May 18, 2015

"Our heritage and ideals, our code and standards- the things we live by and teach our children- are preserved or diminished by how freely we exchange ideas and feelings ~ Walt Disney"

Dear Community,

This is it. All the ideas have manifested into coherent thoughts, all the thoughts have been turned into action. The curtain has closed and the magical journey is over. In this issue, you will see many names that have helped build this magazine for these past four years for the last time. These graduating seniors are leaving behind a legacy that has become the Broad & Central standard, showing students and teachers the true meaning of greatness. We have done our job. It is your job as the reader to keep this legacy from perishing.

This issue is a very bittersweet moment for me because this marks the last of the original members of Broad & Central. Although I will miss the B & C team and the editing process immensely, I am completely confident in the editors in maintaining the great reputation and appraise that Broad & Central has always had. I have complete faith that this heritage that we curated and nurtured will not only survive, but flourish into something purely enchanting. We have manifested from a small, independent club with myriad ideas and dreams into a campus wide success. With the expansion of Broad & Central over these four years, I have seen that, with the combination of an idea and hard work, magic can happen.

Without a doubt, what makes every issue special is the school wide collaboration taken in order to create it. The process of creating this very issue starts with your ideas. Those ideas are then translated into works that range from art, poetry, and prose, all of which will take your breath away. These works are then polished and finalized by the Broad and Central Editors who are idealistic like many of you. This process is then completed by a reader like you, the greatest supporter. The process for making this magazine is with the full intention of it being for the people and by the people.

Now for one last time, it gives me great joy for you to see what lies within these pages. I hope you enjoy the beauty and passion that permeates through every page that is the Broad and Central.

In the Profound Solidarity of the Pen,

Jordan Horton  
Editor-in-Chief ‘14-’15  
Founding Member 2011  
DePauw University Posse Scholar ‘19
Broad & Central is more than a literary magazine to us; it represents the creative force of the community collected into one ensemble. The Broad and Central organization is much more than this magazine of students’ and teachers’ writings and artwork; it is a movement, a coalition, and a commitment. In preparation for this journalistic production, we read poetry and prose, we participate in rigorous writing workshops during which we explore myriad forms of writing, and we share our work with each other in a safe space forum. We are a writing/artistic symposium working towards improving our craft and the craft of our community. In the creation of these periodicals, we have all grown as writers and thinkers, and we hope that this final product will allow our community to participate in this intellectual and creative conversation with us through reading the brilliance within these pages.

The Broad & Central Editor-in-Chief

Jordan Horton................................................................................................................ Class of 2015

The Broad & Central Associate Editors-in-Chief

Shatavia Knight ................................................................. Class of 2016
Adaobi Njoku-Obi ........................................................... Class of 2016
Dianeth Hernadez ............................................................. Class of 2016

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Abiola Olofin (Apprentice Designer) .................................. Class of 2018

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N’Kaela Webster............... Class of 2017
Tia Suggs.......................... Class of 2017
Taj-Jahnae Brailsford......... Class of 2018
Dear Community,

I’ve tried, in vain, many times to write this letter. I’ve explored dozens of metaphors, narratives, and confessions; yet, with each attempt, I’ve found myself at a loss. At first, I cursed this writer’s block, attributing my paralysis to the gravity of the task; this letter, I committed, must be perfect. And with each passing day of indecision and with every backspace and strikethrough, I only grew more exasperated. This is, after all, my last submission to Broad & Central as advisor, and, these, my parting words. What should I say to this incredible community? Hopes for the future of our publication? Nostalgia for our humble beginnings and pride for our innumerable accomplishments? Reflections on the importance of the written word? The last of these struck me as the most poignant. I turned to the words of Broad & Central, as I often do, for comfort and clarity. I read the words of some of the greatest writers of our time—Jada Anderson, Charisma Lambert, Amir Ballard, Shatavia Knight, Jordan Horton, Jessica Debrah, Sandra Osei-Frimpong, Hannah Jackson, among many more—and I was instantly transported. I see Adaobi Njoku-Obi, a timid freshman, illuminated by the glow of Christmas lights, standing tall at her first open mic night. I feel the hush of an entire community as the covers of the newest issue of their voice is opened. I see a room of young adults learning to crack ribs and spill their hearts onto paper. I see the eyes of elementary and middle school students widen in admiration at the words of their older brothers and sisters, looking so cool in their blue jackets. I see smiles, feel love, hear the snaps of respect, touch wet ink, and savor the sweetness of single moments.

These reveries provided instantaneous clarity, for I came to realize that I had been conceptualizing my parting words all wrong. In fact, though I did not know it at the time, my earlier paralysis was not the consequence of perfectionism; rather it was that amazing clairvoyance of the heart knowing truth in rawness prior to the mind interpreting its pangs. And, now that my synapses have found the rhythm of my heart, I leave you with the best advice I can offer for the future of our beautiful organization (and the advice may come as somewhat of a shock):

Always remember that, no matter how powerful or beautiful they may be, words are bound by a certain inconsequence, and the primary intent of Broad & Central has never and should never be words, for words are merely an expression of living. It is only through living fully that we have words to write, and we write to capture the beauty of our living. When I look back on my time in Broad & Central, it is not the words I will remember, but the living.

And so, Broad & Central, it has been an honor to live fully with this community as your advisor and assist in its birth and maturation. I look forward to the incredible developments to come for this organization and the magazine. Live fully and love completely, and the words will come as breath.

In the Profound Solidarity of the Pen,

Mr. Matthew McCluskey
Founding Advisor
Broad & Central

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It is with great pleasure that the Broad & Central editing team acknowledges the many people who helped to make this vision a reality. Although we cannot name every contributing force, it is crucial that we thank the following people due to their overwhelming support:

- Mr. Mann, Ms. Harris, and Ms. Burgess for your leadership and support.
- Mr. McCluskey for your vision, guidance, and many hours of advising and editing.
- Ms. Mastrocco for being an asset to our writing team in many ways.
- Mrs. Verrilli, Ms. Whitehead, Ms. Schrag, Mr. Brown, Ms. Coffey, and Mr. Taubman for guiding us in our pursuit of mastery in the craft of writing.
- Mr. Jeremy Nelson for advising our design team and his constant support.

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Wendy
By: Dianeth Hernandez
El Sueño Americano
By: Dulce Gómez

We all carry the original sin of our parents
crossing a boundary to achieve
El Sueño Americano

We all come from....
Selfish governments that make the rich richer and poor poorer
Where ignorant people sell their vote to the devil for $20
Where bad has more power than good
Where democracy is the horror mask of a dictator
and suffocates the whole country in a blanket of fear
All our life we have learned how America is the land of the free
We learned that college was our goal
We learned that a education is needed for libertad
We threw our graduation caps in the air
We got a degree that supported our hard work
Yet were enslaved....
Enslaved in a reality so cruel that people have already died
Enslaved by a series of number called Social Security that means nothing to me
A series of numbers I thought Hitler was dead
A series of numbers that have only caused pain and tears in our mothers' faces
The Reality of not having the right to achieve
El Sueño Americano

To live your whole life with big dreams
of becoming a lawyer, or a doctor
Yet plummet so hard when you realize you don't have that series of numbers
The pain of seeing our parents work 12 hours or more
with a minimum wage
in order for us to become better than them
Dr. Martin Luther King fought por su sueno
He dreamed of a country where everybody was equal
Yet it's been 50 years and we're still here
Fighting for an education that we deserve
Because education should not be restricted
Many have drowned in a reality of dead dreams
and dried up hope
But we still fight for what we have worked so hard for.
We will fight por Nuestro Sueño Americano
A dream that should not be taken away
because of a series of numbers
I will fight for what I believe.
Silence
By: Na-Tarria McSeed

One would think maturity would grant one a voice.
But I have been granted silence.

Oppression only exists in silence

My father is non-existent
Nothing but a figment of my imagination

How can something that doesn't exist control you?
How can something that is imaginary leave you broken and abused?

Suffering in silence is all I’ve ever done
How can something fictional trap one from reality?

I want to provoke the same pain I feel
To finally be granted the voice to liberate myself
yet it is still impossible

Your inability to realize the last bit of sympathy I have for you.
I feel as though your dark intentions
have destroyed my interior without a single touch
Oh Father, please Father.

But you still destroyed my reality and fantasy.
You can’t take back what you never had
Your hollow heart heavy in your chest
I try to receive your love but it’s helpless.
You’re hopeless

Stereotypical Racism
By: Tyanna Hawkins & Sean Smart

“If ignorance is the oxygen of oppression,
then passivity is holding your breath.”
Oxygen, the most vital necessity on the planet.
It’s the perpetuation of
the very issue we try to stop.
Racism is the stereotypical belief that
one is who someone else says they are, but
they don’t have to be.
Being classified into the superior or inferior category.
Blank
By: Princess Sabaroche

Day 1:
The sirens went off
And my heart started pounding
Because I thought they were coming for me
And I sat there with a blank stare

Day 2:
"Who got robbed"
That's crazy and she just got that phone too.
And the sirens went off
My heart skipped but my stare stayed.

Day 3:
Honor roll, that's my girl.
Boy was she happy,
Happy as can be
The news came on.
4 men shot and stabbed by police.
And the sirens went off,
But this time I expected it.

Day 4:
A young woman walked down
The street and her hair shined
Bright red.
She was pregnant though,
And her stomach made more of an impression
Than she did.
And the sirens went off
And the sirens went off
And the sirens went off
And the sirens went off

Day 5:
17yr old Blank
Was shot and killed.
I waited for the sirens this time.
This time I waited.
The sirens refused,
Refused to budge
Squeak, crack, and shake.

Day 6:
I went about
No one died today
O the sirens went off
They did
They went off.
They say that home is where the heart is,
If that’s true—you’ll never find my heart.
This is not the place tramps run to
—nor a place to “make it” big…
And my sixteen-year-old spirit would concede
that an anonymous suburb was killing her softly.
Home is where the diner is.
Where my first taste of freedom was the warm, congealed cheese
between two slices of white bread.
Where I would climb into the front seat of my best friend’s car—
And we would cruise aimlessly for hours
just to get out of the house.
Home is where the questions are.
Where I learned on the hill how to speak for myself,
still learning how to create space for others’ voices.
Where I get to return to the idyllic, tattered portrait of “security”
And wind up with my insecurities reflected back,
a constant need for change.
Home is where?
And even as I move closer,
Every time I visit
Home seems further away.

Premature Eulogies
By: Jordan Horton

We live in between sunrises and sunsets
The time that each person has to take in the beautiful view varies
Some are longer than others while
Some end as quick as they arrive.
Like how it gets dark around 5 in the wintertime.
There is a new birth defect in the nation.
Obituary studies show that skin tone and male gender can lead to a premature eulogy.
Who knows if the studies are still underway, the news keeps race issues and trivial entertainment
separate like apartheid.
But no matter how long the intervals between start and end may be
It is our natural right to see.
How dare anyone interfere like a cynical catalyst,
Closing the lid on our gone-too-soon caskets
I hope that the world sees that the only antibiotic to unfair epidemic is love.
Side effects may include, unity, innovation, but most importantly,
An equally longer time to watch the sun set.
Not A Colored War, But A Black And White Battle

By: Kiah Stern

I wish for no more falling stars
As I watch lives drive down faster than stolen cars
17 black men killed each day
Genocide of the Black race
Bullets thrown in their hearts
Their lives never ended; they barely got to start.
Silent tears, muffled cries, but loud riots
That man wasn’t indicted, he was lying
We know the truth
A war has begun; we’re on the front lines fighting
We will no longer be single minded
We’re eukaryotic
No more distraction, no more slacking, no more lacking
It took some time, but we’re finally putting our backs in
Do you know what we’re really capable of?
Committing crimes: leather gloves
Suicidal? No more love
Didn’t think we would go this far?
Tired of unanswered calls on shooting stars
We’re battling for falling hearts
And dreams
And killed futures and lost home
Because they never go the chance
Take my hand, we can fight this together. We can get past this,
Snowy weather
—self defense
A noun and a verb
That allows unjust killings to be silent and unheard
Now more than just a genocide
Casualties are a plague if you live here, you’re killed
No consideration to your age
Not in a designated area
This isn’t a war but we can call this Battlefield America.
—self defense
Legal in only a few and-
It’s killed more than just these two
But it’s okay, we were taught to never have a say
Minstrel coon, act a fool, don’t forget to bow down too
We’re supposed to be modern day slaves
No chains, no whips but we’re killed daily
—s e l f...defense
How do you protect yourself? Against a person with no weapon!
Tell me!
This society has fallen death and I don’t think there’s any going back
We thought we learned from our past, but it’s caught up to us, we can’t outrun it
It’s too fast
—self....d e f e n s e
This country has fallen blind
And unlike Keller we can’t recover
Eventually we will fall
Like Rome it will be over
This battle will kill us all,
USA will be no longer.
Dead Sea Scrolls
By: Mr. Matthew McCluskey

Unearth me,
As Qumran,
And forever alter the course
Of this existence.
I’m Scripture
Forgotten (or hidden—I can’t tell which)
Deep within this dense earth,
And the heaviness of this heart,
The weight of this bygone happiness
And the gravity of these lonesome dreams entomb these words forever further away
From some Father
For whom they were
Written.

Unearth me.
Uncake this dirt from my cracks.
Shake the dust from my skin.
I will stand weak-kneed and unsteady
Atop the safety of this solitary place.
I will bask in the wide open space,
And I will ground myself in the unbearable lightness of being.

Unearth me.
Give me weightlessness.
Give me pouring rain
And paradise.
Let some lips read these
Words and find in the earthquake,
Not the faults of doubt,
But resolve,
Balance,
And welcome to a Garden
In which they will happily be buried,
Forever reading.
Girl With The Death Mask
By: Maymouna Sissoko

She plays alone
But one time
A “friend” took her out
Took her out to the deep end
But she couldn’t swim
Both couldn’t
So she just played alone in the shallow end
Calling, “Marco” but to no response
She just walked in the sea, her feet touching
The ocean floor
She’s still in reality – playing alone
The shallow end cut deep
Her footprints were washed away
But they later found the red trail leading to the deep end
She floated still – seeming to like playing alone
So they played alone, together, in the deep end, where neither could swim.

Sonnet from the ‘Hood’
By: Zulimah Sawab

Where I live ain’t the place to be.
Where I live, it’s dangerous you see.
People get gunned down everyday.
Their families cry so we all must pray,
For the end of bullets and empty shell cases,
For Newark to start helping raise the nation.
The next street over from my house,
You hear the gunshots firing all about.
A brother dead, a son gone,
And a little girl who will never know the man she’s from.
I’m sick of hearing the gunshots fly.
I’m tired of crying and saying goodbye.
As you can see Newark may not be so good,
But, hey, this is just another sonnet from the ‘hood.
Lucky
By: Jay Nelson

Little girl, why must you frown?
Are you unaware of how your skin glistens under the light in the sky
Why would you cry?
When you have everything to smile for
from the strong bone structure that lies in your face
the fullness of your lips
the curl in your hair
Don’t you dare bow your head, unless you plan to lift it whispering “amen”
Don’t you weep
Don’t you cry
Don’t you dare break down unless you plan on getting back up
Little girl
You must not know, you’re lucky.
You’re BLACK
BLACK is lucky
Luck is chance, and you were given the chance to be unique.
Unique is different
Different is uncommon
Uncommon is you. You are lucky.

new part
By: Ms. Alyssa Mastrocco

the sun started setting after 4:30 again
so I cut my hair and parted it
on the other side, like I always do in February.

I walked with wet hair along the river
and watched the little hairs fly off my shoulders
and into the cracks on the sidewalk.

if I keep walking north, I’ll get to a place
where the sun doesn’t set, and my
wet hair will start to freeze.

instead, I’ll go home and sit next to
the baseboard heater and listen
to the hot water that rushes through the pipes,

warming the room into which I brought the cold.
Here’s To Forever
By: Paola Saladin

Life is full of “sometimes-es”
and with “maybes,”
and “nevers”
but not with “forevers”
and maybe I should stay away
but hope and reality
never seem to be in my favor.
I pray at night for someone to come
but what if maybe I wasn’t made for anyone
and its true that from the moment that we are born we begin to die,
but it only seemed true when you turned away.
and no one seems to comprehend what I tend to see;
that I am a disheveled mess, tied up in an elegant dress.
And maybe it wasn’t worth it breaking my rules for you,
but the poison didn’t seem so deadly when being thrown from your hands and dragged into my veins, because I thought you had the slightest eyes telling me no lies.
and I guess that once the bar becomes my home, and my blood can easily be mistaken for alcohol,
that instead of regretting you, I regret my one simple choice.
My choice of believing that forever was something that you and I could carve into a tree and make magical,
But since life is made up of “sometimes-es” and “maybes” and “nevers,” I guess I’ll go home again
and intoxicate myself enough to raise a glass and cheer,
“Here’s to forever.”

Bone Deep Beauty
By: Ama Hagan

My beauty. There is none because I’m not who I want to be.
I’m just not pretty. Ugly is my friend. She’s more attached to the outer me than the inside. She’s skin deep and I can never articulate why.
My beauty is bone deep. Deep as in it seeps in the soles of my feet. Too deep to be seen, so to every eye the beauty that I have is a lie. What makes me feel like I’m model size? Enhancement. I dab makeup on left and right thinking I’ll step out if my hell underneath the darkness of my heavy shell.
Hoping for the best and never expecting less.
But that’s not the real me because the real me is the natural you see. The imperfection of my reality.
But no one will understand my mystery of the so-called beauty that lies hidden within me.
Universal Truth in Nature
By: Karimat Bello

The Golden Ones they call them
The crispy, beautiful yet rusty yellow leaves exposed to the sunlight
What about the trees in the back?
Shaded off by the crumbling leaves beside them
Bended, twisted, and begging for the nurturing water just inches ahead
But those Golden Ones they absorb all of the water and sunlight
These Golden Ones are the minority
The superiors, who dominate the benefits of all
And those shaded trees in the distance they hold mob rule
Yelling and screaming and shouting and crying for the benefits of the greater good
However, those Golden Ones don’t grow so healthy
For their greed eats them alive
And those trees in the far back they inch a little taller
And grow a little greener
And hold each other up a little stronger
Because as the sun shines a little brighter,
And the water wades a little farther up the slope
The mob rule reaches, and it reaches, and it reaches
Until they too can dominate the benefits like the superior ones.

Society
By: Willma Arias de la Rosa

Here's something we refer to as home.
We roam around like society’s drones.
Worry about things like the next iPhone,
Instead of problems going on at home.
Fixated on being Perfection,
An eternal asymptote that leads to aggression.
It’s time to stop worrying about those things so listen up kids cuz class is in session.

Christians, Muslims, and Jews as well
Believe in the same God and heaven and hell.
But deep-rooted differences down to the core,
Cause international problems resulting in war.
Divide and Conquer, see them everyday; all over redlined districts they scurry and play.
While the rich get richer and the poor stay poor, the diabolic twins continue in uproar.
Their long lost cousin presides in education,
He’s best at preserving gentrification.
Makes sure you get nowhere in this nation, remaining marked with a sad reputation.
Forever destined to be dead or in jail,
Coming out the womb means entering the cell.
Unless you have money or skin that’s pale, you might not make it without a round trip to hell.
Education for the non-privileged is key. They always say knowledge makes you free.
So when you can barely add and subtract, society puts chains on you and checkers your back.
A slave of society is what you become, so how do you prevent that? Many say they can’t and away...
Away they run.
Infatuated Sonnet  
By: Raequan Nelson  

I want to express a lot  
But I have nothing left to say  
I made a melody, believe it or not  
But I don't have the piano to play  
My mind is a fruit left to rot  
Like fresh melon left to wilt in the day  

I'll give you my shoes, time, and tears  
If you gave me voice while I ruminate  
I have all the colors but no brushes,  
Nor a canvas on which to create  
When I watch the world as it rushes  
I wish I had a person who can relate  
And understand that her silken touches  
Can quell my anxious inner state  

Weeping Souls  
By: Rahshemah Wise  

Can an invisible thing cry?  
Will it weep the tears  
of the no longer living?  
Because the soul is forever  
the spirit cannot be killed  
no matter how much it pleads.  
When the soul cries,  
will you feel the tears  
raining down on you  
like a sudden thunderstorm  
in the middle of summer.  
Does it hurt more  
to be killed  
before you live  
or to live a thousand lifetimes  
and never die?  
Will a broken soul mend  
like a broken bone,  
or will it remain forever fractured  
like the shattered hearts  
of those who could not  
stop death?
Symptoms
By: Akira Caruth

Lost love is a sickness.

Most common symptoms:
• Drowsiness bc you’ve been up for days
• Dry eyes, bc you’ve run out of tears
• Runny nose, the only thing that still seems to work
• Thoughts of suicide, just to see if he cares

You take a pill
You heard it works

Side Effects:
• Burning sensation in the pit of your stomach where he used to leave butterflies
• Sudden urges to clean everywhere he’s touched(your face...legs...hair)
• Everything but temporary memory loss
Because, shit, the thoughts are still there
You take 7 more
You’ve got nothing left to lose

Side effects:
• hallucinations of his smile, eyes and heart, and for a few seconds the part of you that died
when his love finds a few more breaths
• depression. because there aren’t enough pills in the bottle for when his eyes, heart, and smile have
moved on and left yours for dead
• poetry

O’ Lonely Dark
By: Brisco Kayjay

O’ lonely dark,
why do you only hide in the corners of the wall,
secluding yourself from the rest of the world?
We can’t see you.
We can’t hear you.
We can’t smell or taste you.
So we no longer keep you in our thoughts.

But are you really as bad as people say, O’ Innocent dark?
Are you really the reason men fight?
or why Children cry at night?
You can’t really be that bad, can you?
There must be something that glows in you, dark.

Maybe your brother can help. Where is Light?
Is he still gathering the attention of the world?
Still looking to catch all and any eyes that peek his way.
Couldn’t Light maybe, possibly, somehow, share some of that glory that has plagued him?
Or is his heart now a dying flashlight, becoming once again, blind?
Amorphous: The Perfect Love Letter
By: Haki Withers

Amorphous (Adj.): Shapeless

I learned a new word in School today
It’s perfect
Like you of course
Amorphous
For what does unconditional love really look like?
It is boldness and pride, or quiet, unquestionable loyalty
Maybe it’s in the way I look at you
Wait,
That came out wrong
I mean, when I look at you
The feelings are there, but I really don’t know for sure
That what this feeling is
Is easy to identify…
It’s frightening really
To know the word for it I mean
How can love be shapeless?
And as I lay awake lost in the wonders of West Savannah
Thinking of you and all your perfect imperfections
Getting caught up in feelings and flying closer to the sun
Like the wings, my heart melts at the seams
Maybe you can be my Daedalus and fix it
But I still haven’t even texted you back yet
I guess the courage in that situation is amorphous too.

clementine
By: Shaquan Nelson

maybe you’re not supposed to hear butterflies at the sound of my name like no one runs from the lion just because of its mane

and maybe my touch wasn’t supposed to shatter you into a thousand pieces because we have as much faith in supernaturals as we do in grand jury speeches

maybe it was too much to expect what i’d written about because love is a disease that no one’s figured out
and you weren’t my tangerine
more like my clementine
a little different but nonetheless still meant to be mine
so to recap my mishap:
it tooks me acres
of planting, panting, and ranting
to unearth a fruit that was worth a damn thing
Reality
By: Abiola Olofin & Christopher Dominguez

Power overpowers the powerless
And leaves the powerless powerless
Against the powerful.
Because...
In reality, power can
Never be overpowered.
But...
We can take it or keep it.
We can save it or destroy it.
We can own it or set it free.
We can break it or build it like a tree.
Because...
In reality,
We are power manifested.

Maybe One Day
By: Erika Saladin

I hate that feeling of maybe —
Maybe we’ll see each other soon
Maybe I’ll travel to Paris
Maybe things will turn out alright
Maybe they’ll accept me
Maybe I’ll get that scholarship
The answer to Just Maybe may break you or make you
not even knowing that, has the power to kill all your hopes in a heartbeat
We crave unique, acceptable, smart, creative - a yes or no answer
for the answer that will change your entire future.
You have it right in front of you, the letter that will tell you your future. For the first time we have an
answer for the future, yet we hesitate to find out... because of the Maybe.
Maybe they said

Dear You
After thoughtful consideration of your early decision candidacy, the Admissions Committee has decided
to deny your application.

Dear You
Congratulations! It is with great pleasure that I inform you of your admission to X College as a mem-
ber of the Class of 2019.

Your heart races, breathing gets difficult, surrounding sounds are blocked, hands starts to tremble,
tears are prepared by the inner tear duct ready to launch by the side of your cheeks as celebration or
mourning. The answer to our Maybe is right in the palm of your hand, right there. You have waited 4
months, 118 days, 2,832 hours, 169,920 minutes and 10,195,200,000 milliseconds
for the answer to your Maybe. Yet, here you are unsure of what is to come, unsure of what it’s in front of you, unsure of your future, when it’s right in front of you.
You convince yourself to get it over with and decide to just open it and see what the Maybe that took so long says.

Dear You...
Doomsday
By: Rosemarie Archer

Periodically pursuing
the transparent thoughts
Plastered purposefully onto us
Like the small fractals of diamonds slowly coat our body
Becoming immobile on the road to the light
Sadistically we watch the struggle to remove ourselves from the suffocation
Flailing around like a blinded bird
Until someone falls off the path into the abyss.
The first crystal stuck onto me when I saw the first magazine cover wondering if I could ever be
this thin or pale
Then the hair all straight and light while
Mine is so heavy and curly.
Why?
Yet the conscious mind is unaware of the shackles we have placed on our being
Always wondering why
Why am I so different from the girls on TV
Or the one sitting next to me.
Are we beyond our skin and appearance?
Our minds and souls have been contaminated by the toxic sludge pouring out of the media
The stick thin figures
We have become misshapen and deformed
Twisted in the views
For we crave the conformity
Plastering on makeup
Pressing our hair
we create the enemy out of the mirror so we inflict pain onto ourselves
You're so fat and dark
Eyes are too big
Lips are too small
Too short
Too quiet
Be like them
Don't be like you
I hate it
I hate you
Damn mirrors
Breaking glass and spilling blood from our soul
Giving giving giving into the pressures until bones puncture our lungs
In those last cold slow minutes of life
look at the shards laughing and smiling hearing the truth
From the TV
“You hate yourself because you will never be what you see on TV. That’s why your soul is stuck in the mirror”
But my mirror is broken.
And I hear the sirens and they say
“It’s Doomsday.”
How Our Patriarchy Falls...
By: Tia Suggs

Look at the little boys that some men have become. They don't want to fight me like a man, But they rather shoot me with a gun. I believe it's the mentality of the children in these streets. They would rather have ammunition for protection, But barely use their mind as a weapon to keep. Additionally, These young men haven't learned how to love a woman unconditionally. They would rather experience thirty minutes of pleasure and leave, Rather than spending a lifetime with their own baby. Look at the broken families out here today. It's because in some situations, The fathers have decided to go astray. Now, I am not talking about all men, But I am talking about the majority. It's discouraging to internalize that The real, strong men have become the minority. Young men, When you pass your stage of adolescence, Please become strong-minded, Aspire to be a leader to us all. Don't follow the modern ways of our fathers, Because this Is how the patriarchy falls.

You're Pretty for a Big Girl
By: Asaada Cooper

When they say “You’re pretty for a big girl” I think...Am I supposed to be ugly? What does my size has to do with my beauty? Just because I’m big I’m automatically... What? Ugly? How is this considered a compliment? Who made this okay? Who said because I’m big I can’t be pretty? Who said because I’m big I MUST have low self-esteem and hate myself? Who said because I’m of bigger size I’m automatically unhealthy? Why in society do “thinner” women automatically have a “beauty” stamp, while “bigger” women are stamped with “fat and ugly”? “You’re pretty for a big girl” No. I’m pretty. PERIOD.
To the Nobodies

By: Shatavia Knight

I want my words to be a bomb that radiates,
to burn off the tumors of ignorance and hate that have infiltrated our minds like a cancer
I want to be our chemotherapy,
For my words to be the last good soul in hell or an atheist’s last ounce of faith
Or be like black nail polish
Something that can go with every shade of skin or age of sin
I’d like to begin the remembering of the forgotten
The loving of the broken-hearted.
And so this is to the nobodies
To the Clark Kents who never figured out how to fly or couldn’t find their cape
For the Bruce Waynes who couldn’t even scrape up enough money for a boomerang let alone a bat cave
This for those brave soldiers who tried to come out of battle unscathed but gave all of themselves to their country and were sentenced to an early grave
To the Peter Parkers whose spider bites only gave them an extensive trip to the ER
For the wonderful girls who couldn’t quite be Wonder Woman because their bodies couldn’t fit into that star spangled suit
Which was meant to mute the mind but enhance the body making them seen and not heard
For those who have not yet learned the immortality that lies in words
Let this be a demonstration because
This is to the nobodies
To the average joes
The Jane and John Does
Those who, long ago, traded in the “s” on their chest for a suit and tie
The people whose seemingly simple legacies will die along with their seemingly simple lives
It is ok to not achieve renown
Because the remnants of your being will be found among the crevices and spaces of these pages
And in the love residing in familiar faces
So your shoulders don’t have to move boulders,
Nor must you supplant happiness with sorrow to help mold the children of tomorrow
Because that is for heroes
But know that turning over stones or giving a child a home
Can make all the difference.
You Have Your Dreams, Now Run

By: Lucy Yeboah

It’s been given to you since birth
Ever since the day the Earth
Breathed
A heart beat
In the middle of a scene
You screamed
To be of
Greatness.
No God-forsaken-ness.
You took the seeds,
then blew out the weeds.
You were destined to be
You.
True.
No fool.
No prostitute.
In these streets.
The Miami heats
could not even prosper.
The doctor called St. Octave
and stole the proper ID.
She heeds
who/what she feeds
and her creed
will always succeed.
To breed
and populate
Can we stand back and congratulate--
my dreams.
Now, up up here we go.
Where we stop?
Nobody knows.
Cordelia

By: Dianeth Hernandez
Apartment 7J
By: Shatavia Knight

In my building, in some broken down apartment that the Hispanic maintenance men never visit, there lies a man, armed with a beer can,
Who sits in his place filled neck high with empty liquor bottles
That were supposed to wash away his sorrows
but, instead, washed away the white in his teeth,
the life in his voice,
and the gleam in his eyes.

And the days when he is able to pry himself out of bed, he goes down to the liquor store to buy some more and returns to the dark cave of his life behind the apartment door,

And
he always wears sunglasses,
Even when it's dark out,

And I don’t know what that’s all about, but maybe he was hoping that the glasses would obscure his vision so that he wouldn’t have to look at his reflection in the glass bottles he uses as substitutes for a soul.

Maybe his whole objective for wearing army green pants was to sink into the background like a chameleon so no one could see the stained yellow teeth,
the red washed eyes,
and the stomach that sinks in like wet tissue paper when you stand too close to him on a tightly packed elevator.

This guy that no one will notice will waste away like exponential decay and will keep declining but will never reach rock bottom because his mere existence will be all that’s left.

Maybe the broken bottles on the floor of his apartment are like the Humpty Dumpty pieces of his life that he couldn’t put back together alone,

But no one will try to put back together an already broken home.

Maybe the bitter contents of each bottle are supposed to wipe away some of him so that maybe by drinking enough, he can wash away all of himself in an effort to become someone else,

Like baptism.

And as another ounce of himself switches places with the liquor in the bottle,
306 people in my building are listening and will then turn up the TV to finish watching jeopardy.
303 didn’t know he existed and the last 3 will crawl up to his apartment to ask if he is okay.
He will respond, yeah I’m fine, unable to show his red eyes to reveal that he had been crying.
And he will sink into himself believing that for sure, his only life will remain in the comfort of his liquor bottles behind the apartment steel door.
I Am Who I Am
By: Keanndra Nicholson

Imagine walking into your mother’s room, head hanging low with shame because she just found out that her only daughter was dating the same sex. The amount of hurt I felt when she pulled out her phone to show me pictures of my girlfriend and me and described what she saw as disgusting. Not having enough pride to defend myself at the time, all I could do was cry because I was ashamed of who I was. What hurt most was that I no longer felt accepted or loved at home. Being devastated at the time, it felt like all hope had vanished. My mother demanded, “If you continue with this behavior, you will be kicked out of the house and sent to live with your father (whom I have no relationship with).” Forcefully, she made me promise to her that I would change my ways. In that moment I felt let down by the only person who was always supposed to have my back. Was I supposed to change to be the person my mother was expecting me to be or was I supposed to learn from this experience and become a “better” individual? To keep my mother happy at the time, I told her what she wanted to hear and not the truth. Being disappointed in myself, I didn’t know how to feel about her knowing about the real me. Myself.

After realizing how happy I was becoming with my true self, I stopped living the life others expected and began living to please me. People often comment that “God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” And, yes, while that may be the case, the prophet Moses said, “I am who I am.” And that is basically the statement of my life: I am who I am. Since I’ve decided to stay true to myself, others have been able to accept me as Keanndra Nicholson. For example, my aunt judged me based on my outward appearance and told me that me, being a female with dreads who dresses the way I do, I wouldn’t be able to get a job. Yet because of personality, experience, and creativity, I was able to get a job as a camp counselor at the YMCA. Because of my success, my aunt now sees me as Keanndra Nicholson, a person who can accomplish anything, and not something less. What others made seem impossible, I made possible.

I have accepted myself for who I am. People often hold my identity against me. I am a strong student. I have goals for my life. I am able to build strong relationships. All these characteristics are what matter most to me and are what allow me to love myself for who I am. I am seen as a model for other students to be who they want to be. On my future college campus instead of being associated with the crowd that puts people down for being different, I will stand up for those put down and allow them to be themselves. I can stay true to myself and not change because of another person’s beliefs. Peer pressure hinders success and overcoming it allowed me to succeed in finding who I truly was as a person. If I can conquer societal norms, then I believe I am powerful enough to conquer anything. I am able to handle anything else that comes my way because I am aware now that “I am who I am,” and I am proud to say that I no longer have to fight to be me. Now I walk in my mother’s room with pride. Head high. Squared shoulders. I’m not ashamed of who I am.
Shoes To Fill
By: Aletha Watson

The sun is blazing on my skin. I pick up dirt covered rocks with my overly worn garden gloves. It is a perfect moment. The wind calmly blowing. The birds singing and speaking to each other. My twin sister and I reminisce on our past. We talk about the moments at Life Camp. Making so many friends. Playing in the dirt. Basically, in our minds, taking over the world. I always watched my sister take lead. I emphasize her greatest achievements and push her toward more. The best kind of sister bonding. “I’m tired Aletha,” she whines to me. I tell her I am too as if she was stating the obvious. We have been working out here for a couple of hours anyway.

“No!” she yells. I do not get it. She is tired of being mistreated. She is tired of being hurt, abused, and lied to. I feed her anger. I tell her to stand up for herself. Knowing she would do what I was too afraid to. She has always been my voice. Maybe I could push her to the limit. I fill her mind with negative thoughts toward our abusive grandmother. Suddenly she stops and storms to the house creating a dust path in her wake.

As I run after her, my heart is pounding so hard it hurts my chest. In my mind, I repeatedly beg her not to do anything stupid. Too late. I hear the dreaded words. “Get out! Get out of my house!” In the blink of an eye she is gone. She leaves the house. There is no holding her back. No changing her mind. The deed is done. But how could she leave me alone? Who was I without her? I was lost, confused, and heartbroken.

As weeks pass, the confusion grows, paralyzing my ability to explore my new self without my sister. Every night is filled with tears that I am left to taste before I sleep. Eventually, I cannot even cry anymore. I am still empty. Crying can’t bring her back. Crying can’t help me find me. Over time, I begin to explore, think, and write. I become an independent thinker. I began to uncover the parts of me that are buried underneath a lack of self-confidence. I now have no choice but to do things by myself. When I realize that no one can drive me around anymore, I study day and night to get my learner’s permit. I also discover my passion for helping kids. I enthusiastically sign up for a babysitting class and receive a certificate.

A few months later, after being reunited with my sister, I am now a self-sufficient thinker. I have been preparing for a rally for a long time. I grab the creatively designed posters and push the door open. “This is going to be great!” I think to myself. I am empowered to talk about the inequality in education for all students in Newark. I feel confidence growing within me as I move toward the growing crowd of protesters. I now know that I can make a difference. I hear the crowd get rowdy and their yells begin to grow. I join them and make my mark on the world. I am now the person I always knew I could be. I watch my sister’s hazel eyes glow as she takes the posters from my hand. She is no longer taking the front seat. Instead, we are working together. I can express my true self. I am now the girl who fights for what she wants. I can express my true self. An advocate, a supporter, a force that cannot be stopped. I am no longer my sister’s shadow.
Strong Caramel Skin
By: Alisa Watson

I was coming from the blazing heat outside into a house that instantly became cold as I touched the knob. I froze in my tracks as cold chills spread down my spine. Should I go inside? Sighing hard, I walked in to face the habitual pain that awaited my entrance. I greeted my dog, Honey, with a rub on her belly, and walked up the steps praying to avoid any trouble. I raised my hazel eyes and there she was. My heart sank, and I knew that my attempts of going to my room peacefully were ruined. I continued to walk up the steps one foot at a time but slower than I did before.

It took me by surprise, being stabbed by my grandmother. I lived with her for only 4 years (7th-10th grade), but she abhorred every child of my mother for reasons that remain a mystery. As her anger grew each day, it transformed from verbal attacks to punches, and then finally into this. Like a kid frolicking in the park who then falls bruising her leg, I felt my wound instantly. In pain and alone, I couldn’t find comfort like the kid who probably had a parent supervising them to kiss their bruise. I was alone. I was hurt. I was stabbed.

Everyday locked away in that cold house, I constantly heard the “You will never be anything” speech and turned into a walking wound as more painful events ensued. When the pain became too much to bear, I removed myself from the cold house into a strange, unclear environment. I was away from the abuse but still an open wound.

I started junior year in September with people who became Band aids to me. Every smile and hello as I passed by students in the hallways and lunch conversations about random adventures became my recovery. My teachers’ encouragement and patience gave me hope that everyone wasn’t like the lady in the cold house.

It was through the school musical that I felt I truly disproved the degrading words of my grandmother. I was waiting for our theater teacher to call my name to come in for an audition. My heart sank, and I felt butterflies. I long-believed the words that I would never be anything nor do anything great. I began doubting my dancing and singing skills. I mean, could I even sing? But once I got into the room, all those emotions faded when I heard claps and shocked looks on my teacher’s face: “I never knew you could sing like that Alisa. I’m so impressed!” From that moment on, I knew that I could achieve anything.

Day by day, my memory of that painful time disappeared, and I was happier. Positive. Different. There were times where I felt like my Band-Aids would come off, and I would sink back into the wound that I was. But, I am a better person than that and my Band-Aids are pretty sticky. Everything I did during my time of uncertainty was done to the best of my ability. Now, I was stabbing, stabbing those “You will never be anything” speeches, and my smiles were abusing those hardships that I faced. I turned those times that were once cold and painful into motivation to be the best.

Now, my once smooth caramel skin has a scar, but, like every scar, composed of rougher, darker, and stronger skin. All this is to come will become new layers of skin to me. New environments may be difficult for me, but any experience that may break me down will also encourage me to be better in life. It will be a bright day in August, and no matter if it rains or shines as I walk up the stairs to the college of my choice, I’ll sigh but will feel warmth and love as I touch the knob.
Bees don’t make sense. Their bulky bodies mathematically shouldn’t be able to fly. Their wings, disproportional with respect to their bodies, sustain flight. This feat befuddles and perplexes the inner depths of my mind. Mockingbirds, bee-eaters, and other predators more prodigious, more swift, and more graceful make prey of these delicate vernal organisms. Bees’ waggle dance is indecipherable by humans. Sometimes, the things that confuse us most are things we can see in ourselves.

I don’t make any sense either. Statistically, I should have not survived. The vestiges of my father, who so graciously decided to never bless me with the gift of his presence, can be seen in only in my bothersome acne and towering frame. In the depths of my mind lies a black hole left unfilled by a man unknown to me. Although I have never seen his face or held conversation with him, his genes are woven into the fibers of my being. Instead of endeavoring to forge a platonic bond never to surface, learning to play catch or being lectured step-by-step on how to tie a square knot, I focused on success.

Factor in the fact that my city, my beehive, was ranked the sixth most dangerous in the country by CNN in 2013, with 33.8 murders per 100,000 people (compared to 8.7 per 100,000 in neighboring New York City). It is a miracle that the hails of bullets I hear on my street, traveling under the veil of night, have never gone astray and made a home in my bedroom.

This year, my mother lost her job as a result of the plummeting economy and subtle racism, as she likes to insinuate. Regardless of the reason, I should not be applying for college, or still in school for that matter. The eldest son abandoning school to work at a monotonous part-time job to help support the household is a common occurrence in my community when mothers lose the only source of income.

Although we don’t easily understand bees, the world needs them. The fate of a myriad of species relies on their mutualistic relationship with bees. The vital task of pollination was delegated to bees. Bees are an essential part of the world. Without bees pollinating one flower at a time, the world would not be what it is today, or what it would be tomorrow. Bees’ importance is not mitigated by people sympathizing with their plight, nor understanding their reason for flight.

It may be difficult, and nearly impossible to understand the profundity of my character given the restraints surrounding this essay. The point is that we need each other: your college needs a bee. In every class, regardless of personal problems, I strive to do my absolute best. At home, I attempt to be a guiding light to my sisters by exemplifying hard work in school. In a city infested with hate, I try to show compassion to all living things, big or small. This especially reigns true in my work at Brantwood summer camp, which is for inner city youth who otherwise would not have the opportunity to do so, where I try to help children younger than me by giving them someone to look up to.

Despite seeming impossible, bees flutter through life and do not let anything deter them from fulfilling their niches. With all of the odds fixed against me, I have survived. My flight baffles the fundamental principles of the world; my success defies stereotypical boundaries. Having a bee, like me, on your college campus would be a greatly coveted addition to the incoming freshman class. Having me at your college would allow me to fertilize the greens with reverence and compassion, and pollinate your institution with progressiveness, vivaciousness, and an undying dedication to excellence.
Rewinding the Turn-Tables
By: Gabby Ballard

I just wish I could hear the sweet sound of the first hip hop beats on the streets of New York. The Rap and MC gods, from DJ Kool Herc, Melle Mell, Afrika Bambaataaa and the rest of the Zulu nation to Eric B and Rakim, Tupac and Nas, began writing what would become an integral aspect of black culture and grow to become part of American culture.

Songs begging for opportunity, verses advocating for freedom, lines urging for equality captivated urban youth. They could be more than just a factory worker; they were more than just a maid service for the elites in society. They could reach any ambitious goal their hearts desired, which is all any aspiring adolescent can ask for when growing up. These songs were more than just rhythms in your head; they were messages played your heart, in our hearts. And in replaying these songs, we each can hear a voice calling for us and inspiring us to reach for our own goals.

We, as a people, as black people, and as American people, cannot forget our roots in hip hop, just like we can't forget our roots in the very beginning of America. We cannot relinquish the culture and emotion, power and feeling that permeated the rhymes. Those bars were transcending lessons from our ancestors and our ancestors’ ancestors, who had their own bars and chains and musical ways to maintain sanity in the face of relentless oppression. They were instructions on how to fight for what we believe and defend our sacred, human rights to freedom and opportunity.

But somewhere along the way, someone pressed pause. The history of our people has always been entwined, interwoven, and entangled with the music we created, but it seems that right before our eyes we’ve begun to rewind.

Rather than the inspirational, uplifting, constructive hip hop we started with, there seems to be a downward spiral that places materialism and violence on stage. Instead of building each other up, we see constant competition resulting only in conflict and confusion.

Since hip hop reflects black culture and influences American culture and values, we all need to be critical of what we see and hear and what we permit as a portrayal of our morals. We shouldn't dehumanize women or disrespect honored historical figures, and doing so should not make us rich. “Music,” for lack of a better term, that condones this behavior has lost its purpose and vision.

To truly maintain high social standards of what is appropriate for us as a people, each part of our culture must look to the past; we must remember a time when hip hop was viewed as more than just noise. It was music; it was art. It is art, and it permeates our very being and represents everything for which we stand.
Universal Truth in Nature
By: Adaobi Njoku-Obi

There was nothing more beautiful than the pond at sunset. The illuminating orange reflected over the blue water perfectly, as if the two colors were locked in an ephemeral dance and song that could only be played at the end of each day. The clouds were mirrored on the water as if the pond was just an extension of the sky’s immortal beauty. The evergreen from the trees dotted every bend of the pond, mixing with the brief tango and making an effortless bond that could only be broken by the impending darkness that is night.

It was then in that very moment that I realized how nature masterfully exhibited the truths of human relationships. Every relationship is doomed to end, no matter how beautiful it is. Though in the moment it may seem like the relationship like the perfect partnership of the orange sunset and the blue pond will last forever because of its beauty, and elegance it is destined to end. Beauty such as the one shared between the two colors is too good to be true.

Every relationship is destined to end, or so I thought. With every beautiful thing in this world there is hope. There is hope that when the beautiful sycamore tree dies in the winter, it will be reborn in spring and its beauty will live on. There is hope that when the small caterpillar retires to its gray, decrepit cocoon it will emerge as a vibrant butterfly. The old sycamore tree and the small caterpillar both die or transform in order to make something more magnificent. The two creatures relationships end to make something more wonderful and worthwhile just like the ethereal waltz of the orange sunset and the blue pond seems so perfectly sad because it must come to an end because of the treacherous night, there is hope that the sun will again. The sun rises and sets and with each one a new and better dance is born. Until one day the sun never sets and the music never stops and the dance is ever continuous and night never comes.

They Wanted Honesty
By: Nigel Harvey

They wanted honesty. The truth was that I wasn’t really supposed to be there. My heart knew what it wanted and it is a very spoiled thing. But I knew I wasn’t supposed to be there. “Corridors aren’t scary because of what’s at the end of it, but the whole walk there. And when you turn off the lights you’re not helpin’. When I got there the lights were more than off. They weren’t there. Broken.”

They asked me why I went there. I took a sip from my drink. They wanted honesty and a conscious man can’t be honest to himself much less anyone else.

“I…” Take another sip. “The lights weren’t there. I didn’t even see here there. If I had took some time to fix those damn lights…” But your heart knew what it wanted. Take another sip. “But… I didn’t want to do it… I wanted to love her but… she’s a cheating whore! She’s evil…” She loved you though. Sip and tell them. “Well really… her actions were wrong…” She was right. More “right” than you were. Hurry and tell them before a guard shows up and pushes the execution to now. Make this the last one. Speak. “I was wrong. I never really loved her. I was with two other women… I got mad at her because she needed love… love that wasn’t comnin’ from a piece of shit like me…” And what did you do. “Then I went there and shot her.” Shot your wife. “My own damn wife.”

The tears came and made me sober again. They sat around me with a mix of disgust and empathy firing from the crowd. “Lunch is over! To your cells!” I put the drink under my bed like normal and pray for sleep before I could let go of all the guilt in my life.
Fathers and Sons
By: Brisco Kayjay

Sitting in that movie theater, I pulled my arms inside my shirt as the lights dimmed and the wonder of modern technology began. Not too many people were in the same theater to watch this film. A few others joined me, but only to watch. I’m pulled in by the lights that play in front of me. The movie soon goes into one of those cliché moments that we hate but still love to see. But I’m suddenly pulled in by something else; in front of me, I notice one of the males in the room is hugging his son. It puts a smile on my face to see this love play out.

As I look down the row of empty seats on each side of me, I take note of the abyss and emptiness around me. Where is my mom? Oh yeah, at home fast asleep. She gave me the money to see the film but didn’t have any interest in going. Where’s my sister? Oh yeah, at home. I didn’t dare invite her in fear of the resentment that would follow for asking a silly question like that. Where's my dad? I really don’t even know anymore. Just far enough to not be in front of me but still close enough to be in the back of my head.

The movie theater gets colder and I can’t even stand to watch the film anymore. I hate my mom for giving me the money to go to this shitty movie. I hate my sister for not being more ...more. I don’t even know. I hate everyone in that moment. Why can’t I have been that boy in the rows ahead of me, showered with love by his family?

I stop. I stop and just accept.

I accept that the way my life has turned out is not my fault and is just the conditions that I agreed to in return for life. In that split second of thought, I don’t wish to be the little boy, rather his father. Yes, I want to be the man that stays there for my children. I want to become the man that take cares of those important to him.

Every moment, for the rest of my life, I will learn how to be the man that can give my children the conditions that will make them happy. Through this act, maybe I gain some sort of happiness, much more powerful than loneliness. I will care for a family that will never know the loneliness that I felt.

Maybe then I will take my son, my daughter, my wife, and even my mother and sister to see a movie. And in the moment that the hated yet beloved cliché moment appears, I will shower my family with this heartwarming love.
The Replacement
By: Gbemisola Tijani

Her second grade teacher asked her on her first day of school in America. “Can I call you Sola? I can’t pronounce your name.” This replacement would follow her for years to come.

Ring!! Ring!! The lunch bell. The young girl had been by herself all day, yet the lunch bell brought a smile on her face. At the lunch table, another student asked her name.

“My name is Gbemisola,” she responded. Giggles erupted around the room. Gbemisola did not know what to do, except to cry inside. She timidly opened the delicious lunch her mom had made for her. Once again laughter filled the lunch room, and Gbemisola thought to herself, “What is it now?” She soon realized that the aroma of the delicious food caused the laughter, and perhaps it’s appearance, both equally foreign in this classroom. Suddenly, the delicious food wasn’t so delicious to Gbemisola anymore.

“What the hell is that?” Laughter “… it smells like that food that African people eat in the jungle!” chuckled another student at the table. The laughter continued.

In her own defense, Gbemisola gasped, “I’m not from the jungle. I am Nigerian.” Then, she quickly ran to the bathroom so no one would see her at her lowest point.

She finished the day without speaking with anyone and wondering how people could be so vicious. When she returned home, her mother asked, “Gbemi, how was school?”

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After my mother asked me about my first day of school, tears flooded my eyes and I could barely answer the question. When I got control of my emotions, I choked, “The kids were mean to me. Someone made fun of my food, and they all made fun of my name, and they said that I did not speak English.”

“Gbemi you are Nigerian, and you should be proud of that,” she replied with confidence. “Do not listen to what kids are saying, you are just different from them, and trust me it’s okay to be different.” These were exactly the words I needed to here.

From that point forward, I began to embrace the values of my culture and those that my parents uphold in my household. As the years progressed, I began to compare the values of my African culture with what I’ve observed in the cultures of my peers. As a Nigerian, I have been raised to respect my elders and treat everyone in the community as if they were family. I’ve grown to embrace my culture and be proud of who I am as a Nigerian.

On my 18th birthday outing where my friends and family went to Hard Rock Café in NYC. Afterward, we all came back to my house and my mom and aunt served us food from my country. “I want some more jollof rice,” I jumped. “And some more efo please!” My mother and I couldn’t help but laugh. I felt unequivocally myself, unashamed of my culture, and it was pleasing to know that my friends were accepting all of me. Though, at the time, I did understand that, even though my friends and family were accepting of my culture, other people I may interact with may not be as accepting and that is perfectly fine. I have to be proud of who I am and where I am from because that’s what makes me unique. As the evening came to an end, I thanked my aunt for the amazing meal.

“No problem,” she responded as she walked out. “Bye Sola! And Happy Birthday! Love you!”

“Love you too!! And thank you again! And…it’s Gbemisola!”
Playground Philosophers
By: Jordan Horton

I’m writing this on the last day of camp. I’m considered an adult here, and you would be too. Before Art Camp started, I imagined it would be me and a few other camp counselors and perhaps some others that I haven’t met yet, bossing kids around, exchanging ideas for projects that we will never start, trying to stay out of trouble ourselves: things like that. But it turned out to be so much different than my expectations.

To paint the picture, we’re still at the last art gallery show, where 6-year-olds have their masterpieces that only a mother could love displayed so all their family and friends can see. We’re still wearing our red camp t-shirts, which are nearly identical to those of the campers. We still smell like fire from the kiln in the ceramic studio, and I’m covered in a combination of acrylic paint, glitter, and glue.

Some of the kids are leaving and back in the real world; we don’t go to the same school, don’t live in the same town, and are nowhere close in age. So until next year, this is it for us, unless the stars have something else in alignment for one or for both of us which would cause us not to return to camp next year. A lot of kids have said their goodbyes, hugged their art teachers and counselors, and taken their boxes full of artwork home.

My favorite camper comes up to hug me goodbye. She was the only one in my four waves of campers who called me Jordan—no “Ms.” included. Now you may think that’s slightly disrespectful, as I did the first time she said it, but a simple dropping of a title has taught me as much as I could have taught her.

During lunch time, I did my homework as they ate their pudding or whatever vegan snack their nannies and babysitters packed them. My favorite student came over to ask me what is wrong. Forgetting that I was talking to a child born in only 2007, I explained the issues of biology and how I feel that I never have enough time. She stared at me with her bright blue eyes for a moment and said that, even though I’m “pretty old,” I am still too young to worry.

I think that she taught me the most valuable lesson that school forgot to put in the curriculum. Who needs the ideologies and theories of Locke and Plato when you’re surrounded by second grade philosophers? I’ve heard people say that your teens and twenties are the greatest times of your life, and I am here today to detest this idea as I spent my summer counting time with the amount of friendship bracelets exchanged, Band-Aids that I’ve applied to scraped knees, and missing teeth from my campers smiles.

All the campers are gone now. We hug our coworkers goodbye and wish them good luck in the new year, varying from starting college to finishing high school. This is the end of summer, even though there are two days until school starts. This isn’t a story about how kids are silly or how art camp is fun, this is a story about how I actually learned something. This is about how I’ve learned from someone I was expected to teach. The truth is that I started camp with the expectation of being treated as an adult and left with the longing of going back to childhood.
Out Cold
By: Himaayah Agwedicham

She shifted her wool scarf, pulled on her gloves, and pushed the squeaky door open. She sighed, plunging head on into the blurriness of the storm. Immediately, tiny fractals settled on her nose and lips, and she could almost hear the tiny crystals melting in her hair. The girl was going to be cold, but she couldn't really be mad at anyone because she was the one who lost her hat.

They say that no 2 snowflakes are alike, but it doesn't even matter because snow doesn't fall one flake at a time. The white frenzy quickened and from afar, it probably looked like the flakes fell in unison, but the girl knew they didn’t. There were thousands of flakes rushing past her head, like tiny zooming cars driving in a million different directions.

By now, she was planning her refund request because the fleece lined boots that were “guaranteed” to “keep out the warm” were failing, miserably. Her toes became ten crooked seashells and every step felt like the sound of nails on a chalkboard. Her hands were brittle coral, and her bouncy curls had fallen into damp clumps of black seaweed.

The girl looked up to catch a glimpse of the beauty that the spectators from inside were probably seeing, but all she saw was a white frenzy, a giant cloud of monotony and uniform motion.

Picking up her feet felt like dragging two petrified logs from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean and she didn’t know how much more she could take.

Her paralyzed fingers sat motionless in her tiny pockets, and frigid water trickled down her clammy neck.

She didn't even realize how many times she had to inhale and exhale to compensate for how hard her body had to work to keep her going.

She wondered to herself how she could have believed so strongly that snow was purity, tranquility, and childhood bliss. She realized that snow is only beautiful when looking at it from the inside of a window.

The girl trudged on in the snow, and, as the icy wind whipped her back and her the heavy flakes clouded her sight, she walked on, gradually getting lost in the blizzard.
WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS...

Poetic Selections from our Middle School Family of Artists

DOWNTOWN • CLINTON HILL • VAILSBURG • WEST SIDE PARK
Society
By: Paulyn Annor
8th Grade DTMS

bound by the chains of oppression, dehumanization, stigmatization, physically and mentally restrained from

freedom
liberty
justice

i break free
from the chains through
education
empowerment
knowledge of self
fight not by
guns, rock, knives
but pen, paper, my voice
alter those systems
that keep our people
enslaved
chained
suppressed

live the life of a
mentally and physically
free woman
inspire others to
advocate
learn
speak out

Song of Myself
By: Precious Olajobi
7th Grade VMS

I celebrate myself, and sing myself.

Visions clear to those among the dead,
Lavish ones in the clear for
Those who swept past the gate of carnage
Lest thou feed the morning feet

If the night would fight my past my own defeat
Carrying the blood of the feeble ones
Ignorance their bliss and sin their strength

If I'm not shadowed by the fort
If I'm not Constantine of the cross
If I'm crowned holiest of them all
Shame is upon the ones that set fire to air
Song of Myself
By: Alasia Williams
7th Grade VMS

I sing a song of roses
a song of thorned roses
with profuse colors
a song of roses that may wilt in the cold of winter
but bloom again in the summer delight.
I sing a song of fire
a song of the ignited
with a variety of fuels
a song of the engulfed
that fills the heart with warmth, but consumes it at the same time.
I sing a song of water
a song that cleanses the heart and soul
with various methods
a song that calms the burning
stopping the flames in its track.
I sing a song of me
a song that only attracts a specific ear
with abundant symphonies
a song of heart and passion
that breaks, but stands again
coming back stronger and better than ever
A song for me.

Blank Canvas
By: Tatiana Dundas
7th Grade WMS

My canvas is blank
I sit here for hours waiting for the inspiration to come
to me. Everyday it's the same routine.
Get up, shower, eat breakfast, and
sit in front of a canvas. My brush in hand
and my paints are unblended like my soul.
I sit here for the hours; the only light is the
light from my blinds. I sit here thinking of what could have been.
My soul is filled with deep regret and hatred. I look at my canvas
and remember the day my inspiration went away. The person who inspired me the most
was gone that day. Everything went downhill
from there. The brush stopped moving and the colors
were unblended and now I just sit here. Suddenly
my hand starts moving. I am painting lines up and
down the page and I realize how I drew. My inspiration.
Then it hits me how stupid I have been. My inspiration
has been here the whole time in my heart. All I had to
do was believe in myself.
Black Is Gold
By: Devian Parker-Rogers
5th Grade CHMS

In response to RuNett Nia Ebo’s poem “Lord Why Did You Make Me Black?”

I made you black for a reason my dear:
Black is the color of our previous leaders.
It is the fur on a fearless wolf that lies
deep in the forests.
You should love your color

Black is the color of the midnight skies
that help you sleep while you count each and every sheep.
Black is the color of a police man’s uniform that protects you
from the harmful streets.

Black is the color of a great black stallion
that rides all day long, the color of your mighty
ruler President Barack Obama. It’s the color of your Harlem
Renaissance leaders that fought for your rights.

I did not make you in the image of darkness
Not the color of the bruised eye or the color of the dirt
You might not like your color but the color is for you
Because it is the color of excellence, especially you.

The Statue of a Diorama
By: Malakai Buckner
Class of 2026

I don’t want to be a statue of
A diorama
And I don’t always like school
But everybody at school thinks
I’m cool
That’s not being a statue

I’m really good at art
But sometimes it’s difficult to start
But when I do it flows through me
That’s not being a statue
I’m real

Art in a Cherry
By: Zimele Buckner
Class of 2026

If you look in a cherry
You will find
A pencil,
A crayon box,
An eraser,
And Love.

You may think you find seeds,
But there is more than you can see.
Poetic Selections from our Alumni Family of Artists
Therapy Session
By: Jada Anderson
Class of 2013
Marist College ’17

grown woman sits propped between
Momma’s big brown legs
head resting against her thighs
weighed down by memory
Momma has a brown comb in her hand
parting her hair and scratching her scalp
grown woman is suddenly little girl again
gritting her teeth and wincing at
the pulling of her thick, coily mane
Momma is singing her a blues
she tried hard to forget
trying to scratch that memory out
of her baby’s head
she sighs and rolls her big brown eyes
until Momma sings an end she never heard of
and comes to understand a Mother’s love
grown woman/little girl
folds herself into Momma’s arms
and thanks her with tears

Cold (December)
By: Timothy Williams
Class of 2014
Temple University ’18

The sun is setting and its 4 pm.
The sun is setting on this year and rising for the next.
Sheesh, time really does fly.
You weren’t ready for everything to be so damn frozen, everything is so damn cold.
The joy and merriness in the air is frosted over by early night times and gloomy daytimes.
It’s always this depressing moisture in the air
Dealing with a frigid family causes the warmth of a home to that of an igloo.
Your friends are now your polar opposites as your feelings for them are bipolar.
No one is there to bundle up and grit through the tundra of December with you.
Everyone is so damn cold.
And even after the malls have closed and the snow has melted, you’re still cold.
And you realize, it’s not just December… everyday is so damn cold
Black Girl
By: Charisma Lambert
Class of 2014
Franklin & Marshall College '18

They say:
Yasss black girl
Work black girl
Go black girl
But only as far as their eyes will let you... my broken black girl
Broken down, battered
By the standards placed upon you by... them
It'll be fine black girl
It'll be good just as long as you succumb
To that- mouth poppin', weave pattin', baby bearin' standard of... them

Yasss black girl
Work black girl
Go black girl
But only as far as their leash will let you... my broken black girl
Broken down, battered
By the circumstances placed upon you by... them
My black girl... my black girl.... my black girl
You are trapped
Only because your ancestors were and it's hard for you to be free when everybody else isn't
You are trapped
Only because the white man once ruled the world and now the black man is trying to take over
when the black woman is left idle
You are trapped
Only because the black woman has been pushed aside that we all forgot her capabilities

But I say:
Yasss black girl
Work black girl
Go black girl
As far as your ancestry can take you
As far as the fiery blood, burning passion
Created in you, by you, for you... can take you
My black girl... my black girl... my black girl....my black girl.....my black girl
I love you
I love the standards carved out for you that you defy
My black girl, I love you as that broken black girl, fixed black girl, developed black girl, wonderful black girl ....
That you are... my black girl

I say:
Yasss black girl
Work black girl
Go black girl
As far as you want to.... My black girl
The Right to Exist
By: Amir Ballard
Class of 2014
Brown University '18

The Indictment Was Never Made
My people are never given promises — only excuses
And because we cannot afford to forget anything
We must remember that in the grand design of their America
The law is our master, not our servant.

Thank you, America, for reminding me
That whether my name is as white as Michael
Or as Black as Treyvon
My ebony skin still excludes the danger in my infinite darkness

Thank you, America, for encouraging me to run on treadmills
So I can remind myself that no matter how much I run I will never escape my blackness
Thank you for reminding me that there is no get-out-of-black free card
That the God you gave us doesn’t have enough tables for Amirs or Tyniquas

When is my existence valid?
When will our truth be seen as real?
When are my people allowed to heal?
When do we gain access to a life that we deserve?
When will we be seen?
When will you gain a conscience?

Thank you, America, for making me prove my right to exist as if every black breath
Should be rewarded with diamonds because they are so rare
Thank you, America, for taking my humanity in a stranglehold
While my people are given pats on the back and table discussions determine
when we are allowed to live

There is no peace without repression.
There is no justice without ignorance.
There is no comfort without adversity.
There is no civility without fear.
There is no love in this place.

Thank you, America, for reminding me that all your racial equations
Will never make us equal.
That if I added up all the times I had nightmares about my brother dying for being
Too Black
That I could finally reach the end of eternity.
I cannot think of a better teacher.
Ophelia

By: Dianeth Hernandez
Window to the Past

By: Nia Berrian
Window

By: Bren’et Muldrow
Paz
By: Dulce Gómez
Lorraine

By: Jordan Horton
Death of a Salesman

By: Haki Withers
Free

By: Andrea Hammond
Set in Stone

{We hereby commemorate those who committed three or more years to Broad & Central}

Jada Anderson*....................... Class of 2013
Jessica Debrah*....................... Class of 2014
Tiaja Harley*.......................... Class of 2014
Charisma Lambert*.................... Class of 2014
Sierra Stridiron...................... Class of 2014
Jordan Horton*....................... Class of 2015
Dianeth Hernandez*.................. Class of 2016
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Amir Ballard......................... Class of 2014
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Iman Yussuf*.......................... Class of 2015

*Founding Member

Dry Ink

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Muata Nkosi.......................... Class of 2013
Starkwan Bethea..................... Class of 2014
Ebony Felton......................... Class of 2014
Gabrielle Ballard.................... Class of 2015
Camari Singleton...................... Class of 2014
Nicole Ransome...................... Class of 2014
Maymouna Sissoko.................... Class of 2015
Nia Berrian........................... Class of 2015
Yes we created conversations
To birth converse nations and
Yes we have the audacity
To rebel on the top of soap boxes
Because
We are more than late nights and
Poetic spotlights,
More than paper and
Pens or beginnings to your end,
More than unrequited lovers and
Lost souls to found mothers.

We are the people who can take rats and find a star.

We are the people who
Can take unending evil and
Learn to live,
Because we tackle jumbo shrimp and
Know how not to be a stereotype.
We fight to be Good Shepherds and
Nostalgically recollect on what it means to be children again.

So that when we try to believe that we
Are the marigolds that grew in the fall of 1941,
We know that some people just couldn’t find us because
We were here.

We are here
Flourishing in the concrete cracks
at the intersection of
Broad and Central

Write & Be Embraced
Draw & Be Celebrated
Create & Be Remembered

Vol. 6 Issue 1, Coming Soon
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