Ebony Axis
Thank you for taking the time to read Ebony Axis. Please accept our apologies for the misprint in page numbers in the table of contents and our contributor Val Salvador’s class year as she is in the graduating class of 2017 not 2018. Thanks again for your continued support!
Editor's Note:

Ebony Axis started off as a poetry zine that exhibited diverse perspectives of Black womanhood on the Brandeis campus. Ebony represents the rich beauty of our skin and Axis speaks to the single-axis framework that disregards the intersections of racial and gender discrimination Black women continue to face. Another name for this concept is intersectionality. Both of these terms were introduced by attorney and civil rights advocate Kimberlé W. Crenshaw.

Last year, seventeen remarkable Black women contributed to this zine and changed the way we engage in conversations about Black womanhood at Brandeis. Their poems had the power of telling our stories while serving as a platform for empowerment. Their stories created a space where Black women can feel secure and heal. I like many others were so moved by these experiences that I decided to produce another publication. These stories are more significant than ever in the aftermath of Ford Hall 2015 and the continuing quotidian and physical violence inflicted on Black women. In order to honor these stories, I decided to add a prose component of the zine that incorporates storytelling. Storytelling among Black women is a form of social activism and promotes communal healing. Storytelling restores our complexity and serve as a form of activism in response to our daily experiences in life including individual experiences of social injustices.

When you read these poems, I don’t want you to simply consume the stories told, I want you to learn from them. Consider filling in the writing prompts. Let this zine be a space where you can candidly and unapologetically express your truth. Allow yourself to be free-whatever that means to you.

I want to extend my thanks to the contributors this year, our illustrator Justus Davis and my friends and family who inspired me to continue this transformative project.

LaShawn Simmons ’18
Editor
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To the lost souls

From 13 to 50
25, and every age in between
For all my brown brothers left red by the boys in the blue
This is for you

For all my sisters whose stories are never witnessed
This for you
For all my people who's goosebumps have felt black privilege
The privilege
To give a white officer nerves in his stomach that turn into itching, angry, trigger fingers
This is for you
To my caskets souls in the stands on trial for their own murder
Who can't console their own mother
As she cries
Cause the jury just killed her boy for the second time.
This is for you

To my brothers
Who looked down and saw their communities cry
No tissues for the tears
Blood stain as they dry
To my sisters
Who looked down and saw their community scream
Through the stitched mouths,
American has seamed
This is for you

To all my people whose lips could only mumble the lies of the pledge of allegiance
Who could never understand why
they even fixed their pen to write justice...
for all
This is
For all too black to be innocent
For all my too awoke to conscious to be alive in prison
For all my questions asked a couple bullet holes too late
For all my too suspicious
To all my ears chrigging
As the officer said he would do it all again
To all my souls who died for the third time
When the audience applauds for him
To all my necks hung, and tree branches that grew stronger
When the judge gave the officer back his badge

This is for all my not guilty verdicts
This is for all
all the people who gave me the anger to write this
1191
And counting
This is for all my victims in the making
This is for all my lives that have been taken

Just knows that they hung our bodies on the tree along time ago but soul still hasn’t rottened
And even though they still picking for us the same way that had us picking cotton
Doesn’t mean we’ve stopped plotting
Cause we hear the screams of Rice, Brown, and Garner
Just as loud as we heard the cries of the babies left in the water

We will not ignore you!
Because we have injustice tattooed on our blacks
We are just like you
Because we produce fear with our melanin
We are just like you
Because we are bullets shot too fast
We are just like you
Because we are illegal choke hold grasp
We are just like you
Because we are bodies left lying in the ground
We are just like you

We cannot ignore you
To my lost souls
We will fight for you
Because we are you!

Victoria Richardson '20
Writer's Block

Dizzying pencils
Glare at my barren notebook
Unraveling veiled woes
Stabbing myself with my venom
Because
I ain't got no poems left inside me

Ancestors chewed them all
They didn't feel like regurgitating inspiration
until I read them seriously.

LaShawn Simmons '18
An Ode to Black Bodies on Campus...Ford Hall 2015 Reflection

We’re supposed to feel grateful to receive access to a five-figure per year education. We’re supposed to feel privileged. Honored. Blessed to just be here. “Here,” they said. “Let’s throw a few coins your way to remind you of how grateful you should be that we allowed you access into our facilities. It matters not whether you earned it. You make our numbers look good,” they said, they believe.

We’re supposed to be quiet. Obedient. Docile and content that we’re present in spaces not meant for us to exist. Spaces with few of our faces trapped in the struggles of honoring our unfolding identities and strategically maneuvering through politics of respectability where Blackness is never welcomed. Spaces that are quick to remind those of us who embrace our Blackness how grateful we should be.

Fast forward to the steps where we stand with some of those same strained faces occupying the space of the highest office on campus. Steps where we utter words threatening our survival but desperate to be heard. Words we know not to speak lightly because words from Black bodies are a natural rebellion toward the violence of Whiteness.

Standing on a campus toting social justice,
A campus on colonized lands into which we invest energy in the pursuit for professional, respectable advancement.

We pay to speak. We pay to be heard. We pay to be respected. Our dollars carry the same pain, hurt, and residue of White supremacy that stained the five fingers of felonious forefathers as they sold our ancestors. None of it is catered to what we need to succeed in the best way for us because regardless of the respectability, our Blackness is inherently a part of the experience we bring to the world. And we cannot shut it off.

But it – our Blackness – IT will shut it down. It being the feeling of being grateful and happy to be here. It being the lack of acknowledgement on the merit and effort of Blackness marked by lost blood, dried sweat, and spilt tears. It being the charity customarily placed upon Blackness as if it is a terminal affliction. A chronic condition unfit to exist in a completely constructed narrative fueled by the violence of Whiteness wishing to render us silent.

We are tired of feeling grateful to gain access to spaces when we’ve earned our way. We are tired of feeling as if the only way to exist is in the midst of White approval. We are tired of being forgotten when spoken to but remembered for two photo ops. We are tired of sluggish responses to honor our voices but early requests for capital never fail to process.

We didn’t expect to graduate with an additional degree in trauma just because the essence of Blackness disrupts the fragility of Whiteness. We are blessedly chosen to don the complexion of melanated royals, warriors, and creators.

We are here. We are present. We are human. We are magic.

Alex Montgomery ’17
MPP/MA in WGSS Student at the Heller School for Social Policy
Choosy

To my brothers,
Damn.
Amen to the brave man that's an only child.
I really don't know how they do it.
But they say He never give us more than we can handle, so I guess it was never meant for me to know.
Either way, they boss as hell. And I'm grateful that I don't have to be.
I told a guy I call a best friend of mine,
"When we pick who to love, which people to TRULY love, I don't think we know how big of a commitment we are really making".
You are hopefully choosing to love that person, whether they be a friend or something more, UNCONDITIONALLY.
I guess you can love with conditions, I know I have, but that's not the way to do it. The right way is unconditionally.
That means that, when the day comes that they don't resemble the version of themselves that you knew when you decided to love them, and that day ALWAYS comes, you are supposed to still be there.
When they lie, when they don't lie, when they cheat, when they don't cheat, when they murder, steal, betray, disobey, disregard, disappoint, deny, disrespect,....whatever, you're supposed to still love them through it all.
That is, there is no cut-off, no limit, no boundary, no contours, no provisions, no....conditions.
When you CHOOSE to love them, you choose to love THEM.
Not their honesty (because they won't always be honest), not their kindness (because they won't always be kind), not even their mind (because one day that might lose it).
Some days, you will swear they switched up. You'll say "this can't possibly be the person I fell in love with". Or, "the girl I used to call my best friend would never do me like that".
All that shit might be true, but it doesn't even matter.
Because, if you CHOOSE to love them unconditionally, you're supposed to fight through the conditions.
I know it sounds crazy, but that's it. That's the way to do it.
We don't really do it anymore, meaning fight for each other, set aside whatever pride or guilt or shame or whatever it is to keep the ones we so-called "love".
We don't choose people anymore, we choose parts of them. Usually the parts that make us happy.
And that is why I thank God for choosing my brothers for me
I am as sure of that choice as I am of anything in this world.
I think God wanted to make sure that we choose at least once in life, find somebody that is truly there from start to finish.
So he made the choice for us, and gave us brothers.
Me and my brothers were raised in a particular way. My family never hugged, we never cried to each other, we never talked about our feelings, we never said “I love you”, we never comforted each other. And really, we never needed it. We just knew, We was good. Always have been and still is. We never needed outward affection to show we care. And there’s nothing wrong with having it, I guess there’s nothing wrong with not having it either though. Whatever works. They’re the reason why I know bullshit when I hear it, they’re the reason why I’m confident, why I know how to finesse damn near anything I want, why I don’t need play brothers to I don’t know...play, why I don’t pledge or promise loyalty, honesty, transparency, or anything else to anyone accept them and the few that I choose to, why I dress how I do and do my hair this way, why I tell jokes like I do, why I’m always comfortable and pray as hard as I do. I think about the love they have for me and it gets me through anything. I’m the shit to them. I’m not especially funny, I’m not that nice, I’m only moderately smart, I talk shit, I get a bad attitude for no reason some time, and that’s not even the half of it. And that’s just me being honest. We all balance out to about the same though. Either way, you couldn’t show them another person on this earth, no matter how perfect, that they want more than me. That they love more than me. Likewise, you’ll never find another person to replace, act as, or compare to my brothers. My life is so intertwined into theirs, that I don’t make a single move without them mine. And to say that “If I got it, they got it” isn’t enough. Because if they don’t have it, I’ll get it to give them. And I know that if a day ever came where I needed it, they’d do the same for me. I like to see it like this:

At the beginning of a day you leave home unscathed, You go out in the world to take care of business...to live and you get beat down, torn apart, put back together again, take 2 steps forward, then 20 steps backward, do something you’re not proud of, fix it, do it all over again, lose hope, fall apart again.....and go back home. Every single time, they put you back together. If they can’t find all of your pieces, they give you as many of theirs as you need to be good again. No matter how you come back home, no matter what life did to you, and some days, what you did to it, they don’t just love you, THEY STILL WANT YOU. And they do that every single day, because God chose me for them.

Maybe my brothers is your sisters, or your best friend, or boyfriend/girlfriend, or your cousin. I don’t know. But everybody needs one. Like life partners. People that promise to partner with you in life.
And if that partner is one you have a romantic relationship with, you might wanna have a back-up plan.
Not tryna be funny, but people like falling in love, accidentally falling in love, not choosing to be in it. People are confident in choices, but I don’t think anyone stays down for long after a fall. It was an accident; you were supposed to get back up.

Mercedes Hall ’17
Who are the people who “put you back together”? How would you describe their caring?
Black Woman

Black woman goes to war
Black lives matter I scream
Black woman march for the death of someone she is afraid of
Black men swimming on the floor on his own soul
Soul betrayed him for a bullet
Black woman screams black lives matter at the top of her lungs
I scream for justice
Screaming for equality for someone who oppresses me
For someone who does not love me
Who rejects me
I am used to loving a man who hates me anyways
Man who says my beautiful black hair needs a perm
A man who says my skin is too black
He likes the girl who uses bleach
The girl whose skin shade has less melanin
He hates black girls
He wants someone prettier
Someone prettier
Someone prettier
He hates black girls
Like his mother ain’t black
Like he ain’t feed himself from a black nipple
Like the womb that deliver him ain’t screaming black
Black lives matter only when it comes to black men
My name is not safe from the list
I as a black woman I can be beat
I as black woman I can suffer from racism
I as a black woman I can suffer from gentrification and no one will give a shit
I can be erased by the police like I have never existed and no one will talk about it
Because I am insignificant
Bullet does not only pierce black man
Bullet does not care of our gender
Black woman makes sacrifices for black men
Black woman is the burning building that never collapse
You ask what type of voodoo that can be
They reply black girl magic
Black woman hips hold us together
Black woman for the first time tries to write a poem without naming herself an object
Black woman is a shadow
Black women forget to protest for black women
When bullet hits a black girl her death is not worthy of publication
Black woman is oppressed by the person she protests the death of
Black woman stays surviving

Black woman lives matter too.

Awa Soumahoro '20
Pressure. The craft of diamond-making
requires a fair amount of pressure.
A constant build-up of both
internal and external forces.
A dynamic system comprised

of both attraction and repulsion
Another tug of war with gravity:
To fly or be buried? The buildup
continues and gradually,
As gravity wins and the self bends
backwards slowly, eyes upturned
—or closed—in forlorn defeat with
Hands still fastened on the rope, fingers in tatters,
All become compressed into a singularity,

An amalgamation of nonsensical elements,
Light-sucking, sound-cancelling, numbing…
And Lo! The implosion occurs and the lacrimal ducts that become

Potentiated, allow for the passage of
Dozens of tiny, priceless treasures that soon
Disappear. Never to be marveled at by the world.

Tuïsha V. Joseph '18
Fat Black Bitch Check List

- cook everyday for people that think you should eat less
- break chairs when you sit down because these skinny folks can’t design anything strong enough to hold someone as full of power as you
- be the crying shoulder for your hourglass-shaped friend who has gotten to date all the cute black boys who won’t even look at you twice
- founder and most proud member of the no booty / big tummy club
- avoid rap as your place of body empowerment because thick just means skinny with curves in the right places
- watch the medical world market procedures to your hood that cut people’s guts open so they don’t have to look like you
- listen to doctor talk about some disease you gonna get that you ain’t got yet
- listen to skinny friend discuss wearing a XL t-shirt to bed as a nightgown while you hit up rebdolls for that 5xL bikini
- be a symbol of “unchecked desire” if you’re bisexual, because too much food is one thing, but now you’re attracted to multiple genders too?
- don’t attempt to find clothing for that genderqueer androgynous aesthetic because it won’t come in your size
- be denied femininity because cis men don’t really view you as something worth saving
- be denied masculinity because your tummy makes the buttons on flannels pop
- don’t expect to be asked on a date but spend a few hours answering your tinder messages from boys who have “no fat girls allowed” in their bios
- listen to thin friends complain about gaining 2 pounds so they have to start running again
- be hyper-aware of your size, everywhere you go, but keep it to yourself in feminist spaces

-Aly Thomas ‘18
Sweet September

We met
In the moment
We had no idea of how
Strong
Deep
Unconditional
And happy our love would be
You smiled at me
And without even knowing you at all
I instantly knew everything I needed to know

Asia Hollinger '18
Open
Bare
Vulnerable
So much to give
So many willing to take
Nothing to receive in return
Except the weight of all lost love's pain
Each time ending with the same result
With my heart collapsing in my chest
While I smother in this crowd
Under the weight of my own heart
You craved me and I loved you
What is a craving anyway, but a empty desire
And you actually thought a simple apology would suffice
But you did what you did at the expense of my emotions
You didn't care for you I would cross the sea
Even though I cannot swim
I told myself you was different from him
And you are
It's just that the pain I feel from your leaving is worse
See he left before I had the chance to love
And you chose to leave after finding out that I do
Making me realize love has done me more damage than good
Each time it breaks, the rules change
It creates a shield preventing passage of new comers
The mind tries to make sense of it all by blaming me
Emphasizing all my flaws
Making me feel more and more insecure
Calling out all I did wrong
Because despite all that happened you will be okay
And I will not
you will be social
And I will hide until I can feel no more
I will lie in my bed crying
As you play your video games
I will be broken
And you unscathed
You will welcome new love
And I will question their every intention
Love is a disastrous game
...For me anyways
I'm done with compromising myself
I'm tired of the new insecurities I create
So I'm choosing to leave it alone
And accept that I'm beautifully broken
Because every time I've loved, I loved... not him
And because of this lack of reciprocity
I will never love the same
And since this has changed how I loved
I decided to not love at all
Why?
Because how many heart breaks will it take before I am incapable
I'm choosing not to find out
So I'll stop while I'm ahead
Receiving myself in return
Not allowing any to take
Because now I have less to give
Cautious
Cloaked
Closed

Kenyatta Hendricks '18
When I feel displaced or lost in the chaos of life, the best way I can comfort and/or support myself is by....
If You Really Knew Me...

By looking at me you would never know that I struggled with self-perception issues pertaining to race/ethnic-origins for most of my life. I remember feeling lost because of who I was; too Eastern for the West, too Western for the East, stuck between my mother's homeland and my own. I stripped myself from my love—my country, all to deny my identity in order to fit in. I did not want to be seen as a Somali girl living in Portland, I wanted to just be. It slowly deteriorated my soul and left my eyes telling stories of rage. I could not stop though. To my younger self; fitting in was much more important than being honest. What hurt most was denying myself of Somali friends in order to seclude myself from their scrutiny. I did not want to associate myself with my own people, and I justified my inability to forge bonds with those as marginalized as I, by assuring myself that one needs to assimilate to fit in. As I entered college my outlook on life drastically changed with the emergence of my new sense of self; bearing with it an empowered need to express and participate in all the spaces my identities allowed me to occupy. It just sort of hit me one day that what I was dealing with was internalized feelings of self-hatred, and that things needed to change. I made myself unpack all that I had been conditioned to think from an early age. Only then did I begin to realize things change when people take affirmative action, and saw no one better than myself to sort out these issues. I, along with many others founded a racial justice group here in our little city and my love for my blackness began to bloom. I am determined to fight for justice. As cliché as it sounds, nothing will deter me. Being black is a blessing, and I will no longer watch my fellow citizens live in a younger society that preaches hate. Although I found myself through self-deprecation, I wish that no one else feels the need to hide who they are. I wish that someone was there for me, but we can only move forward so I wish to be there for someone else. We are the generation of progression. We are the generation of love.

Hamdi Hassan'18
On April 21st, I walked into the party and your eyes were stuck on me like super glue.
You think you have a shot because you’re a white man and as a black woman I should be
honored...well you’re wrong!
You think that the attention you give me for a week justifies your desires to turn me inside and
out, to fulfill YOUR jungle fever, and taste MY chocolate skin.
You think that the attention you give me allows you to break my walls, touch my heart, and
gain my trust.

Just for you to walk away after you get what you want
Where I’m left with confusion, with the broken pieces of regret
With the heartache of shame
With the desire to HATE you... because you took what was once mine
I am the one who is left to rebuild what you destroyed
I am the one who is left to reconstruct what you tore down
I have to pick myself up and remind myself momma never raised me to fall by any man
You want to ride me, but not stick by me?
You want to show me what your capable of in the bedroom
Yet you can’t hold me down for the long run?
Black White Yellow Purple Light Skin Dark Skin
Do not mistake me as your naive female
Do not mistake me as your average woman
Momma never raised no fool
Momma never raised me to forget my worth

On April 21st, his head snapped, his eyes rolled, his mouth dropped
His head snapped, his eyes rolled, his mouth dropped when he saw me walking across the
room
You see, I was able to catch his attention by the shape and illusion of my body
I was able to captivate his interest because of his personal desires
Yet, I will not be able to have him remember my name
No, I will not be able to have him interested past my looks
Because in our generation,
Females expect too much from the average male,
In our generation we overanalyze the amount of attention they give us
Society has constructed, manipulated, and polluted our minds to think our worth is for the
desire of HIS pleasure.
To think that the only way a male will gravitate to us is if we fill his hunger with our bodies
I will not allow society to objectify me, manipulate me, reduce my value
Control how I feel, control my actions, based on the desire of HIS pleasure
I will not let your minute of lust be confused with love
I will not let your undivided attention confuse me with reality
You want me to take you seriously, then what’s my name? What are my interests? Who is
Herlyne Das? 

#whatsmyname

Herlyne Das '18
Dear Hair,

I’m guilty.  
You’ve been loyal and faithful, but I’ve hurt you; I’ve held you back.  
I straightened you to death to look "pretty", when you were always pretty, so for that I’m sorry.  All the girls and boys told me I was most full of life when you were most lifeless, and I believed the bullshit.  
When you refused to grow in this one spot, I was salty, not gonna lie, but I forgive you.  
I’ve listened when people told me to "tame" you or "fix" you. Girl, you look like a "bruja", they’d tell me, and I’d smile, but then I took my shame out on you.  
I’ve spent hours and hours in the bathroom trying to make you listen to me, to mold you to the standards engrained in me, but you refused. You stood your ground, and I’m proud of you for it.  
I’ve cut you out of spite. I’ve burned you. I’ve scarred you. I just hope some day you’ll forgive me for it.  
I promise.  
When boys tell me “Linda, Linda, honey, honey, you’d look sooo much more beautiful with your hair down”, I’ll say swerve, because sometimes you do need a break.  
I’ve hated you for most of my life, but never again will I take you for granted.  
I’ll stick up for you even when you stick up, because you’re the shit.  

I love you.  
When I wake up and look at you and think, DAMN GIRL, I still love you.  
When I said I’d come home with long pretty braids, they said “no, wear it straight; that’s prettiest”, but you deserve to be beautiful, to be protected, to be preserved, to be loved. Nothing will stop me from making this up to you. For however long it takes, I will love you, guide you, and help you blossom into the goddess I know you can be, and have honestly always been. I will heal you.  
I know people look at us like we’re crazy sometimes, but they don’t understand. It’s all about you now and I will love you no matter what form you take. You do you boo boo.

Val Salvador ‘18
The Ballad of a Black girl

"Can I touch your hair?"
So Familiar.
"You're pretty for a black girl."
Too Familiar.
"I'm not usually into black girls."
I know, how nostalgic.
"Why are you always so sassy?"
Fuck you.
Why is my very existence so perplexing to you?
Why do you question it?
If you cut me, I promise my blood will be red.
If you hurt me, I will feel.
If you love me, it's not a sin.
I'm capable.
I'm here.
Don't stare.
I will stare back in black girl amazement.
Always wondering,
Did my melanin set me up?
Is my fate sealed?
Always wandering,
I'll know the answer one day.

-Nia Duncan '20
What Even Are You

My mom was born in Brasil. My dad was born in Jamaica. Bring together this Brasilian woman with tan white skin, with a Jamaican man with dark brown skin, and you’ll get a girl with light brown skin. With curly hair that’s silky smooth when it’s wet, curly and frizzy when it’s dry. With a nose that took a while to get used to, but with a body that really didn’t. Now bring this light brown skin, to a school with 98% white skin (shrug). Now you have a girl with light brown skin, with a father with dark brown skin, a mother with tan white skin, and friends with all white skin. But in my eyes, I hardly saw skin. I only saw faces. Tried to understand what was within their minds, and to forget about races.

So between then and now, I became me. I have my own mind, my own style, my own ideas of peace. I’ve built morals, friendships, and a long list of mistakes. I’ve made self discoveries, know what I believe in, and am thankful for my faith.

I’ve been through a bunch of life things ~ Most of it beautiful, a lot of it ugly. All of it adding a hand to creating me into me. Just like all dark periods happen for a reason, we weren’t meant to have 100% clear skied, perfect weathered seasons.

The question “Who Are You-----?" always seems to make me stumble. I just say what I’ve said above~ except in this slightly confused, foggy minded mumble.

I’m not saying I’m not black, I mean I’m obviously not white. I mean I guess I’m part Brasilian, part Jamaican, but something still doesn’t sound right. So for now I am what you see. Let my actions take care of the rest.

But girl, so then what are you?

Well ~
My mom was born in Brasil. My dad was born in Jamaica. I have my own mind, my own style, my own ideas of peace. I’ve built morals, friendships, and a long list of mistakes. I’ve made self discoveries, know what I believe in, and am thankful for my faith. I’ve been through a bunch of life things. All of it transforming me into me, without a doubt. Just like all dark periods happen for a reason, we weren’t meant to have 100%, clear skied, perfect weathered seasons.

Sooo... I’m still trying to find out.

Sarah Dorneles Sharpe ’20
Hey Good Lookin,
You made it! It’s odd how old people say “one day you’ll look back on life and laugh”. You can’t image that because you get a headache when you think back to a week ago. On Monday, you got a voice message that said you wouldn’t be able to attend orientation on Saturday which was just five days away. The sounds creeping out of your phone hit you like a ton of bricks. They sink in your stomach and settled in next to the cake and memories of the graduation party you had on Sunday. Ouch. The crazy part was that the admissions office didn’t even know you were going to attend the school! Scary doesn’t begin to describe the feeling. It was a heartbreaking, teeth pulling, stubbing your toe on the side of the bed type of pain. Ugh.
Your not very optimistic view on life could have, potentially, possibly aided or induced some of the stress in your academic life. Having a soap opera for a personal life wasn’t much help either. This was definitely clear over the last few weeks, as you struggled to find and submit pieces of paper that would ultimately determine the next two to four years of your life. Bending over backwards, jumping through rings of fire, crying on the inside as you dealt with your seemingly useless parental figures, barely describes what it felt like as you did what had to be done.
But, (yes there is a but) it is not about how you do something, it is about getting it done, right? Enough with the cheesy quotes, you’re not getting paid for this. Anyways, now that life (step one at least) is in motion, you need to breathe. Take that moment you never seem to let yourself indulge. It is clear that you are scared if you stop, if you let yourself enjoy an accomplished goal you fought so hard to achieve, it will be destroyed. Everything good always is. Was, make it the past and let it go. Let go of the fear that it will disappear, it won’t I promise. This moment is vital and you deserve it, you earned it, it’s yours.
Breathe, because you have a hell of a battle in front of you and you will need to be alive and ready for it. Remember why you chose this. Grams was so proud, mom bragged, dad nearly cried. “My genius princess” he says. Though you admit you are hardly a genius, think back. What recollection do you have of what college he went to, or mom, or grandma? Which of the three of your sisters finished? Or will be moving into their next year, or semester? Remember to breathe. Believe in yourself more than they do. Surpass the expectations they have for you. After all, they already expect you to. It’s time to move on to step two, get ready. Think it, do it, exhale.

Sincerely, Sabribri
P.s. Accept that the ice cream freezer is closed in the morning. Get over it and have an apple.

-Sabrina Howard ‘19
Write down the affirmations that make you feel empowered.
Just Ice.

Am I lost in translation or easy to read?
I'm filled up with a volume of contradictories.
I am warped in my own world of their insecurity
Not sure why I can't just DO.
I say I am and they say I'm not.
What does this mean for me
In this cold, cruel world of just ice?
My reality is not their perspective.
I make an ass out of my own assumptions.
I am a key holder of my own promises that
I'm afraid to let go and just BE.
Am I coming or are they going?
I'm here, yet they're everywhere.
Why can't I be free from it?
What I hold to be true is self-evident
In a world of mixed messages and expectations.
Almost over the hill
Yet still shivering in the valleys of subliminality of just ice.
Despite the mixed hypocrisy
I'm in love with ME.
Despite the intimate perplexity
I transcend past it FOR THEM.
I fight against it so BLACK and BROWN can just BECOME.
One warm day, it will come.
Where I show the world who I just AM
So THEY can and forever more continue the legacy
In the true name of JUST ICE.

-Kenyora Johnson, MSW
Assistant Director of Precollege Programs
Dark Matter

when he doesn't answer my texts
two minutes after I send them
I should not have to worry that my
slightly annoyed, playful
"Are you alive"
will soon be met with a
I am so sorry for your loss

I should not be filled with
nights of anxieties
in between my nightmares
and my nightmares dreams
because my brother's seventeen
permitted to drive but never white enough
or bright enough to live his life

I should not have to spend nights
kissing my lover's umber skin
smile so blinding
reminding him beneath the moonlight
he is glistening

but
his friend's blood is glistening
red on black pavement and black skin
a flag that never really was ours to begin with

and yet I held him and
I kissed him
I kissed his dreads
his hands
His too wide nose
his too big lips
until he was wanted in a place

that never dared let him think
he ever would be

-Ashley Simmons '17
I feel weary when...
A few words unsaid

That indescribable feeling a girl experiences when she thinks she has found the perfect person to be with. For a girl to gain that feeling is truly breathtaking. For this to be her first experience with this feeling she just felt so confused. He wasn’t the first boy she had ever been with intimately, but he was the first one to break down the many walls she had up. She could easily say that during this time she felt happiness that she had not felt for such a long time. Then her happiness withered away leaving her truly broken. To have her heart broken for the first time in her life made her question herself in ways she never did before. She constantly asked what was wrong with me? What didn't I have that he wanted? And would I ever feel like this towards another person ever again? She walked around for a long time with a fake smile on her face just to avoid people asking her what was wrong. The pain she was feeling had lasted for such a long time she thought she’d never get over it. Over the summer she decided to finally tell him how she felt. She no longer felt alone in the situation. At one point it was hard for her to accept that they were only going to be friends. But at this current moment she can finally say that she is no longer questioning herself, she is no longer sad, and her happiness has repaired itself. She thanks him for putting her through this situation; because, it has made her stronger. She thanks him for his friendship and for the lessons he brought along the rocky road.

-Kiaina Gomez ’19
My Life Matters

I am black woman who loves everything about herself

My life
even when people think it does not matter
My skin color
even when I am excluded from certain communities
My hair
even when schools don’t want me to wear it the way I like it
My eyes
even when people think it’s intimidating
My size
even when people criticize me for it
My teeth
even when no one likes them
My nose
even when people think it is the weirdest one on earth

My laugh
even when people think it is annoying
My dedication
even when people think I am lazy
My belief
even when people think my Lord Jesus does not exist
My culture
even when people fail to understand its value
My ancestors
even when people misunderstand their braveness
My race
even when people think being Black is a pain

Your opinion about me won’t change
and will never change the fact that I love myself as an educated, Christian, Black woman.
In other words, your opinions about me don’t matter
but my life does.

Geraldine Bogard ’20
First Poem

I was a biscuit when you wanted a bagel. You came in my room and left me in crumbles.
And when I asked for more and you said no, I felt like a whore.
What is about sex that makes a boy see you differently?
Hello, thank you, come again soon. I was your convenience store, a place to get what you need
and leave without a thought.
You weren’t the only one, I let boys in because I thought they’d stay.
But all that they wanted was a good lay.
A corner store no longer, my body is not at your, at anyone’s convenience except my own.
My doors will say “we’re closed” until the day I find someone who leaves me feeling full.
I shall settle no longer, I shall learn my worth.
Reborn like a phoenix, I will soar above until I can fly no higher.
New year, new me? Just maybe.

Viola Dean ‘18
Untitled (To be read aloud)

How can I hope to survive in a place
where my life means so little?
Where it, contrary to what Maman always says
does have a price
Free
like the man who may shoot me
will inevitably be
Free
as he always is when he takes a life that’s
unbearably similar to mine
Free
like they always have been
Free
like I am afraid people who look like me
never will be
Free
like I know I am to leave this Godforsaken country
I am privileged to be international
Blessed to proclaim that
this land
drenched in blood
where mothers have their tragedy
replayed on the news
hashtagged on Twitter
shared on Facebook
for 24 hours at most before whomever is next to lose
and only ever see justice online
This country
where the angel of death is
no longer a figment of the darkest parts of my imagination but rather
a bonafide weapon-bearing, badge-wearing Judas at your local police station
This country
is no home to me
Every night I pray
that the Kings and Queens who know not where they have come from
whose lineage can be traced back only as far as
the cursed place where the land meets the sea
who built the very streets that they march on
that they die on
that one day
they will know without doubt
what it means to be
free.

- Sarah Nzisabira '20
Tell Me Why?

A paper and pen is giving me more life than the police can give my own brothers and sisters.

Why is that my brothers can’t live long enough to be a black product success? Why is that my sisters can’t live long enough to live in their “natural” state? Confused on why society can’t have blacks excel with all us alive...

I wasn’t told to get out of the hood and make something of myself to see my blackness die from what was suppose protect us. I can no longer have my heart feel like an earthquake on pause of another one of me dying. I don’t want to feel comfort in knowing on the news I don’t need to look because another one of me is dying, black is not curse it is a blessing. And at this point I’m trying to live long enough to see my color trigger not violence, but be seen as magic it has always been.

Imani A. Islam '20
Always and Forever

Always and forever
In my heart
Intertwined with my soul
Gracing my thoughts
In love
I'm a feign
For every inch of you that you have to give
We have been through so much together
I'd do it all over again
Meet you
Fall in love
Fight
Love
Cry
Love
Laugh
Love
And JUST LIVE
A wise man once said
"I'd rather have hard times with you than good times with someone new."
I never truly understood it
But I've become captive in your heart
And it's so warm I never want to leave
So I sit here
In your heart
Wrapped in loyalty, compassion, and sweetness
And as I think back to that beautiful quote I can't help but to see you
You gave me what I didn't even know I needed in my life.
You completed me
I thank you my love
My everything

Asia Hollinger '18
Choosy (Continued)

To my brothers,
I have to love y’all because sometimes I hate it here.
Sometimes I think, “What am I doing? I don’t even have to be here”
And then I remember why. We have to get put on.
No amount of school work, fake friends, sleepless nights, stupid distractions, or pointless
obligations can overshadow the fact that my brothers deserve this.
Why? Cause they my brothers.
Brandeis is ass sometimes, but its boss the other half.
So I guess if it weren’t for going out and getting them this, I wouldn’t know y’all.
The gift that gives and gives.
Four years in undergrad is nothing, I’d do forty years in prison for them niggas without
thinking twice. Whatever they need. Who ever they need me to beat. Or whoever they need me
to be, I’ll be it.
They get the best of me and from me....for NO reason.
The only qualification they ever needed, they were born with. My blood.
We got some guidance from my granny, some from my mama I guess,
But we bought the table, the utensils, the chairs, and the food and we learned to set it, all by
ourselves, it only makes sense that we’re the only ones to eat at it.
We climbed from shit, and built every single thing we have now.
We went without together, we seen each other as completely weaker versions of who we are
now, when we had nothing to offer,
It only makes sense that they’re the ones to get the best of what I got
Because I know that, if I don’t become that neurosurgeon, they’ll take the lead and do
whatever they have to do to ensure that I come home and feel better, and that I have a home to
come home to.
So if my little brother Marcelius’ plans of being an NBA star, or back-up plan of playing in
the D-league and working up the NBA, or back-up back-up plan of playing ball overseas, or
back-up back-up back-up plan of being a sports analyst, or a back-up back-up back-up back-up
plan of coaching, all fall through, he knows he chose the right one. Until his day comes,
every 6:30 am trip to the basketball court, every session of getting his rebound for hours, every
dollar spent on special edition video games because they come with points and $250 basketball
shoes because of the “supportive hyperposite overlay and the breathable flywire material,
CEDES!”, every day spent with me dragging my friends to all of his UAA and school games,
every hour spent alley-ooping the ball to him til he finally sinks that same ass dunk, every NFL
game I missed watching NBA western conference teams that I could care less about, and every
minute spent on the phone promising him that, as a freshman in high school, he is already the
shit with and without basketball.....he deserves it all and I’d do it two times over if he asked
me to.
And if my big brother Clifton’s plans of being an actor, or back-up plan of being a barber and
hair-stylist, or back-up back-up plan of interior design, or back-up back-up back-up plan of
finessing any and everywhere business opportunity that presents itself, all falls through, he
knows he chose the right one. Until his day comes, every dollar spent on bus fare to a job interview or to a party to distract him from not getting the job, or every trip to the weed man that I had to cover because my he desperately needed to get out of his feelings, every late night pep talk, every lesson on how he HAS to fight through adversity, every dollar put on bail money when he fought through it too hard, every visit to the hospital when his diabetes hits the worse, every fight against an enemy that damn sure aint mine but I made them mine for him, every bottle of 1800 bought for them to celebrate his accomplishments, and every trip to church to hear him sing and thank God he lived to see them.....he deserves it all and I’d do it two times over if he asked me to. 
But they'll never have to ask me to, I already chose to do it.

-Mercedes Hall '17
Redemption

Glossy eyes gaze
into somber darkness
encasing the room.
Limp hand cradles
an evergreen bottle,
next to a dresser full of pulp love letters.

In the midst of darkness, the Lord’s words are slipping through this liquor, radio muffles
Bessie’s sorrows and embraces gospel. Suddenly, the woman’s crippled vocals
quakes my body.
I fell to the floor
gripped it like my
mother’s chest as
Self hatred collapsed
all over the carpet.

LaShawn Simmons ’18
Nondescript

Gaze upward as if in prayer
she stares at the sameness
That formed a cage around her
Blue-green état d’âme
Arms crossed
Behind her back
In the stern manner
That the sisters used to carry
Themselves as they paraded
Around the school grounds
Their refined eyes, surgical scalpels
Making incisions on our
Transparent skins,
Laparoscopically
dissecting us of ourselves
Much like the woman,
Her wisening, but still dark hair,
Distinguishing her
From the uniformity that seems
To suffocate her.
But even that too will disappear
For the tumor must be removed
So that all that remains is
Her blue-green garment
So beautifully concealing
The scars and holes where bits and pieces of
Herself used to exist.

-Taïsha V. Joseph '18
Elated

She feels like she’s meditating in space
Shifting past galaxies and meteorites on her way
Up, Up,
Higher,
Highest than the highest hue
She’s spinning and traveling and knowing and flipping and seeing and channeling and
oooh its meeting and fucking and seeing and fucking and knowing and fucking and fucking.
She is a meadow in serenity. She’s the queen upon the lands. gloriful, powerful, all
encompassing.
She is one with the power.
She is one with the knowledge.
She is...my soul.

Keturah Walker '18
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