

VOL. 2

HAPPY NEW YEAR

JAN 2021

1969

THE BLACK STUDENT UNION PUBLICATION

VISION AND VISIBILITY

1969 is committed to creating a space, by us and for us, to express how we see ourselves and how we want to be seen.

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dedication

The Sidwell Friends School Black Student Union dedicates this issue of 1969 to Brian Stark, former SFS Lower School Teacher and former Lowell School Teacher; Brian died of liver cancer on June 28, 2020.

The schools in which Brian worked benefited from his love for students, dedication to teaching, and genuine investment in community. Even after leaving SFS in 2015, Brian returned to SFS every year so that his children and he could participate in the BSU Production. During the last three years, Brian emerged as an organized, gentle, but firm backstage presence.

Respected and loved by many students, colleagues, and parents, Brian brought warmth, humility, and honesty to every space he entered. A deeply spiritual Quaker by conviction, Brian's calm disposition and deep respect for humanity emanated in his every interaction with his students, friends, and acquaintances. In particular, he had a natural talent for working with children, and his legacy is one of inclusion: from the beginning of his teaching career, Brian consistently sought personal and professional growth in the interest of creating an environment of diversity and equality in his classrooms and the minds of his students. He committed himself to every role he played: teacher, father, husband, brother, uncle, and friend. He never claimed to have all of the answers, but he always did his best, and his journey of self-improvement was never-ending.

In addition to teaching, Brian was also a self-taught guitarist and lover of music, a passionate hockey spectator and player, and a huge fan of *Star Wars*. He unapologetically embraced who he was and defied stereotypes simply by being himself. He cared deeply for those who surrounded him and left a lasting impression on every community of which he was a part. Brian was an inspirational leader and an extraordinary soul, and his memory will live on forever.

brooke hart '21 & hayes davis

letter from the editor

The initial promise of this magazine was to uplift Black voices. Now, more than ever, we must embrace this mission. Against the backdrop of a mishandled pandemic, Black people internationally were yet again reminded of the condition of Blackness and its real life or death implications. So, we channeled our pain into collective expressions of grief, frustration, support and love. We chanted, we marched, we sang, and we held each other in the Light.

All in all, we're tired.

We're tired of being hashtags and black boxes.

We're tired of being political props.

We're tired of being statistics and footnotes.

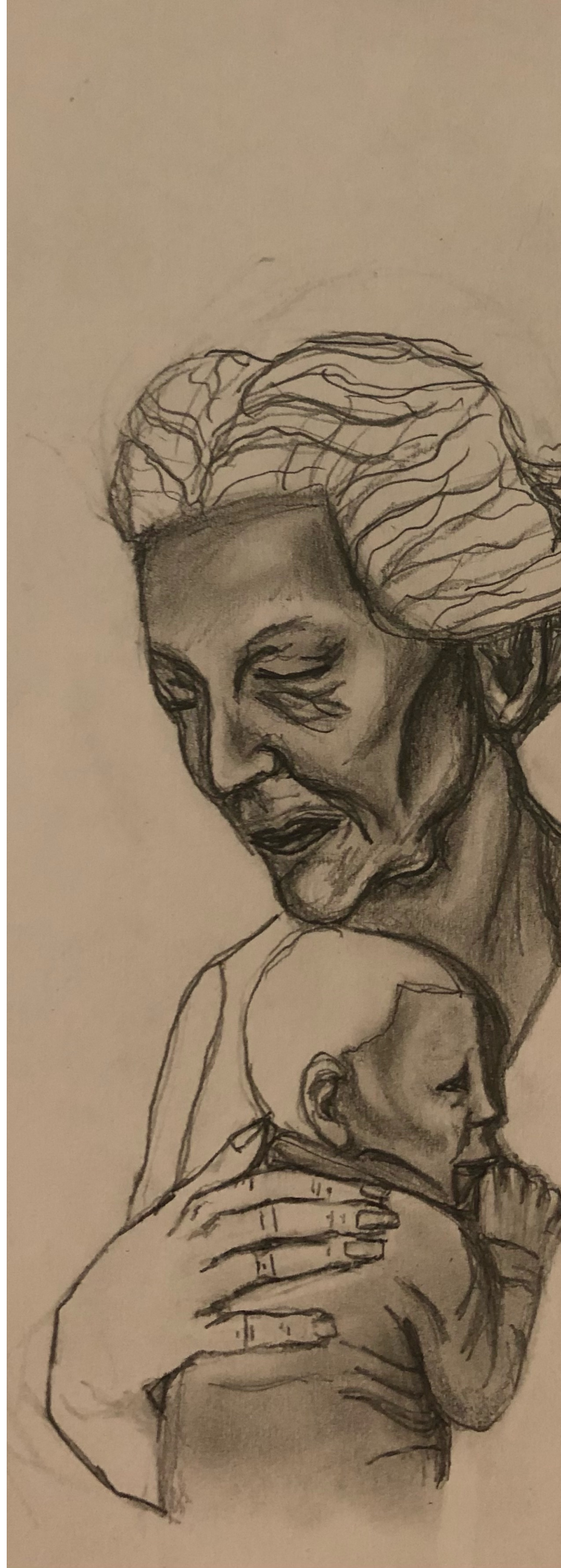
To quote the honorable Fannie Lou Hamer, "we are sick and tired of being sick and tired."

As club leadership, we made the intentional decision to make the theme of this issue open-ended. Oftentimes, our expression, creativity, and intellect are stunted by the expectation to exclusively relive our darkest, "Blackest" trauma. Not only does this flatten our experience, rendering it one-dimensional, it also negates the moments of joy that we, too, live as Black folks.

In a recent conversation, Ms. Shaakira Raheem, African Studies teacher, emphasized the need to foster spaces of healing and growth, as this, too, is revolutionary. In this issue, Vision and Visibility, we aim to do just that. We are creating a space, by us and for us, to express how we see ourselves and how we want to be seen.

We hope you enjoy!

atswei laryea '21 & adeoluwa fatukasi '21



Unraveling the “Other”

WHY I ONLY WROTE ABOUT WHITE PEOPLE

Words and Art by Parker Alexander '21

In elementary school, I kept them in large binders. In middle school, I stored them in a flash drive. All my life, I have been coming up with stories, writing sprawling manuscripts about dragons and detail-filled brainstorming documents for hypothetical TV shows. My creative goal in life is to write a story about LGBTQ+ children of color to normalize discussion of queer identities with kids and to portray minorities, specifically Black, Asian, and multiracial people, in substantial, non-stereotypical roles.

So, it was very odd to look through my old writing and realize that for a large part of my youth, I only wrote about white people.

Rereading these stories was a very surreal experience. Sloppy writing aside, they felt completely alien to me. I was appalled at the lack of diversity—even though I am a multiracial person, only one ethnicity was ever represented. Identity was not even an important part of these stories, despite it now being one of the main reasons why I create art.

I began to wonder what influenced me to write this way? To uncover the truth, I looked back on who I was at the time.

I went to an overwhelming white public elementary school in Montgomery County. I was one of four Black boys in my grade. There was only one Black girl. Every single teacher we had was white. But I never noticed this back then—I was not acutely aware of race and racial discrimination. At school, they did teach us about some racist systems and policies in American history, such as the Civil Rights Movement, slavery, and Japanese internment camps. However, they made it seem like these events were distant and not presently important, despite the fact that kids like me had parents who were subjects of such bigoted hatred. The education was aimed at the white majority of the school, and as a result of growing up in that environment, I did not identify with my heritage. I thought being nonwhite meant I had to feel like I was “other,” that I had to feel different from my white peers. And I didn’t.

I didn't feel Black. I didn't feel Japanese. I didn't feel mixed.

In fourth grade, an influx of mostly Asian students joined my class as part of the Gifted and Talented program. Around that time, I started identifying as Japanese. I felt more comfortable with the Asian side of my heritage due to seeing more people who were like me. But, I still didn't acknowledge how I was multiracial. I still did not identify as Black, even though that makes up the larger part of my racial background.

Being white must be part of being a typical American ... So, all of my characters must be typical Americans, and of course they must all be white.

My school environment was only one factor in my dissociation from my Blackness. Back then, I had difficulty making friends, so I always immersed myself in books or television—stories that could act as my friends when it felt like no real person would. The protagonists I loved were Harry Potter, Spider-Man, and Phineas & Ferb. Occasionally, the stories I liked had side characters of different ethnicities, but all of the important characters were white.

And I wanted to be just like them—brave, courageous, and funny. When I was writing, I drew off of what I had seen for inspiration. The main characters in everything I saw were white. The majority of my classmates were white. Being white must be part of being a typical American, and the target audience for my writing was everyday Americans.

So, all of my characters must be typical Americans, and of course they must all be white. It was not a decision I made or gave any thought to. It was just how it was.

Going to Sidwell was the impetus for my internal change. It was the most racially diverse environment I had ever been in. Having classes with many people of varying ethnicities helped me think about my own race and experiences with it. The most important turning point was learning about Emmett Till, a young Black child who was viciously murdered in the 1950s by white men for allegedly whistling at a white woman. As I mentioned, I did learn about racism at my old school, but it “othered” the experience of being black in America. Learning about Emmet Till made me unravel that notion of the “other” because he was so similar to me. He was only a couple of years older. He was an ordinary kid, on vacation. And they killed him, brutally and without mercy. And he was Black, just like me.

That led me to fully realize that I am Black.

After that, I thought a lot more about my race. I composed poems about being mixed. My characters got more detailed ethnic backgrounds. I realized that I wanted to see more protagonists who had the same background as me, so I made them. I began to learn more about the history of Black and Asian Americans.

All this change happened over a long period of time. Until looking back at my old stories, I hadn't realized how far I had come.

Now, all I can think about is how far I have left to go.

I want to tell a younger Parker that his ideas about a typical American are wrong. I want to tell him that even if a majority of the people in this country are white, he shouldn't try to write from a white perspective. He needs to know that his voice and unique background matter, even if he never saw or read about it anywhere. And I want to tell myself now that I should not feel that I do not belong in Black or Asian spaces because I am multiracial or because it took me a long time to embrace my identity.

I am Black. I am Japanese. I am multiracial.

I am not "other."



1969 PRESENTS...

SHORT

ANSWERS

FEATURING ALUMNUS STERLING KEE '19,
BECKI M'MARI '23, & JAYSON ROSS '25

HOW DO YOU SHOW UP IN THE WORLD? ARE THERE ANY AFFIRMATIONS OR THREATS YOU RECEIVE WHEN YOU SHOW UP?

BECKI M'MARI: It is important to recognize how others perceive you and how you treat others. I always try to be humble, trustworthy, and honest because those are qualities I believe everyone should strive to have. Most of all, I want people to know that they can talk to me about anything because I will always provide a safe space. When people interact with me, I hope they see a well-rounded person who cares about them. To show up in the world, you have to understand yourself and use your strongest qualities in the best ways possible to create change. A leader does not usually try to fit in with societal norms; instead, they are always uniquely themselves so that they can be set apart. When your uniqueness is recognized by those around you, they appreciate you more because you are transparent about how you feel about yourself. Leaders like that are respected because they are trustworthy, and they provide hope to those struggling with their identities.

I know that I am doing my best to love myself and others. I am happy to see that I am becoming a better person as I interact with more people. I am choosing to be happy, and I look forward to a great future. This world is full of many people who may or may not agree with me. A lot of people find it hard to accept others who are not like them. Instead of focusing on negativity, I am choosing to use my voice as encouragement. If you do not embrace yourself, this world will never get to know how astounding you are.

JAYSON ROSS: As an African American male, I try to show up in the world composed, calm, and intelligent so that I can seize opportunities that are offered to me. I try to show up in the world as unthreatening as possible due to stereotypes, which Black men are reminded of quite a lot on the news. Despite my height, I try to make people feel comfortable enough to approach me. I am trying to use my talent and resources to achieve my dreams and create options and opportunities for myself, so I don't have to be stuck in a cycle that a lot of Black Americans get looped in. This cycle can include becoming a drug addict, an alcoholic, or even a hashtag on the news. These situations can happen because of an abundance of different reasons, but the main factors are the double standards and prejudicial thinking some Americans in power have. My goal is to make a difference in this world anyway I can, whether it is sports, by becoming an Olympian; or in school, by getting an education and being able to grow my wealth and help create change; or charitably, by helping this world out anyway I can. I truly want to make a difference while I can.

WHAT WOULD BE TRUE ABOUT THE WORLD IF EVERYONE COULD BE THEIR WHOLE SELVES IN EVERY SPACE THEY ENTER?

BECKI M'MARI: If everyone could be their whole selves in every space they enter, I do not think that the world would necessarily be a better place. Right now, there are Latinos, Asians, Black people, white people, Jews, LGBTQ+ people, white supremacists, neo-nazis, racists, terrorists, liberals, conservatives, upper-class people, lower-class people, Christians, Muslims, men, women, and so many other categories we could be put in. Not everyone on that list makes the world a good place to live in, and if they express their thoughts freely in any environment, someone could get hurt. So, what do we do when we can't accept oppressive behaviors and mindsets? In order for us to get to the point where we can be our whole selves anywhere, we have to teach each other how to be kind to everyone. That means getting rid of ill-treatment and our prejudices while also working towards a better community.

The idea of a world where everyone could be their whole selves is not completely negative. In the world today, some people are unable to express their thoughts and feelings. A world in which they could be heard, without worrying about what others might do, would be freeing and amazing.

STERLING KEE: If everyone could be their whole self in every space they entered, we would experience far more real friction between people with differing values. The social barriers that prevent everyone from acting and speaking honestly influence people on all points of the political spectrum. Instead of saying "I don't want to use they/them pronouns because I don't really care to validate that identity," people will say, "I don't want to use they/them pronouns because they just don't make sense with the English language." Instead of saying, "The police are irreformably ineffective for this country and that part of our culture should be abolished entirely," people will say, "We just need to take SOME responsibility from the police because they're overworked." By shielding our actual values and by extension our identities when we talk about these things, the conversations we have surrounding them are full of hot air, they're hollow. We defend points that only symbolically represent what we believe because we don't want to step into radical territory, but we're only delaying the inevitable.

This is not to say that all of these barriers should come down immediately. Some of them, marginalized people have put up to protect themselves from trauma and violence. Protection against hate speech is not one of the barriers I think should come down, as much as hate speech might be a reflection of one's whole self. We should start with the self-censoring we do that only serves to keep our public personas uncontroversial. The real world implications of saying you won't date Black people because "you didn't grow up around them" are no different than the implications of saying you won't date Black people because you just don't like them and you think they smell. So, it's more productive to just speak the truth with your chest so people can meet you where you really are.

HOW DO YOU SELF-LIBERATE FROM SOCIETAL CONSTRAINTS?

BECKI M'MARI: As humans, we always find ways to instill ideas in our minds about how you should act, look, and feel. These ideas always lead people to believe that they are better or worse than someone else. This world is full of people of many different skin colors, body types, religions, interests, and visions. Instead of hiding our uniqueness, we should be encouraged to be ourselves in the biggest ways possible. Maya Angelou once said, "If you are always trying to be normal, you will never know how amazing you can be."

I do not allow other people to decide how I act. For example, I am known as a quiet person, but I do not let others push me into a box. There's nothing wrong with being quiet, but once you let someone else decide who you get to be, it's hard to find yourself. I've had to learn how to fight for myself, how to use my voice, and how to gain confidence. If you want to live apart from societal constraints, you have to be disciplined enough to commit to that. You have to stand your ground no matter what happens to you. John Lewis once said, "I say to people today, 'You must be prepared if you believe in something. If you believe in something, you have to go for it. As individuals, we may not live to see the end.'" To me, he is saying that if you are truly passionate about something, then you should go for it without regrets. That is an important mindset to have because passion allows you to accomplish more than you thought you could, and in the process, maybe you can encourage others to go for their dreams.



CHRONICLES OF THE ALUMNI

Gone, but never forgotten! We check in with some former SFS students to hear about their journeys beyond the classroom.

Patti Spady Ross

"LITTLE PI" SHARES SOME
OF HER NEWEST WORK

STATEMENT, IMAGES, AND POETRY BY PATTI SPADY
ROSS '80 AND ADEOLUWA FATUKASI '21

Patti Spady Ross '80 aka "little pi" is an orator, poet, poor peoples advocate, and feminist warrior. Patti earned a Journalism degree from the American University. After publishing in The Washington Times and the Rural America newspapers, Patti landed a career in the corporate technology field. She writes and performs poetry and spoken word under the name "little pi." She also writes at littlepisuniverse.wordpress.com.

I came to Sidwell at an early age. I was 5 years old and this was the beginning of my education. I was to start "Transition," what I think is now called Kindergarten. I remember the experience through photographs of class pictures and classmates' photos. I was only one of a few Black children in the lower school at that time, and although we were not all in the same classes there was a sense of unity that persists to this day. We were forging new ground in 1968—we were to be some of the first graduates of the prestigious Sidwell Friends School in the very white neighborhood of Friendship Heights.

Of course, at the age of 5, I had no idea what the journey would be. It was the foresight of my parents who wanted to offer their only child a real chance in these United States. They both grew up through the Jim Crow era and knew the importance of a good education. It was what elevated them and their parents out of systemic poverty. Although racism was present in Washington DC when my parents moved here from Richmond, Virginia, they were able to shelter me from most of the egregious acts.



At 6 years old, my mother enrolled me in the National Ballet School, which opened in 1964 on Connecticut Avenue. In 1971, I performed in the ballet school's first production of *The Nutcracker* at the Lisner Auditorium on the campus of George Washington University. I was the only Black kid in the production. A few years later National Ballet closed its doors and we were sent to attend the Washington School of Ballet under the direction of Ms. Mary Day.

The lower school bus brought us back to the main campus, and the walk to the ballet school was just a few blocks away, and I was able to continue my dance studies.

Both my parents worked. I learned early on how to be independent. The learning that went on at both Sidwell and WSB was independent with the understanding of interdependence and I liked that.

I did not live near Sidwell. I lived in the liberal community of Takoma Park in Northwest Washington, DC. My community bordered what is now known as Takoma Park, MD, a swanky place now but back in the '60s and '70s a "hippie" community filled with community living.

It was a spiritually freeing place to grow up. I left Sidwell in the spring of 1972 and attended the local public schools. I graduated early and was in the first class to graduate from The Duke Ellington School of the Arts in 1978. I was 16 years old. I had a scholarship to the Philadelphia College of Performing Arts, and I was going.



Although racism was present in Washington DC when my parents moved here from Richmond, Virginia they were able to shelter me from most of the egregious acts.

It was an adventure I will have to share at another time. However, I did not lose touch with some of my Sidwell buddies, and throughout the years, we attended birthday parties and teenage parties and finally even adult gatherings. Sidwell gave me a firm foundation of learning and the confidence to pursue any goal, whether participants looked like me or not.

I have had three business careers and now I am embarking on my final career as a spoken word artist, poet and writer. I have been a lover of the arts and the world of words since I started the *Paddington* series back in 2nd grade. As a graduate of The American University with a degree in journalism I have found myself always pulled back to language and its use.

Language is universal yet very personal. Each of us have “our” language and we have the language of our ancestors, our culture, and our universe. Arts and words go together; they are the most expressive mediums a person can use to share themselves with the world.

My great grandfather Ora A. Spady was a moderator for the Baptist Association in lower Eastern Shore Virginia during the early 1900s, perhaps that is where I get my auditory nudge from. I host a couple of open mic readings, including founding the EC (Ellicott City) Poetry and Prose Open Mic Summer Salon series that took place last summer in old Ellicott City, MD. At present I host an online open mic through the Maryland Writers Association, of which I am a board member. The open mic series is titled “First Friday’s” on Zoom. You do not have to be a member to participate; if you go to the MWA webpage there is a link you can use to register for each event.

I want to leave you with a few verses
of a poem I am continuing to write
and gives me pleasure in knowing my
history and what my race has
contributed to these "united" states.
We must never forget the sacrifices
that were made for us to have the
privilege to call ourselves Sidwell
Friends alumni. Let's dig in and lay
the path for those who come after us
to know that they too are a part of
this institution and its legacy, and we
will help them carry it forward.

Why my History got to be only one month long?
Like there isn't a lot to tell from all the years and all the songs.
Crispus - took the first bullet for our flag.
We were claiming territory neither one of us had.
My ancestor's bones are the sand that you sink
your feet in at the beach.
Gazing across the waters at lost loving memories.

Why my History got to be only one month long?
Even though we pray to the same God.
You want to say I am not patriotic because I take a knee.
I think your psychotic when you avoid me in the History.
How could God give you privilege and turn his back on me?
Wasn't it our Lord who said, "the Truth will set you Free?"

Only one month long? Not my History.

PATTI ROSS '80
"BLACK HISTORY MONTH"

Jonisha Matthews Levi

ENJOY SOME POETRY
FROM

STATEMENT AND POETRY BY JONISHA MATTHEWS
LEVI '95 AND ADEOLUWA FATUKASI '21

Johnisha Matthews Levi '95 lives in Nashville, TN, where she works as the Development Manager of The Nashville Food Project, a food justice non-profit with the mission of bringing people together to grow, cook, and share nourishing food. She is a graduate of Harvard College and New York University School of Law; she also earned a degree in Baking & Pastry from Johnson & Wales University. She enjoys reading, nature, and recipe testing in her free time.

JONISHA M. LEVI '95 "DREAMING OF PHILLIS ON THE INAUGURATION OF 44"

I could not help but think of you today,
a new New Englander
first "articulate" member of the race,
left with a single ancestral memory unkidnapped:
A mother pouring water before sunrise.

Sable sister,
our Poet Laureate,
dreaming in transcendent verse,
tailor of a newborn country's mythology,
chronicler of the scenes of a war unfinished.
A true Patriot,
believer in the Commander you praised,
who could not reciprocate the dignity of your name,
your Art untrusted,
authenticated by John Hancocks.

Again are fix'd the eyes of nations on the scales,
this time in hopes that an African son will prevail
and assume the mansion of that Commander's namesake,
incandescent proof that a face like yours
does more than brood.

JONISHA M. LEVI '95
"CULTURAL STUDIES': A NOTE FROM A
BARNES & NOBLE CUSTOMER"

In Faulkner's neighborhood,
I am peering down the black ledge
in vain for Ralph Ellison.
I am looking for a true American crusader,
but next to Mae West, no empty space
reveals itself for Ida B. Wells.
The President is here,
but Capitol Men—
Revels, Pinchback, Bruce, Smalls—
do not cohabit with Ulysses,
or even Cary,
Grant.
Not in Biography—Alphabetical by Subject,
nor in History—U.S.

In Poetry—Alphabetical by Author,
you might see Langston
cozy with Ted,
Selected Poems of Rita Dove
nestled against volumes of Donne.
But no Dunbar in residence,
no Gwendolyn Brooks nor Audre Lorde,
other than a few pages for each,
sprinklings in an anthology,
African-American.

No race can prosper till it learns that there is
as much dignity
in tilling a field as in writing a poem.

Presumptuous to assume that mine
are more than merely "African American Interests,"
Not quite a full bookcase.
13% never looked so bare.

Nia Baker

WHAT DOES IT
MEAN TO BE
AN ALLY?

WRITTEN BY NIA BAKER '19

Nia Baker '19 is an actor and model in Los Angeles. Nia currently studies acting, film production, and the entertainment industry at the University of Southern California, School of Cinematic Arts. She wants to act in, create, and produce films from underrepresented narratives that will ultimately empower people to take a stand and be the best versions of themselves. You can learn more at www.niabaker.com

Ally and allyship. We often hear these terms in conversations regarding social justice, but what exactly do they mean?

According to Merriam-Webster, to be an ally is to be “a person or group that provides assistance and support in an ongoing effort, activity, or struggle” and, more specifically, “a person who is not a member of a marginalized or mistreated group but who expresses or gives support to that group”. Essentially, allies actively combat oppressive systems of injustice, despite not identifying with the oppressed group. Anyone can become an ally as long as one acknowledges their privilege and makes the undying commitment each day to educate themselves on various struggles and hardships. Allyship is imperative in the fight for equity because allies utilize their privilege to uplift and amplify the powerful voices of marginalized communities.

Below I have composed a few pointers on how you can become an ally and how to better yourself as an ally on both small and large scales:

1) **Educate yourself.** Do your research to understand the struggles that the marginalized community endures and what you can do to help. While it is important to listen to the voices of said community, do not solely depend on interviewing your friend to better understand their oppression. It is exhausting to unveil traumas and past experiences to someone who only understands on a surface level. A google search is not hard.

2) **Speak out against bigotry and hatred.** This statement applies not only to what you might see in the media, but also to what you hear from family and friends. Explain to them why the sentiments in their 'jokes' or words are hurtful. If you are hesitant because of your discomfort, imagine how uncomfortable it is to hear it as a member of the oppressed group.

3) **Become aware of your own biases.** Unlearn problematic parts of history and society that you have been taught to normalize. Also, check yourself when you think or say something unjust.

4) **Use inclusive language.** Ask someone what their pronouns are and try not to make assumptions.

5) **Remember that allyship is intersectional.** It is important to uplift all members of the community. For example, you cannot fully support the LGBTQIA+ community without fighting for Black Lives Matter and the Black community because you would be excluding black members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Likewise, you cannot truly fight for Black Lives without supporting the LGBTQIA+ community because you would only help a certain group of Black people and not everyone. To be an ally is to be intersectional and inclusive.

Know that when (and not if) you make a mistake in your journey to becoming the best ally that you can be, you must learn and grow. Being an ally is a difficult, yet rewarding, commitment to social justice each and every day.

WELCOME TO THE

ARTS
Corner

Two lovers perform the swing,
Twirling their cotton clothing, adorned with matching ties
moderating the wind,
Reléved feet hover the ground,
Rhythm reflects,
As their toes keep tapping

AYORKOR LARYEA '23
"ONE LAST DANCE"

Your shoes press against the earth,
but your mind is in the clouds.
I love that about you,
but be careful.
You don't always look where you're going,
but you leave your mark as you skip
across the world.
Some want to hurt you,
some want to watch you fall,
but remember,
they are not close enough to hurt you.
I am close enough to heal you.
I will tie your shoelaces tight every morning,
before releasing you out into the world.
Maybe it won't be enough,
but I will be there at the end
of the day to wipe off the dirt,
and chase away the pain.
I will do my best to protect the land you walk on,
and you will still fall.
When you do, I will scrub the stains off your clothes,
and tie your shoes
again.

I am still here,
Graciana

GRACIANA KABWE '26
"SHOES"

"A STUDENT YET A TEACHER"

JASMINE FLOWERS '24

When I go to school, I am supposed to be a student
When I go to school, I want to be a student
I am the student until it comes up

Race

Every laugh and snicker
Every heavy sigh and eyeroll
Every look that says "I don't want to be here"

Do you ever stop to think that I don't want to be here?

I don't want to be here
I don't want to have to deal with this

When I go to school, I want to be a student

Only a student

Yet in the span of seconds I have to be the teacher
I have to be the one to stand up
I have to be the one to lead
I have to be the one to teach
I have to be the expert because everyone assumes that I am

Why can't the person who is 3 times my age be the expert?
Because they decide to be quiet.
They decide to slip into the role of a student.
They decide to no longer be the teacher.
They decide that it is best for someone else to take their role.

Because of their choice I have no choice to be silent
I don't have the choice because if I choose silence what is wrong is suddenly okay
I have no choice, but you do.

Because of your choice of silence, I have to be the one to defend myself and others
I have to be the one to speak up for myself and others
I have to be the one to teach about myself and others
I have to be the teacher.

I am a new student to Sidwell
I hope that Sidwell is a change
I need Sidwell to be the change because I am tired of being a student and yet a teacher.

