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Releasing Our Voices: Confronting Marginalization in the Academy

Keiba Bragg-Best & Catarina Campbell

A voice resonates most brilliantly when it breaks through a drastic and long-held silence. Such is the reality of many marginalized and oppressed peoples within the Academy. This compilation of poetry is the resonance of our voices, the processing of our souls toward wellness, from within structures very capable of silencing us. We write in poetry, rather than prose, as an affirmation that our voices are beautiful and contributing to higher education in whatever form we are brave enough to call them forth. While we do not and cannot represent all identities of the many of us who are silenced in a myriad of ways within higher education, we do own our personal identities. As a woman of color and as a queer woman of color we proudly strive to serve as a porta-voz—a bridge for the voices of others—so that they may begin to appear on the pages of journals like this one. We write about institutionalized racism, systematized hatred, and about our journeys into pleasure and joy, for this is how we live and this is how we choose to show up in script as well as in the Academy.

Keiba Bragg-Best is a poet who writes about diverse topics. She currently works as a counselor at the University of Vermont Counseling and Psychiatry Services (UVM CAPS). She is an alum of the University of Vermont Graduate Counseling Program. She is dedicated to seeing people holistically. She firmly believes that we all hold multiple identities that make up who we are—which cannot be compartmentalized. She is committed to supporting students and creating a safe space for all. She is passionate about addressing issues of social justice such as gender, sexual orientation, class and race, etc. Her professional interests include counseling underserved and underrepresented populations, women, college students, identity development, and community outreach. She identifies as a Womanist and a longtime activist for gender equity. She is interested in the phenomenology of and women of color in the professional world.

Catarina Campbell aspires to be a poet, artist, and revolutionary. Her revolution begins with wholeness, both on the page and in her life as a student affairs professional. She strives to integrate seemingly disparate identities and to use her voice as a means to uplift and empower herself and others. A graduate of Middlebury College in 2011 and of the University of Vermont Higher Education and Student Affairs program in 2015, Catarina is grateful to have the opportunity to realize her personal and professional goals for agency and visibility through participation with TVC.

Owning It by Catarina Campbell

What I want to do is stand here and say
I am a transracial adoptee, Amazonian Indian
Cancer and child sexual abuse survivor
With brown skin that glows like glitter
I'd like to tell you that I'm bipolar.
And that I'm still here.

I wish to say these words with inner strength and grace
That manifests outwardly
To those who share my identities
So that they see me living— happy and struggling.
I wish to shine solidarity on this life
Rife with chaos, bliss, and everything in between
Let myself be fully seen, understood
For all this life I've had
'Cos when we believe it's all good or bad
We've already lost
Too many youths and too many fighters
Caught in the crossfires
Of a realness
We were too timid to portray

This is the place... by Keiba Bragg-Best

This is the place where red marks on paper turn to doubt
Doubt that consumes you
Trembling
Building
Seeping
Thick like sap
Terrified
Unbalanced
What I thought I knew I now doubt
Nothing rocks you like this
Everything
Every single thing
Wavering
Like a flag in the wind
Bouncing
Residual sounds
Small fragments of my voice
Most have been erased
Faded
Fading like charcoal on paper
But some of me remains
This is the place where the letters behind your name are more important than
your name
Your given name
And its ties
Truth?
Bridge
Do I cross it because I need what is on the other side or that I want it
Does either matter?
Is this a dream or an alternate reality
Was I bought and sold this?
Questionable
What will happen if I cross?

This is the place where self-doubt turns into critiques
Valid or invalid
Visibility
Truth seeking
Self-doubt is present
Shifting
Creeping
Challenging
Challenging you to
Know yourself
Remember this is the place where I rewrite my story

by Keiba Bragg-Best

Women
silenced
academy
Meaning
Beautiful
Struggle
Joy
Community
Health
Vocal
Holistic
Journey

The Scream by Catarina Campbell

{{{{white power}}}}
bellowed toward us from the car
across the street
their screams were fleeting
as we
continued walking...

oppression strikes my belly with a fear
of existing
leaves me too paralyzed
in my cage
to look for the key

liberation
is my decision
to pursue freedom
in an imperfect world.

they yelled.
their
w h i t e p o w e r

has no power
over me.
We continued walking
down black streets
into the grey evening.

To My Stretch Marks by Catarina Campbell

Disgust.

Repulsion
and a deep desire
to erase.

A cold, damp wish
to remain stagnant
rather than stretch
lines of scattered
plum
across my
mahogany
skin.

But then again,
Changing is all I've
ever been
and I've never chosen
monochrome.

Wounds by Keiba Bragg-Best

Icky, pus filled technicolor wounds
I will live there a while
I will live here a while
Inside them
I think I am allowed to
Right?
it's settled
I have decided that
I will live here while
Where the red river rushes
Where the dreams of many die
Or transform
Where the sun shines brightly- some days
Where pleasantries overpower the reality
The reality of wounds
Old ones and fresh ones
They do exist such as I
Oozing with emotion
loss, tears and pain
I hear whispers
Whispers filled with hope and sadness
I often wonder how these wounds can sting so much
Sometimes
I forget that those wounds are lined
Lined with shards of glass
Kind of like a sidewalk mosaic
full of crystals and diamonds
Shards piercing my soul
I remember
that this is why red rivers rush
Bleeding wounds
Bleeding souls
They for it
Quickly
Staining my skin while
Wading in it
Fighting the current
Red rivers rush
I feel it moving swiftly but it will not sweep me away
Glass can be melted and transformed
It can burn and cut through skin

Wounds

I will live here a while with you

Because I am real

And I live in the real world

I have no choice

My blood

Full of

Dripping

Flowing into the river

My breath did that?

Yes

These lungs

Expand like swelling pipes

Filled with water, words, feeling

That is too “large” for this body

This is where I will live a while

Along the red river

Among my wounds

Creed by Keiba Bragg-Best

My creed
Stand outside during the rain
Sing daily
Pray for the world
Soak up the petals of grace
How surreal are these blessings
Deeply woven
Pain
Sometimes it comes in the form of oppression
Stinging, lingering
Staining
My soul
It never leaves
Even when I want it to
Creed
Don't let it break you
Risk taker
This is what you get for being you
All of you
My creed reminds me
That this treatment
Is systematic
Turning
Shifting
Dirt remains in the crevices
Sweep up
Bathe in your own salty tears
Just add lavender for scent
During the train ride
I question the authors of these books and the professors who subscribe to them
And the words on these yellow tinged pages
I don't mold
This curvature
Unique
Live
shine brightly
Starlight that you are
When bureaucracy does what bureaucracy does
Remember that one day it all dies
Places, people and the land
Stagnation
Movement
Hard

by Catarina Campbell

This is a love letter to remind you

That yesterday you thought the storm would never end.

The air in the sky of me by Keiba Bragg-Best and Catarina Campbell

I want to be seen

I need to be seen

I don't need to be seen

Because We already exist

And that is enough.