



# *The Lies They Told* **AND THE TRUTHS WE TOLD BACK**

**AN ANTHOLOGY OF BLACK WOMANHOOD CONFESSIONS  
AND BLACK GIRL MAGIC DECLARATIONS**

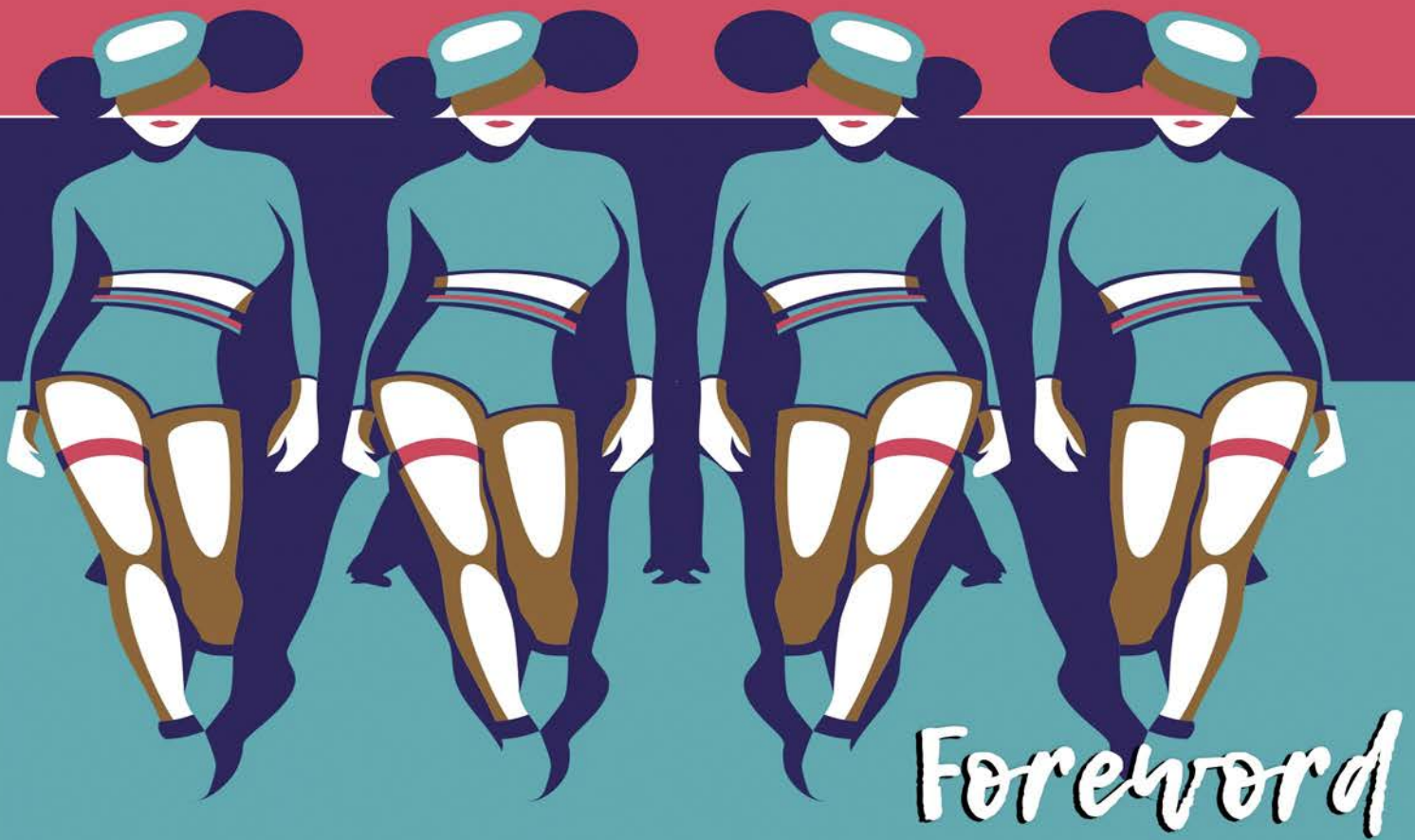
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**When I sat in front of my computer to write *No Lies Told Then*** I wanted to tell a story about a young black girl named “Sandra”. She would be the kind of character I didn’t see when I was growing up. As she aged and her journey unfolded, women like me would see ourselves in her story, which is both unique and universal. I completed that first draft during a much simpler time.

Obama was President, Michelle our first lady, and the alt-right was confined to distant corners of Reddit. Facebook was finding its footing, communicating in 140 characters or less seemed impossible, Google was a merely search engine on the ascent and Alphabet had yet to exist. Trolls and bots and 45 were light-years away from being a thought in anyone’s mind.

Culturally, the landscape was stuck in neutral. It was in before *Scandal* and *Belle* and *Ava* burst onto the scene with *I Will Follow*. It was before Kerry’s name could greenlight a project, Tessa Thompson elevated everything and *Viola* took her throne as the queen of acting. Black stories and voices were muted, and films for and about our experience were mostly born from black suffering. There were occasional exceptions—an over-the-top comedy here, a love

with a bumping soundtrack there, but they were few and far between.

Though people of color weren’t content with the status quo, we helped support and sustain a system that largely excluded our stories.

“Liberal Hollywood” was centered in its whiteness, maleness, exclusivity and supremacy. Gatekeepers worked hard to keep it so, but through small cracks, narrow roads, treacherous pathways and great obstacles, filmmakers like Spike, Reginald Hudlin and Lee Daniels created unforgettable works. Others who followed in their footsteps were given one shot, and more often than not, a single mis-step marked the end.

Our current reality is slightly less bleak, though some things never change. Opportunities don’t fall into the lap of women and people of color. Our scripts aren’t given to a friend of a friend who knows someone who can get us in the room with a decision maker. We still have to forge our own path, raise our own capital, build our own team and elbow our way into existence.

With that in mind, the team at *No Lies Told Then*



rolled up our sleeves and prepared for the long game.

We knew we could not travel this road alone; we had to connect with our audience early and build an enduring relationship. We needed our supporters to be with us every step of the way to uplift, cheer, inspire and push us over the finish line.

With time, the dream grew bigger and more than connecting with our audience, we worked to build a movement that exists and thrives before a single scene is filmed and long after it's been released.

Our guest blogger series, #LiesTheyTold was born.

Within communities, there are commonalities and shared experiences from which bonds are formed and strengthened. Who among us hasn't had crises of confidence which cause us to question our purpose? Who hasn't wandered around hopelessly lost? The questioning and wandering may be exacerbated by our race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc., and people may define us by our limitations and/or their prejudices. The opinions of others, their perceptions and projections take root.

We internalize their issues. We wonder if they're right? We beat ourselves up. We lose control of our own narrative and become a version of ourself that's inauthentic and untrue. Sometimes, we must overcome the hatred and lies, that don't match reality, and discover our own truth. In those moments, we are all "Sandra".

The team at No Lies Told Then wanted to provide a space for women like "Sandra" to shed the baggage, the weight of the expectations of others and share their story for overcoming the lies they'd been told—we wanted to provide a safe space for all who were willing to share.

Over the past several months, we've posted testimony after testimony by writers from around the globe. Some write for a living, others had a story they simply wanted to share. Through feedback and interaction, it's clear that these stories are touching people within the community and beyond.

As a very small "thank you" for joining us on this journey, and with the permission from the incredible authors, we present you with this ebook of #LiesTheyTold.

## ABOUT TORRI

Torri R. Oats has written, directed and produced two off-off Broadway plays. More recently, she wrote and produced the short film, Tomorrow Is Too Late. She has contributed to Madame Noire and The Atlanta Post. If there is a credo which defines her work it is to give voice to the voiceless. She aims to continue to write pieces that portray positive images of underrepresented groups, have a social impact and challenge authority and conventional wisdom. Currently, she is working on her first feature film, No Lies Told Then.

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# THE ROOTS & STRENGTH OF BLACK WOMANHOOD

PHUMUZILE MABASHA

**LOOKING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN,** one would believe that all Black women do is fight, gossip or basically hate each other. This is a narrative that is perpetuated on mainstream TV with shows like *Real Housewives of Atlanta*, *Basketball Wives*, the *Love and Hip Hop* franchise. In some cases this is also perpetuated in some television shows. Shows that I am ashamed to watch and enjoy.

One of the biggest lies I have been told is that black women and women in general just can't get along or support each other. My father recently passed away and at the funeral it was my mother's friends, sisters, aunts and even acquaintance who stepped up and helped us through the funeral process which is known as "rufu" in my mother tongue.

I was in awe at how everyone came together—friends and family members that she had even fallen out with. They paid for everything and made sure my mother and I ate. They decorated the vigil area for my father's coffin. All my family paid for were the flowers and food for the catering after the funeral service. I felt that there was deep understanding that each woman had for my mother that she had lost her husband. One of her friends even went as far as saying she will not call my mother a widow.

As someone who had believed the lie that as black women we don't get along or support each other, I was greatly touched by this and saw the strength of black women. This made me believe that even though my mother had lost her husband of 38 years, she will be looked after and supported through this and whatever happens in this new chapter of her life.

Additionally, I also felt that I will be looked after and supported during this time by my mother's community and by mine. I grew up with men and they were the ones that always were my pillar of support but I don't think they can comfort me the way my friends have, and the way my mother's friends have done for her. There are some things that men just do not get, and that's the beauty of female friendships and interactions.

The Dalai Lama once said that "A tree with strong roots can withstand the most violent storm," and that is something that is true in black womanhood. The roots of our relationships with other black women will help through anything, and it should not just be through our struggles but our triumphs as well.



# SELF-REFLECTION

AMY TAYLOR

## ON DECEMBER 25th, 1983

on a New England frozen winter morning, I was born to a black father and white mother who loved me dearly. My family moved to California in 1985 where I grew up in a predominantly white suburb of Los Angeles. In all honesty, my environment was color blind and I had a very happy and healthy childhood. As I have gotten older I understand how fortunate I was to have not experienced the painful truths about identity. I never had to choose to identify as “black” or “white” because I only identified as Amy.

That being said, I did have the normal teenage insecurities. I didn't have white features, but also did not look like anyone else I knew. My features did not resemble my mom and she was unable to teach me standard beauty skills, which made me feel isolated. Luckily, I had supportive friends who didn't see my curly hair, or my bushy eyebrows and they never made me ever feel less than beautiful.

When I went to college in the fall of 2002 I was not prepared for the exposure of black culture and with it, internal racism. My sheltered upbringing made me naïve to the twisted concepts such as “skin tone ranking” and “oversexualized black woman”. It blew my mind because I grew up in liberal Los Angeles where I was exposed to history and the melting-pot genetics of our city, and I thought myself cultured. I remember my parents standing in solidarity during the Rodney King beatings and the LA Riots. In fact, I only know my black family, as my mother was disowned by her parents. So the first time exposure to the black community and its struggles was a very impactful period of my life.

**The biggest lie I've been told about my blackness is that I am not black enough.**

When people look at me the last ethnic group they “guess” (because of course it's a game to figure my genetic makeup) is black. My natural hair is tight and curly, but I wear it straight these days. My go-to joke is that I tell people, “I am black similar to the look of Rashida Jones.”

My skin is light brown, and I look like my ancestors, but to my peers I was not “black enough” because I didn't resemble a stereotypical black woman.

This was not my interpretation; those two words “not enough” were said to my face on several occasions. That was a hard lesson to learn during my freshman year of college. I struggled with identity for the first time in my life.

That got me thinking about the stereotypical black woman and the black queen. Think about it. Definitions, constraints, and classifications used for purposes of control. These grandiose notions are alive and well in the twenty-first century. Black women are a diverse spectrum of hue and magic that weave together to make up

a community, and when we judge one another off of stereotypes it becomes a never-ending vicious cycle. For me, the reality is that I am never going to fit the white beauty standard or the black beauty standard. I have learned that there is no one way to be black, just as there is no one way to be human.

Earlier in the year there was an art exhibition in LA titled Skin. One of the exhibits had blank books and patrons were encouraged to write a story of their testimony.

#### **This was my entry:**

*“Last year, in 2015, I approached a (black) man whom I was interested in dating. As the conversation progressed we had a lot in common. I revealed that civil rights are also important to me and that I am indeed a black woman. He proceeded to laugh in my face. When I asked him why, he said that he assumed it was a joke. According to him, white women target black men and he figured that his skin tone was the main reason I was contacting him.”*

In the past few years I have been embracing my black woman identity. Through self-reflection I uncovered that my biggest hang-up was in how others saw me. While, I wholeheartedly identified as a black woman, I knew the world didn't see me as black and it was confusing. My insecurities would strike in public, especially if I was out with a black man. Would people judge me thinking he was out with a white woman? This false notion of acceptance in hindsight is ridiculous, but the feeling's justified.

My truth is, I am American. My parents are American. I can't claim an African continent as my heritage. I can't convince others and prove my worth. I am uniquely my mother and father's loved child.

Over the past year I decided to take my blackness into my hands. I have joined several organizations in Los Angeles, including the Urban League on a path of self-discovery among my peers. On this journey I have found passionate and loving sisters and brothers who make me feel valued and loved. My truth is I am black girl magic, which to me means acceptance, community, and abundance.

## ABOUT AMY

Amy Taylor is a Los Angeles native who has made a career in the entertainment industry. Having worked for high-profile studios, Disney and Warner Bros., she has taken her business skills to help “person of color” owned businesses with marketing strategies. Her goal is to tackle each facet of the industry to help propel positive representation of all ethnicities on screen, in music, and beyond.

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# BLACK BEAUTY VS. AMERICAN BEAUTY

MALIKA PENN

## **There are many lies told about black womanhood.**

The biggest lie I was ever told was that the black woman is inferior. Now in a literal way, we are. The black woman is always viewed as the “last resort”! I viewed myself that way for quite some time until I did some digging. I did a bunch of research on the Black Panthers and a few other organizations whose sole purpose was to uplift and unite black people.

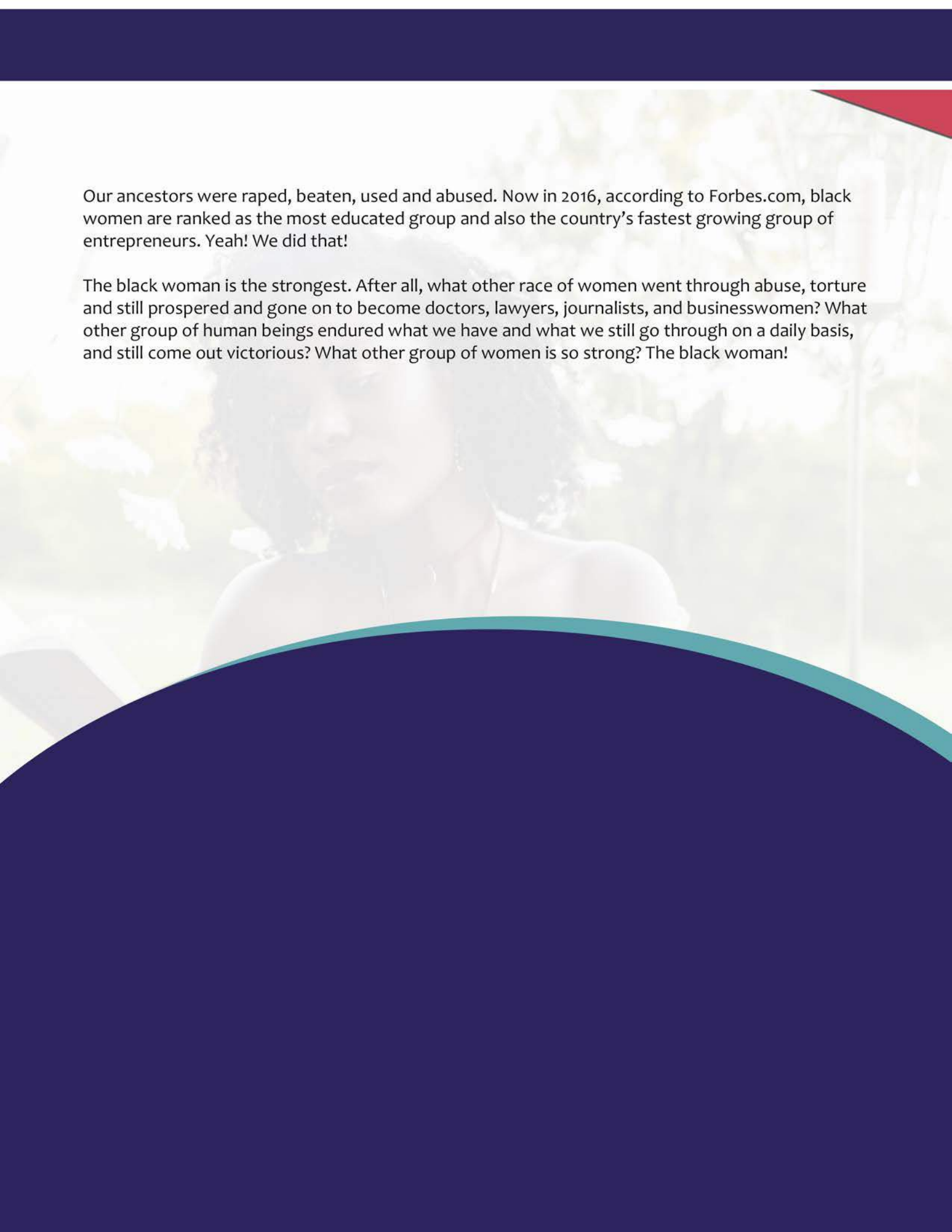
It wasn't until I became “conscious” that I realized how other cultures of women emulate and try to imitate us in so many ways. By that time I'd realized how many other lies I was probably told or influenced by; that being the very reason why I viewed myself as inferior and inadequate in this society.

The black woman is a queen—nothing more, nothing less. We are curvy, we are dark, we have hair that protects us from the sun, we have round noses, we have full lips. The reason I know black women are queens is because people of other cultures spend thousands of dollars to look exactly like us. They tan. They get breast augmentation. They get butt lifts or injections. They get lip fillers. They get their body contoured to be curvy. It is apparent that what we look like is what they wish to look like. Only, our bodies, our faces, our curves, and our hair is natural.

How can a group be so inferior, yet influence millions of women to look the exact same way? Research has shown that the only way a large group of people will follow something or someone is if they appeal to the lifestyle they want to live or do live.

Being a black woman is the most beautiful thing that you can be, but it's painful. We are told that straight hair is beautiful, thinner noses are beautiful and lighter skin is beautiful. But in reality the nappy hair, round nose and dark skin are the very things that makes us so unique. The saddest thing about these views is they're usually put into our heads by our own people; people who aren't educated on why black is so beautiful.

My truth is educating myself on why the black woman is so strong after being knocked down for centuries. Our ancestors fought for us. They gave us the right to vote, the right to learn and the right to advance. Those were the tools given to us to continue our greatness. When you educate yourself and get to know your roots, you realize that we've been through the most. So educate yourself, educate your friends, educate our baby girls. Let them know that black is beautiful and that they can be anything that they want to be.



Our ancestors were raped, beaten, used and abused. Now in 2016, according to Forbes.com, black women are ranked as the most educated group and also the country's fastest growing group of entrepreneurs. Yeah! We did that!

The black woman is the strongest. After all, what other race of women went through abuse, torture and still prospered and gone on to become doctors, lawyers, journalists, and businesswomen? What other group of human beings endured what we have and what we still go through on a daily basis, and still come out victorious? What other group of women is so strong? The black woman!



# THEY WANT YOU TO BE YOURSELF IN A SOCIETY THAT'S TELLING YOU NOT TO BE

TAMARA JACKSON

## I HAD TO BE ABOUT 11 OR 12-YEARS-OLD, WATCHING TV WITH MY GRANDMOTHER WHEN I BLURTED OUT, "WOW SHE NEEDS A PERM."

We were watching *Girlfriends* and the woman who I believed was in deep need of a perm was Tracee Ellis Ross, star of the show who is still, to this day, known for her voluminous and glorious fro (which I now idolize). But about 15 years ago within that moment, with my grandmother, that fro, in my mind, needed more than a few strokes of the almighty, trusty hot comb.

My grandmother reacted to my comment with confusion "Why does she need a perm?"

I replied, "Because her hair is very nappy."

My grandmother attempted to correct and teach, "No, her hair is not nappy, it's within its natural state. Her hair is beautiful."

Her attempt at correction fell upon deaf ears. Now, looking back upon this exact situation, I had obtained a brainwashed mindset. My final reply in this conversation was, "It's not beautiful grandma, it has to be straight."

A child's initial reaction to society occurs at school—whether it's daycare, Pre-K etc. Anywhere children are around other children in a close environment, children begin to explore, observe and experiment. Kids are around other kids, some who look like them, whether it's ethnicity, race, religion, height, and body structure. There are other kids within the same environment who don't look like them. There's absolutely nothing wrong with differences, but from a realistic standpoint, where differences are present, comparing and contrasting will also occur.

It begins once children are in a setting that's beyond their immediate family. Perception plays a major role and at a young age, the way you perceive things is immensely simple. My little sister had to be about 5-years-old when she came home from school crying hysterically uttering the words, "I want straight long hair. Why can't I have good hair? I hate my hair."

"Good Hair"? What is go- nevermind, we will definitely come back to that. But that's where it begins, kids believe an ideology whether it's right or wrong, and carry it throughout their lives within themselves. That ideology is directly correlated to society.

As I grew older, I slowly but surely deemed that the world was cruel and diminutive within its infrastructure of standards it abides by. Certain elements of life depicted how cruel the world could actually be. I knew that, but I didn't understand or directly feel the intensity of society's standards until I decided to go natural. I was 23 when I realized I just couldn't take it—braids, twists, weaves, any of it. The rotation of hairstyles and expense of each trip to the salon was driving me closer and closer to the

edge until I finally leaped off.

"I'm cutting this crap out and cutting my hair short!" I screamed into the phone to my boyfriend.

He agreed with any decision or direction I decided to make with my hair but always slipped into any conversation pertaining to my hair, "It's beautiful. But your natural hair is just as beautiful." To my boyfriend as well as myself, being "natural" meant wearing your natural hair with no add-on extensions or weaves. Little did I know being natural opened up a whole new realm of life for me.

When I decided to go natural, I did what any other woman does: go to Target and spend hundreds of dollars on Shea Moisture and other natural hair care products. I quickly came to the conclusion that I had absolutely no idea what I had gotten myself into. There were so many methods and techniques of styling affiliated with precise products to get the "perfect look". There was a variation of occurrences where I literally had to give myself a pep talk not to revert back to relaxed hair. Then I stumbled upon all of these blogs that embraced natural hair newbies.

The natural hair community is beautiful within complexity, consisting of women with luxurious long healthy locks of hair sprouting from their head. In all honesty, I felt a bit apprehensive because of immediate thoughts within my head, "These ladies have such long hair, they have good hair. We are not in the same lane." "Good hair" once again...

Practice definitely makes perfect. I displayed my afro proudly on a daily basis. I felt so closely connected with my culture. I felt powerful within myself and the most beautiful and carefree I'd ever felt in my life. My boyfriend was very receptive of my hair and loved it as much as I did. But with every beauty there's ugly. Contrary to belief, Caucasian men loved my hair and complimented me upon it numerous times throughout the day. Caucasian women stared at me, distasteful stares, uncomfortable stares.

There would be so many times I would be on the train traveling from The Bronx to downtown Manhattan and I could feel the difference within the population of the energy towards me. What surprised me most and always left me completely astonished was my own people's perception of natural hair. They were anything less than embracing. The majority of black men were literally not here for it. They would look and then quickly look away. Black women had more than a few things to say, which were more bad than good.

The only people who "got it," who understood, were women who were traveling the same natural hair journey. Some woman cheered me on, some thought they were being uplifting, but were bashing me in the same breath.

"Oh no I could never do this, it's too much."

"It's just not for me."

"It just doesn't go with different outfits."

"If I had good hair I would do it, but I am nappy and I hate the nappy look."

Then they'd have the audacity to ask "Can I touch your hair?"

Well, I hate the word "nappy". I once had a male scream in front of a crowded train at the top of his lungs because I wasn't receptive to his pickup line "GET YA NAPPY ASS HAIR DONE!" I was shocked. I thought my Bantu Knot afro looked pretty bomb that day! Actually, there are many situations of that caliber I endured that began to break me down.

Nappy is often referenced to black men and women hair textures. We have kinky hair which goes back to our ancestors. In Africa, our kinky hair protects our head from the sun frying our scalp. Know your history before you label an entire ethnicity and people. The good hair that people so often refer to as "not nappy" is loose, curly, long hair that most people believe a black male or female can only obtain if they are mixed with another ethnicity. All of this derives from universal thoughts within an unwritten rule book to life that we as a society feed off of,



and whisper amongst ourselves. No! let's speak upon these wrongs loudly and proudly! Let's speak these truths in front of people so they can feel as uncomfortable as we have to live every day. Things have to change, it is imperative! Society needs it!

Not many of us will admit it, the world's perception of us can immensely devalue how we view ourselves. Some will consider it weak; I consider it truthful. I felt broken down to an extremely low point when people would stare at me as if I were some wild, filthy animal because my hair differed from theirs. I consistently told myself "It's okay, they just don't understand. Watch when it grows." Understand. Understand what? Why should my difference in features consistently be compared to the idolized beauty protocol that America has been so enticed with affect anyone? Why would people think that it is of any type of normalcy to stare at another human being and leave that individual feeling comfortable? Why was my hair not considered "Good"? Because it wasn't long? Because it wasn't straight? Because my curls were tight and not loose and flowing? I wanted to know why.

Corporate America didn't make me feel any better about my natural hair either. How many women would honestly go to a job interview with their hair in a fro? No matter how beautiful you, yourself or significant other deemed it to be, "it's not professional or presentable". I have read numerous articles exemplifying this heinous ideology. I would feel as if I was a walking display case of discomfort very often, unable to make eye contact. Why? Because I allowed them to make me feel as if I wasn't beautiful. Because embracing my blackness made society feel uncomfortable and their energy was passed to me...

Society has lied to me as a black woman within the undeclared notion that black women are not naturally beautiful. Society has amplified the notion that black women need the add-ons to resonate as beautiful. Society has amplified the notion that there is some sort of protocol or standard of beauty that black women don't measure up to. We are all beautiful. Society's

fabrication of what beauty is doesn't measure up to our beauty as a whole. That our melanin endowed skin and our own thick kinky coiled hair does not measure up to society's standard of beauty.

No one dares to ever say it, but it's indirectly displayed everywhere. You must have lighter skin and softer hair to be deemed beautiful. For instance, Blue Ivy Carter is about 5-years-old and has already been verbally abused by society, let alone the media since birth.

"Her parents should be ashamed of themselves, all of that money and they can't find someone to do her hair."

"Blue's hair is so nappy."

"Blue is ugly & that hair..."

Sadly, I've heard these exact sentiments from other races but the majority from my own race. We must have a different set of eyes. I see a little girl who, from day one, has always been beautiful. Her parents want her to wear her hair in its natural state. "I like my baby hair, with baby hair and afros," (2 snaps for Beyoncé). I hate to display a comparison but it's necessary. North West's hair is very often displayed within its natural state, just like Blue's. North West's hair is usually in an afro, just like Blue's. North West usually has little ponytails, just like Blue. But North West is repeatedly displayed as a beautiful little girl, so why not Blue?

My truth as a black woman, is I am beautiful. I have luscious melanin skin and thick, natural, healthy kinky hair to match. I am not only a beautiful black woman, I am a beautiful woman overall. I remember going on vacations to other countries or even anywhere within the US me and my friends would often say, "I want to look good; I want to go for the exotic look." Which, in our eyes meant, long Brazilian hair sewn into ours. When all along we didn't cope with the fact that we already look exotic. We have rich skin and almond shaped eyes; we look damn good already.

Natural, organic beauty no preservatives added!

But I will never bash anyone for wearing weaves, extensions, makeup or anything. None of those elements can make or break a woman who is fully aware of who she

No standard of lighter skin or softer, longer hair could ever shatter my self-image of beauty. I wake up full every day; full with the abundance of life.

she is. Society's standard of beauty is idiotic, demeaning and hazardous. Cruel amplifications of black women or black little girls can shatter their interior and cause them to harm themselves. We, as humans, are responsible as individuals and as a whole for the energy we give off not only in society but the universe as well.

All women are beautiful, every single one of us. Don't categorize us or belittle us because we differ in appearance. It's disgusting and immoral. My truth is that I didn't have to find myself within society, I created myself. I am a strong minded, well-rounded beautiful woman inside and out. No standard of lighter skin or softer, longer hair could ever shatter

my self-image of beauty. I wake up full every day; full with the abundance of life. I have ultimately come to terms that I shall not let fear or any form of ideology shame me for being in love with my culture. It's my birthright as a human. I am now ready to live in all ways possible as a black woman--society can't take that from me anymore...

## ABOUT TAMARA

Born and raised within the uptown Bronx area of NYC. From a very young adolescent age, Tamara had taken a keen interest within writing and storytelling. She often expresses her idolization of her grandmother for always encouraging her to pursue her dreams of writing and keeping in mind that her own words will allow her to live her most vivid dreams.

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# STRONG BLACK WOMEN ARE WRONG BLACK WOMEN

CHRISTINA LEATRICE

## STRONG BLACK WOMEN ARE WRONG BLACK WOMEN...

in so many words, that is the lie they tell us. They say society today has allowed women in general to forget their place. But for black women it is 10 times worse because of almost everything we do. They describe it as being over the top; being "extra".

A vocal black woman is an angry black woman. A black woman embracing her natural femininity and choosing natural appearance is a pro black and anti-white, black woman. She is labeled ugly because she doesn't meet society's standards of beauty. A single black woman working two jobs, careful about whom she spends time with and splurges on herself is a black woman who is TOO independent.

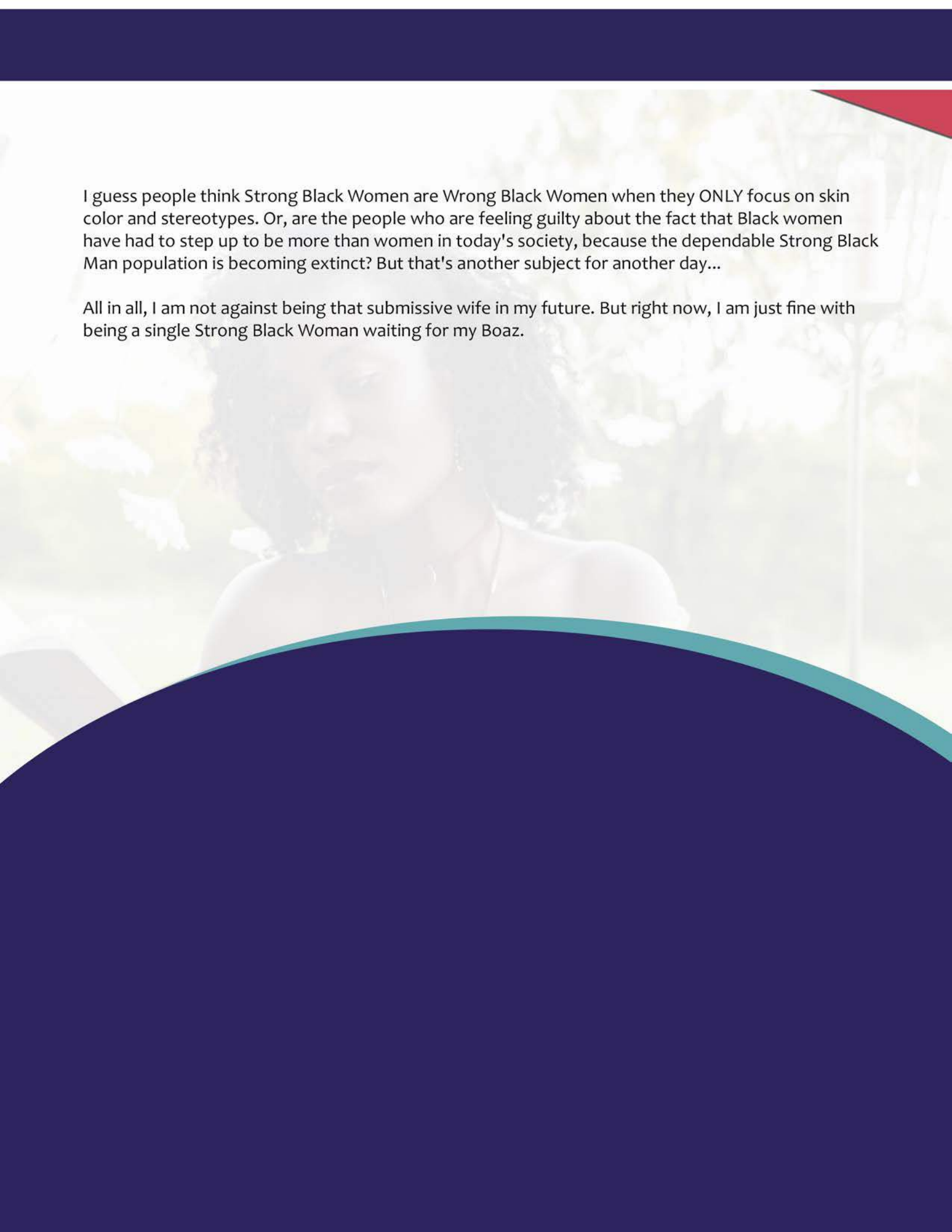
We don't know our place. Strong Black Women are Wrong Black Women...at least that's what they tell us.

But I am a Strong Black Woman who was raised by the hands of two even Stronger Black Women—my mother and my grandmother. They worked for everything they had and have. They made sure their family was fed, safe and loved. They spoke up when they saw something wrong and they always taught me to be the unique person I am. It was about doing what was right and making sure I was happy and healthy. That was all I needed to see and hear in my life because it has molded me into a strong black woman myself.

That's the exact mentality I have. I was taught to be the voice when something is wrong. I was taught to not care so much about what people think of my appearance and choices. I was taught to make a plan for what needs to be done and dominate.

My truth: I've heard that lack of submission will be the cause of me being single for the rest of my life. And also being too guarded will allow my true love to pass me by. Some people may say that these qualities will block love from finding us. So strength and caution are potential downfalls?

No, I do not believe that. I choose to be a single black working woman, who can handle my own. I learned that it's okay to do it alone and it'll be even better IF the right man enters my life WILLING to contribute equally. It will definitely be a team effort. But until then, I still have needs that must be taken care of. If I don't do it, who will? All of these qualities are qualities of a virtuous woman; someone who speaks for what is right, confident in herself and doesn't mind hard work. What man wouldn't appreciate that? What person wouldn't respect that?



I guess people think Strong Black Women are Wrong Black Women when they ONLY focus on skin color and stereotypes. Or, are the people who are feeling guilty about the fact that Black women have had to step up to be more than women in today's society, because the dependable Strong Black Man population is becoming extinct? But that's another subject for another day...

All in all, I am not against being that submissive wife in my future. But right now, I am just fine with being a single Strong Black Woman waiting for my Boaz.



# THEY LIED, I'M MORE THAN ENOUGH

CRISSI PONDER

## I've been told that I'm not enough.

My frame is too curvy. My hair is too kinky. My teeth should be straighter. My smile should be bigger.

My stomach should be flatter. My waist should be nonexistent. My breasts should grow a cup size or two.

I should fit the mold for what society deems attractive, desirable and palatable.

I've been told that the way I already show up in the world is not enough.

I have to work 10 times as hard as my Caucasian counterparts to get a fraction of what they have. There isn't a brown-colored version of white mediocrity.

Then I have to work 10 times harder to keep the crumbs I'm able to grab. The odds are often unfavorable but I'm told to suck it up, because that's the way things are.

I can never be average. It's overwhelming when you're obliged to be exceptional in all that you do. I can't screw up. I can't make a misstep.

I can't be too assertive or I'll come off as intimidating. I have to paint on my poker face for each daily dose of microaggressions I'm forced to swallow.

I must constantly be grateful for what's spitefully thrown my way. I'm not supposed to want more for myself. I'm not supposed to assign myself a set of standards to cling to, neither professionally nor personally.

And speaking of personally, I'm frequently told to play small in order to be "wifey material". I can't expect too much from my partner. I can't demand to be treated and loved a certain way or

I have to be careful not to intimidate men so they won't fold under pressure and flee. I have to personify tired gender stereotypes to make them comfortable, which includes walking on eggshells to protect their fragile egos. I can't just be.

I have to be mild-mannered and meek. I shouldn't have a voice that calls bullshit on the unjust things I experience. I'm meant to be a silent spectator to the perpetual stripping and dissecting and appropriating of my black womanhood.

But I won't.

I won't let the countless lies I'm told about who I'm supposed to be continue to shape who I am.

I can't look for validation from a world that rejects me but capitalizes on my essence. I won't further internalize where I'm told I fall short or fail to measure up.

I will revel in the beauty, boldness and brilliance wrapped up in my existence as a black woman.

## I am more than enough.

### About Crissi

Crissi is an Atlanta-based writer who has been creating since she could hold a pen steady between her fingers. She believes in fighting through self-doubt by refusing to sit on her words.

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## NAVIGATING BLACK WOMANHOOD

MELISSA MICKENS

**It is very hard to have the strength and courage to explore, learn and grow as a woman without strong relationships.**

In all honesty, when it comes to lies and truths as it relates to my black womanhood, I am at a loss. Simply because at this moment in time, I'm finally beginning to understand what "womanhood" means to me. Ideas like this one are so large in scope when you have to magnify something that is instinctual to you.

So when it comes to the biggest lie, I guess it has to be what society equates with "black womanhood". I'm not strong, large, urban, or loud, but I do see myself as a young woman who has something important to say and has the talents, gifts and wonderful support system (strong family and friendships) to try to get them out into the world.

The biggest truth, therein, lies with relationships. It is very hard to have the strength and courage to explore, learn and grow as a woman without strong relationships. People who will call you out on your bull\*\*\*\*, but who you also know you can call in times of trouble, self-doubt, or fear.



# METAMORPHOSIS OF MY TRUTH

JOY WOODS

## IN THE PAST WEEK AND A HALF,

I have had three anxiety attacks. These attacks consisted of shortness of breath, blurred vision, hand tremors and the complete lack of ability to function. It was so bad, I missed an entire day of class—which is not a good thing when you're in your first semester of graduate school. I wish I could say that this was my first bout of anxiety, the massive cloud hanging over me. This dark cloud didn't just bring anxiety, it brought the reign of depression. This "one-two punch" to my mental health has even landed me a short stint in a county psych ward due to suicidal thoughts.

I left my doctor's appointment this week where I was tested for Generalized Anxiety Disorder and prescribed antidepressants when I realized the answer to the question: What is the biggest lie I have been told about my black womanhood? The biggest lie—even though it was subconscious—was black women are strong, and any emotional distress is viewed as a weakness and a mutation of your black womanhood.

As I am writing these words and discussing my personal battles, I am almost embarrassed; however, my truth is that this is a real issue and does not make me less of a black woman—or less of a person in general. Walking in this truth openly is a struggle, sometimes I almost feel like I am wearing a scarlet letter or some symbol that denotes my mutation. I am fearful that my professors will view me as incapable of being in graduate school and my classmates will judge or make fun of me. Or when I talk to my father, he will blame me for my anxiety and say it is my fault. All of these thoughts are racing through my head 24/7, and it makes it even harder to function daily.

But, as I am writing these words I am slowly being freed. Freed from the notion that I am imperfect and broken. Actually, I am more whole than I have ever been. I look back over my life and could list the things I have already accomplished even while

dealing with anxiety. And I realize I am not any less of a strong woman. I have interned on Capitol Hill, I have interned in law offices, and even landed a research position at University of Iowa—where I am currently pursuing my MPH in Health Policy. I did all of these things on my own. Does this not show you that I am strong? Strength is carrying on and pushing through issues like depression and anxiety to achieve your goals, as well as seeking help when needed.

My truth is I struggle with mental health issues and I am a black woman. I have not lost my black card. I do not have something wrong with me that makes me less human. My truth is that some days are harder than others to wake up and get out of bed, but my truth is also I push myself to do it. I do it for me, to prove myself right. I do it for the little girls who look up to me. I do it for my family, to make them proud. And I do it for my late mother, so she knows I am strong just like her.

The fact of the matter is, mental health has had this stigma wrapped around it for far too long, especially in the black community and it is time for it to stop. I hope by me telling my very own truth someone somewhere can live in theirs.



# RECOGNIZE LIES

DALE FRANCIS-FORTEAU

**CHANCES ARE IF YOU ARE AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN, YOU HAVE** been bombarded all of your life with all sorts of nonsense masquerading as facts about your heritage, physical beauty, intelligence and contributions black people have made to American history, or your general overall worth to American society. This is UNACCEPTABLE. No other culture is so beset upon with such vehement disrespect as our culture. We're looked upon as a race of people who serve no real purpose in this country, and generally speaking, we're portrayed to the world as worthless, baby-makers or criminals who speak the language of "Ebonics" and collect public assistance, rather than pursue education that'll result in gainful employment or business ownership.

It's believed that we have no inner drive to contribute anything but problems to American society. The full reality of our lives is far from these unfortunate stereotypes. These lies are perpetuated and manipulated so often by outsiders to our community that even people who come to the US from other countries arrive with a perverted vision of the average African-American person. It's past time we right these wrongs committed against us.

Being an African-American female, I can personally speak to the unjust, mean-spirited lies about my personage that are so constant, I have learned to put up my own walls to the abusive talk in order to exist here. These walls are my vibranium armor (Black Panther reference ☒) against the persistent unfair and unjust pummeling my character takes from ignorant, ill-informed people who don't even know me.

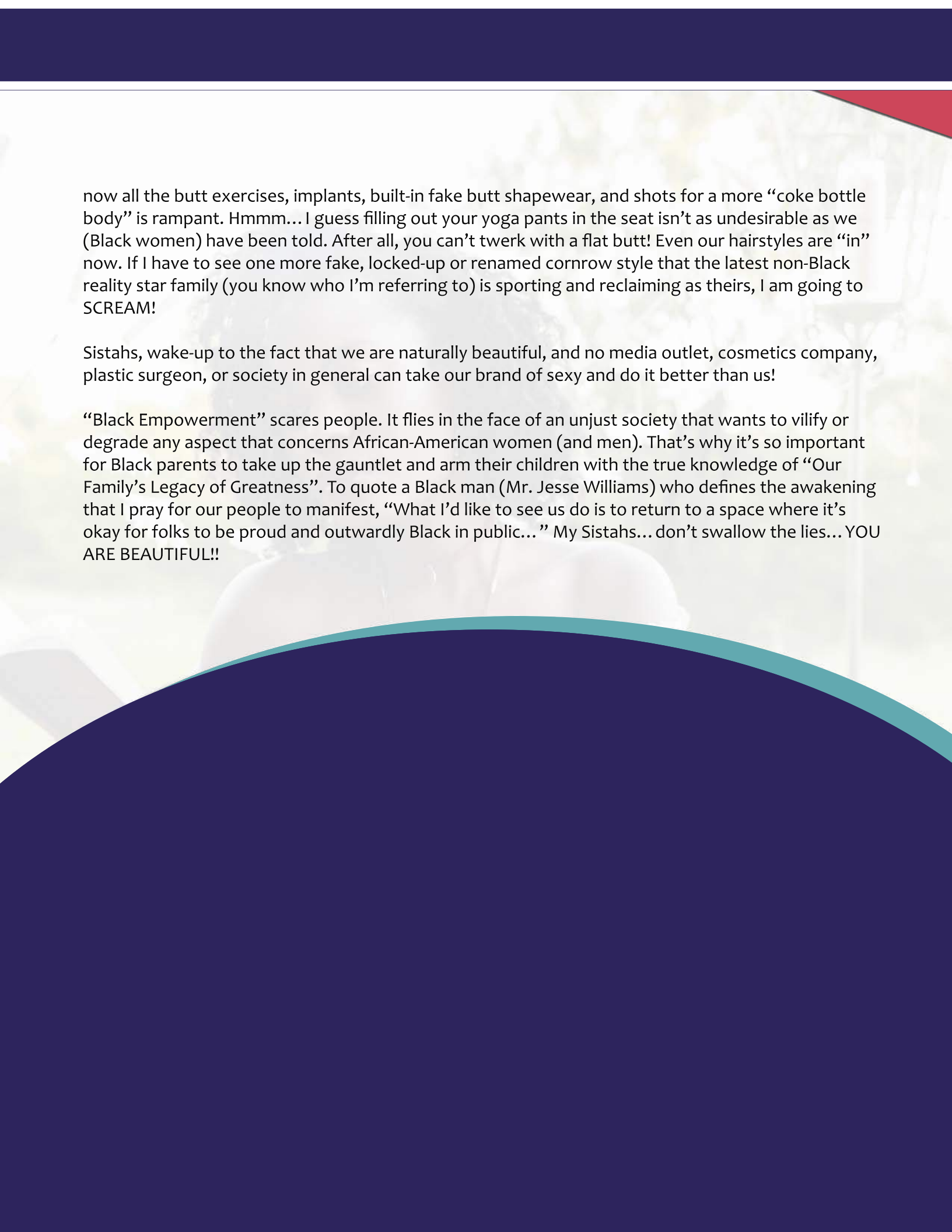
To discuss every unjust belief about African-American womanhood would not be something totally accomplished in an article, so I'll just touch on the subject of our beauty. The African-American woman was blessed with as much beauty, and in my personal opinion, more

beauty than other races of women. That's not to diminish the beauty other women naturally possess, but I happen to personally feel that our full lips, curvy hips, wavy/curly hair, almond-shaped or doe-like eyes, high cheekbones, and hourglass shape have been so often imitated and plastically duplicated to the point of people believing they do it better than God.

To this I say, "Not so fast!" Let's open our eyes to how we've been spoon-fed lies about our physical beauty, ladies. I was raised in a family that taught all girls that our God-given physical beauty is but one reason to walk with our heads held high, no matter what the media at large says about us. (Thank God for strong and proud African-American family bonds!) Black women have been told our facial features are too large and misshapen and our skin is too dark to reflect beauty, yet cosmetics companies and the cosmetic surgery industry pedal our beauty. Full lips, high cheekbones, and exotic eye makeup tricks to reshape or contour eyes, and not to mention spray-on tans to give the appearance of exotic beauty and opulence. REALLY?! How many Sistahs were whispered about and had their ample posterior was ogled as they walked by?

Well, obviously, the smack talk was just the green-eyed monster rearing its ugly head in other women because





now all the butt exercises, implants, built-in fake butt shapewear, and shots for a more “coke bottle body” is rampant. Hmmm... I guess filling out your yoga pants in the seat isn’t as undesirable as we (Black women) have been told. After all, you can’t twerk with a flat butt! Even our hairstyles are “in” now. If I have to see one more fake, locked-up or renamed cornrow style that the latest non-Black reality star family (you know who I’m referring to) is sporting and reclaiming as theirs, I am going to SCREAM!

Sistahs, wake-up to the fact that we are naturally beautiful, and no media outlet, cosmetics company, plastic surgeon, or society in general can take our brand of sexy and do it better than us!

“Black Empowerment” scares people. It flies in the face of an unjust society that wants to vilify or degrade any aspect that concerns African-American women (and men). That’s why it’s so important for Black parents to take up the gauntlet and arm their children with the true knowledge of “Our Family’s Legacy of Greatness”. To quote a Black man (Mr. Jesse Williams) who defines the awakening that I pray for our people to manifest, “What I’d like to see us do is to return to a space where it’s okay for folks to be proud and outwardly Black in public...” My Sistahs... don’t swallow the lies... YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL!!

# SHORT, FAT & UGLY

TORRI R. OATS

I was around 14 or 15 when those very words were used to describe me. It was from a boy whom I'd met at a basketball game. He was actually one half of a set of identical twins, but I preferred him. He humored me to my face but voiced his real opinion behind my back. Through small town gossip, his comments eventually found their way to my ears. I wasn't sure how to react to his words. I have never been much of a cryer when it came to my own life, so my reaction was more of disbelief. He planted weeds that continued to sprout for years to come.

His criticism came at an age when I was the least comfortable in my own skin. My body was transitioning from girlhood to a womanhood, and I was coping with its changes. When I looked in the mirror I saw a chubby face, boring eyes, uninvited pimples and a butt that was too big. I had breasts that didn't seem to belong with the rest of my body and I'd started growing hair in places that I had to shave. Those were just the physical changes. I was also socially awkward—a shy, athletic nerd who only felt at home on a basketball court. Around boys all of my insecurities were magnified a thousand times. I worried they saw me as I saw myself.

Although I struggled with a negative self-image, I had never been that harsh. I knew I was short, but I thought of myself as “athletically built”. Though my face was not perfection, I didn't consider myself “ugly”. I could see the good which offset the negative. But his comments cut me to my core and made me question everything I thought I knew about myself.

I wondered if others thought the same thing and if I was the one who was lying to myself?

His painfully seared words became a springboard for a journey that began with self-loathing and later transformed into self-love. However, I didn't wake up one morning and decide the words he spoke were lies. Rather, it was a series of twists and turns that led me to discover my own truth.

In the immediate aftermath, I was determined to fix some of my “flaws”. I began chugging Slim Fast until my mother discovered my secret stash hidden in my favorite reading spot—my closet. I obsessively washed, scrubbed and moisturized my face. I was raised to discard the noise and lies people told me, but it was easier said than done.

For years, I randomly thought of the words “short, fat and ugly”. I have never worn a size larger than six, but it didn't matter. When I studied myself, my stomach always seemed larger than it was, my thighs fatter and my butt thicker. In my eyes I was still what he labeled me as.

As I've matured, I've maintained a commitment to fitness and health. Regular exercise and clean living are priorities. My body has changed as I've filled out in certain areas and slimmed down in others. My face shed its baby fat and my skin is long past its weird hormonal stage. There's nothing I can do about my height, but I carry myself with an outward confidence that matches the inside.

Years later, he wound up getting a job where my mom worked. He walked into her office one day and worked my name into their conversation. He got nowhere. A reliable source told me that he said, “I heard Torri looks good now.” I smiled. His more recent assessment of me was simply an ego boost. As I began to love myself more and more, I realized that I didn't need him to validate me nor did I require his stamp of approval.

The woman that I am is not defined by anyone's standard of beauty. The woman that I am is one who is confident in her own skin, embraces her assets and flaws, and continues to live her life on her own terms.



# UNTITLED

KIMARA HARRINGTON

## WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL MY HAIR USED

to go from dark brown to a reddish brown in the summer sun. I was born with green eyes, but they turned brown when I was two. Every now and then I will look in the mirror and my green eyes return. My eye and hair color run in my family.

One September when I returned to a southern white Catholic school from summer vacation, our teacher wanted to teach the kids in my class an exercise about how different we are. Hair color, eye color, freckles etc. Each child described his or herself by hair color etc. When it came to be my turn I, of course, said I had reddish brown hair, brown eyes etc.

The teacher looked at me as if I told a lie. She told me in front of everyone that it was impossible for me to have any other hair color but black, because I was black! Therefore my eyes are black and my hair is black! There is no such thing as any other color for me.

I took the backlash, but I was embarrassed and hurt. I couldn't understand why the teacher couldn't see that my hair was lighter than some of the other students. My mother told me to put it out of my head. I could see that she was trying to figure out how to repair the damage, but it was too late. All she could do was soothe my pain.

I cried alone in my bed that night asking so many questions. Why did the teacher look at me as if I were ugly? Why are people so cold and cruel to others? Why would the teacher lie this way? The sad thing is, this lie was just the beginning of the many scars and the baggage I would later carry as a black woman!

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# NOT THE AVERAGE HOLLYWOOD FILMMAKER

CHIQUITA DENNIE

## THE BIGGEST LIE I'VE BEEN TOLD ABOUT MY BLACK WOMANHOOD

is that you'll never make it in Hollywood. A black girl from Tennessee has no business thinking she can be the next Martin Scorsese or Orson Wells. Growing up we've been taught in school to just do enough to get through high school, get your 9-5 job and be happy. A college degree is something you should never even think of attaining.

I was shocked and discouraged from the beginning because nothing is set up to make a big impact on the Arts in Memphis, TN besides music. I decided after watching my first black & white movie to make a change, and with the support of my family, moved out at 18 to live with my aunt in Arizona and attend college. The single most important thing I've ever done, to be able to see a world outside of TN, changed my view on so many things.

I was out on my own at 20 years old and working two jobs to attend school. After graduation, I called my mom and told her I was moving to LA. She didn't believe me at first and was of course scared for me. After some convincing and reminding her that we have family in Arizona and if it doesn't work out for me here, I can always move back to AZ, she was on board and has supported me ever since.

With no place to stay, and leaving for work every morning at 4 AM on the bus and freshly new to LA, it was an eye-opening experience. After many years in LA, I'm lucky to have worked on many different TV shows from The Dr. Phil Show, Tyra Banks Show, Too Late with Adam Carolla, Deal or No Deal, MTV and more. This has led me to establish a few of my own businesses from my passion as a writer. I created "304 Publishing Company," an independent book company showcasing new and established authors. Harrell Street Films, a film production company.

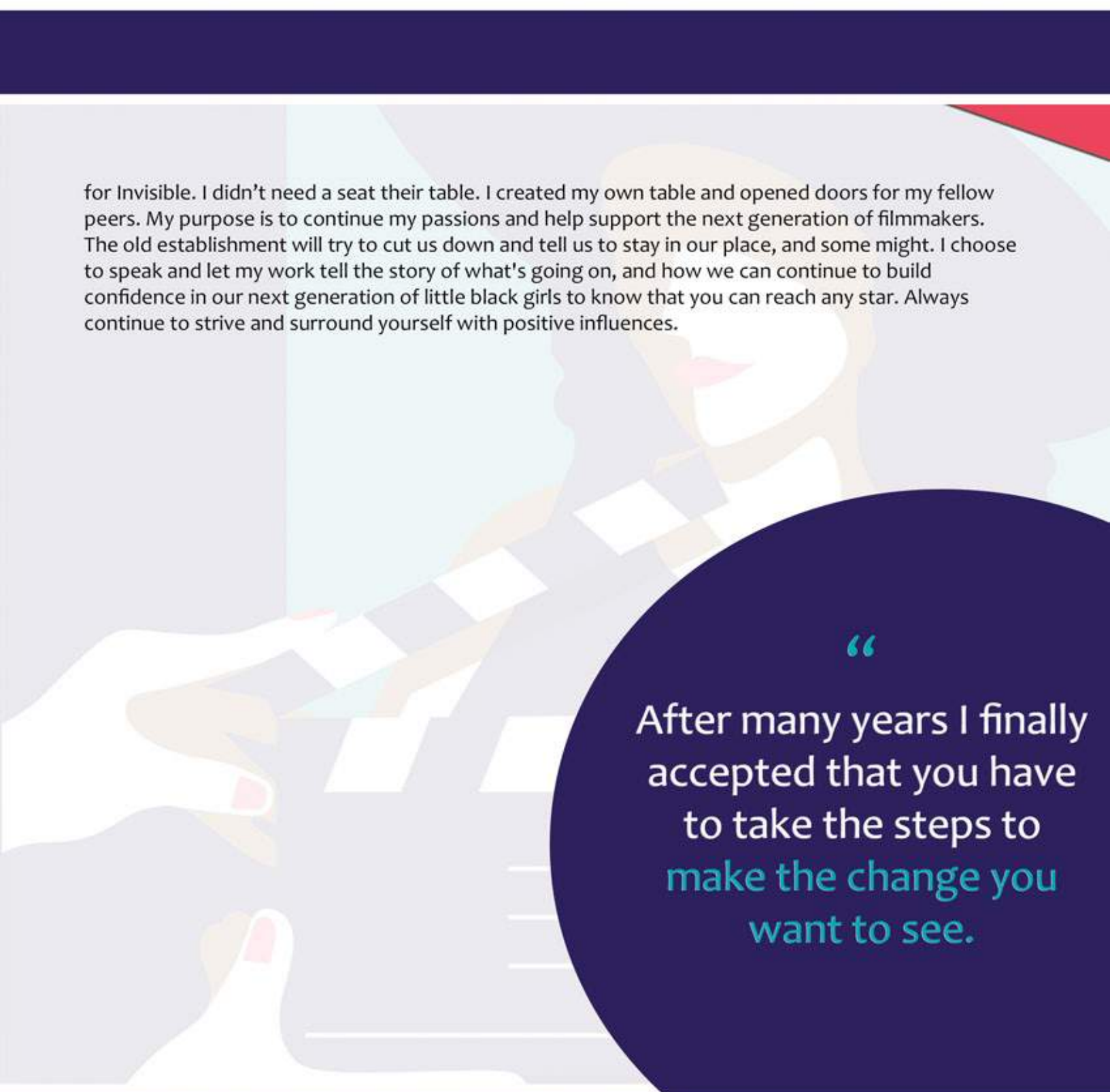
I've written over 15 scripts with a mixture of Film, TV, Short and Digital Media. The first project out of Harrell Street Films is the award-winning short Invisible from Women Only Entertainment Film Festival. I published my first novel this past year, Antonio and Sabrina Struck In Love, with books 2 & 3 releasing in December 2017. Also, I host a podcast Moscato and Tea, an inspiring and funny take on Beauty, Business, and Community. Our stories cross all barriers and encompass a new way of telling our journey from the past to present, and future.

This past year I was featured along with other black female authors in a new magazine, and picked as a semifinalist in a screenwriting competition for two of my screenplays.

What is my Truth? My truth is that I'm a filmmaker, not just a Black Female, Screenwriter, Producer and Director. I was looked at as the girl that wouldn't make it in Hollywood or be thought of as creating something that people would gravitate toward and be interested in. After many years I finally accepted that you have to take the steps to make the change you want to see.

I now strive to live up to the honor of being named an award-winning filmmaker for



An illustration in the background shows two hands, one light-skinned and one dark-skinned, holding a film strip. The film strip has several frames, some of which show a person's face. The background is a mix of light purple, blue, and white. A large dark blue circle is on the right side of the page.

for Invisible. I didn't need a seat their table. I created my own table and opened doors for my fellow peers. My purpose is to continue my passions and help support the next generation of filmmakers. The old establishment will try to cut us down and tell us to stay in our place, and some might. I choose to speak and let my work tell the story of what's going on, and how we can continue to build confidence in our next generation of little black girls to know that you can reach any star. Always continue to strive and surround yourself with positive influences.

“

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**make the change you  
want to see.**

## ABOUT CHIQUITA

Chiquita is a author, screenwriter, producer, director and the founder of Harrell Street Films.

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# US VS THEM: A DIVIDE IN ME

## KEYONNA M.

### **"WE'RE NOT THOSE PEOPLE, [THE PEOPLE] WHO OWN THOUSAND DOLLAR MAC COMPUTERS." - MY MOTHER**

It almost seems trivial now, looking back on the words that my mother said to me when I was twenty years old. I was telling her how I wanted to buy a MacBook Pro because I wanted to get into video editing one day—at the time my school only had the latest video editing software on the Mac computers and because I had never used one, it was something new for me to learn and explore.

The words that I am sure my mother meant to be harmless stuck with me, they haunted me. There was an US and a THEM. In that moment it was made clear to me that I was straddling the line between both.

I am both the little girl who was born, raised, and still resides in the hood, and the grown woman with ambition for greater things. I want to own my own business one day; I want to own a home, a car, and be able to have a nice savings. I didn't want to live paycheck to paycheck and struggle. I didn't want to settle. I didn't want my current situation or the fact that I was born into a poor family determine the type of person that I was or the person that I had the potential to be.

What my mother did with her words was inadvertently placed a stigma in my lap. She planted the seed in my head. I was now painfully aware of the divide between the two sides of me. On the US side was my family, the neighborhood that I grew up in, the people that I knew, it was the street smarts that I had acquired over the years in order to keep myself safe and drama free in my neighborhood.

On the THEM side was the life I was building for myself, it was me as the first person in my family to go to college, me preparing to become a professional woman, my tastes that were growing and evolving, my need to explore and see a world outside of my current surroundings.

My mother's words stuck with me as I made the change from Community College to University. I had graduated with an associate's degree in social work and was moving on to continue my education. Within my first year of University, I was thrown into a few US vs. THEM moments that had me questioning my place on either side.

It came in small, unnoticeable moments to other people but registered as microaggressions to me. It was in the way that my first social work professor complained about her neighbor daily.

"There is this lady on my block who annoys the crap out of me. This woman literally throws food out of her house. I'm talking old bread and rice. She says she is feeding the birds but it is like, 'lady, don't you know you are feeding rodents?' It's disgusting. She's bringing down the quality of our neighborhood."



I sat in class perplexed by what the real problem was. How did a discussion on gentrification and the homeless population in the city turn into my professor bashing her neighbor? Feeding the birds, in my opinion, didn't make this woman disgusting or whatever other offensive term my professor used to describe her neighbor. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised considering that this was the same professor who walked in on the first day of class and after getting a call on her phone, she said to the students in the room, "Hey guys, I have to take this call. We're on the honor system so don't steal my stuff."

I was put off by her statement but I thought I was just a new student being sensitive and not fully understanding how university professors were vs. the professors at my community college.

This, a university and this professor, was a counselor when she wasn't teaching. She couldn't possibly be this insensitive and lack the knowledge to know that just because someone is different than you, doesn't mean that they are less than you? Someone who does something that you wouldn't do, doesn't make them disgusting or wrong, they are just different.

Being a 21-year-old girl in a new environment, I didn't challenge my professor when she would talk down about this woman. I watched other students throw out their two cents, agreeing with my professor. And I just wondered, 'How is this a room full of future social workers and counselors?'

Every time my professor talked about her neighbor, I felt like she was talking about my grandmother or great-grandmother. It was a normal thing for my grandmother and great-grandmother to give us pieces of bread to break up and feed to the birds. As a kid, it was something that I enjoyed. When I was feeding the birds in my backyard, I used to pretend that I was one of those Disney Princesses. It was magical for me. To get to college and find out that some educated woman with multiple degrees considers my little piece of magic as a kid as something disgusting or devaluing, it felt like a personal blow even though it wasn't.

The feeding of the birds stuck with me because my professor used this lady as an example all the time and because it was something so innocent that was made into this bad thing. People go to parks and feed birds, hell I have even seen people on bus stops throw food to pigeons. None of these people were disgusting or devaluing the spot where they fed the birds.

In my public speaking class, I was confronted again with this idea of US vs. THEM. While prepping for a speech debating whether to build a casino in an urban area, a classmate of mine brought up a casino that was located in the city that I was born, raised, and still reside in.

"I would never go to that casino because you risk dying just stepping foot in that city. Those people there, man..." His voice trailed off as he shook his head, him and the three other people in our little group laughed.

Our group was made up of myself and another black woman, two white guys, and a white woman. I didn't fit in with any of them.

The other black woman in my group had come from some nice middle class family with both a mom and a dad. She went to Catholic school and she was the type who laughed at jokes about people in the inner city, people who were working class and working poor.

I felt small in that classroom. I couldn't focus on the speech I was supposed to give because as my group members laughed and cracked a few more "jokes," I was screaming internally, "I'm one of those people. I'm sitting next to you right in this classroom. I'm getting the same education as you and probably working ten times harder because I'm working two jobs to pay for all of this."

But I said nothing. They never knew that I lived in the place that they deemed unworthy of them even stepping one foot in. I felt like a coward for not speaking up, for not defending my community. My inner voice was yelling but I sat there composed. If I had said something, I risked looking too sensitive, too

emotional. They already had formed an opinion of everyone in my community, mentioning that I was one of “those people” would have only made them talk about it behind my back. Remaining silent allowed me to listen to the words directly from the source. I knew first hand what they would think of me if they had saw me in the streets vs. in the classroom.

By the third time the divide between US and THEM came up, I was annoyed but I didn’t take it as a personal blow. I was one in a group of six women working on a project for a leadership class. Myself, another black woman, and four white women made up the group. While leaving the cafe where we held our weekly group meetings, the other black woman looked across the street and made the comment, “It’s crazy that the hood is right there. We pay all this money for school and we are right in the middle of the hood.”

Awkward chuckles and low agreements from other group members followed. It was a slight relief that the other group members were a little more aware of the community around us. They chuckled but it was after a pause and looks around to see if it was okay laugh. It was awkward and you could see their discomfort while in the split second of deciding if it was inappropriate or funny. They found it funny enough to give it a chuckle. I didn’t. The woman who made the comment was ahead of me so she couldn’t see the look I was giving her. Was she just making a random observation? Maybe but it annoyed me coming from her. The neighborhood that she was talking about was predominantly black families living in public housing. No one wants to live in what is deemed a “bad neighborhood,” but for many families, this is all that they have. Her tone held this superiority to it, as if she thought she shouldn’t be breathing the same air as the people in the community surrounding our school.

As quickly as she made the observation, the conversation had flowed onto another topic. I can’t remember what the topic was because I was in my head thinking about her comment. I wasn’t offended because at that point, I had dealt with comments about the inner city, working poor, and

bad communities for two years. I had heard it on every level: a white female professor, a white male classmate, and a black female classmate. There was an US and a THEM and I was straddling the line between both.

At home it was no better. On one hand people acted like they were proud of me for going to college but the second I made a mistake or did something that my family didn’t like, I got called an “educated dummy” or someone would say, “You’re so smart with all that education, why don’t you figure it out?”

I felt like there was nowhere I could turn, no one that I could talk to that would truly understand me. Within my family, no one understood the stresses of going to school full-time while working two jobs. They didn’t understand eight page papers, and thirty minute group presentations. All they saw was that I was never home and they took my absence as running away from my responsibilities.

I can’t lie and say that it didn’t hurt or that I didn’t feel alone because I did. Not having anyone to understand you and not making connections with the people around you, can make a person feel really isolated. Everywhere I turned, I wasn’t good enough and I wasn’t doing enough. For the first time in my life, I felt like a failure. I was failing because I couldn’t even find the balance in me. I was being swallowed whole by two sides that didn’t fully see me.

But somehow in the midst of my isolation, the stubborn part inside of me made the choice that I wasn’t going to let anyone define who I was and who I had yet to become. I wasn’t going to allow the words of my peers to be my judge, jury, and executioner; sentencing me to a lifetime of being silenced and shamed for where I came from and the person that I was because of it. I wasn’t going to allow my mother’s life expectations to be my reality.

I shut out all of the noise and stopped trying appease the US and the THEM. And for the first time in my life, I felt like I got to know me, the real me. Not the lie that people told me about who I was supposed to be.



# LIES GIVEN AND HANDED BACK

LUKI

## **I'VE BEEN TOLD A LOT OF THINGS ABOUT MYSELF.**

"You won't graduate high school", "You won't do much but be just like her", "Nobody will ever love you as much as I do," the list goes on and on. In each situation, I believed them. Not only that, but I behaved the way they wanted me to in order to make these lies a reality.

In each situation I had a close encounter with God that made me see that no matter what lies were told to me, my joy and my magic were given to me for a reason. Playing into what other people had to say wasn't going to get me closer to where I needed to be.

The biggest lies though came from a long-term relationship I was in. He had me believing that he was the only one, that nobody would love me like he did, and that if I left I would never feel love again. He had me believing that his love, as crazy as it was, was the only kind of love I was worth. Overcoming those lies and that mindset wasn't easy and it didn't happen overnight but my persistence, my poetry, and talks with God definitely helped me get through. Morning affirmations and reassuring myself

that I was worth way more than what I was settling for accompanied with my poems checking myself, pushed me to a place of self love and acceptance. "You've been so wrapped up in him that you don't let you pass by watching all your dreams and ambitions die," (line from "Today" by Luki) was a place where I had hit rock bottom in that relationship.

I had to realize that, "This box they want you in doesn't fit...you are a beautiful tornado the calmest tsunami I've ever seen," (line from "Flaws" by Luki) is where I am now, knowing that I am a queen and that no matter what mistakes I've made or what wrong turn I took, I am successful and the true definition of strength. I'm magic and I'm real!!

# THE CAREFREE BLACK WOMAN

ERIN RAUSAW

Being "Young, Wild and Free" is just a phrase to some, but for me I made it into a reality. The world wanted me to conform to fear and I had no desire to do such. Being afraid meant struggling with what my peers thought or felt about me. That would also affect my everyday livelihood in the most negative way. That's what happened until I applied pressure and fell in love with myself.

Falling in love with myself was no easy task. It was simply the hardest thing I've ever encountered in 23 years. It meant loving all of me. Even my aggressive trait that I tried so hard to hide. Being aggressive doesn't make you less of a "typical black woman," if anything, it makes you resilient. It helps you to stand on your own two feet without taking "no" for an answer and giving up. In the spring of 2015, I felt like throwing in the towel. I did absolutely everything within my power to do well and it wasn't working no matter how hard I tried.

I jumped at the opportunity of a change of scenery which helped in the best way. I learned exactly who I was without my friends and family. This BEAUTIFUL BLACK WOMAN was me through trial and error. Making the same mistakes never gave me new results so I stayed afloat, picked up new hobbies and learned to love my laugh, and without hiding my unorthodox personality.

Is happiness the key to a successful life? I indeed would confess it to be true. We all have our

**"Loving yourself  
is an art that no one  
can buy or take  
from you."**

problems in life that give us typical results but why remain sad when you can be happy? Why spend the majority of your energy hating someone when you can make room to love a new hobby or person? You are your own version of what a BLACK WOMAN is and that's what makes you beautiful and unique. Loving yourself is an art that no one can buy or take from you. You have the ability to paint a new canvas everyday, with unlimited paint.



# TRUTH IS: I AM A BRILLIANT BLACK GIRL!

RAVEN COKLEY

## FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER,

I have been labeled as the smart Black girl. Over time, that has come to mean various things when uttered by different people. From elementary to high school, I was tracked for advanced placement, honors and IB courses. I distinctly remember the day that my elementary school principal told my first grade teacher that I needed to be in advanced classes the following year. I was even tested for the gifted program at my school but was denied entry because I hesitated when identifying a fire hydrant.

Anyway, from that day to this one, I have been socialized to be the smart Black girl, by my family, teachers and community members. Attending predominantly White public institutions for my K-12 educational career only amplified this experience. Whenever the school needed a student representative to speak at the school board meetings or for any other “special” occasion, I was always tapped to be the student spokesperson. “Speaking like a White girl” gave me notoriety on campus (even in elementary school) for being the smart Black girl. With this notoriety, however, also came accusations of self-grandeur from my Black peers. However, the truth is that I was not “trying to be White”; I was just speaking how my mother taught me to speak. I did not think that I was better than anyone else; I just found grammar (and learning in general) to be extremely fun and I still do to this day.


Being known as the smart Black girl isolated me from my Black peers. I sat alone, at the front of the school bus, right behind the bus driver (this was my mother’s rule since I was old enough to take the bus alone). After my best friend transferred schools, I ate alone in high school during lunchtime; in fact, I ate alone in the library. Being the only Black girl in IB courses was absolutely traumatizing because I never saw any other Black girls who looked like me, spoke like me or dressed like me. I was all alone. I would literally get off the school bus in the morning and part ways with the other Black kids from the neighborhood as soon as we stepped foot on the campus—my high school was extremely segregated, but this was amplified given that the IB wing was intentionally isolated in its elitism from the rest of the school.

Although my academic career has been in a majority White space, my mother was sure to surround me with Black women in my community whom she trusted to be a part of the village that helped to raise me. I cheered, participated in mentoring programs and engaged in all of my community service endeavors with and for Black folks. I remember vividly being called an Oreo for being “Black on the outside and White on the inside”. I was also told that I was not Black enough to wear certain “urban gear” (my mom had just purchased some Apple Bottom jeans for me and I wore them to school; talk about a throwback!). Though I felt comfortable in being who I was and proud that I was a smart Black girl, I still did not fit in. I did not fit in at school amongst the sea of White students and teachers, nor in my community activities in the neighborhood that I came home to every day. Again, I was all alone.



# My Brilliance allows me to be *free*.

Thus, the biggest lie that I have been told about my Black womanhood was that I was too smart to be Black and too Black to be smart. In essence, I was the exception to both. My truth, however, is that I am a Brilliant Black Girl. I am smart, courageous and lovable because God created me in His image. I do not have to meet anyone else's standards of brilliance, beauty or boldness. I am who God says that I am. I do not have to fit in anywhere because God created me to stand out. As a Brilliant Black Girl, I walk confidently in my purpose, find purpose in my passion and I am passionate about my People. I am not ashamed of my love for learning, for my Brilliance will help me to bring the first PhD into my family. My Brilliance will allow me to show other Black girls who like to "read for fun" or prefer to study on a Friday night that being a Brilliant Black Girl is AWESOME. The truth is, my Brilliance allows me to break barriers; my Brilliance allows me to be FREE.







# ELITE MUST DATE AN ELITE

**NAOMI K. BONMAN**

Since being invited to write on the #LiesTheyTold, I have been pondering for about a good week and half of what lie I have heard coming up as a Black woman.

The one that popped into mind was that as an educated and successful Black woman with many accomplishments and even more to yet be fulfilled, most in our circle expect us to date a man that is also very well educated, has just as many degrees, and just as many accomplishments.

If we come up with the man from the streets, but that has his stuff together, they don't want us with him because he is a "thug," the "bad boy". But men from the streets can just be just as educated, yet they probably didn't go to a four-year university, and have probably only taken a few classes at the local community college, or graduated from a 1-2 year program at a Trade School with his associate's degree, but who can say that he isn't just as educated and will treat his woman with the respect she deserves? At the end of the day, it is how a woman is treated and the happiness that she feels when she is with that man.

We can choose to have a Hill Harper, an elite and handsome Harvard graduate who is scared of commitment, or we can have a Tyrese, the pretty boy from Watts who just married his soul mate and isn't afraid of commitment. Which one do you choose ladies? Let's stop the lie of the status quo when it comes to who we must

date based on what we have accomplished and what we have, and that doesn't mean you have to settle either.

## ABOUT NAOMI

*Naomi K. Bonman is an entertainment and community journalist based out of Southern California. She has been in the field for 11+ years. She has had the pleasure of interviewing big names, such as Kelly Rowland, Chante Moore, Sway Calloway, just name to name a few. She was recognized by the California State Assembly for her work as a News Reporter. Bonman holds her Bachelors of Arts in Mass Media Arts with a concentration in Journalism from Clark Atlanta University, as well as her Masters in Public Administration. She is the founder of Purposely Awakened ([www.purposelyawakened.com](http://www.purposelyawakened.com)) and she is also a screenwriter, author, and youth advocate.*

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# SANDRA'S STORY

## SANDRA

### SEPTEMBER 30, 2016

I am 36. I think that officially qualifies as old. I'm scared.  
Can I say that? I'm not sure I have the right to be, if I'm being honest.  
It's in these pages where I am honest.

I've made something of my life. My future is secure. I've made investments  
and I have a financial woman who's going to make sure the money  
continues to grow. At least I'll know I didn't completely fail.

I can't help feeling like I'm still failing in some way.  
The money is there, but is my mom proud of me?  
Really proud. Am I doing the best I can? Living my  
best life? Making an impact?

I'm thinking differently. I used to be afraid of shining  
too brightly, or being who I am and celebrating me.  
But now we have #BlackGirlMagic and it's doing  
something to us. Such a powerful movement, so  
necessary.

Imagine you are the hated and maybe even the  
hunted. Your features are appropriated. Your style  
diminished. Your qualities demeaned. All that is you  
is mocked, unless your qualities are in a white body.  
Imagine being hated by everybody, and I do mean  
everybody, and all of a sudden you hear the words  
"Black Girl Magic".

It becomes everything. An expression of self love --  
black girl love. A celebration of us. A non-stop party.  
And when it happens, the most influential women in  
the world are black: Beyonce, Bozoma Saint John,  
Oprah, Ava, Nicki, Rihanna -- everybody wants to be  
them and they're just like you.

What an incredible group of women! I hope little  
girls can avoid all the negative stuff I had to face  
before discovering how amazing we are.

Sometimes even I need a reminder. We're  
incredible. Kickass. We're everything. People say  
they hate us 'cause they ain't us. Just remember  
those words when people try to tear you down.  
Those who are the most vocal, most negative,  
are just jealous. Keep doing you. And if you fall,  
know there's a whole group of sister friends out  
there who will catch you.

It took me a long time to figure that part out.  
Don't repeat my mistake. I wasted so much time  
trying to figure out who to trust and who had  
my best interest at heart; more likely than not it  
was black women. They -- we -- are your closest  
allies and biggest cheerleaders.

You know who my biggest cheerleader is and  
was? My mom. I don't know which tense to use  
when I talk about her. She's still here in body,  
but her mind is not what it was. I can't even  
think about it. The what comes next part. And  
it's coming too quickly.

Love,

*Sandra*

*Learn more about Sandra's timeline on  
[noliestoldthen.com](http://noliestoldthen.com)*



# ABOUT NO LIES TOLD THEN

**No Lies Told Then** is the story of a successful author on deadline, fighting to salvage her career while forced to confront unresolved feelings for a past lover. At a crossroad, she must choose between letting go of a pain that may destroy her or holding on as her dreams slip away. She has to face the lies she's been told about her place in the world as a black woman, and fight to tell her truth.



Web: [noliestoldthen.com](http://noliestoldthen.com)  
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Facebook: No Lies Told Then  
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