

Unhinged



Part One: Bét Chase



Each day, since that day, has been the same.

A numbing pain paints every moment with a cloud of despair and insufferable sadness.

Putting on clothes, brushing teeth, and showering felt worse than death, breathing felt like an inconvenience, and her stash of smiles was bare. Just a few months before this day, she was making plans for the spring anticipating the sweet scent of magnolias and tulips. But those plans, like the prospect of being ‘herself- Wanda’ again, didn’t exist anymore. Sometimes she grows tired of weeping in her bed so she

schleps herself through the house to go where they used to sit together. The verandah has two tawny golden and aged teak rockers. She always sat on the left and he’d always sit to her right. She sat down and closed her eyes as she did everyday since that day.

As she closed her eyes, she could hear the thumping. Thump- thump- thump- his feet gently tapping against the ashen asphalt. She feels the earth gently trembling beneath him as the weight of his muscles, fat, organs, mind, and soul charges pass the trees and the cars on the street. She feels the release of his endorphins and the stress from the week evaporating like the beads of sweat saturating his bright white shirt. She hears his heart. Ba-dum. Ba-dum. Ba-dum. She smells the carbon emissions from a jet-black pick-up truck that was slowly approaching him. She hears one of the men inside the car speak. He has a raspy voice. The kind that sounded like he just smoked all of the Marlboro 100’s in town. He hollered “stop” at the man who was running.

She feels the running man's heart beating faster and faster and faster. She clasps the armrests of the rocker as she starts convulsing at the thought of the the anxiety that must've ensued the moment his retina absorbed the light, turned it into electrochemical signals, and sent it to his optic nerve for processing. He starts running again. This time he is going quicker than the thoughts speeding through his mind.

Her bones, like his, are shaking so forcefully that she feels them brushing against the teak a fireboard and spindle rubbing against one another to start a fire. She sees the men get out of the car. She wants to scream but she can't. That takes too much energy. She wants to pray but she thinks that God has forsaken her. So instead, she briefly replays the ephemeral memories she still has of him. Then she hears it: POW—POW—POW. Her one thousandth tear falls on the verandah's floor. There is no indication that this sorrow will ever wane so she gets up and goes back inside the house; forced to accept that the days of cackling and grinning on the front porch with glasses of fresh iced tea are gone.

On February 23, 2020 while the rest of the world was engulfed and consumed by the presence of the novel coronavirus, Ahmaud Arbery was hunted by two White men in Georgia. His mother, like the mothers of hundreds of other Black people, who have been hunted in America, wakes up every day to the most heart wrenching reality that no parent should have to



live in. Her son is dead and he is never coming back. Since then this murder has become frontpage news and caught the attention of high-ranking politicians despite COVID-19's precipitously mounting death toll. The press coverage and outrage by politicians might lead one to believe that people are really comprehending the

gravity of what happened that day. Though that analysis of this situation would be understandable, it would also be an erroneous interpretation of what this reaction says about America's stance on racial matters. Ahmaud Arbery will not be the last Black male to be murdered and Wanda Cooper-Jones will not be the last Black mother to mourn her Black child's death. The outrage over Ahmaud's murder will eventually cool down and what we will be left with, in addition to the agony and despair, is a collection of articles and news clips that will someday be used as evidence that America is no longer a racist country because of how the White media reacted to this murder. This case will set the high bar for what has to happen for White people to acknowledge that Black people in America are hunted. The next Black man gunned down will not be innocent or mourned unless there is tape, as there was in this case, showing that he was hunted. Every other case, no matter how suspicious the circumstances are, will be swatted down as another example of a Black people calling racism.

Perhaps the graver travesty, as it pertains to Ahmaud Arbery's death, is that there will never be justice for him or his family. Mr. McMichael and his son will go to jail and that decision will be praised as an instance of Americans coming together to combat injustice. This case will become the model case for America's racist sect to point out progress on race issues creating this false belief that the America that Black people experience is not actually broken. Sociopolitical issues affecting Black people from varying classes, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations is proof that sending the McMichaels to prison does not mean that America is not a racist country. It certainly does not mean that Black people should now feel safe.

Believing that sending the McMichaels to prison solves the problem of racism is indicative of how people in this country do not realize how much fear and trauma Black people live in in this country. As a Black mother in America, I live in fear; not in fear of a white man or a white woman. Rather, I live in fear of a system that wrought an environment where I can consistently feel like something is wrong with my very existence or experience suffering. I cannot afford to enjoy anything without there being some sort of explicit or implicit push back. My hair is too kinky, my nose is too big, my hips are too wide, my personality is aggressive, my scholarship takes away from white kids who are more deserving, my native country is a shithole, my mom couldn't get diagnosed early enough so she's dead, my dad's spirit was broken so much that he inflicted his

generational trauma on me, my son's father has been broken down so much and is so insecure that he abandoned his Black son, my brother is so scared of being shot that he doesn't talk too much when he is outside. The list of what America does to Black people, both mentally and physically is infinitely long.

Though I cannot what it is like to be a Black offer my experience as a story about the gender, race, religion, many other topics. This is myself, who was told that brave and the land of the hold these truths to be are created equal, that they creator with certain among these are life, happiness. Despite being American soil waiting to physically hunted.



pretend to understand man in particular, I can Black woman. This is a intersectionality between health, education and the story of a woman, this is the home of the free. A place where we self-evident, that all men are endowed by their inalienable rights, that liberty, and the pursuit of told those things, I am on be emotionally or

I, like Wanda Cooper Jones, experience a numbing cloud of pain over my body whenever I remember that because of endemic racism I will be metaphorically and maybe even literally spat on, betrayed, harassed, and unappreciated by people who don't look me. Some of those who do look like me will internalize their experience with hatred and will turn around and belittle my worth as a release for their pain.

I have heard several people say that Black women are angry or that we look for reasons to be upset. However, that stereotype is only one side of our story. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie once said that "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.

They make one story become the only story.” The other half of the Black woman’s story is a tale about repeated psychological and physical assault. Because we are women, we have been doubly or triply colonized. Our retribution for existing has left us bleeding, beaten, and broken. Thus, instilling us with as many reasons as humanly possible for them to be unhappy.

By telling this story, women all across the world reclaiming and reframing Black women are unhinged. Yes. I am am way because the world way. I learned to be heedful by any means necessary. voice is the same ancestors to defend our from those who sought to piercing look I give those



I am hoping that black will join me in the stereotype that aggressive and unhinged. I am who I would have me be this and to protect my flock The indignation in my indignation used by my children and our men harm them. The who offend me comes

from depleted patience for the shit that I can no longer take after 100’s of years of being inadequately protected. And, my ability to go from 0 to unhinged in the blink of an eye is there to serve as a warning to not test me so that I do not have to show you how I can sting like a bee. And the smile on my face despite of my assertive persona is there to remind you that in spite of your ignorance, I will always be a beacon of light and a defender of my culture during the darkest times in history.

Part two: Prizon Entranje



When I was about 4 years old, I moved to Miami, Florida to live with my aunt. Every morning she would wake up and have a steaming hot cup of Haitian coffee with cassava and peanut butter while listening to the Haitian radio channel. Sometimes I felt like we were living in Haiti. Miami is about as hot as Haiti, the water at the beaches is almost as clear, President Bush was an imbecile as was Aristide (the Haitian

president at the time), and we only ever went out with the Haitian people in our neighborhood. The only thing missing was a revolution every other year.

I mostly ignored my aunt and her friends during their monotonous political arguments but every once in a while, I paid attention. They rarely agreed with one another except for one topic. They all came to the consensus that leaving Haiti was the epitome of making it in life. Haiti was depicted as hell on earth. They'd talk about the corrupt politicians, pitiable education system, people dying of starvation, child prostitution, and how hard people had to work to make money.

According to them, there was only one man who came remotely close to creating a Haiti that they could be proud of. His name is Francois Duvalier. The former

president of Haiti is more commonly known as Papa Doc. Duvalier was a brutal dictator and committed terrible crimes against humanity. Those who disagreed with Duvalier or managed to survive the torture from the Tonton Macoutes, Duvalier's special forces, have described the abhorrent acts carried out by his disciples and they are to terrifying to repeat. While his dissidents lived in great fear and were subjected to violence or death, Duvalier's friends and those who were tactful enough not to openly detest his orders loved him. He was a populist who stood up for the working-class Haitians and he hated the petit blancs (light skinned Haitians and mulattoes).





Knowing what I know about Duvalier, I could not comprehend why any Haitian person would like a man who oppressed his own people. I asked my aunt what did she like about him? She said “what is there not to like?” I gave her a puzzling look and she responded by saying that “Duvalier is the same as any American President.” I immediately rejected the slightest comparison and told her all of the things that I learned about him in school. My aunt laughed at me as if she sitting in a front row seat at a Dave Chapelle comedy show. After calling me a stupid American, she told me that the only reason why I think Duvalier is any worse than American presidents is because my eyes are not open. Then, in creole, she said “your mind is imprisoned and you don’t know it.” At the time I dismissed it as my aunt speaking in tongue and went about my day only to entirely forget what she had just told me.

6 years after that conversation, I was sitting in a classroom in one of NYU's fancy buildings. I decided that I wanted to be "woke" and what better way to be woke than to learn about your ancestors. I enrolled in a class about Haiti taught by the late professor Jean Dash. Professor Dash dedicated an entire section of the course to the Duvalier era and assigned a book about the experience of a Tonton Macoute living in Brooklyn. There was one scene depicting the torture inflicted on a female dissenter. A woman was locked in a cell that could not have been larger than eighty square feet. She was fed scraps and unhealthy food one or two times a day. She was assaulted by the guards who knew they would not be punished for raping her. She was imprisoned for questionable reasons. And after being released from prison, she had to commit petty crimes to make a living because no one would hire her. As I read this book, I was a bit perplexed. I knew that I was reading a book about a third world country but this woman's experience seemed analogous to the experience of people imprisoned in America. How could I sit on my high American horse and ridicule these other countries when the same things happen in America?

I had an epiphany while sitting in that class. I realized that my aunt was right. We are imprisoned. The prisons just look different because of a few home 'improvements.' Wooden ships were replaced by large brick and mortar complexes. You don't defecate while standing in close proximity to one another; now you can do it while you sit on a toilet that is in cell which is shared with three or four other people. You don't need to buy your freedom in the literal sense anymore; however, you do pay a steep price financially through the bail system and through low wage labor while in and after prison. In case these prisons are not similar enough to slavery, oppressors added the slave chaser feature to this new and improved framework. We no longer call people in this profession bounty hunters but parole officers play a very similar role in society. Thus, it seems as if though the 'advancements' that we thought were made are not advancements at all. They are mutations of the same oppression that has always existed.

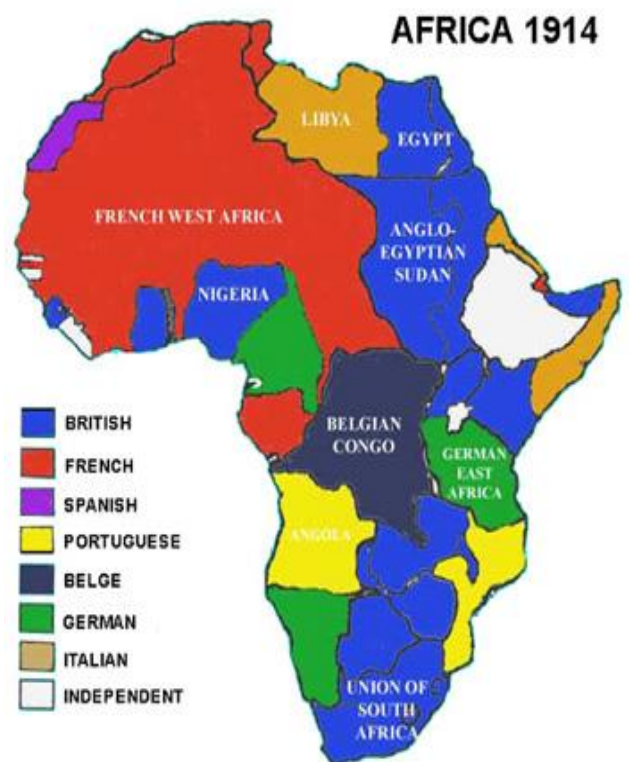
Our minds, our bodies, and our souls are imprisoned. All of us are prisoners in foreign countries and every so often we are reminded literally, like when Trump supporters started chanting "send her back" at one of his rallies, or figuratively that this is not our home. To better understand how we were taken from our homes?

why Black people, no matter where they are, live in a world that oppresses them? and why do some Black people naively believe that they are actually free in foreign countries? We must first acknowledge that no matter how accomplished you are as a black person in this country, you are oppressed.

In addition to acknowledging our lived reality, we must stop naively thinking that oppression starts with the actually act that is committed today. When a white person calls you the n word, their ability to go unchecked for that did not start when Donald Trump became elected. We must go back to the colonization of Africa to understand the root cause of the current mutation of oppression. One way to do that is by analyzing literature about colonization and then applying a Black prospective to it.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* addresses a plethora of deep seeded cultural and societal problems through the lens of a European colonizer and provides some insight as to how colonizer's beliefs have percolated into present day current society. Conrad's story about a white 'liberal' man's misguided and ingenuine sympathy is demonstrative of how the colonizer's unfamiliarity with the landscapes, cultures, and people they conquered caused them to infer numerous misrepresentative conclusions about those people's way of life and created an insensitivity/ lack of appreciation to their lived experience.

The Heart of Darkness, was revered as a great calling to the white consciousness to rid the world of King Leopold's despotic and brutal slavery. Conrad is regarded as a moral man because after visiting the Congo, on behalf of his European monarch, he wrote about the atrocities he witnessed under King Leopold. It is supposed to be especially stunning given that he is white, from a very rich country, agreed to go on that trip to make that country richer, and had no reason to criticize these practices given that he benefited from them. That is the logic that is used to prop up Conrad's behavior. However, as you delve deeper into the text, you begin to see that while



Conrad claims to be exposing the murderous and genocidal actions that the Belgian imperialists implemented, he did so while perpetuating the same biased and exploitative point of view that makes colonialism possible to begin with. Similarly, to a plethora of 'academic' literature on Africa by foreigners, Conrad is influenced by the universal stereotype that West African people are subhuman. He describes the African people as not "[speaking] at all: they grunt; they chant; they produce a 'drone of weird incantations.'"

Conrad seems to have conveniently forgotten that in order to speak, without fear, you must have the freedom to choose whether or not to speak and you must not think that speaking will earn you lashings. Words matter and no matter how small the word, it has the ability to entirely change the essence of the sentence. The African people were not "not" talking. They were not allowed to talk. They were kidnapped from different regions of Africa, grouped with people of other tribes so that they could not conspire/ revolt together, and then severely abused if they even breathed in a manner that their master did not like. To say that they did not speak at all insinuates that their silence was a choice when we know that it was not. Silence was forced onto them. Again, these depictions are important because they show how oppressive systems work to belittle the atrocities committed and work to help the imperialists better cope with what they were doing.

Conrad wrote about how the slaves had "a wild vitality" and their "faces [were] like grotesque masks." He states that the slaves "were called criminals and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from over the sea. All their meager breasts panted together, the violently dilated nostrils quivered, the eyes stared stonily up-hill. They passed me within six inches, without a glance, with that complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages." When discussing the slaves, he does not speak about them as people but as parts of a whole. Their nostrils, eyes, and breasts are merely parts that he noticed on the savages and not the bodies of men and women, not savages, who deserved respect/dignity/ humanity.

Conrad's lack of sensitivity to the lived experience of the enslaved peoples is also what Conrad wrote about



what he perceived to be the most heinous acts that he had witnessed. Think about the last time you witnessed a crime, if you ever have, did you wait several years to call the police? If you are walking in the street and see a woman getting abused and claim that what you witnessed was so disgusting, why would you not take actions to stop it from happening to other women at the hands of the same oppressor? It seems like Conrad did not do that because he did not view slavery/ colonialism as inhumane in and of itself; he thought that the Belgians were the problem. Although Conrad's story does show the evils of Belgians colonization of

the Congo, Conrad's description of Mr. Kurtz - although he is meant to be a heinous person- comes across almost romanticized as he is said to have been a writer, an intellectual, even being adored by the Africans of the Inner Station. The blatant disregard or lack of acknowledgement for just how visceral and violent slavery/ colonialism is appalling.

By way of Marlow, Conrad portrayed himself as a savior and selfless. In the same vein, Conrad also imparted his British imperialism on Marlow as well. Hochschild writes, "Marlow was speaking for Conrad, whose love of his adoptive country knew no bounds: Conrad felt that "liberty can only be found under the English flag all over the world." Because of Conrad's British pride and anti-Belgium ideology, it is clear that he wanted to

portray the Belgians in the worst light possible. He specifically targeted Captain Leon Rom, who is the supposed inspiration behind Mr. Kurtz, the murderous head collector.

Given this irrefutably offensive conclusion, you may ask yourself why do some schools still teach this work as part of their curriculum? Conrad's offensive rhetoric is excused because Conrad uses alliteration, assonance, hyperboles, litotes, and a slew of other rhetorical devices. They are a sign of his intelligence.

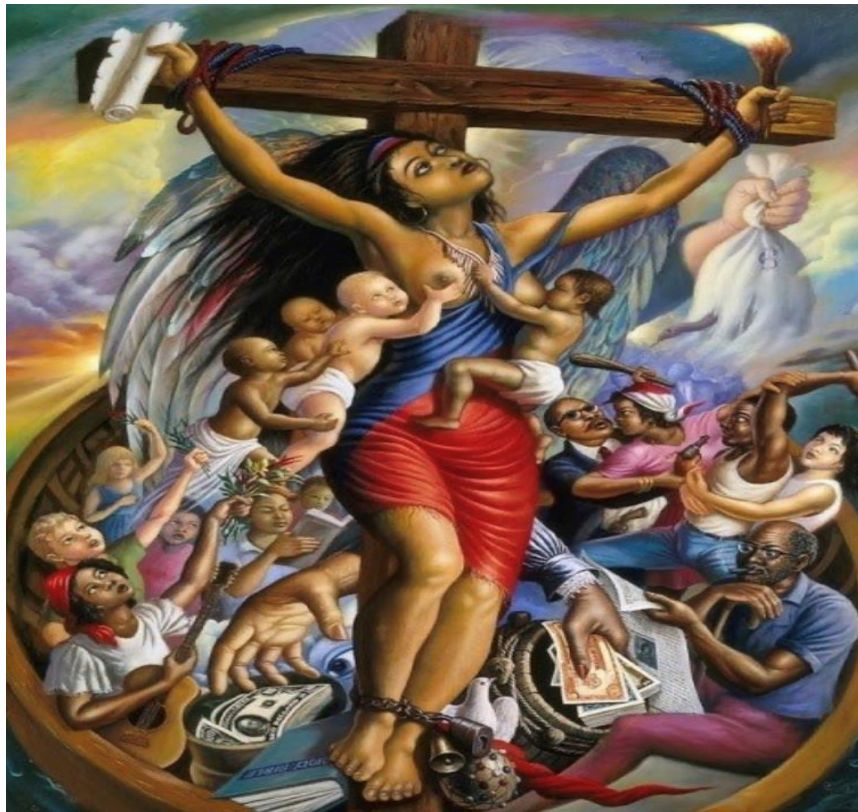
Intelligence and IQ—manmade constructs used to label those with different forms of intelligence as dumb and to put certain groups ahead of one another. The idea that Conrad's racist work is being taught because he is a great writer is yet another example of how the white liberal imaginary works to further oppress Black people. by creating the illusion that progressives actually understand how ingrained racism is in our society. There are a multitude of great writers who write using a bevy of literary and rhetorical devices who do not also champion imperialism. The constant confrontation with praising slavery/ colonialism contributes to the



unsettled spirits of Black people in this country. It also certainly serves as a reminder that this place, America, will never be our home. This mechanism of chaining Black people's minds and lashing us whenever we dare to attempt breaking away from it is proof that we are all living in foreign prisons. Captured and taken away from our motherland only to be mentally or physically enslaved for hundreds of more years.

Part Three: Bondye

It was the middle of September and I was sitting in my room. My hands were shaking feverishly, my eyes glossy, my vision blurred, my blood boiling, my stomach caving in. I blinked over and over again hoping that when I opened up my eyes I would be in a different place. Instead the room looked smaller. The walls got closer together and it felt like I had nowhere else to go. I looked up at the white popcorn ceiling and started noticing its texture. Thousands of little balls. Some with sharp edges. Some with round edges. Some large. Some tiny. Some grouped together in big clusters. Some in smaller clusters. The ceiling seemed like the perfect escape from my life. I grimaced at those little dots for what was probably only a few minutes but it felt like a few hours. For those few moments, time was suspended and I was in a different world. That feeling that you get when you first put apple AirPods in your ear. The ‘white noise’ is cancelled out and you can all of a sudden think more clearly.



This was the third month of my pregnancy. Each of the previous ninety days was the exact same. I’d wake up in the morning and call a friend or family member who thought moving forward with my pregnancy was a bad idea. I’d listen to them tell me it was a bad idea and that I was too talented to “waste my life” on being a young mom until I couldn’t listen anymore. I’d cry about it. Sit in my dorm asking myself “how did I let this

happen?" or convincing myself that this meant I'd never become the professional I wanted to be. Then, when the sun went down, I would put on baggy clothes to hide my belly and go do the exact same thing while walking the Brooklyn Bridge.

I was desperately seeking a refuge but had no idea where or how to find it. Staying at NYU or going back home wouldn't have made sense. For the most part, I despised the environment I created and the people I chose to hang around. The only place that could've been worse than NYU, would've been my home. I fled there as quickly as possible when I graduated high school. As a matter of fact, I moved into Goddard Hall a few hours after my high school graduation ended.



There were so many unknowns but the one thing I did know was that I did not want to welcome my son into any of the environments I previously lived in or introduce him to any of the people I had known my whole life. So, I started thinking about my options. There was this nagging voice in my head that kept saying, why don't you get over it? What do you have to lose if he fails you? Even if you don't believe in him, just pretend. What if I do believe in him? I was talking to myself about this opportunity that I had been offered. It was an opportunity of a lifetime.

On one of those walks across the Brooklyn Bridge, I called my best friend

Norvilia. Her and I had grown a part in college because she became religious. She didn't drink anymore, she

didn't party, she didn't talk to boys, she didn't curse. Basically, as I became a hardened pagan, she was becoming Mother Teresa. Two trains going in the opposite direction. She decided that she was going to become a nun while she was in college. I couldn't understand why my brilliant friend would choose to move to the middle of west bumble Missouri, where she'd be the only black person, and give up life all in the name of GOD. I didn't think God was making any sense but I supported her anyways. I also decided to support her because I was about to never see her again since the religious community, she chose was a contemplative and cloistered order. Thus, if I wanted to talk to her, I had to write her letters.

Norvilia convinced me that fully support her, I'd have to help her help me. Because of her obvious affection for God and Catholicism, helping her help me meant that I had to let her bring me to the Sisters. She introduced me to two Sisters from an Augustinian order of Nuns in New York City. I wasn't a fan of organized religion and would actually tell Norvilia about how strange I thought her catholic faith was given Christianity's troubled past with Black people and logic. Despite my reservations, I went. I was very desperate.

I had no idea what to expect. I just remember thinking that I had nothing to lose. It's not like I was



happy with my status quo. Since I am too poor to sit on a fancy couch and speak to someone about my problems, I figured maybe I should give this God thing a shot. I said to myself "Claudine this is a listening event not a talking event. This is not class or a debate. All you have to do is listen." Ironically, I ended up talking for about three hours. But not about what I expected to speak about. I thought that they'd tell me about how much of a sinner I was. On the walk there I would look at the faces of the people walking pass me and their faces and bodies would be covered

by a habit. They'd say "there is not enough holy water in the city to cleanse this one."

In hindsight, I am definitely sure that the Sisters thought I was a mental case back then and maybe they still do now; however, during that initial meeting, I remember feeling the purest form of love that I have ever experienced apart from the bond that I have with my son. Sister Brigid and Sister Zellie told me that though they don't typically do this for many of the thousands of women their organization services, they'd like to offer me the opportunity to meet the Superior Sister to discuss moving into the convent. That moment changed my life forever. I found a holy respite. I couldn't believe that I was so excited to live with nuns. I couldn't comprehend how I would make sense of this with my brain. There was such a wide gap between what I believed to be organized religion and logic.

In *Soul Mountain, Xingjian* "I could of course think maybe there is no meaning at all in this blinking eye, but its significance could lie precisely in its not having meaning. There are no miracles. God is saying this, saying this insatiable being, me. Then what else is there to seek? I ask of him." In the months that I spent with the Sisters, I opened my eyes to the beauty that exists in simply being. Their loved for a simple life made me want to want simplicity too. Their vows to God are chastity, obedience, and poverty. Everything they have is donated to them by other people. They walk in the streets of New York City and take week long driving trips with no phones. They eat whatever is given to them. They have no money whatsoever. They don't go to fancy colleges or have fancy jobs. Yet, these women, are the happiest people I have ever come across in my life.

In hopes of achieving that degree of happiness, I started following in their footsteps. One of the Irish sisters always says "early to bed and early to rise makes you healthy, wealthy, and wise." So, I started waking up at 5:30 AM when they woke up. I ate the same bland breakfast every day. I went to holy hour and actually prayed during the service. I would bring my petitions to God even though I wasn't sure I believed. I would go to confession. I even learned some of the Latin hymns that they sing. By the time eight months had passed, I felt like a different person. How could I be worried about not making six figures? The sisters make no money at all and they eat better than I ever did growing up. I could I be worried about the prestige of the graduate school I go to? Some of the sisters went to previous colleges and still chose to live a life that fulfilled their actual desires.

Why can't I do that to? How could I be worried about not having things for my son? My son has more now than he could've ever had if I had followed his father or if I had gone back home.

I became at peace with my life and started thinking that perhaps there is a God and maybe he has been with me all along. Just as I started to think that, I had a deep revelation. My main reason for distrusting the concept of God was my inability to reconcile God's messages with the actions of his disciples. I used to think that if God were so smart, why did he leave his church to Peter who betrayed him? If he makes those kinds of mistakes with his own son's life, why on earth do people think I should to pray to him to protect my son. If he is so good, then why have Black people been enslaved by people carrying his holy book?



While searching for land, minerals, and other natural resources to commoditize they came across an even better discovery that could and would be monetized and exploited for an eternity- Africans. They were in utter disbelief by what they saw. These civilizations had gold, ivory, coffee, even more minerals that were unfounded at the time, and an exponential amount of people who could be used to tap into those resources. When faced with the decision of what to do with these different people, their resources, and their territories, the European colonizers chose to pervert religious teachings to oppress the Africans. "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion" (Achebe). The imperialist's clever

maneuvering and clandestine intentions caused the Africans to become “amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay” (Achebe). The perversion of religion to oppress others is not an original idea. The white man’s burden was often the chief reason given, by European colonizers and monarchs, for going to African shores. In fact, part of the reason why Christianity spread so quickly and Europeans ramped up their conquering efforts was because they feared that their Muslim and Arab competitors would become a greater power around the world.

In *God Dies by the Nile*, the Egyptian and award-winning author and doctor, Nawal El Sadaawi writes that many a time her people were told “that Allah would help us, and that you should pray to Him, and be patient?” (Sadaawi). This line is indicative of the fact that it is not just Christianity that exhibits the issue of God



being used to justify heinous acts. The Europeans came to our lands, as different people went to the Middle East and other parts of the world, with their religions and taught us that being obedient to God means that we must be obedient to them. They flagrantly beat our own religions and cultures out of us. They labelled them as satanic, as they did with the Voodoo practices seen in places like Haiti, and forbid them. You were given no choice—obey God and the more ‘sophisticated’ practices or face the penalty of death. That deep psychological abuse “has put a knife on the things that held us together

and we have fallen apart” (Achebe). The “will of God”, according to imperial interests, found its way to the America’s and has never left this stolen land since.

So how have I tried to piece it all back together? For starters, I have questioned and grilled the sisters on an almost daily basis. There are still many things that I am not sure I agree with or believe to be from God. However, I have come to my own conclusion about who God is and what it is that he wants. It’s simple. God is faith. That is, it. Nothing more and nothing less. God does not ask us to not like gay people or people who lie or cheat. He does not tell us that we are not good and that we cannot be loved. In every situation or whenever someone turns to God for something, they are turning to him because they lack faith and his response is to give it to them.

It is not a people do not go Sunday, sing to whenever they Easter with the white people Christianity to purpose. Any not know what



coincidence that Black to masses every the high heavens feel like it, or celebrate same fervor that the who brought them do. It is done on insinuation that they do was done to them is

insulting at best and ignorance at worst. We have chosen to reclaim God. We have given him a Black person’s touch that is evidenced by the way Black pastors preach, by the way we sing devotionals, and by the way that we highlight his similarities to the deities that are from our motherland. I reconciled my suspicion of religion by recognizing that religion is merely a manifestation of one of the many ways to practice discipline and faith. It is why nearly all of them teach the same things. You give back to the poor because those who are poor need sustenance. More importantly, they need to have faith in humanity so that they do not go and rob others. You pray for hours at a time because everyone needs moments of silence to be alone with their thoughts. Being alone

with our thoughts and being able to rationalize our failures or desires gives us faith that we will be better tomorrow.

When these people were writing gospels, thousands of years ago, they did not have iPhones, skyscrapers, and clubs. There was quiet time, exercise, and meditation built into life. All of the teachings of God, not the manifestations of them in practice by people, are thoughts that I agree with. I think most people agree with being kind to the elderly, treating others how you want to be treated, and not wasting resources when there are people in the world with nothing. Thus, while I still detest the groupthink and misinterpretations of many of God's disciples, I have begun to separate who I believe to be God from them. I do not see white people now and say well I can't believe in God because you are racist and you are racist because you believe in God. Rather, I tell myself that they are the ones who do not believe in God. I once heard that the master's told will never aid in the destruction of his house.

For me, the tools afforded to me by my new found belief in God have helped me to break down my master's house. I am no longer in a prison and instead I am on my own soul mountain with myself, my son, and my faith; with desiderata. The word desiderata means things wanted and needed. To remind myself of what is wanted and what is needed, I read the poem Desiderata by Max Ehrmann:

Go placidly amid the noise and the haste,
and remember what peace there may be in silence.
As far as possible, without surrender,
be on good terms with all persons.
Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others,
even to the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story.
Avoid loud and aggressive persons;
they are vexatious to the spirit.
If you compare yourself with others,
you may become vain or bitter,

for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.

Keep interested in your own career,

however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs,

for the world is full of trickery.

But let this not blind you to what virtue there is;

many persons strive for high ideals,

and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection.

Neither be cynical about love;

for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years,

gracefully surrendering the things of youth.

Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune.

But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings.

Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars;

you have a right to be here.

And whether or not it is clear to you,

no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore, be at peace with God,

whatever you conceive Him to be.

And whatever your labors and aspirations,

in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams,
it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.



Part Four: Rekonesan Pou Sa Ou Genyen

Dr. David Jeremiah once said that “no matter what our circumstances, we can find a reason to be thankful.” In an age where everyone is obsessed with happiness, it is natural to wonder how does one become happy? A few years ago, I went to Yoga to The People to take one of their free classes. Afterwards, I thought to myself “am I supposed to feel happy now.” Based on all of the things I was reading at the time, things like yoga, meditation, and saying positive things so that you can manifest positivity were supposed to cure unhappiness. The yoga class made no difference so instead I spent the walk home thinking about happiness.



I thought about my AP psychology in high school. I learned about Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Maslow was a psychologist who firmly believed that self-actualization could only be achieved if our most basic needs were met first. He divided human needs into five different categories. The first category is physiological needs such as air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, etc. The second category is safety needs such as personal security, employment, property, and resources. The third category is love

and belonging. The fourth one is esteem which, according to Maslow, equates to respect, self-esteem, status, recognition, and freedom. And finally, if you have all of those things you will arrive at the fifth category which is self-actualization. For Maslow’s purposes, self-actualization means the desire to become the most that one can be.

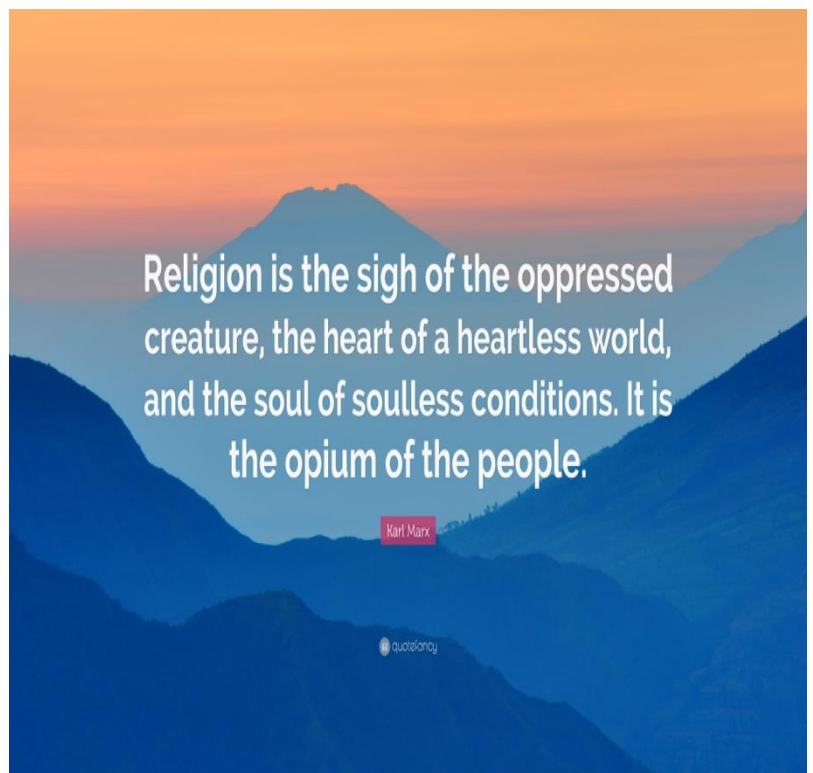
Maslow’s hierarchy is well designed to tell us what we should be striving for and what tools we need in our tool box to build a self-actualized self. However, how do we acquire those tools? How does one attain the safety needs or the love that Maslow refers to? If you were to ask most people how do you attain those safety needs, they’d probably say “well that’s obvious if you want a job, you apply for one. If you want a car, you buy one. If you want property, you buy property.” At least that is probably the case for most Americans.

Theoretically speaking, once we purchase these things and secure them for prolonged periods of time, then you move on up. Not to the eastside but rather to the next level of needs until you make it to the very top- self-actualization.

Maslow could've never foreseen the future and thus recognized how this logic would take effect in practice in a neo-liberal world. I on the other hand have had the great fortune of living through and in the aftermath of several new-era travesties like 9/11, the Rohingya Genocide, and the Corona Virus. I posit that the idea that we need to go through all of these different levels of acquiring things to become self-actualized beings is the perpetuation of the root cause of unhappiness. Maslow's triangle is upside down. Self-actualization comes first and the rest follows. Buddha once said that "we need to learn to want what he has, not have what we want, in order to get steady and stable happiness."

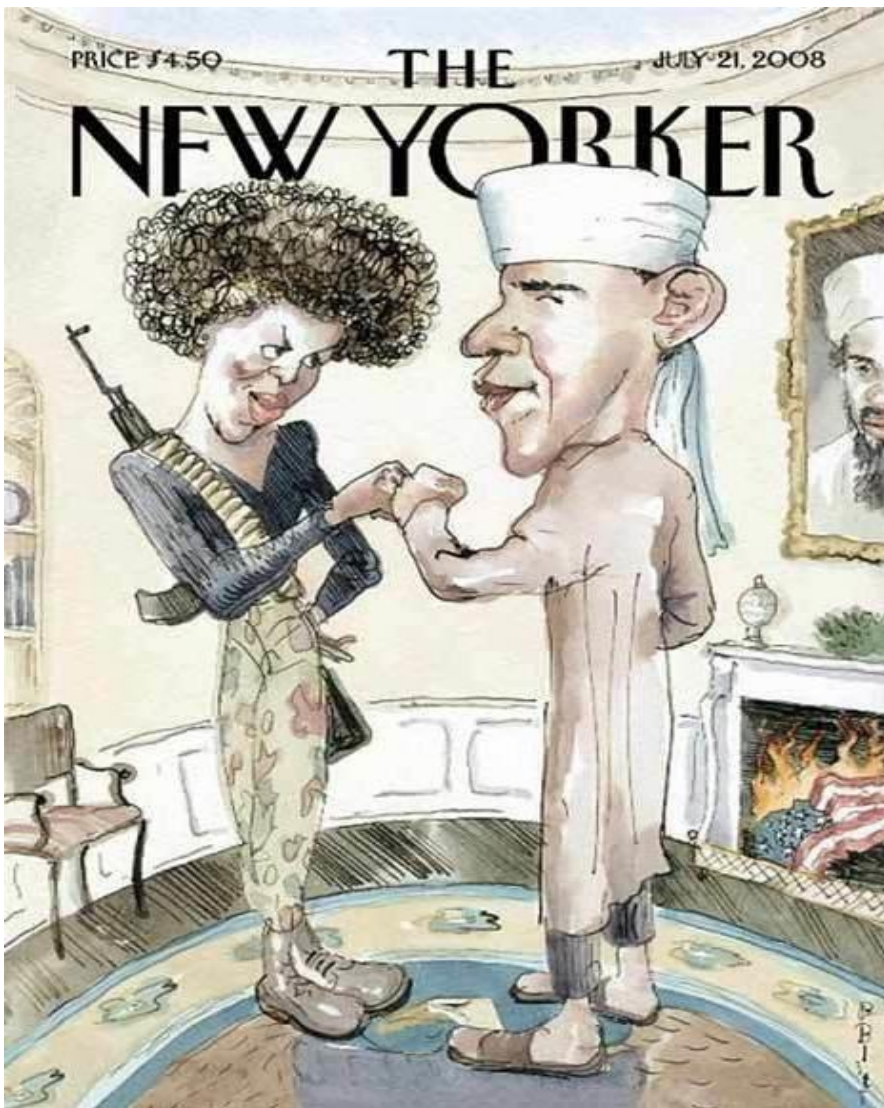
Buddha's quote, though very inspirational and good principle to strive for, can easily be manipulated to be used to oppress people and prevent them from questioning why they have so little when others have so much. It is why Karl Marx called religion "opium for the masses." You won't revolt because you are dying of starvation if are happy that you are starving. Buddha is a well-known figure whose life was recorded so we know that he actually

believed those words; however, how are quotes like this one used to teach people to stop complaining about having less? Though happiness has no monetary value, we as humans have managed to make it the most expensive intangible commodity. The price for happiness or inner peace is not only to expensive but in many cases, people may not even want to buy it.



I know what I have and so do many other people of color. Wanting what I have means to, in part, be happy with my oppression? If you have to work fourteen-hour days on a farm in the sweltering sun, be grateful because in Mexico there are no jobs at all. If you are in prison, be grateful because there are no buildings in Africa so you wouldn't have a bed, a table to eat dinner, or dinner at all if you were not in America. The list goes on and on of the things to be grateful for. Underneath these messages are gratefulness lays the truth behind why immigrants and people of color from poor countries may never be wholeheartedly accepted in America. America will take anyone from around the world to build up her vision but if that person cannot offer anything other than physical labor or if they cannot advance her standing in the world, they are viewed as indentured servants whose lives are payment for being able to stay in America. Moreover, if that person dares to call their luxurious upgraded and masked oppression to 'actual' oppression, then that person must not be grateful for how lucky they are to be oppressed in America as opposed to their shithole country.

The Fire this Time by Jesmyn Ward, advertently and inadvertently, addresses how Black people must work double time to not progress to far or protest our oppression to much so as to not make massa feel like we are ungrateful for "all that has been done for us." Ward posits that when our ancestors seemingly thought that they were making improvements to America's racist system, they were instead merely providing our oppressors with a blueprint of how to enact their oppression more covertly. Ward states that "For every action of African American advancement, there's a reaction, a backlash." An excellent example of this is the presidential election in 2016. Barack Obama became the first Black man to become President of the United States of America. For eight years, he and his family were attacked. Some of the things they attacked him for were so asinine that if you were viewing the news around that time in history, you might think that there was a shortage of real news stories to report on. Some of the things he received criticism over were his decision to wear a tan suit or him fist bumping his wife. Why is it that in the 21st century something as basic as bumping your knuckles with a woman, who you have clearly had far more intimate moments with, is such massive news? It challenged the status quo. It was an act that is closely tied to a more urban and ethnic portion of Americans. In other words, it was too black.



Since Obama “was living while black” every single movement and breath was scrutinized to create an image of an incompetent, unremarkable, and undeserving man. What happened after Barack Obama was smeared and lied on so much that most rural, impoverished, white, and uneducated Americans believed that he alone left them behind, ruined the economy, and didn't care about their prosperity? They elected a man who literally awakened the most racist, xenophobic, sexist, and dangerous movement seen in the 21st century. This visceral reaction to the first black man as

the president of America, is a prime example of how every action of advancement, by black people, is met with forceful backlash.

Another example of the backlash is the prison industrial complex. For years, our grandparents and great grandparents expressed that they revolutionized and eradicated Jim Crow. They did, obviously. However, Coates' critical question of why do we free ourselves? is one that highlights why the view that we freed ourselves from the jaws of a more vicious form of racism is a bit misleading. We did not want to end Jim Crow so that years later Black people would be thrown into prisons at alarming rates in the U.S, suffer from similar physical and mental traumas, and then exit those prisons essentially doomed to a life in a segregated ghetto/ in poverty. The racism wrought in our society didn't become less vicious. Our oppressors merely morphed their tactics and made them a bit more difficult to identify.

As a Haitian American, the idea that black people receive severe backlash whenever we attempt to make progress is poignant because of the current state of affairs in my motherland. Since Haiti gained its independence and became the first free black country it has been the poorest country or one of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere. That is not been a coincidence. Many Haitian natives and scholars often discuss how Haiti owed a great deal of money to France and was punished by the international community for its audacity to revolt against Napoleon.

Life and Debt is a highlights the pointed powers such as the IMF destabilize the economies countries such as Jamaica Caribbean or African Africa (which has the people in Africa) has been Ward's analysis of how harshly to any with her analysis of what of that. Ward states imagination likes to feel black suffering, there



L'Union fait la force

documentary that efforts by major world and the World Bank to of many Caribbean and Haiti. Not a single country, apart from South highest population of white able to join the G20. our oppressors react advancements is coupled can happen on the flipside “though the white liberal temporarily bad about really is no mode of

empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black: no hands in your pockets, no playing music, no sudden movements, no driving your car, no walking at night, no walking in the day, no turning onto this street, no entering this building, no standing your ground, no standing here, no standing there, no talking back, no playing with toy guns, no living while black.”

We see examples of the white liberal imagination temporarily feeling bad about racism but not going the extra step to actually intervene to actively prevent our oppression. One example that is often cited as an example of this is the pay gap between men and women. Oftentimes, you hear white women, namely those who are most active at events like the women's march, discuss how white women make less on every dollar than white men. That is true, of course, and no one disputes that that is terrible. However, those same voices are not half as loud when the fact that black and Hispanic women make even less than white women on every dollar. They are also less vociferous when issues such as black women being more likely to die or suffer from some complication in a hospital setting due to medical professionals not taking their pain seriously or black women having greater fear of the police than any other population.



As a woman who recently gave birth 3 weeks and two days ago, Ward's critiques of both the harsh response and the seemingly progressive response by white liberals, has brought up several questions and thoughts for me. First I felt conflicted by the fact that while I am grateful for the fact that I live in America and recognize that my life as a young single black mom would be easier here than many other parts of the world; I am also enraged, as Coates was, by the fact that I should feel grateful for

things that I shouldn't be thankful for. I shouldn't be any more thankful for my education than my white peers are for theirs. I shouldn't be grateful because if I avoid the far right or even centrist leaning left portions of this

country, I won't have to feel like I am to black. I shouldn't feel grateful that my son will have healthcare because I gave up on my dreams to work a job that I don't care about, while many other kids with his skin color won't have healthcare at all. All of these false positives teach people of color to be grateful for things that are not privileges but are instead more tools in a box filled with weapons to oppress us. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie writes that "if you're telling a non-black person about something racist that happened to you, make sure you are not bitter. Don't complain. Be forgiving. If possible, make it funny. Most of all, do not be angry. Black people are not supposed to be angry about racism. Otherwise you get no sympathy. This applies only for white liberals, by the way. Don't even bother telling a white conservative about anything racist that happened to you. Because the conservative will tell you that YOU are the real racist and your mouth will hang open in confusion."



Even when expressing how daunting living under these circumstances are, you must make sure that you do not offend the ever so fragile neo-liberal framework that rules America. In this respect Adichie is touching on the same note that Ward discussed about the white liberal imaginary. So as to make themselves feel better about the violence enacted on people of different races it is easier to say things like "I appreciate different cultures and races" without having to do anything when their Black friend tells them that they don't feel comfortable going to work without her hair "done." All of these moving parts in society help to contribute to a world

where millions of none white people would rather see themselves through the “blue eyes” that they will never have.

Ward uses her influence to remind us that even when the tides have not changed to much we must “know that there will be times when some people might be hostile or even violent to you for reasons that have nothing to do with your beauty, your humor, or your grace, but only your race and the color of your skin. Please don 't let this restrict your freedom, break your spirit, or kill your joy. And if possible, do everything you can to change the world" (Ward). Despite the lack of faith in the dream that the next generation of black children will live in a world where they are judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin; Ward writes to her nieces “may that day come, Mira and Leila, when you can finally claim those crowns of yours and put them on your heads. When that day of jubilee finally arrives, all of us will be there with you, walking, heads held high, crowns a-glitter, because we do have a right to be here” (Ward).



Part Five: Bon Cheve, Je limyé, Po jis

In 2010 Haiti an earthquake nearly wiped Haiti off the face of the earth. I remember hearing about it and wondering how my life would change after the quake? Did anyone in my family die during the disaster? How were my parents going to respond? And how was Haiti going to recover? As I thought about the impact that this event would have on my life, I couldn't help but notice how disconnected I was with my own heritage. Why? Because before that earthquake, I had never been so interested in Haiti in my entire life. I spoke Creole and I certainly grew up with Haitian culture. However, I never visited Haiti and never thought about what it meant to be Haitian. It was kind of what it must feel like to grow up American. Most people don't realize how privileged we are or what it means to be American until they are much older, if they ever do at all. I never understood the gravity of what it meant to be a descendant of my Haitian ancestors and apart from Haitian flag day, I never celebrated being Haitian.

I actually actively tried to be anything other than Haitian for most of my pre-teen life. While attending Norland Middle School in Miami, Florida, many of the kids would make insensitive jokes about the poverty that many Haitians experience. They would say that Haitians ate cats and that they smelled really bad. I didn't want to be associated with that so I denied my roots. My desire to be the "other", greatly impacted my ability to be at peace with myself and I constantly wanted to look different and to be different. When I was younger, I tried very hard to act like the "spicy" Spanish girl and hated that instead I was the black girl with "nappy" hair. In hindsight I now realize that much of that ignorance can be attributed to the racism enacted on Haitians by people from the neighboring Hispanic



countries such as the Dominican Republic and Cuba. As a college student, I spent a great deal of time learning about and studying the racial divide in many Afro- Latin communities and realized that the violence inflicted on me, as a child, was no coincidence at all but rather a systematic problem that designed to do two things.

First, to keep me in a mental prison (as discussed earlier) by finding yet another reason for me to be unhappy with my existence. Second, to turn me against my fellow oppressed sisters and brothers. During slavery, white people would sometimes have one of the other slaves beat an insubordinate slave to teach a lesson. Psychologically speaking, that practice helped white people to teach slaves that no one, even their fellow slaves, cares about them. In present day society Black people still see the remnants of that practice's effectiveness. Think back to 2016 when Dr. Ben Carson was running to become the 45th president of America. Dr. Carson depicted slaves as immigrants. This 'well-educated' doctor, who performed a historic operation and is black himself, has literally internalized so much racist misrepresentations of what happened during the transatlantic slave trade that he thinks that slaves were immigrants. Why did he do that? The answer is simple when you think about the context surrounding those statements. Ben Carson was attempting to demonstrate that Black people becoming lazy and depending on several Keynesian artifacts (public housing, food stamps, cash assistance programs, public space) is a recent phenomenon and that our ancestors were hardworking immigrants who came to America and worked hard so that we could complain about not having more.

The fact that a Black man can turn around and tell his Black peers that even though he made it to where he did in life because of government assistance, other Black people should not be granted the same opportunity is demonstrative of how dangerous us turning. our backs on one another can be. I started realizing that Latino women are oppressed in their own way. They may make more money on each dollar than a Black woman does but that does not make her oppression less important. We could be fighting our oppressor together; however, if I spend more time hating her because her hair looks more like my oppressor's hair than mine, then that means that he has effectively kept us both oppressed. And the more tragic part about it is that the oppressor would've achieved his goal with my help.

Though I stopped participating in the “oppression games” or what I like to call the “Oppression Olympics”, I do still think that it is important to acknowledge and discuss the depth of anti-Black woman rhetoric, colorism, and lookism. Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* links patriarchy, racism, lookism, and how they work to triply oppress women of color. The novel discusses the idea of what it means to be a black woman whose self-worth is consistently diminished by the representations of beauty and worth presented by American culture. Morrison writes “Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty.... A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes.” This line resonated with me because I spent a decent chunk of my life wishing that I looked different. Sometimes I would wish to have straighter or more manageable hair. Sometimes I’d want to be skinnier and look more like my non-black friends that I went to school with.

Adichie
Americanah, that
being in prison.
rules you. You didn't
because you don't
straightness. You're
your hair do what it
quote emphasizes the
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not unsystematic.
well-organized attack
hair.



writes in her book,
“relaxing your hair is like
You're caged in. Your hair
go running with Curt today
want to sweat out this
always battling to make
wasn't meant to do.” This
same concept and deep
Morrison. Black women are
hair. To make it more
to make it more palatable
violence against our hair is
Rather it’s a targeted and
on the rich history of black

If you were to walk around on the streets of any diverse major urban city in the United States, you would probably see a wide range of braided hairstyles. From box-braids to cornrows, black hairstyles are worn by women of all races. Some people are even ignorant enough to start wearing them after they have seen these styles get appropriated by the likes of women such as Kim Kardashian. However, these African hairstyles are far more than a new fashion trend or merely a way to contain unruly, kinky, and/ or ‘nappy’ black hair. These hairstyles have greater meanings that are well documented. Some scholars have documented how some slaves would use the braids on their heads as a way to illustrate routes to safe passage away from slave owners and bounty hunters. In some African tribes, the way a woman’s hair is braided has a direct correlation to her economic status and her social status.



The braids themselves are not all that is important. Our hair, in and of itself, was celebrated. Coming together to do our hair is a special moment in most Black cultures. As a young girl, all of my aunts and cousins would look forward to it. Though we do not have much control over anything else in our lives, we could determine which pattern to do our hair in, what we discuss as we do our hair, and celebrate the blackness that is within us. The texture of our hair is that intangible blackness from within expressing itself in a tangible and physical form. If the hair on our heads and the rich culture behind it is a part of a Black woman's experience, why do we relax it and change it to look like the other? Adichie says that it is because we want to make our hair do what it is not meant to do. Our hair is a metaphorical symbol for ourselves. We want to make ourselves be and do something other than being Black. It is not just our hair but rather our existence that is forced to do something that it's not meant to do; and that is we exist to live in captivity as opposed to live as freed beings with our own brains, hearts, and desires.



The pain of living and breathing in a body that you don't want to be in is incredibly painful. It is numbing. You don't just want to see yourself through blue eyes, you eventually would prefer for your eyes to be shut. Morrison uses the words 'rise up' to describe becoming anything other than Black. It is because Morrison knows that being Black is synonymous with being the bottom of the caste. Being at the bottom of the caste means that there is nothing desirable about your existence. The only thing that can be done with you is

commodifying your existence. That toxic commodification turns into “waste which we dumped on [the Black woman] and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us--all who knew her--felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used--to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength.”

Perhaps the most troubling part about these harmful tropes about Black women is that they are, far too often, also perpetuated by Black men. Being a Black woman in this country means that not only are oppressed by non- black individuals but you are also beat down by your own kind as well. Patriarchy, as a social construct, adheres to a basic principle without fail at all times. That is “male shall dominate female” (Millet, 25). The primary focus is to ensure that female members, of any given society, are dominated to the point where males have every advantage. No matter which society you are currently living in, patriarchy exists and is often one of the highest castes of a myriad of social hierarchies. Colonialism similarly follows a basic principle as well; white nations/ cultures/ beliefs/ religions are superior to black nations/ cultures/ beliefs/ and religions. What happens, from a Black woman’s perspective, when you mix colonialism with patriarchy? you get what is called Triple Colonialism. Triple colonialism refers to the concurrent oppression that Black women face as members of a patriarchic structure and the systematic hierarchical oppressions experienced as a result of slavery/colonialism. In many respects, after the colonial powers physically evacuated Africa they left behind the vestiges of colonialism. One of the vestiges was a newly morphed version of colonialism that remade itself to fit the post colonialist world and to create new oppressors. “Empire and patriarchy act similarly to each other [in the postcolonial context] and both of them have control over female colonial subjects, who are doubly colonized by imperial or patriarchal power” (Jamili and Jamal, 2).

The Black Scholar by Robert Staples discusses, what he calls, The Myth of the Black Matriarchy. He describes this phenomenon as “the assertion that the black family is organized along matriarchal lines, that the domineering black female has been placed in a superordinate position in the family by the historical vicissitudes of slavery, and that her ascendancy to power has resulted in the psychological castration of the black male and produced a host of other negative results that include low educational achievement, personality disorders, juvenile delinquency etc. One of the solutions to the “Negro” question we hear is that black males divest themselves of this female control of black society and reorganize it along patriarchal lines which will eventually solve the problem created by black female dominance” (Staples, 9)



The need to assert dominance over the only other class that they can assert any dominance over, has led to a toxic relationship consumed by feelings of betrayal helplessness for Black men and women. As a result of this brokenness in Black families, we teach our youth several problematic things. One of those problematic things is the inferiority of Black women. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says “we teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We say to girls, you can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful. Otherwise, you would threaten the man.”

Part Six: Koupe tèt- Boule Kay

European colonists common; we are obsessed young girl, I have been revolution. I spent most of revolt against my immediate really wanted to run away family. As I was concocting plan, I started asking myself such as how do people a successful revolution? Do



this time? Where would I retreat to if this plan failed? Who are my allies? Etc. I quickly learned that planning a revolution is difficult and that I would not be revolting against anything if I wanted to eat dinner. But I did begin to get even more interested in how other people planned revolutions. I started doing some research and immediately came across one of the greatest revolutionaries of all time- Toussaint Louverture. The great Haitian General defeated the French armies in less than ten years and shocked the entire world when France retreated Saint Domingue.

Toussaint was unlike any other revolutionary I heard about in school. Rather I should say he was unlike any of the revolutionaries that I remembered learning about in school. We were learning about Martin Luther King in Civics at the time. The key takeaway from the lessons on him always seemed to be about peaceful protesting and boycotting. My teachers would always talk about how people like Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi changed the world because they did the right thing and that their revolution was a call for humanity to come together peacefully. Even at the age of 13, I always thought that that was an awful way to characterize why Martin Luther King was successful. I thought “why are people so obsessed with Black people

and I have one thing in with war. Ever since I was a infatuated with conflict and time thinking about how to oppressors. That is to say I from my parents and my my very intricate getaway the nitty gritty questions successfully revolt? What is I actually need to do this at

or other people of color who protest peacefully?” I have never heard about White people doing things peacefully. They didn’t protest the Native Americans or bargain with Africans. Even the colonists didn’t take their independence peacefully. They through tea in harbors and killed off their British friends. Then when poor white people felt like they were being oppressed after independence, they led Shay’s Rebellion. It just never really seemed like anyone emphasizes peace when white people want things. I came to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a peaceful revolution. There are some peaceful protests in some revolutions- sure. However, we will never know what would have happened if Dr. king was boycotting without the Black Panthers using force during the same timeframe. We will never know how far Ghandi would’ve gotten without the protesters who took more drastic measures against the British.



It would make no sense to teach people how to effectively disrupt your oppressive framework. That would make you an incompetent oppressor. It makes more sense to give them enough rope to tug at you a little but not enough to hang you. If you teach people to just stop buying goods from stores that promote racist ideas, then you will have a problem but that can be remedied by controlling the market so much that people have no option but to buy your goods. But what do you do if you incense people so much that they start cutting off heads and burning houses? If we have learned anything from history, Toussaint showed us that more often than not if you want your freedom you must take it not negotiate for it.

Since 1804 Black thinkers have been discussing how to address our oppression through a bevy of methods. Some started organizations like the Black Panthers or the NAACP. Some make films or shows like The Boondocks or She's Gotta Have It. Some write letters or academic papers calling on us to open our eyes. Through the implementation of descriptive language, an appeal to moral values, and the use of an uplifting message about how to survive the attack on our existence James Baldwin wrote a letter to his nephew, James, about living while black. It is unique because unlike other forms of writing about racism, such as academic journal publications or psychological analyses on the effects of racism, Baldwin's work uses colloquial language and appeals to the pathos, ethos, and logos of each individual reader.

Baldwin starts by discussing how this letter was a contemplative work. "I have begun this letter five times and torn it up five times" (Baldwin). This first line foreshadows how difficult it is to write about the topic that Baldwin is discussing. In this letter he is conveying to his nephew, who he watched grow up, the realities of the world that he'll face while simultaneously instructing him to forgive his 'countrymen' for what they have done and will do. It is already difficult enough to describe how his "countrymen, have caused you to be born under conditions not far removed from those described for us by Charles Dickens in the London of more than a hundred



years ago.” To add onto that, he is also instructing his nephew to work as hard as he can to not allow this form of oppression to break his spirits. Thus, it makes sense why he started this letter 5 times. Asking someone to forgive their oppressor is one thing but asking them to basically turn the other cheek and wish them well is even harder. From my own personal experience with writing letters to loved ones I know that writing about issues that are perceivably less sensitive than systematic racism is often a hard task when you know that you are about to expose their hearts and minds to a reality that even you are still struggling with.

Baldwin uses imagery depicting memories from the past with his brother and nephew. He describes his sibling- paternal relationship with his brother, James’ father. These subtle descriptions of his upbringing and paternal experiences, with his brother, are not only important because they provide the reader with a visual of the characters but they are important because it gives us an insight into the trauma that starts at such a young age for many black Americans. “I have known both of you all your lives and have carried your daddy in my arms and on my shoulders, kissed him and spanked him and watched him learn to walk” (Baldwin). Though we do not know how old he was when he was carrying his brother, watching him learn to walk, or wiping his tears, we know that there is no age where it is appropriate for a young child to have to bear that kind of responsibility for their siblings. Baldwin says that “I know what the world has done to my brother and how narrowly he has survived it” (Baldwin).

Though several decades have passed, the dichotomy between the best way to revolt still exist. The present-day equivalent to Malcolm X is Ta-Nehisi Coates. Coates and Baldwin’s writing styles are similar in the sense that they both use rationalizations and logic to describe how deep racism is in our society. For example, they both justify why Black people should fight their oppression by providing logical explanations for the purpose of fighting. Coates states that he does not believe "in accepting both the chaos of history and the fact of my total end, I was freed to truly consider how I wished to live--specifically, how do I live free in this black body?" Baldwin then explains how we should want to live by explaining that we should not aspire to let our hearts become so calloused that we stoop down to the level of our oppressors.

Part Seven: Citadél la

I can still feel the crisp cold breeze brushing against my face. I still smell the aromatic smells of mofongo and chicharrons with fresh avocado from the Dominican restaurant across the street from the convent. I can still see the beautiful deep blue Hudson river. When I close my eyes, I can imagine the small buds and bushes that must've turned into fuchsia pink magnolia's or bright yellow tulips.



Though this has been a hectic and dejected time for most people, COVID-19 has been a great gift for my mental and psychological development. By being secluded in a convent with no screens, a very tightly structured schedule, and a newborn baby I have been secluded just enough to think clearly. I use my imagination to transport myself to a different setting. I could go anywhere. Paris, Italy, Venice, Ghana, Jamaica, or Dubai. But I always find myself at the exact same place; the Citadelle Laferrière. The Citadelle is a great fortress built on the mountain top of one of Haiti's tallest mountains. It is most famously known for its impenetrable walls and its stunning beauty. Adichie once said that she thinks that people "travel to search and you come back home to find yourself there." The Citadelle feels like home. It feels like I started there. It was there the first Isaac, who was obviously not called Isaac at the time, started the Haitian culture, language, and

revolutionary spirit that lives in me today. The Citadelle is a symbol of being emboldened by what is right and having the courage to do it even in the face of death.

About a few days after I got to the convent, I started going outside on my own to go on walks since it is very close to the Hudson River. I had a rough day that day after school so I went straight to the water to watch the sun set. When I go to the water, I remember closing my eyes and being shocked by what I saw. I didn't see the great fortress that I always imagined. Instead I saw this little brick house with a massive cross and a statue of Mary. It was the convent. My new Citadelle.

The convent is not just a place that I stayed at for a year. I came here to become emboldened to do the right thing and to receive the grace and courage to do it in the face of doubt. Similar to Gao Xingjian, I went on a journey and came back with a “the story of one [woman’s] quest for inner peace and freedom.” After a devastating bout with cancer, Gao retreated to a mountain to find his inner freedom and peace. In a somewhat similar fashion, I retreated to a convent shortly after learning I was pregnant to find my inner peace and freedom. I was not sure of many things, when I found out I was pregnant, back in June of 2019 but I was sure of these four things: 1. I was going to be a mom. 2. I desperately wanted to get this parenting thing “right” (whatever that means), 3. I wouldn't be able to get it right if I didn't start with the pain and self-destructive behavior that got me running to God. 4. I had to at least start the process so that by the time my son was old enough to actually know me, as associate a personality and values with me, he would have a mom who is proud of herself.



I began by thinking about why do I live? and who I live for? Xingjian taught me that “there is little you can seek in this world, that there is no need for you to be greedy, in the end all you can achieve are memories, hazy and intangible, dreamlike memories which are impossible to articulate.” While reflecting on my pre-COVID and pre-pregnancy life, as Gao suggested, I did not remember any of the things that I so greedily sought or the things that I planned to seek because of greed. I thought all of the times that I wish I had been kinder or the times where I unnecessarily caused myself stress.



I remembered this trip that I took last year in February. It was the beginning of the competitive season (the playoffs) for the Mock Trial team. I was my teams star attorney. Everywhere we went they spoke about what Claudine Isaac is going to do at this competition. I was also just cordially invited to this national competition where the top 16 competitors compete against one another for the bragging rights of being recognized as the best competitor in the nation. Even though all of that was going on, I was presented with an excellent opportunity to go on a cheap vacation to Miami, FL with some of my friends. I was elated. Actually,

saying that I was elated might actually be an example of litotes. I was ready to jump over the moon. Despite me working as hard as I have throughout college, I had never gone on a vacation in my life. I lived the mundane life of going to work, school, competitions, and taking care of my family.

So, as I looked at this opportunity, I said to myself “Claudine you have to go. You have got to be kidding me. You can have fun too. You are in early twenties. If you don’t travel now, what will you say about your life.” A bit dramatic—I know; however, I convinced myself enough and I went. That was the first step. The next part, actually enjoying the trip would prove to be the more challenging part. I was on the sandy beaches of Miami. I hadn’t been to the beach in 8 years. I had an unobstructed view of the sky. I could see the different shades of blue at the different times of the day. I saw the sun. I didn’t smell gasoline and bus fumes. I saw people smiling. I visited my family. I spent time walking a trail with an old friend who I went to middle school with in Miami. In hindsight, I had a great trip that should’ve been filled with some awesome memories if I was actually living in the moment. However, all I can remember from that trip is how I left behind my team. I remember calling and texting them frequently. I remember having conversations with people and being in another universe in my head. I was so worried about making sure my team would win and that I’d get an award that I forgot to be a 22-year-old. I forgot to live.

Xingjian’s quote about there being very little we can seek hit home for me because it struck a chord that I have been stringing in my head for some time now. I want to genuinely believe, not just say I believe because mindfulness is the hip new trend, that if I am present and content with what I am, I will have no need to focus on what could have been or what will be. Focusing on what I am has helped me to open my eyes to a variety of things related to the readings we have done so far. For example, while reading Americanah, I discovered how passionate I am about being able to love my natural body and



hair. The book invigorated me so much that I actually cut my hair to remove the straightened parts. While reading Saadawi, I began to question the role that God has played in my life. Since then, I have begun to think more critically about my faith in relation to my culture and race. Exploring myself through these lens' has led me to believe, like Gao, that "life for me once again has a wonderful freshness. I should have left those contaminated surroundings a long time ago."



"You lived in the city for a long time and need to feel that you have a hometown." Reading *Soul Mountain* has wrought in me the desire to explore NYC again and to "feel" the city in a way that I had never before. I want to observe, not just notice, the different smells, textures, people, and cultures. I want to make it my home. In the process, I am aiming to apply those same practices to myself. I want to feel the texture of my figurative wound. I want to see the deepest crevices of my heart. I want to imagine the woman that I want to be tomorrow and start showing up as her. I want to do these so as to prevent myself from making the terrible mistake of greedily seeking tangible things

while neglecting the achievement of making memories.

The next thing that I started thinking about was my self-image. What do I think about myself? How does my view of myself affect my ability to love others? And how can I work on the things that make me unhappy with my image?

Metamorphosis and *Love in The time of Cholera* both address issues pertaining to self-image, the power that we give other people to influence that image, and how those relationships affect us. They show us that to

attract ‘love’ from other people- albeit family members or former lovers—we would rather lose sight of our own desires and dignity. A prime example of this is when one of Gregor’s family members said “you've got to get rid of the idea that that's Gregor. We've only harmed ourselves by believing it for so long. How can that be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would have seen long ago that it's not possible for human beings to live with an animal like that and he would have gone of his own free will. We wouldn't have a brother any more, then, but we could carry on with our lives and remember him with respect” (Kafka).

This comment on two levels. One when this comment he not still their because his body has no longer matter reimagine it in a changed? To repeat believe that his family a person whose worth contribute to the represent her father of good (money, food, acknowledged as



shows a level of brokenness level of brokenness is created falls upon Gregor’s ears. Is brother, son, or loved one changed? Does his life now because they would need to different way now that he has such a comment leads me to member also views herself as is contingent on what she can family. If she can go to work, well, and bring in some sort etc..) then she is worth being herself. That way of thinking

is prevalent in our society today. The second level of brokenness is inflicted on the person who has heard that comment. Gregor woke up that day having realized that he was no longer a joy for his family—he was a burden. When Gregor passes, he knows that his family is relieved that they will not have to take care of him or ruin their human lives for his well-being anymore. That degree of selfishness is the opposite of what love is. Selfishness is often disguised as logic; however, more often than not, what happens instead is we essentially project an image,

inadvertently or advertently, of what are the basic requisites to be considered “worth it.” The coronavirus has helped me to recognize that it is more prevalent than I thought.

It has been all over the news lately. People have been protesting the shelter in place orders in Michigan, Indiana, California, just to name a few states. Why? Because there is dignity in their work and they need to be making money to support their families. Whenever I hear that, my heart breaks a little because some of them do need to work and feed their families. However, what value have we placed on the human life in relation to work, when it is more important to go to work than it is to avoid a deadly virus that has claimed nearly 80,000 lives in America alone. Kafka writes that “as in fifteen years of service Gregor had never once yet been ill. His boss would certainly come around with the doctor from the medical insurance company, accuse his parents of having a lazy son, and accept the doctor's recommendation not to make any claim as the doctor believed that no one was ever ill but that many were workshy.” The fact that Gregor’s work is so important that he would wake up in the morning and spend the first few hours thinking about how he is going to miss work or what his family will say/ do, is proof of the absence of love and compassion.

I understand Gregor’s reservation about revealing his new self to the outside world because I too, experienced a drastic change to my ability to contribute to society and my body over the past few months. As I read the scene in *Love in The Time of Cholera* where the female character is nervous about consummating her long-standing marriage because she is ashamed of how her body has changed, it reminded me of myself throughout my pregnancy. I did not know anyone pregnant before this and I never spoke to a pregnant woman about what making a baby is like. So, all I had was pictures of celebrities before, during, and after pregnancy. I also had memorized scenes from TV shows about how amazing childbirth is. None of those shows depicted how hard it was to rollover at night time when your belly protrudes past your toes, how hard it is to sit at a desk in school, what it feels like to be out of breath after walking a distance that you could’ve ran in like two seconds. I felt Gregor’s pain as he thought "how about if I sleep a little bit longer and forget all this nonsense", he thought, but that was something he was unable to do because he was used to sleeping on his right, and in his

present state couldn't get into that position. However hard he threw himself onto his right, he always rolled back to where he was. He must have tried it a hundred times, shut his eyes so that he wouldn't have to look at the floundering legs, and only stopped when he began to feel a mild, dull pain there that he had never felt before.”

Before my pregnancy, I was an athlete. I love playing sports and have done so competitively for quite some time. In addition to playing myself, I enjoy watching all kinds of sports that I do not play. Apart from golf and a few other really slow and non-action-packed sports, I love all forms of physical activity. Thus, when I came back from the hospital, I immediately got to work in the gym two weeks after. Then one day, I was in my shower and I experienced this gush of sadness. Nothing happened. I just felt so sad. I couldn't stand the fact that I didn't like the stretch marks on my stomach, the blubber on my arms, or the fact that I was still bleeding even though I gave birth two weeks ago. I couldn't stand being on the treadmill and watching the sisters run in their habits while I, a young 23-year-old, was walking at a sloth's pace. Similar to Gregor I started feeling that “it took just as much effort to get back to where he had been earlier.” I was expending more energy or just as much energy on thinking about where I was before my pregnancy than I was spending thinking about my way forward. While crying in the shower, I realized that I thought that because I was not “Claudine” anymore that meant that I was essentially worthless- excuse the dramatics, I was just a few weeks postpartum and as it turns out, women do not give birth and then all of a sudden become glowing figures with no problems and happy babies.

That feeling of worthlessness stemmed from the fact that my body and mind had gone through its own metamorphosis and it still has not gone back to its former self. I still cannot run as fast. I am still not as sharp as before and I still don't write as quickly as I once did. I still do not sleep well enough. I still can't go back to work or contribute any tangible goods. I still don't have the energy to go out and visit my friends (though I probably wouldn't be doing that anyways right now). I am unsure of how this metamorphosis will affect me long term but reading Soul Mountain last week and then this piece this week helped me to recognize that my inner peace is not contingent on what I can do or who I am around. My “reality exists only through [my]

experience, and it must be personal experience.” I cannot spend many more nights thinking about how my depleted capacity is a deterrent because this state of mind and being is impermanent. I have enough to worry about; like where will my son and I live, where will I work, how will being single mom affect my law school prospects, when will this huge glob of wrinkly and stretched skin be gone, or when will I be able to run and feel the wind propelling me forward again. My personal experience has shown me that despite the lack of the safety needs, and esteem, and love, I can be happy and reach my goal of self-actualization. I am learning, as Buddha says, to want my self-metamorphosed self in order to achieve a steady happiness.



Part Eight: Atizay

Phenomenal Woman

Phenomenal Woman by Maya Angelou

It's in the reach
of my arms,
the span of my hips,
the stride of my step,
the curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
phenomenally.
Phenomenal
woman,
that's me.

judement wall

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies.

I say,

It's in the reach of my arms,
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

I walk into a room

Just as cool as you please,

And to a man,

The fellows stand or

Fall down on their knees.

Then they swarm around me,

A hive of honey bees.

I say,

It's the fire in my eyes,

And the flash of my teeth,

The swing in my waist,

And the joy in my feet.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

Men themselves have wondered

What they see in me.

They try so much

But they can't touch

My inner mystery.

When I try to show them,

They say they still can't see.

I say,

It's in the arch of my back,

The sun of my smile,

The ride of my breasts,

The grace of my style.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

Now you understand

Just why my head's not bowed.

I don't shout or jump about

Or have to talk real loud.

When you see me passing,

It ought to make you proud.
I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need for my care.
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

As I started envisioning a life moving forward, I thought about the women who I have focused so much on these past few years and I imagined myself as one of the. I placed myself in the shoes of Adichie for a few moments and thought about what poem or story she might like. She most commonly known for her revolutionary spirit. However, I thought of her as a person who is a revolutionary because she respects and understands the extent of the inestimable value in Black women.

It is why I chose this poem by Maya Angelou. Phenomenal woman is about the beautiful aspects of our minds and bodies that make us unique. Though people cannot figure what it is that keeps us phenomenal, Angelou uses sensory and visual images to say that it is everything about us that makes us great. She paints a picture of a woman with wide hips, long arms, and a bright smile. Adichie often also paints a picture of what kind of woman she envisions when she sees a phenomenal woman. Phenomenal woman is an example of the physical beauty and the inner- mystery in Black women that cannot be described.



Part Nine: Pitit gason m' – Soléy la

My name is Claudine and I was born in Manhattan, NY to two Haitian immigrants. My mother, Lusnie, and my father, Claudy, immigrated from Haiti when they were in their mid- twenties. Based on the stories I have heard from my aunts and uncles, the two of them were raised under the same roof. My dad, who lost his father as a teenager and grew up in intense poverty, lived on a smaller plot of land on my mother's family estate as a worker. He started living with my mother's family when his mother, my grandmother, left him in Haiti to go live in the Bahamas, with her other daughter and son, in pursuit of better economic fortune. It was while working for that family that he met my mother. The rest was history.



About 5 years after moving to the U.S my mother gave birth to me in June of 1996. When she went in for one of her doctor's appointments the physician told her that she had stage four breast cancer. When my aunt tells the story, she describes how my mom's face turned as pale as a ghost and how it felt like the time and the world suspended. Her body became so tight and her vision became so blurry that she could feel the weight of all of her bones and she could see smallest microparticles in the air. After an uncomfortably long pause my mother asked the doctor, "what should we do?" He responded by saying that he recommended she immediately start

with chemotherapy and radiation. Though the cancer had not yet spread to other parts of her body, in the 1990's the technology to spot treat cancer had not yet developed. If a patient elected to start chemo and radiation, they would receive the treatment everywhere. My mother looked up at the doctor and said "what is that going to do to my baby?" My aunt said that she bowed her head down and began to cry hysterically because she thought that my mom didn't understand the gravity of what the doctor was saying. She was wrong. My mom knew exactly what the doctor was saying but in case there was any confusion the doctor proceeded to tell her "Ms. Descieux I am sorry if I was unclear but I do not believe that it would be safe to continue with this pregnancy. Your cancer is advanced and at this point you will be lucky if you have a few years left. If you opt to not undergo radiation and chemotherapy, you will not live to see her walk." She looked back in the doctor in disbelief, not the kind of disbelief that you'd expect. She turns to my aunt and says in creole "doktè sa a fou." It translated to this doctor is crazy. "I will be there for my child no matter where I am."

She decided that my life was worth giving up her own for. Though I was not able to understand what was happening at the time, that decision and that moment would shape so many of the events of my life and how I viewed the world from the moment I was born. My dad decided that he was not even going to attempt to raise my siblings and I alone so we started off our lives moving from one home to another between Miami, FL and New York City. As my siblings and I jumped around, as kids/ teenagers, I found myself developing the thick layer of skin to look into my siblings eyes and convince them that everything would be okay though I didn't know that they'd be okay myself. I learned a bevy of lessons that a kid should have never learned and even when I got a chance to finally be responsible for no one else but myself, when I started college as NYU, I was so used to being a mom figure that I never allowed myself to enjoy being a college student.

I enrolled in the university, after attending high school in Long Island. I had never even heard of NYU. I grew up loving sports so I wanted to go to a school that had a massive sports program so that I could go to football games and watch the majorettes, flagettes, and dancers during halftime while imagining that I had been able to do that when I went to high school in FL as a teenager. Since I loved that big sporty and sorority culture, I wanted to attend a school like UMichigan, UCLA, Penn State, or USC. I applied to NYU last minute after

thinking that it would be selfish for me to go to college far away from my siblings. Luckily NYU accepted me into the Stern School of Business with a full scholarship. I sucked it up and I came to NYU. At least at the time it felt like I was sucking it up but coming to NYU has been a great blessing. I quickly learned, after starting school here, that Stern was a big deal. Apparently, business students there go on to work at fancy banks and make a ridiculous amount of money. I hated it there to say the least. I thought it was nice but it never appealed to my interests. I was always far more interested in the disparity between black/ brown students' experiences in predominantly white universities than I ever was in how to create models for Goldman Sachs. Thus, I filled up all of my free time, outside of the classroom, with law related activities. I joined the Intercollegiate Mock Trial Team, started working for a criminal defense attorney, and set my eyes on law school.

Though I knew that I did not want to stay in Stern and that I most definitely was not going to go work in business, I stayed in Stern for two more years. When my father heard that I was a student at Stern, he became a different man. He actually started to treat me like his kid. I knew it was fake love but it felt nice to feel like I had a parent who was proud of me. I fought through my unhappiness and my depression about my inability to do what I really wanted to until I decided that I couldn't live like that anymore. I put in an application to transfer to the College of Arts and Science to study Social and Cultural Analysis. I was so proud of myself. For the first time in a long time, I was studying something that fit my interests.

In addition to switching my major, I also began to focus on other topics that I was interested in. I started taking classes on African Culture. I also made a massive change in my post- college work prospects. I accepted an offer to work for Teach for America as opposed to working in the finance industry.



My son, who was born in February, is Haitian and Ghanaian. Thus, I started to work the skills that would also improve my ability to be a good mom while also being cognizant of my son's diverse background. I wanted to become more well versed in African Literature and culture. I began reading and writing about authors like Achebe, Emezi, J.M Coetzee, and Ngugi. I also started joining discussion settings that spoke about what it meant to live and work within the framework of double consciousness. In light of these discussions, readings, and classes, I have decided to also write a letter to my future son about some of the things I have learned about being Black in America.



As a Black woman, I have experienced too many instances of racism and sexism that I care to talk about. However, there is one portion of Coates' reading that spoke to the fear that the constant exposure to racism and violence has wrought in me. "I think back on those boys now and all I see is fear, and all I see is them girding themselves against the ghosts of the bad old days when the Mississippi mob gathered 'round their grandfathers so that the branches of the black body might be torched, then cut away" (Coates, 35). One day while I was in class preparing for an interview, one of my classmates asked me what I was going to do with my hair? I don't think that she had bad intentions or that she was trying to be rude but I know that she clearly did not even understand how her question was a microaggression. She did not ask any of the girls of a different ethnicity what they would do with their hair and she certainly did not ask them if they would straighten their hair. She made me feel like my afro was unfit for the corporate setting and it was wildly inappropriate.

In light of Coates' declaration that black women wearing their natural hair is a win, I decided to write an open letter to my son about what I think it means to stay true to being authentic and proud of your blackness.

Dear Cristien,

I write to you from a place of trepidation. Some days, I find myself a bit nervous. I ask myself; will I be Sybrina Fulton, Gwen Carr, or Wanda Cooper? Will I be sitting on the wrong end of a phone when a police officer tells me that my son has been gunned down in the streets of NYC. That feeling of fear is very strong but throughout these past nine months I have had enough time to think about what feelings are stronger than that fear.

I settled on quite a few of them but the main one was faith. I chose to believe that it is more important that I have faith that you will be okay and that we will live a happy life. I decided that if we live in fear every day, then the terrorists have won. I want you to walk outside with the armor of God, the confidence that only your ancestors could bestow on you, and the knowledge that you are loved by your momma. I want you to feel proud of who you are and to not let anyone shit on your homeland. I want you to speak Creole and Twi as loudly as you do English. I want you to know that, to me, you have the most beautiful history and culture in the world and that of you share that beautiful black boy joy with the world, you will set everything on fire.

Sincerely,

Momma