

Spring 5-5-2016

## **Standpoint: Black Queer Southern Revelations**

Mitchell Joseph Sewell  
*University of South Carolina - Columbia*

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# Standpoint: Black Queer Southern Revelations

Mitchell Joseph Sewell

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First and foremost, I extend a heartfelt and hearty thank you to my director, Dr. Edward Madden for his insight, guidance, and patience in writing the poetry, as well as the grammar and syntax of the paper. Thank you, as well, to my second reader, Dr. Todd Shaw whose understanding of theory helped guide the paper writing process. I feel incredibly honored and blessed to be mentored and guided by such intelligent minds and would not trade the experience for anything.

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ThesisWhy Was This Necessary?

As I sit down to write this, I am not entirely sure what I want to write or what it is that I would like to say. Having created an outline prior to writing does not particularly make this task any easier nor does it expedite the process. “Where does your inspiration come from?” I prefer to answer the question with a cliché, underwhelming, and non-profound, “It just sorta happens.” This is true to a certain extent; my writing does just sort of happen. In all honesty, if I could forgo classes and my job and just get paid to write, I would in a heartbeat (fingers crossed for my career aspirations). In an interview I did with a friend for their YouTube channel, they asked me that exact question. I responded by saying I write a lot about topics related to feminism, racial justice, gender, and sexuality. I do indeed write a lot about topics related to feminism, racial justice, gender, and sexuality, but that does not wholly answer the question. So, where does my inspiration come from?

This project is something I have been excited about since its inception. Since I had the pleasure and privilege of taking a class with Dr. Ed Madden (SCHC 480, Debating Same-Sex Marriage) and have seen the scope of what can be done with poetry, and how poetry can be used to build a bridge between personal experience and universal themes, a little seed was planted in my mind and has been germinating since spring 2015. I am amazed at myself that I have managed to cultivate this seed into the blossom it is now (with plentiful amounts of help along the way). This class I took with Dr. Madden was about the rhetoric and arguments for and against same-sex marriage (SSM). Having taken the class in spring 2015 only for SCOTUS to rule SSM as the law of the land later

that summer felt like an incredible twist of fate. Originally, I intended for my thesis project to be a collection of one-act plays around the central theme of being black, queer, and southern, in relation to a theatre production we saw as a class before SCHC 480 began. I will address later in this why I changed my method of delivery.

In that class, we read *A History of the Unmarried*, a book by poet Stephen S. Mills, a book I go back to every now and again because it is where this project started. While my project is based in spoken word poetry and Mills' book is a merging of personal experience with universal themes, exactly what I was hoping to do and am hoping I have done. In this thesis, the question, in several parts, I will be attempting to answer is as follows: How does one use personal experience as a way to understand the world? Does my experience lend itself to theory?

I got into writing spoken word poetry late September/early October 2015. I haven't been writing for long. I've always dabbled in writing poetry but I didn't really make it a part of my life, a part of who I am, until last year. It was per the prompting of my friend Brandon that I decided to pick up a pen and put some words on paper. Doing spoken word poetry has been an incredibly positive, cathartic, and therapeutic experience. That made itself clear very early into my time writing. I was using my writing to process and make sense of my experiences and thoughts. I am far from the first person to have this realization and to use my writing for this purpose, but it occurred to me, why can't I use this concept for my thesis project? I was already planning on doing a thesis about the experience of being black, queer, and southern but I wondered to myself, why don't I make it about my experience? After all, I am black, I am queer, and I am southern.



The last of the three was the hardest to conceptualize. For my entire life, I have distanced myself from a southern identity. I was raised in Northeast Florida (Jacksonville, specifically), which is not inherently southern but has very southern pockets and has plenty of people who will proudly and loudly tell you how southern they are. I was raised around such people. My best childhood friends, my granny, and my aunts /my mom's best friends (whom she has affectionately dubbed "The Sister Girls") were and are all incredibly southern. However, my mother was born and raised, and spent most of her young adult life, in North Philadelphia. My father was born to Jamaican parents in London and moved to the Bronx in New York City when he was about 12 years old. My two older siblings and I were all born in Philadelphia (something I will proudly divulge regardless of whether or not you asked). My nuclear family, while we have adopted southern mannerisms and patterns of speech since our migration to Florida 17 years ago, at its core, is Northern. Or, at the very least, we are *not* southern.

But, coming to a southern university has made me southern, or, at the very least made me identify with southern living and southern culture. Whether it's the copious amounts of sweet tea, the seemingly compulsory act of holding the door open for people behind me, or the ubiquity with which the word "y'all" leaps from my lips, I have certainly been molded into something resembling a southerner. For a long time, I actively resisted this, and I think that it was because I had an ever-present family to act as a buffer. Without them, I have succumbed to a bit of a twang (my family in Philadelphia says I have an accent) in my voice and in my thinking. Also, a connection to community is something I could have gotten anywhere, but I feel as though being at a large southern university has instilled in me a desire to be connected to my surroundings in a way I

would not otherwise have. Being here has also transformed my identities as a black man and a queer man.

I'm certain I would have naturally come into my own as a black man and a queer man, regardless of setting. However, something about being at a southern university has made this different for me. I came out as gay at school and my mom toward the end of my freshman year of high school, at 14 (I came out to my mother a second time at 18, then my family). Starting about a year and a half ago, I started claiming the identifier "queer," a blanket term used when referring to the LGBT+ community (PFLAG National, 2016). I did this because, although I understood my sexuality as gay from age of 14, I realized my sexuality was more fluid than I previously thought it was. While who I sleep with is very important, I have always understood that there is much more to being queer than that. In my final semester, I took a class titled Feminist Theory (WGST 307). In said class, we discussed queer theory. A basic principle of queer theory is that, "queer" means existing in a way that is non-normative in the margins of society (Mann, 2016). That's part of the reason I decided to write this project. I understand my world as being on the outside looking in on what is normal, normative, and mainstream. I'm always in favor of queering my worldview. What was most amazing to me about this section of this class was how easily the analysis of queer theorists could be applied to race. With this project, one could say I racialized my queerness and queered my race.

My blackness is probably the identity I have come into the most out of all of the intersecting identities involved in this project. By that, I mean I have a better understanding of blackness, in my own terms, more so than being southern, queer, or a

male. For me, blackness is very similar to how I understand queerness: existing in a non-normative fashion that places you in the margins of society.

Neil Hilborn (who coincidentally enough is white) has a poem titled “Motown” that sums it up in a decently succinct fashion: he opens the poem by repeating a quote from Roger Quenveur Smith: “They like black music but they hate black people” (Hilborn, 2014). It’s really interesting the way white supremacy works. White people love consuming black productions (art, fashion, speech, etc.) and even have an obsession with controlling the black body (i.e. incarceration rates of black people) or destroying it if it refuses to be controlled. However, white people hold contempt for a black person. They like black bodies but they hate black people. I want to be clear in that I don’t believe white people, or whiteness, is inherently insidious and evil. The problem is white supremacy. This is what pushes me to the margins of society. What I like to call the White Supremacist Capitalist Cishetero Patriarchy (borrowed from bell hooks’ concept) describes such a small portion of people in the United States: white, capitalist, cisgender, heterosexual men. Comparatively, there are more people who don’t fit that description than those who do. Hell, around half of millennials don’t even identify as heterosexual (Laughlin, 2016). Granted this statistic, as any, should be taken with a grain of salt, as only about 30% of the time does what someone reports as their sexuality match their behavior (Mann, 2015). What is important about that it demonstrates a flexibility and fluidity that is going to be key to ending the White Supremacist Capitalist Cishetero Patriarchy. To me, blackness is resistance. My ancestors survived the middle passage, slavery, the Jim Crow era, and countless instances of dehumanization and brutalization so I could be here. Blackness is resistance, resilience, and refusing to give up. Then when

you queer that blackness, you get something that, by its pure existence, is mesmerizing. If queerness is about existing on the margins, and blackness is as well, there is a certain level of resistance and resilience that are present and must be for those identities to persist and thrive. Black queerness and queer blackness, I feel, magnify that resistance and resilience.

Identity is important. It's important not just for me, but for people in general. It's important for people who don't realize they have identities (whiteness, maleness, straightness, etc., as the default), just as it is important for the people who fully realize every identity they encompass. As important as identity is, it's just as important, if not more, to understand how these identities interact with one another. Legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality," a theoretical framework that represents the ways marginalized and privileged identities interact with one another to reproduce systems of inequality and oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). That is to say, a white woman will experience misogyny differently than a black woman will and things like that. Crenshaw's theoretical framework has wholly informed the work I have done at USC as a LGBT Peer Advocate and has also helped me to understand how the world functions.

I would love to live in a world where distinctions like race and gender do not matter. However, that is not my current reality. I live in a reality in which my right to vote is under attack, people who look like me are experiencing extrajudicial executions in a public fashion, and people are constantly looking for ways to discriminate against me and get away with it (Liptak, 2015; Mapping Police Violence, 2015; Driessen, 2015). In an age where white, straight, cis men claim their right to free speech is being suppressed,

I always have to wonder why they act like free speech doesn't free them of consequences and why they think free speech has always been allowed equally. My current reality is that I pay taxes to a country that used to consider me property, and there is probably a sizeable number of people who consider me to be 3/5 a person, if that. I still experience white women clutching their purses to their bodies very tightly when I walk on the elevator, earphones in, minding my own business. According to a recent Center for Disease Control report, 1 in 2 black gay and bisexual men will contract HIV in their lifetime (2016). The correlation between being a person of color and poverty is a major factor in this prevalence. We are nowhere near a poststructural setting where identity does not hold any significance. Unfortunately, people look at you and see your blackness, whiteness, maleness, or anything else, and think they know everything they need to know about you based solely on that. That's why I created this project. Identities matter, my blackness matter, my queerness matters, my black queerness matters, and my queer blackness matters. I'm beyond the point in time where I am going to let myself be made to choose between my identities. I don't wake up in the morning and decide "I'm going to be black today, I was queer yesterday." They're with me always. I'm going to say so and make sure people understand that. As I state in my poem "I'm Just Really Stressed Right Now", "As hard as it is sometimes/I let myself be" Riki Wilchins said in *A Certain Kind of Freedom: Power and the Truth of Bodies*, included in *Reading Feminist Theory* by Mann & Patterson, that "...what isn't named doesn't exist. What is named must therefore exist." (2002, p. 343) If this is true, then I must speak. I must name myself; otherwise I cease to exist.

### Through the Looking Glass: Personal Experience as a Lens of Understanding

Taking WGST 307 Feminist Theory, has exposed to me a lot of different kinds of schools of thought about feminism specifically and life in general. In one specific section of this class, we discussed standpoint epistemology through readings written by Dorothy E. Smith (from *The Everyday World as Problematic*), and Nancy Hartsock (*Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?*) (2016, p. 204-209, p. 210-212). We also examined intersectionality theories framed through pieces written by Crenshaw (*Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*) and Collins (*Black Feminist Thought*) (2016, p. 264-273, p. 273-276). What was so amazing about reading the readings for our section on standpoint epistemology is that I learned wording to put to my thoughts that I have always had. It's an incredibly validating experience to realize that not only have other people already thought about what you're thinking about, but they have developed an entire practice around it. The purpose of standpoint epistemology is to assert that there is no objective truth and that everyone's understanding of the world is influenced by their position in society, typically conveyed through their identities. We, as a society, tend to understand the unmarked white, cisgender, heterosexual man's viewpoint as being the only purely objective viewpoint. Standpoint epistemology says that this is untrue and this person's position in society as a white, cisgender, heterosexual man influences the way they understand the world and the knowledge they produce. I always like to say "Science is only as good as the people who do it" and I've gotten into many an argument with students in STEM majors because of this. The ones I've argued with lack the ability to

understand the ways in which my worldview differs than theirs because of the marginalized identities I embody.

This is the reason why it is so important that standpoint epistemology be paired with intersectionality theory. Collins, in the second edition of *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), writes that the matrix of domination “describes the overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained” (p. 228). Epistemology is about the way knowledge is produced and whose knowledge is valued over others’ knowledge. Intersectionality theory is about the way in which power is enacted on certain types of knowledge producers. For example, in the excerpt of Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought* that Mann and Patterson pulled for *Reading Feminist Theory*, Collins writes, “Subjugated knowledges, such as a Black women’s culture of resistance, developed in cultural contexts controlled by oppressed groups. Dominant groups aim to replace subjugated knowledge with their own specialized thought because they realize that gaining control over this dimension of subordinate groups’ lives simplifies control” (2016, p. 275). This is why whenever I am describing microaggressions to people representing the dominant group(s), I am often met with invalidating statements such as “I don’t really know though,” “It can’t actually be that bad;” or my personal favorite, “I think you’re just overreacting.” They can’t see these kinds of statements as true because we are conditioned to believe that subordinated knowledges are invalid. That is a large part of the reason why I decided to name this project *Standpoint: Black Queer Southern Revelations*. In a way, I am paying homage to the people who developed this school of thought that has become so integral to the work I do and the way I view the world, but also to emphasize the fact that I am giving voice to myself and people like me. If my

personal is going to be political whether I like it or not, I am going to control what is being understood about me.

The phrase “The personal is political” has been used in feminist circles since the late 1960s and early 1970s, although nobody knows for sure where it came from. Some people, like Carol Hanisch, attribute it to Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (2006). Others attribute it to other radical feminist groups like the Redstockings. What is understood is that this phrase is meant to highlight the fact that aspects of women’s personal lives like access to birth control are political issues. I have adopted this phrase for this context for reasons that I feel are obvious. As a black man in the south, and a queer man in the south, and a black queer man in the south, my personal is political. It’s not just who I have sex with and how we have sex (although a large part of my existence as both black and queer is boiled down to sex) that’s made the subject of debate by people with institutional and political power that I don’t have. It’s whether or not I deserve protection from employment discrimination, housing discrimination, or even whether or not I deserve physical protection. If I am seen as a threat to the people who are paid to ensure my protection before I am seen as human, how is the personal going to remain personal? If I am cast to the margins of society because I don’t desire a heterosexual marriage (or any marriage for that matter), how is the personal going to remain personal?

So what does any of this have to do with my poetry? My poetry and the way I interpret my standpoint as a black, queer, southern man are intertwined. Although I haven’t been writing for long, I have always been using my poetry as a way to process emotions, make thoughts concrete, and try and put to words feelings that I have difficulty



articulating. So in regards of how my standpoint informs my poetry, more than just the subject matter, my standpoint is represented in my poetry in its performance. One of my favorite things about performance is when someone comes up to me afterward saying something to the effect of “You put into words something I’ve been feeling but wasn’t able to say.” More often than not, whether it is me saying that to a performer or someone saying it to me, there is a shared inability to fully articulate what is being felt. In my poetry, I strive to give voice to both the voiceless and what is difficult to or even unable to be voiced. That being said, one thing I struggle with in my writing is when I encounter something someone shows me or tells me and I want to write about it, I have a hard time discerning whether or not I should. As far as I understand it, some stories are not mine to tell. For example, I’m currently trying to figure out how to write a poem about HB2 in North Carolina, a recently passed law targeting trans people (and LGB people as well but puts trans people at the most risk), barring them from using public bathrooms designated with genders that match their gender identity, as well as the recently proposed similar bill here in South Carolina state legislature. Hopefully by the time this is completed, it will no longer be a concern. I’m struggling to write this poem because I am not trans, so while I am concerned for the safety and wellbeing of trans people, I feel as though I cannot access the emotion necessary to give weight to this issue simply because it is not my story. Granted, I don’t necessarily need to be emotionally connected to that degree to write the poem. Just because I cannot empathize does not mean I cannot sympathize. One of the most effective ways an ally can engage in allyship is to use their position of dominance to speak to others in a position of dominance to highlight the importance of the subjugated knowledge produced by those with whom they ally themselves. I often run

into the question of where the line is between using my privilege to speak to other men about sexism and other cis people about cissexism, and speaking for or over, as opposed to with, those with whom I ally myself (women and trans people).

It was once said to me by Dr. Todd Shaw that stories may not be ours to share, but sometimes they are gifted to us. *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* by E. Patrick Johnson is an excellent example of just this concept. In this book, Johnson travels all around the south interviewing black gay men as young as traditional college age to elderly gay men in their 70s and 80s to ask them about coming out, religion, their lives, and other things (2008). The men who Johnson interviewed for this book gifted their stories so Johnson could write this book to help increase knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a black gay man in the south. With any story I am gifted, that is my goal: to spread that knowledge, be it subjugated or not, and help give the person who gifted me that story a platform to make sure their story is heard and felt is what I feel is part of my duties as a poet, writer, and activist.

#### Turning Standpoint Into Theory

Suzanna Walters, in her work included in Mann & Patterson's textbook *Reading Feminist Theory*, ends a section of her critique of queer theory *From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace (Or, Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Fag?)* with, "...Again, personal transgression or predilection has metamorphosed into political and theoretical action. Sexual hobbies do not a theory make" (2016, p.139). Walters writes this passage in fear that "the personal is political" is becoming too large a point of emphasis and that a personal experience does not constitute a theory. In order to properly discuss this, we have to first understand: why is the

personal political? To be marginalized is to have to justify your existence. In my class with Dr. Madden examining SSM, we talked a lot about the concept of the “counterfeit,” the idea that same-sex relations, in any fashion, were thought to be unreal, invalid, and counterfeit. A simple example of this is the ever present “Well how do you know you’re gay if you’ve never had sex with a woman?” This question has larger implications, pointing to the fact that non-heterosexual sexualities are illegitimate, reproducing the belief that heterosexuality is not only superior but is the only sexuality that is real. Homosexuality, or simply non-heterosexuality, is seen as illegitimate because of heterosexism, and heterosexism perpetuates the belief that homosexuality is adverse. The personal is political because people don’t understand how, or even believe, that two women can have sex with one another, or that bisexuality exists. When people try and legislate that belief, your life becomes the pawn in a chess game being played by people who don’t know the first thing about you. Unfortunately, that is the reason why the personal will never be 100% personal. Even if we get to a point where people are no longer trying to write discrimination into the law books, on any axis of identity, we will always have those people who want me gone because of my queerness or my blackness. I believe people are socialized into these beliefs, that they are not inherent. The systems that cause the beliefs can be eradicated but the beliefs themselves will never be eradicated because you can’t destroy ideas and discussing whether or not you can or should enters into an area of ethics for minds different than my own. As one of my favorite writers, Oscar Wilde, said, “I may not agree with what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to make an ass of yourself.”

So even if personal experience does not constitute theory, it is still important on a personal level. The concept of White Supremacist Capitalist Cishetero Patriarchy I mentioned earlier is something I conceptualized through my own experience. It was certainly sparked by hooks' concept of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (n.d., p. 1). I developed my own concept, theory if you will, because I needed something that fit my own worldview and my own day to day living. So while personal experience may not be good for universal theory, it is good for just that, the personal. After all, standpoint epistemology is about your own unique social situation in the world. It sounds redundant to say I have my own theory for my own world, but that doesn't mean my own experience can't be used for developing a theory applicable to the world as a whole. This is why works like *Sweet Tea* are so important: so you can synthesize the experiences of people with shared identities and examine them for common themes and events to determine if that is applicable on a large scale. So while my own life and work may not be suitable to create an entire theory or school of thought, knowing it could be a part of something larger and useful to dismantling these interlocking systems of oppression is just as satisfying and significant.

#### Where Do I Go From Here?

The work is never done. As long as being a black queer is related to my oppression, my work is not done. This likely is not the last project I will undertake around this theme. I am not done examining the ways in which White Supremacist Capitalist Cishetero Patriarchy impacts my life. I feel examining these ways through poetry has given me more freedom and a wider range of tools than I would have had if I had chosen a sociological study or a literature review. As long as it is necessary for this

work to be done, I will be doing it. Like any other kind of understanding, mine will change and evolve over time but I feel safe in saying that standpoint epistemology and the theory of intersectionality will always remain key to who I am, the work that I do, and the art that I create. Do I hope for a day where my personal is no longer political? Of course. Until then, and continuing afterward, I am going to be making my blackness queer\_and queering my blackness, all as a reluctant (and sometimes willing) southerner.

Poetry

Baby Hair and Afros

So I woke up this morning to the sunrise in my mind's eye  
Because there are no windows in my bedroom  
The glow of the Vizio on the bottom of my tv resembled the orange glow  
That shone off the living room table whenever my mama  
Would make me dust with furniture polish on a Saturday morning  
And it shone with a glow that looked the fire inside my belly  
That makes me feel like a dungeon dragon  
That got me feelin like Avatar Roku

My hair is sitting in my durag  
And it'll be the last thing on me to wake up  
I am not a morning person  
It takes my spirit an hour and a half to join the physical world  
And that's if I'm lucky  
It takes a while for me to muster up the wherewithal  
To spend another day dealing with stigma  
That comes with this hair  
That comes with protein growing out of my head that's as naturally occurring  
As the breath that breezes out of my lungs  
This hair that's natural to its roots like Alex Haley  
Because of all that things that come with natural

Natural is divinity  
Natural is descended of Gods and Kings  
And I ain't talkin bout that bullshit movie  
Where they decided Christian Bale should play Ramses  
Excellent Bruce Wayne, terrible Egyptian  
Because ancient Egyptians weren't white  
Their hair looked a lot more like mine than Christian's  
Besides, look at the sarcophagus  
They go to sleep with their hair wrapped

Natural is power  
Because I live in a world where the act of wearing my hair as it grows out of my head  
Is considered revolutionary  
My dad is always asking me when I'm gonna cut my hair  
I tell him to ask Samson what happened  
When Delilah cut his hair

Natural is resilient  
For over 15 years I've watched the women at my church try  
And run combs through little girl's hair

For 15 years I've watch that hair resist  
It don't budge  
There's a metaphor in there  
You try to separate us and we just hold onto one another tightly  
Wrapped up inside one another because there's strength in numbers

Natural is versatile  
The possibilities are endless  
Don't ask her if she grew 18 inches of hair overnight  
Black people aren't superhuman  
But we are damn near it

My hair and I aren't that different  
My hair may be nappy but I stay woke  
My hair isn't the only thing about me that's kinky  
We both dehydrate easily  
We both love sleeping on silk  
We are both dark and soft and messy and beautiful  
So ask me again why I won't cut it

## Can I Kick It?

You ever watch a MMA fight?  
UFC  
World Extreme Cagefighting  
Strikeforce  
Pride Fighting Championship  
It doesn't really matter which  
The premise is the same for all of them

You got 2 people  
2 bodies  
Locked  
In a cage  
Solely for the purpose of hurting each other  
To leave the other person  
To leave the other body  
Broken  
Bruised  
Bloody  
For the sake of spectacle  
Sport

There's this thing that used to happen  
Back when it was legal in this country  
To own a person  
Specifically a black or African person  
Where the enslavers  
Would literally breed the bigger, stronger enslaved bodies with one another  
To create stronger and tougher enslaved bodies  
And when the enslaver had a black or African body that was particularly  
Strong

They would take that body and make it fight  
Other enslaved black or African bodies  
2 people 2 bodies  
Pitted against one another  
For the sole purpose of leaving the other body  
Broken  
Bloody  
Bruised  
For spectacle



I started learning mixed martial arts in January  
After years of wanting to learn how to  
Work an armbar  
Throw a roundhouse kick  
Slap on a triangle choke  
And it's been one of the best experiences of my life

But I finally understand now why I've always been  
Mesmerized  
By fighting sports  
It's in my blood  
Blood that's been spilled  
On dirt  
Streets  
Floors  
Ships  
Plantations  
Jail cells  
Hospital rooms

Some days  
Stepping out of bed feels  
Like I'm stepping into the cage  
But it's weird not having a weight division to fight in  
Because you're weighed down by all the bodies that came before yours

I think that's why I decided  
On Tae Kwon Do  
As my base discipline  
Your legs get really strong  
When you walk around every day  
Carrying ghosts  
I ask "Can I Kick It?"  
They respond "Yes you can"

## What My Mama Taught Me

The idea that my mama isn't very nurturing  
Was born of a conversation that she had with me and my brother  
In which he said  
"You're not very nurturing. It's not a bad thing, it's just who you are."  
And... I think my mama took it kinda hard  
Because that was a few years ago  
And she still mentions it in conversations  
She'll say "I know yall don't think I'm very nurturing"  
But I think what my mama heard  
And what I hear when she says it  
Is, "I know yall don't think I'm a very good mother"

Which couldn't be further from the truth

I don't know how many cookies she baked  
Between my premature birth and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade  
But what I do know  
Is that if I had a dollar for every time  
She tied my shoe, cleaned my booboos, kissed me good night  
Helped me with my homework, and put my needs  
Before her own  
I'd have enough to finally give her what she deserves  
I can't afford the world  
But eventually  
I'll be able to afford that cabin in Connecticut

To quote Drake, "I'm just worried about my mama worryin less"  
Because when someone gives you 21 years of the best  
The least you can do is say thank you

And honestly, so what if my mama isn't nurturing?  
She is so many things  
And she isn't so many things

My mama is better at embarrassing me than anyone else  
She is where I learned it  
It's impossible to embarrass me, ask my friends

I've watched my mama pray for other people like her life depended on it  
Like her life was on the line  
And while we don't see eye to eye on Christianity  
I'm certain someone heard her

I'm a 21 year old black man

How else would I be here?

My mama is up every morning at 4 AM  
So she can give the sun permission to rise

She goes to a job where she's the brightest star in the sky  
That nobody can see because of all the light pollution  
All because she loves her kids

My mama goes 0 to 100 real quick  
Will read you for filth while she pours you a drink  
She is the first revolutionary I ever knew  
Because she lives in a world that tries to pass her off as a note  
When she knows she wrote the whole damn song

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation,  
And that is an act of political warfare”  
That quote is attributed to Audre Lorde but I'm not so sure I didn't learn it from my  
mama

My mama smells like cocoa butter and resilience  
Like relaxer and wisdom  
Like oven roasted chicken and elegance  
Like black olives and pain  
Like Skin So Soft and healing

My mama has taught me how to keep my head up  
How to wash my clothes  
How to make some bomb diggity pasta  
How to hide away love for when you need it most  
What it means to forgive  
And that it's okay to come home

My mama taught me that when a black woman speaks  
You shut the hell up and listen  
And my mama made my first name Mitchell  
After my dad's mom told her not to

Watching her, I learned what it is to rearrange atoms  
If it means giving your kids a chance  
I swear, my mama is an alchemist  
The way she can turn an empty fridge  
Into a 3 course meal  
I could watch Chopped  
But I'd rather watch my mama do magic

Being an Honors Student can't teach me  
How to grit my teeth and work for someone who's bad at their job  
But my mama has taught me that nothing  
Has to be permanent  
That circumstances don't have to be permanent  
That a little elbow grease and incense can change your life

And my mama taught me what the difference is  
Between a mother  
And a mama

## Know Yourself

I was born 3 months premature  
 According to my mama, I had a 20% chance of survival at birth  
 Whenever I have to share an interesting fact about myself  
 That's my go-to  
 Mainly because I'm not great under pressure  
 I love basketball but you don't want me taking the last shot  
 Some people become diamonds under pressure  
 I prefer to stay charcoal  
 And if you've ever seen a charcoal sketch, you'll know why I say that

My favorite color combination is navy blue and cherry red  
 I love black cherries and maraschino cherries and I despise bing cherries  
 Even though I'll still take one from my mama if she's eating them  
 I love navy blue because it reminds me of my dad  
 I hate sky blue because it looks undercooked but I wear it anyway  
 Because it looks good on me

I love the aesthetic appeal of chevrons  
 I prefer my coats and blazers have elbow patches  
 If I can, I handwrite before I type  
 And despite how good I am at it, I abhor public speaking  
 Something about having all eyes on me makes me unable to function  
 Even if those eyes aren't on me  
 And I've only managed to convince myself they were

Despite the best efforts of fundamentalist Christians  
 White domestic terrorism  
 The KKK  
 Metropolitan police departments  
 The Republican presidential candidates  
 And the musical stylings of Iggy Azalea  
 I have always managed to be my own worst enemy

I couldn't be any less concerned about masculinity  
 Hegemonic masculinity is a game for white dudes  
 And it's a game I'm never going to win

I'm also a hypocrite  
 I love having a beard, I like sports  
 I prefer to be physically larger than my sexual or romantic partners  
 As much as I hate the restrictive and oppressive nature of masculinity  
 I hate even more that I don't know who I am without

Whenever I see a police car

I get this feeling where my whole body quivers at once in rhythm  
Pins and needles shoot out of every extremity  
As if someone ran a current through my bones  
Fear is a conditioned response  
It doesn't matter that I'm a student at the number one Honors College in the country  
It doesn't matter who my grandmother is  
I'm a monster underneath this mask  
A beast resembling a man  
It doesn't matter because the only thing that matters certainly isn't black life

I'm tired  
I'm tired of old, rich, white dudes inventing reasons  
For brown people  
To die  
That we can stomach violence predicated upon children  
Foreign and domestic  
I'm tired of being asked why I don't salute a flag  
That was stitched together by the exploited and unpaid labor of my ancestors  
I'm tired of being made to feel like I have to pick  
Which identity is most important to me

I'm also happy  
I'm happy that I'm 21  
I'm scared to be so close to graduation  
But I'm excited for the uncertainty  
I'm still learning how to be in love with myself  
If I can be in love with myself  
I'm in love with a beautiful artist  
And I'm in love with being in love

I'm grateful my early adolescence was so shitty

I really enjoy cheap wine because it gets the job done  
And I really love expensive cheeseburgers because sometimes  
A little pomp and circumstance is a good thing

Sometimes I wish my parents were more queer friendly  
But then I feel bad because they could be so much worse  
Other people's struggles do not negate my own  
But maintaining perspective is easier said than done  
Even when you have 25/20 vision  
Especially when other people's thoughts are so opaque  
I'm learning MMA because if they're going to lie  
And say I was armed after they murder me  
I may as well make my body a weapon  
So I can make honest people out of them at least once

That and I've always lowkey been interested in fighting sports  
I wrestled in high school  
The most important thing I learned  
Is that you cannot make anyone do anything

I weigh 185 pounds, give or take 5  
I'm 5'10" when I wear my boots  
My arms stretch to next Tuesday  
I talk with my hands  
And sometimes I accidentally hit the people I'm talking to

I've never gotten a parking ticket because I don't own a car

It's not very hard to annoy me  
I have several nephews and a niece  
I don't want kids for the next 10 years  
But hanging out with them makes me want to skip the next ten years

I'm a very easy man to please  
I like scented candles, bath bombs, and chocolate  
At the same time

I dream of piloting an X-wing  
Despite being profoundly afraid of heights and moving at high speeds  
I can be kind of impulsive, particularly about tattoos  
I don't know what my first word was  
And I don't like to think about what my last will be  
I claim Philadelphia because that's what's on my birth certificate  
Even though that's not where I was raised  
I have an affinity for falling for boys that are bad for me

I'm the most complex person I know  
While I'm also the simplest person I know  
I asked my friends to describe me  
Because sometimes I forget who I am

Some days I am a 5000 piece jigsaw puzzle  
Where some pieces are missing  
And a few wet from the tears of the person putting it together  
And some days I am a stained glass window  
Filtering light, trying to make it more beautiful  
Being unsure if I'm actually doing so  
And if I'm lucky every now and again I get to be  
A BIC pen, simple and functional

I'm the son of a man who's better

At spelling out "I love you" with his bare hands  
By rearranging the stars  
Than he is at forcing air past his vocal cords  
And forming the letters with his tongue

I'm the child of a woman  
Who wants to hold onto her family as tight as she can  
And the older I get  
The easier it is to let her

I'm the brother of a woman who doesn't know how to love half heartedly  
And I'm the brother of a man who makes sure my ego doesn't grow too big too soon

I realized around 13 years old  
Why I love impressionist art so much  
It's a mess when you examine it closely  
But it's an organized mess

I want to make sure queer adolescents don't ever  
Have to feel like I did  
Because in 21 years, I've learned  
I'd rather be burying the hatchet than burying a body  
That it's better to fold your cards than fold in on yourself  
And that sometimes nobody can hug you  
Like an oversized sweatshirt can



## I'm Not Down For the Brown

I don't remember a great deal about it  
 Loud pop music  
 Alcohol flowing  
 Queer people everywhere  
 But what I do remember is this feeling

"I'm not down for the brown"  
 A punch. In. The gut.  
 I wasn't asking you on a date  
 I wasn't even attracted to you  
 (And I'm still not for that matter)  
 But you felt it necessary to make space for white supremacy

"I'm not down for the brown"  
 An incredibly appropriate thing to say to a stranger  
 We met, what? 10 minutes ago?  
 Because your best friend is a good friend of mine  
 And it wasn't even organic to the conversation  
 But there's always room for anti-blackness

"I'm not down for the brown"  
 I don't know why I was so surprised  
 Lord knows I'm not right now  
 Freud would have a field day examining my defense mechanisms  
 Not letting myself think I'm too attractive  
 Because there's no way other people will agree, right?  
 I'm actually surprised when people call me cute

"I'm not down for the brown"  
 How dare I believe I'm worth something  
 I forgot all black men, black people, are the same  
 Meanwhile, your empirical research must be so well conducted  
 With your n=1 convenience sample of that one time  
 You maybe thought about possibly swiping right on that black guy on Tinder?  
 Or, potentially responding to the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 black guys sitting in your inbox on Grindr?  
 Ya know, the ones without face pictures and no listed stats  
 Because otherwise your filter will block them so you don't have to?  
 Which is why said black guy doesn't show anyone his blackness,  
 Just so he can receive an iota of attention from a system of beauty standards  
 That couldn't give less of a damn about his black ass?

"I'm not down for the brown"  
 What makes you so certain the brown is down for you?!

I live in a world where I am royalty  
Descended from kings  
And I am relegated to being the whipping boy  
Because mythical norms have the bar so high  
I could be in the NBA and I still couldn't get over it

"I'm not down for the brown"  
That's fine because my eyes are as radiant as your stupidity  
My lips are big from a bloodline built on protest  
The lines on the palms of my hands prove I was sketched by God  
My melanin glows in the sun  
Your porcelain skin resembles a toilet which would explain the shit spewing from your mouth

"I'm not down for the brown"  
I'm not down for my life being at risk  
Because I played my music too loud  
Or I left the transit station  
Or because I sold untaxed cigarettes  
Or because I had a BB gun  
Or because I had a BB gun in a Walmart  
Or because I was sleeping on my couch during a raid  
Or because I was pulled over for a "routine" traffic stop  
I'm not down for having 1 million of 2.4 million people incarcerated  
Look like me  
Or that kids who look like me are more likely to get expelled than graduate  
Or that when people see me, they just see a big dick

"I'm not down for the brown"  
That's fine  
I'll take my brown, find my friends, spend my night gettin' down  
In this place where I am not made to feel welcome  
When you don't get invited very often  
You learn to take the party with you wherever you go  
I'd invite you to join but  
You're not down for the brown

## I'm Just Really Stressed Right Now

I am an angry ass black man  
I may or may not look threatening  
It depends on who you ask  
I learned a while back that  
I don't have a permit but  
If I'm apparently walking around with all this anger  
I may as well make a weapon of it

I've probably been angry for about 21 years now  
It's my default setting  
But I've gotten really good at masking it as something else  
"I didn't get enough sleep last night"  
"I'm kinda stressed right now"  
I could put it on my resume  
Like the Joker said  
If you're good at something  
Never do it for free

It's like  
As a child  
When you'd be perfectly fine  
And your mama would tell you  
"You betta not be catchin an attitude"  
Which would then in turn spark an attitude  
And you'd get in trouble for having an attitude which you didn't originally have  
All because your mama was trippin over some petty shit

So when someone is like  
"You betta not be catchin an attitude"  
I've learned to say  
"So what the fuck if I am?"  
As if I don't have a reason to be?  
Even if my anger isn't righteous  
Even if it isn't justified  
Every action has an equal  
And opposite  
Reaction

If I am angry, it's because when I was born  
I was tattooed with a target from head to toe

It's because when I was a teenager  
I spent 3 years of my life  
Wishing for new skin  
Different skin, better skin  
Lighter whiter skin  
As if that was going to solve the problem  
But when you're suffocating  
You will grasp for whatever air  
You can get your hands on

If I am angry, it's because I always have to be something  
I always have to be angry  
I have to be lazy  
Dangerous  
Unintelligent  
I always have to be so many things  
But I can never just be

If I'm not smiling, I'm angry  
I have so many reasons to be angry  
But I have so many reasons to be so many things  
I'm tired  
I'm sleepy  
I'm joyful  
I'm hungry  
I'm a person

There was a point where the last thing I wanted to be considered was angry  
Jumping through hoops  
To be seen as acceptable  
Palatable  
Respectable  
"If I speak in a more articulate fashion  
If I do these AP classes  
If I  
If I  
If I"

But now  
Now I'm angry  
They're going to call me angry anyway  
So I let myself be angry

Annoyed  
Upset  
Pissed

I let myself be sad  
I let myself be happy  
I let myself be indifferent  
As hard as it is sometimes  
I let myself be

## Black Boys

I know black boys  
Who are dipped in coffee  
Honey  
Hazelnut  
Butter  
(Peanut, almond, cookie, and Country Crock)  
Whose skin is dark like the ink on this paper  
Whose skin is lighter than Steph Curry  
In a spotlight  
With skin even and smooth like Coltrane  
With skin rough and blemished like the mountains they've moved  
And they all beautiful as hell

I know black boys  
That have galaxies behind their eyes  
Brown nebulas  
Full of stars burning bright  
Stamped with greys and greens and purples  
That make Van Gogh look like a sketch artist  
And will have Starry Night look like a drawing you tape to the fridge

I know black boys who are misguided  
Who don't know where they are going  
What they are doing  
Why they are doing it  
And who they are doing it for  
Not because they want to  
But because nobody ever taught them  
How to read a map

I know black boys  
Who go to work like Rihanna  
Who work two jobs and collect one check  
Who work security whether they want to or not  
Because as soon as they leave the house  
They have to be on guard

Black boys who do thankless jobs  
Black boys who run that shit  
Black boys who are being exploited

Because we have a history of performing  
Unpaid labor

I know black boys who ain't shit  
Who ain't no good  
That don't never do something for nothing  
That feels the world owes them everything  
When they haven't even tried to do anything  
Who want what ain't theirs  
And don't care who they have to hurt  
To get it

And I know black boys  
Who will give you their shoes  
While walking with 2 feet  
Of snow  
Black boys who will fight you for suggesting  
They do something for themselves before  
Doing something for someone else  
Whether they need it or not  
Black boys who are bad at taking advice  
Regardless of who gives it to them

Those black boys that got the Midas touch  
And those black boys who get down and get funky  
Who dab to everything  
And the ones who don't got a lick of rhythm in one  
Of their 206 bones  
I know them too

I know black boys  
Who can create something profound  
And arch your back  
Using only their tongue  
And I know black boys who make the Earth gyrate  
When their feet hit the ground  
So they walk on their toes  
I know black boys who live inside their own mind  
And I know black boys that spend every day  
Wishing they were Goku  
Black boys that would rather listen to The Velvet Underground  
Than Tupac  
Black boys that don't understand AAVE

And black boys that code switch like  
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

I know black boys  
Who read all the time and never have anything to say  
Who don't ever read and will teach you  
Everything you need to know  
Who curse you with their smiles  
And bless you with their tears

Black boys who are afraid  
Black boys who are superheroes  
Black boys who are trying way too hard to be men  
And black boys who have always been men  
Because they never got to be children

I know black boys who create whole universes in the lines on their palms  
Who spend their days building  
Coalitions  
Bridges  
Building up others  
And spend their nights turning up  
Winding down  
Shedding their skin  
And healing their wounds  
Singing praises in a 5 part harmony  
Finding solutions  
In a bottle of Henny  
Rolling joints  
Rolling their eyes  
Rolling their bodies while Fetty Wap whines in the background  
Citing Cam'Ron like he's an existential philosopher  
Arguing over how Reconstruction economics still affect the South  
And then arguing over whether the Deadpool would beat Deathstroke in a fight

Black boys are something special  
An arrangement of abstractions  
Personified in atoms and flesh  
Heard in screams and in whispers  
Felt in handshakes, on and off the court

I'm one of those black boys



## Well-Meaning

There is a difference  
Between being not-racist  
And being anti-racist

You may be wondering  
“Wow, Joseph. I didn’t realize that.  
What’s the difference?”  
Thank you for asking  
Allow me to share

Not actively contributing  
Or so you think  
To a cultural mindset  
And a social context  
That disadvantages, degrades, and dehumanizes  
People based on the color of their skin  
Versus actively rejecting ideologies that state  
That one type of body is better than another based on skin  
Is the difference

There is a difference between not perpetuating beauty standards  
That declare black girls to be ugly  
Which is a gahtdayum lie  
And asking yourself why  
Every black girl you’ve ever wanted to put your mouth on  
Has the same loose curl pattern  
Light skin  
And Coke bottle silhouette

Being not-racist  
Is not being anti-racist

Being not racist is  
“Yeah, I have a black friend”  
Without having stopped to ask  
why you only have one  
Being anti-racist  
Is wondering why you got promoted over the black woman whose desk is next to yours  
Who has been here 3 years longer  
Has 2 kids  
And 1 more degree

Being not-racist means  
“I don’t understand why they interrupted Bernie Sanders.  
Interrupting Hillary Clinton is disrespectful. They’re  
On our side.”  
Instead of joining them in protest

And granted  
Interrupting a candidate in protest  
Takes a lot of guts, time, and prep  
Fair

But anti-racism is not  
Quoting Martin Luther King Jr.  
Once a year  
Out of context  
On Facebook

And anti-racism is not  
Just skipping the N-word  
On your favorite Jay Z track  
And let’s be real  
Even that’s probably asking too much

Anti-racism is not distancing yourself  
From Donald Trump  
Because you’re one of the good ones  
Anti-racism is asking your uncle  
Why he thinks the only people emigrating to the United States  
Are Mexican or Syrian  
Brown

People love to say that America is the greatest country on Earth but never think to ask  
For whom?

And anti-racism is not  
“I don’t even see you as black”  
Because if you have to erase my existence  
To see me as human  
Then I’d rather you just not see me at all

Being not-racist means being selfish  
Centering yourself in conversations that aren’t about you

“I didn’t do that though”  
“I wasn’t even alive when that happened”  
“I would never do something like that”

I love “I” statements as much as anyone  
But your white tears  
Do not matter more than the very real consequences  
Of your refusal to recognize your complicity  
In this system of interpersonal, economic, and psychological  
Violence, inequity, and inequality

Your white feelings  
Do not matter  
More than black lives

I’m not going to shoulder your guilt  
When I already have the weight of the world on my shoulders  
I do my squats  
But my thighs aren’t that strong

Congratulations  
You voted for President Obama  
Twice  
But you said nothing when your mom started complaining  
About having a nigger in the White House  
As if that’s the first time  
Who do you think built the shit?

Inclusion is not integration  
Inviting me to a seat at the table  
Means nothing  
If I’m the only person at the table who looks like me  
Even if I am your black friend  
Racism is not going anywhere  
Until white people collectively accept culpability  
Because being not-racist  
Is trying to argue that any group of people of color is  
“More racist” than white people  
Instead of wondering why racism exists to begin with

There’s more to racism than you not calling me a nigger  
Even though you probably want to

There's more to racism  
Than the KKK  
Strange fruit is no longer hanging from the poplar trees  
That we know of  
But that's because it's been picked  
And now  
It's being stopped and frisked  
Sitting in prison because of a mandatory minimum  
Being assaulted, suspended, and expelled  
Lying in the street lifeless for four hours

There is a difference  
Between being not-racist  
And being anti-racist

Being not-racist  
Is being more concerned  
With being called a racist  
Than not being racist

## Parenthood

My parents were not prepared  
For a child like me  
I'm not sure my family  
In general  
Was prepared for a child like me  
And the reason I know this is because  
Now I'm a man  
(Whatever the hell that means)  
And hindsight is 20/20  
And I see things now that I didn't see in 2006

Like, now I know that people are sometimes  
Hateful for no good or real reason  
And it's not my fault  
That I didn't do anything to earn it  
Back then, I thought it was my problem to solve  
And that it was my parents' fault  
For having a baby that was so darkskinned  
For cursing me with all of my melanin  
Skin that I never asked for  
And I never told them about it

I never told them about how  
Every day for 3 years  
I was compared to  
Shadows  
Oil slicks  
3:15 AM  
I joke about it now because  
I laugh to keep from crying  
But I didn't tell them  
Because I didn't think I could  
When you're constantly told  
"Stop whining" when you're very young  
You learn that you're emotions aren't valid  
When you get scolded for speaking up  
Whether it's baseless or not  
You lose your voice

I don't hold anything against them

3 kids  
2 jobs  
1 mortgage  
That's a lot to worry about

My parents weren't prepared for a boy like me  
A boy that wasn't concerned  
With everything a boy is supposed to be  
A boy that turned out to like other boys  
A boy that caused trouble cause he thought too much  
And asked too many questions  
Not because he enjoyed it  
But because he didn't know any better  
Because he was a square peg living in a round hole  
And as far as he could see  
His hole wasn't even considering  
That it could try and grow corners

There was a point in time where I would hop out of bed in the morning  
Like I had a spring in my soul  
And I would summer in my own mind  
Vacationing in my thoughts, my imagination as my destination  
But when I was made unable to sing out  
I started to fall silent  
And eventually I entered the winter of my discontent  
But now, when I think about it  
I'm glad my parents weren't prepared  
Because that helped them do a full revolution around their son

I learned that if you have something to say  
"Don't be a coward" as my mama likes to say  
Say it  
Make them hear you  
Make them listen  
I hate the sound of my voice  
But it's like a fingerprint  
It is distinct  
It is mine  
And you're going to know I was here

So now here I am

21 years old  
Preparing to graduate from college  
And I'm just now learning  
That as much as my parents were unprepared for me  
Is as unprepared for them I was

I suppose I wasn't prepared  
For parents who change with the weather  
With foggy minds and clouded judgement  
Sunny dispositions casting shadows on me as I walk through the door  
Wondering why there's a bowl in the sink  
Or if I think I could have swept the floor  
Or why I didn't put the trash cans on the curb  
Which, if I had knew how to listen, I would have realized probably sounded a lot more  
like  
"Goddamn my boss is an idiot"  
"I have no idea where I'm gonna get the money to pay this bill"  
Or "I'm afraid for the safety of my queer son"

It's been said to me before that parents  
Envision a specific life for their child  
And when their child finds a different life for themselves, the parents have to mourn  
But children also have to mourn  
When they envision having a certain kind of parent  
And realize their parent is not who they hoped they'd be  
Life runs on compromise

What I'm saying is  
That I am an adult now  
And I am complicated  
And my parents have always been complicated  
And I'm just now seeing that  
The same way they are just now seeing it

## Tips for a Successful Interracial Relationship

- 1) First and foremost
  - You are under no circumstances
  - Ever permitted
  - To say the n-word
  - I don't care if it's soft a or hard r
  - Shortened or elongated
  - Don't breathe it
  - Don't think it
  - Don't mention it

Even if you're thinking about all of those times I've affectionately asked you "Nigga, are you crazy?"
- 2) I am not going to
  - Teach you how to Dougie
  - Milly Rock
  - Jerk
  - Cat Daddy
  - Lean wit it or Rock wit it
  - Stanky Leg
  - Or Dab
  - I don't know how to do some of those myself
  - I just learned how to Wop this morning
  - Milly Rock on any block?
  - I can't Milly Rock on my own block
- 3) When you catch me doing any of those dances
  - When I'm cooking dinner
  - Don't let me know you saw me
  - Let me think
  - That you think I can't dance either
  - That way
  - When we go visit my family
  - You don't have to sit by yourself during the cookout
- 4) Speaking of which
  - Understand right now
  - My mother is never going to call you my boyfriend
  - Only "Your lil friend"
  - Even after we share a house, 2 kids, a bank account, a business, and a life
  - You are my lil friend



To my dad  
 You'll be my roommate  
 To my brother  
 You'll be white boy  
 Until the day he calls you homie  
 When he calls you homie, be happy  
 And to my sister  
 You'll be her new brother

- 5) When they ask you  
 Who's the man and who's the woman  
 Don't be a smart ass  
 My mom doesn't take to being disrespected in her house  
 Just say the typical  
 "We're both men, that's the point"  
 Then let them teach you how to electric slide  
 And before any of this  
 Remind me to teach you to throw and catch a football
- 6) Understand that  
 While I am your window into blackness  
 You're still on the outside looking in  
 Be aware of how much space you take up  
 How large your white voice is  
 The heaviness of your white footsteps  
 Be careful where you place them  
 Consider that yours  
 Are not the first pair of white hands to touch a black body  
 To touch this black body  
 Keep that in mind as you decide what do with them  
 Be careful where you place them
- 7) Know that you can say something that is racist  
 And know that you can do something that is racist  
 And when I point this out to you  
 Know that I'm not calling you racist  
 Know that you can perpetuate antiblackness without being antiblack  
 When I call you on it  
 Don't hear "I don't love you anymore"  
 Hear the opposite  
 "Because I love you, I want you to do better  
 I need you to do better"

- 8) When you mix black and white  
You get grey
- 9) I love nothing more than when you come to me  
With an article about misogynoir in film  
The first time you asked me about how hip hop  
Can be culturally appropriated because you were  
Curious and confused  
I couldn't answer properly because I was thinking about taking your clothes off  
But you can't be upset when you ask me about black masculinity  
And I send you an article to read from Everyday Feminism  
Or Black Girl Dangerous  
Or a Kat Blaque or Chescaleigh Ramsey video to watch  
Because I don't have the energy to have the conversation  
It's 11:45 PM  
I spent all day as a black queer  
I'm tired
- 10) You'll never truly understand 100%  
The battle  
The war  
The pain or joy  
That comes with the social classification that was bestowed upon me  
Nor will I understand  
The fear  
The anxiety  
The fun  
Or the safety  
That comes with yours
- 11) Be really careful about  
When you decide is a good time to take a selfie  
Where are we? Do we have sun?  
Lighting is important
- I don't wanna take this selfie  
If I can't see how much I love you

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