The Sundial

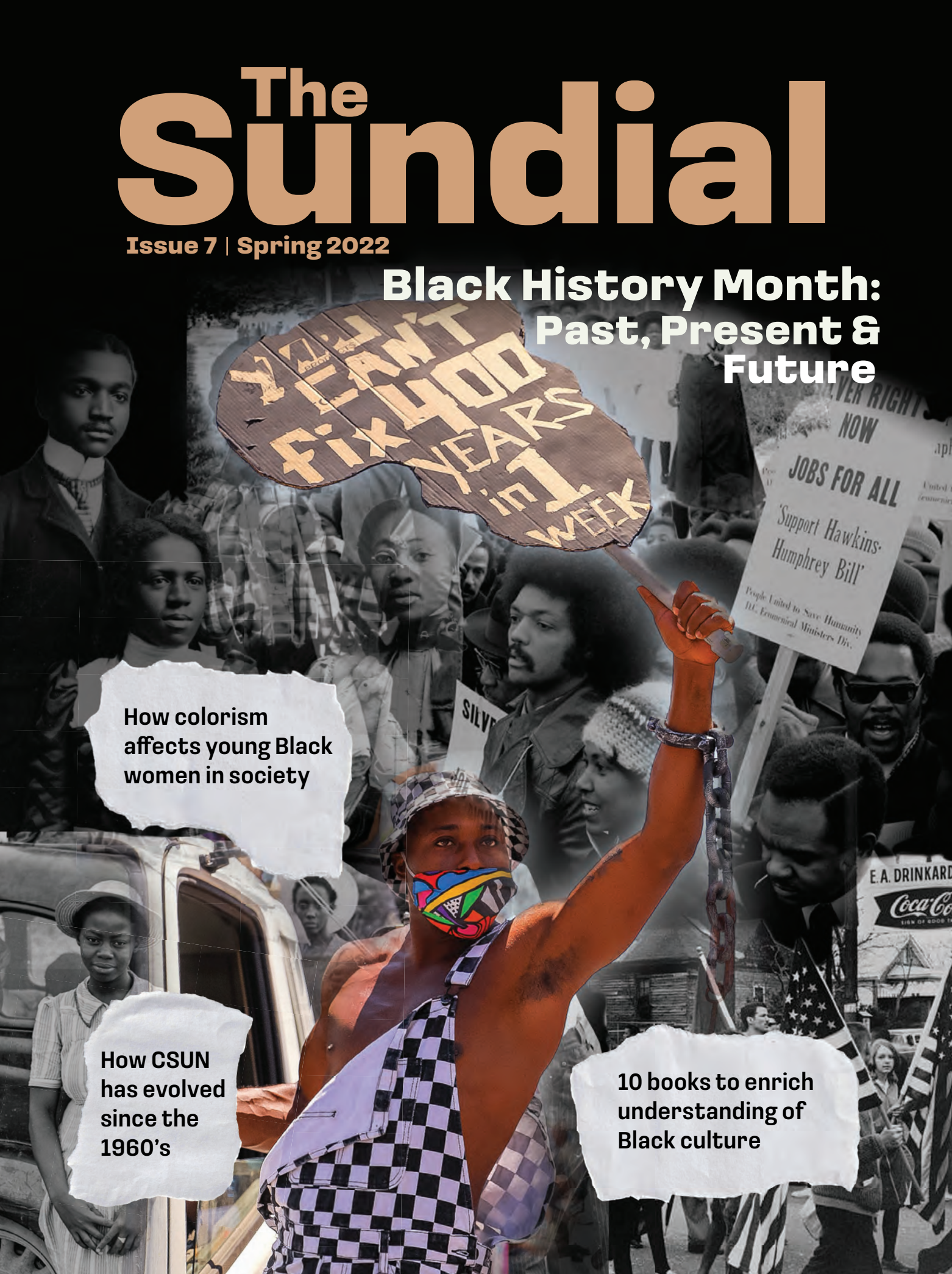
Issue 7 | Spring 2022

Black History Month: Past, Present & Future

How colorism affects young Black women in society

How CSUN has evolved since the 1960's

10 books to enrich understanding of Black culture



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Black History Month is a time that means a great many things to different groups of people. For some like myself, it is a time of remembrance and reflection; looking to the past and honoring previous success while gaining inspiration for what is to come. It can also mean a time to shine a spotlight on the pride one may have for their heritage. Over the last two years, this country has witnessed a massive change within the Black community in terms of social justice and coming together for support and change.

In this issue we will explore topics pertaining to the Black community and Black History Month. Some stories offer us a glimpse back in time, such as the conversation with Rev. Broadous; while others tackle uncomfortable but unavoidable topics such as colorism.

Just like the unique spectrum of color and identities within the Black community, we hope this issue embodies that diversity and provides a more rounded representation of problems, solutions and celebration.

Mercedes Cannon-Tran

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Zedar Broadous stands in the previous location of a campus meetup the “open forum” in Northridge Calif., on Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2022.

Mercedes Cannon-Tran | Mercedes Cannon-Tran

A Conversation with Zedar Broadous:

CSUN Alumnus Still Making a Difference

On a Wednesday morning he showed up 20 minutes early for his interview, pleasantly chatting with reporters in the newsroom before the interview began. A thoughtfully color-coordinated outfit was accompanied by a uniquely carved cane he held between his hands. His muted but slightly boisterous laughter was infectious as he made small quips with the reporters.

His name is Zedar Broadous, a reverend by trade and CSUN alumni from before the name change of San Fernando Valley State College to California State University, Northridge.

At 73 years young, Broadous has come a long way and seen even more. He is a Navy veteran and longtime resident of the San Fernando Valley.

Broadous wasted no time jumping into answering the interview questions posed to him, and made a point to circle back and connect thoughts after every detailed answer.

His story begins in the past, as most always do. The year is 1968, and students had taken over the administration building in protest of an alleged assault on a Black football player named George Boswell. Broadous recalls a call going out on the usual communication channels used back then for support. A few days after the incident, he came to what was then known as the "open forum," a stage area used for gatherings that has since been converted to the campus bookstore.

"What occurred was because of the great turnout of not only students but the community," said Broadous. "Yet also a great turnout of the LAPD. Quite a few of us ended up going to jail during that period of time on more than one occasion."

As one of 11 children in his family, he followed in his father's footsteps and became a minister. He takes his ministry and leadership roles quite seriously, as he has served on several Black committees and boards in addition to serving as president of the NAACP Pacoima chapter.

A moment of pause before he shared his view of what Black History Month means, he squinted his eyes for a moment to find the beginning.

"[It is] commemorating the successes of those [who have come] before me have had, so that we are closer to a better society than we were," he said. "And then you realize that there is still hope, but that hope comes at a price."

He went on to say that along with commemoration there is

“We have to shine a light on those inequities. Good people have to do that, and sometimes it’s painful”

-Zedar Broadous

celebration and continuation. Celebrating the wins and recognizing that for the Black community, the struggle continues.

His hands, though a bit weathered, showed the passion and belief he holds as he used them in conversation. When he is particularly passionate about a statement, he makes a point to emphasize his thought with an accompanying tap on the desk.

Broadous speaks on a great many topics as a leader in the San Fernando Valley’s Black community; and Black History Month, in addition to the responsibilities of the community, are a few of those topics he’s quite devoted to.

“Why not spend a couple hundred dollars per kid, get school supplies [and] help a young lady or young man have the opportunity to tour NASA[‘s Jet Propulsion Laboratory],” said Broadous. “So that they can see that just because you’re in this circumstance [of struggle] right here today doesn’t mean that’s where you have to be tomorrow.”

He mentioned that he was once a student fortunate enough to receive the opportunity to attend college from a chance given to him by the Equal Opportunity Program.

Broadous paraphrased the allegory of “Plato’s Cave,” a story of a lost people living in a cave afraid of the unknown and quite literally shown the light, to emphasize the need for kindness and knowledge being passed within the community.

He got emotional when speaking on his prayer for the community, making a joke to distract from the brief glimpse of vulnerability.

“We have to shine a light on those inequities. Good people have to do that, and sometimes it’s painful,” said Broadous. “I see the progress, and I see the change here on campus. But as with anything else, we can do more. My prayer is that we can shine that light on what this campus is doing.”

[Above] Now and then, the University Library and Broadous stand the test of time in Northridge, Calif., on Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2022.

[Left and Below] Zedar Broadous takes a walk down memory lane in the Sundial newsroom in Northridge, Calif., on Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2022.

Problems in the Black Film Industry

Addressing Black Representation in Cinema

Ever since the viral hashtag #OscarsSoWhite gained momentum in 2016, there has been increased attention on the long-lasting inequities within the film industry for a lack of diverse representation. In response, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences implemented inclusion standards for the Oscars in 2020.

While there is more representation reflected in front of and behind the camera, the film industry has failed to recognize that it's complicit in perpetuating racial biases and stereotypes, specifically within the Black community.

Since the early days of film, Black people have been portrayed negatively compared to their white counterparts. Although Black roles have evolved, most movies fail to represent the Black experience as a whole.

Black films tend to fall into three categories: slavery or the Jim Crow era, hood movies, or films where Black people exist to make the white character seem like a hero.

Hollywood has a long history of portraying Black actors with a level of cultural exoticism, as a way to diminish the humanity of the Black experience. The reality is more insidious: the film industry profits off of the misery and suffering of Black people.

Slave tropes sell. White-savior films sell. Black trauma sells.

And more importantly, these are the types of films that are recognized by film boards and associations as achievements in cinema. While it is fantastic that skilled actors like Lupita Nyong'o win an Oscar for her performance as an enslaved woman in "12 Years a Slave," it's unfortunate that we witnessed her character be brutalized, sodomized, and whipped throughout the entirety of the film.

To add insult to injury, Nyong'o was snubbed by the Oscars for her performance a few years later, in the critically-acclaimed 2019 film "Us."

So is Hollywood even attempting to step outside of this box, and produce and recognize films outside of these tropes? Unfortunately, the jury is still out. But one thing is for sure: Black people want to see themselves and their culture represented in movies.

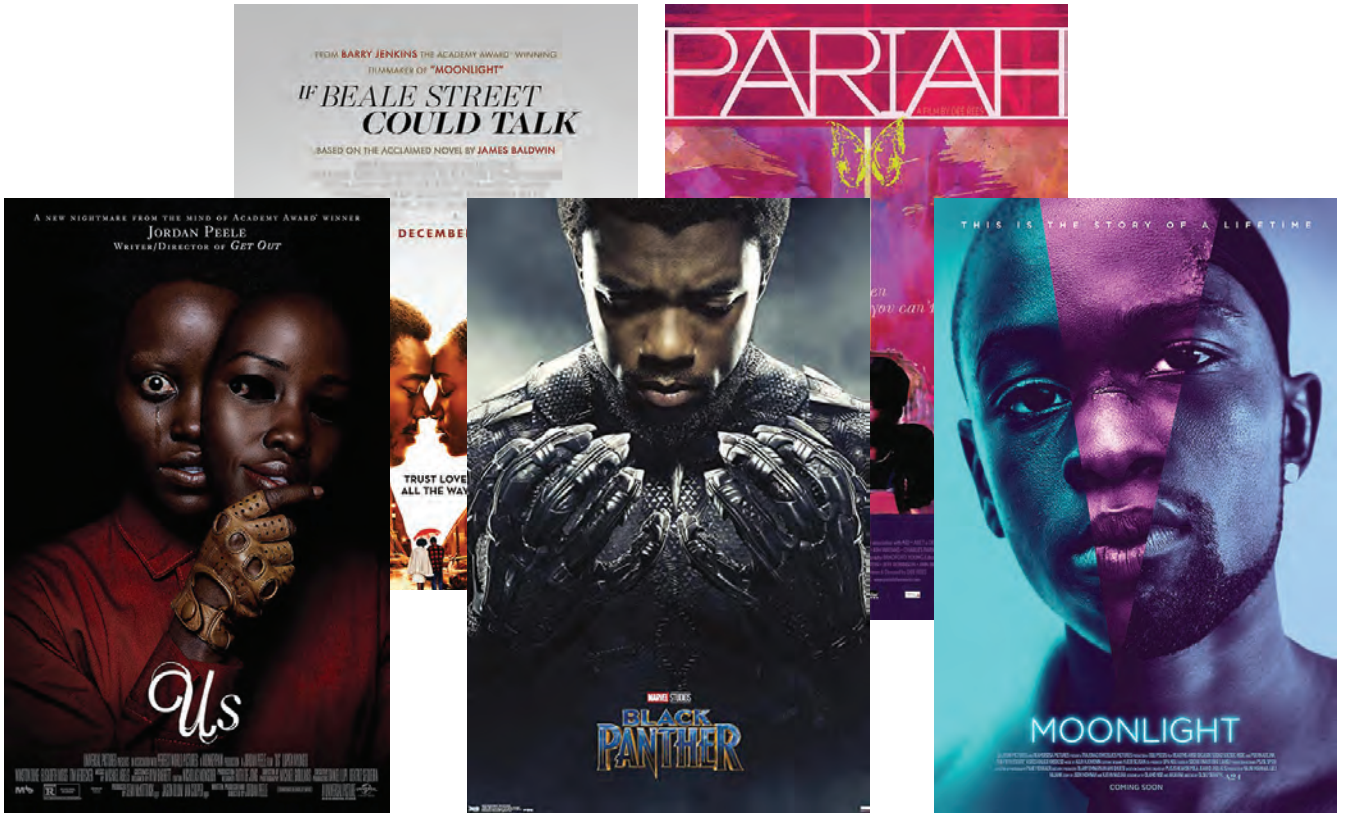
The #RepresentationMatters report, a 2020 study by the National Research Group, showed that two in three Black Americans don't feel represented on-screen. The study also found that 83% of Black Americans polled believed that the media currently perpetuates negative stereotypes of their culture and has the power to influence real-life perceptions of them.

Progress has been made over the decades; there are fewer depictions of Blacks being portrayed as lazy hypersexual criminal caricatures. But the public still feels as though these historical problems are far from being resolved. Sixty-two percent of Black Americans said Black writers and directors are underrepresented in Hollywood, which leads to less representation on screen, and 79% said that they can tell when Black characters are not written by people of color.

"The entire media ecosystem needs to step up its representation game," according to the NRG report.

One may argue that historical movies about slavery and the Jim Crow era are important because of the educational value that they bring.

But it's important to point out that the Black experience is not an ethnic monolith. We rarely see the happy and loving moments of Black people portrayed on screen. These moments do exist; they are real and deserve to be shared on



film. Life isn't all about trauma.

All is not lost. There have been critically-acclaimed Black films released in the past decade that have received the recognition they deserve.

"Moonlight." "Pariah." "BlacKkKlansman." "If Beale Street Could Talk." "Us."

It would be a big fail if I did not mention Marvel's "Black Panther." The movie was an absolute hit making over $1.3 billion worldwide. So why was it so successful?

For starters, action movies tend to make more money internationally. Second, critics have hailed that its success derived from "race and gender-conscious casting and costuming," and showed us what Black self-determination looks like. It also doesn't hurt that the movie was actually good.

These are all great examples of how Black characters can show dynamic depth outside of a victim-driven trope, even if they have socio-political undertones about race in America.

Suppose you've never heard of these films, but you know about "The Help," "Green Book," or "Harriet." In that case, I'm sorry to say it, but you're playing into Hollywood's Black narrative and are missing out on some entertaining films.

The real question is can Hollywood be creative enough to tell a variety of Black stories?

There are so many uncharted stories about Black history-makers that would be absolutely fascinating to tell in a feature film. Take Jane Bolin, the first Black woman to attend Yale Law School and the first Black female judge in the United States. She went on to work with private employers to hire people based on their skills, as opposed to discriminating against them because of their race.

See Hollywood? There are plenty of stories to tell that inspire, uplift and reexamine Black people's roles in America's historical landscape.

Until Hollywood can make significant changes, we as consumers need to do our part and demand that change is made to reflect the myriad of experiences that make up our diverse cultures.

Black people are complex human beings, just like every other human on this planet. We are not homogeneous; we deserve to have our stories reflect our multifaceted identities. It's important to see empowering stories across the spectrum, so that we can be seen and allowed to connect over the bonds of our shared humanity.

Black Panther - Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures | If Beale Street Could Talk - Mirror Releasing | Moonlight - A24 | Pariah - Focus Features | Us - Universal Pictures

Kaitlyn Lavo | Kaitlyn Lavo

Three Black Women Explain How Colorism Has Affected Them

"Colorism is the social marginalization and systemic oppression of people with darker skin tones and the privileging of people with lighter skin tones"

- Sarah L. Webb of Colorism Healing

A subconscious bias has been placed on Black American society due to the socialized conditioning that begins with our country's foundation, and is continually reinforced through the same generational trauma many families experience. It puts light skin on an invisible pedestal, while placing a divide even within those of the same community.

Ideals that have been reinforced as a result of the experiences that their family members endure, including those whose ancestors' worth could be determined based on the lightness or darkness of their skin. Those experiencing dehumanizing treatment throughout the last 400 years have unfortunately been forced to place value on the lightness of their skin solely from the necessity to survive.

Colorism impacts members of the Black community from stereotyping, perceptions of intelligence, social status, healthcare treatment, and toxic ideals of beauty standards and self acceptance.

The Sundial takes a closer look at the lives of three women of color, to understand how colorism has affected their lives, and how they've learned to reclaim their space in a Eurocentric society.

Kaila Moore-Jones

Portrait of Kaila Moore-Jones taken in the CSUN campus photo studio.

CSUN senior Kaila Moore-Jones holds many titles, from proud member of Zeta Phi Beta sorority, National Pan-Hellenic Council President, president of Black Girl Magic, a member of the Housing Affinity Group, and a student for quality education intern on campus; but her role as a leader in the CSUN community was something she could not have imagined for herself four years ago.

Jones describes how her ceasing to follow Western standards when it comes to hair helped her grow in her own self-love journey.

"I really got to connect with myself and my hair in general, but really myself ... We're growing this and we're taking care of it like from the seedling on," she explained. "You learn you have to go through that little ugly phase, and then it goes to the phase where I can't really do anything with it. And you kind of have to learn to love it throughout these stages of 'ugliness'."

She explained that once she cut her hair, her family had mixed reactions at first due to their experienced generational trauma with their own hair. Jones showed them the love she had for her Black hair, which convinced many of them to feel the same.

"There's nothing wrong with Black hair – just the perpetuation of racist discriminatory ideals across generations," Jones said. "Like my Grandma reacts to my hair sometimes. I know it's not really coming from a bad place, it's what she grew up on."

Her grandmother would say things to Jones like, "'I love your hair. It's so big.' Then sometimes she says, 'You need to do something to that, put it away.'" Jones responded, " It's an afro, this is what it does – what it's supposed to be like."

As Jones bears the weight of unlearning for the generations that came before her, she is working to break patterns that have held her and other women in her family back, while finding solace in their identities and embracing their roots.

Portrait of Devin O'Brien taken in the CSUN campus photo studio. Photo by Kaitlyn Lavo.

Devin O'Brien

CSUN creative writing and gender and women's studies major Devin O'Brien, who uses the pronouns she/they, is an aspiring songwriter and runs a vegan false eyelash business with their supportive mother.

Colorism was something close to home for O'Brien, who had trouble being able to identify as a Black woman because of the lightness of their skin while feeling like an outsider in their own community.

"I never even thought about colorism, because my mom never praised my skin," said O'Brien. "There's a lot of that in the Black community with people that are lighter."

O'Brien said having more European hair texture was equivalent to being more accepted. This uneven bias was not something their mother imposed on them, but instead something they learned in the classroom.

Fellow students would often say O'Brien wasn't actually Black, which they eventually believed.

It wasn't until the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests that O'Brien began to truly see themself as a member of the Black community, as they rose up to show support of their community.

O'Brien has used their privilege to speak out for members of the community, giving multiple speeches about colorism during her time as a student in both high school and college.

"I feel like privileged groups overall don't speak about oppression, because why would you talk about something that you don't experience," said O'Brien.

O'Brien still struggles with feeling comfortable taking up space, and the acceptance of their own identity. They still straighten their hair once or twice a day to feel more acceptable while living within white spaces. O'Brien recently mentioned how they finally wrote a song about self-love and acceptance, which proved to be a huge leap for them in their journey to experiencing love, both internally and externally.

Jisel Soleil Ayon

Jisel Soleil Ayon in "Waitress." Photo courtesy of Jeremy Daniel.

As a CSUN alumna, Ayon took time out of her busy tour schedule to share her journey to becoming a professional actress and embracing her role in the world as a Black female performer.

During her last semester at California State University, Fullerton, Ayon received notice that she would be cast as Wednesday Addams in The Addams Family Musical at the Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts.

As she began to see herself playing roles on stage she never thought she would, Ayon began to reflect on the years of her life where she did not see herself as a Black woman. With a family who is half-Mexican and half-Black, she found it hard to identify with either part of herself.

She did what she could to fit the whitewashed beauty standards, including damaging her hair from the straightening of her natural curls.

Ayons voice started to swell with a powerful happiness as she said, "I love my curls. Sometimes I still freakin hate them. But … I look at my curls now [and] I feel myself with the curls, which would never happen before."

As she tours in places around the United States, she not only is changing her own mindset of her identity in the roles she pursues, she's also bringing new perspectives to audiences from parts of the country who do not view women like her in the roles she portrays.

The feedback she received from audience members in Alabama put everything into perspective, with race being at the forefront of a majority of American conversations. Having a woman from the audience compliment her on her performance, and acknowledging that she would never have seen someone like Ayon in a role like this before, presents an important step forward in the world of live American theater.

Briana Walden | Briana Walden and Mercedes Cannon-Tran

Studio 216 student Rae practices a pole trick during a Pole Dancing Tricks class on Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022, in the Van Nuys neighborhood of Los Angeles, Calif.

Black Business Spotlight: Studio 216 Making Moves

In the heart of the Van Nuys neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, on the corner of Saticoy Street and Balboa Boulevard, Studio 216 is making big moves. Co-owned by Kendrick Clevor and Kendale King, the studio is committed to honoring Black history through its deep roots in dance, offering classes such as Afro Fusion and Vogue Feminine alongside its already wide-ranging class list.

After moving from Cleveland, Ohio to Los Angeles to pursue a career in dance and choreography, King felt the dance studios he went to were missing something. It was then he decided to open his own studio and fill that missing piece.

"I wanted to bring a piece of my home to Los Angeles," said Clevor. "I wanted to create something and provide a space for dancers to showcase their work."

A few of the classes they offer range in levels of difficulty. Their classes include beginner pole dancing and tricks as well as a workout focused class 2Litt Twerk Fitt.

In addition to their pole classes and dance classes they also offer vocal training and choral workshops. The vocal classes and workshops are weekly and are held both in person and virtually.

Studio 216 also will be offering a pole competition and performance prep boot camp. This program is two months long and offers the opportunity for students to get hands-on training with instructors. Students can also look forward to a video of their solo performance they learn while in the program.

Dance and music are not all that Studio 216 offers to the community. For photographers, dancers, or creators looking for a backdrop and creative space they also offer studio rentals with three different studio options ranging from a plain dance studio to something more whimsical.

Students warm up during a Pole Dancing Tricks class.

"I wanted to bring a piece of my home to Los Angeles"

- Kendrick Clevor, co-owner

They have a lavender painted floral room, and in contrast, a macabre vampire vibes throne room for creators to take advantage of.

The studio prides itself on being able to accomodate all skill levels of voice and dance and welcomes them with open arms to learn the craft.

"I want people to know that this is place where they can grow," said Clevor. "I want them to feel loved and feel like they can network and grow with this [dance] family here."

[Top] Co-owner Kendrick Clevor has a long-forged history in the world of dance, working as a choreographer for over ten years prior to opening the studio with Kendale King.

[Above] Instructor Jammin assists a student during a Pole Dancing Tricks class.

National Pan-Hellenic Council members from each organization active on campus pose with each of their hand signs and letters in front of the University Library on Jan. 14, 2022, in Northridge, Calif.

David Nieto Orellana | Grace Da Rocha

School Spirit and Cultural Ties:

The Importance of Black Greek Life

Kayla Simpkins has grown up hearing about Greek life, specifically from her cousin and sister. Malaysia Long's fourth-grade teachers had introduced her to Greek life, and Derrick Lewis heard about it in high school when members of Greek organizations visited his campus. Their journeys to joining fraternities and sororities have all been different, but the common thread between these three is that they now hold executive positions in their Black Greek organizations.

"These organizations provide history from a time in which members of the Black community were not accepted elsewhere," said Long, secretary of CSUN's Sigma Gamma Rho Epsilon Phi chapter. "[Black Greek letter organizations] provide a safe space for those members to learn and [dive deeper into] their culture."

It has been easy for the Greek life community to exclude men and women of color throughout history. Black students were not allowed to join Greek organizations in the early 1900s during segregation, which led them to establish separate Black organizations that became the foundation of Black Greek life. One of these organizations was the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

Established at Howard University in 1930, the National Pan-Hellenic Council was created to unite Black students as they fought for equality within their universities. It consists of nine historically-Black Greek letter organizations, referred to as the Divine Nine, that govern the houses within Black Greek life. Most of the Divine Nine started as study groups or community spaces for Black students at their universities, but have now grown into international organizations.

"Black Greek life encompasses lots of things, such as the creation of a community for those that are consistently misrepresented," said Lewis, the secretary of CSUN's National Pan-Hellenic Council and president of Alpha Phi Alpha. "[There is] lots of culture projected through stepping and dances we called strolling, and lots of rich history of people that have worked hard to create opportunities for Black people, as well as breaking the generational curses that were systematically put in place."

CSUN currently is home to its own National Pan-Hellenic Council, with each executive board member representing their respective Divine Nine fraternity or sorority chapter. Alpha Phi Alpha, Sigma Gamma Rho, and Zeta Phi Beta are just some of the organizations that keep Black Greek life at CSUN

alive, alongside others outside of the Divine Nine.

For many of those involved, the unity among organization brothers and sisters is only one fraction of their love for this community. The dedication to community service, sense of identity, and empowerment shown through traditions like their rhythmic dancing draws Black students towards Black Greek life while providing them with a support system seen in very few corners of the university, according to Long.

"To me, Black Greek life encompasses a different and stronger form of sisterhood and brotherhood," said Long. "There is always support and guidance from others within your organization and beyond."

Many BGLOs at CSUN even collaborate with groups like the Black House and Black Student Union to host community service drives and educational events where Black students can have a safe space to discuss topics such as Black self-love and safe sex practices.

"We're using our space to kinda amplify and echo what's happening in the world while allowing them a space where they can vent, learn and share their perspectives," said Simpkins, president of CSUN's Zeta Phi Beta chapter.

Despite all of the work BGLOs do for their community, they still feel the effects of negative stereotypes regarding Greek life. Stories of students being seriously injured or dying due to harmful hazing practices have driven many people away from Greek organizations.

Many groups, like Zeta Phi Beta, do not allow hazing, but the distrust of Greek organizations still has an influence on their recruiting efforts. Simpkins believes that these stereotypes, combined with a lack of support from CSUN, the lack of knowledge about Black Greek life, and the small population of Black students on campus, make recruiting a lot harder for BGLOs at CSUN.

However, these organizations still thrive, according to Simpkins. She notes that they place more importance on how they leave their mark on CSUN through the work they do, rather than focusing on the amount of members they have.

For organizations like Zeta Phi Beta and Sigma Gamma Rho, the ways they leave their mark include providing an environment where young Black women can grow academically, personally and professionally without being overshadowed.

"Black women are already overshadowed: overshadowed in classrooms, overshadowed at events, overshadowed in everything that is done in society in general," said Simpkins. "So creating a space where they're not overshadowed will also make them find their home away from home. I think that's very important because then we see people find their way - find their purpose."

The spring semester brings more opportunities for Lewis, Long and Simpkins to continue uplifting CSUN's Black community through their organizations. Whether they're tabling for recruitment or stepping across the campus for their yard performance, BGLOs have made a home for themselves at CSUN and aim to keep Black Greek life alive in Northridge.

The National Pan-Hellenic council, which includes the nine historically-black Greek letter organizations, promotes a lifetime commitment to the organization upon membership. It assures sister/brotherhood, scholarship and service. If you are interested in learning more about CSUN's NPHC you can reach out to them on Instagram at @csun_nphc

“To me, Black Greek life encompasses a different and stronger form of sisterhood and brotherhood”

-Malaysia Long

Michaella Huck | Michaella Huck

Toxicity of Black Love

Lessons Learned from Limiting Myself in the Name of History

Black love is not something that just came out, it is a necessity in the community. More than just an important part of Black history, it's a love for our ancestors because love was all they had. Not just love with a significant other, but also love within family structures.

As we celebrate Black history, I wanted to recognize the importance of Black love.

I remember hearing stories from my grandparents about when slavery first began. Slave owners would sepearate female and male slaves, but the owners soon realized that would give them more bodies by forcing slaves to produce children.

From a young age, I constantly watched movies depicting Black love like "Love & Basketball" and "Love Jones," and I always wanted that for my family. As a Black woman I wanted so badly to love a Black man, because looking around me I wanted my children to grow up in a pro-Black household. I understand now that looking at Black love from that perspective is extremely toxic.

Love is not based on ethnicity. I have been through a lot in the name of trying to love a Black man. Especially during the incident with George Floyd, I felt as though I needed to be a shoulder to lean on for my significant other, as the world was against Black men. However, the summer of 2020 was one of the worst times in my life.

I was isolated from society due to my relationship, and the world was not on my side. I had become co-dependent on this person and my life was a living hell. I was being mentally, physically and emotionally abused by a person I thought I loved. This was not a good time in my life both mentally and physically. I was exhausted. I was at my lowest and journaling became a center for healing.

I found that oftentimes the Black men in my life didn't treat me with respect. Now this does not mean that Black men are horrible people and don't deserve to experience love. But what it does mean is that me choosing to date only Black men in the name of love has not worked in my favor.

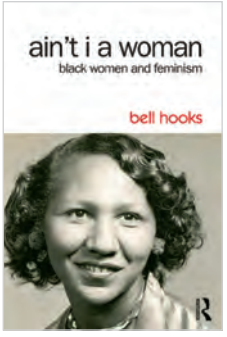
I am a giver at heart, and as a Black woman in society I do not experience the same luxuries I have given others. What I want others to take away from this is to not limit yourself based on what you think is culturally acceptable. Love who you want to love: if you choose Black love that's okay, but don't do it just for the sake of the term.

"Too Close for Comfort" is a section where our audience and editors give firsthand accounts of issues that relate to them. If you have a story about an incident that's too close for comfort, please email us at toocloseforcomfort.sundial@gmail.com.

Learning from the perspectives of Black authors

Black History Month is a time to collectively celebrate and learn about the experiences, stories and accomplishments of Black Americans, including those who put readers in the shoes of Black Americans who lived through the experience of history and the generational effects of it.

1. "Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism" by bell hooks



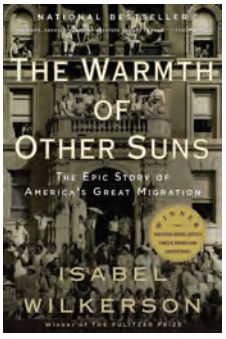
As suggested by the lowercase spelling of Gloria Watkins' pen name, bell hooks was a writer who wanted readers to focus less on her identity and more on her ideas.

Hooks takes a deep dive into the patriarchal landscape of America while explaining slavery's role in upholding a male-dominated society. Hooks reveals how these structural barriers led to the exclusion of Black women from the early stages of the feminist movement.

By redefining the term feminism, hooks explains that to be feminist is "to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression."

2. "The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration" by Isabel Wilkerson

Between 1915 and 1970, roughly six million Black men and women left the South in pursuit of a better life in the North, in what is now known as the Great Migration. While each individual held different reasons for making this move, one dominant factor that catalyzed this migration was the implementation of Jim Crow laws in the South.

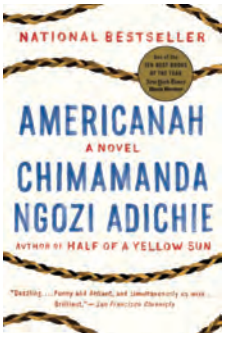


Wilkerson provides first-hand accounts of this mass migration by documenting the success stories of three individuals who escaped the racially-segregated South to pursue a prosperous life for them and their families.

The stories she tells represent an overarching theme of Black people not allowing an unjust system to stop them from creating opportunities for success.

"They did not dream the American Dream, they willed it into being by a definition of their own choosing," Wilkerson writes.

3. "Americanah" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

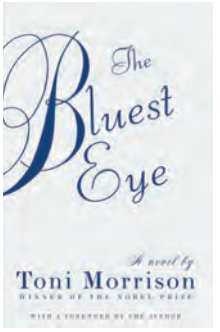


"Americanah" follows the story of Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman trying to build a prosperous future for herself in the U.S. after leaving everything behind in her native Lagos. Adichie explores the conflict of balancing multiple cultural identities at once as an African assimilating to American culture out of necessity.

Whether it was faking an accent to hide her African tongue or straightening her hair because braids were deemed 'unprofessional,' Ifemelu attempts to fit in as she struggles with her cultural identity.

Adichie also contrasts the role of race as a structural pillar of society in America to her homeland. "America doesn't care. So what if you weren't 'black' in your country? You're in America now," Ifemelu writes.

4. "The Bluest Eye" by Toni Morrison

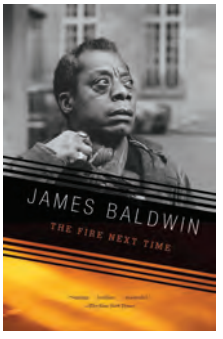


Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" is the story of Pecola, a Black girl who struggles to nurture self-love and acceptance of her identity in an environment fueled by disdain towards her skin color.

Pecola learns to associate her dark skin with ugliness and thus wishes for blue eyes, a trait her privileged white peers possess. To Pecola, blue eyes symbolizes liberation from the pain and prejudice inflicted upon her for being Black.

The Nobel Prize in Literature winner's novel shows how racist attitudes can encourage Black women to strip themselves of their confidence and identity in pursuit of Eurocentric beauty standards.

5. "The Fire Next Time" by James Baldwin

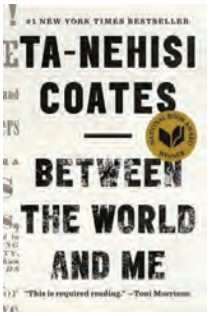


Baldwin's work is a collection of essays that encapsulates the civil rights activist's perspective on what he believed was necessary to bring forth an equal and united country.

Baldwin believed that reciprocal hatred between Black and white Americans would create no progress towards an equal country. The letter aimed to help his nephew understand America's state of racial tensions while stressing the importance of eliciting change from a place of love and acceptance.

"Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure does not testify to your inferiority but to their inhumanity," Baldwin wrote.

6. "Between the World and Me" by Ta-Nehisi Coates



"Race is the child of racism, not the father," Coates wrote in this letter dedicated to his teenage son, in preparation for the harsh realities a Black child may face in America.

Coates takes a critical look at racism from the eyes of a Black father by writing about the racist experiences he himself faced while growing up in Baltimore, including the death of a Black friend killed by law enforcement.

Coates' storytelling gives readers a glimpse into the pains and struggles that come with the everyday workings of systemic racism.

7. "So You Want to Talk About Race" by Ijeoma Oluo

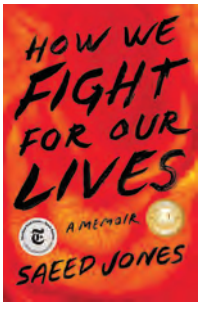
Race is a complex subject to discuss, whether it's sharing personal experiences, explaining how it's a systemic problem, or confronting a family member who made a racist remark.

Oluo's "So You Want to Talk About Race" confronts this fear and urges readers to realize that if "we continue to treat racism like it is a giant monster that is chasing us, we will be forever running."

She offers a contemporary perspective on racism by recounting her own experiences of navigating the hurdles of being a Black woman in a white-dominated patriarchal society.

8. "How We Fight For Our Lives: A Memoir" by Saeed Jones

Jones' coming-of-age memoir focuses on his journey to understanding his identity as a Black gay man in America. "Being black can get you killed. Being gay can get you killed," he writes. "Being a black gay boy is a death wish."



By living in an environment surrounded by homophobic attitudes and discrimination, Jones found himself having to fight for his existence in a society that challenged his very existence.

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