

San Francisco State Africana Studies Journal (*ASJ*)

An Annual Publication

Department of Africana Studies

College of Ethnic Studies
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The *ASJ* mission is to promote student scholar/activists and creative artist/activists through publication. Thus when the students matriculate into life beyond the university, they will have the *ASJ* to include in their resume as evidence of achievement(s). To these ends, this student-produced Journal may host limited works by figures whose presence in an issue highlight, by association, Students' talents. Contact Professor Dorothy Randall Tsuruta (dsuruta@sfsu.edu) for info and requests. Reproduction requires permission of the individual contributors and the *ASJ*. This Journal is printed in San Francisco by TED & PARTNERS, INC.

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Congressman John Lewis and Alumnus Rev. Dr. Ramona Tasco,
at an SFSU gathering, Wednesday, February 18, 2015

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Faculty Advisor's Welcome

This 2014/15 school year has proved wonderfully eventful in the way of intergenerational dialogue between SFSU students and revered activists who from the 1950s to the present, have put their lives on the line to advance rights for Black people, thus for a healthy America. The photographs of **Minnijeon Brown-Trickey** of the 1957 Little Rock Nine, **Congressman John Lewis** of the 1965 Bloody Sunday Selma March, and **Rev. Dr. Ramona Tasco** of the 1968 BSU Strikers, are seen on the front cover surrounded by our appreciative students. Then just as this issue was about to go to press, the journal sought and received permission from **Alicia Garza**, co-creator of the Black Lives Matter” movement, to reprint her important published article titled “A Herstory of the #Black Lives Matter Movement.”

Immediately following my welcome here, are three stellar students who are graduating with honors. These “Young, Gifted and Black” males, along with many more, resound voice-over the dire sound bite about Black males’ chances of success in college. And there are far more such stellar students, male and female, than a limited “talented tenth.”

The story telling photographs continue on the back cover of this journal. Faculty and staff are captured enjoying hosting students at our traditional “Chicken and Juice” lunch, and all having a great time dialoguing in mutual respect and affection. Africana Studies faculty, Professors **Serie McDougal**, **Dawn-Elissa Fischer**, **Antwi Akom**, **Amar Casey**, **DaveyD**, **Madeline Flamer** (who doubles as Africana staff and lecturer), and I are joined from across campus by Professor of Design and Industry **Ricardo Gomes** and Information Technology Specialist **Sterling Shanks** (seated centered at the long table lower right) who count among the villagers it takes to educate.

Dorothy Jane Randall Tsuruta
Professor and Chair of Africana Studies
May 2015



ANTHONY ALBEY SOLIMAN

AFRICANA STUDIES MAJOR

**RECEPIENT OF THE HONORS AWARD IN RECONGINITION OF HIS
SUPERIOR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS AND HIS OUTSANDING
CONTRIBUTIONS TO STUDENT LIFE AND UNIVERSITY**

**INNOVATIONS: ANTHONY IS AMONG THE HONOR
STUDENTS DEPARTMENT, COLLEGE, AND
UNIVERSITY-WIDE EARNING THE
BACCULAUREATE (BA) DEGREE
AS A MEMBER OF THE
CLASS OF 2015.**

Here you see Anthony in conversation with Xola, the eight-year-old prodigy son of Professor Fischer. The radiating smiles on their faces speak to Anthony's natural ease with people of all ages, which in turn puts them at ease. This photo, taken at the "Chicken and Juice Luncheon" (see back cover of this issue) was snapped by competing iphone cameras, as it was just too great of an uplifting photo-op. to miss.



MICHAEL PAYTON

**A BROADCAST AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS ARTS MAJOR
& AFRICANA STUDIES MINOR**

**HONORED IN RECOGNITION OF HIS CREATIVE INGENUITY HE
CONTRIBUTED HIS GIFTS OF TECHNOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE
AND EXPERTISE TO DEPARTMENT AND COLLEGE EVENTS
THAT KEEP THE UNIVERSITY FAITHFUL TO OUTREACH
TO THE COMMUNITY. MICHAEL IS AMONG THE
OUTSTANDING STUDENTS EARNING THE
BACCALAUREATE (BA) DEGREE
AS A MEMBER OF THE
CLASS OF 2015.**

Faculty praise Michael for his patience, and for always being so very respectful even when faculty would come running late after a class or office hours for their scheduled recording appointment with him. The dignity of his bearing, and his courtesy in dealing with others, reflect wonderfully on Michael's upbringing and specifically on his strength as a self-confident person of integrity.



JONATHAN BRUMFIELD

**GRADUATE STUDENT IN ETHNIC STUDIES, WITH AN
AFRICAN AMERICAN EMPHASIS**

**SELECTED BY THE COLLEGE AS THE MOST
DISTINGUISHED GRADUATE STUDENT
EARNING THE MASTER OF ARTS
(MA) DEGREE IN THE
CLASS OF 2015**

Each year in the College of Ethnic Studies, the chairs of the Departments of Africana Studies, American Indian Studies, Asian American Studies, Latina/Latino Studies, the Race and Resistance Program in Ethnic Studies, and the César E. Chávez Institute come together to select the most distinguished student graduating with the MA degree. This year that honor goes to the talented Jonathan Brumfield. This honor puts Jonathan among the honor students university-wide who are nominated by their respective colleges to be draped with the hood at the commencement ceremony, representing the entire class receiving the MA degree.

Loveday Ukaigwe

Student Editor's Welcome

"I think there are police departments that have to do some soul searching. I think there are some communities that have to do some soul searching. But I think we, as a country, have to do some soul searching. This is not new. It's been going on for decades."

*President Barak Obama
April 28, 2015*

Pictured on the cover of this issue of the Africana Studies Journal (ASJ) are people who count among the many who put their convictions into actions. We pay homage to the contributions of 1950s/1960s Civil Rights activists such as **Congressman John Lewis** and **Minnijean Brown-Trickey**. We pay homage to San Francisco State 1968 Black Student Union (BSU) activists such as **Rev. Dr. Ramona Tasco**. The Black students on this campus inspired a national/ international movement, and the establishing on our singularly renowned College of Ethnic Studies. The struggle for justice today takes heed of the determination of Black leadership/ activists over time. We pay homage to the creators of the "#BlackLivesMatter Movement": **Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi**. And we thank Alicia Garza, a SFSU alumnus, for allowing us to reprint in this issue of the *ASJ* her published article, "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement."

Tracy Stuart's "Black Lives Matters" and **Michael Barba's** "The Creator of the Black Lives Matter Slogan" each focuses on the importance of the movement. **Bradley Focht's** article "The Media Perpetuates the Subjugation of African American" brings attention to the fact that our challenges are not just the law enforcement agents, but also the media's constant depiction of Black people as not relevant in society. In fact, the media doesn't even respect the office of the United States of America's Black President.

Skye Phillips' follows with her article "GOP Attacks Against the First

Daughters” to decry Elizabeth Lauten’s low brow bash of the First Daughters, whose very status as First Daughters must go against the grain of Lauten’s biases. Then in “BlackLiveMatters: Technological Abilities Raise Opportunities for Awareness” Phillips underscores how technological advancement such as cell phone cameras and video capabilities offer an opportunity to help hold officers accountable in light of the recent killings of Black people by law enforcement agents. In fact, the recent murder charges of police officer Michael Slager of South Carolina, who shot 50 year old Walter Scott eight times, was in part the result of a citizen’s capturing the shooting as it unfolded April 4th, 2015.

Rick Arenas in his piece “The Murders of Black People” asserts: “I believe that what is really lacking in the African American community today is leadership, a sense of guidance [we] once had that directed the community’s drive for a common goal, and working together to achieve that goal;” Arenas stands out in this issue in his confronting not only police murders of Black people, but also the perplexing murders committed by Black youths, in particular, of one another that is so contrary to Black youth activism in support of Black Lives, as was that of the Black youth led sit-ins at lunch counters, the Selma marchers, the Little Rock Nine, the Black Panthers, and the San Francisco State 1968 Black Students Union members, among many other Black youth uprisings to rally on behalf of the quality of life for Black people.

I was further enlightened by **Regina Rhodes’** “Black Lives Have Always Mattered: An Interview with Dash” that brought attention to Ishmael Reed’s book *Barack Obama and the Jim Crow Media* that explores assault on Black people, and Dash’s focus of the gravity of the situation. In the second interview of this issue, **Imani Miller** interviewed Samone Mann, a third year nursing student at SFSU for a personal commentary on the Trayvon Martin murder. I was struck by Mann’s observation that she as a Black female is not as overly cautious of being targeted by police as Black males who must be ever “super cautious in their environment “[in relation to being in the presence of the police]: in fact, she said, “it’s so sad to see people being afraid of the people who are supposed to protect [us].”

The eruditely crafted pieces by my fellow scholars about the challenges we as Black people face in the 21st century America, underscore the enormity of the work that we need to do in our generation to continue that of our forebears from the 18th century to the activists of today. They include but are not limited to Phillis Wheatley, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, Ida B. Wells, Marian

Anderson, Margaret Walker, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi. I am honored to pen the 2015, editorial piece of the *Africana Studies Journal*, along with the thoughts and ideas of my peers. In reading the contributors' pieces, I am encouraged that there is an army of dedicated scholars/activists intent that true equality, not token equality, can be fully realized in America.

Alicia Garza

A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement



Alicia Garza

I created #BlackLivesMatter with Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, two of my sisters, as a call to action for Black people after 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was posthumously placed on trial for his own murder and the killer, George Zimmerman, was not held accountable for the crime he committed. It was a response to the anti-Black racism that permeates our society and also, unfortunately, our movements.

Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.

We were humbled when cultural workers, artists, designers and

techies offered their labor and love to expand #BlackLivesMatter beyond a social media hashtag. Opal, Patrisse, and I created the infrastructure for this movement project—moving the hashtag from social media to the streets. Our team grew through a very successful Black Lives Matter ride, led and designed by Patrisse Cullors and Darnell L. Moore, organized to support the movement that is growing in St. Louis, MO, after 18-year old Mike Brown was killed at the hands of Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson. We've hosted national conference calls focused on issues of critical importance to Black people working hard for the liberation of our people. We've connected people across the country working to end the various forms of injustice impacting our people. We've created space for the celebration and humanization of Black lives.

The Theft of Black Queer Women's Work

As people took the #BlackLivesMatter demand into the streets, mainstream media and corporations also took up the call, #BlackLivesMatter appeared in an episode of *Law & Order: SVU* in a mash up containing the Paula Deen racism scandal and the tragedy of the murder of Trayvon Martin.

Suddenly, we began to come across varied adaptations of our work—all lives matter, brown lives matter, migrant lives matter, women's lives matter, and on and on. While imitation is said to be the highest form of flattery, I was surprised when an organization called to ask if they could use "Black Lives Matter" in one of their campaigns. We agreed to it, with the caveat that a) as a team, we preferred that we not use the meme to celebrate the imprisonment of any individual and b) that it was important to us they acknowledged the genesis of #BlackLivesMatter. I was surprised when they did exactly the opposite and then justified their actions by saying they hadn't used the "exact" slogan and, therefore, they deemed it okay to take our work, use it as their own, fail to credit where it came from, and then use it to applaud incarceration.

I was surprised when a community institution wrote asking us to provide materials and action steps for an art show they were curating, entitled "Our Lives Matter." When questioned about who was involved and why they felt the need to change the very specific call and demand around Black lives to "our lives," I was told the artists decided it needed to be more inclusive of all people of color. I was even more surprised when, in the promotion of their event, one of the artists conducted an interview that completely erased the origins of their work—rooted in the labor and love of queer Black women.

Pause

When you design an event / campaign / et cetera based on the work of queer Black women, don't invite them to participate in shaping it, but ask them to provide materials and ideas for next steps for said event, that is racism in practice. It's also hetero-patriarchal. Straight men, unintentionally or intentionally, have taken the work of queer Black women and erased our contributions. Perhaps if we were the charismatic Black men many are rallying around these days, it would have been a different story, but being Black queer women in this society (and apparently within these movements) tends to equal invisibility and non-relevancy.

We completely expect those who benefit directly and improperly from White supremacy to try and erase our existence. We fight that every day. But when it happens amongst our allies, we are baffled, we are saddened, and we are enraged. And it's time to have the political conversation about why that's not okay.

We are grateful to our allies who have stepped up to the call that Black lives matter, and taken it as an opportunity to not just stand in solidarity with us, but to investigate the ways in which anti-Black racism is perpetuated in their own communities. We are also grateful to those allies who were willing to engage in critical dialogue with us about this unfortunate and problematic dynamic. And for those who we have not yet had the opportunity to engage with around the adaptations of the Black Lives Matter call, please consider the following points.

Broadening the Conversation to Include Black Life

Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes. It goes beyond the narrow nationalism that can be prevalent within some Black communities, which merely call on Black people to love Black, live Black and buy Black, keeping straight cis Black men in the front of the movement while our sisters, queer and trans and disabled folk take up roles in the background or not at all. Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement.

When we say Black Lives Matter, we are talking about the ways in

which Black people are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. It is an acknowledgement Black poverty and genocide is state violence. It is an acknowledgment that 1 million Black people are locked in cages in this country—one half of all people in prisons or jails—is an act of state violence. It is an acknowledgment that Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families and that assault is an act of state violence. Black queer and trans folks bearing a unique burden in a hetero-patriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us is state violence; the fact that 500,000 Black people in the US are undocumented immigrants and relegated to the shadows is state violence; the fact that Black girls are used as negotiating chips during times of conflict and war is state violence; Black folks living with disabilities and different abilities bear the burden of state-sponsored Darwinian experiments that attempt to squeeze us into boxes of normality defined by White supremacy is state violence. And the fact is that the lives of Black people—not ALL people—exist within these conditions is consequence of state violence.

When Black people get free, everybody gets free

#BlackLivesMatter doesn't mean your life isn't important—it means that Black lives, which are seen as without value within White supremacy, are important to your liberation. Given the disproportionate impact state violence has on Black lives, we understand that when Black people in this country get free, the benefits will be wide reaching and transformative for society as a whole. When we are able to end hyper-criminalization and sexualization of Black people and end the poverty, control, and surveillance of Black people, every single person in this world has a better shot at getting and staying free. When Black people get free, everybody gets free. This is why we call on Black people and our allies to take up the call that Black lives matter. We're not saying Black lives are more important than other lives, or that other lives are not criminalized and oppressed in various ways. We remain in active solidarity with all oppressed people who are fighting for their liberation and we know that our destinies are intertwined.

And, to keep it real—it is appropriate and necessary to have strategy and action centered around Blackness without other non-Black communities of color, or White folks for that matter, needing to find a place and a way to center themselves within it. It is appropriate and necessary for us to acknowledge the

critical role that Black lives and struggles for Black liberation have played in inspiring and anchoring, through practice and theory, social movements for the liberation of all people. The women's movement, the Chicano liberation movement, queer movements, and many more have adopted the strategies, tactics and theory of the Black liberation movement. And if we are committed to a world where all lives matter, we are called to support the very movement that inspired and activated so many more. That means supporting and acknowledging Black lives.

Progressive movements in the United States have made some unfortunate errors when they push for unity at the expense of really understanding the concrete differences in context, experience and oppression. In other words, some want unity without struggle. As people who have our minds stayed on freedom, we can learn to fight anti-Black racism by examining the ways in which we participate in it, even unintentionally, instead of the worn out and sloppy practice of drawing lazy parallels of unity between peoples with vastly different experiences and histories.

When we deploy "All Lives Matter" as to correct an intervention specifically created to address anti-blackness,, we lose the ways in which the state apparatus has built a program of genocide and repression mostly on the backs of Black people—beginning with the theft of millions of people for free labor—and then adapted it to control, murder, and profit off of other communities of color and immigrant communities. We perpetuate a level of White supremacist domination by reproducing a tired trope that we are all the same, rather than acknowledging that non-Black oppressed people in this country are both impacted by racism and domination, and simultaneously, BENEFIT from anti-black racism.

When you drop "Black" from the equation of whose lives matter, and then fail to acknowledge it came from somewhere, you further a legacy of erasing Black lives and Black contributions from our movement legacy. And consider whether or not when dropping the Black you are, intentionally or unintentionally, erasing Black folks from the conversation or homogenizing very different experiences. The legacy and prevalence of anti-Black racism and hetero-patriarchy is a lynch pin holding together this unsustainable economy. And that's not an accidental analogy.

In 2014, hetero-patriarchy and anti-Black racism within our movement is real and felt. It's killing us and it's killing our potential to build power for

transformative social change. When you adopt the work of queer women of color, don't name or recognize it, and promote it as if it has no history of its own such actions are problematic. When I use Assata's powerful demand in my organizing work, I always begin by sharing where it comes from, sharing about Assata's significance to the Black Liberation Movement, what its political purpose and message is, and why it's important in our context.

When you adopt Black Lives Matter and transform it into something else (if you feel you really need to do that—see above for the arguments not to), it's appropriate politically to credit the lineage from which your adapted work derived. It's important that we work together to build and acknowledge the legacy of Black contributions to the struggle for human rights. If you adapt Black Lives Matter, use the opportunity to talk about its inception and political framing. Lift up Black lives as an opportunity to connect struggles across race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality and disability.

And, perhaps more importantly, when Black people cry out in defense of our lives, which are uniquely, systematically, and savagely targeted by the state, we are asking you, our family, to stand with us in affirming Black lives. Not just all lives. Black lives. Please do not change the conversation by talking about how your life matters, too. It does, but we need less watered down unity and a more active solidarities with us, Black people, unwaveringly, in defense of our humanity. Our collective futures depend on it.

Reprinted with permission of Alicia Garza

Michael Barba

The Creators of the “Black Lives Matter” Movement



Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi

While scattered instances of “Black Lives Matter” appeared on social media before they politicized the phrase, three Black women pulled the slogan onto the streets, adding a hashtag to three words that would be burned into the collective memory of a generation during the months of protesting that ensued. Protesters would scribble the phrase onto signs, walls and windows alike: “Black Lives Matter”. From its inception in cyber-space to its first manifestation in Los Angeles, the three co-creators have manipulated the phrase to empower Black people in direct response to rampant murders, often by police. And as Cullors put it, Black Lives Matter has won the public imagination.

The Black Lives Matter cofounders are Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors,

and Opal Tometi. According to Cullors, they share much in common with Civil Right's activist Bayard Rustin, who conceived the idea for the March on Washington. Like him, the trio is Black, but as Cullors notes, unlike Rustin they have not been asked to disassociate from the movement they created as he was. Instead, they have stood alongside, and often in front, of protests since they created the Black Lives Matter campaign.

At first a response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who shot and killed Black-teenager Trayvon Martin, the campaign began in 2013 as a simple statement of fact from Garza to her friends on social media. "On Facebook she wrote a love letter to Black folks and she ended it with, 'Our lives matter, Black lives matter,'" said Cullors, the Los Angeles-based co-founder. "I put a hashtag on Black lives matter." Within the next 24 hours, the three realized the potential for a project behind the phrase. They pasted the hashtag onto signs at protests before the week's end and were soon interviewed on radio shows about the project.

Raised in Los Angeles, Cullors received what she called a liberal education at Cleveland High School in the San Fernando Valley where she would begin her career as a community activist. "Being sixteen and coming out as queer and having a set of mentors who were really nurturing instead of critical, and having an entire program that spoke about racism and homophobia really gave birth to this political identity of activism," she said. The first campaign she worked on was a "naive" and "failed" attempt after a man came up to her and a girlfriend on the street and warned her that children were around. It appeared her homosexual behavior was unacceptable to him, so she staged a protest of about ten people. "I didn't know anything about organizing and building a campaign," Cullors said. But that would change after she participated in a weeklong social justice program at the National Conference for Community and Justice. Cullors would later protest on high school campuses for low-income bus passes, work with the Clean Air Campaign to reduce the number of cars in Los Angeles, and then start to work for the Community Right Campaign, where she would stay for nearly a decade. There, she focused on decriminalizing youth truancy before leaving to join the Dignity and Power Now Coalition in 2012, to end Los Angeles Sheriff violence in jails. A year later, she started Black Lives Matter.

Today, the Black Lives Matter Campaign consists of twenty-three chapters across the country, plus one in Ghana and one in Toronto, Canada,

united by a set of principles while focusing on individual issues at hand. “The entire world is watching the Black Lives Matter movement” Cullors said. “I understood that theoretically, but going to England, Scotland, Ireland, people are sort of deliberating with the hashtag — using it as a way to talk about their oppression.”

But the success of Black Lives Matter is not owed entirely to them. Cullors said human beings can only be beaten down for so long. “It’s been about thirty years since the rise of the prison industrial complex,” she said, in explanation of why the phrase took. “This is from Amadou Diallo, to Rodney King being beaten, to Oscar Grant. The human response is to get into a collective.” And that was the human response in many parts of the U.S., but in particular in the Bay Area where protesters were often centralized in Oakland, toting the Black Lives Matter phrase. “Mike Brown was just the final straw,” she said. “You can only suppress an individual until she or he finally fights back.” Garza lives in Oakland and is from the Bay Area, the region Cullors credits for its role in the Black Lives Matter conversation, as well as the change it created when the masses flooded city streets. “The problem just can’t be seen by a couple of individuals; it has to be seen by an entire nation,” she said. “Five years ago we were not seeing mainstream media covering police brutality. Now we see it every day.

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Tracy Stuart

Black Lives Matter--Not a Moment. a Movement
Founded by Three Black Womanist Activists:
Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometti.



In the past few years there has been much public outcry over the senseless killings of young African Americans by law enforcement, or by people who claim their actions were justified. These senseless killings have caused numerous people to band together demanding answers. Are these killings just a coincidence, are they racially motivated or stereotypical motivation, are officers being trained to kill or just having a bad day? These are the type of questions that come to the minds of angry people who want answers and who want racial justice.

The shooting death of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American from Miami Gardens Florida by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch

volunteer in Sanford, Florida on February 26, 2012 sparked a whole movement of angry people; The “Black Lives Matter” campaign. Not only were there African Americans but also people of all backgrounds, and from all walks of life came together to protest and demand justice not only for Trayvon Martin, but for all Black lives. The public was outraged because George Zimmerman was released and not charged with the murder of Martin. The police chief said Zimmerman was released because there was no evidence to refute Zimmerman’s claim of acting out of self-defense and that under Florida’s “Stand Your Ground” statute the police were prohibited by law from making an arrest. Most people would agree that is a load of crap! If the shoe was on the other foot and George Zimmerman was a Black man killing a white kid, the justice system would have thrown the book at him. Zimmerman was released and later acquitted for the murder. The African American community was outraged by this, and that’s what started the whole Black Lives Matter movement. People were angry because the killers were not being held accountable for their crimes, basically saying that these young African Americans lives did not matter at all and they got what they deserved.

Black Lives Matter is a U.S. based international movement co-founded by three Black women activists/organizers: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometti. It began as a hashtag after George Zimmerman’s acquittal for the shooting death of Trayvon Martin in 2013, and gained momentum after the shooting of Michael Brown, the shooting of John Crawford III, and the death of Eric Garner all in 2014. Currently there are 23 Black Lives Matter chapters in the U.S., Canada, and Ghana. Rooted in the experience of Black people in this country who actively resist our de-humanization, Black Lives Matter is a call to action and to a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society. Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes, and the organization states that Black: “Black Lives Matter” affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. The movement has received worldwide media attention due to its massive scope and ongoing existence. Protesters and protest organizers have met with President Barack Obama and other prominent leaders to demand an end to racial profiling, police brutality, mass incarceration, and demilitarization of many U. S. police departments. Black Lives Matter is working for a world where Black lives are

no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. The cause for Black Lives Matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for Liberation.

Another sad story in the news was the police officer shooting twelve-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland Ohio, who was sitting in the park playing with a toy gun, and was shot and killed by a police officer within a few seconds of arriving at the scene. Seems like the officers just shot and killed a young Black child as soon as they approached him and saw that he was Black with a gun, without trying to find out what was going on. They claim he was reaching in his waistband but the story is unclear. The death was ruled a homicide although the officers were not charged for the crime. The 911 dispatcher failed to tell the officers that the caller had stated the gun was probably a fake! The 911 responder also asked the caller several times whether the boy holding the gun was “white” or “Black”. For me, that brought to mind a bit of racial motivation instead of someone giving a description of a person holding a gun in order for the police to identify them. The incident received national and international coverage, in part due to the time of its occurrence coming shortly after the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri; the death of Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York; the police shooting of Akai Gurley in Brooklyn New York just two days before; the shooting of John Crawford in Dayton, Ohio, and the subsequent unrest following these incidents had attracted world-wide attention. U.S. Attorney General, to examine whether officers routinely engaged in racial profiling or showed a pattern of excessive force; concluding on March 2015 that police officers in Ferguson routinely violated the constitutional rights of the city’s residents by discriminating against African Americans and applying racial stereotypes in a “pattern or practice of unlawful conduct.”

The “Black Lives Matter” movement wants to end what seems like racial hatred. They are basically saying if it does not end this is what we are going to do; continue to come together and protest until some change is made. Although many of the questions that angry people have cannot be answered, like why these lives were taken in what seems to be senseless killings and was it really necessary; it gives some people a sense of pride and accomplishment when they come together for a good cause and knowing that change is sure to come.

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Skye Phillips

GOP Attacks Against The First Daughters

On November 24, 2014, President Barack Obama took part in the nationally televised turkey pardoning, alongside his two daughters, Malia, age 16, and Sasha, age 13. During the program, the young girls appeared fairly disinterested, and once it aired, many media outlets covered the story and playfully mentioned the first daughters' typical teenage indifference. But the national public was surprised to hear from Elizabeth Lauten, a GOP officer with serious criticism for the daughters. The former communications director for Tennessee congressman, Stephen Fincher, went to Facebook to share her thoughts. After the Thanksgiving holiday was over, on November 29, 2014, she posted:

Dear Sasha and Malia, I get you're both in those awful teen years, but you're a part of the First Family, try showing a little class. At least respect the part you play. Then again your mother and father don't respect their positions very much, or the nation for that matter, so I'm guessing you're coming up a little short in the 'good role model' department. Nevertheless, stretch yourself. Rise to the occasion. Act like being in the White House matters to you. Dress like you deserve respect, not a spot at a bar. And certainly don't make faces during televised, public events.

As a media director for a GOP representative, it's assumed that Lauten would understand the likely repercussions of her public comments. Either way, she quickly learned the impact of her message after receiving backlash of her own. This quickly led to her religious laced apologies, followed by her reported resignation. Most of Lauten's backlash from national media outlets highlighted both the insensibility and uselessness of the remarks, especially due to her crucial, at-risk position. Lauten's attempt to council the daughters included several behavioral demands and also commented on the daughters' attitude and facial expressions. Without knowledge about the lives of the first daughters, it

appears that Lauten's comments stemmed from a common racist trope about the 'sassy and strong Black woman' who carries hefty attitude and promiscuity. If so, and alluding Ishmael Reed's essays in *Barack Obama and the Jim Crow Media*, this would serve an example of white media's fetish for the exploitation Black people. In addition, perhaps the daughters' nonchalant vibe within such an exclusive position of black leadership frustrated Lauten. And did Lauten believe that publicly posting exaggerated criticism reflected her own 'class'? Maybe so, despite her own mischievous teenage past, including stealing from a department store that resulted in her arrest. Lauten's lack of professionalism surely overrides Malia and Sasha's supposed lack of class.

Where did Lauten's angry judgments come from and why did she feel the need to share it publicly? And, why would the first daughters take advice from an adult professional who specializes in government-based communication but chose to publicly criticize the President's children? Due to the privileged stance and agenda of predominantly white media today, Lauten apparently found her comments completely appropriate, or at least something she could get away with. Alluding to Reed's essays, the 'white media jury' systematically advances from judgments against Black people, especially members of the right wing. Reed would certainly consider Lauten's message as another example of constant propaganda assaults against Black citizens.

Unsurprisingly, most national media outlets spun Lauten's attack on the President Obama's daughters into a profitable story. But Lauten's isolated incident is a common but typically concealed and unapproachable theme of white media. Yet, typically the content involves code words that carry acceptable buzz, like 'welfare' or 'poverty.' Lauten attacked the first daughters as if their boredom at a turkey-themed event was detrimental to themselves or the national public. Antics like Lauten's are the result of segregated media with right wing alliance.

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Skye Phillips

BlackLivesMatter: Technological Abilities Raise Opportunities for Awareness

Today in the United States it is not safe to be a Black citizen. As a Black woman in this country, I've witnessed cases and testimonies supporting the unjust murders of Black lives. And I've also noticed new age technological abilities raise opportunities for awareness and justice across the globe.

New developments in technology include innovations that work against blatant and often brutal racism present in the country: for instance, the simple camera. Yet, many doubt the effectiveness of police body cameras due to the outcome of the Eric Garner case. A law enforcer was filmed forcing Garner into a chokehold and as a result, the law enforcer killed Garner. The chokehold method is prohibited, yet the law enforcer used it anyway. The victim died because of it. Although the entire attack was filmed, and the entire world witnessed it, the law enforcer was not indicted for his crime. Advocates for very basic human rights were inherent advocates for Garner. The huge wave of support helped ignite the viral social media hash tag, *#icantbreathe*. News stories and forums about justice for Black people in America are in rapid rotation and constant exposure. Over the past decade, social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr have served as underground media sources for anyone with Internet access to the free platforms. Tumblr is web of information that grasps and exchanges ideas of all kind with no contextual limitations. The website's function allows bloggers to share ideas with their followers, and like a domino effect, popular posts are "re-blogged," or recycled to even broader realms of the virtual community. Hundreds of blogs particularly dedicated to the "Black Lives Matter" movement post news stories and opinion pieces that reach thousands all over the world. Posts are often hyperlinked with sources to information regarding the unjust murders of Black people, ways to support the families involved, and suggestions for activism in your local community.

In reaction to the murder of young Michael Brown, and with little trust in the country's government system, Black teenage siblings from Georgia created the phone application, "Five-O," in late 2014 that allows users to report, rate and track police behavior in local and outside communities (*Business Insider*). After downloading the application on your mobile device, you can report an incident, rate a specific police officer and access a community board where you can view. I feel heartbroken that children resulted to technology rather than law enforcement in these vulnerable and unjust times. But I am also inspired that their intent led to a mechanism that can keep their communities safe, and help communities across the country.

Virtual activism has led to live protest support, but how far can virtual abilities lead to justice for all? The recent technological advancements with the purpose to empower Black citizens with unfiltered resources channel the yellow journalism tactics of the *Chicago Defender*. By just word of mouth, and with the help of high-risk exclusive print, Black citizens congregated to unify and empower themselves from White political and institutional tyranny. Only a few decades ago, the Civil Rights movement led to significant changes in basic human rights. Minus the red ink, bold statements and alarming imagery catch the virtual eye and achieve the purpose of spreading information. As a Black citizen, social media user and supporter of human rights, I have faith in my generation's viral awareness.

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Business Insider. "Application Story": <http://www.businessinsider.com/fiveo-app-built-by-teenagers-to-document-police-abuse-2014-8>

Example: Black Lives Matter Blog, <http://Blacklivesmatter.tumblr.com/>

Bradley Focht

The Media Perpetuates the Subjugation of African Americans

“If you’re not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.”- Malcolm X

As we stand on the precipice of our future, a future in which Mars colonies and flying cars twinkle in the distance like stars glistening in the night sky, I cannot help but think of how far our country has truly come. Yet I’m reminded every day of the ways in which we have not progressed. The media continues to subjugate and misrepresent African Americans in this country, perpetuating a racist and archaic mentality that harkens to the days of Jim Crow laws and Bull Connor. How is it that our society has taken great strides in racial equality but still some continue to cling, fervently, to the ideas that echo from the flames of a burning cross. The media, in the past and present, has chosen to portray African Americans in a negative way and manipulate the perception of them to reinforce their own white supremacy.

There is no arguing that the media has twisted facts to fit their own agendas. Dr. Robert Entman, Professor of Media & Public Affairs at George Washington University, illuminates these facts in his study titled, *Race to Jument: Stereotyping Media and Criminal Defendants*. In this study he found that Blacks and Latinos are more likely than whites to appear as lawbreakers in news. He also found that Blacks in criminal roles tend to outnumber Blacks in socially positive roles in newscasts and daily newspapers. These startling facts highlight the media perpetuation of Black subjugation. These misrepresentations of people of color continue to perpetuate racial stereotypes

and engrain in people's minds that they criminals. Entman also supports this idea with his study in which he said "The implications of this research for public attitudes are troubling. Messages continually associating people of color, especially people, with poverty and crime reinforce the updated form of racial prejudice known as symbolic racism, racial resentment, or racial animosity" (p. 102). When the media uses its power to portray Black people in a negative way they in turn perpetuate racial stereotypes and racial subjugation. This can lead to, and most likely is, the cause of, heightened police discrimination and violence.

This idea is backed by the Justice Department investigation, in which they reviewed data collected by the Ferguson Police Department from 2012 to 2014, which shows that African Americans account for 85% of vehicle stops, 90% of citations, and 93% of arrests made by FPD officers, despite comprising only 67% of Ferguson's population (p. 62). The investigation also discovered that African Americans have force used against them at disproportionately high rates, accounting for 88% of all cases from 2010 to August 2014 in which an FPD officer reported using force (p. 62). In all 14 uses of force involving a canine bite for which we have information about the race of the person bitten: the person was African American (p. 62). These powerful statistics highlight a possible correlation between the ways in which the media portrays Black people as violent and the rates of arrests of Black people.

With the data fresh on my mind I cant help but ask why, in 2015, the media continue to echo the same ideas of racist and ignorant ancestors. As a journalist I see only one solution: show the public these misrepresentations and reveal these injustices. If we stand by and knowingly allow the endless subjugation to continue we are showing others that it is ok to continue it, but if we give people the hard facts they cannot deny the injustices. We need to keep the legacy of Robert and Dori Maynard alive, and help reveal injustices

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Regina Rhodes

Black Lives Have Always Mattered: An Interview with Dash

In deciding on a candidate for this *Africana Studies Journal* (Rhodes) interview, I considered the sentiments of author Ishmael Reed as voiced in his book *Barack Obama and the Jim Crow Media*. In this collection of essays, Reed mentions that the white supremacist media is structured such that Black voices are muscled out of all conversations about race and race relations; the white anchors and field reporters get their thousand dollar state of the art equipment, while the non-'breaking' people of color, especially Black people are left to toil in a sea of misinformation. However, people of color are able to make use of the most widely known, mass-data, information base, the Internet, to share information. Blogs and microblogs like Twitter and Tumblr act as moderately safe spaces for the Black community, specifically its youth. It seemed, then, reasonable to turn to these spaces which Black youth has carved out in the webosphere to find an interviewee.

Rhodes: "In discussing the current Black Lives Matter movement, I would like to focus our conversation on the initial response of the mainstream media to the murder of Michael Brown of Ferguson, Missouri by Darren Wilson. First, though, are you familiar with Ishmael Reed's work, specifically *Barack Obama and the Jim Crow Media*? I would like to open up this dialogue by taking a few notes from his work as a means to explore the topic."

Dash: "I am not completely aware of his work, but it does sound like something interesting to consider. Would you mind giving me a brief run-down?"

Rhodes: "Essentially, Reed talks about the practice of 'breaking' employed by media powerhouses like CNN, MSNBC, FOX News, and so on. The term breaking refers back to era when whites were compensated for beating defiant enslaved people into submission. You can see how a trend like this would evolve over time."

Dash: “I could certainly make that connection. I’ll assume- and hopefully you’ll correct any missteps- but it seems as though the position of the breaker in modern media would be that of propaganda peddler. More than likely, these white news anchors are taking cues from the high-ups to defame the character of the Black victims in order to continue in the attempted justification and normalization of the constant assault on Black bodies.”

Rhodes: “You’ve got the meat of it right there, yes. So, you certainly seem like someone who was watching the CNN coverage of the Ferguson protests and the Black Lives Matter demonstrations, marches during last year’s Thanksgiving parade, the massive die-ins on the east coast. Is that correct?”

Dash: “I generally intentionally avoid watching network television because I know what I can expect at this point. It’s just a constant barrage of character attacks on people of color who attend these demonstrations. And the anchors seem to think they’re cleverly disguising this blatant prejudice by having in-the-field reporters who happen to be Black or biracial or Latino, as though that excuses the message they’re sending by interviewing the most volatile and least informed people at these events. To answer your question: Yes, I did watch as much of the major network coverage of the movement as I could stomach before realizing that none of them were really trying to depict the members of the movement as intelligent, strategizing, or articulate individuals.”

Rhodes: “You mentioned that these networks are using people of color as the reporters in these cases and clearly that is intentional. In Reed’s work, he mentions that Black people are commonly called on to make statements about the actions of their ‘brothers’ or ‘sisters’, and since you mentioned that media rarely represents the leaders or participants in the movement as individuals, I would like to ask if you feel that this is a possible cause or rather an effect of the constant vilification of Black people.

Dash: “Oh, absolutely. Oh definitely, that’s very clear to me. For some reason a considerable portion of the people in my circle cannot make that connection. It’s lumping us all together, and granted, for us it gives us a sense of community when we unify, but to be stuffed into a niche is incredibly uncomfortable. Black men are depicted as all ‘bullies’, ‘thugs’, and ‘gangsters’, ‘frightening,’ ‘intimidating.’ That’s how they described that baby boy in Ferguson who got shot, as a ‘thug’. And on that note about Black people being called to question

the actions of other Black people, some Black celebrities have hopped on that bullsh*t wagon, asking us to consider that we don't really know what Michael did before that happened to him. I think it was Pharrell, called that young man's actions "bully-ish in an interview (see the note at the end of this interview) and truthfully this has been a year of reflection for me and a lot of other Black people. Some of our idols within the Black community are really showing their true colors, and not one of them is Black."

Rhodes: "I can definitely agree that this year has provided me with the information and inspiration I needed to distance myself from some people, some musicians, drop some of my friends and look to enmesh myself in the local Black community and participate in the Black Lives Matter movement. I'm taking the initiative to spread information and support for the social media leg of the '#blacklivesmatter' movement. I, however, have not participated in any of the demonstrations, and I'm wondering if you have."

Dash: "I haven't either. At least not yet, I am doing what I can to act as an informational database for those who are willing and able to participate. I haven't gotten out there because I don't live in a metropolitan area, and I don't have too many opportunities to get out to one."

Rhodes: "I would encourage you to start some sort of local action, however credible that sounds coming from me after having just said I haven't gone out there myself. But, to get back to the major media coverage, I have noticed that when the demonstrators were initially covered, they were painted as savage or disorganized. Some more extreme ignorant Internet subscribers gave the Black Lives Matter demonstrators a treatment similar to that which Nat Turner receives. The white supremacy seems to fear that a quest for the examination of systemic racism means that Blacks are sharpening their machetes. Painting these leaders as inciting or dangerous people, do you think is another example of Reed's 'breaking'?"

Dash: "Absolutely, without a doubt. It's defamation of character of these women and men. It's unfounded. It's uninformed, and it's 100% steeped in racism, and a white guilt, which tells these people to operate under the assumption that equality really means supremacy and genocide, because that is what they practice. Habitually."

Rhodes: "I completely agree, and that is not a phrase I make a habit of using

loosely. But, some of the claims of disorganization of the movement are coming from older members of the Black community. Unfortunately, some older Black people who were alive to see the rise of the Black Panther Party are claiming that this younger generation of activists lack the organization, strategy, and sense of togetherness which was crucial to the movement of the 1960s. As our final question here, do you think their criticism is coming as a result of generational disconnect, or just a lack of respect for organizers like co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement Alicia Garza?”

Dash: “Even if it is a disconnect, it’s still stemming from a lack of respect for the founders of this new movement. Being older doesn’t excuse the fact that they haven’t given the younger generation the chance to prove their ability. It also results in the general feeling that again, Black people are being pitted against one another; rather than offering help before critique. It’s harmful and it’s toxic; however, there certainly are people from that older generation who are offering support and advice. And I think that’s crucial to success; working together is proving to be crucial to this movement gaining momentum.”

Rhodes: “I want to thank you for your time, as well as the conversation. I would also like to mention that it was interesting- for me at least- to look at the media through someone else’s eyes, and though we did stray from my original blueprint, this was a great way to re-examine the situation.”

Note: In the interview, published on *Ebony’s* website Nov. 13, Kenya Hunt asked if the singer [Pharrell Williams] had he seen the surveillance video allegedly showing Michael Brown stealing cigarillos from a local convenience store and pushing a store employee. “It looked very bully-ish; that in itself I had a problem with,” he said. “Not with the kid, but with whatever happened in his life for him to arrive at a place where that behavior is OK. Why aren’t we talking about that?”

This quote taken on April 25, 2015 from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/26/pharell-williams-michael-brown-bullyish_n_6226960.html

Imani Miller

Interview With Samone Mann, SFSU Nursing Student

Samone Mann is a third year nursing student at San Francisco State University. Although she goes to school in San Francisco, Los Angeles is her home Town. Whenever Samone is home, she is very active within her church community. She is associated with many organizations that advocate for African American and civil rights. However, when she is in San Francisco, she tries to remain intact with the African American community.

Miller: First of all, I just want to thank you for allowing the Africana Studies Journal this interview with you, as I know that you are active within the Black community.

Mann: Yes, I am very active within the Black community. I love being the one to get opinions in the air. I want people to realize what's going on in the world around us. I appreciate you for allowing me to contribute in this interview.

Miller: Ok, with that being said, what were your thoughts when the killings of Trayvon Washington, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner were happening?

Mann: Ahh man, I was truly hurt. It was just sad to see these murders happening back to back. Those three murders aren't the only Black killings cops were involved in. There are way more. But it just proves that discrimination, and prejudice still exist.

Miller: Yes, I totally agree. Did these murders make you more aware? Did you take any precautions towards the police as a Black individual?

Mann: Me personally, I did not. As a Black female, I didn't feel like I should have to be super aware of my surroundings. However, I do believe Black males must be super cautious.

Miller: How did they become cautious, in your opinion?

Mann: Well, many of my friends just started watching what they do around police and in public period. It's so sad to see people being afraid of the people who are supposed to protect them.

Miller: Yep, I agree on that too! So, how did this make you feel during the trials and indictments associated with the Black murders?

Mann: I remember being let down, especially with the Trayvon Martin case.

Miller: Yes...

Mann: The evidence was right there! Everything was right there, clear-in-fact! But White America always gets the long end of the stick. It pissed me off.

Miller: How did the killings affect the Black community?

Mann: I believe there were some individuals within the Black community who used the murders as an excuse to go out and cause a disruption, and I believe there were some who actually cared and peacefully protested to make a difference and to stand up for those who lost their lives to police brutality.

Miller: Were your parents, your family, scared for their lives during this time?

Mann: My mother wasn't scared for her life, but she was very educated and aware about everything happening around her.

Miller: What were some of her thoughts?

Mann: She felt like history is replaying all over again. Its crazy.

Miller: Do you think the murders could've been prevented?

Mann: Sure, anything could be prevented. Some people bring harm upon themselves, so I'm not going to blame it all on all the police but some police need to learn how not to be trigger happy.

Miller: In your opinion, what were the reactions of the White community during this time?

Mann: I don't think there were many things said from the White community that were good or bad. But I do remember at the time there were sporadic events happening.

Miller: Like what?

Mann: I remember students found a board cutout made to look like a Black guy, hanging from a tree at U.C. Berkeley. I don't know if white people had anything to do with it, but I just thought it was quite a coincidence.

Miller: Tragic. So what do you think the future holds for the Black community?

Mann: Greatness, it holds nothing but greatness! Black people constantly defeat stereotypes. We're on the rise!

Miller: With that being said, I appreciate you for having this conversation with me.

Mann: I appreciate you for allowing me to share my thoughts.

Literary Section

The Literary Section of this issue begins with a poem by the poet Marqui Hicks who signs his work as *Marqui deVol da poet*. Titled “Social Trends,” his fascinating poem covers so much territory in a tone of controlled incredulity, discussing the murdering of Black people that he decries as now “trendy”. The poet observes that the horrific murders are as omnipresent, conversely, as Martin Luther Kings’ dream that resonates to the deep core of our humanity. San Francisco State University Alumnus Kenric Bailey recently attended the International Jazz Day event in Visitation Valley in Sunnydale, and like a talent scout, Bailey was impressed with a poetry reading by Marqui Hicks, who is a Youth Crisis” counselor. Bailey brought this talented poet to the attention of the *Africana Studies Journal*. That our alumnae remain faithful to the university in such endeavor is in part a tribute to the community service infusion in their education.

Next, Sho’mane Evans-Ture’s brilliantly resonating poem “Do Anybody Care?: A Block conversation With A Little Black Girl,” gives voice to how it feels in a Black neighborhood to be forced to live ever cautious of the threat to life as targeted in one way or another by killing forces. The poem moves in dialogue to great depths of understanding. His poem moves with verve and grace, verse to verse, on a subject to which sublime narration focuses attention on the killings, in this post-slavery revival of crimes against Black humanity. The poem in capturing a conversation taking place on the sidewalk between a young man and little girl, brings to life the emotional toil and too early thrust into adult worries, of a young girl, and does so to great depths of understanding.

The short story that concludes this issue is that of SFSU Creative Writing major Andrea Bell who as a student this semester of Africana Studies’ Black Journalism class, submitted her story for publication in this issue of the *ASJ*. The title of the story, “All In Vain,” captures the essence of what ensues in light of choices that can fly in opposition of stable outcome. From a personal and somber reflective angle of vision, a young woman name Sinestra reflects on her life from youth to early adulthood. The story ends with the reader eager

for the next story that catches up with Sinestra as she moves on more in self-awareness, to see how she deals with the challenge to bring the sort of foresight to her life choices that might ease hindsight's explosion of wisdom after the fact.

Marqui Hicks

“Social Trends”

Trends
come in,
escape and then are somehow hidden.

Repeated like instruments over time,
to social rhythms,
and,
overcoming retreats by those people driven,
by heartbeats of love ones,
lost,
riddled inside of them
like the pounding of
drums beaten.

Increased have been the tones so loud,
of a past where Dr. King's speech,
increased the domino effect of a people
left to reach.

To run towards a door locked
separating one man's dream
from block to block.

Back in time,
when colors simply coordinated an outfit
set to impress.

Not to claim names of a street,

territory, or domain.
where today's youth lie dead in distress.

Outcries for help, for peace, for hope,
have gone unheard;
births of geniuses in inner city communities
have been improperly nurtured.

Generations have kept trends alive,
like jazz, hip hop, and
like recipes passed

like gossip, and hate,

And now you telling me,
the deaths of brothers,
are fads.

Trends have come and gone.
escaped sight and are somehow hidden.

Then,
Repeated like instruments over time,
To social rhythms.

Now's a time for loud drums,
excruciating tones of bass players, and saxophones.
making noise to the social trends of today.

Listen.
Listen

To the Increased tones,
of a past where Dr. King's speech,
increased the domino effect of a people
left to reach.

and

Now to run towards a door and open it,
boastful, Unafraid and hopeful;
unleashed,
with no regrets.
following and embracing the words of Dr. King
“Of that dream”

Like a Trend we can never forget.

*Written 4/22/15; at 10:43 pm complete.
by Marqui deVol da poet.*

Sho'mane Evans-Ture

“Do Anybody Care?”

A Block Conversation With A Little Black Girl

The other day a young sistah came up to me
randomly talking to me emotionally
when I was standing on the block,
observing two Black males being frisked by two white cops.
At first I acted like she wasn't there,
because she was distracting me as I videotaped,
and if I move a lot my camcorder doesn't come out clear.
She didn't care, had no fear, it was like she was
too shell shocked to run away from a gangsta stare.
Her eyes were wide open as she asked me,
“Do anybody care?”
I said “Get out of here!”
Then she gave me a stern stare,
and said again,
“Do anybody care?”
I said, “Damn little girl them police don't care,
and they might harass you to if you don't get out of here.”
Then she responded,
“Thats the problem; if I leave who else would see
how they treating them is unfair;
now can you answer my question please,
do anybody care?”
I looked around, and she was right.
We were the only ones standing around
the hood; kats and community was nowhere to be found.
I turned to her and said, “Well I care, so yes somebody cares.”
She responded, almost in tears, “Then why wasn't you there

last night when I had to sleep under my bed scared,
 watching bullets enter my computer chair;
 why wasn't you there when my mother had groceries and got attacked;
 why wasn't you there this morning when Auntie Marie got her purse snatched,
 and I know you be there, I stare out my window, I see you hustling here."

"Yeah I know all the kats, but I'm one dude,
 and I can't tell a starving man not to look for food."
 She said "That's your excuse" I said, "It's no excuse it's just the truth."
 She said, "Well your truth is destroying the community and killing the youth.
 That's why I hate this place,
 It's always our race,
 shooting each other up."
 She mumbles to herself more words like hate, my people, not their fault,
 and as the police drove off with the two brothas in handcuffs I got irate.
 Hold up wait!
 Little sistah you getting out of place;
 I can not believe you're going to say it's not the white man's fault,
 especially seeing these two brothas hauled off?"

"Well what's not the white man's fault:
 the person who shot my brother was Black;
 the person that hooked my mother to crack was Black;
 and the people that rob other Blacks is Black!"
 Then I said ,"Well little sistah you must think
 what made it come to be like that.
 We are no arms dealers, Drug cartels, and organize crime:
 just oppressed people victimizing the oppressed,
 trying to make a dollar out of a nickel and dime."

She said, "I am not supporting that, I see it everyday,
 Dudes mugging each other living an image—ugh, hella fake,
 acting like a gangster movie or some rapper on a mix tape."
 She had strong words with a straight face,
 and I had never really thought about this before,
 so I listened to what she had to say,

but instead she had questions for me.

“Why it got to be our race?”

“Slavery and crack got us not knowing how to resist and act,”

“That is no excuse to sit on your back or kill another Black.”

“Well poverty and self hate keeps us confined to destroy ourselves in this small space”

“If we don’t try then it’s our fault we will stay in hella bad shape,”

“Well you can’t blame the victim for taking too long to heal from brutality and rape.”

“Well playing victim has a heavy price to pay—now we last in everything.”

“Well, slavery wasn’t no game, no people can play, act, or lie about this great ancestral pain,”

“Shit—it’s hella crime, hella drama, hella dope fiends, and we can’t even keep or own streets clean” (she kicks a soda can on the ground).

I was caught off guard by her emotions.

In the growing commotion from across the way (hood kats walking back).

And to keep it real—I was feeling like her the other day.

It’s strange how things happen in a certain kind of way.

Just last week me and my girl were talking about moving;

She’s been afraid I might get killed since the hood is not improving.

She continued...

“Do anybody care—really do somebody care?

I doubt they even really hear—really, I doubt they want to hear.

Only people I see that ain’t Black around here

is the Arabics that own the liquor stores,

the Chinese people that own the 99 cent store,

the Mexicans that own the burrito spot,

and the Koreans at the nail shop,

and them damn white cops.”

I thought about what she was saying.

It was with no smiles—twinkles of the eye,

pleasant girly giggles or gentleness, and

no intentions of dropping the subject—
and she was not wasting any time
asking hard hitting questions—right after another;
only a fool would start debating.
I felt like a dried raisin
being scolded on the sidewalk,
Numbed to her words—but opened as she talked.

Then her squeaky voiced veered:
“Are you listening to me—are you there?”
My first experience of freedom dreaming
was then wiped clear.
“Yeah little sistah I’m still here.
I was just thinking why so many people are not aware.
and.. how old are you?”

She said “Ten”

“And someone your age can understand the problems in the world more then them.”

She said, “I watch CNN, the ten o’clock news, and I check my internet: my teacher is an activist; she gives us the right tools.”

I said “Oh so, what school,” and she said “I go to an Afrocentric freedom school.”

And I thought to myself, no wonder why she’s so smart. I only went to public school.

I looked at her,
and said,
“Well life can be unfair,
even when you live in the same place,
some people got it better then others,
and despite being behind, they are a step ahead of their race,
and a lot of them don’t care,

and never come back to this place,
and I think the first step to care is returning your face.”

She did a quarter spin, looked up into the sky, and let out a soft sigh,
and said “If I get a chance to leave I will never come back,
this is not the place I want to raise my kids,
or the place I want to die.”

Then I simply replied, “Then my little sistah I ask you,
Do anybody care?”

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Andrea Bell

All in Vain

Sunday night, Willis and I went to The Grotto in Watts where he played regularly. While he serenaded the crowd, I mingled, scanning the room as I sipped my drink. A few handsome fellows caught my eye but one in particular; I decided to flirt with. He stood about six foot five wearing an ice blue suit with a lavender handkerchief and shoes to match. We winked and blew kisses at each other from across the room. The dimmed lights and candles set a romantic mood. Couples held each other close on the dance floor, moving melodically in sync. Once the music stopped, they gave applause and Willis joined me at the bar. The guy from across the room walked over and approached Willis.

“Let me borrow your girl for the night, young blood!”

Willis looked at me in confusion. The bartender approached us and before Willis could say anything, she spoke. “Big Art! Sit down before I shoot your big a--!” Then turned to Willis, “Take your girl outta here.”

I’ve been thinking of him lately, *daydreaming* about the last time we saw each other. Besides the fact that he stimulated me musically, I wanted to know what it was like to make love to a musician. Three months prior to that night, I noticed him from my bedroom window. A truckload of Daddy’s new workers drove down the dirt road toward the fields. We made eye contact. He smiled and I smiled back. With a guitar in his hands, he played effortlessly and sang so angelic. On his breaks, I’d lure him into the winery basement. He’d whisper soft tunes in my ear while I caressed his back and enjoyed wet kisses until it was time for him to go. Daddy started to suspect something was up so we ran away together.

We’ve known each other four years and I still feel like I don’t know you. Laila says, after taking a shot of tequila and squeezing lemon down her throat. Now you’re leaving. Her pink dress displays her long pretty legs and

compliments her honey brown complexion. She runs track for Utah State University. She has been my guide around campus since my first day and we've been friends ever since.

She's right, I don't let her in. *What is there to tell?* That I ruined the only friendship I had back home or that I gave my parents hell growing up. That I'm a troublemaker.

Wherever I start, Miss Prissy couldn't relate.

Last year around this time, I called Daddy and demanded he let me come home. I was exhausted from school and felt so out of place. Their ideal of a good time here is eating ice cream and rock climbing. I'd rather go to a bar and dance. He pleaded with me and reminded me that mom couldn't wait to hang my degree. I couldn't argue with that so I asked for money instead and he obliged. I'm glad I stayed.

It's Friday night and I'm done with my finals. I arrive home, get the door of my apartment open and *Surprise!* Everyone jumps out at me and I drop all that I hold in my arms. They laugh of course, help me with my things and escort me inside. The apartment is decorated with graduation banners, balloons and streamers hang from the ceiling. I reach for a Corona from the table where other beverages, appetizers, and cupcakes are set up and circulate around the party. As the music blasts in the background, we chat in escalated voices. I open gifts, collect hugs and hear a ton of, *I'm gonna miss you, Sin.*

So, what are you gonna do when you get home? Laila asks, after letting our last party guest out. *Work.* I say but was really unsure what I would do. I'm starting to think my past is taking over, hindering me of moving on from the trouble I caused my parents, causing the nightmares and my fear to move on. Whatever the case, Daddy would take care of me. Besides, this was his idea anyway, getting me out of California for a while. As we tidy up the kitchen, I drift into my *thoughts.*

Before leaving, I winked at Big Art one last time. He followed behind and approached us again, pulling me towards him and dared Willis to do something. He tried but Big Art punched him in the face. Willis fell to the ground. "Let me go!" I tried to pull away but his grip was strong. Before I knew it, I was in the back seat of a car, a short and stalky guy driving. Big Art instructed him to drop us off at the Edward's Motel on Santa Barbara.

The more I moved and yelled, he held me down tighter. I grew exhausted and stopped fighting. I needed to plan my escape.

A penny for your thoughts. Laila says with concern. She worries about me she tells me. *You're always daydreaming, drifting off. Come on, let's go to my room.* She waves her hand to motion my steps and I follow behind as she sashays to her room. She opens the closet door, rumbles through and brings out a box with photos. As we stretch across her bed and shuffle through her memories, she tells me more about her family and upbringing. *Growing up, my mom was addicted to drugs. Most of the time I didn't have food or guidance.* She says while looking at a picture of herself and her mom. She tells me about her high school days, how she wanted to play sports but instead she had to work after school to support herself, then junior year, she met John. He told her she was beautiful, bought her gifts and spent lots of time with her. They took road trips and ate at elegant restaurants. Eventually, Laila didn't have to work. She was happy that she could focus on school. Senior year, John forced her to work the streets. He threatened to harm her mother so she had no choice. She wore wigs, stilettos and excessive makeup, usually to cover bruises, and frequented cheat motel rooms for five years until she built up the courage to set him up and have him arrested.

As she tells her story, her voice trembles. She looks in my eyes as I look into her soul. Chills fill my body while listening and although I want to, I never look away. Instead, I concentrate on the beautifully placed freckles on her face and trace flowers that I want to give her, to console her. Our experience is different but this story feels so familiar. I've been through a lot but my pain comes from my own actions. No one forced me to do anything, just impulse and lack of self-control.

I sit up and cross my feet under my legs, overwhelmed with what I've just heard. *How did all that happen to you?* I ask but really it's a rhetorical question.

It could happen to anyone. Human Trafficking is real.

I know, I remember your presentation on it.

Yea, I want to help put a stop to this \$32 billion global beast.

I'm beginning to think my troubles aren't so bad. I tell her about Willis,

our visit to Watts and how Big Art forced me in his car.

Once we were in the room, Big Art sat on the edge of the bed while I danced for him. In the distance, cars honked and drivers aired out their road rage. Inside, I concealed mine. I rubbed his shoulders and nudged him to lie down but he didn't budge. Instead, he grabbed me and threw me on the bed. I kicked and punched. One or two connected and blood spurted from his mouth. "Get off me!" I yelled as blood splattered onto my chest. I twisted my way from under him and ran for the door. He lunged for me. "Where you goin' little bitch!" he said as he wrapped his hands around my neck. The room whirled around him. I blacked out.

I was violated, stripped down and alone. I needed Daddy to save me but it was too late. He didn't know where I was. I picked myself up as my legs shook, every step hurt. I had a massive headache and with blurry vision I navigated around to find my clothes as they lay lifelessly on the dingy rug. I managed to get dressed and went off in search of the nearest pay phone.

Hello.

Daddy, can you come get me? I cried out.

Where are you Sinestra? I've been worried sick about you.

I'm on Santa Barbara Street in Watts.

Watts! He yelled because that was no place for his little girl. *Stay put, I'm on my way!*

I walked across the street towards the coffee shop and reflected. I thought about a range of events: The time I ran away to Vegas with a fake ID. I wanted to strip because I love to dance. The club was raided and I had to call Daddy from jail to bail me out; when I stole Daddy's Porsche to joy ride and crashed on I5, I walked away with a busted lip. Daddy stayed calm and mom just cried her eyes out each time. *I could have lost my little girl!* I just laughed. I've done so much that hurt the people who care for me, including Willis. After meeting Big Art, I no longer felt invincible. Daddy suggested I enroll in school. I decided I'd do it to repay them.

Now you know why I chose Psychology. I say to answer a question she asked when we first met; I had no easy answer so I changed the subject.

Wow, tough girl. I finally get to see your softer side. I'm glad you shared that with me.

I'm glad I finally got it off my chest.

All along, I thought Laila and I wouldn't relate on that level. I was

wrong. I've never talked about this with anyone, until now. I've learned new things about myself that I never knew existed. I opened up and trusted her. She listened to me with no judgment and advised without pride. I was no longer ashamed.

Why am I so reckless? I was ready to get answers.

Pay attention to your intuition. She says.

The next morning she drives me to the airport. She sits behind the wheel, still strapped in. *I'm gonna miss you, Sin.* She says smiling.

I'm gonna miss you too. I'll call you when I land. I walk through the sliding doors towards check-in. Once I'm on the plane, I get comfortable in my window seat and glance out. *Utah did me some good after all plus I have a great friend.* When the stewardess comes around, I order a merlot and drink it like water when it arrives. By the time we're flying the skies, I doze off to sleep.

Welcome to LAX. Enjoy your day. The voice blaring from the intercom says. I open my eyes to people moving around me. One in particular, grabbing his overhead carry on with his fly open.

My flight lands at 4:40 PM. I gather my belongings and rush to meet Daddy.

Daddy! I run into his arms.

Hi sweetheart. How was your flight?

It was good.

So, how does it feel, huh? He says trying not to smile.

I feel good. I'm glad it's finally over.

I know baby. I'm glad you're home.

The drive home is awkward. Usually Daddy plays jazz in the background while we chat but today, he's quiet. I am too. I think about Laila, our talk and my new found sense of freedom. The oranges and reds in the sky press against the white clouds as the sunbeams freely on this May afternoon. I smile at the thought of seeing mom's face when I walk through the door. Can't wait to give her my degree. Her first trophy from all those sleepless nights. She would be in the front room playing solitaire or sketching. Dressed up with nowhere to go in particular.

We're driving down Clover Way, almost home. Outside, a woman

trails behind two young boys on tricycles headed to the park, a block away. A couple's having their afternoon jog. I turn on the radio and attempt to find my favorite radio station then suddenly, we drive in silence again.

Sin, your mother's sick.

Let's go to the store and get a few items. I say, to get her some tea, honey, lemon and flowers.

Daddy pulls over at the park. *She has Pneumonia and is developing Alzheimer's. I'm sorry Sin, I wanted to wait until you got home.* His bagged eyes connect with mine. *She's been very quiet lately and doesn't remember anyone.*

She'll know her only child!

It's not that easy, Sin

Everything is easy for you! Can't you fix it?

The look he gives, I don't recognize. He says no more, just gazes off as his lips quiver. My heart sinks when I realize he's powerless. I force the car door open and run with no destination. My throat swells and my breathing begins to wheeze. In that moment, I was seven. Mommy and I sat at the vanity mirror. She slid red lipstick on my lips. I mashed them together then puckered up. The mascara brushed my lashes, I blink repeatedly. The blush made me feel like a clown but I let her apply it anyway. She'd always say, "*A lady never leaves home without her roses.*" She'd pin my hair up and let me put on her fancy dresses and heels. I'd switch my hips until they hurt.

I'm out of breath, fall to the grass and just lay there. I want to be taken away, like the million times I've watched ants in the backyard carrying crumbs and wounded soldiers back home.

Back home, I walk up the windy staircase to my bedroom, remembering the last time I slid my hands across this cherry oak railing, I was nineteen and naive. My teddy bears Daddy won at the county fair are sitting on my bed, the pink knitted blanket mom made is on the rocking chair and my favorite white and gold jewelry box still sits on my dresser. I open it. Tunes dance out and greet me with a kiss. *I'm finally home.* I close my eyes and revisit the days when mom prompted my tiny feet on hers and we'd twirl to the symphony until we'd get dizzy, then plunge to the rug and laugh until we ran out of tears.

Mom has a live-in nurse. I walk into the den as she's finishing her feeding. A hospital bed is set up with flowers on the small table next to the

chair she sits in. The room is dimly lit from the remainder of the sun. She faces the window but her stare is blank. *Hi mom, I'm home.* I say in hopes that I would get a response. She says nothing. I hold my degree in my hand and I feel like it's too late. Like it's all in vain. I grip it with hands, my thumbs and index fingers. Ready to rip it to pieces. I think about the time I spent trying to do something right for once. The time I wasted.

Instead, I place it on the table, collapse at her feet and rest my head on her knee wanting her to pet my hair and tell me that everything will be okay but she's mute. I twist my hair around my fingers, pulling out a few strands to feel the snaps from my scalp. While I wait, I glance out the window along with mom. A blue jay lands on the fountain in the middle of the lawn. Splashing through the water shakes its little body dry, drinking occasionally then freely flies off. I imagine I'm that bird but I have nowhere to go. I can't seem to think of any place I'd rather be but here with mom.

Several weeks pass and my degree remains unframed. Mom is bed written and most nights I cry myself to sleep. Today, I finally check my messages; Laila has called several times, worried. I haven't called. I don't want to talk anyway. Daddy has been trying to get me out of the house but I refuse every time. He walks in my bedroom and tells me I have a visitor.

A visitor? I ask annoyed as I try to fix myself for this unknown intruder. I look up, it's Laila.

What are you doing here?

I've been calling you. I finally contacted your father. He insisted I come. Look at you, what are you doing with yourself?

Nothing. I snap.

I can see that honey.

I roll out of bed, dress and join Laila for tea in the backyard. The breeze welcomes me to the outdoors. My skirt flows with the wind. She's excited to finally meet Daddy and a bit distraught about mom. *It's okay.* I tell her but really, I want to break down. She tells me about her First Women's Conference coming up in Los Angeles, for troubled young adults. Her project since we've known each other.

Congrats girl, a long time coming huh?

Yea, now all I need is a Keynote Speaker? She says sliding me a flyer with my picture and name on it along with hers. It reads: *It's time to Live on Purpose.*

You want to join me?

No! I'm still trying to figure things out.

Are you ready to get over your issues and help someone else?

I will, in time.

The time is now Sinestra. She says sternly.

In this moment, I hear my mother's voice. The hairs on my neck rise.

I'm speechless.

