

Racism  
with a side  
of sickness

Poems by Jakeel Harris

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The concept of the book was inspired by Tobe Nwigwe and *The Pandemic Project*. These poems were all written out of quarantine during the Pandemic days of 2020, where racism and COVID-19 combine to make a new concoction of ignorance and oppression.

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Racism  
with a side  
of sickness



Black people!  
look in the mirror  
and repeat after me:

*I am enough*

and don't go out into society  
until you believe it without doubts

because the world will try to convince you  
that you are unfit for existing  
and unworthy  
of acknowledgment

# Racism with a side of sickness

you deny police brutality  
systemic oppression  
and black importance  
in the same breath  
that's suppressed by  
a virus that you don't  
even acknowledge

you protest  
being inconvenienced  
while those around you are dying  
while those who are melanated  
are being murdered

you expect the world  
to be silent about America's mishaps  
yet be loud about catering to your needs  
you say screaming for your "rights"  
is mentally exhausting  
oh, how tiring it must be  
to have to figure out  
how to sleep in privilege  
while the rest of us are awake like insomniacs  
alert during these oppressive times  
burdened by the nightmares that haunt our realities

# Over It

Black folk aren't asking you to step down from the  
roles you've played in television shows  
we are not begging for your pity or sympathy  
because your white guilt finally realized blackface was  
unacceptable  
we are not screaming requests of cancellations for  
brand logos we deemed racist decades ago  
we have not told you that we are reminded of the  
shackled nightmares that enslavement brings  
when occupying the largest room in our households  
we have been yelling outbursts of our lives mattering,  
angrily justifying our existence  
and y'all still don't get it  
we simply desire not be killed anymore by the same  
people deputized to keep the safety of our futures  
alive  
we call for the arrest of the thugs in badges who  
murdered Breonna Taylor and the prosecution of  
those gunning down Black folk for sport  
because we know  
that no matter whether  
we are innocent of crimes  
or guilty as FUCK  
the response is always to slaughter  
trigger so quick to kill, to massacre, to destroy  
and we are tired of explaining how that's impacting us  
we want to live  
is that so hard to understand

# Denial

to deny racism exists  
is to benefit from its consequences  
or be free from its wrath

just because its impact is invisible  
in your life experiences  
doesn't mean it ceases to exist

- *Racism didn't disappear*

# Becoming trendy

when the tear gas clears  
and the presence of blood  
is cleaned off of the streets  
will you still speak on the importance  
of Black lives mattering?

when politicizing about Black death  
stops being so trendy  
what will your Instagram posts consist of?  
will your Facebook rants still be attached to solidarity?

will you continue to vocalize your concerns about the  
mistreatment of me and my people?

or will you just reminisce about  
the time you became trending on Twitter  
because you tweeted about a city burning?

- *thoughts from someone who can't afford to neglect the  
reality his blackness presents*

# Black is King

undeniable greatness  
is within the coding of your DNA  
it spews out royalty

your melanin protects  
this brilliance  
absorbs the sun's essence  
holds onto it  
no matter how hot  
or luminescent

your glow will remind you  
that you'll shine  
even during those dark hours  
where you spend time  
setting aside your pride

- *Black is King*

# Make it home

I pray that Black boys  
make it home  
in time  
to live to see another day.

I pray that Black girls  
will grow up to be women  
who don't violently disappear.

I pray.  
I pray.  
I pray.  
I pray.

hoping that the world will see  
how golden Black people  
really are.

- *Black is golden*

# Periodt

Black women  
don't have to be  
well-tempered  
in order to be respected

they have every right  
to express their emotions  
however the fuck they'd like to

just because their ability to confidently  
convey an attitude that doesn't meet your  
expectations  
makes you feel uncomfortable

shouldn't spark the silencing of their voice

your unstable idea of entitlement  
will have you anticipating worship  
from a population of women  
who set their own standards

- *Black women need respect*

# Protect Black Women

protecting Black women  
goes beyond the ones who have impacted your life  
it's more than respecting their presence  
on days you choose to recognize it

protecting Black women  
is shattering masculinity  
uplifting their voices higher than your own  
while using yours to praise their existence  
it's stopping with the comparison to other women  
and to settle that argument  
ain't nothing like a Black woman

if you're not willing to silence your privilege  
open your ears to hear their experience  
meet their needs without complaints  
and lay your life on the line  
so that hers doesn't disappear  
then protecting Black women  
isn't something you truly embody

there are levels to this shit  
and Black women have suffered long enough  
while you sit there and ponder  
if your strong enough to support them

- *Black is safety*

# Hood PTSD

nightmares of nights scared  
questioning if this night will be your last  
from bullets to sirens  
your nerves have desensitized these sounds as normal  
window taps bring flashbacks  
of flashing red and blue lights cascading  
on the back of your car window  
trigger fingers trigger terrifying memories  
of severe anxiety  
emotional avoidance becomes distinct behavior  
patterns  
cycled thoughts of nervousness  
take over your mentality  
grinding is the only coping mechanism  
you can only get it, how you live it  
and you live it rough  
paycheck to paycheck  
you start to feel hopeless about the future  
told the acceptable way to heal from it  
is through anger  
violence becomes medication  
but no one's alleviated from this pain  
you bring home  
nothing but exhaustion  
and think everything's okay  
it's not  
you need to see someone about these hood dreams

- *Black men need therapy*

# Backlash

don't provoke Black folk  
and await our compliance  
    expect backlash  
we are not going to allow  
anyone to get comfortable  
harassing and dehumanizing us

    you will be handed with  
more than just life lessons  
        the day you decide  
to let your comfort zone  
stretch into Black boundaries

- *Black is vast and powerful*

# 3 things I affirmed in quarantine

1. there's no such thing as too much anime....that  
shit is amazing
  2. solitude and reflection can transform negligence  
into appreciation
  3. despite how others perceive my Blackness, it  
stands completely unbothered wallowing in its  
excellence
- *Black is excellent*

# Black and mistreated

we've blessed this world with everything  
and with everything  
they prove  
that they don't deserve us

but we stay making an impact  
despite the circumstances

- *Black is a gift*

As Issa Rae once said:

“I’m rooting for everybody Black.”

and I stand behind that statement

# Rooting for Black Folk

encouragement will plant love  
into the soil where our roots grow

# Lift every voice and sing

back in the day  
before I was cruising the streets of Oceanside  
in my Nissan Maxima  
I was exploring the confines of my city  
on public transportation, looking for adventure

to avoid having unnecessary interactions  
with those some would call deranged  
on the 309 to town center north  
I would often plug in my headphones  
and listen to the Black National Anthem  
having mental conversations with our Lord and  
Savior until I reached my destination

I remember this one time  
when attempting  
to get GODs attention  
I tried to lift my voice so high

that it would soar through the skies  
and be heavy enough to shake the gates of heaven  
that my rejoicing wouldn't just rise  
it would escalate exponentially  
but on that day  
I was met with so much white resistance  
that my songs of hope  
were remixed into hymns of fear  
I forgot the lyrics to my daily resilience  
changed pace to something more reassuring  
instrumentals that implant survival in them  
no chorus  
no lyrics  
just something familiar to help me drown out the  
sounds of racism  
and once the angst subsided  
I was able to communicate  
with GOD again

# We Lit

on Twitter

I saw one of my white followers retweet  
“being Black is kinda dangerous, but it’s pretty dope”

dope like the stuff the CIA brought into Black  
communities  
injecting us with poverty lines of cocaine  
a high that has lasted for generations  
but we lit fam  
lit like front yard cross burnings  
lawns becoming drive-in movie theaters  
screening our struggle  
where you can choose to ignore our pain  
the same pain that sits in the palm of your phone  
screen  
streamed uploads of racist slurs, racial profiling  
making a mockery of “Karen”  
watching lifeless Black bodies become hashtags  
because some officer decided  
that the fear rushing through their body  
was enough justification to suck the life out of one  
when I saw that post  
I thought myself  
being Black is a blessing  
most of you  
will never understand

# Life on Earth

cities have become  
nothing more than places  
for the privilege  
to flex their lack of knowledge

they run around  
exercising their right  
to misunderstand

## SHOUTING OUT NONSENSE

wonder why their opinions  
are out of breath  
fortunately for them  
their entitlement  
has always seem  
to work out  
in their favor

and as their ignorance gets stronger  
they make it harder  
for everyone else  
to lift themselves up

INHALE.  
BREATHE.  
EXHALE.

REFLECT.  
PROCESS.  
ADAPT.  
ADVANCE.

Some of the simplest and most beautifully impactful aspects of life are the rekindling of connections, genuine kindness, gratefulness, reflection and appreciation

- My therapist

# Understanding Frankenstein's Father to an extent: Message to my unborn Son

Son,  
when you are born  
my world will come to a complete stop  
time will be flipped on its head  
and everything around me will just slow down  
excitement will fill these lungs  
tears of joy will fall down my face  
like streaming waterfalls  
happiness will seize control over my smile  
and I won't be able to put you down for a second  
but shortly after the adrenaline fades  
fear will rush through my body  
as it knows  
that I am not prepared to raise a black boy in this  
world  
where people see monster  
before they see human creation (child)  
a world that sees chaos in his eyes  
where I see beauty  
where I see innocence  
where I see myself

Son,  
when you open your eyes  
you'll be greeted with so much love  
that your heart will beat twice as fast  
it will be a bit overwhelming  
I apologize in advance  
I've been anticipating your arrival for some time now

when you take your first breath  
the moment will be magical  
everything inside you will start moving with purpose  
your organs will start to communicate  
you'll have plenty of opportunities in the future to  
decipher what they are expressing  
just know  
the blood pumping inside you is partly mine  
it's saying we are alive  
don't let anyone spill us

when you go out into the real world  
out from the security of my overprotective barriers  
you'll experience so much judgement  
some people just lack understanding  
when it comes to the skin you will embody  
some simply  
don't share the same appreciation for it  
that I will instill in you  
it will be upsetting  
and triggering  
times it will be scary  
and honestly this feeling never really goes away  
I know exactly how you'll feel at this time  
wondering if it will ever stop

wondering why it happens  
and yes  
I experience it too

but son  
the day you are brought onto this Earth  
the day my world stops  
I promise  
to never leave your side  
when the hate comes  
I promise  
to always love you  
through your mistakes  
and accomplishments  
I promise  
that you will never have to worry  
or question  
if I ever regret creating you

Son,  
there is nothing you can do  
to stop me from loving you

# My mind, my decisions

men need to shut the fuck up

and silence their opinions

when it comes to women

making decisions

about anything they believe

is important for them to live

happily, healthily, and full of independence

# Confused Masculinity

masculinity doesn't even know  
what it wants  
nevertheless  
men never question it

instead

they'll  
belittle a woman's existence  
but ask for her presence  
demand her obedience  
but beg for her attention  
diminish her emotions  
but request her love

men live in the constant condition  
of hypocrisy and confusion  
but cannot fathom  
why they cause so much destruction  
leaving emotional wreckage in places  
their entitlement should've never gained access to

- *Men have so much learning to do*

# Priorities

if I put my feelings on display for you  
I'm trying to get you to see  
how important you are to me

so significant  
that I'm making my emotions accessible  
for your self-gratification

but if you ask me  
to place my goals on hold  
just so you can feel entitled to my attention  
understand that  
while my affection for you is unquestionable  
it will not be enough to justify  
the sacrifice of my aspirations

know that  
I will never make you a priority  
just because it's convenient  
but I will put effort  
into maintaining our relationship  
if it proves to be worth it

# Worship

pyramids remind us  
that even temples of worship  
can have a tainted history  
of oppression

so, let it be known  
that one does not have to  
attend church  
to be religious

the relationship one has with GOD  
should be a private one  
and sometimes the places  
we choose to openly express our love  
to this Holy Spirit  
engages in judgement before acceptance

Open is who I am  
Love is how I want to be  
Fact is, I am proud to be me  
Me, the embodiment of candor qualities  
the result of being closed off to those who have  
always had an interest in fucking with my energy

# Love is

there's something so unusual about metamorphosing  
your affection for someone  
into the aspect of you not being able to  
recognize the person in the mirror

if it's not attached to a coupled identity  
you get amnesia  
forgetting your own individuality  
we consume this belief  
and call it love

but love  
is not losing yourself inside someone  
until your souls intertwine  
it's being able to give someone everything they  
deserve  
without sacrificing who you are  
and when you provide that same energy to yourself  
you will not just give love  
you will become it

# Loving me again

when you see these scars  
you'll get curious  
as to what adventures  
provoked their creation  
and I'll tell you

this is what it looks like  
when you're learning  
how to fall in love with yourself  
all over again

- *My heart telling me about those scars*

# Self-love

self-love is  
realizing that your  
inherent worth is vast  
and certain

when people start to question its significance  
or label it as selfish  
embed yourself in more of it

let them see the importance of its impact

- *Self-love is the best love*

# Dear self

you don't need permission  
to love yourself openly

you don't have to hide it  
nor be ashamed of it

it doesn't have to come with  
restrictions

stop letting other people  
dictate the way in which  
you need to show love to yourself

# Boys will be boys

I'll admit  
I used to believe that masculinity  
and destruction  
were the same action  
that it was measured  
by the amount of trauma  
you could suppress  
that it was shown  
through the projection of anger

I was raised by men  
who taught me to turn my fists  
into weapons of mass aggression  
at any sight of opposition  
posing a threat to my manhood  
I became a soldier of neglected feelings  
like the men in my family before me  
this tradition has been  
passed down for as long as I can remember

I served two tours in fear of expressing myself  
never really gained the courage to be vulnerable  
relied heavily on my rage to increase my survival  
chances  
I've never lost a battle  
no matter the opponent

often times  
I didn't realize  
I was my own enemy  
leaving each arena  
bruised and confused  
stuck in combat with my emotions  
fighting to keep them imprisoned  
because they have been deemed  
domestic terrorists  
for their warfare of sensitivity

I'll admit  
I've never learned  
how to end a war  
without friendly casualties  
but I'm trying

I know it takes time  
and understanding  
to find a way  
to turn these hands  
into tools  
to pry open  
someone who is so used  
to being closed off  
I'm working on it  
slowly but surely  
appreciating and experiencing  
true emotional processing

# Stay quiet

I hope  
the susurrous sounds of doubt  
stuck in the back of my mind  
don't figure out  
how unstable my anxiety is

I hope it doesn't realize  
the lies I've created  
to help them  
stay dormant

or the exaggerated assertions told  
to encourage them to stay quiet  
because if they are too loud  
they'll wake my insecurities out of their slumber  
and we all know the kind of monster that they'll turn  
into when disturbed out of their comfort  
King Kong of sadness  
navigating the jungle of depression  
fighting this dinosaurs age old battle  
with mental illness

I hope  
my doubts never gain the courage to speak up  
that they will continue to whisper silently  
so I can ignore them  
and carry on with confidence

# Lessons

heartbreak taught me  
to cherish the moments I have  
where I can show love to you  
because there will be times  
where I don't make treating you right a priority

- *Talking to my heart*

# Pretending

I had to experience disappointment  
in order to comprehend  
that I was continuously pretending  
to be ready for relationships  
with people  
interested in me  
because they welcomed my flaws  
and characteristics  
without conditions

when you live a lie  
for so long  
it will become your reality  
regardless of the impact  
it has on innocent victims

I had to challenge  
the notion  
that love waits for no one  
and be patient with my healing  
because if I didn't recover properly  
from the wounds left from previous partners  
I'd continue to force future ones  
to deal with the consequences of me settling

# I'm only Human

having weak moments  
doesn't mean you are broken  
having weak moments  
makes you incapable of perfection  
and that's  
the quality  
that makes you human

# Miracles

unintentional happenings  
can birth  
beautiful consequences too  
not everything  
has to go according to plan  
to be considered successful  
and when these spectacular phenomena occur  
welcome these miracles

the sex  
the love  
the care  
the hours spent  
coming up with thousands  
of reasons  
why we will always be together

- *it was all good until it wasn't*

evolve in every part of your life  
and the quality of your interactions,  
relationships and partnerships  
with people  
will begin to expand in value

# Tolerating

no more bearing through  
situations  
that are not good for you

you shouldn't have to  
cope with  
tolerating circumstances  
that are bad for your mental health

it's time to prioritize  
your stability over  
making sure  
everyone else's needs  
are fulfilled

once you properly  
navigate the energy  
around you  
you can determine  
if certain people  
deserve your attention

# Soul searching

I hope  
in all that time  
you spend soul searching

you refuse to leave  
until you find  
what you've been looking for

# Bear with me

bear with me  
as I am  
trying to make better  
use of these fears

I am trying to turn  
them into  
something worth holding  
onto

# Wasting Time

just because you are working out the details  
on how to be honest with yourself

doesn't mean you can expect someone to be patient  
about receiving answers on whether or not  
you want to be involved with them

the vagueness in your intentions  
doesn't provide any type of reassurance  
there needs to be an indication  
that you are not there to waste their time

when you decide to commit yourself to someone  
you are telling them  
that the energy they put into your relationship  
isn't going to be taken for granted

- *Don't commit with uncertain interests*

# Realization

when you've grown accustomed  
to being controlled in a relationship  
being presented with space as a healing option  
will feel similar to rejection

independence will feel like dismissal  
when all it really is supposed to do  
is show you that you're the one  
in charge of making decisions  
about your own healing process

# Begging

never beg anyone for anything  
that includes time  
attention  
and love  
even when you need those things the most

don't let people think  
that your happiness is dependent on them  
don't let them feel like  
they have the power to control you

# Envious

let them hate  
let them envy you  
but never let them  
take away your light

that's the thing  
that shines bright in you

- *Your spark is sacred*

# Limits

create restrictions  
around your positive qualities too  
generosity can turn into depletion  
without boundaries

understand what you're willing  
to handle  
then enforce it with purpose  
before you burnout  
and exhaust all your kindness

- *Kindness should be protected too*

# Secrets

let our love be  
the greatest secret  
that we keep to ourselves

- *Talking to self-esteem*

# Lines

there's a fine line between  
the acknowledgement and acceptance  
of your feelings  
and dwelling and living in them with the belief that  
they cannot change

sometimes  
our circumstances, conditions and trauma  
influences us to think  
that negativity has to be permanent  
in our growing environments

the thing about life is  
while it teaches us  
many lessons  
it forgets that some people  
view their philosophies  
from different perspectives  
and others  
have never agreed  
with their teaching methods  
or benefitted from its content

# Purpose

if there is no empathy  
in your heart

**ask yourself**

what purpose determines your actions?

**ask yourself**

is your sense of identity disappearing?

**ask yourself**

what defines your soul?

- *Your purpose is just as important as your actions*

# Survival Tactics

keeping to yourself  
can be a survival tactic  
when those around you  
are trying to contaminate your surroundings  
with fatalistic attitudes  
attempting to poison  
your peace of mind

- *things I learn in quarantine*

# Journey

follow the path  
that makes the most sense for you  
and if that leads you into the wild  
where danger is lurking  
transform into whatever is necessary  
to stay in the continued state of living  
until you find yourself

once you gain some  
newfound understanding  
come back to civilization  
trusting the experiences  
of that journey

# Selection

be selective about  
who you keep around you

if you choose to place support  
in your surroundings

you'll begin to notice  
how steady  
your unstable thoughts become

- *your support system can be the balance you need*

# Worth

whether you are surrounded  
by millions  
or stuck in isolation  
don't let loneliness  
have you questioning  
your worth

- *your value won't change unless you force it too*

# Butterflies

fact  
butterflies are cold-blooded insects  
their transparent wings cannot  
establish flight  
if brought under cool temperatures

they are rendered immobile  
if ever caught in a chilly situation  
this crucial detail  
in their genetic makeup  
forces them to rely heavily  
on their atmospheres  
for survival

fact  
butterflies often only live for a few weeks  
and in that time  
they focus all of their energy  
on eating  
mating  
and learning new strategies  
to avoid being consumed while breathing

they camouflage so well  
that invisibility becomes a personality trait  
sometimes  
predators see through the fear

so butterflies  
make themselves seem more poisonous  
than they actually are  
to keep enemies at bay

fact  
I can relate  
I too am afraid that the world will devour me  
I too cloak myself to avoid confrontation  
I too pretend to be more toxic than I am  
just to evade being approached  
I too am trying to figure out  
how to best make use  
of the time I have left  
on this Earth

# The phone-call weeks after a one nightstand with Courage

**\*RING\* \*RING\***  
**\*RING\* \*RING\***  
**\*RING\* \*RING\***  
**\*RING\* \*RING\***

you have reached the voice mailbox of Courage  
please leave your name and situation  
after the beep  
and I'll respond  
when it's convenient

**\*BEEP\***

hi, it's me  
the one you promised  
to be there for  
the one who put all their trust  
into your commitments

I haven't heard from you  
since that wild night out  
with my inhibitions  
and was just wondering  
if I'll ever see you again

press 1 if you are satisfied with this message

your message has been sent goodbye

**\*CLICK\***

**\*RING\* \*RING\***

**\*RING\* \*RING\***

**\*RING\* \*RING\***

**\*RING\* \*RING\***

you have reached the voice mailbox of Courage  
I currently am dodging your calls  
so please leave your name and complaint  
after the beep  
and I'll happily delete your message  
to avoid confrontation

**\*BEEP\***

me again, I just wanted to ask you some questions

why did you disappear  
when the problems  
caused by your confidence  
entered the room  
are we ever going to finish that conversation  
about you becoming more consistent  
or will you continue to reschedule  
this appointment  
to a time  
where you don't feel pressured

press 1 if you are satisfied with your message

press 2 to erase and record

message erased, leave your message after the beep

**\*BEEP\***

please come back to me soon

message marked as urgent

your message has been sent goodbye

**\*CLICK\***

support is validation displayed

it will fuel my purpose

on days where I feel empty

# Medium Hood

I was raised by a low-income family  
in areas where poverty  
robbed us of basic necessities  
so naturally  
I've got some hood tendencies

I learned how to create meals  
out of snacks that gourmet kitchens  
could never match  
turned hand me downs  
into fresh fits  
to pick up women  
even with my high waters  
I never had a leg up

I discovered how to mask struggle  
by finessing on the regular  
I've adapted this hood mentality  
to code switching  
which has benefitted me  
professionally and educationally  
but honestly  
was often asked to forget my voice in those spaces  
I don't recommend it  
unfortunately, I normally complied  
until one too many meetings  
where Blackness was being condemned  
caused me to unleash this explosive attitude  
that brought back recollections of playground  
fisticuffs

ghetto hallucinations of a yo' momma joke that went  
too far  
that to say  
I no longer contain these opinions  
like mysterious secrets  
I vocalize my gift  
like heavenly blessings

as a result  
I have secured 6 degrees  
a higher education job  
where I teach the value of self-awareness  
to the next generation  
without sacrifice to my being  
I guess I've grown up to be medium hood  
meaning, from 9-5  
I am striving to have a positive impact  
on my students, coworkers and institution  
so long as my identities and purpose remain un-  
attacked  
I'm patient with their ignorance and use it as  
teachable moments  
but the instant 5:01 hits  
tolerance goes out the window  
any voice that sounds like conflict  
pointed in my direction  
will see a shift in my demeanor  
best believe if you press me  
you will get these hands  
because I did not forget the survival lessons taught on  
hood pavements  
I did not forget where I came from and I never will

# In times like this

it is times like these  
where GOD's existence  
seems more figment  
than reality

but it is times like this  
where faith has to be stronger  
than the will to abandon  
hope of progression

*#RIP Kobe, Gigi, John and the other passengers*

*#RIP Chadwick Boseman*

*#RIP to the innocent victims of police brutality*

*and negligence*

*#RIP to the guilty ones too*

*#RIP 2020*

# Skydive

watching someone  
fall out of love with you  
is like going skydiving  
for the first time

you don't know what to expect  
but you know  
that one mistake and everything  
can go from exhilarating memory  
to eminent danger  
you understand that  
you may feel some discomfort  
when it's all over  
you may even fall upon feeling the impact  
from crashing down at high speeds

it may hurt  
may leave you a nice reminder  
in the form of a scar  
but eventually you will get up  
although you might need a helping hand  
you'll get there eventually and heal  
though it will take time and effort

hopefully this experience  
will prepare you  
for the next adventure you decide to take

# The day you walked past me

the moment our paths crossed  
my body forgot how to operate  
causing my behavior to react  
in what I can only describe as  
unexplainable

to help you envision the scenario  
I'll illustrate the strange phenomena  
that impacted my bodily organs

on that day  
my tongue swallowed my voice  
trapped my confidence in the middle of my throat  
saliva covered nervousness all over my language  
desire slipped and crashed directly into my larynx  
leaving me speechless

on that day  
I observed someone so fine  
that the rods and cones in my eyes  
had to have an emergency meeting  
with my optic nerves to decide  
that you  
were the most vibrant thing  
they have ever seen

calling the decision an ode to Q-tip  
so vibrant and vivacious  
nothing has ever come close  
to matching your beauty

on that day  
my knees weakened  
legs became two icicles  
stuck in awe  
hands losing control of their stability  
all I could do  
was wave uncontrollably  
with a facial expression saying  
“please approach me”  
you didn’t

on that day  
I dreamt about  
how your hair bounced like gymnastic follicles  
how your smile commanded the sidewalks  
how you strolled as if joy was in your footsteps

on that day  
I woke up in cold sweats  
with an adrenaline provoked heartbeat  
and hope  
that fate will have us meeting again

# Mamba Mentality

Back in 06' I was in high school  
basketball courts  
were like sacred sanctuaries  
I spent many hours in this haven  
putting faith into my athleticism  
praying I never got crossed up  
or experienced hang-time baptisms

every so often  
me and some family members  
would put on sermons so epic  
you'd catch the Holy Ghost  
just by seeing our dedication

we followed the path of mamba mentality  
to guide our natural born blessings  
into talent

On January 22nd, 2006  
Kobe Bean Bryant put up 81 points against a Toronto  
Raptors squad consisting of Mike James, a young  
Chris Bosh, a veteran Jalen Rose  
and a team full of potential  
making NBA history as the second-highest points  
scored total by a single player

when asked about his performance  
even the Mamba himself said he was stunned

believed something took over his body  
such as a snake like decision-making process  
mass producing precision and a will to overcome  
an 18-point deficit  
this made getting that dub (W/win) possible

his opponents thought his jump-shot  
must have been heaven sent  
as they watched him execute this feat with grace  
I too observed this miracle in all its glory  
wanted to spread word of this legend  
like David and Goliath

it was in that moment  
where I learned  
to never doubt persistence

don't let this pandemic  
force you to treat me  
worse than I deserve

you better find the energy  
to be good to me

- *reminder for myself*

when you have absolute certainty  
in your ability  
to love wholeheartedly  
fear will dissipate  
and provide you with enough energy  
to make it through the next day  
and that kind of strength  
allows you hold onto your beliefs  
with trust  
that you will be guided  
to the exact place  
you're intended to be

will the people around you describe your  
companionship as compassionate  
when the sands of your time left on this Earth runs  
out

or will they mourn a burdensome heart  
that had the opportunity to love openly

just a Black boy  
trying to enjoy joy  
before he learns  
his smile threatens  
white comfort

# Critics Say...

it has been said  
that my poems are too repetitive  
that I use the same literary terms in different poetic  
sentences  
that my pieces of perceived art  
don't convey my vast knowledge of the English  
dictionary  
basically  
my written passages  
have been categorized as elementary  
kindergarten literature  
not mature enough to be advanced in nature  
simple in stature  
telling complex stories  
that become easily digestible  
for everyone's reading desires

I'll be honest  
these criticisms used to  
slice through my ego like butter  
spreading hesitance throughout my creative process  
like it wasn't hard enough to learn  
that the pain I created by opening up traumatic  
wounds  
was necessary for me  
to bleed this vulnerability on journal pages  
like trying to write the right words to describe  
something deeply distressing  
that you haven't even confronted yet

isn't difficult as fuck  
sorry for my vulgar choice of words

since it has been expressed  
that there is a need to see my extensive vocabulary  
in action  
to somehow validate my “poet” status

I'll undertake this vacuous escapade  
to utilize a variety of eloquent language  
to elucidate my moral episodes, debatable  
assumptions on life, and astute observations,  
to an audience of eager critics  
who could never connect to it

I bet they'll have something to say to this

# Realizing

to those who need to hear it  
it doesn't matter how much love  
you have for someone

if you can't translate it into a language  
they understand  
or into an image they can recognize

uncertainty will validate their insecurities in an  
unstable relationship  
and you'll never get your point across  
no matter  
how much you try to speak it into existence

the problem with loving tirelessly  
is that we keep trying to communicate affection  
in the same dialect as misunderstanding

the depth of your love  
will showcase your commitment to patience

the adaptability of your expectations  
will reveal your efforts towards establishing  
understanding

the intertwining of these concepts  
will strengthen your connection  
and keep miscommunication  
from entering your relationships

# Invalid Research

after decades of research  
we have finally discovered  
the top three things  
Black men are afraid of

through three pivotal studies  
we have ultimately decided  
that the following  
are the most influential components  
in inciting fear in this population

**Fatherhood. Emotions. Death.**

## 1. Fatherhood

it has been found  
that Black men  
have a higher likelihood of spending more time in  
prison  
than time spent on raising their kin  
we looked at the statistics  
and came to the conclusion  
that they use imprisonment  
as a form of parental avoidance

our data suggests  
that 1 in every 3rd potential Black father  
will use this technique to escape paternal duties

some apparent limitations  
to this finding is  
we didn't take oppression into consideration  
we've also been manipulating the variables  
to fit our narrative

## 2. Emotions

we surveyed over a thousand Black men  
from the city of Wakanda  
on the aspect of their thoughts  
towards expressing their emotions

shortly succeeding the analysis of their answers  
we were able to come to this important implication:  
**Black men are terrified of their feelings**

below are some participant responses  
to our question **“why are Black men so angry?”**

- “maybe because society gives us so many reasons to”  
“probably has something to do with racism”
- “maybe my broken idea of masculinity contributes to  
this”
- “often times that’s the only thing that is expected of  
us”
- “sometimes we are taught to punch our way into  
opportunities and out of problems”
- “at times anger is lighter to carry than the burdens  
that come from being vulnerable”
- “mostly due to the way society treats us”
- “it has been a tool of survival for generations”

### 3. Death

since we didn't want to be insensitive  
due to this topic  
we asked one Black man we knew  
if they'd participate in this case study  
he agreed  
but asked to remain anonymous  
so for the sake of protecting his identity  
we called him  
"The Black Spokesperson"  
he explained to us  
that Black men are afraid of death  
well maybe not death itself  
because we all know  
one day our time will come  
but the realization that  
there are just so many things  
that have been  
designed, established and socialized  
to kill Black progression  
or normalize contentment with  
Black bodies moving on to a better place  
way before it gets handed its eviction notice  
but that is just one Black man's perspective  
ask another and the results may vary

# Thoughts on Neighborhood Watch

some white people think  
they are equivalent to the law  
because they know two of them  
that aid them in escaping repercussions  
to their racially motivated actions

the 1st and 2nd amendment  
these protect them from feeling guilty  
for what they believed was defending their livelihood  
while their skin shields them from consequences  
of taking, harming and harassing Black life

dear white people,

we will not give you some pretentious title like ally  
because you haven't been overtly oppressive  
in our presence  
what you do when we're not around is also taken into  
consideration  
what you say about us when we've angered you  
matters  
you do not deserve  
a ceremony thrown in your honor  
because you stood up for marginalized populations  
you shouldn't be compensated for calling out your  
family members  
although your efforts are appreciated  
they shouldn't only come  
because you're expecting recognition

sincerely,

oppressed people

p.s. this applies to everyone with privilege

# Being a Felon

born in a neighborhood  
that reinforced survival  
over  
growth  
because opportunities  
avoided our city  
like government assistance

grew up believing  
that committing crimes  
were only regarded as such  
when attached to jail sentences  
and everything else in between  
were just the necessary strategies of grinding

thought that struggle  
was just as ordinary  
as frequently missed meals

engaged in some mistakes  
in my late adolescence  
and was sent to prison  
to answer for my teenage problems

following my release  
a desire to place good  
back into the world  
influenced my purpose  
but was disturbed to learn  
that my delinquent status

stifled progression in bettering  
my community  
discovered that my rights  
were more exercised  
on prison yards than sidewalks  
realized I had more of a say  
behind bars than free of them  
no wonder why recidivism rates  
are so high  
we can't even get stable jobs  
without disenfranchisement

being a felon  
is a life sentence  
regardless of  
how free from penitentiary cells  
we are

# KICKED OUT/Taking a sick day

and the boss asks  
“does anyone have anything to say regarding the  
unfortunate news that is devastating our nation?”

without hesitance I make it my duty  
as the only Black professional in this zoom meeting  
to provide a sentimental statement  
on how some Black folk may be feeling

although I am not the sole voice  
for the Black and magnificent  
I believe some perspective is required in this moment

and the remarks went as followed  
“we are tired and exhausted  
from hearing and seeing Black life  
not receive any justice  
ignorance is becoming more and more  
detrimental to our livelihoods”

and the boss replies  
“the question was in reference to the police officers  
who were shot as a result of the ongoing protests”

as if the Black woman's life  
who sparked the reason for them  
wasn't literally snatched from its existence

my voice becoming a barrage of sarcastic assertions  
“well what were the officers wearing?”  
“were they looking suspicious?”  
“did the residents think they didn't belong in that  
neighborhood?”  
“they must've looked guilty of something?”  
“maybe they were about to commit a crime?”  
“probably had a track record of breaking the law”

do you see it?

how ridiculous these statements are when trying to  
justify the murder of someone innocent

do you see it?

how quick we are to condemn citizen behavior  
but timid about criticizing the conduct of officers

do you see it?

or am I the only one who notices the racism  
the dehumanization of our women  
the blatant disrespect of Black bodies  
are you that misinformed  
or are you choosing to ignore it  
like the rest of the world

# Normalize

we have to normalize  
criticizing our heroes  
just as much as we praise them

come to the understanding  
that even the people who  
have improved our lives for the better  
can make mistakes  
that they too  
have unpacking to do  
that they too  
have to unlearn the  
socialized beliefs of their childhood  
or adulthood

we have to remember  
that pedestals  
are built  
by placing perfection  
onto an elevated perception of someone  
who is human  
and full of flaws

# Soulmate

her essence  
aligned perfectly  
and kindly embraced  
the homely soul  
that inhabited my body  
a connection  
of mutual understanding  
moments of euphoria  
transformed into authentic compassion  
unconditional happiness  
buried in the silence of our love

tradition is no excuse  
to uphold racist ideologies  
you can't justify the existence  
of oppression  
by ignoring it like your ancestors  
you will only inherit societal problems  
if you keep trying to  
maintain the behavior of their mistakes

- *Revoking History*

# Art

art is all about perception  
and I can see that beauty exists  
within your flaws  
that love crafted your smile  
that your character was sculpted  
by the finest of parenting methods  
which molded you into a masterpiece

I hope one day  
you'll allow me  
to show you  
how I appreciate  
art and its creative foundation

# Dominate

there are an absurd amount of individuals  
who are waiting for the second  
you give up your desire to make decisions for yourself

they are waiting for the opportunity  
to regulate your actions  
by attempting to make you feel helpless  
and dependent on their commands

they want you to believe that  
they know what's best for you  
and that you shouldn't question their intentions

sometimes people will try to pretend to be supportive  
just so they can be dominant

it's okay to be in these streets  
just don't belong to them  
don't belong to anything  
or anyone  
that isn't  
yourself

# Fetish

I've developed this obsession  
with getting lost in your laughter

I've become so fixated  
on the awkward pitch changes  
in your cackles  
that I have memorized the rhythm  
of your giggles

if I were asked to describe this unique noise  
I could probably mimic it with exactness

these spontaneous sounds of lively amusement  
have been the source of my happiness

and it remains  
one of the biggest reminders  
that I don't always have to take  
everything in life  
so serious

# Reclaiming

I remember the night I lost you  
emptiness occupied my body  
and nothing felt right ever since  
I remember how my courage hid  
like it was playing childhood games again  
hoping never to be found  
scared that people would've realize  
how unsure it really was about  
everything  
I remember  
trying on other people's opinions  
like costumes  
because I felt more comfortable  
with their identities  
than figuring out my own  
I remember the day you chose to resurface  
it was like seeing a ghost resurrected

you  
all grown and confident  
strong and aware  
nothing could stop you from being yourself

I remember the day you came back into my life  
it was like something inside of me being reclaimed  
it was the day I started to feel whole again

- *Reminiscing with my Voice*

# #UBFamily

when you think we don't give a FUCK  
about the things you're going through  
or the HELL you've endured to get here  
you better re-evaluate that SHIT

we care so much about your crazy ASS  
that we are willing to surrender our free time  
to ensure you have everything you need  
to be okay

remember  
real family can laugh at your mistakes  
and still be by your side to help you  
get through the ache

- #UBFamily

- #UBFilter

# Don't try me

before approaching me  
with an audacious attitude  
consult with whomever  
you whisper your prayers to  
please rely on the teachings of  
whoever you believe is listening  
to the way your faith communicates  
contact them in any way you need to

because I will not respond to your boldness  
or disrespect with questions  
I have accepted physical force  
as a tool for these occasions  
to be straightforward  
I will throw hands  
box  
catch fades  
engage in quarrels  
exchange right hooks for uppercuts  
scrap til' the break of dawn and brawl  
until my point is made

I will resort to violence  
to defend my people and heritage  
I have no problem fighting for a purpose

so please  
try your holy provider  
before you attempt to try me

as Tobe Nwigwe once said:

“To the governing forces in Louisville.....y’all some  
hoes.”

and it’s still

**ARREST THE KILLERS OF BREONNA  
TAYLOR**

**SHE DESERVED BETTER  
PLEASE REST IN HEAVEN**

Message to the white  
woman who wanted to  
argue about  
#blacklivesmatter in  
Costco

I will no longer entertain debate  
about the importance of my existence

I will no longer provide specific examples  
of how people who look like me  
have been targeted because of their skin

I will not justify your ignorance with the  
acknowledgment of your perspective

if you want to have dialogue  
about the state of our nation  
educate yourself first  
because I will not have a conversation  
about my experiences  
knowing damn well  
you'll never believe them

To the non-Black  
people who say the N-  
word/I want to say the  
N-word

out of all the words  
in the English language  
why does this one  
arouse a fascination  
so strong  
it becomes an obsession

you've heard  
thousands of derogatory phrases  
statements  
and slang references  
millions of times  
in your lifetime  
yet for some reason  
this one has made its way  
into your everyday vocabulary

I know it's sitting steadily on the tip of your tongue  
eagerly waiting  
for the day it's granted permission  
to jump out of your mouth  
without consequences

I know you are desperately trying  
to connect to a culture that's not yours  
for popularity  
constantly practicing  
your vernacular in isolation  
to sound "cooler"  
to impress ignorant fetishizers  
who perpetuate  
anti-blackness in all their behavior

affirming the understanding  
that everyone wants to be Black  
until it's time to be Black  
wanting all the accolades  
but none of the pain

you get so envious of the language  
we've created for ourselves  
that you try to integrate it in yours

you put so much effort towards  
trying to be Black  
that your focus  
ends up forcing you  
to forget where you came from

some people will be more committed  
to misunderstanding your beliefs  
than they are  
to hearing your point of view

choosing not to engage  
in this conversation  
can protect you from  
putting in an unnecessary amount of mental labor  
into an interaction with someone  
who never had intentions on seeing things  
from your standpoint

# Disconnect

disconnecting from people  
who believe that you need  
to put on a facade  
in order to for them to be  
content with your relationship  
is self-care

don't let anyone persuade you  
into feeling guilty  
for severing a relationship  
that was bad for your health

# Change (Create Happiness And Navigate Goodness Everyday)

this one time  
I was asked  
if I could change anything in the world  
what would it be and why

would I  
turn the streets into gold  
paving fortune onto city sidewalks  
eliminating the disease of poverty  
ridding the world of brokenness

would I  
outlaw rudeness  
making it illegal to lack manners  
pettiness becoming irrelevant in our behavior patterns  
kindness socializing us to believe  
it is just as important as breathing

if I could alter anything in the world  
it would be something simple  
I would change the way Black women are treated

I would pump an excessive amount of appreciation  
for these heavenly women into humanly bodies  
fill their lungs with so much respect for these Black  
angels

that you can smell the gratitude  
emanating off of undeserving breaths  
I'd make complimenting these queens  
a common language

if I had the ability to establish  
anything in this world  
Black women  
would be receiving  
everything and anything  
made of love

# Courage

when I was a child  
I'd watch courage the cowardly dog  
to provide me with laughter  
before exhaustion entered the privacy  
of my late night T.V. sessions

in every episode  
this timid pink canine  
with paranoia problems  
would find himself  
facing all types of monsters  
like ghoulish ghosts, serial killer barbers  
alien ducks from outer space  
and not to mention  
vicious weremoles

which was this freaky combination  
of a werewolf and ground mole

each causing panic to the young pup  
but despite the alarming anxiety  
coursing through his bloodstream  
he somehow rallied up the nerve  
to defeat these creatures  
without allowing any harm to his family

now that's loyalty  
being able to overcome  
fears, threats or delusions  
to ensure the protection  
of those who are important to you

be wary of those  
who promise  
to give you the world  
yet do nothing  
but try to dictate  
your place in it

# To Our Future President

how you gon'  
actively oppose equality  
throughout your whole  
political career  
and feel like you can sway  
Black folk to think that you will incorporate  
equitable practices in your future decision making

how you gon'  
support the criminalization  
of all Black behavior  
and think we should give you the benefit of the doubt

y'all must be out y'all's  
got damn mind  
to assume that Black people  
are just going to be complacent  
with endorsing  
mediocre politicians  
promising justice  
when perpetuating the exact opposite

we've always seen y'all  
for exactly who you've always been

hypocrites

# 2020 Presidential Debates

I didn't watch the 2020 presidential debates  
but I'm sure it sounded like America  
old white men screaming privilege  
over one another  
trying to convince the audience of onlookers  
that they will make decisions  
in the best interest of the people

I bet both made some persuasive arguments  
putting on the front  
that they too are disgusted with racism  
with the history of colonization in our classrooms  
churches  
communities  
language

they probably promised to give more  
freedoms than they intend to  
probably committed pandering to the needs of the  
unheard to memory  
just for a checkmark on a ballot  
probably blamed each other for the state of the nation  
probably didn't actually address it

but I didn't watch the presidential debates  
and if you did how accurate is this

soothing break of the day  
a bright wholesome sun cries  
jealous of the stars

hoping that one day  
people would think  
that it was just as capable  
of making wishes come true

# Distance

you would think  
that after  
all this time we've spent separated  
I'd find the right defense  
to guard myself against your manipulative ways  
but I haven't

I'm deathly afraid  
that if I ever came  
face to face  
with your influence again  
I'll be immersed  
by your hold  
and allow you to convince me  
to believe  
that every word  
coming out of your mouth  
contains truth

- *Letter to my insecurities*

# Reasons

If you ask me  
why I love you  
I'd say  
because the heart  
pumps blood throughout the body  
because lungs  
provide oxygen at just the right moments  
because clouds exist  
because mountains are tall  
because we still don't know if water is wet  
and you'll probably be confused  
so I'll explain it to you like this  
some things that occur naturally in this world  
don't have an explanation for occurring  
they simply exist  
but if that response  
isn't adequate enough  
to meet the requirements of your question  
I'd say  
because your smile carries encouragement  
because your attitude disguises care so well  
because sincerity builds comfort in your concerns  
because at the end of the day  
I know  
whether I'm at my best  
or at my worst  
the love you have for me  
will still be present

# Occupied

sometimes being busy  
isn't about  
being occupied  
with tasks

when your thoughts  
become overwhelmingly needy  
you have to give them the attention  
they require to sort out your feelings  
or they will consume more time  
than you ever thought they could

learn how to praise people  
without expecting reciprocation

you don't need to have ulterior motives  
to candidly appreciate an aspect of someone's  
character

an admiration of who they are as an individual  
doesn't have to come with intentions

you are allowed to adore  
the beauty of a person's mentality  
and not have any desires  
toward pursuing them

it's okay to give recognition  
to people you aren't interested in

at the end of the day  
everyone wants to feel noticed

# Dismantle

vulnerability  
can dismantle  
fortified structures  
of emotional suppression

you just have to be  
patient enough  
to find your purpose in the ruins

forgiveness  
can deconstruct grudges  
into pieces of healing

every part necessary  
for seeing  
exactly where the pain  
you held  
came from

# Lessons from the Moon

it's okay if it takes time  
for you to get comfortable  
showing your whole self to people

we don't always have to  
expose our vulnerabilities  
just because the people who said they care about us  
want to see them

it's okay to hold back sometimes  
if being so open is exhausting you  
you have to be protective of yourself  
and still learn how to illuminate

understand  
that even the moon experiences nights  
where it only has the energy  
to be half-full

but no matter how it feels  
it still finds the time  
to let the world know  
it's up there in the sky  
shining bright enough  
for us to notice it  
amongst the stars

# To Black people trying to figure life out

please process whatever you're going through  
before you move on from it

# Things About Her

I know a girl so strong  
she can deadlift the burden of unwanted attention  
throws that shit over her shoulders  
like nothing  
and carries herself with purpose

this girl  
wears her heart on her sleeve  
puts her passion on display  
like it's the main exhibit in her love museum  
often forgetting  
that men  
have lost the art of appreciating  
and that kind of neglect  
leads to devaluing  
deteriorating  
a once secure sense of self-esteem  
  
now she covers the traumatic scars  
of her childhood experiences  
with insecurities  
losing her faith in commitment  
because the idea of love she once held on a pedestal  
is unstable  
broken  
shattered  
but she is resilient

she is the epitome of apotheosis  
a reflection of fantasies reincarnated

her beauty is unrivaled  
nonetheless  
doubt comes out of her essence  
like a fragrance  
and I just want her to admire the smell  
of all her qualities just as I do  
I could bottle that shit up and call it grateful  
a scent of her existence

# How Black Are You

I'm so Black that  
I say nigga (N-word for you non-blacks) after almost  
every statement  
whether out loud or in my head  
it's expressed

I'm so Black that  
I speak in Ebonics  
taking slang shortcuts  
to communicate my thoughts

I'm so Black that  
I inherently know the dance routine to the electric  
slide  
Cupid's shuffle  
and tootsie roll  
without two stepping a foot  
into a dance rehearsal

I'm so Black that  
I have smelled chitlins (chitterlings)  
fried chicken  
greens  
and cornbread  
with cinnamon rolls on the side  
during every major Black celebration  
like holidays  
or days off from work

I'm so Black that  
I walk with so much swagger  
calm  
cool  
and collective  
can sponsor me for a sneaker deal

I'm so Black that  
occasionally  
I operate on CP time (colored people time)  
because I was taught  
that sometimes you gotta move forward  
before even deciding where you're going  
and figuring out the right path  
may take longer than expected  
it doesn't help that there are so many things  
attempting to hold you back  
or get in your way

a history of racism and oppression  
is an extremely difficult barrier to break  
and can be a bit discouraging to navigate through  
but that doesn't mean  
my work ethic is unreliable  
actually, it's unrivaled

I've worked 10 times as hard  
to be in the position  
to receive the same exposure to opportunities  
that some of my non-Black counterparts  
were handed

I'm so Black that when I walk into a room  
full of education professionals  
they assume  
I'm a diversity hire  
that all I can add to institutional conversations  
is color and opinions on race  
that my grammar is better than expected  
as if  
I didn't learn English in the same public-school  
system as they did

I'm so Black  
that my name sparks questions  
of its origin  
because people can't accept the things that  
Black creativity has made

I'm so Black that  
my identity refuses to be contained  
by any American standards  
that to say  
it does not bow down to whiteness  
it aggressively rebels  
forces its recognition into every space  
without approval

I'M so Black  
I'M SO Black  
I'M SO BLACK

that with every action I take  
I know the world is watching

# America the Hypocritical

you encourage the people  
to speak their minds  
in the name of protecting their rights

you tell them to let their voices be heard  
but you are the one silencing them

you claim circumstantial immunity  
when asked  
why you don't follow your own constitution

breaking the laws you've created  
to enforce ones that don't exist yet  
stating your acting within the best interest  
of your citizens  
protecting your status  
as the number one country  
to those who benefit

while everyone else  
is busy asking for directions  
to the place where freedom is  
and you have the nerve to say  
right here  
in the home of the brave  
without telling them  
they are going to need  
more than courage  
to survive here

love is an unrelenting  
unstoppable  
unbreakable  
force of compassion  
that is underestimated  
by those who have never had  
the opportunity to witness its strength

# Connections

I never thought connection  
would feel like this  
a link of emotion  
tied to another person  
for the sake of togetherness

I never thought attachment  
would have me feeling so desperate  
each moment  
I'm away from my personal associations  
creates a bond  
based in a fear of abandonment

I've never been so vulnerable  
and so anxious  
but riddled with so much excitement  
I have a devotion  
to these interactions

I'm eager to see where they take me

tell me  
how a man  
should love you  
and I'll interpret  
those words into understanding

I'll transform them into  
consistent action

whether you roll with the punches  
or duck the consequences of your mistakes  
learn how to shake off the negativity  
and enjoy life

- *Only if things were that simple*

# Overcoming Myself

how can I put aside these anxieties  
how can I silence the doubts  
that have been screaming at my thoughts

they've been bickering  
back and forth  
never coming to an understanding  
at the rate that they are going  
I don't think they ever will

my self-esteem  
is extremely concerned  
with the pressures of always having to be  
overly alert of the consequences  
my silence generates

lately  
they have been comparing themselves to others  
unsatisfied with their appearance  
demanding recognition in spaces  
that make my shyness uncomfortable  
it's not ready for that kind of attention

I try to give constructive feedback  
but my ego takes it personal  
I ask them not to be defensive  
and that was like requesting conflict

despite my attempts at de-escalating the situation  
matters only seem to get worse

add that to  
the financial burdens  
relationship issues  
and fluctuations in my mood  
equals one colossal problem  
of getting in my own way

even with all of this chaos  
I still manage to dream  
of a future with independence

after I learn  
how stand up to my inner voices  
I'll be able to hear the gracious sounds  
of affirmation

when I gain the strength  
to lug around this baggage  
without shame  
I'll be able to come to terms  
with the regrets that follow me

I know I have to realize  
that avoiding the difficulties life presents  
won't excuse me from making mistakes

once I stop  
tripping over my own mental blocks  
I'll be able to run  
toward everything my heart  
knows it deserves

you were my backbone  
I relied on you  
every time  
the world got confusing  
or difficult  
I hoped  
you'd always be my scapegoat  
someone to place blame  
when I was at fault  
for exploring the curiosity  
of my childish ways  
I knew  
eventually  
I'd outgrow you  
I just wish  
it wasn't so soon

- *To Innocence, my best friend*

# I got questions

when a Black man is murdered by a cop  
do police stations  
view them as indications that a holiday is being  
recognized  
festivities to justify  
why no work is being done  
to bring justice to the situation

when a Black woman is assassinated in her own home  
why do criminal investigations label them  
as unfortunate  
as accidents  
as results of misinformation  
calling them everything except for  
what they are  
HITS  
premeditated targeting with the intention to kill

when a Black person does anything other than  
breathing  
why is it seen as a threat

what about us living makes you feel so unsafe

To the person who  
asked me to stop  
talking about racism so  
much in my poems

how are you more upset  
at conversations about racism  
than actual acts of racism

that's like being angrier  
at the person  
who thought about beating yo' ass  
than the person who actually did it

that's like being mad  
at the ocean  
for the trash floating within its waters  
as if they are responsible

in other words  
your priorities are a little  
fucked up

and if that doesn't encourage you  
to rethink where you place your attention  
I suggest you look into other artistic outlets  
because in MY poems  
I will not be silent

I used to try to remedy the pain  
from disloyal friendships  
with tears  
because crying is cathartic and at times  
therapeutic

then I had a breakthrough  
and realized laughter suits these situations better  
because life has a funny way of showing you  
that some people who you chose to invite to the  
celebration of all your successes

will be the same people who hoped  
that you didn't actually attain them

# In the good ole days

I watched you smile when I came into the room  
I watched you laugh at my awkwardness  
I watched you engulf happiness  
until you were bursting with delight

the side effects from being together

I saw gentleness in your tears  
I saw humanity in your anger  
there were even moments  
where I saw a stable future with you  
in our arguments

back in those times  
there was nothing that could convince me  
that you would ever find contentment  
with someone else

but I was wrong

because now  
I watch you smile to a presence that isn't mine  
I see you enjoying someone else's love  
and it dawns on me  
we aren't in the good ole days anymore

# Allegory of A Woman

broadcasted over the clouds of awe and admiration is  
an undeniable truth  
human perfection can be observed  
through wandering eyes  
conversation surrounding the topic  
have been the cause of debate  
over thousands of decades  
as many believe this idea is preposterous  
but it's still about perception  
it's about who is observing the object  
in question  
it's about who is perceiving the qualities  
and labeling them as flawless  
it's about someone transforming their sight into  
focused, methodical, open-minded spectacles  
capable of observing godly qualities in a human form  
if people can't fathom the concept mentally  
it probably will fail to be shown  
in their vision

you're carrying all these concerns  
and it's making you feel  
like waking up the next morning  
is going to be a hassle  
you may even hope that your brain  
hits the snooze button on your heartbeat

you see the route that you have chosen  
is taking longer than desired  
to get to your destination

you believe  
your courage and purpose  
have went on separate paths  
getting lost from each other  
and now you don't know where to go

just keep  
easing down the road  
and you will notice  
that happiness isn't found at a location  
when you insert it  
in your footsteps

# Catcallin'

you think your street harassment  
is appealing

that your provocative gestures of unwanted flirtation  
are going to win female attention without discomfort

you seriously expect  
her to fall at your feet  
because you compared her physique  
to some playboy bunny

compared her skin to dessert

you wolves are always trying to make a meal out of  
feminine bodies  
howling at every opportunity  
that passes you by

newsflash  
women hate catcalling  
and you getting upset at her rejection  
is male entitlement feeling obligated  
to call for the silence of female independence

- *your privilege is showing, and it's disgusting*

## Slang Dictionary: Shole

**Shole (adj)** \ 'shōl \: a degree of certainty marked by an amount of satisfaction in the action; often followed by a request to do something about it

also referred to as: shall

synonyms: sure, sho'

ex: I shole did eat the last piece of pizza, and what?

# Neutrality

neutrality is a dangerous reaction  
to decisions about  
responding to injustices  
especially when they become questions  
and human rights  
shouldn't have to be a political platform  
in order for people to recognize them

# Still Missing You

at night  
when I'm supposed  
to be counting sheep  
I'm awake  
counting down the days  
until I get to see you again

# Love with an Open Bar

I walked carelessly  
into a bar  
when a swift aroma of arousal  
overtook my body  
drawing me to the face of a man  
whose presence  
brought my sexuality to its knees

I saw the dim light in the room  
bounce off his glasses  
as he gazed in my direction  
a look that could make pleasure tremble in excitement

my desires whispered statements of persuasion  
in my ear  
hoping to coerce my confidence to be fearless  
and approach this magnificent example of walking  
temptation  
but I couldn't

because nervousness clung onto my self-  
consciousness  
promising to never leave its side  
even brought anxiety along for extra support

so I just sat there  
and observed in wonder  
daydreaming of potential love  
wishing we would leave this place together

you call yourself broken because you haven't healed  
from things that hurt you

I call you resilient because you have learned to leave  
the things that have made a habit out of being  
content with asking for forgiveness instead of  
preventing themselves from causing you pain

everything in life can be seen from multiple  
perspectives

# Meals

they say  
breakfast is the most important meal of the day  
in fact  
eating a 9:00 am bowl of self-esteem has long term  
health benefits  
it can reduce obesity  
high blood pressure  
diabetes  
and can even cure the worst cases of negative  
thinking

for my meals  
I like an ounce of confidence  
sprinkled with a little bit of happiness  
I'm also a sucker for a good steak sandwich

I've never been to coo coo for coco puffs  
the round chocolate balls never seemed to provide me  
much sustenance  
or maybe  
the small orbs of corn covered in cocoa  
is too reminiscent of my childhood  
empty promises of satisfaction being spoon fed into  
my innocence

needless to say  
I don't skip fueling my body with the necessary  
energy to avoid feeling unhealthy

# Flowers

everyone loves flowers when they first start to bloom  
everything about them seems exceptionally  
remarkable  
until you observe that one flower  
that tries to lure you in  
just to catch you in its trap

sometimes  
people will sacrifice being around others  
to make sure their flower  
has the necessary attention it requires  
others suck at keeping them alive  
we need to be mindful  
that some people want to have them  
just to pluck the pedestals  
without valuing the roots that caused its growth

many get so attached to these plants  
that they continue to keep them nearby even when  
they are dead  
continue watering them as if they are going to grow  
hoping that the effort they put in will bring them back  
to life  
knowing damn well they need to stop  
but have committed taking care of them to routine

and I understand this thought process thoroughly  
I used to believe that I could not live without a flower  
to call my own  
that breathing would be difficult

if I never found the right flower to provide me with  
oxygen  
or purpose  
I've watched so many flowers go from daylight  
radiant  
to nighttime withered  
due to under-appreciation

there are lessons within the pollen (consequences)

flowers are delicate  
they need to be treated with lots of love  
and affection  
they need to be talked about positively  
or given with intentionality

flowers will give you just as much happiness  
as you put into them

\* for the duration of this poem  
I replaced the word relationship  
with flower (or reference to plants)

\*read it again replacing flower with relationship

A place that condones racism  
and fails to condemn racists  
will always see violence  
as an acceptable option  
to restrain outside opinions  
that seem like disobedience

# Haiku About Being Black in America

the world mistreats you  
blames you for breathing too hard  
stares while you suffer

# Haiku About Being Black in America Part. 2

your joy is envied  
your laughter causes healing  
but seen as a threat

revenge  
rarely heals what hurts  
without causing new wounds

in life  
you will enter so many spaces  
where the energy introduced in the room  
will be unfamiliar and unpredictable  
you won't have many options  
in responding to the unusual aura  
but in every environment  
remember to  
protect your spirit

# Memory Lane

I've had  
too many trips down memory lane  
where my experiences  
were supposed to be  
vacations for my mind to wander  
instead  
they turned into nightmares  
where I was held captive  
by my traumas  
with no place to run  
no hero to rescue me  
just my thoughts and I  
tied together  
looking for an escape  
trying not to panic  
hoping we'll be able  
to find a way back home

one day  
I hope  
my poems  
will stop  
being about you

# Family Reunion

there may be a day  
where we get see each other again  
and if that's the case  
I'd like to say  
3 things before you return to  
your heavenly retreat with Jesus

1. I miss the way you said my name  
it always sounded like you skipped  
the vowels and syllables but I knew it was just your  
way of getting my attention

2. I miss the faces you'd make  
after hearing me complain  
about the smell of cigarettes in the house  
you'd smirk and shrug at your hearts content

3. I miss being able to see you from the safety of my  
bedroom  
your presence lingers in every room I enter

and when you get back to God's Temple  
tell him  
that I'm looking forward to the day  
where you get to introduce me

# To Hood Niggas

my niggas!  
I see you holdin' down the block  
trying to make a name for yourself in these streets  
remember  
at times it can get dangerous  
so, watch yourself out there  
you know these villains of criminal justice  
are looking to turn Black boys  
into evil plots of land  
covered in tombstones  
they've made  
too many Black women damsels in disappearance  
we've all heard of hood heroes  
slain in broad daylight  
by police henchmen  
leaving heroines alone to fight back  
the tears of missing loved ones  
be aware  
these scoundrels are trying to convince the world  
that they are the victims  
understand  
that police bullets  
don't care  
whether your courageous or fearful  
they are simply out to kill you

to every Black person searching for validation of their  
uniqueness in the irregularity of uncharted comforts

hopefully you grasp the understanding that your  
Blackness is not a monolith

we hold a multitude of behavior, beliefs and  
characteristics

many that deviate from the standard of Black  
stereotypes

we are a microcosm of Black brilliance  
living in a society  
that forces us to choose between racist archetypes  
in order to ease white anxiety over Black everything

remember

we each make up the particles  
of Black magic

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# About the Author



Jakeel R. Harris is an educator, speaker, organizer, and spoken word poet that tackles topics of social justice, cultural awareness, leadership, and self-awareness. His activism includes a strong focus on promoting and encouraging pro-Blackness,

engaging in community restoration, and providing equitable resources to disadvantaged communities. He holds a Master of Science degree in Counseling with an emphasis on Student Development in Higher Education from California State University, Long Beach, as well as a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Humboldt State University.

Jakeel performs and writes spoken word poetry under the pseudonym SPEAKS, covering topics of race and identity, while using his life experiences as a platform to discuss important issues that plague our society.

SPEAKS is an acronym for Spreads Positivity Encourage Awareness Know Something, which is not only his stage name but also the non-profit organization and movement he has founded.

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