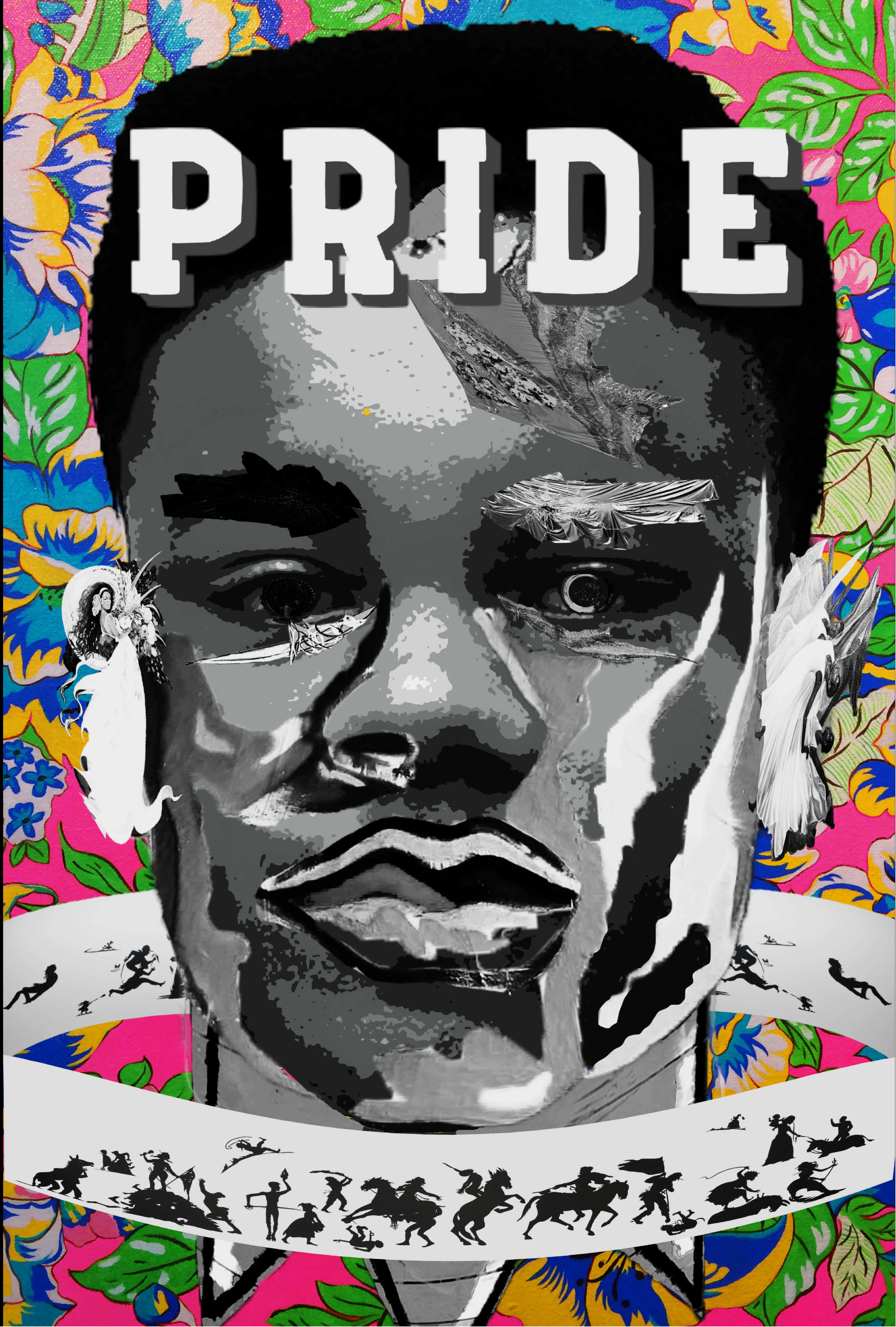


PRIDE





28 days are not enough... **Black History Month is every Month.**

PRIDE

DECEMBER 1, 2019

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A Note To Our Readers

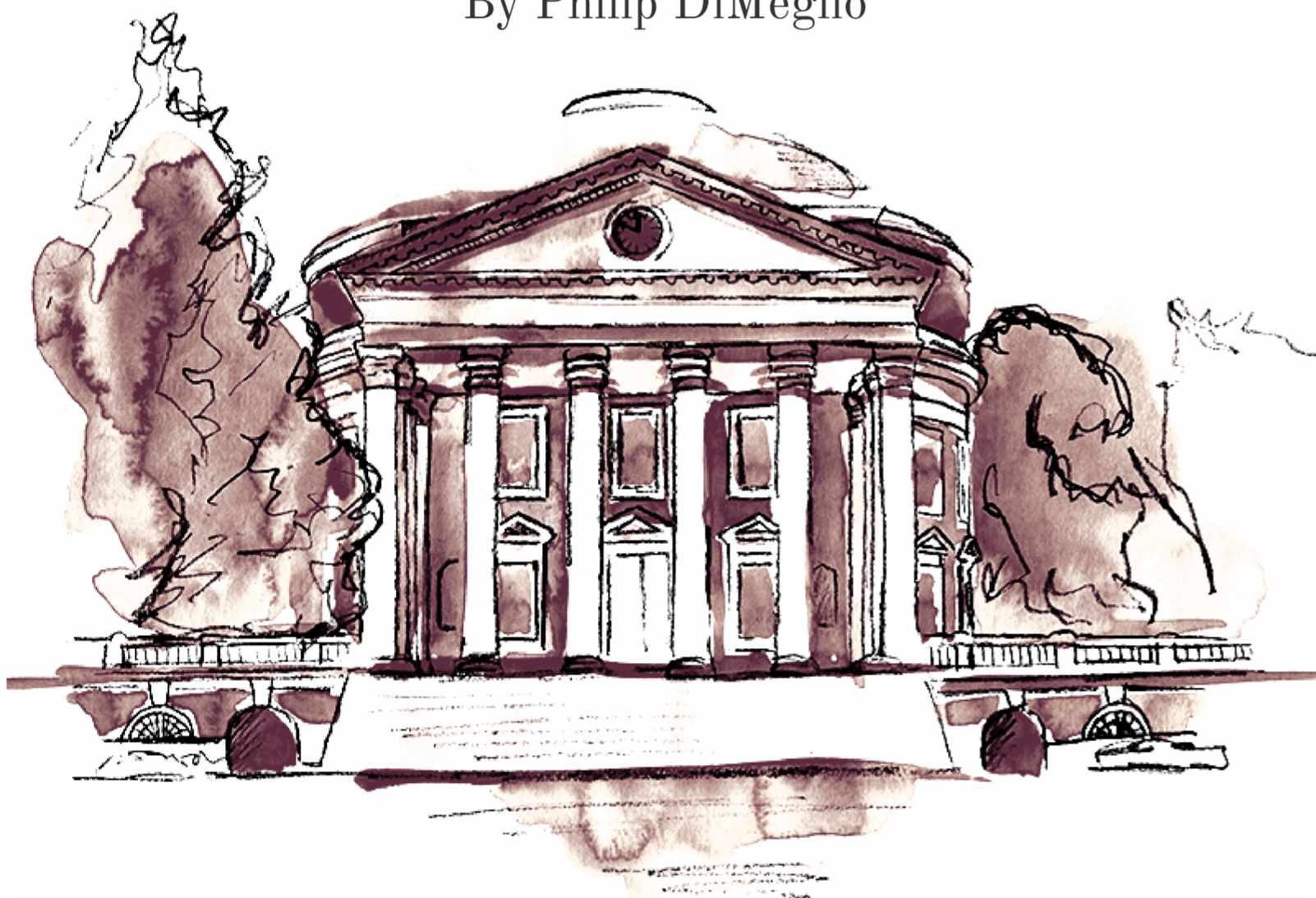
For this rebirth of PRIDE Magazine, we chose the overarching theme of “The Boundaries of Blackness.” This title intentionally allows for fluid and multiple interpretations; just as readers might encounter a piece about a topic they aren’t expecting, we acknowledge that there are many potential approaches to the boundaries of Blackness at this University that we have omitted. As with all exploratory literature, there are limitations to the voices that could be highlighted in this work. We did our best to produce a representative text, but in no way, shape, or form is the goal of our issue to show all the complexity and nuances of Blackness at this University. Furthermore, we would be remiss to ignore the privilege that each of the contributors to this issue holds: that of being able to attend one of the most highly ranked universities in the United States. This privilege, like each of our distinct life experiences, has in part guided our writing of this issue. However, we have made a concerted effort through each step of compiling this issue to bring to light the voices and struggles of people groups within this bounded Blackness who are too often excluded from the University narrative. We organized this issue around both literal and figurative boundaries from a macro to individual level, beginning with access to the University; progressing to institutional structures both in academia and University employment; zooming in on Black Greek life in a discussion of social barriers; and finally, opening the floor to individuals whose Blackness is a source of contention in this space to share their perspectives, feelings, and stories. The titles of each of these subheadings are partially adapted from texts produced by and about Black creators regarding various facets of Blackness. We include these titles as a tribute to our many creative predecessors and, hopefully, as future inspiration for where a true restoration of PRIDE could take the voices of and for Blackness at this University. Thank you for reading.

-Nia Blibo and Katie Cantone

This issue of Pride will address the boundaries placed on and within Blackness at the University of Virginia. To fully grasp the articles in the issue, one needs knowledge of the context behind the presence of Black students at the University. The following three pieces are designed to lay the foundation on which the rest of the magazine stands.

The Boundaries of Accessibility

By Philip DiMeglio



Before diving into the barriers to institutional and community life at the University, the realities of who can and can't gain access to education here in the first place must be deconstructed.

Gregory Swanson technically integrated the University of Virginia (UVA) in 1950--but as recently as 2018, the Black student population only accounted for 6.7% of the student body. However, 35% of African American applicants are offered admission, compared to 30% for all applicants. Although it seems that the University is making an effort to include more Black students in each First-Year class, UVA is failing in at least two very important matters. The first issue regards the remarkably small group of Black students who choose to apply to UVA: out of 37,000 applications to the University in 2016, only 2,200 were sent by Black

students. A second, related issue pertains to the yield rate of Black students: of the Black students that were offered admission in 2016, only 34.6% chose to accept the offer, a rate significantly lower than the overall 42% rate of matriculation of the total pool of accepted applicants. Among other factors, these two issues stem from not only Black students' difficulty or inability to pay tuition, but also from a lesser desire to study at the University than the overall applicant pool. Skyrocketing tuition has been a nationwide trend, especially since 2000, but UVA has delivered extreme increases in tuition, even when posed against the national standard. The national average college tuition has increased by ~70% since 2000, but UVA's out of state tuition has more than tripled, and in-state tuition has more than quadrupled. While these drastic increases affect most populations thinking about schooling at UVA, they especially affect Black households, the median income of which has remained significantly below the national median

income since 2000 (~\$40,000 compared to ~\$60,000, respectively). The issue of Black students' lesser desire to attend UVA involves many more factors than simply facts about tuition and income. Simply put, many students from the Mid-Atlantic or Northeast perceive UVA, Charlottesville, and the South as a whole to be off-limits for college. Since many students migrate toward schools that support their views, a student from the Northeast is less likely to feel that they will be accepted in the South due to its ubiquitous and violent history. This sentiment rings especially true for many Black students who did not grow up in the South. In an interview with a friend who attends Yale University, she shared with me that she "didn't consider a Southern school whatsoever." Furthermore, for her family, "none of [her] cousins considered schools in the South except HBCUs" (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). While she did not cite UVA as particularly problematic when compared with other Southern institutions or mention the White Supremacist attacks of August 2017, which took place while both of us were still in high school, those offered often the first or strongest perceptions of UVA and Charlottesville in many people's minds who were not already very familiar with the University. With such a murderous and terrifying impression of the University and the surrounding area, how can we expect Black students to feel comfortable enough to spend four years of their life here?

Blackness in Spatial Politics

By Kalea Obermeyer

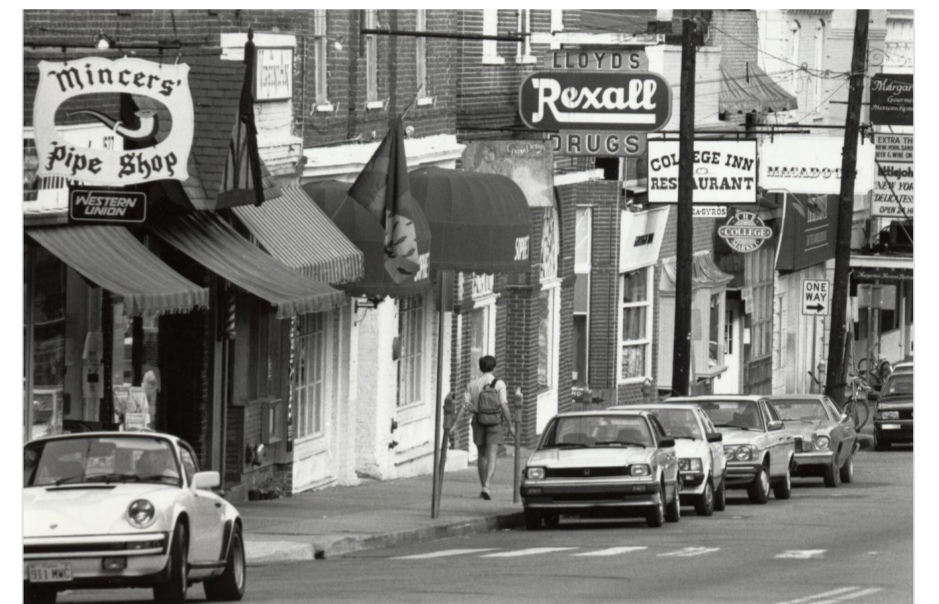
Looking at the Rotunda in the morning versus at night elicits two very different feelings for me. With the Fall months slowly slipping behind us, the red and yellow painted leaves that outline the Rotunda during the daytime brings me a sense of calm. But looking at the Rotunda at night, with its orange-tinged glow and domineering whiteness, the structure looks more ominous than it does welcoming. This image of the Rotunda, looming in the dark, evokes images of torches being wielded on the Lawn by neo-Nazis and White supremacists spitting “Jews will not replace us” and “White lives matter.” In the wake of the rallies of August 11th and 12th, the concept of what constituted a comfortable space for Black students at the University was rendered nonexistent. The rallies begged the question: what spaces can Black students claim at a university literally and figuratively built to devalue Blackness? From an outsider’s perspective, it can be hard to imagine that within 100 feet of Lawn rooms displaying posters and stickers that proclaim phrases like “respect women of color” and “Eliminate the Hate,” bigoted calling out the racist bigotry of a security guard who was harassing a group of Black women.

How I’ve spent many a night at Sheetz, which previously was home to Jaberwoke, whose owner Anderson McClure instituted a racially discriminatory dress code and yet claimed, “There’s not a racist bone in my body.” How I walk past Trinity Irish Pub every day on my way to work, where Martese Johnson was brutally beaten by ABC officials the night of March 17th, 2015.

This history of spatial discrimination cannot be ignored, and it also cannot be what defines the Black experience at UVA. The scope of “Blackness” cannot be limited to historical injustice and oppression; it must also elevate the stories of Black resilience, power, and PRIDE at the University and in Charlottesville to deter the erasure of Black culture in such spaces.

Martese Johnson resonates with this struggle of balancing Blackness in a White space firsthand. For the class of 2021, the students who would begin their first year at the University preceding the rallies of August 11th and 12th, Johnson (2017) provided protestors filled the same space with heinous chants proclaiming “you will not replace us.” But these Grounds, and the greater Charlottesville area, are entrenched in a deep

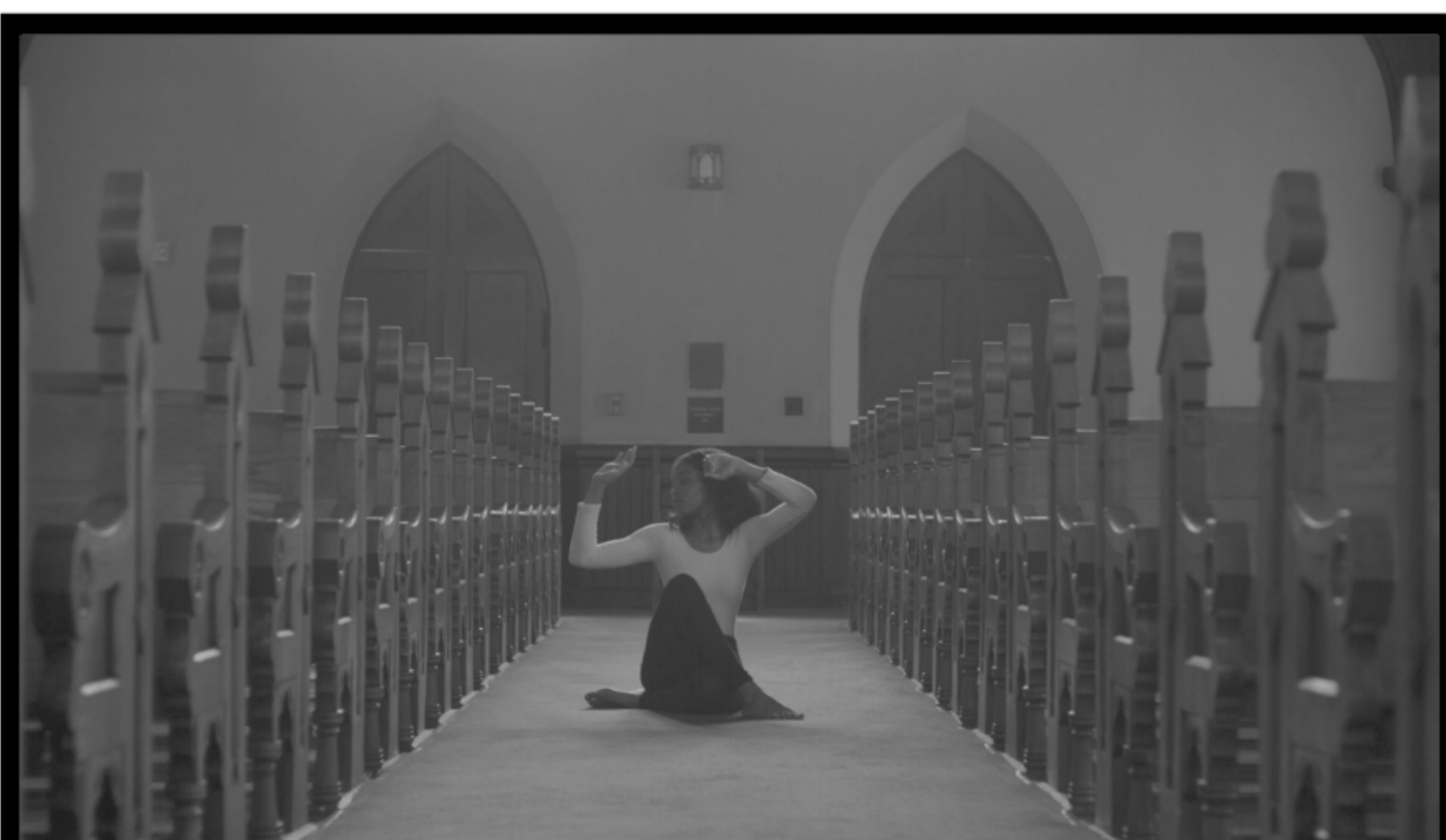
history of hate and prejudice. At UVA, I would be remiss to forget that the Lawn room I sleep in every night was built by enslaved laborers. That Charlottesville and the University of Virginia served as a hub for the study of eugenics helping to validate and institutionalize social perceptions of racial difference. Remiss in remembering times I’ve eaten at Littlejohn’s, where Devone Jennings and Robert Stepney were arrested in 1999 for



The Corner circa 1987

struggling with their decision in attending UVA: “I will not ask you to feel comfort despite a highly uncomfortable university environment, because I prefer to address realities with real solutions. Instead, I ask each of you to find comfort in the challenge – in the possibility of there being a different narrative for students who arrive at the University after you...This is not a UVA phenomenon – it is a world phenomenon – and running away from this reality will be proven futile with each attempt. Instead, learn to address it.”

As Johnson suggests, despite the continually attempted erasure of Blackness at UVA, resilience persists. It must persist. And in those moments where I look at the Rotunda and see the fire from the torches of August 11th, I also see the flames of hundreds of candles from the vigil days later. I see the probate line reveals of NPHC (National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc.) Greek organizations, students stepping with PRIDE. I see Black Lawnies in formation dressed in Black robes on the Rotunda steps, PRIDEful defiance etched on their faces. I see Black Voices performing during Rotunda Sing, contemporary gospel piercing the air with PRIDE. I see organizations like The Living Wage at UVA addressing the University body with a list of demands, petitioning for all workers’ rights. This space, institutionally built to be inaccessible to anyone who isn’t a cis-gendered straight White male, is actively being rendered accessible through PRIDE. And PRIDE is resilient.



Reclaiming Space, Reclaiming Identity

Created by Micah Ariel Watson, Black Enough is an intimate and poetic web series about what it means to survive in the Black community. The story follows Amaya, an insecure dancer, as she checks off ingredients from her #BlackGirlMagic Potion in order to survive at a predominantly White college. Check out this powerful series written and produced by UVA graduates and students at Black-enough.com.



Pictured: The Black Lawnies of the 2016-2017 Academic Year

How are Black Students Still Changing Spaces Today at UVA?

By Justin Smith

When talking about the Lawn as a physical space today, it is so important to recognize who it is supposed to represent. It's obvious looking at the University's history that the Lawn was a space very intentionally built by Black people and not for Black people. But one could make the argument that it remains today a space with similar problems of inclusion. What exactly is the Lawn supposed to be? The best representative group of Fourth-Year students? The students with the best grades? The most "involved" students? It's not explicitly stated what the Lawn is supposed to be, but it's clear that even in recent memory, that description has not necessarily included Black students. In the 2015-2016 school year, zero African-American students were selected to live on the Lawn. So, scratch the representative part, I guess. That sort of exclusion closes off a 'central' student space from having connections with Black students, making it not-so-central to many parts of the student body, and pushing that meaning of the Lawn much closer to one of status and not one of inclusion. The following year, however, a 'calibration committee' was created going forward, tasked with ensuring the selection process would be a more fair and inclusive one. The Black Lawnies selected that year would take this stand a step further, opting to collectively purchase

black robes as opposed to the traditional white ones, demonstrating their presence and importance in the space.

We can also see important, large-scale, and sweeping changes of the spaces at this University, led by Black students following the aforementioned events of August 11th and 12th, 2017. In the days and weeks following the violent march and rally, the student community came together to create initiatives to change the university as a whole. One of the main initiatives consisted of a list of demands for the University administration to undertake, put together and read to former University President Teresa Sullivan by the Black Student Alliance. These demands would later be sponsored by dozens of student organizations and demanded not only the physical safety measures that needed to be put in place for students in preparation for future incidents, but also pushed for tangible efforts towards improving diversity and the representation of Black students and faculty at UVA. These efforts included a rekindled momentum toward acknowledging and sharing the holistic histories of UVA--for instance, through the re-contextualization of problematic icons like the University's founder and the renaming of buildings commemorating anti-Black figures such as slaveholders and eugenicists.

While Black students have been working

to better the present-day inclusion of Black narratives and voices, students are also looking to the past to reconcile the exclusion of Black stories there. In 2010, the Memorial for Enslaved Laborers, a student-led working group was formed with the purpose of pushing for an adequate memorialization to the enslaved laborers that built and ran the University from its inception in 1817 until emancipation. The memorial is meant to be a thoughtful and reflective space, designed with the idea of creating an environment where community members can think openly and critically about the importance of honoring those who created the place we inhabit today. It is another example of how Black students are still changing spaces today, and serves as a symbol of hope for the changes to come looking forward. The memorial is set to open to the public in April of this coming Spring semester.



Pictured: Approved design of the 2020 Memorial

..... TEACHING UVA HOW TO CARE

In order to examine the relationship between the African-American, African Studies Department, and First-Year Black students at the University, we conducted interviews with two First Year students who identify as Black about their experiences with the two respective programs during their time at the university thus far. Based on these interviews, we reflected on how these students' knowledge, or lack thereof, affects the common black student's experience at UVA.

Curriculum and Consciousness

By Jenna Mulvihill, Neha Rana

Charisma Armah

What year are you at UVA?

1st

Tell me about your experience at UVA.

It has been ok. It's decent, I guess.

How many classes have you been enrolled in in the African-American and African Studies Department?

Just one.

Tell me about your experience in this/these class(es).

It's fun. It's a good class.

If you could add a course what would it be?

I think they have all of them...they got Black women, Black power, African American studies in general. So, I don't really know which I'd add.

What are your thoughts on the African-American and African Studies Department overall?

It's cool and I'm glad they have it.

Anonymous

What year are you at UVA?

I'm a First year.

Tell me about your experience at UVA.

It's been fun. I really love my friends, just wish there were more Black people. I went to Howard for Homecoming and it was so lit, I don't know why UVA ain't have that energy. But I do like it.

How many classes have you been enrolled in in the African-American and African studies department?

One class.

Tell me about your experience in this/these class(es).

I really like it. It's about music within the politics of African-American community and I think it's a good topic because it explains the history, but is also fun because it touches on light topics like music.

If you could add a course what would it be?

I don't know...maybe about slavery in America and like how it actually happened.

What are your thoughts on the African-American and African Studies Department overall?

I don't know much about the specifics of it, but I think it's pretty well-run and there a lot of different classes that discuss Black people and our lives.



The University of Virginia First-Year students we interviewed on the topic of the African-American and African Studies (AAS) Department all had one thing in common: they don't know much about it. African-American and African Studies became a department just in the past decade, but there hasn't been much information out to the public about it. The transition to college is already a daunting experience for many in the First-Year class, but what makes it even harder is being able to "find your place and people" in the midst of this life-changing adjustment.

Black students are often overlooked in this process; although there is a concrete AAS Department in place at UVA, the effect of this department is minimal if Black students themselves are unaware about the courses offered and opportunities presented. The lessons to be learned through these classes are ones that have been neglected in the standardized curriculum for high school education nationwide—but how will these lessons meet a wide scope of students if there is no attention being placed on African-American and African Studies? Enlightening students about the nuances and specificities of a department and its curriculum is what makes for a good department. Although heavy emphasis is placed on areas of study surrounding STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), business, humanities, and other majors, little-to-no light is shone upon the importance of AAS,

as exemplified by the responses of the First-Year students we interviewed regarding their sentiments about the department.

The University needs to fix this. There must be more opportunities for students to learn about the African-American and African Studies department. At the beginning of First Year, students should attend mandatory presentations where they can learn about the different departments, especially those that are lesser-known. Otherwise, students will continue to be uninformed about a department in a field that was likely neglected in their educational experience prior to college.

It is emphasized in the liberal arts education that students should learn about a wide range of disciplines, but if African-American and African Studies is excluded from this scope, students miss out on a significant portion of our population's history. Because of this, it feels as if AAS should fall into its own category of liberal arts requirements. This requirement could face some backlash, however, since the discipline of AAS is taught with the notion that history and time don't always necessarily move linearly, but rather are entangled, allowing the past to inform the present more overtly. The further incorporation of AAS as a required discipline would allow for students to further frame their education in a more holistic and well-informed journey through UVA.



Then

Now

University Raises Wages of Full-Time Workers, Adjusts Living Wage Plan to Include Contracted Employees

By Sarah Shin and Emily Ashton

We interviewed both full-time and part-time contracted employees (who chose to remain anonymous) on their thoughts regarding this change. When I entered the Newcomb Starbucks in search of interview participants, two employees were willing to speak with me about the new living wage campaign. The first was a full-time worker who I asked three questions about the change. She was hesitant at first, but then opened up a bit more about her thoughts towards her experiences. There was also a part-time employee present who chimed in occasionally, but seemed unphased by the rest of the questions.

What do you think of the living wage lift to \$15 an hour?

Full-Time Employee: Well, it doesn't start until January 1st of 2020. But I do really think that it will help. It is not much more than we were getting, but it adds up.

Part-Time Employee: Well, I am a part-time employee, so I only got \$13 an hour. But I do just fill in when they need me.

Do you think it will make an impact on your standard of living?

Full-Time Employee: I don't think there will be a ton of things changing in my life. I still have to pay for my transportation here everyday, so the extra money will just go to covering some of those costs.

Why do you think the University did this?

Full-Time Employee: I honestly haven't even thought about it. I mean when we heard it, we weren't complaining, but also I didn't feel like it was something that needed to be celebrated either. Sometimes I think that the University does these things to cover up some of the bigger issues that students and faculty have with the university. I am still thankful for the living wage increase, but I do think that there is still some progress to be made.

Reflection

On October 24, 2019, the University announced that its new living wage plan will include an increased minimum wage of \$15 per hour for more than 800 of its full-time contracted employees, which involve its two food service providers, Aramark and Morrison. Aramark Corporation is a food service provider that has been working with the University of Virginia for more than twenty years. The minimum wage of workers at Aramark is currently \$10.65. Beginning on January 1, 2020, the University's contracted workers (a majority of whom are racial minorities) will benefit from this change.

This shift in policy is connected to a larger issue: the history of centuries of racial discrimination that has faced Black workers at the University. To give a non-contemporary, yet more recent example, the 1996 Muddy Floor Report's examination of the University's racially charged unequal treatment of minorities in the service and maintenance industry highlights the disturbing realities of working conditions and workers' statuses that Black workers have

had to deal with at the University of Virginia in the past--and continue struggling with in the present. On top of this poor treatment, living wage has consistently been a topic of concern as attaining a living wage, especially in a town like Charlottesville, is vital for survival for Black workers. Without a living wage, finding affordable housing--essentially living-in Charlottesville is impossible.

With the implemented change by President Ryan this past October, it is crucial to always keep in mind that in the past, 40 hours of work a week (which is the standard full work week) for most in America is enough to live off of. However, in Charlottesville, as in many other places in this country, working 40 hours a week still leaves people in poverty. It is also important to note that this wage is only for full-time employees. Therefore, while this wage increase is a vast improvement and corresponds to a trend of forward progression at the University of Virginia, concerns for seasonal contracted workers--those who contribute service to the University episodically--and student workers remain painfully relevant.

..... I AM BECAUSE WE ARE



Social Boundaries and University Greek Life

By Rachel Walet and Rob DiCicco

1973 was a momentous year for Black Greek life at the University of Virginia. In 1970, UVA admitted its first class of over 100 African American students. Brothers of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. living in Charlottesville took notice of this. One of those members, Charles Chambliss Jr., a graduate of Hampton University, saw this as an opportunity to establish a historically Black Greek letter organization on the campus of UVA, a historically White institution.

Chambliss’ ideas came to fruition on September 7th, 1973 when the Lambda Zeta chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. was founded on grounds. This brave group of institution-builders paved the way for several other Greek organizations in the fall of 1973 and spring of 1974, like the Kappa Rho Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Zeta Eta Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., and the Iota Beta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc.—to name a few.

By 1980, 8 of the 9 “Divine Nine” organizations associated with the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) had chartered at UVA. Through probates, step shows, and block parties, Black Greek letter organizations have added a rich sense of vibrancy to Black social life at UVA and Grounds as a whole, while also creating strong connections to the Charlottesville community through philanthropy. However, the environment in which these organizations were formed has imposed great boundaries on their activities and success.

In the early years of Black Greek life at UVA, the NPHC had to deal with a Board of Visitors and President (Frank Hereford, President of UVA from 1974 to 1985) who were more concerned about their memberships to Farmington Country Club, an all-white club that over 10% of the UVA faculty belonged to, than their meetings with minority students and organizations. Around this time as well, the recently established African-American Studies major was struggling to obtain the necessary funding it needed to put together programs for its students to cement itself as a legitimate area of study in the college. Nonetheless, these organizations have survived and thrived since 1973, and remain an integral part of Black student life at UVA.

Currently, UVA still has seven of the Divine Nine active on Grounds. Critical to understanding these organizations’ realities, both distinct and shared, is analyzing the different boundaries they face. We interviewed three active members of different chapters, gaining insight into the ways chapter operations and success can be difficult here at UVA. As with many aspects of the human experience, these problems and concerns are inextricably linked with one another. We identified four types of boundaries or barriers that NPHC organizations battle, often reinforcing one another: membership, visibility, financial, and social.

The first thing one must know about the NPHC is that it’s small. The largest chapter at UVA, the Kappa Rho Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (“the Deltas”), has between twenty and thirty current undergraduate members at UVA. Although this is more than four times

the size of some organizations—like the Iota Beta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. (“the Alphas”), which has six current undergraduate members at UVA—their chapter size still poses challenges to organizing events and parties. “We’re comparatively big but comparatively small,” says current Fourth-Year member of the Deltas, Valerie Uduji. For reference, chapters within the Inter-Sorority Council (ISC) and Inter-Fraternity Council (IFC) are generally between fifty and 150 members, and can be even larger during the Spring semester.



A major implication of the NPHC’s size is its visibility and publicity at UVA. “[I feel like] a lot of the Black people who join the [IFC] do so because they don’t really know much about the NPHC,” says current president of the Zeta Eta Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. (“the Sigmas”), John Kanu. At historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), NPHC organizations often have “plots,” or physical markers of their chapter’s presence at the school. These plots are spaces in which current members can congregate and also a point location for generating publicity among non-members. The University is supposedly building plots for UVA chapters, set to be completed by 2021 and located on the Fine Arts Grounds. Uduji questions the location of Arts Grounds, as it is not commonly frequented by most students and visitors to the University.

Nick Smith, a member of the Alphas, feels that UVA doesn’t really draw much attention to the NPHC: “You don’t see much written in the Cav Daily about the NPHC, and I don’t really think UVA cares, which generates an interest problem.”

This lack of interest highlights a constraint on chapter membership: many Black students don’t join NPHC organizations unless they have strong family or friend connections to specific organizations. All three of the members we interviewed named such linkages as one of the main reasons they ultimately joined the NPHC: for Smith, his uncle; for Uduji, family and friends from high school; for Kanu, friends with family legacies.

These three members discussed different ways that UVA could work to increase the visibility of the NPHC, possibly creating

the potential for increased membership. Kanu cited branding concerns, stating “I feel like the school needs to run the NPHC website better. There is technically one, but it’s [outdated]”. Both he and Uduji also mentioned that if UVA were to officially sponsor a step show, they could market to a broader audience and drum up interest about the NPHC.

Increasing membership of NPHC organizations could mitigate other boundaries they often face, namely financial and social. Smith noted the impact that members’ different backgrounds can have on their experience with the NPHC: “A lot of minority students in these organizations have financial limitations and may be first-generation or low-income or both. They might be here on scholarship, but that doesn’t cover fees to join the fraternity.” Thus, not only is there a financial boundary for some to even join the NPHC, but chapters also have limited ability to raise funds due to their small dues-paying bases.

Having fewer financial resources impacts the social capacities of many NPHC organizations. Whereas almost all chapters within the ISC and IFC can

finance and access chapter houses in which they can host social gatherings, only a few NPHC organizations have informal houses. These informal houses are farther off Grounds and often situated in residential, non-student neighborhoods. Uduji expressed her concerns about the disparities between policing of “Rugby Road,” where many ISC and IFC houses and parties are located, and NPHC houses and/or parties: “Whenever we plan a party, we always entertain the possibility that it’s going to be shut down. And a lot of the time, it is. We’re not afforded the comfort of being around an under-policed area like Rugby Road.”

In the past, NPHC organizations would occasionally rent out an IFC house to host a party. In the words of Uduji, however, these “traditionally White fraternity houses are less and less accessible.” Kanu attributed this reality to the IMP Society/Student Hip-Hop Organization party that took place at the Beta Theta Pi (“Beta”) house in Fall 2018. Bouncing partygoers at the door, it was alleged that some Beta brothers routinely allowed White students to enter, while turning away students of color. Kanu noted that after this incident, many IFC organizatio-

ns have been reluctant to host NPHC organizations, often citing liability and national charter concerns as their reasoning.

Largely lacking off-Grounds access, many NPHC organizations rely upon on-Grounds spaces to host their events. Kanu lamented over the poor efficacy of UVA’s Event Planning System, the mechanism through which students reserve spaces: “We had the Student Activities Building booked for a party with all our documentation done a month in advance, and then a week beforehand they told us they lost all the forms and that we were out of luck.” He cited similar instances he’d heard from members of other NPHC fraternities. Kanu eventually contacted local police enforcement to aid with security for the event, and was permitted to hold the event given the police’s security support. But this responsibility fell on him and his chapter themselves, rather than the office supposedly in charge of coordinating administrative details of these events. Concerns about accessing spaces for social events was a consistent theme across the three interviews.

What shone through more than anything from these individuals is the pride they

feel for their chapters and for the NPHC and its work as a whole. “What you do in the community is everything,” Smith noted, “and I joined [the NPHC] because I saw that people on Grounds I respected [were members].” Kanu echoed the strength of the NPHC community, stating, “We have people from every walk of life.” Uduji’s eyes lit up when discussing the strength of her chapter’s sisterhood, emphasizing that many have gone on to do great things, both at and beyond UVA. This is one of the main benefits of Black Greek letter organizations on Grounds: they provide strength, community, and connection for Black students, among a wide array of benefits. Despite facing many boundaries, these organizations persist. However, the work of maintaining themselves is hard enough without the added socio-economic hardships that the University’s places upon them. Therefore, it is UVA’s responsibility to increase its support of these groups— not only to help augment the prominence of the NPHC on Grounds, but to aid the efforts of the student leaders within them. Because without NPHC organizations, Black UVA and the larger UVA community would be faced with a gaping and irremediable hole.





From the Cavalier Daily article “The Fifth Annual Africa Day celebrates Black pride and first-generation students” by Maya Das, photo courtesy of Nate Diemer

.....The Souls of [Othered] Black Folk



Of the Contended Strivings

By Nia Blibo

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

-W.E.B. Du Bois

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois lays out a concept known as double consciousness. A duality, of sorts, that Black people in America constantly live in that separates our identity as Black and American. While this description of existence is accurate for some in the Black community, for others, being Black in America extends beyond fluctuating between the Black and American identities proposed by Du Bois. Although it was significant in beginning to articulate the complexity of understanding “self” as a Black person in America, the concept of double consciousness fails to recognize the roles played by gender, sexuality, and ethnicity.

The absence of gender in double consciousness, is an issue that can be understood through the use of feminist theory

to break down the specific type of gender inequality that Black women face. American author, professor, feminist, and social activist bell hooks proposed that in the United States, we live in a “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.” Hooks attributes the origin of this patriarchy to the spread of Christianity during colonization. I argue that this patriarchy allows for the oppression of women of all races, but the intersection of white supremacy and patriarchy creates a combination of oppression that makes Black women one of the most oppressed groups in the world. American lawyer, civil rights advocate and leading scholar of critical race theory, Kimberly Crenshaw, coined the term intersectionality to describe the interconnected nature of social categorizations

such as race, class, and gender. Intersectional theory takes into consideration how these factors apply to a given individual or group, and recognizes how their overlapping can heighten the effects of interdependent systems of discrimination, and leave individuals at an even greater disadvantage. Therefore, the idea of double consciousness in its inception was too narrow to be representative of all Black people because it never took into consideration the hardships unique to Black women. Hence, to be Black, American, and a woman, is to live within a state of triple consciousness. Additionally, Blackness is not monolithic. There is no one way or right way to be Black, and it would be naïve to ever expect that from such a large group of people. Yet, at times within the United States it feels that the bou-

ndaries of Blackness are so narrow and confined, that if you don't fit into those boundaries you are somehow less Black. These limitations are farcical, especially considering that the African diaspora stretches to all corners of the globe and includes people of different faiths, nationalities, sexual orientations, and other identities. However, in the United States, there is an erasure of diversity within the Black community and a homogeneity associated with it. In the United States, if you are racialized as Black, you are automatically assumed to be Black-American (identify with the generations of Black people who were brought here as slaves and never returned to Africa) rather than African (identifying directly with continent).

This distillation of Blackness into a single image is an issue for a plethora of reasons. First, there is a difference between being black or Black. At first glance the difference between the two may seem small, but the case of the letter "b" signifies a difference in meaning. Being black is something that everyone who is a part of the African Diaspora is because it is defining blackness as a race. However, being Black is a state of belonging and identifying with Blackness as an ethnicity. This distinction is important because the legacy of the Transatlantic slave trade erases the national identity of Black people who were transported out of Africa, making Blackness into an ethnicity. However, for those of us who are immigrants we may be black but not identify as Black. Additionally, for those of us who are children or grandchildren of immigrants, these boundaries of Blackness can leave us in a gray area.

As a child of immigrants, I have had to contend with my identity of being African(specifically Liberian), being Black, and being American. I do choose to identify as Black because I've grown up in America within Black culture, society also never allowed me to be anything but Black. I always have been, and always will be, automatically perceived and treated as a Black woman, for better or for worse. It is not as if I could say, "Wait, don't brutalize or mistreat me because I'm not Black American, I'm Liberian." However, growing up around some people who identified as Black American, I was told that "I wasn't Black." To them, I do not fit within the bounds of Blackness, and my African-ness others me. It makes me different, so I do not fit into the idea of what being Black in America is supposed to be. Therefore, because I live in the U.S. and I am a woman, Black, and, my family comes from somewhere else, I live within a state of quadruple consciousness.

In the Black community there is also another state of being that is not always welcomed: queerness. With colonization, the spread of Christianity led to the mass condemnation of different religions, lifestyles,

and sexual orientations. One imprint of this legacy was the adoption of queer-phobia throughout the globe, whether that be in relation to sexual orientation or gender. Although queer-phobia is an international phenomenon, the African Diaspora is seen as its breeding ground. In the Black community, regardless of where you are, being queer is seen as something that "we don't do." Queerness is viewed as stemming from the white community, and it is commonly believed that it is proximity to whiteness that makes Black people queer. This is a false and damning narrative that leaves Black queer people in a space of contention. We must try to negotiate our Blackness and our queerness in order to exist. Hence, to be Black, a woman, African, queer, and American – as I am – is to live within a state of quintuple consciousness.



So why is all of this relevant? As noted above, the United States is a "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy," and as such, Black and LGBTQ+ people live in state of constant violence. Furthermore, the intersection of these identities' leaves people in a state of perpetual danger, especially when gender and gender identity is taken into consideration. Although we can not directly address or fix the systems of oppression in this country here at the University of Virginia (UVA), I propose that the easiest way to assist students with their effects is by providing them with a space to congregate and find community. Being at UVA, a predominantly white institution (PWI), all spaces are automatically going to be white spaces.

We live in a white supremacist society, and UVA, being a microcosm within a macrocosm, is no exception. As such, Black people are subjected to violence on a day-to-day basis. Thus, it is important for us to have built-in spaces in order to find solace and comfort in an institution that wasn't made for us.

There are a myriad of organizations and institutions on Grounds to support Black students. The Black Student Alliance and Office of African American Affairs offer spaces for Black students from all over the diaspora to find and build community with one another. There is a space for African Students in the Organization of African Students and the East African Student Association. The list goes on and on for all the spaces that Black students can go to find community. However, none of these spaces incorporates Black queer people at the University.

While the university does have a LGBTQ+ Center and Queer Student Union, these spaces are not specifically designed for students of color, and unfortunately, inherently white. . These communities still solely serve white queer people and are places of contention and potential violence for Black queer folk.

Unfortunately, the Black spaces listed above are an uneasy site for Black queer people because of the queer-phobia within the larger Black community. Additionally, being a woman in Black space it often feels that your sexuality is a commodity rather than a part of your identity because of intensity and subjection of the male gaze. So, where do we go? Where do we find a space within this microcosm? And how does that translate to the macrocosm? How can we continue to improve upon the duality proposed by Du Bois, and recognize a consciousness that is accessible to people like me? And how can we put that new multi-faceted consciousness into action here at UVA? Because I feel this fiveness, — an American, a Black person, a woman, a Liberian, a bisexual; five souls, five thoughts, five unreconciled strivings; five warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps me from being torn eunder. Where do I go?

The page is decorated with intricate line drawings of flowers and leaves. In the top-left corner, there is a large, stylized leaf with many fine, curved lines. In the top-right corner, there is a flower with many petals, each having fine lines. In the bottom-left corner, there are several flowers and leaves, some with fine lines and others with more solid shading. In the bottom-right corner, there are more flowers and leaves, some with fine lines and others with more solid shading.

SISTER OUTSIDER

by Nia Blibo

(A Rendition of "I, Too" by Langston Hughes)

I, too, sing America.
I sing of Black America.

I am the darker, queerer sister.
They send me in the closet
When company comes,
But I love,
And I laugh,
And I fight on.

Tomorrow,
I'll be in the light of day
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me
"Hide in the closet"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
How beautiful my love is
And be ashamed-I, too, am Black.

I, too, sing America.

Current Students Talk Black

What It Means to be Black at UVA--and What It Doesn't

by Katie Cantone and Karishma Srikanth



The aim of this group interview was to learn from the voices of Black students at the University who don't fit into the description of normative "Blackness," specifically from an ethnic standpoint. Through the conversation we had with these students, we not only defined what that normative definition looks, sounds, and feels like, but began to dissect the impacts on identity formation and sense of belonging at UVA if one does not or cannot assimilate to that category. Although coming from distinct non-African American backgrounds and heritages, the participants we interviewed coincidentally all identified as female, and that factor ended up shaping the nature of their responses and the trajectory that the conversation took in insightful ways.

*Editor's note: The participants' responses have been organized within subheadings and are not necessarily presented in chronological or sequential order. Many of these responses are excerpts, for purposes of length; the interview was over 1.5 hours long. To access the entire interview transcript, please contact Katie Cantone at ksc5my@virginia.edu.

Interviewees:

Cecile, Third Year, Liberian/Liberian American

Funmi, Fourth Year, Nigerian American

Tayah, Third Year, Afro-Latina (Puerto-Rican)

FINDING COMMUNITY

On Transitioning to UVA

Cecile: In high school I never really hung out with specific people from my ethnic group, I've always hung out with people from African American backgrounds and stuff like that. So coming to UVA not being any Liberians, like, a little amount, really wasn't that shocking of a change...I just kind of hang out with people from other African countries, or African Americans, or people of Hispanic descent or Latino descent, just kind of mix it up.

Tayah: It was much easier for me to transition at UVA because I was raised around White people...It was much harder for me to adjust into the community here of people of color because I was so used to being around White people...But then getting to know people, some of my closest friends are people of color

and they've helped me integrate myself so I didn't feel like I was on the outskirts. But it definitely took some adjusting to actually try to make friends that were more like me.

Cecile: I went to a majority African American high school, being one of the few African students who went there. Especially, in Philly at the time, being African, people weren't really understanding the culture sometimes. There was a lot of barriers, so sometimes you get made fun of, like people would say "oh, Africans stink," just a lot of ignorant stuff.

Funmi: I'm born and raised in Richmond, Virginia, but as a child of immigrants, so both my parents came directly from Nigeria...they raised me very much within the culture, and so my elementary school was primarily Black...And then, in high school, I went to a predominantly White high school and I was in the specialty center where I was one of three Black kids in my entire cohort, so that's when I became more comfortable being around White people. So coming to UVA it was like, I knew the kind of ignorant stuff that would come my way, like somebody would always try to say the N word, and all that type of stuff, and I would just be like, "no, you can't say that." In terms of me fitting into the Black community...with the help of my peer advisor as well as friends that I've met through CIOs that I did--so like the Organization for African Students and Fashion for a Cause--I feel like because I did Fashion for a Cause my first semester here it really helped me get acclimated into the Black community. And then doing OAS and Africa Day my second semester. Because I feel like when the Fourth Years, so class of 2020, I feel like when we first got in was when there was that shift toward being accepting of African culture. Whereas in the past, it was like, oh, my parents are Nigerian but I'm Black, I'm from PG County, and stuff like that...Within Black UVA, it was through the help of joining clubs, but then actually being able to be out there, express my African identity, that hasn't started happening until recent years. When it became cool to be African.

Cecile: I still kind of felt like everyone within OAS kind of had people that they were in a community with, like you said, it's Nigerians and Ghanaians here but I never really felt like I had...someone to relate to. Like Guineans have at least one other person; like, "you're Guinean as well, I have one person here," but it's like, I never had them. Like dang, there's no Liberians that go here. But it's okay, I can still try to relate to other people's culture.

On Choosing an Identity

Tayah: So, when I was young, I was raised thinking I had to choose one over the other. Just because my mother had to make that choice when she was young, so I was raised that way...you kind of always have to put on a

different hat depending on who you're with...It's just hard to get into the Latinx community or Hispanic community here. It's much harder than trying to get into the Black community here...And infiltrating or getting in and making friends, it's just much more difficult. Especially given that I don't speak Spanish as fluently as everyone else...But the Black community has always- they've never made me question if I'm Black, if that makes sense. . . I've noticed a lot of hierarchy in people of color too. White people think they have the right to rank us. And at the bottom is Black people...so if you happen to be mixed, and anything else than Black, they would much prefer you claim this other half...I'm still tokenly mixed, so it's like, oh, yay, we have this one mixed friend. But like. They'd much prefer I claim to be Latinx more than I claim to be Black.

Nia: Specifically in reference to the Black community, have you ever felt othered because of your African heritage or Africanness?

Funmi: So yes and no. So I would say no because for me, being Nigerian, a lot of Africans here when they come to UVA, they're either Nigerian or they're Ghanaian, and so I've never felt othered in that case. I have had instances where Black people have told me to stop talking about it. They're like, oh, well, you talking about you being Nigerian makes me feel shitty because I don't know where I come from. And so it's kind of like, I get that, but do you just want me to alter the conversation when I'm with you, or do you just want me to completely cut off my identity?

Cecile: I do have a couple friends who don't know where they're from...they've never been like, "Cecile, stop talking about Liberia all the time."...They're actually pretty interested in it. Cuz a lot of people really don't really know much about Liberia. It's just one of those countries people just aren't educated about at all, so when I do talk about myself, people do listen.

BLACKNESS AND BELONGING

On Defining Blackness at UVA

Karishma: Is there a type of Blackness that is most accepted [at UVA]?

Funmi: I would definitely say being from Philadelphia and not from the NOVA/Virginia area...sometimes you really can't relate...to this environment, since the majority of people are from NOVA and like Virginia as a whole...It's been interesting learning about the whole NOVA culture and stuff like that...that's more accepted, upper-middle class Black.

Tayah: These NOVA kids think that Black people are all the same--from Philly, or from Atlanta, they're all these hood rat city people...Some of them from NOVA kind of...

I don't want to say 'forget they're Black,' but they assimilate with the White people and they forget us...It's okay to want to join a White sorority or have all these White friends because I was raised around White people. But I know I'm not going to betray one of my Black people for the White people's approval. There's always the NOVA Black kids that meet someone from the city, and so they switch it. It's like a bad code-switching. The minute I said I was from Atlanta, people started trying to relate to me, and I'm like, please stop. It's fine. I'm just like you, and I was raised around White people too...they feel like because middle-class and lower-class students have this better life because we're more "real," and we're more "authentically Black," and they don't understand that White people planted that idea of Blackness in their head. And so they try to switch to make us feel better, but it really just makes us feel like crap.

On Spotighting

Funmi: It's overwhelming the amount of dialogue White Americans at UVA feel like they have. It's irritating...they'll be like, "Oh, were you born in Nigeria?" No...I was born and raised in Richmond. "Oh, really? Cool! Do you go there often?" The last time I went was when I was eleven...the ignorant questions that you get.

Tayah: Another thing here at this school, the minute you say you're Puerto Rican, Nigerian, Liberian, "Oh, do you know blablabla?" No! I have never met that person a day in my life! It's always some person I've never heard of before!...It's ridiculous. Even the Black people ask you. It's so weird! White people probably wouldn't ask a random Black person if they knew a random Black person here. Unless they were African or Latinx. It's like we're niche groups, they feel like we all have to know each other...you don't ask Catholic people if they know other Catholic people.

On Black Femininity

Nia: Are there any instances that you've had to reckon with your identity as Black and female at UVA and just in general life?

Funmi: So this past weekend, there was an instance where somebody that's an athlete had gotten called out for basically fetishizing the fact that his White girlfriend had started becoming really tan. And someone called him out on it and he was like, well...he basically was saying that he prefers White girls to Black girls because Black girls are shared within the community. Excuse me?...First of all, ain't nobody sharing me, sir...you need to watch your privilege, because based on what I was told, he identifies as Black when it's convenient for him...you look at me, there's no "she's mixed," no, I am Black, I identify as Black, I look Black. Looking at me, are you all of a sudden gonna assume that, oh, I'm the community girl because I'm Black?

Cecile: When I was a First Year I was more seen because you're fresh and new, you're not from here, no one really knows you...but now as you're a Second Year, you're kind of, not used, but people don't really see you as a Black woman anymore here. I feel kind of invisible going to this university...As a Black woman, you don't feel as seen, especially through the eyes of the athletes, with the whole praising the White girls and craziness that's been going on lately. The football players, they definitely have created a culture that has been very toxic to be a Black woman. And it's something that's really not spoken on enough. And especially the girls who hang out with them and encourage their behavior...as a Black woman, how can you do that when they treat Black women like that? But you're still their best friend? You have to call them out and you're not supposed to condone this behavior.

On Beauty

Funmi: Me, I'm a fuller figured woman...These features on a Black woman? Eh. But if you have the same features on Becky that lives off of Gordon, oh, everyone wants her...I will literally be at UVA, thinking I'm ugly, thinking I'm fat, thinking I'm not pretty...Being here, if you don't fit that picture perfect image of what guys want here at UVA, you're automatically put into this bubble or this melting pot where it's like no one wants you.

Tayah: And then I'm Latina, the minute that comes out, I fail the test. I fail it, and that's it. They just don't talk to me. Except for White dudes, for some reason. White dudes will be like, oh, Black, okay. And then I'll be like, "oh, yeah, my mom's Puerto Rican," and they're like, "WOOOOAH."...You didn't like me when I was Black, don't like me now.

On Dating

Tayah: White guys will only date Black girls that are what they call 'ghetto' if they feel like they want to feel like they're dating the 'real' Black woman. If you sound like me, and you're from NOVA or something, they're not going to date you...you've got to be darker. Every mixed couple I've seen here, or interracial couple, either she's mixed, like, mixed-mixed, with the curly hair, or she's dark-skinned.

Cecile: I haven't dated any undergrads for a minute...they really don't see you as a person anymore, unless you're a First Year, someone who they find impressionable or easy to plot on or manipulate...once you kind of see what's going on, you have experience...they don't really acknowledge Black women here anymore.

Tayah: There's a thing in the Black community called blacklisting. If you are caught even socializing with someone's man—as a First Year, and you don't even know who anyone or anyone's man is—you are done. No sororities for you, no clubs for you, no friends

that are upperclassmen for you, because your boyfriend or someone else's boyfriend was caught cheating on them with you. How is that fair?...Black women will literally talk mad crap on another Black girl...Why are we competing with each other? I don't understand that.

LINGUISTIC BARRIERS
On Code-Switching

Tayah: Socially I've had a rough three years. I'm not gonna lie. It felt like I was in a liminal space between cultures. Just because on the Black side, I did not know how to code-switch until I got here. My code-switching was from Latina to Black, and that was it. Or Black that sounds White, as I [was told] when I got here. Socially I had a hard time just because I sound the way I do, and I'm out of state, and I'm also mixed, so all of that added to like, "eh, you're kinda Black, but not really."...I might not present as the stereotypical Black girl but I really do have my roots in that community and I wouldn't betray that community. I think I had to prove that because a lot of people have a misconception.

Cecile: I think there's nothing wrong with being able to code-switch here and there, just like even at home, I can be able to talk to my family in [proper] English. Or I could talk to my friends with the Philly little terms or something like that. But I can talk to other people and switch it up. So I think everyone kind of code-switches it up nowadays. There's nothing wrong with that. You change it up depending on where you are.

Funmi: I think the one thing I hate about code-switching though is...the accent I use when I'm talking with my African people, and I have the one when I'm talking with my

Black friends, and then, if I'm in a professional setting. But then people are always like, "oh, you're talking White." No, I'm talking proper. I can speak vernacular, I can speak proper. And when I choose to speak proper, they're like, "oh, you sound really White."...Is it because I went to high school with a lot of White people? And they say, "Oh, you sound like you feel like it makes you sound like you're better than everyone." I'm not tryna act like I'm better than everyone, and I don't want to give off the assumption that I'm better than everyone. This is just how I speak in professional settings. And I don't think that 1) I should feel bad about that and 2) I don't feel like I should change that because it's gotten me to where I am now.

Tayah: I feel that too. My two friends that are First Years are actually from Philly. And they code-switch, but when they're around me, they get really Philly, and it's awesome...I think I've kind of picked up how Philly they get, and so my mom came to visit, and she's not used to that, she's used to me sounding like this, so she heard me getting Philly with them and she lost her mind: "What is wrong with you?!" And I said, listen, this is how you survive at UVA. You find your friends, and you get comfortable with them, and you talk with them, cuz if you sound like this all day every day, you're gonna drive yourself insane. If you can't code-switch, then you're gonna be a little bit on the outskirts. So I learned very quickly. And [my mentees] definitely taught me this year. Because when they first met me...they were like, "you talk White, and I'm not talking to you." They straight up told me I appreciate the honesty, because...I had a bunch of Black kids as my mentees and I was like, why is no one talking to me? And they

were like, straight up, it's cuz you talk like that. You need to learn how to switch it, because we're not gonna talk to you, we're not gonna trust you with information until you do.

On The Power of Names

Funmi: One thing that was a huge pain--it's still a huge pain now, and I actually went off on one of my professors yesterday because of it...My government name: 14 letters long, first/middle/last name, very African, you know I'm not American. And as a result, people feel like, oh, well, I can spell your name wrong because it's a difficult name...People feel more comfortable getting things incorrect...If you're my professor and I've known you since my first year, there's no WAY you should be getting my name wrong when you spell it...Because if you can spell my lab partner's name right and she has an American name, you're taking away my identity by spelling my name wrong. You're taking away the meaning of my name by spelling my name wrong. And you're disrespecting me, my family, and my culture by spelling my name wrong and thinking that it's okay repetitively. And it's not even the same way misspelled. It's kind of like, let me type this and whatever happens, I'll send it.

Cecile: Growing up, I wasn't as comfortable telling people about me being African until later on, my senior year, because the environment was a bit too ignorant and hostile towards Africans, so I kind of was just like, I'm just not going to share anything about myself. But coming to UVA and meeting other people from different African countries, it was pretty refreshing, but at the same time, people don't really understand you that well because they don't really know much about where you're from or who you are...Especially with my name being Cecile



...and the last name Smith as well, is not an African name at all, so people are like, “Are you African? Are you really African, though?” And people kind of have this connotation like Liberians aren’t really African. And they really don’t know that the majority of Liberians are traditionally indigenous people...So people need to kind of know that we are African, stop saying, “are you guys African? You have Williams last name, Smith last name”--stop with the stereotypes.

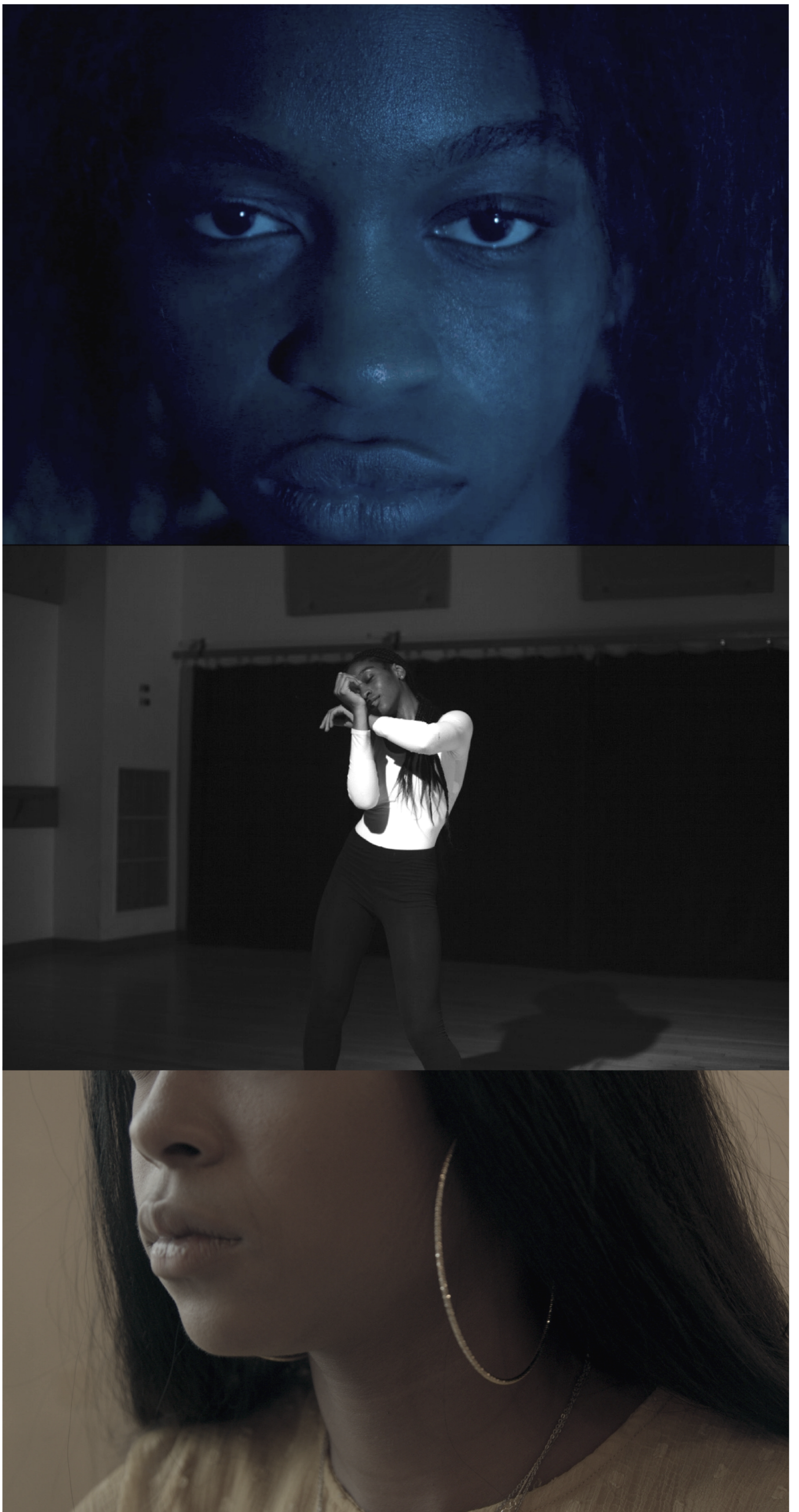
Tayah: I get that a lot, cuz I have a Black last name, I guess...I get questioned a lot by the Latinx community if I’m actually Puerto Rican...I was raised Catholic, my family speaks Spanish, my grandmother is the most Puerto Rican woman you could meet in your life...but I still get those questions.

On Multilingualism

Funmi: In terms of culture, I would say my parents raised me to be like, you’re Nigerian...And I mean, with a name like mine...how can you walk around and say “I’m ‘just’ Black?” But I got to UVA and I met the other Africans here, and I always felt like I was too African for them. Like I was too in touch with my culture. I almost felt like sometimes I would just have to tone it down. My parents speak Yoruba, I can understand it fluently and I can speak it pretty well to people. I can hold a simple conversation. But then I have some friends who are Nigerian as well and they don’t speak the language of their parents. Their parents raised them like, “Okay, behave American, assimilate to the culture.” Which is a very common thing...I come here and I’m really into the culture language-wise and then I meet my other African friends and they don’t get it at all, and sometimes I feel like I have to tone it down just so they don’t feel uncomfortable.

Tayah: I face the opposite with the Latinx community. I don’t speak Spanish well enough for them...the minute I say I don’t speak Spanish, they think that means I don’t understand Spanish. So they start talking...I tell them, I just understood what you said, and then they feel bad. And it’s like, you should! Because you sat there are basically kicked me out of this little group because I don’t fit in...I just can’t communicate my thought fast enough. You can, cuz you were taught that first. My parents told me straight-up, you’re Black and that’s it, and they taught me English first, and then moved on with my life.

Cecile: Not speaking your language is a big thing for me where I do feel ashamed about a lot...my grandma would speak it and my parents would speak it but they don’t speak it all the time, just like to each other when they’re discussing something they don’t want us to hear...language is such a big thing and I really didn’t take the time to really understand it and learn it. It’s like I’m missing a lot of who I am by not really knowing my tribal language.



Photos from the “Black Enough” Project. Find image at www.black-enough.com

IN CONCLUSION

On ‘give and take’

Funmi: I look at people that go here I’ve literally known since middle school, and their dream was to come to UVA, nothing else. My dream was to go to college, right? And then they’re here having the best times of their lives, joining sororities, doing all these fun things, and me, it’s like I’m here having to overcome all these things...I don’t deserve this

shit! All these boundaries and obstacles that I didn’t do for myself...external factors that are prohibiting me from reaching my goal or make it that much harder to reach my goal... I thought I was going to meet my husband when I got here...no. It’s so hard being at this university...I’m over here like, so who am I gonna come back for YAR with? It’s difficult, give and take, I guess. ★

My Constant Companion, Solitude

By Tolliver Mance

Sit in the front and sit up straight. Do not talk during class. Do not ask questions, but answer them correctly. Be respectful. Be intelligent. Be yourself. This is the advice my mother gave me from day one as the Black student in predominantly white spaces. I was always aware that something was different about myself and my positionality, but I never questioned my environment. I was the token Black girl--- always a leader, friends with everyone, successful and hardworking. I mastered the art of bringing my own chair and taking a seat at the table. And at first, I never noticed why everyone else's chairs were already there for them. While I learned United States History, I also learned that I'm the favorite person to steal glances at during classes on slavery. While I read plays in English, I realized that my white classmates don't think the N-word is all that bad. I balanced life lessons between my textbooks and discovering the isolating experience of being a Black woman. I didn't blink an eye when I was constantly mixed up with the one other

Black student. No, I'm not Morgan. I'm Tolliver. That's okay, it happens all the time. I'm Tolliver, though. I'm Tolliver. I'm Tolliver. I'm Tolliver. Once I noticed how tiring it was, I was arriving at college, and my identity's performance was placed on an even larger stage.

Here, like everywhere, and like always, I cease being myself when I enter the classroom. In a sea of white peers, my sole Black face becomes the faces of many. I am Rosa and I am Harriet. Barack Obama, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison. Deemed expert on Martin vs Malcolm, the quote book of Maya Angelou, and record player for Motown. I am the embodiment of Brown v Board of Education and the manifestation of the Little Rock Nine. Just one generation away from when my father integrated Woodberry Forest School. He was the first Black student to step on their perfectly manicured grounds. I walk on different grounds now in a different time, but I'm trying to unravel the same injustices and create the same solidarity. I serve as the representative of my entire race, tasked with the preponderance of its

reputation. Do I seem smart enough? Am I being a leader? Does the professor like me? Am I making a lasting impression? I have to make sure I participate enough, but I can't be the Angry Black Girl during discussion. How does my voice sound? How does my face look? Be graceful, be eloquent, be strong. These challenges both push me forward and hold me back as the spotlight shines upon me. But I know this classroom. I know this group project dynamic. I know this casual comment that really means something else. I know the lowered expectations, the belittlement before I even open my mouth. I've been inside this room my whole life, only now it has gotten bigger while the sound of my voice stays the same. I will just speak louder. Take up more space. Continue to carry my own chair into the room and place it at the head of the table. Be more unapologetically Black with the boldness it requires. And remember to: *Sit in the front and sit up straight. Do not talk during class. Do not ask questions, but answer them correctly. Be respectful. Be intelligent. Be yourself.*



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