his

plans of furthering his education and look for a job. He had prayed about his fears and asked God to intervene. His father had been a top-rated professor who had helped a lot of his students in diverse ways and many of them returned to the school after their courses to thank him. Thus, when news about the son of their favorite professor's predicament got out, in appreciation for the old professor who had contributed in no small way to make them what they had become, some offered to sponsor his university education. To the Shark, their kind gesture could only be interpreted in one way: an answer from God to his prayer.

His mother, who was a professor like his late father, had suffered a mild stroke after his father's death and could not earn a living to support her four children. The Shark, therefore, had to take up various part-time teaching jobs after lectures to not only keep body and soul together but also to support his three siblings at school. Determined to make it in life and thereby reverse his apparent ill fortune, he kept strictly to his books. "No entertainment and no socializing until I complete my education and see what the Lord will do with my life," he repeatedly told himself. He kept to his books for long hours and all his spare time was taken up in activities geared towards earning a living. He taught several children at their homes after classes and when schools were on vacation, he organized classes for several of them for a fee.

After his university education, he regarded the post at Crestwood Girls High School as a great blessing. The Shark put all his energy into his work and was determined to make a mark in whatever venture he undertook. "Whatever you do, do it with all your strength and aim at excellence. Nothing short of that is worth attempting. As a Ransford, you have been penciled for greatness," his late father had drummed into his head virtually every day. At Crestwood Girls, the young Physics professor was very punctual to class and never missed a lesson if he could avoid it. Even when official duties took him out of the classroom, he made it up by scheduling extra classes. How the students hated him for that, but he always responded, "Why are you in school? Your parents are breaking their backs to make sure that your future is secured and if I remain your Physics professor none of you is going to fail your final paper."

That year, when the results of the School Final Examination were published, no student failed in Physics. The ecstasy that greeted this performance was widespread. It was historic and the principal was delighted and proud of the achievement, especially as it coincided with her first year at the school.

She had heard very favorable reports about Mr. Ransford and had even been told about his nickname and how he comported himself at school. She thanked God for the difficult decision she had taken the day she set eyes on the young Physics professor. She recalled that his good looks had bothered her, and she had wondered whether adding such a handsome, single young man to her staff would not amount to setting a wolf among her flock of sheep. She had engaged him in a lengthy conversation and had discovered, to her delight, that the young man took his Christianity seriously.

After that remarkable performance by his students, the fortunes of the young man changed dramatically. He had not thought about extra classes for students during vacation, but the parents of some of his students in the Junior class, together with others from schools in the region who had heard about him, insisted that he organize them. To his surprise, some of the very rich and influential ones went ahead and rented premises in the town where the school was located, and he was compelled to offer extra classes. "We'll pay you good money," a parent of a student from another school in the region offered. He made very good money and he discovered that he could meet all his needs, send more money home, and even put money away into his savings account. "Thank you, Lord. It is from you that all good and perfect gifts come." He breathed a prayer of thanksgiving every morning as he set off to teach.

After school one Monday, the Shark went about his routine activities. He read through his notes, prepared for the following day, and took his usual afternoon rest. Later in the evening, he took a stroll to the school's gardens to clear his befuddled brain and also take in some fresh air. He lounged about till the dark clouds enveloped the compound. Slowly, he retraced his steps back to his flat to watch the evening news on his new, 32-inch Sony model TV. After 10 p.m., he decided to call it a day. He switched off his television set and proceeded to the door to lock it before putting off the lights and retiring to bed.

He was stunned when a knock sounded on his door. He instinctively glanced at the wall clock. He was right. The wall clock read 10:05 pm. Wondering who could be knocking at his door at such an ungodly hour, he pulled the curtains aside and peered into the darkness. What he saw nearly made him collapse. He rubbed his hand over his eyes and peered again into the darkness. This time, he knew he was not mistaken. Standing in front of the pillar was Alicia Hayford in her school uniform, a blue skirt and white T-shirt. She was holding a flashlight in her right hand and an exercise book

and handkerchief in the other.

“My good Lord, what is this?” he gasped.

Alicia Hayford was a troublemaker, he knew that too well. He, including everyone else, was aware that if there was any trouble on campus and Alicia was not at the center of it, it would not be worth recounting. The Shark had heard through the grapevine that one of his colleagues was having a clandestine affair with her, but he had dismissed it and minded his own business. He was in Crestwood Girls High School to teach and earn a living and he intended to do just that. With that attitude, he had pushed Alicia and her supposed affair out of his mind. Alicia was beautiful, a black beauty with traditional African features: plump, a round face with a small gap in her upper front teeth, dimpled cheeks. Although she was a teenager like most of her peers, she had the full-rounded body of a woman. He had noticed that Alicia was very conscious of her beauty and exploited it to her full advantage. Thus, although one could not deny the fact that Alicia was beautiful, her arrogance took the joy out of beholding her natural endowment. The way the girl carried herself was offensive to most of the people who knew her. She had a way of twitching her nose, arching her eyebrows, and slanting her lips in a sneer that made the object of her scorn feel like dirt. As time went by, the girls at Crestwood began to speak about giving people the “Alicia look” to ward off unwanted attention from men.

So as she stood there that night, she looked rather vulnerable and one could detect fear, worry, and uncertainty in her very being. The Shark thought very fast. Should he just send her off by talking to her through the open window or open the door and meet her outside? Just as he was settling for the former option, the girl shivered and looked quickly over her shoulders as if frightened by something in the shadows. The Shark’s male protective instinct immediately went to work. His mind went to his sister Margarita, and touched by the sight of the lone figure now virtually huddling in the dark, he allowed his emotions to overrule his better judgment and opened the door. It was only when he got outside that he noticed he was still in his blue silk pyjamas. He hesitated, briefly wondering if he should not go back and dress properly. Just then the girl approached him and offered him a white envelope. It was a large one and he realized it was the object he had earlier mistaken for an exercise book.

“What is it, Alicia?” he asked suspiciously.

“Oh, nothing sir, it’s just something small I am bringing to you,” she

smiled coyly.

“But what are you doing here at this time of the night? You should be in bed by now,” he remarked as he extended his hand to receive the envelope. His protective instinct clearly warned him to be careful. It was so loud his hand refused to move when it was halfway towards the parcel. Noticing his uncertainty, the girl quickly pushed the parcel into his hands as if she had practiced the act. It all looked very unreal as he watched the girl throw her arms around his neck and plant a kiss on his lips.

The Shark was stunned, and he reeled from the impact of the contact and felt dizzy. His confused brain went blank and refused to think. It was like watching a horror film with him as the main character. He was still reeling from the shock of what the girl had done when he saw one of the school’s night security men standing behind them.

“Ohhh, I see. Mr. James Ransford and Miss Alicia Hayford. What is going on here?” asked the officious-looking night security, Mr. Danson.

He snatched the envelope from the Shark’s hand and roughly tore it open. As he did so, two photographs of Alicia in flimsy clothes fell out. In a patronizing voice, Mr. Danson tried to extort money from the Shark to keep quiet, but when the Shark refused to play by his extortion, he reported the issue to the principal and was supported by Alicia as his witness, who claimed that she was in a romantic relationship with the Shark. The Shark, despite his outstanding performance and his pleading not guilty, was dismissed from the school. Months later, he found a new job as a Managing Director of the newly created Beverage Company of Mr. Lawrence Bamford, the father of Antoinette Bamford, the most intelligent girl in class who also believed in his innocence.

In her last term at the school, just before writing her final examination, Antoinette called the Shark late one evening. “You’re vindicated”, she shouted.

“What do you mean?” he asked in confusion.

“Alicia has confessed that she lied about you,” she explained.

“She *what!* Oh my God,” was all the Shark could say as Antoinette poured out the story of what had happened.

Mr. Philip, the Chemistry teacher, was reported to be having an affair with Alicia, but some time later he took a fancy to another girl, Rosemond. When Alicia found out, she was furious. She felt he had stabbed her in the

back, especially when she thought of all she had done and gone through just to satisfy him. To take revenge on him, therefore, she had gone straight to the principal and confessed her role in the scheme to get the Shark disgraced and sacked from the school. It turned out that Mr. Philip was envious of the Shark's popularity with the students and the never-ending gifts he was receiving from the students' parents. So he and the night security man hatched a plot to trap the Shark. Alicia had been the right agent to put the plan into effect, which was executed perfectly.

It was also revealed that Mr. Danson, the night watchman, was collecting money from the girls and some of the male teachers and allowing them to sneak to teachers' bungalows, to the town, and other social activities at night. When the truth eventually came out, all the people involved were dismissed. Alicia was sent home but was allowed to write her finals from home, Antoinette told him.

TO BE AN EMPATHETIC REALIST

To walking contradictors,
Your third eye is invisible;
To the coin flippers or privileged with an off-switch in their heart,
You have the ability to intuitively place morals and logic.
To the selective moral expressions,
You have the key to human interaction.
To the few who feel awake in a world of single-file lines,
You are the keeper of the glasses with the true view.
You are a rarity in hiding,
Keeping chaotic truth bombs
From breaking and hurting those who avoid you.

DIARY OF A MAD BLACK WOMAN

Dear Diary,
I am a black sister
Warning her little brother
Not to lust over women
Cuz that don't get you nowhere
In a strong black woman's mind.
Yeah, we black women: breast, hips, and butt.
Little brother,
Look for a personality in black women,
Not the shapes they were given.
Little brother,
Don't you dare call any sista out her name!
We black women too strong
And we will strike you down
If you don't support our power
If we trying to support you.

—*Dajah Burrows*

ASIAN PERSUASION: HIP-HOP IN JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA

Hip-Hop is renowned as a world-wide phenomenon. It went from a party in the Boogie Down Bronx, to growing a cult following, to finally being known as one of the most popular genres of music played all around the world. And of course, it goes without saying that it has had major influences within the East-Asian realm of the world. Hip hop has become so prominent that there are different artists from different East-Asian countries, such as K-Hip-Hop artist Jessi (Korean-American), K-pop/Hip-Hop artist Rap Monster, and J-Hip-Hop artist SKY-HI (Japanese). We see African-American influences as well as their own cultural influences within the genre. Many have even compared these artists to other American artists. East Asia, though, has quite the influence over American hip-hop as well; for example, the Wu-tang Clan, Nicki Minaj, and Tokyo's Revenge. Not to mention a lot of American rappers have Asian-esque rap names, like Sukihanna, Tekashi69, Asian Doll, and Tokyo Vanity. There appears to be quite the symbiotic relationship between East Asia and American hip-hop, and this essay will delve into those connections, similarities, and more.

South Korea

As Korean Pop has been making waves and headlines in the west, it's no surprise that Korean hip-hop would follow. See, in a regular K-pop group, one has the vocalists, the visuals, the dancers, and of course, the rappers. Though they may be in a Korean pop group, rappers have always been essential to making the sound resonate. But even so, many people consider these rappers to not be true rappers. But for a lot of these rappers, hip-hop is their lives and livelihood, and they wouldn't have it any other way. For example, BTS's Rap-Monster (aka Namjoon) has been in love with hip-hop his entire life, and in an interview in 2015 he shared with the audience that his first international influences were "...Nas and Eminem..." ("Rap Monster Singles"). The interviewer also asked the question of what hip-hop means to him: "It's something that can't be explained. It's a way that expresses me as well as being a mean-

ing for freedom and rebelling. Because it's something where people play and have fun with, it can have messages of peace and love placed in it. Personally, hip-hop to me is the world."

There are also a lot of female rappers on the scene in Korea, and they are treated with respect. One of the biggest female rappers is Jessi, who is a Korean American hailing from New Jersey. Jessi seems to have a mix of American and Korean imagery and ideology in her music videos. For example, in her 2020 video for "Nuna," she has provocative movements and lyricism, while also maintaining a more conservative tone. In one of her lyrics, she makes a nod to "JLO" by saying, "I'm still Jessi from the Block" (Ho 1:30-1:36). Most people do, though, compare her to Nicki Minaj, as their lyricism and looks tend to resemble each other, but that will be brought up later.

Japan

Japanese hip-hop, unlike South Korean hip-hop, is a little bit more underground. Japanese music as a whole has not made quite the splash as Korean music has. But that has not stopped Japanese people from creating and making hip-hop of their own. One of the most popular and prevalent hip-hop artists in Japan is currently SKY-HI. The website Japanese Music Entertainment describes him as "a passionate fan of hip-hop music [who] honed his skills for several years by taking part in freestyle battles and collaborating with other artists before finally making his major debut as a solo rapper under the name SKY-HI in 2013." Though there aren't many interviews about his views on hip-hop itself, he is very serious and a lover of his craft.

Of course, another prominent figure is AK-69, who had his start in 2004 but made waves in the Japanese hip-hop scene in the 2010s. He is someone who has been moved by and has grown in the ways of American hip-hop. He walks around with stereotypical grillz, long gold chains, and sagging pants. He is also signed by Flying B Entertainment and, surprisingly, Def Jam Records.

The United States of America

It would be a disservice to discuss all these East-Asian rappers and hip-hop artists without telling how much of an influence East Asia has had on American rappers. So many examples are placed in front of us, such as Nicki Minaj and her Chun-Li, Harajuku Barbie aesthetic. Nicki always flaunts her Chun-

Li personality, and makes it even more apparent in her song of the same name. In that song, she gives homage to the Chinese Street Fighter character, saying that “plates been Chun-li/Drop The Benz Off” (Maraj 2:06-2:10). Aside from Minaj and Tekashi69, who got his name based on a Japanese anime that he loves, one of the biggest groups in hip-hop that incorporates Asian influences is the Wu-Tang Clan. The Wu-Tang Clan, from their name to their flow, takes parts from old Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee movies that they used to watch, and pays homage to them in their rhymes. They’ve never once missed a reference and continue to show grace and love for what they grew up watching.

America and East Asia have always and will continue to bounce great ideas off one another, and one would hope that these itty-bitty tokens they take from one another will never stop.

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A FEATHER

I picked it up off the pavement
Some days ago, in pure amazement,
For never had I seen such a feather
In my years and days, altogether.

A Guinea fowl feather, so free and light,
Charcoal grey upon which scattered dots of white;
Half of it straight and stately,
The other half furry and disorderly.

The quill that told the tale of two halves
Set my heart vacillating to the valves:
To hold close this heavenly bestowed gift
Or put it out to resume its worldly drift?

It dawned upon me suddenly
That keeping it in my custody
Had been an act of selfishness,
A moment of fleeting blissfulness.

So, I released it to the breeze,
To dance and twirl, to find its ease.
May other eyes its beauty meet
And share in my amazement's feat.

