



EMPOWERED VOICES ✊ COLLECTIVE

*The platform for students of color
to get their voices heard*



Project by Destiny Rivera

Thank you

I would like to extend a big thank you to everyone who submitted to the Empowered Voices Collective (EVC)! EVC started as a dream project that I had for the school. I was interested in creating a platform that amplified the voices of students and alumni of color. I wanted to create a space for people to talk about their emotions or express their creativity.

I am glad I was able to get a mixture of submissions from you all. There was so much talent showcased throughout, and I am glad I get to share the final product with you all. This work was made possible through your passion and dedication!

Enjoy!

Destiny

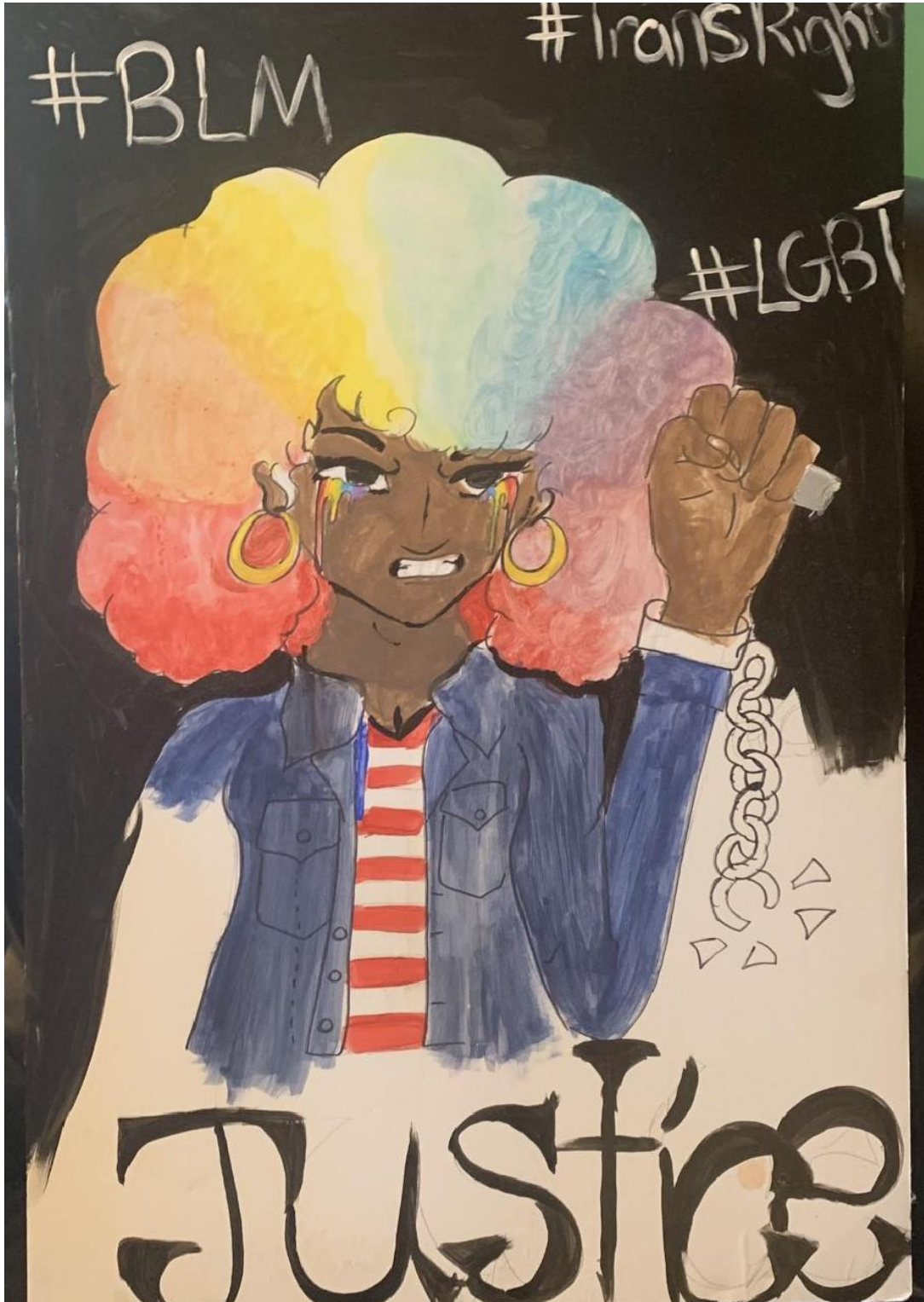
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All That Was Seen Was The Red
By: Khyahjah Alexander



Never Stop fighting
By: Khyahjah Alexander



April 27

By: Erica Barreto

Time is feeling,
and I fear feeling weak.
I build up my defense,
I drop bombs on those who see beyond
my toughened exterior.
I harden my heart and call myself
a strong woman, a warrior.
But then the Trees — they sway in the breeze,
they shake their heads with disbelief.
In the sound of their thrashing leaves, I hear:
*”Child, why do you inch closer to death?
To harden oneself
is to become its companion”*

Who Am I

By: Roberto Castillo

I'm just a kid trying to become an adult.

I'm just someone giving the middle finger to the system,

knowing that one day I'll be part of it.

I'm just an immigrant surviving in America trying to become another

American but avoiding becoming an American Idiot.

Who Am I

I'm just someone trying to figure out life.

Chapter 1: The White Witch

By: Brianna Christie

On top of a hill lies the plantation
Once populated by the enslaved.
Sugar cane and plantains are in
Close proximity to the three palm trees.
The White Witch turned on a switch
That reigned terror on the islanders.
No one was a bystander, not even
Her husbands. She killed all three,
Buried them by the sea, and thought
She'd live life happily. The witch
Found love, but he found hate. He
Murdered her which gave the witch
Her fate. Doomed to the grave, her
Ghost now stays on top of the hill in Montego Bay

Chapter 2: Takoo
By: Brianna Christie

Obeah: (noun) a system of spiritual healing and justice-making practices developed among enslaved

West Africans in the West Indies.

Takoo practiced Obeah. He had learned it from

His family after they found themselves on the

Island of Jamaica after colonizers took them

From their homeland. He had met the White

Witch after being enslaved on her plantation.

She claimed she loved him, but

Takoo knew this wasn't true since the witch was

Evil. After killing his grand-niece, Takoo sought Revenge on the witch.

He hated her.

They all did. This would be his parting gift to her.

She had to die at his hands.

I feel

By: Victoria Fisher

I feel and I fear
None of you aware
They destroy my mental, yea
I shed my tears
They live on, don't care

Heart on my sleeve
Probably
look like
Swiss cheese
So I
Gotta get this bread
(And a little head)

Yea, I fit in the box
But only an arm or a leg
Can't belong to one group
More than what she is

This life
ain't meant for me
This world
made to destroy me
(I'm surprised I'm still here)
I feel and I fear Some aware
Live on
Don't care.

Woman and Man
By: Victoria Fisher

To exist as a female, as a woman.
What am I condemned to,
my body? showing...
I am more than a pretty face
More than a good form, as Nicki would say.
My silhouette and frame
has nothing to do with my brain.

Men are seen as human beings,
they have freedom to do as they please,
they aren't conditioned to be subordinate,
Seems being a woman is unfortunate
Men have access to anything they desire,
and (as it being a man's world) they have power

By: Taylor Hope



By: Taylor Hope



Behindsight
By: Jaela Horton

With the ceaseless downward spiral of the last year — starting with the announcement of a literal pandemic, which forced his university to abandon ship and its students with it, followed with the realization that he had to pack all his things by himself, would have to drive the rented U-Haul trailer alone for three hours through Arkansas — the college student should have known he wouldn't be able to return to the single bedroom his parents had, after his sudden call, spruced up with love, unscathed.

The college student, cautious of the time that he'd pay for the trailer — though it had been watered down by the student discount the person working (who would much rather be on Instagram at that moment) insisted wasn't available to him because he didn't look like 'a college student' — should have known that the excellent time he was making (up to this point he'd gone to only one rest stop that loitered right beyond the city) wasn't good luck, but the conniving hand of fate arranging for him to be in the right place (a silenced highway) at the right time (in the dark of night).

After the black and white car aimed for the trailer, the way a bull would charge at a wavering cape and continue at the sight of blood, the college student should have known that the next two hours belonged to the man in the dented hat.

The college student should have known that his right to deny search would, actually, amount to the right to say that he denied a search preceding the right to get handcuffed, then the right to be placed in the back of the car and, finally, the right to cry out to his family, over 100 miles away.

Anyone should have known what happened next: The man with a dented hat called others with dented hats to come on the scene, one of them contained a dog which, of course, was curious of what was inside so he told the men with opposable thumbs to grab the key, to unlock the trunk, out of the ignition and then told the people to take out each of the college student's boxes — from picture books to picture frames — draw and quarter them, and — without the tape needed to re-assemble — left them exposed and laying around.

Two hours later, after the dogs and the hats were given time to clear out, the first man returned back to his own car, he knew that he couldn't just leave it stranded alone in that dark highway, and by his grim look and stern tone, the college student should have been grateful to know that he's been issued a warning and let go.

What the trooper wouldn't have known was that this college student was the son of a retired judge, who — before returning to private practice — had served for 18 years, firmly reciting the do's and don'ts of law well into the kid's youth, inspiring him enough to peruse the career himself at the University of Arkansas School of Law, of which he was driving back from.

The trooper wouldn't have known, couldn't have known, that the man he pulled over, at age 32, was a third-year student. How could he have drawn such a conclusion when he saw the college student sitting — no, shaking — in the back of his car weeping, “I didn't do anything, daddy, please,” and, “Daddy, I don't want to die. I don't want to die.”

Mother Nuclear
By: Oghenemarho Ogilo



Light from Above
By: Oghenemarho Ogilo



Words of Affirmation
By: Destiny Rivera

I showed you a piece of my writing
A sliver of myself on a page
And you told me how amazing it was
And I felt myself preening
Like a scarlet macaw
Exploding into a symphony of pigments
With a hunger to begin another piece anew

Visions of The Future

By: Destiny Rivera

If I try staring at the future for long

My eyes feel as though they are melting

To know what is coming next

like Icarus when he grazed the sun

The more I look the more it alludes me

my happiness burned by a gaseous orb of starlight

A schism between the three parts of me

Like Orpheus unable to prevent himself

My patience is hanging by a single thread

from stealing a marveling glance at Eurydice

If I do not unclench the thread will snap

Only to see her be whisked away by his very eyes

The future tantalizes me so deeply that I am

Unable to know where the soil begins

The fire starting in the present

And her ashes in the end

HEALING

By; DonJea Smith

Love, the way we know it:
we're on fire throw
oil on it
I ain't ready for gold
or HEALING
They will not respect your
Bigness
And you must not kill them
Even though that is so instinctive
We owe ourselves love
We mourn under red light to
feed the violence sitting in time out near the pancreas
never knowing where to place power
Well, power is nothing when it ain't shit

I Said Yeah, Right
By: DonJea Smith

You should be an English teacher.

That is what my first Black English teacher
Told me.

I said yeah, right

And here I am, almost something like an English teacher

A black English teacher
not even trying to teach
English, but Ebonics.

Now, I know what I've learned up until this point:

Always listen to black women who look at you like they know what they
Talking about

You can know if the energy from a look

You receive

Is genuine

An Apology Letter

By: Dominique Stevenson-Pope

I believe the only good apology from someone is a genuine one and one that takes full accountability. I want to believe I've made whole-hearted apologies in my life, of which I take full accountability, but ultimately I can not be the judge of that. The apology is one for the person or group to accept, and if they do not accept it, then that is something the apologizer must accept on their end. I am stating this in the beginning so that the reader is aware that I recognize my apology might not be accepted. That is fine in my book, I know what I have done — put a sour taste in people's mouths, and made them think less of me to some degree.

I can not and will not be the person that thinks just because I made one apology, that everyone will be fine with it. I can not and will not be the person who only makes one apology as well. I will apologize as many times as needed and to whoever would like an apology. That, in my regards, is what makes an apology valid and truthful. We must always and continue to own up to our actions and remember that they can hurt people in later parts of their lives. Just because someone was okay with something, in the beginning, does not mean they will be okay with that same action in the future.

In my freshman year, I made a public statement to an MCLA Facebook page in regards to a protest occurring at the school.

The protest was in regards to the school administration and their inability to assist people of color at MCLA. The protest was also being held shortly after the 2016 election and referenced the Black Lives Matter movement as well. It consisted of flyers and balloons being hung from trees, poles, railings, and ceilings throughout the Campus Center, Bowman Hall, and the Quad. There was also a large banner hung from the banner railings in the Campus Center which stayed up there for the remainder of the year. Faculty support in this protest was recognized, but this was driven by students at MCLA.

In retrospect, the flyers and balloons were quite moving in the juxtaposition of the message. MCLA has failed to support students and faculty of color for decades. The campus police have wrongfully prosecuted students of color, invaded their personal spaces and property, and pushed the blame on them for years. These same actions are not seen with white students at the college or have been at a lower degree. Faculty of color have also faced many issues with the administration, and the representation of faculty of color at the school is extremely low.

During my time at MCLA, the History and Political Science department consisted of two faculty of color and dropped down to one by my senior year. New faculty were hired, however, they were always white faculty members in charge of Black and African American History courses. Race, culture, and ethnicity were not the only issues MCLA has failed to assist and provide a strong support system to grow, but it is a huge area of neglect, given how much MCLA states they accept and promote these issues.

In the following years, and especially more recently, I have tried to understand why I would think this way or believed I was right at all. I have come up with a few theories, and know some root causes, but I also know I should have known better ultimately. I had grown up in a predominantly white, upper-middle-class, conservative society. Did my family raise me in this manner? No, my mother and family members tried their best to prevent this kind of thinking, but I still held on to it. I felt I needed to fit in and assimilate, rather than question those around me who carried bigoted beliefs. I was extremely white-washed at a young age, but this was my fault.

I knew that being whitewashed provided some form of protection at school and in public, but at home, and around people who looked like me and lived similar lifestyles, I was the outsider. I was educated on my culture, my background, and heritage, but never tried to join it.

When I got to college, I followed suit with my mindset and stayed with the people who I made myself used to. Even while in classes discussing race and racial issues, I played devil's advocate, did not do my readings, and just looked like boo boo the fool all the time. I wasn't helping myself or improving my knowledge, I just continued to dig a deeper hole each day.

Around junior year, I met my friend Fatima, who shined a light on how bad it had gotten. I had the chance to live with her at my apartment, and we had long talks about this behavior I had exhibited. Although I was a history major, there were many areas that the MCLA history department failed to cover, instead, they chose to cover more eurocentric history.

I can not speak of how they improved in this area, but I do remember discussions of maybe expanding some courses in the future. Fatima educated me in the areas that I lacked a large amount of knowledge, reminded me of my privilege as an individual, and reminded me where my biases were.

Throughout senior year, I tried and failed many times, but she still helped me through. It wasn't until senior year that I saw how wrong my posts were and how ill-informed I had been my entire life.

Again, this was at no one else's fault, but my own. I've gone back and forth as to if this letter will even be acknowledged, how it would be perceived, or if people will accept me after reading it. I've even wondered if this is more performative than assistive, and if this letter will ultimately just dig my hole deeper.

I do not justify any of my actions from freshman year as valid because I was whitewashed, I knew I could get out of that mindset and expand my understanding of my culture and other people of colors better. I chose to be in that mindset, and need to right the wrongs as an adult. If people do not accept it, I must accept that, and do what I can to provide.

My apologies' goal is not to gain sympathy for my actions, but to let others know I understand they were wrong actions and moves taken. I will always try to better myself and help, and if I fail, I want to be held accountable. If this isn't a big deal to one person or seems as though I have overdone it, I understand that too.

This is something that has weighed heavily on me since freshman year and has caused me much stress. If there is a better route I should have taken, please tell me, and I will do that instead. I want to improve as a person and show change, but I want to make sure I am doing that correctly.

I hope you have read this letter in its entirety, and if you are someone who remembers this post, my behaviors, or have thought of me in the manners I have stated here (or other manners even), please reach out to me to let me know what you think if you feel comfortable. This was freshman year, people might have forgotten this, but I know I have not, and if someone has and it has altered their perception of me, I want to help fix that or show I have changed in any means they find suitable.

I thank you for your time and appreciate you for taking the time to read this letter.

My most sincere apologies,
Dominique Stevenson-Pope

By: Drew Thomas



By: Louis Torres

MY REVELATION

Searching For a home.

ALL I'VE Known...

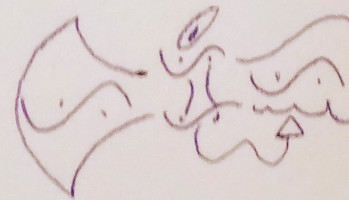
Is that Snow

Covers on EVERY Surface

But can never

Cover the u

Feel about you



eye

Hermanos/Brothers
By Tarah Valin

Spanish: "Hermanos"

¿Es por la soñolencia que el silencio crecer entre nosotros

ó

por la nieve cayendo como

cenizas en el cementerio?

Porque las estrellas son tan maravillosas

y el césped debajo de mi cuerpo es maravilloso

y ambos son hermanos – dices

Porque callados sabemos lo que somos

cenizas a cenizas

césped a césped

polvo de estrellas a polvo de estrellas

sementeras del efímero

English: "Brothers"

Is it because of the drowsiness that the silence grows between us

or

for the snow falling

like ashes in the cemetery?

Because the stars are so wonderful

and the grass under my body is wonderful

and they are both brothers - you say

Because quiet we know what we are

ashes to ashes

grass to grass

stardust to stardust

sementeras of the ephemeral

La Montaña y La Tormenta/ The Mountain and the Storm
By Tarah Valin

Spanish: "La Montaña y La Tormenta"
¿Qué es lo que dicen las montañas del Dios?
¡Ya viene, ya viene el viento!
viene, viene la lluvia
la misma montaña que no puedes subir
es la que te protege de la tormenta

English: "The Mountain and the Storm"
What do the mountains of God say?
The wind is coming, the wind is coming!
the rain is coming
the same mountain that you can't climb
is the one that protects you from the storm

To Love is My Kind

By: Huab Xiong

To hold hands with a man is to hold hands with a man who looks like my people.

To date a man is to date a man who looks like my people. To kiss a man is to kiss a man who looks like my people.

To have a family with a man is to have a family with a man who looks like my people.

To love a man is to love someone who should look like my people, Asian.

Is this love I am searching for or just a skin color or language to match mine because I am told to do so?

The more I try to find a man to match with what I was born with and into, the more frustrated I become.

To them, to be in love with someone not Asian is “rebellious.”

To me, to love is courageous in this world of chaos.

There will be people who tell me: “Just do whatever you want, who cares.” Sometimes those people sound more disturbing to my soul than those who judge me.

I’m trying to understand love still. As an Asian woman,

To love a Black man —

To love a Native, Indigenous man —

To love a Latino, Hispanic man —

To love a White man —

To love a Biracial man —

To love a man Is to love a man who looks like my people.

To love is to act and receive on both ends.

I look at you and I then stumble with my thoughts of the gossip and judgments that float in my mind.

Why must I feel like I am betraying my own kind when I know that is not the case?

Love is love.

Loving a man of my choice is to love someone who makes challenges and opposites feel like they are in sync.

Love is my kind.

To that, I say:

Love me for my beautiful soul that creates music at night when nobody is listening when I am alone in my room. Love me for the sound of my voice that sings the harmonies to my melodies, softly near your ears as it gently puts you to a sweet dream.

Love me for my skin color that burns from the hot sun from the summers in California.

Love me for the food I make that keeps my parents feel at home and alive in this westernized world.

Love me for the clothes that I wear to feel connected to my ancestors and homeland.

Love me for my religion that keeps me near and close to my loved ones.

Love me for the baggage that has been on me since the day I was born.

Love me for the barriers that I continue to fight everyday. Love me for every second because I am trying.

I am Hmong Southeast Asian American.

To love is to love, and that is my kind.

Dedication:

I would like to take the time to thank all of the talented IAH Team members who helped make this project possible. Thank you Drew for designing such an amazing cover for the booklet. Thank you Declan and Brianna for helping EVC grow through superb marketing. Thank you Lisa for motivating me to turn this idea into a full-fledged project. And thank you to Erica for all your guidance throughout. I could not have asked for a better team. You guys are amazing!!

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