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Anthology on Racism, the Black Experience, and Privilege

Marshall University Society of Black Scholars

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Anthology on Racism, the Black Experience, and Privilege



Truth telling and shared passages for those who strive to better understand our racial and cultural differences as we strive to build stronger and lasting bridges for humanity, racial, and social justice

**Anthology by Marshall University Society of Black Scholars,
In collaboration with the Marshall University Office of Intercultural Affairs**

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If you're treated a certain way you become a certain kind of person. If certain things are described to you as being real they're real for you whether they're real or not.

- *James Baldwin*

Anthology on Racism, the Black Experience, and Privilege

As argued by President Lyndon B. Johnson in his 1964 speech to Howard University, “You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘You are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.” As Black Americans we must be resilient and move progressively to attain a balanced share of our society’s promises for rich, rewarding, and fulfilling lives that can, partially, be achieved through quality higher education. Thus, the impetus for Marshall University Society of Black Scholars is deeply rooted in the stone bed of our national history, educating and nurturing our best to become leaders, while inspiring and teaching others along the way.

Established in the fall of 2003 among a group of 21 freshmen, The Society is a highly select honors program for Black students who seriously aspire to high academic outcomes, advancement of character, refinement, personal growth, and professional leadership preparedness through 3-4 years of active participation in a moderately rigorous set of growth experiences. For the past 6-7 years, Society members have successfully engaged in annual service learning projects as a practice that encompasses the delivery of services and/or knowledge to others, originating from a period of self-discovery and enlightenment. As a core principle, members of the Society must always consider opportunities to help and improve the lives of others as a result of their gifts, wisdom, work, and personal life experiences. Previous Society project topics included: Generation Z, Women and the Struggle for Social Justice, History of Segregation in US Public Schools, History of Segregation in US Colleges/Universities, Confederate Statutes, Strong Black Women...the Truth or Stereotype, Grit and Resilience, Solving a Problem, Wisdom of Ordinary People, Intercultural Friendship Day, Know Your Black History and many others.

During academic year 2019-20, our work concentrated on racial and social Justice and more specifically involved intensive “truth telling” writings on Racism in Your Life, The Black Experience, and White... Black Privilege. Each member selected one of these topics and submitted their writing. This collection of deeply contemplated writings are revealing, revolting, and truthful. They will be significantly helpful to others in the university and our communities to better understand the menacing trauma associated with racial and social injustice. We must know the details of truths to understand the depth of despair if we hope to build better roads to justice. Truth telling, sometimes, can lead our mind and souls to many solutions.

RACISM IN YOUR LIFE

The depth, impact, and experience of “racism” in our personal lives is a story that we do not often tell. These are predominantly private matters, only occasionally shared and with only certain people in our lives. Unfortunately, many people in our world are unaware of its full existence and do not know the truth about the experiences of racism in our daily lives. Without knowledge of these truths, society, including university leadership, cannot make adequate advancements to address these demoralizing experiences of people of color. In this anthology, writings on this subject will bring clarity, truth, and definition to the racism in the life of seven students.

THE BLACK EXPERIENCE PROJECT

In an effort to significantly elevate awareness and a depth of understanding about the world and uniqueness of Black life in America, telling one’s personal story about what it is like being Black in

America will contribute to greater enlightenment and awareness by others. Perhaps, analogues on the experience of Black life may lead to further dialogue and more meaningful long term institutional changes. Our Black experiences are deeply rooted, sometimes complex to describe, individualized, and threaded in the many fabrics of our physical, spiritual, emotional, cognitive, and historical existence. What is it like be a Black person, your uniqueness, 'walking in your shoes', in your skin, and in your mind? These thirteen writings entail deep contemplation and personal introspective examinations necessary to describe what one's world and life is like as a Black woman or man.

WHITE PRIVILEGE...BLACK PRIVILEGE

According to the Aspen Institute, White privilege, or "historically accumulated white privilege," refers to whites' historical and contemporary advantages in access to quality education, decent jobs, livable wages, homeownership, retirement benefits, wealth and so on. White privilege is an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in every day, but about which I was meant to remain oblivious." (Source: Peggy Macintosh, "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." excerpted from Working Paper #189 White Privilege and Male Privilege a Personal Account of Coming to See, Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies. Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College Center for the Study of Women, 1989). This set of anthologies consists of eleven writings that inspect the existence of white and Black privilege in the student writers' lives and reveal their perspectives and struggles upon this construct.

This publication contains thirty-one Society writings on these three topics and incorporates technologically oriented dramatic performances of select writings to fill the reader's souls and expand one's enlightenment, which is necessary for change.

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PART I



RACISM

Makayla Had Quit Months Ago

Makayla had quit months ago. West Virginia's heat broke records that day, and yet they still sent the pale sixteen-year-old girl outside to pick weeds. Thank God that is not me, I thought to myself. "Chris, go outside and sweep," my masta' commanded. Unable to protest, I embraced the moist blaze.

They would make me sweep late into the night, so late that I could hardly awake the next morn' for my lessons. I always had a rich desire to learn, I loved to read and write—to take myself far away from West Virginia. One day, the masta' caught me reading during break time and he said, "Boy, put down that book! I didn't need no education to get where I'm at—all I needed was a lil' grit!" He explained to me that I did not need to read or write or study or learn—all I need is money and manipulation because that is how yah get the world to spin. "Yer breaks over, get back to work." While I did ponder the masta's words, I was not reading for necessity, I was reading because I wanted to—because I wanted to learn. But as time progressed, and as I got older, my breaks got shorter and shorter. They kept me up sweepin and cleanin longer and longer. I tried to keep studyin', but it was gettin' to a point where I wasn't havin' no sleep. And mama says I get grumpy when I'm lackin sleep—and grumpiness round here will getcha killed. I almost snapped at the one of the mastas "guests," he would have us call em. I'd made a nice lil' sweepin' pile and they clambered right on through it. I asked em why to which they responded, "It was in my way, sweep elsewhere boy."

Finally, enough was enough. I sat down in my car and started writing—

Dear Employer,

I would appreciate if my hours could be lessened, as I am currently attending three AP classes and a Dual Credit Class. I love all my classes and I am learning a lot in them, but I am starting to fall behind. I am not getting any sleep at night. So please if I could get....

My writing was interrupted by a pounding on the car window. I jumped out of my seat and reared my neck. An old police officer stood over me. "Oh, well, you're just doin' your homework!" He said, bewildered. I opened my mouth in confusion. There was a police car and an ambulance surrounding my vehicle. The ambulance workers told me they had received a worried call about a Black boy in his car with his head down, presumably passed out. The police officer told me they had received a phone call that a Black boy was snortin' something.

After that incident, I quit my job, focused on my studies, and graduated high school with a 4.5 GPA. I learned that I am my own master, the master of my mind and body—and I will continue to grow. And I will never allow anyone to stop my growth. I will crack cement, climb abandoned buildings, and rip apart the fabric of oppression—I will grow.

My Experiences with Racism

My experiences with racism and discrimination are limited. Within my life, my parents sheltered me from exposure to this importantly discussed topic. The main reason of why my parents hid me from this subject was due to my father's earlier life. He went through many experiences that someone should never go through, just like many other men and women of color. Though from the protection of my parents, I had to learn what racism was on my own.

My school was predominantly white with me being the minority. In middle school I tended to eat lunch with teammates from basketball and baseball. Some of these people I could call my friends and others I strongly disliked. Every day as I would sit down at this table for lunch and these individuals would make fun of me. More often I would be called racial slurs and made fun of because I was different and not privileged. These actions would make me feel depressed and angry because I couldn't control what I looked like. They made me feel worthless at many times and today I still lack in self-confidence because of their hurtful actions. One of my biggest mistakes was never going to find a different place to eat lunch. Instead, I would sit there every day throughout middle school and somehow put up with the impertinence and not tell anyone because I was scared. I was scared because I thought my "true" friends would look down upon this action. To this day I wish I sat somewhere else and made new friends instead of dealing with the burden of being bullied every day of school.

My most recent involvement with racism occurred at work. I am employed at a grocery store, hired as a cashier and a greeter. Most of the people who I worked with were mainly white. My task for the day was to greet all incoming customers and check receipts of the customers at the entrance door. As I was doing my job, one of the store's managers confronted me and told me that I had to switch positions for the rest of the day due to some unhappy customers. I asked him why the customers were dissatisfied as I felt I did nothing wrong. He responded by informing me that there was a woman saying that a Black man should not be in the front of the store checking receipts, but instead I should be in the back of the store where no one can see me. Since that day, I was never placed to greet the store again. I got placed at low seen positions to where no one can complain about the color of my skin.

In conclusion, men and women of color are constantly faced with the adversity of racism. Though my experiences are slim, I completely understand the struggle that many of us face almost every day. It is completely unfair that many of us have to deal with this struggle. We all need to continue fighting for equality. With my time here at Marshall, I hope I can have a lot of involvement in helping end racism.



Some of the Earliest Memories of Racism

Some of the earliest memories of racism that I have experienced was in elementary school. In the fourth grade this day was something I will never forget and is a vivid experience I always come back to ponder. I had a long-term substitute teacher during my fourth-grade year because my teacher was on leave. Toward the end of class on a sunny day we began to talk about the topic of the color of our skin. The teacher was explaining to the class how everyone had different skin tones. She explained that some individuals in the class, white students, would not get as dark as other students in the class, Black students. I remember specifically that she pointed me out in class, made me stand up, and proceeded to say, "I could never get as dark as her." The teacher then told other Black students to stand up and told them the same thing. After the teacher had finished pointing out other darker students in the classroom, white classmates began to agree with the teacher and say, "Yeah, I couldn't get as dark as them either."

I knew immediately as a fourth grader that this topic was completely inappropriate and made me feel uncomfortable about my skin tone. The teacher made me and other African American students in the class feel like the color of our skin was beneath theirs just because our skin is naturally darker than theirs. The teacher specifically singled out the Black students in the classroom that had ranged from various skin tones. The comments the teacher made further contributed to the deeply-rooted racism and divide within America's school system against African Americans. The teacher has now made it okay for other students to judge and compare other skin tones that are darker than their own. This type of mindset has continued to stick with my white classmates as I grew older.

When I reached high school, I noticed more people at school started to question my race just because I was "light skin". During my first year of middle school, I sat at a lunch table talking with my friend while other students, both white and Black, at the table began to question my race. They asked me if I was mixed or another race because I did not look or sound Black. I also had this same encounter with white kids who I had gone to school with for years at my locker. "Are you sure you aren't mixed or Mexican or something else?" they would say to me. "You just don't look like you are Black," one student said to me. "You don't sound like it either," another student told me. These moments have made me insecure about my skin tone. Especially as a young African American girl, it damages my self-confidence in my Blackness and who I am.

What does a Black person sound like? What does a white person sound like? You cannot sound like a certain race, and Black people are not the stereotype that white people have created for them, such as being "loud" and have improper speaking. We are talented and educated individuals who can and do speak properly. When people say that

someone does not look Black, they reference the racist stereotypes that Black people sag their pants and wear flashy clothing and jewelry. What does a Black person look like?

We come in all different colors and wear unique styles of clothing. You cannot look like a race and people should stop using this stereotype to compare Black people and other people of color.

Another encounter I had faced was at the nail salon. I was getting a pedicure with my cousin when the nail salon worker asked me, "What are you?" I was confused by the question and taken aback. He could read the confusion on my face and said, "Like are you Mexican or something?" No, I told him and explained that I am Black. His face looked shocked as if he had never seen a light-skinned African American person. He never asked my cousin, who was darker than me, what she was and automatically assumed her race as Black. Asking these types of questions in this manner is unacceptable and rude. It is fine to inquire about someone's race but respectfully. Never assume someone's race or be shocked and off-putting about it.

When You are Black Facing Racism

When you're Black facing racism it is part of the daily battle. I remember the first time that someone called me the n-word I was seven. It wasn't super alarming at the time, mostly because I was young and didn't fully understand the weight of the statement. My mom was very calm in the way she handled the situation. When I think back to that moment on that summer day, I find it very disturbing. There have been several more instances of racism that have happened to me since then. Some were more subtle and some others were more direct. A few of them have occurred at Marshall.

It was My First Week of High School

It was my first week of high school...older students that were much larger than me shoved me into a locker wall and told me that I, a n****r, did not belong there, a predominately white school. I went home feeling sad and defeated because I did not stand up for myself and that someone would be that mean to me just because of my skin; I did not even know their names. This was my first real experience with racism...Senior year was the year that the deepness of racism was revealed to me. I was a part of a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program that allowed me to be certified to work in the hospital. One day, when the nurse that I was shadowing introduced herself, the patient smiled at her and responded nicely. But when I entered the room and introduced myself, the patient became non-verbal and their body language changed. When I went to touch my patient, she gave me a nasty look and flinched away. Touching was not an option in their eyes. Once I left the room, the nurse apologized and said that the patient's reaction to me is similiar to how she reacts to the Black doctor on call. I can still remember the look in their eyes as I walked around the room, like I didn't belong in such a place.

That experience opened my eyes to the fact that there are still people in the world that will truly dislike me and believe that I should not be in certain occupations. Sometimes I feel that I have to tiptoe around people and explicitly show that I am not racist. I want to change the way people view us. We have the potential to become anything in life and that our history will not hold us back.

I Would Like to Thank Some Organizations

I would like to thank some organizations that I have found a deep sense of community in. The Society of Black Scholars, Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation Program, Ambassadors of Social Change, Sustainability Club, Intercultural Affairs Office, Center for African American Students and the LGBTQ+ Office have always served as communities where I feel seen and heard. Starting off my college experience, I declared my major within STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). Initially, I knew there would not be too many people who shared the same complexion or even ethnic background as myself, so I knew things would be extra difficult for me. Regardless of not seeing myself represented in the classroom I remained determined to make an impact and strive to become a first-generation college student to finish college.

My Experience with Racism Here at Marshall

My experience with racism here at Marshall University has consisted of a series of microaggressions scattered throughout the three and a half years I've spent here. Every encounter has been small and easy to interpret as something other than the racism it truly is.

I once visited a boutique in Pullman Square with a couple of my friends. We were excited and looking through all the nice things they had on display. We were not the only teenagers in the store, but the store manager had one of his associates follow us around the store as we shopped. The Associate kept asking us if everything was okay, or if he could help us find anything. At first it just seemed like he was doing his job and being attentive, but when I realized that my friends and I were the only three Black people shopping at the time, it became clear that he was watching us for other reasons. I suppose his boss told him to watch us in case we decided to steal anything.

I called my mother and told her about the situation later that night. She told me that I shouldn't worry and that my race most likely wasn't the reason why the manager had us followed. She thought it was more likely that college kids had stolen from his store before, so he was being extra cautious. I didn't think that was true. My friends and I were not the only college kids in the store. None of those girls were getting the same amount of attention and customer service. It made my friends and I feel uncomfortable. There were so many things we wanted to buy, but in the end we just left. Even though no one in the store said anything openly racist or discriminatory, their actions and mannerisms made their thoughts clear. This is an experience that I will never forget.





PART II

The Black Experience

I Asked Seven Women Who Identify as White

Being Black is like walking a fine line between being too Black and not Black enough. It's difficult to walk that line, and it is something that I struggle with on a daily basis. Anytime I am among a group of white people, I become a representative of my own people and all people of color. Being Black instantly frames my opinion as law for an entire group of people. Your actions reflect and inform stereotypes for the white people you interact with. For example, in an Appalachian community like Huntington, WV, you have a choice either to uphold or break the stereotypes that plague your identity as a Black individual. For me, I actively choose to dispel stereotypes – a never-ending cycle of telling others that stereotype doesn't define me. Being Black is knowing when you walk into a classroom, you are already losing. Regardless of your GPA, you are losing because you always have something to prove.

Being Black comes with this overwhelming desire to fit in. I am judged by my own people for not being Black "enough." Judged because at an early age, I learned how to shrink myself into a bite-sized chocolate bar in order to succeed at this school and life, in general. It was difficult growing up in a predominantly white community. As a Black individual, I've learned if I make myself small enough and sweet enough, white people will be able to digest my Blackness. With that came ignoring the way the opposite sex stares at me because most of them couldn't bring a Black individual home to Mom and Dad. I am constantly combating stereotypes, trying my best not to play into the angry Black narrative. Being Black is being constantly aware of my Blackness. Realizing the moment, I walk into a room; I have been simplified and categorized as the diversity. The token Black person. It instantly means that if anyone dares to talk about race-related topics, everyone will turn in their seats to see what I think.

It means having white people ask me extremely uncomfortable questions and knowing if I don't answer, who will – one of their white friends or the Internet? Being Black is having to understand that (a) I don't have a responsibility to speak up for my people, (b) white people shouldn't expect me to educate them, and (c) that it is a choice to be a thought leader in a minority group. However, many times I don't get a choice, just like I don't get a choice to wear the brown skin that I'm in. My skin color gives me authority; and yes, I deserve the authority to speak for my people. White people should view my decision to educate them as a privilege. They should understand anytime I share my experience that it is a privilege, not a right.

Being Black is powerful because of the knowledge (and intuition) that is engrained in each of us. I think the hardest part about being Black is the choice I make to ignore the power of "knowing." To ignore the fact that the white people that I call "friends" may not think that my life matters. White people never have to think about that. They never have to think about how the person sitting next to them might not value their life. They never have to

think about the people in their life, who justify their overt racism with excuses. Such as “my father is a cop” ... “I grew up in a small town” ... or “I was taught that all lives matter,” even when a racial group is being disproportionately killed at a faster rate than others with little to no explanation why. Name one white person who looks knowledge straight in the face and denies her existence on a daily basis. I choose to ignore that my so-called “friends” secretly voted for the same presidential candidate as the Ku Klux Klan because acknowledging otherwise hurts so much. I act like my livelihood is a political stance in a two-sided debate. I swallow the pungent taste of spite when my white “friends” claim that “all lives matter”. But, what’s political about my identity as a Black individual?

Being Black is being told that I belong to this larger family, such as the one at Marshall, and never truly feeling what it’s like to belong. To me, a family stands up for one another. But as a Black individual, I walk around knowing that the people who surround me couldn’t stand up for me. I am potentially the only Black representative in their lives, and they can’t even defend my identity behind my back. They can’t even give me the common dignity of asking if I’m okay when a Black man is murdered by the police, and his dying words are televised for the world to see. I want them to ask me how I felt because they will never understand. Being Black is feeling the death of a stranger so profoundly that my knees still weaken and my eyes still water. George Floyd died because of the color of his skin, and that immediately makes him a part of my family and ultimately a part of me – because it could’ve been me.

I have dedicated my life to correcting stereotypes in my athletic, academic, and work environment. Being Black is a complex, multi-faceted, and almost incomprehensible experience to put into words, let alone on paper. For too long I allowed white men and women alike to walk all over me because I just wanted to be liked. Being Black is powerful. Far too often we allow white people to rewrite our narrative, yet they will never begin to comprehend what it’s like to fight a system that was built on the whipped backs of my ancestors but not for me. And so, I will continue to break down racial barriers for those who come after me. I will never stop fighting for Black representation in every aspect of my life because this country direly needs it.



Part of Being Black is Sharing Experiences

Part of being Black is sharing experiences with millions of strangers you will never meet, but at the same time, you are shackled to the expectations of how society views you, no matter how much you attempt to break free.

Part of being Black is always having to wonder. When the cashier throws your change on the counter rather than handing it to you, you must wonder. Part of being Black is wanting to assume that maybe these people are just having a bad day, yet in the back of your mind, you wonder.

Part of being Black means that everywhere you go, no one looks like you, walks like you, talks like you, or thinks like you. Everywhere you go, you are looking for someone that understands.

Part of being Black is to feel invisible, yet it also means that it is noticeable when you are absent. Being Black means that you can't miss a class because you stand out as one of the only Black people in a room full of 80 other students.

Part of being Black means you can't make a mistake, because when you do, it does not just affect you. It speaks to Black culture and causes some to cast judgment on all Black people. Any mistake is chalked up to a negative mark on the entire culture. Therefore, part of being Black means that you always must be on top of your game.

Part of being Black means that when you make a mistake, the consequences are much more dire.

Being a Black Woman in America

Being a Black woman in America puts you in a box. Being a Black woman raised in West Virginia puts you in an even smaller box. I have known since a very young age that the world perceives me differently than who I actually am. While other people are just now learning about the injustices towards Black Americans, I have had to be aware of these injustices since I was four years old. I had to learn in elementary school that some of the kids would not want to play with me because of my skin color. I had to be taught how to act a certain way in front of white people as long as I can remember. I have learned throughout my twenty years of living that the world will always perceive me in a way that is not my authentic self. I have learned that I will be judged as soon as I walk into a room of strangers without them even knowing my name. My Blackness is defined by what I am rather than what the world wants me to be.

Growing up in West Virginia molded me into who I am and how I define my Blackness today. In elementary school I dealt with the white kids who did not know any better but what their parent or guardians taught them. I was being told things like "I can't be friends with you because my grandma said Black people were made by the devil". In middle school I had to learn that the white kids looked at me and the other Black students as walking stereotypes. I was told things like "Get me that tissue because that's what your people did back in the day" or "You act white" or "All you are is a fried chicken eating n*****." In high school I had to learn that some boys will never want to date me solely based on the color of my skin. I have been told things like "You're pretty for a Black girl."

Throughout my life I have faced with every racial slur in the book, I have been stereotyped, put down, and have had microaggressions thrown at me left and right. Statistically, West Virginia is one of the whitest states in the country, Black people only make up around three percent. My grandfather said that to me quite often growing up. I spent most of my childhood with him while my parents worked. He taught me to be self-aware of my skin color in a predominantly white state. He wanted to prepare my siblings and me for how we were going to be treated in the real world. We were not allowed to use slang, curse, have our hair look messy, or be super loud in public. On that side of my family, everyone is a scholar or teacher, and they play heavily into respectability politics. We were not allowed to act like the "other" type of Black people. In a way it was helpful because I talk very proper and grammatically correct, I know how to act in public, and I know how to talk with professionals. However, it set me back because I was acting in a way that makes white people feel "safe" around me. I was not acting the way I did because it was who I am but rather to make society more comfortable with me and my blackness.

When I discovered this about myself in ninth grade, that is when everything changed for me. I became extremely obsessed with Black history, Black injustices, and Black spaces. I started to experiment with my style and evaluating the people I had been surrounding myself with.

I had a full-blown identity crisis in 2015 and truly did not know what my blackness was. There were the Black kids that were good at sports, and the Black kids that were loud and eccentric, and then there was me... the Black band nerd that was also in theatre and the only Black girl in all my honors and AP classes. I felt alone most of high school and I myself defined Blackness as all the stereotypes that came with being a Black woman. I realized that I had internal racism since I was raised to have this inside me, to judge the Black girls who played loud music and danced in the hallway, or were loud at lunch, I was doing the same thing that my white peers did to me. I put them in a box just as I put myself in a box. In college, I have come to terms with the fact that I am more than what society labels me as. Just because I have good grammar and am quiet in public doesn't mean that I "act white", just because I was raised in the suburbs does not mean I have had a "white lifestyle". I can talk the way I want, act the way I want, dress the way I want, and really do whatever I want as a Black person, and it does not tarnish my Blackness. My Blackness is everything I have endured. Every Black person has dealt with micro-aggressions, racism, and has to think about their Blackness in white spaces, whether they know it or not.

Coming to college and surrounding myself with a predominantly Black friend group made me realize that I have been putting on a show my entire life. My Blackness is using African American vernacular with my friends, bumping loud rap music in my car while I drive, being pro-Black even in white spaces and even when it makes nonblack people uncomfortable, loving my curly hair, lips, and hips. Embracing my culture and being unapologetic is my Blackness, and I would not want it any other way.

The Meaning of Being a Black Woman Today

The meaning of being a Black woman today, in my opinion, is needing to constantly defend myself against other individuals' judgment of me based on my skin color.

All my life, I constantly heard various expressions, such as "You are so pretty for a Black girl." "Your hair looks too weird, can I touch it" or " I am surprised by how well spoken you are." They think that these are actually compliments, but are really not. These comments suggest that the color of my skin has any type of effect on things such as my manners or intelligence. When I was younger, I went through predominantly white schooling and that is when I received comments like these, and I never understood the irony of their "compliments" until I was older.

These comments are one of the biggest reasons I work as hard as I do to be the best in all aspects of my life. Everything from my education to my extracurricular activities, to being the best daughter and sister for my family. Unfortunately, due to recent events that have been happening all over the country. I have realized that no matter how hard I work or how much I succeed in life, there will always be people around who will see my Blackness as a reason to think I am somehow beneath them, but I will not take that as the insult it is meant to be as fuel for my future success and prosperity.

Being Black is A Community

Being Black is a community

The color of my skin is the only admission I need

Growing up I learned we had secret codes

A subtle head nod expresses "I see you... Stay strong"

A simple "you good?" is the only therapy I need

Moving to Southern West Virginia I feared the racism I may endure

Although, I have felt very safe while being at Marshall

I have also learned...

To never go out at night unless my hair is done

To never go out unless I am dressed professionally

A hair out of place and I will be followed around the bookstore by MU police... again

But this is a small price to pay when I am a daughter of Marshall

Over the past year I have seen many organizations take a stand for Black Lives Matter

Countless statements released letting me know, at their institution.... I am safe

Marshall University? Who boasts their diversity and inclusivity?

I find myself still waiting

Is it the Way Her Natural Voluminous Mahogany Crown Cascades

Is it the way her natural voluminous mahogany crown cascades down her back? Or the way each chunky coil bounces in the striking sunlight? Is it the proprietary blend of orange grapefruit blossom, sandalwood spice, and rose that snatches their attention when she walks by? Perhaps it's the hints of amber, vanilla, pistachio, almond, jasmine, and caramel that envelopes her brilliant yellow cotton sweater that makes them intrigued. It could be the pearly whites inside the smile that shines so brightly, that gives them that peculiar butterfly sensation in their tummies. Or maybe it's just what's on the outside of the pearly whites – the lips. So full, so sparkly, and so enchanting. Possibly, it's the way her melodious voice sings, sounding ethereal to their eardrums. Suppose it's her heart, warm like a heated blanket and bigger than infinity that pours out an abundance of tenderness, warmth, passion, and love, making them feel appreciated. It may be the way she rhythmically articulates her words, always presenting herself in the most professional manner. Perchance, it's the variation of her fifteen hearty laughs that lifts their spirits instantly, or how entralling each curve on her body is. Maybe it is the way her mocha brown skin glistens and soaks up the sun, or her teddy bear, snuggling, comforting and reassuring chocolate eyes, that truly mesmerizes them. Is it her determination, strength, and burning desire for success that inspires others to keep going? Or her passion for helping and giving to others? Her extraordinary personality? Her versatile choice of clothing? Her astounding keenness to detail? The way the blemishes on her skin create art?

Whatever it may be, her Blackness is immaculate. Black means Warrior, Remarkable, Compassionate, Eccentric, and Courageous. We are the future.

Being Black Is Being Art

being Black is being art
it is being art in a museum--
a lovely, messy one, full of mislabeling and
intentionally subconscious injustices.

it is being art that is constantly in rotation
never catching a break from open exhibit
never the forefront of any collection
(Save for the shortest month of the year)

Always the obscure reference
lest referring to the pieces copied
and pasted onto more favorable wholes.

it is being an uncredited muse for many
our portraits hang on trees instead of walls
our still life is Strange Fruit
that metaphorical realism, deceivably abstract
increasingly contemporary.

being Black today is being in
constant proximity with the past,
operating in the limbo between anger and melanated joy.

being Black is a constant battle between living & existing.
being Black is being expected to educate, to tell a story.

Every move is threatened with meaning,
and questioned in validity.
Every path is a cautionary tale,
with minimal cordons warding off vandalism.

being Black is being forced into the museum
being told that our quality is three-fifths of decent,
haphazardly installed and left to collect dust.

it is being shoved in one subpar room, project, ward, ghetto--
and our varying identities being redefined as
a collectively humorous monolith.

stripped away of individualism
until it's more profitable to be restored
until the institutions keeping the wretched caste system say otherwise.

indeed, even in feeble attempts at understanding
what it means to "be Black," "live Black," "die Black"
the privileged patrons rely on one singular voice

for the answer which could never be encompassed by that singular dimension.

the "Black experience" could never be explained by one,

yet one person is all that's needed to Hate an entire art form.



To be Black to me is to be Feared

To be Black to me is to be feared for all the wrong reasons, to be thought as a single thing is so strange but that's how most people reduce Black people down to, just Black. Coming out on top and striving to not only be the best me but the best of everyone around me, just to get a chance, is exhausting. It's not physical or solely mental exhaustion it's an exhaustion where I almost hate myself.

Being Black in WV for me has been a singled-out narrative, single Black person in class, single Black person in the waiting room, single student to have both parents not at the school function, etc. Being a success some days while Black is just coming home unharmed and that's something a lot of people don't have to think about, "Am I going to make it home tonight?" isn't a thought even in the back of their minds, and that seems crazy to me because I've never not had that thought for the past 12 years. I used to be Black in the sense my white peers would call me Oreos or Snickers and say I wasn't Black in the way "other Black people are" and I didn't understand what they meant until I supposedly started acting Black in that "other-ing" sense.

As a result of the Genetic Diversity

As a result of the genetic diversity that derives from Africa, Black people appear in varying shades and sizes. Our skin tones range from porcelain to deep rich brown. With this diversity comes disadvantages, however, in social media and in the entertainment industry, dark skin Black women are portrayed as less desirable, mean, and confrontational. In opposition, their lighter complexion counterparts are presented in a more flattering and palatable light. This is a trope in the media that has existed for a long time and is used today. Colorism exists not only in the entertainment industry but in the Black community as well. Black men and men of other races have voiced their 'preference' of light skin Black women over their dark counterparts.

There is nothing wrong with voicing this opinion. However, when followed by the bashing and degradation of women with darker skin, a line must be drawn. It is detrimental to the Black community to uphold this ideology because it sets us against one another. This trend takes place in other ethnic groups, such as Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin/ Hispanic communities, to name a few. European beauty standards have seeped their way through countless ethnic cultures and have violated their individuality, expression, and appreciation of their natural beauty.

When I was in seventh grade, I was in a group with three white kids. One of them asked me, "If you could be a white person, would you?" I said, "No. I love being Black; I won't change it for the world."

Growing Up, My Mother Owned a Home Daycare Center

Growing up, my mother owned a home daycare center. At an early age I grew up with children of many ethnicities, although, as a child, race was never a thought that came to mind. The focus of a child is how much you will get to play, or what television show you will get to watch before bed. My first encounter with racism was in the 1st grade. I remember the incident undoubtedly. I was in gym class, and I had asked the girl standing in front of me a question about the game we were playing. She looked at me intently and said, "My grandpa told me that I cannot talk to Black people because they are dirty." My heart sank and tears welled up in my eyes. I was speechless and astounded at what she had just said. As a child I heard what she said and knew it was wrong, but I did not understand at the time the deep-rooted meaning behind her words. Reflecting on the events of this story, there is an extremely crucial point to make. No one is born a racist. Racism is a taught behavior that is passed from generation to generation. As children, you do not see color as a key factor because you simply just want to enjoy yourselves with those who surround you.

Throughout my life, I have attended predominately white schools, and I knew I was different from the other students at an early age. I had thick curly hair and brown skin, which were opposite of my classmates. Knowing this, I constantly tried to blend in with my surroundings. I would straighten my hair and compare myself to people who looked nothing like me. I dealt with constant self-doubt because the comments, "You are so pretty for a Black girl", or "You are the whitest Black girl I have ever met" would arise. I struggled with what these microaggressions meant and contemplated how I fit in. It wasn't until my junior year in high school when I felt comfortable with who I was becoming as a Black woman. I saw more and more women of color wearing their natural hair with pride, and I loved every moment of it. I felt as if I could finally stop trying to be someone I wasn't. I continually use the strong Black women in my life today as role models to guide me to become the best version of myself.

As I grew up, I felt a lot of confusion and tension in the world around me. The first case of racial injustice I vividly remember was in 2012 when Trayvon Martin was killed. I was ten years old, and I recall the moment that I had heard what happened on the news. A seventeen-year-old African American teenager had been shot and killed after going to the store to get Skittles and tea. I remember crying day after day as I heard new developments in his case. The thought of Trayvon Martin's young life gone too soon is a constant thought in my head that never fades away. Trayvon could have been my brother, cousin, or friend, but most importantly he was someone's son, someone's cousin, and someone's friend. When the justice system failed Trayvon Martin, I was deeply saddened by the state of the country and how far we still had to go to reach racial equality.

The question "What is the Black experience like?" has made me dig deeper into my own understanding of the culture I was blessed to be a part of. The Black experience is having a community who will rally behind one another in times of trouble. The Black experience is having a strong spirit and will to persevere through any tribulation because of where we have been and where we are going. The Black experience is being proud of all those who came before

you to fight for the very freedoms we have today. The Black experience is the music that will make you want to dance all your troubles away and yell out the song lyrics “To be young, gifted, and Black”. The Black experience is hearing the story about how the White House was built by slaves, but we have seen the first Black President of the United States and now the first Black woman Vice President of the United States. The Black experience is knowing how hard your ancestors had to fight to wake up every day knowing the place they live did not accept them for the color of their skin, but they never stopped fighting. The Black experience is loving the crown of curly hair on your head and the beautiful brown skin God has blessed you with.

The Black experience is much more than struggles and hardships. It is a blessing to have an abundant group of intelligent, inventive, resilient, humorous, talented, caring, and beautiful people to call your community. Black culture is filled with richness and depth, from music, to fashion, and all the way to the sports world. Music is always an outlet for artists to express the times that the world is facing. Sam Cook’s “A Change Is Gonna Come”, Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On”, and James Brown’s “Say It Loud- I’m Black and I’m Proud”, were major anthems for the civil rights movement. Afros in the 70s were a way for Black people to express their pride in their own skin. When analyzing the sports world there are many names who come to mind that impacted the Black community. Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in baseball and gave hope to all children of color who had hopes of making it into the major leagues. Muhammad Ali took a stance on his beliefs and was an unapologetically outspoken advocate for the civil rights movement. All the way to LeBron James, who today, is not only an amazing athlete but an advocate for social justice. There are countless role models that have impacted history for the Black community and America. These civil rights heroes never stopped pressing towards their goals and dreams, and it gives me the drive I need to do the same. They walked with grace and when the world tried to quiet them, they only grew louder.

I am proud to be a Black woman in America. America is a country with people from all countries, ethnicities, and backgrounds. The Black experience differs from the experiences of other races in this country in many ways. The lives of all Americans are different, and that is what makes us all unique, but we all deserve equal opportunity and treatment regardless of skin color. Racial tensions in 2020 moved the country to talk about many uncomfortable topics that have been present for many years. For growth and change, you must leave your comfort zone. Through listening to each other's experiences and challenges we can understand one another.

When we listen to one another and support one another we can grow toward one American people, united because of the mutual respect we share for each other.

Stop Acting Like a White Girl

“Stop acting like a white girl.”

“You have white people hair.”

“You’re not Black enough.”

These are just some of the many phrases I’ve heard growing up. If you ever want to know what it’s like to struggle with your identity, I’m the one to ask. I can remember when I was a little girl, and my white mom would struggle to do mine and my sister’s hair. She would ask my Black aunts and they wouldn’t know. They would treat our hair as if it was theirs, but the thing is, it’s not. My hair isn’t like my mom’s either. I can look in the mirror and see I resemble my Black father more than my white mother, but that doesn’t make me any less white. Just as I can look at my sister and see my mom more than my dad, but that doesn’t make her any less Black.

I’ve been fortunate to be raised by both my parents. I have been able to experience both cultures equally. That comes with a price. Recent events have played out over the years from police brutality to Black Lives Matter there has been conflict among my family. My mom’s side has had a different perspective than I have to the point where I feel as though my Blackness is not fully accepted. Yes, they know I’m biracial, but it’s like don’t I dare embrace my Blackness. It’s hearing, “Don’t forget you’re white too.” Or “I’m not racist but...” I’ve had to cut some family members off because I won’t take blatant disrespect to my Blackness.

Being biracial isn’t something that can be easily categorized in society. It can make others uncomfortable because it’s like what are you? Are you Black or white? And I can’t answer that fully, I’m not fully Black or white, so where exactly do I fit in? I still struggle with that today. I sometimes feel as though I can’t fit in with Black people because I feel like I am not fully accepted. Black girls, especially in middle school and high school were the main ones who would make snide comments about me and constantly remind me that I wasn’t Black enough. Since I’ve been in college that has changed, but that is always a thought in the back of my mind when I am around Black people.

To be Black is to be Many Things at Once

To be Black is to be many things at once. It's to be brown-skinned, light-skinned, white-skinned, and dark-skinned. It's to be loud and ratchet, to be quiet, and "one of the good ones." To be poor and dumb. To be rich and boujee. It's to have big lips and monkey-like features or petite and Caucasian-esque characteristics. It's to be easily offended and too sensitive or a white wannabe. It's an amalgamation of all those associated with the Black race and being a little bit of all of them at once. It's being the single representation of your entire race and making or breaking the image you want to portray to them until you die. It's losing a part of yourself to fit in with certain crowds. That's what being Black means to me...because that's what I've had to experience.

I was born in the deep south and was raised there some years before I was taken to the projects of Harlem. Getting "jumped" to death, fights, shootings, rapes, and fires were all everyday occurrences during this time. I couldn't take the stairs, especially alone in my own building, because many would perish, buy drugs, sell drugs, be raped, kidnapped and gather for private deals in the stairway. This forced me to learn how to tell the difference between water, soda, and urine splatters from trips up and down the building elevators. When asked where I was from, I'd tell of my birthplace. Although I had spent more time in the projects than my own birthplace, people, including my branch of family there, didn't consider me to be "one of them." I walked, talked, and looked just like them on the outside – but on the inside, they thought of me as a country girl when I remembered none of it. It would be a few years later that I would come to West Virginia. By that time, my identity was still based on where I considered home – the ghettos. I remember moving into a small, poor neighborhood and going to the empty park where I sat on the swings for a while. Everything was so different – the scenery, the people, even the smells. I sat alone for a long time until a Black boy, slightly older, came up to me and introduced himself. From then on, he became my first friend here and one of the only Black kids I had met at the time. When I went to school, no one looked like me. I was the only Black kid in my class. In fact, there were few others like me spread throughout the school. I had never seen so many white people in my life! No one from my previous home looked like them – though there were some who resembled them.

As I grew older--middle school, high school, and now college, I think back on what has happened in my life. I always identified as African African/Black on state tests and forms, but my personality traits were always tied to my mother being half White and therefore, me being that too. Then, when I asked if I should include that on forms, I was told, "Naw, you're Black." When my grandmother told me of how her grandmother was a Native American stolen from her reservation, her toes cut off, and forced into marriage by a White Scotsman, I thought maybe I should include that. "No, you're too

Black," I was told. When in the last year, I found out that my own father, who I always thought was purely African, was only a third Black and his family were Guyanese Native Americans who had mixed with White and Blacks, I thought I should probably add that. "No, you're too Black," I was told. I'm too Black to be Native American. I'm too Black to be White. But I'm too White to be fully Black? I suppose I'm all those things – and yet none of them.

I was considered mean and scary to my classmates all the way until college. I guess I am. I was called 'SpongeBob's' little sister, a nickname my older brother earned for his yellowish skin, and one I was earning because my skin was the same. I guess I am. I don't wear braids in my hair and am mistaken for Dominican in my college Sociology class. I guess I am. I should be angry and conscious of all the injustices that Black people have faced and will face. I guess I am. I should expect to struggle more in life because I'm a Black woman. I guess I am.

I'm a little bit of what everyone wants me to be...and I'm none of them. I have come to accept it. I've come to accept that being Black means accepting certain things in life. I have come to accept that there are people in this world, more than I could ever dream, that will never truly like me because of what I am. I have come to accept that people will assume things about what and who I am. I have come to accept that I will never be enough for my race or enough for any that have made me who I am. I have come to accept that I don't feel Black, but I don't feel like anything else. I feel like me. That's all I've ever known, and I can't change that. I don't want to change that. We all wish we could be someone else, but I don't. I may wish for better but being someone else is not one of them. Being Black is learning to accept the world around me.

PART III

White Privilege...
Black Privilege

Privilege is a Special Right

Privilege is a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group. For example, white privilege is the societal privilege that benefits white people. As a person of color, I can see white privilege vividly. I am constantly aware of white privilege as it surrounds me in my daily life in terms of my behavior and my self-image.

One example of white privilege is how society has perceived white people as the beauty standard. This was especially hard on me because I am a Black woman. Up until a few years ago, I could look up “beautiful woman” on Google and not a single African American woman would show up in the results. Most models were white and if there were Black models, they were never wearing their natural hair. All the dolls that were marketed to me when I was growing up, had blond straight hair and Black women were forced by society to get perms and straighten their hair to look more presentable. I remember when I was growing up, I was teased in school for my Afro hair and because I did not have long straight hair. When my hair was braided, everyone laughed at me. This really hurt my self-esteem at the time because I felt like I was never beautiful. I feel like I spent most of my life wishing I was white so I could have the “pretty” hair and “pretty” skin that everyone around me desired. Our society made me hate my skin for a long time because I thought I was not good enough. I was also bullied because of my skin complexion. People would point at me and laugh, or they would say I was too dark. Many people would say things like “I would want to date you but you’re too dark for me” or “If you were lighter, you would be prettier”. Comments like these broke me inside and made me feel ugly. I hated myself because I did not know what I was doing wrong, and I did not know why my hair and skin were not desirable in their natural state. White people do not have to deal with not fitting the beauty standard as much because they are the beauty standard. Even on Marshall University’s campus people have teased me for my skin color. I have been called “blurpurple” which means that I am so Black that I appear to look purple. The sad thing is, if people think that people are not bullied for their race in our society today, they are very wrong. It still happens to me very often and many of my friends and family members.

Another example of white privilege would be how white people are viewed versus how people of color are viewed. Black people are typically seen as threats or suspicious characters. I have been followed around expensive stores and pulled over by police officers because I apparently looked suspicious. Sometimes I am terrified of the police because I do not know what they are going to think of me based on my skin color. A few of my African American friends were blatantly singled out on a school field trip because “they looked like the type of kids to use marijuana” and they were the only ones searched. To add insult to injury, they were not carrying marijuana. It is instances like these that make me terrified to be a Black woman in our country.

Black people are also not typically seen as successful as opposed to white people. Even when Black people are successful because of their own talents, it is questioned whether their success is due to affirmative action. My dad makes a decent income and we have always lived comfortably. People would always ask me if my dad sold drugs because they could not understand how he had so much money. Could it not just be because my dad worked hard to get where he is and now he has a managerial position that pays well? I always wondered why people always have to question our success. White privilege explains why people of color are not seen in a successful light. I feel like white people do not have to deal with the same feelings of self-doubt that I do. People have made me doubt this by making me think I was simply a “diversity hire.” I questioned whether I deserved all the attention and success that I have. Black people typically are not seen as very smart. In my school district, I was the only Black girl in most honors classes. People always questioned my intelligence even though I was just as smart as everyone else in there. I was teased for speaking proper and not “speaking like a Black person.” Sadly, this is something that I still deal with on Marshall University’s campus. People have approached me and made comments about the way I speak. Am I not supposed to sound educated because I am Black? I think about this all the time because my accent and the way that I talk is not something that I can change.

White privilege is something that I will continue to think about every day. I hope to eventually see a change in the way society views African Americans and I hope that white people are more aware of the privileges that they were born into. I feel as though we all need to be aware of these privileges and acknowledge that they exist.

I Believe White Privilege is a Very Real Thing

I believe white privilege is a very real thing. Whether it is access to certain things and opportunities, the likelihood of being stopped by police, or having to deal with blatant racism, white privilege is real. I don't believe there is any societal Black privilege, but I do believe it is a privilege to be Black.

The head start white people have over Black people automatically gives them the advantage and therefore privilege. The head start allows the privilege of access and opportunity. Black people came out of slavery and had to build from the ground up. None of the Black families had any old money that their children could live or build off, let alone six generations down the line. There were no established Black schools or teachers. There were no Black owned businesses, no Black owned land, nothing. Today, we see the advantages of this privilege in our everyday lives. The schools in predominantly white areas are always better quality than those in a predominantly Black areas. Most businesses we see and use every day are owned by white people. Most of the property you will find for sale is owned by white people. White people are more likely to find a good job with a livable wage in a good community that they are also more likely to afford to buy a home in. Without this 400-year head start, the playing field would look much different.

A big part of white privilege to me is the relationship with law enforcement. As we see every day on TV and other media outlets, the relationship between Black people and the police is tarnished, and it always has been honestly. After the abolishment of slavery, the police and prison system were used to oppress Black people and is still are, even as I write this. The police have terrorized Black communities for years and this is something white people don't have to think twice about. Even Black children have to be cautious. Even Black with your hands up you have to be cautious. Even when you're in custody and "safe" you have to be cautious. Even when you are the person who called them, Black people have to be cautious when it comes to police, because in every one of those scenarios, more than one Black life has been taken by police. White families don't worry about their kids being stopped by police and not making it back home, Black families have to. White families don't worry about their loved ones dying over petty crime Black families have to. Eric Garner was MURDERED for (ALLEGEDLY!!) selling loose cigarettes! The relationship white people have with police is a privilege.

White people have the privilege of not having to deal with blatant racism. As I get older it gets a lot easier to see how alive racism is in the US. I have had a customer at work (older white man) straight up give someone I was training (a white male) a 20-dollar tip and told him not to split it right in front of my face! A friend of mine was growing dreads and his job told him that he needed a more professional haircut; I won't say the

company, but he was perfectly capable of doing his job with his hair and on top of that he had white male coworkers with longer hair than his. More times than I can count on both hands I've been followed through stores and harassed by workers. I've had people lock their car doors as I walk by with a group of friends, everything. It's crazy to think that a large amount of people still think that way. It's crazy that because of my skin color people will think I'm a bad person. It is most definitely a privilege to not have to deal with or even think about any of these things happening to you or your loved ones when you leave your home.

I believe it is a privilege to be Black, but I don't think there is any such thing as Black privilege in society. To me it's a privilege to be Black because even through everything Black people have been put through, we always manage to keep pushing for change and never give up. It's a privilege to be Black because of the strong culture and history of Black people, and for so many other things. I don't think that Black privilege is real because the things people consider to be Black privilege are not actually a privilege, but more so an attempt to even the playing field. People say that there is Black privilege because there is no NAAWP or other related groups to work force, or "white people aren't being hired at rapid rates to fill racial gaps in the workforce". These are selfish arguments when you consider that every other group is for the advancement of white people and that there are still more white people in the workforce, and they are still being hired at higher rates.

I recently had an old friend complaining about there not being a program like the Society of Black Scholars at Marshall for white students. They specifically said, "There is no program I can be in that would give me the support and connections the Society gives you just because I'm white". I had to explain to her that, for starters, nobody in the Society of Black Scholars is in it because they are Black. You don't just get in for being a Black student and that every one of us earned our position in the Society with our performance in high school. I then explained that there are a dozen programs that have been around for white people since before Black people were even allowed to attend college. I do see my membership in the Society as a privilege, but I don't think a group dedicated to Black students on an underrepresented campus is considered "Black privilege".

As far as Black people being hired to fill racial gaps in the workforce, you can do a quick google search and find that the gap is nowhere near being filled. White people are still hired at much higher rates. White privilege is a very real thing, and we see it every day in society. Black people have come a long way and we still have a long way to go but I believe we can turn the tables in our favor in due time.

The Concept of White Privilege is so Deeply Embedded

The concept of white privilege is so deeply embedded within the foundations of this country that most white Americans are blind to the advantages they possess. The opportunity whites own is one hundred-fold more than any other race. It's obvious to any educated individual of the privilege white people have in education, jobs, healthcare, especially the criminal justice system and every disastrous event human history has faced. For example, in the public school system, we are taught that the pilgrims befriended the Natives, and they had a nice dinner and a happy ever after. Did they just forget to include the mass genocide of the Native people? It's so disgusting that I have had to relearn the real history of the world through social media sites like twitter.

Colorism is another factor that plays into the roles of white and Black privilege. Lighter Black individuals are treated much differently than darker skin Black individuals. It's so present in all forms of media. Where I see it most locally, and within Marshall University is the sororities on this campus. There are maybe seven Black girls in the sororities on campus, and the majority are light skin or biracial girls. I see no coincidence; I've heard many girls talk about not letting certain girls in the sorority houses because of appearance. I do think light-skinned Black people experience a sort of Black privilege that dark-skinned people do not.

When Initially Asked About Whether Black Privilege Existed

When initially asked about whether Black privilege existed, I struggled to come up with any sort of discussion about this. I asked friends of all races and ethnicities and none of us could think of anything more than “our skin ages well with less wrinkles!” As I write this, I still falter in my attempts to directly answer this question; it makes me reflect inward to ensure that I am considering all sides, racist or not, of what seems to be a debate in some conservative circles.

Let’s first acknowledge something: as a triracial African American with a white mother, I do have some inherent privilege due to my lighter skin tone. Those who may encounter me could also know my mother, which may make things easier for me in certain situations compared to others. This has me wondering if the intercultural scholarships I have been awarded over the years are the result of Black privilege and if one could consider things such as scholarships, programs like the Society of Black Scholars and LSAMP, and other organizations meant to discover and elevate those with academic excellence, a form of Black privilege. I think not. While it may seem that way to some, the centuries of inequity that have existed in the American judicial system and society alone have had a trickle-down effect that affects a vast number of people today. If this is the case, though, then wouldn’t this also mean that the scholarship I received from an eastern Native American association indicate that I have any sort of “native privilege?”

Some conservative circles began circulating the phrase “Black privilege” over a decade ago. The issue with this is that privilege is often unearned, exclusive, and socially conferred, and, in the case of white versus Black privilege, deep-seated in power. This power is the result of the actions taken hundreds of years ago when this country was colonized by Europeans. During slave times, whites dominated, and this was often generational. Centuries later, we are still seeing the effects of this, as we have not modified our democratic system such that the playing field is level for people of all races; inequity has been brought to light more within the past few years than ever, and racism is still alive everywhere, in every job sector and economic and social class that exists. If anything, Black privilege is synonymous with Black oppression.

Let’s clarify the difference between equality and equity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines equality as “the condition of having equal dignity, rank, or privileges with others; the fact of being on equal footing.” Alternatively, equity is defined as “the quality of being equal or fair; fairness, impartiality; even-handed dealing” and therefore recognizes that everyone’s circumstances differ in terms of the dealing of resources. This being said, I believe that the phrase “white privilege” came into existence due to the recognition of unequal opportunity for those of certain ethnicities when compared to those who are white.

David Horowitz, author of the book *Black Skin Privilege and the American Dream*, believes that “the fact that white people are better off is not a privilege; it’s earned.” Horowitz continues to elaborate by explaining that Blacks are still more privileged despite lagging other racial groups in varying categories and that white privilege does not prevent them from succeeding. Rather, it is their behavior and inability to build more intact families. Horowitz highlights something here that must not be discredited: the “inability to build.” There are many socioeconomic factors that play into whether or not a person is stuck within a generational cycle of any sort – poverty, abuse, lack of education, et cetera – and the motivation of a person has the potential to make or break their escape from this cycle. However, there are times when motivation and effort are simply not enough to propel one out of a situation like this, hence where the argument of “Black privilege” dissolves. Metrics taken at various times across several decades – not including the racist history of the United States of America – indicate that African Americans are lagging in several areas, with college graduation rates just being one example of this.

Things such as Black History Month are not a result of Black privilege. The scholarships I receive because of my race are not a result of Black privilege. If this were the case, I could make terrible grades and still be offered financial help obtaining my degree from willing donors. Instead, I work to keep my GPA up to standards, and as a result, I am awarded scholarships. Nothing about this exudes privilege. There will always be inequity. However, the argument of the definitive existence of Black privilege is nothing more than a prolonged whine from those unwilling to accept that there are not only racial disparities in existence within our world, but also centuries and generations of inequity whose consequences find their way into the lives of modern-day African Americans.

We Go to Hibachi Because They Don't Sell Fried Chicken

We go to Hibachi because they don't sell fried chicken and watermelon at Hibachi. All my friends love Hibachi. All my friends are white. In my twenty years growing up as mixed race, I've never had a single biracial close friend. I get it – correction I USED to get it. I got it, and I outgrew it. I remember the feeling, though. It's like you're not quite human to everyone else, but something exotic trying to be human. I used to be very embarrassed to enjoy fried chicken and watermelon in public. "You are terrifying and strange and beautiful, someone not everyone knows how to love." – Warsan Shire

I have always hated being called exotic. I was born and raised in Charleston, WV. Maybe that's why I "talk white." It's because I sat between the Abigails and the Adams in my first grade class and learned their language. I learned their language while suppressing absolutely any trace of AAVE or a blaccent, because I had to fit in to survive. I was six years old when I can remember first experiencing racism.

My parents tried as hard as they could to make sure I was proud of who I am, embracing my unique identity, and they failed. I still want to thank them. Thank you, mom and dad, for the following: staying together all this time because that meant I could not get made fun of for being the Black girl with the single mom, reading me lots of intentionally intercultural children's books, gluing the head back onto the Black Barbie doll I ripped the head off of at age 5 as an act of self-hatred, taking me to therapy, understanding that you will never understand the identity crisis I've struggled with for as long as I can remember, and going to bat for me when I got bullied in school for being Black. Every single time.

My mother has kept a binder documenting every injustice her three Black children have experienced in the public school system. While I applaud her efforts, if I were her, the binder would not exist. Lions do not belong in cages alone, surrounded by giraffes and gazelles. Lions need their pack and their tribe, to learn to roar and their potential. This lion has only known solitude for most of her life. I walked with my head down, shoulders slumped, tail between my legs, trying to take up as little space as possible and to go unnoticed. If the Abigails and the Adams cannot see me, they may not call me a nigger. They may do their classwork instead of re-enacting the scene in Alex Haley's *Roots* where Kunta Kinte is beat against a tree for refusing to give up his name, in the middle of my math class. While the teacher sits and laughs along while I was the only Black person in the room. At that moment, back in high school, I felt like the only person in the room. The only person on Earth. I always loved *Roots*. I felt so unbelievably empowered and strong when I originally watched it. I learned about my nameless, enslaved ancestors. I imagined their strong hands and the fight in their eyes and hearts when the Abigails and the Adams cornered me during free time in the bathroom to try to "beat the Black off of me."

Only that half of me seems to matter. Yesterday, I was asked whether I consider myself a Black student or a white student but before I could decide how I personally identified I knew what the answer was, what it always is. I am a Black student even though I am equal-parts white, it only lingers like an exponent on the Black half of me that seems to be all anyone sees. My Blackness

is strong enough to cancel everything else out, like math. To the world, I am Black. To the Black community I am high yellow and too whitewashed to fit in. To the white population I am only Black, carrying around all the other hats I wear like a heavy systematically oppressed backpack full of trauma and suppressed self-loathing. I am not your fetish. I am not Abigail's mixed baby #goals or exotic in any way whatsoever. I am not pretty for a Black girl. I don't look like Zendaya. I can't dance or cook. I don't really think Kevin Hart is all that funny.

I am uncertainty pumped into a body serving as my armor and a glowing neon sign reading "not like the other ones." My mind is a linguist, code switching with every encounter to the point I no longer know my default. When you're biracial you switch your whole identity based on who you're around. When you are biracial you are treated as the spokesperson for the entire Black community because colorism allows you to be white enough to be taken remotely seriously. Black Lives Matter. I pretend I do not wish to feed the woman, who is more upset over the Target getting robbed than the insurrection of our nation's capital my fist. I am MLK, to her. I know I am Fred Hampton. I have fought my entire life to conform to what makes me the safe, approachable, and agreeable Black that can be employed and befriended in white corporate America and break down as many barriers as I can to make an easier life for the next generation, like my father did for my brothers and me.

I have fought my entire life just to feel okay. I would have given absolutely anything to have had a role model like Kamala when I was a little girl to show me that I can be Black and be biracial and do anything. Maybe my poor Barbie would not have had to feel the same pain, frustration, and feeling of being trapped in a high security meat prison that doesn't allow my thoughts feelings or ideas to make it from my mouth to the ears of my oppressors. Her mere existence is cathartic to all younger versions of myself, and everyone else who understands what it feels like to be left out of the narrative.

We're here now, and here to stay. My fight is not for nothing.

I can graduate. I can be the Student Body Vice President. I can be the Vice President of the United States of America. I simply imagine the version of myself I would like to be and show up as her.



When People Hear the Word Privilege

When people hear the word privilege, they stop listening to the conversation because it's somewhat insulting to what they have accomplished. Saying that white privilege exists does not take away from the struggles that white people may have faced, but simply says that their challenges do not relate to those who have been faced by people of color. In my opinion, white privilege is not symbolized by huge mansions and "daddy's money", but with the kind of white privileges that happen right in front of our faces.

Now, some may say that Black people have their privileges, too. While they may be seemingly true on the outside, these privileges that you may think you see are basically there to make Black people feel like they are not still being oppressed. Black privilege is a seemingly meaningless term made up by those who were just offended that white privilege is a used term. It's not there, it just makes them feel better about their actions to think that Black people have privilege.

White Privilege to my Understanding is Like Faith

White privilege to my understanding is like faith for a Caucasian individual. They may not believe it's there or cannot see that it exists, but it is always there for them. The hardest thing I think for a Caucasian person to understand is that it exists. Empathy goes a long way in helping understand privilege. Another example of white privilege is entitlement to opinion. In the news today we see all the time when a Caucasian male or female gets aggressive, they are described by their name and what they did for a community or a patriot. If an African American male is put in the same situation, then they will be described as a "thug". I was handed so many things in life and I still find myself questioning, if I was Caucasian, how my life would be shaped.

How do we solve this invisible battle? How is a battle won with an enemy that you know exists but the people with privilege are convinced that they earn everything they have today? Maybe the solution to this is to keep breaking the barrier, or showing people who have the most privilege that someone who has the least, can still make it.

As a Biracial Man

As a biracial man...I see myself as both Black and white because that is what I am, half and half...I receive more Black privileges than white privileges. I have noticed while in high school, there tends to be more scholarships specifically for Afro-Americans than for Caucasians. For example, Marshall University has many scholarships for minorities/ African Americans, such as Health Science and Technology Academy HSTA and the Intercultural Student Scholarship. I can honestly say that these scholarships do not target a white audience. This also brings about the fact that there are not white only scholarships known in most colleges. I conclude that both whites and Blacks will have some type of privileges in some way, shape, or form.

As a Young Woman of Color

As a young woman of color attending a predominantly white college I can recognize white privilege and can truly understand the term itself. White privilege is viewed as a built-in advantage that the Black community does not experience. White privilege consists of going into the store and seeing that the main displays of shampoo and conditioner are catered to your hair type and not put into a separate section in the aisle labeled as "exotic hair". It also means being able to move through life and not be racially profiled or unfairly stereotyped.

At Marshall University you will experience diversity. There are so many people from different backgrounds and groups. I appreciate going to a college that is aware of white privilege and can use it to be beneficial to all people. Ways to act are to use your privilege to amplify voices and share the work and perspectives of people of color. Lastly, stay educated about this topic and educate your fellow peers. It is still an ongoing problem in today's age, and it will most likely never go away. Recently we just hired our first Black head coach for football which is such a big accomplishment and something that I show great gratitude towards.



It is Hard to Have a Difficult Conversation About Race

It is hard to have the difficult conversations about race with your families or coworkers because no one wants to be told that everything they have was handed to them without a challenge. When people hear the word “privilege”, they stop listening to the conversation because it’s somewhat insulting to what they have accomplished. Saying that white privilege exists does not take away from the struggles that white people may have faced, but simply says that their challenges do not relate to those that have been faced by people of color.

Now, some may say that Black people have their privileges, too. While they may be seemingly true on the outside, these privileges that you may think you see are basically there to make Black people feel like they are not still being oppressed. For example, Black scholars can receive scholarships for just being Black. This may seem like it is such a privilege to have because who doesn’t want free money towards their tuition, but, if you think about it, it’s just another way of keeping a university’s diversity rate up. It’s not a privilege, it’s a scholarship. Some also talk about how there are clubs that are solely created for the purpose to serve minorities. White people may say that if they were to create a group like that, then they would be called racist. By being the predominant race and the oppressor where nothing needs to be specified as white, yes, it would be. Having these clubs is not a privilege, but a way of connecting with and creating a safe space with the Black community.

Overall, I simply believe that white privilege is real, but it is not the kind of high-class, billionaire privilege that is portrayed in the media and movie industry. It has more to do with systematic racism and the differences there are in how people of color are treated compared to white people. Black privilege is a seemingly meaningless term made up by those who were just offended that white privilege is a used term. It’s not there, it just makes them feel better about their actions to think that Black people have privilege.

The Major Advantage of White People is Resume Building

A major advantage for white people is resume building. Resume building is important to learn because it takes learning what you need to put in and what needs to be left out. I had a resume building meeting a couple of weeks ago. When we started, I was informed that some accomplishments should be left out because of the racial bias. You want a resume to look good, but some things that you include can cause a hindrance instead of a benefit because of racial bias. It is good to include things, however, some things that you can be proud of may result in your resume less likely to be chosen. White privilege enables those that have it to include more accomplishments than minorities.

I can give an example of privilege that I see in the media that truly upsets me; how protests were handled in our country. When it came to the Black Lives Matter protests at the Capitol, the officers would use violence and weapons to stop the protestors. However, when the US Capitol was invaded, the situation was handled very differently. The people at the Capitol got away with many events that they should not have gotten away with. The police did resist; however, it was nowhere to the extent that the Black Lives Matter protests were handled. You can see how the situations escalated on both sides. Privilege in society, to me, shows exactly what people are able and unable to get away with. It is something that must be fixed if we all work together.

White Privilege is Defined Through My Eyes

White privilege is defined through my eyes as having unearned advantages in society through the color of your skin being white. In some ways, being born white in United States means you have white privilege regardless of classism.



Commentaries and Recognition

“These writings did not surprise me at all in terms of what they express. They are representative of the voice of Black America. They are sad stories of being excluded, discriminated against, and struggling to just be treated equal in America. I have heard these same stories before at a previous institution from the Black students there. It is a shame that most people in the majority have no idea what the average Black person experiences on a daily basis. These stories are honest, raw, depressing, and enlightening.”

– DR. JEROME GILBERT, FORMER PRESIDENT OF MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

“Composed by Marshall students, the Anthology of Racism, The Black Experience, and Privilege casts an unflinching gaze not only on overt racism but on every aspect of the lived Black experience, in all its diversity, in 21st-century America. It’s impossible to read these personal testimonies and not feel moved, outraged, overwhelmed, and impressed by the force of these writings and the self-possession and strength of those who wrote them.”

– DR. RACHAEL PECKHAM, PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AT MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

“These are powerful testimonies to the broad spectrum of challenges our Black students confront on a regular basis. Sadly, frustratingly, maddeningly, they show the continuing corrosive power of racism to impact the well-being, self-esteem, and aspirations of our most gifted and talented students. Yet, these stories, reflections, tributes, and invocations also reveal the incredible resilience, pride, intelligence, creativity, and fortitude of students who refuse to bow down.”

– DR. CICERO FAIN, PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AT MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

“Reading the reflections of students from Marshall University’s Society of Black Scholars on the topics of racism, the Black experience, and privilege left me profoundly moved. One student challenged Caucasian individuals to “use your (white) privilege to amplify the voices and share the work and perspectives of people of color.” My hope is that we will use the writings from this anthology, and other writings of people of color, to commence a campus-wide dialogue that will deepen our understanding of just what white privilege is and why we must work toward achieving greater equity in our society.”

– DR. MARY BETH REYNOLDS, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT, MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

“These rich personal testimonies, poems, and essays offer us a wealth of insights about the challenges our Black students and their families continue to face in dealing with racism. The text also raises important questions about the pervasiveness of colorism in our culture, pointing clearly to the work we have yet to do in creating a more just society.”

– DR. MONTSERRAT MILLER, PROFESSOR OF HISTORY,
MARSHALL UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE JOHN DEAVER DRINKO ACADEMY



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