



Newsletter of the Kuumba Singers of Harvard College
Established 1970 Fall 2016



VOICES



President's Letter

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This year has been one of disbelief. We lost Ali. We lost Prince. We lost the election. The theme of this year's Christmas Concert, "Joy Comes in the Morning" offers a glimmer of hope, but it implies that this night is ever going to end; some days, it feels like it won't.

The songs that we sing have sustained me during my time here. They ring of times of hardship and of struggle, but also of joyous celebration. Kuumba has been and will continue to be a place where we can go after a long day of classes or work or anything that has weighed heavy on our shoulders and just be. After hardship, the Kuumba community was there to share in my pain. After success, the Kuumba community was there with me to rejoice and be glad. The community has always provided whatever I have asked from it. My relationship with this space has always been centered on this community. This home away from home.

Kuumba has been nothing if not an educational experience. Learning to cope. Learning to grow from my experiences. Learning how to face and deal with adversity. Through the members of the choir, I learned of the concept of sankofa, which is a Twi word roughly translating to "go back and get it." Look on the past and learn from it, and the lessons taught there may guide and direct your future.

That's what Kuumba is about—growing and learning, both about your history and yourself. We make sure that the choir member understands the space into which they are stepping, as well as the history associated with it. Without this base—without the knowledge of our own history and our own people, we are truly lost. (continued on page 3)

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It is knowledge of our past that provides us with the strength we need to endure the present. If we have been through these struggles before, if we have been through this darkness and yet we still see the light on the other side, we know that there is hope. It is this hope that sustains us and drives us to succeed. It pushes and prods us as we go through our daily lives, encouraging us to continue our fight. It is this hope, rooted in our past and in those who came before us, that enables the current generation to thrive and prosper as we have and as we will continue to do. So thank you, to the alumni and to the founding members—to all of those who paved the way so that we could walk, thank you for giving us a platform for our voice. A hope for our future.

Respectfully,

Ryan Boyland

President, 2016-2017



Kuumbabe Reflections

Lone Survivor

Darlye Élise Innocent, MSW, Ph.D.

A mother never forgets the face of her son's killer.

Weaving their way through the crowd gathered on the mountainside, law enforcement scanned the throng for signs of trouble. As Roman soldiers patrolled this assembly, ever on alert for yet another uprising from the Jewish nation, Jesus felt the tension. Some of these soldiers were the very ones that carried out King Herod's murderous directive nearly 30 years ago and Jesus notices this mother's body stiffen as one of the soldiers walks by, a little too slowly and a little too closely, for comfort.

What's it like to be the lone survivor of a massacre?

Jesus knew.

He was the only male Bethlehemite His age. His "kind" was disposable and His life such a threat to the powers that were, King Herod of Judea ordered Jesus' entire generation of men wiped out in just one night.

The boys hadn't even outgrown toddlerhood.

Imagine that by this mother's side is her husband, bearing the scars of his failed attempt to shield his infant son from the Roman sword. He is inwardly seething with rage and feeling helpless. Hopeless.

He wants justice.

Picture a teenage Jewish boy catching the eye of a Roman soldier long enough to communicate he would not be made to feel small even in the presence of their authority, but short enough not to incite an altercation.

The masses were ready for change.

Standing on the very land that God had covenanted to give to His friend Abraham and his descendants two millennia earlier, Jesus prepared to address a people weighed down by the trauma of multigenerational oppression. His people had been enslaved in Egypt, afflicted by the Philistines, conquered by the Assyrians, led away captive by the Babylonians, crushed by the Persians, dominated by the Greeks, and they and their promised land were now under Roman rule.

They'd had enough.

Lone Survivor (cont'd)

It was to this multitude of broken, bruised, mistreated, discounted, exploited, persecuted, subjugated, and wearied children of God, and quite likely in the presence of His own Roman would-be assassins and future executioners at Calvary that Jesus Christ spoke these words:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." [Matthew 5:43-48]

Love. Bless. Do Good. Pray.

For our enemies?

Radical. And remarkably effective.

Jesus' life, death, and legacy proves just that.



K Dot's Harmartiology: A Theological Reading of Kendrick Lamar's "untitled 05"

James Ramsey '15

In *Race: A Theological Account*, J. Kameron Carter ambitiously embarks on a quest to trace and constructively disrupt the theological underpinnings of modern racial constructs, with an eye on liberating the discipline of theology itself from their clutches. After outlining these foundations of the, as he calls it, “theological problem of whiteness” and the gaps in how some of the available literature deals with it, Carter turns to theological readings of slave narratives to liberate both black personhood and theological discourse from what he deems to be oppressively heretical frameworks. The slave narratives epitomize a corrective break from the “pseudotheological” discourse which has, according to Carter, undergirded Christian structures of white supremacy and the havoc they have wreaked for centuries.

This paper will argue that Kendrick Lamar’s work similarly embodies and prophetically (i.e.: in the spirit of biblical prophets, heralding a better, more Godly way of justice) calls for a corrective change in discourse from mainstream Christian notions of sin and agency, particularly as theologies circumscribed by white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and their intersections. Inspired by Carter’s approach to slave narratives, this paper will offer a theological reading of Kendrick’s “untitled 05 | 9.21.2014.” from his 2016 album *untitled unmastered.* in order to glean from Kendrick a more nuanced theology of sin, disentangled from modern race-gender constructs and their stereotypes, as he provides, in Carter’s words, a better “Christian account of New World black existence” (251).

Kendrick Lamar is not technically a part of the “Christian rap” or “Christian hip hop” genre, but he writes of his faith often, cathartically weaving stories about the tensions between Christianity and the hard realities of life, especially of life in the black American underclass. Through songs like “Faith”, where he narrativizes wavering faith in God, “For Sale”, where he talks about being tempted by “Lucy” (a manifestation of Lucifer), and “How Much A Dollar Cost”, where he tells the story of a homeless man revealing himself to be Jesus, Kendrick establishes his own kind of constructive theological discourse which runs counter to white, mainstream understandings of Christianity in America. These songs are more-or-less straightforward in their theological interpretations; Kendrick spells them out rather plainly. “untitled 05” on the other hand, while it makes striking theological claims, is not as explicitly religious in character or content, but through style and narrative, Kendrick and the other featured artists on the track name theological truths about the complex relationship between interior morality and the immoral systems that can corrupt it within the black, male body. These challenge the common isolation of agency as a concept from surrounding and embodied social superstructures and the faulty bifurcation of “personal sin” and “social sin” in much of the discourse within American Christianity. As Carter implies in his work, it is no accident that the prevailing voices seeking to expose “black-on-black crime” and control black criminality through oppressive means— with little regard to reliable statistics, the effects of stereotypes, restorative justice, rehabilitation, or to historically honest accounts of how the black underclass came to be in the first place — are most often conservative Christian voices; this is an unsympathetic shortcoming of their theological discourse. In “untitled 05”, Kendrick brings to light this problem in his and similar bodies as he holds together nihilism from systematic oppression, the wounded morality that flows from it, and the ironic inadequacy of mainstream Christian frames in addressing the plight of the downtrodden.

This problem — the tension between faith and circumstance, between individual and societal culpability — is highlighted in nearly every part of the song, lyrics and general sonic landscape alike; from the beginning, the pounding rock beat layered over palpitating bass lines and spastic saxophone improvisations evokes feelings of angst, heightened by the unsettling effect of tense, sparsely resolving chords underneath and an eery, suspenseful melody line in the chorus. And the chorus itself, first sung by Anna Wise, and then by Kendrick,

K Dot's Harmartiology (cont'd)

speaks of suicide¹, which establishes the nihilistic theme for the rest of the song and characterizes this ominous background music. From there, three sections of lyrics further articulate and explain this nihilism: Kendrick’s first verse, Punch’s verse, and a combined call-and-response verse between Kendrick and Jay Rock.

Kendrick, channeling in a semi-autobiographical sense the emotional and mental turmoil of systemic oppression, shouts (in contrast with a much more measured delivery later on) a tale of a man beside himself with grief and hopelessness who turns to violence as a solution. He contextualizes the drunken hopelessness referenced by the chorus:

See I’m livin’ with anxiety, duckin’ the sobriety
 Fuckin’ up the system; I ain’t fuckin’ with society
 Justice ain’t free, therefore justice ain’t me
 So I justify his name on obituary
 Almost immediately, the resolution to self-destruct introduced by the chorus is linked with systemic failings, which leads him to plan nihilistic, miserable violence:
 Now I’m drinkin’ by myself, at the intersection, parked
 Watch you when you walk inside your house
 You threw your briefcase all on the couch
 I plan on creeping through your fuckin’ door and blowin’ out
 Every piece of your brain until your son jump in your arms
 Cut on the engine, then sped off in the rain;
 I’m gone

Through this sad tale, we see Kendrick associating violence, particularly in the psyche of black males, with injustice, which problematizes mythical notions of unmitigated agency often ascribed to people by conservative, American Christian thought (a perspective on agency which is often developed from positions of privilege occupied by white men, who have become the most centered voices of American Christianity through centuries of the imperialistic exclusion of other voices). Furthermore, for Kendrick, in the character of a self-destructing black male, American Christianity in its conventional, mainstream sense is insufficient: the second line in the verse talks about this character putting his Bible “in the trunk”, which is meant to be a metaphor for relegating faith to the back of his mind, and the lines just before the character meditates on the specifics of the crime say,

Why you wanna see a good man with a broken heart?
 Once upon a time I used to go to church and talk to God
 Now I’m thinkin’ to myself, ‘Hollow tips is all I got.’

This personal, violent sin is a precipitate of the collective sins of the society that created the conditions for the black underclass and has broken the hearts of black people. It is the result of a collision within black bodies between survival instincts and victimization, and the kind of faith this character is accustomed to cannot address this.

K Dot's Harmartiology (cont'd)

In the second verse, a featured rapper named Punch raps more extensively about the psyche in these corrupt conditions. However, unlike Kendrick's verse, he speaks from his own perspective as a black male who has escaped from some of these conditions of the black underclass through financial success. He deals bitterly with survivor's guilt, a theme present throughout Kendrick's later works. Punch is afflicted with a sort of double consciousness, suffering from fear of change and from sleepless nights due to occupying divergent experiences ("Maybe I'm crazy, maybe I exist in a different dimension") and a felt burden of the responsibility of uplift ("Cause I could speak the truth and I know the world would unravel"), along with the shame of turning his back on the communities he has surpassed ("I guess I'm lost, the cost of being successful is equal to being neglectful"). Wracked with the hypocrisy of professing a purportedly humble faith while effectively dodging some of the oppression in his world ("Studied the son of God but still don't recognize my flaws"), Punch connects this interior sin of apathy and neglect to his attempts to escape the bleak, sinful, societal conditions elaborated upon by Kendrick in the first verse. For him, such personal sin is a natural, direct result of trying to transcend the misery around and within him. The verse concludes with this understanding:

I watch the sun rise, then I watch the sun fall
 Studied the son of God but still don't recognize my flaws
 I guess I'm lost, the cost of being successful is equal to being neglectful
 I pray my experience helps you
 As for me, I'm tryna sort it out
 Searching for loopholes in my bruised soul, but who knows?
 I just need a little space to breathe
 I know perception is key, so I am king

The final verse, Kendrick's and Jay Rock's duet, focuses on the systemic oppression that has been in the backdrop of the song until now. It explicitly names these injustices: subliminal messages wounding self-image ("I fall behind my skeleton, they tell me that I'm blind/I know that I'm intelligence, my confidence just died"), the racist, profit-making engine propelling American society, particularly with segregation and concentrations of black poverty ("I'm passin' lives on the daily, maybe I'm losin' faith/Genocism [genocide] and capitalism just made me hate"), and mass incarceration ("Correctionals and these private prisons gave me a date/Professional dream killers reason why I'm awake"). For them, black men's peace of mind, self-image, and hope — in God and in society — are shattered by systemic injustices, leading them to consume everything around them, to borrow one of Kendrick's depictions of nihilistic behavior².

Thus, the imagined, psuedotheological dividing wall between societal sin and personal sin is shown to be abolished within the experience of the black body at the expense of the soundness of the black mind ("The other side has never mortified my mortal mind/The borderline between insanity is Father Time"). Rather than shift the culpability entirely to society, though, Kendrick and the featured rappers on the song seek to explain personal, highly destructive immorality in its context within the surrounding, historical immorality that instigates such decisions, and they aim to disrupt perceptions of black people, men in particular, as inherently sinful or violent because of some inexplicable predisposition for crime and chaos. Additionally, by choosing to explicitly identify the Church in all three verses about the intersection of societal and individual moral failings, they call mainstream Christianity to task, signaling a reclamation of the essence of the prophet Isaiah, through whom God simultaneously condemns Israel's systemic oppression of its own underclass³ and issues commandments for righteousness⁴, marrying holiness with justice and immorality with injustice. And, poignantly, they conclude the song by lamenting the futility of a Christian faith that neglects this; this reality of oppressed and oppressing black life causes a

K Dot's Harmartiology (cont'd)

neat, detached faith that promises hope only in the future (with little for the present) to falter:

Before I blink, do I see me before them pearly gates?
 Or this is just a mirage or a façade; wait.

Isaiah affirms the falseness of this gilded "faith":

Announce to my people their rebellion,
 to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet day after day they seek me
 and delight to know my ways,
 as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness
 and did not forsake the ordinance of their God....
 Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day,
 and oppress all your workers.
 Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
 and to strike with a wicked fist.
 Such fasting as you do today
 will not make your voice heard on high. (Isaiah 58:2,4)

Notes

1. "Somebody said you bumped your head and bled the floor
 Jumped into a pit of flames and burned to coal
 Drowned inside the lake outside, away you flow, and this I know
 And that means the world to me (3x)"
2. In the postlude of "Mortal Man" from *To Pimp A Butterfly*, Kendrick compares the nihilistic, black male to a caterpillar through metaphor: "The caterpillar is a prisoner to the streets that conceived it. Its only job is to eat or consume everything around it, in order to protect itself from this mad city."
3. Throughout, but see Isaiah 5:8-23
4. Isaiah 1 and 6

 Untitled

Alexa Slaughter '20

“You’re so smart for a black girl” is something I have heard repeatedly in my eighteen years. When I was little, I would greet these words with a small smile and a timid “Thank you.”

These days, I have a sassy remark and eye roll on hand to deal with statements such as these. I didn’t think to defend myself in my younger years because I never realized how ashamed of my blackness I was until I got to high school. All the jokes about the shade of my dark skin were brushed off with a laugh at school, but at home I would subconsciously try to catch the light in selfies and pick the filter that lightened my skin the most. There was a point when I wouldn’t even go outside in the summer out of fear of getting darker. Dark was ugly; dark was humorous, and I was tired of pretending to think racially fueled jokes were funny.

Looking back, I am awestruck by how far I would go to distance myself from my complexion. Eventually the sting behind every underhanded “You talk so white” faded and I began to wonder why those around me acted like white people were the only ones capable of forming cohesive thoughts and expressing them verbally. The subtle racism present in microaggressions is a part of the lives of the minority youths that often goes undiscussed because it is common. But, common will never equate to acceptable. These statements made me think that my skin color was unacceptable, and I tried so hard to conform to what society thought I should be, which seemed to be as close to being white as possible. This need for acceptance plagued my whole childhood, and it can still creep its way into my head from time to time, but I make the conscious decision every day to be okay with who I am. I believe it is important for little girls and boys, no matter their ethnicity, to understand that who they are is perfectly fine. I know I was scared to raise my hand in class because I didn’t want to be the “smart black girl,” I wanted to be me. I realized it is okay to just be me.

It took me eighteen years to embrace my deep brown complexion, to wear my natural kinky hair with pride, and to lay on the beach in California and absorb the sun fearlessly. So no, I am not #TeamLightSkinned, I never will be. I don’t have a lovely caramel undertone to my skin, though I never really liked the idea of being referred to in reference to food. Yes, I will always disappear when the lights go off, but now when this joke arises, I can laugh because I have accepted that to have melanin in abundance is a blessing. This I believe.

 Black

Ata Amponsah '19

I wore black on the Fourth of July
 I didn’t even try
 To be patriotic; I
 Am so done telling lies
 You celebrate your freedoms, but
 I still haven’t found mine
 Not when I have to worry that
 The next time could be my time
 When I heard about Alton Sterling, I thought
 I should’ve saved my black for the next morning—
 Should’ve worn funeral colors in mourning
 Would’ve tried to cry, but
 I done run out of tears
 Could’ve worn black daily
 For the past four hundred years
 Every time it happens, I wonder
 When it’ll be my turn to go under—
 Wonder if these clouds are harbingers of thunder
 And lightning; it’s frightening
 I can feel my chest tightening
 I can see that the gap in
 Understanding is only widening
 I want to believe police when
 They swear to serve and protect, but
 The Darren Wilsons are the cops I’ve come to expect
 Black bodies are being broken;
 This isn’t about respect
 This is about assumptions and
 Biases that you elect to live by
 I wonder what I look like in your eyes
 Trayvon wore a hoodie, so
 He had to be a thug; he died
 He was shot before the questions:
 “What did he do to press him?
 Did he have on him a weapon?
 Did the police ever have to arrest him?
 Surely the fears were founded?
 Surely they were grounded to
 Stand their ground and shoot him?”
 Listen to how they sound when
 They criminalize the dead and
 Believe the things killers have said
 Make mockeries of justice
 While the streets keep running red
 My brothers and sisters are bleeding

They’re taking bullets and beatings
 Being choked till they ain’t breathing
 Executed as they’re pleading
 We shout, “Black lives matter”;
 Why are you disagreeing?
 Is there something in society that you simply aren’t
 seeing?
 Maybe you don’t realize, but
 This country’s killing me
 This really ain’t no different than
 Lynching us from the trees
 How can I convince you that
 Racism is a disease?
 Open your eyes and see how
 It brings black people to our knees
 I wore black on Independence Day,
 And I’mma tell you why
 The freedom the patriots fought for
 Apparently wasn’t mine
 While you eat your food and eat your beer
 My black brethren die
 And when we die, they leave our corpses
 In the streets to dry
 My God, I love* this country, but
 Until I have my rights—
 Until the state no longer hunts me—
 I’ve no choice but to fight
 Until I break these chains which bind me
 And mark me second-class
 I’ll fight, resist, and scream—if need be,
 Until I breathe my last
 *I put “love” because it flowed rhythmically. I don’t
 think I “loved” the United States when I wrote this
 piece in July, and I almost certainly don’t love it now.

An Excerpt from The Truth Shall Set Us Free: A Two-Act Satire *Trinity Saves (Sara Horatius)*

(Lights Up on students Sasha and Troy sitting at their desks in their 10th grade History class. Sasha is a natural hair sister who is 15 years old. She is excited about Black History Month; she treats it as if it is a religious holiday. Troy is a black clean-cut brother who is very intelligent, but lacks common sense. They are chatting about their Black History Month presentations, which they will be presenting in class today. Nasheed, a black conscious brother walks into the classroom.)

SASHA: (She is watching a video on her cellphone) She is so stupid.

TROY: (He is also watching the video on Sasha's cellphone and is shaking his head) Yeah, she is definitely a coon

NASHEED: (He takes a seat next to Sasha) Who's stupid? What are you two watching? (He leans over Sasha's shoulder to try and see what she and Troy are watching on her cellphone)

SASHA: Stacey Dash, she was on Fox News last night making a fool of herself. Talking about we should get rid of BET and Black History Month.

TROY: Blasphemy!

NASHEED: (He gives a nonchalant shrug) Yeah, I wouldn't appoint Stacey Dash to be the spokesperson for Black people, but I would have to say that I agree with some of the things that she was saying.

SASHA & TROY: (Both Sasha and Troy suddenly turn their heads to look at Nasheed. She drops her cellphone) WHAT!

SASHA: (She Leans down to pick up her phone) You made me drop my phone.

NASHEED: You guys know that Morgan Freeman said the same thing on 60 minutes a couple of years ago and no one was up in arms when he made that same statement.

TROY: When was this?

NASHEED: I think in 2005.

SASHA: Well regardless if it was Stacey Dash or Morgan whatever his name is, they are both wrong for saying that.

TROY: I agree! Their comments just go to show that they are ignorant about the importance of this month and the lack of support for their own people. Black History Month was started by a black man and you of all people should know that Nasheed.

NASHEED: (raises one eyebrow) Oh yeah...please enlighten me.

(Troy gives a 10-minute dissertation about Black History Month)

NASHEED: (clapping sarcastically) Thank you for that historical spotlight on Black History Month, but it

sounds like you've been reading from Wikipedia. (Laughs)

SASHA: (serious) That's not funny Nasheed. You clearly have no respect for all the hard work and sacrifice that our ancestors went through to ensure that we have our "time" to showcase our culture, history and race. All the other months are dedicated to everyone else's history. Our history is never told in those other months. However, I look forward to February, because for once out of the 10 months while I'm in school I can learn about my history.

(Janitor enters the classroom and changes the trash bag in the trashcan)

NASHEED: (stops laughing) Sasha, Black people have existed all throughout history. We didn't just miraculously show up or evolve in the month of February. Black history has existed for every 365 days, every 12 months and for 525,600 minutes yearly. You can't tell me that now living in the 21st century that my history is only confined to a y-e-a-r-l-y 28/29 days. C'mon people!

JANITOR: (shouts) TELL 'EM!

(JANITOR exits the classroom)

(The Play Continues...)



Untitled

Content Warning: Deals with sexual assault

Anonymous

You promised you wouldn't stay at my house again
 But now your dad kicked you out
 So where else would you go?
 Just suck it up
 Let me do what I want
 Close your eyes until it's all over
 Pretend to like it
 Think of your dad
 Think of college
 You wanting to go is why he's mad isn't he?
 Scared to see his daughter leave?
 Well too bad now
 Time to prove how much you want to go
 Feel me inside you
 Don't look into my eyes
 Don't let me see you cry
 Oh, you can't talk now?
 Don't let me hear you scream
 Let me cover your mouth
 Give you bruises on your neck
 Let me bite a little too hard
 Ask me to stop
 Let me keep going
 Because these four walls are the only thing between
 you and the California winters
 And how does that feel?
 Never mind
 Don't think about that
 Just let your body react
 Get your mind out of it
 It's not supposed to be there
 Think of your mind
 How powerful it supposedly is
 Powerful enough to get you to college
 But not enough to get you out of this bed
 Think of this bed
 How comfortable it once was
 Now think of death
 How easy it could be
 How close you already are
 Now think of me.
 Don't I make you happy?
 Don't you feel better now?
 Was that so hard?
 It's over sweetie

I told you it would be easy.
 Now turn over
 I like to switch positions.

I never realized how your last name melded so beautifully with mine
 How your first name seemed to roll off my tongue so easily
 And how you never said mine.
 Only babe
 Or sweetheart
 Until you said her name to me in bed
 Then I realized
 And I tried to forget
 Your dishonesty
 My heartbreak
 Your lies
 I laid in bed every night
 Thinking
 About how your last name was clinging to mine
 Digging into its flesh until there was nothing left
 And how should I feel?
 What should I say?
 I can't leave now
 There are a million reasons why I want to stay
 My friends tell me I should go
 But don't they know?
 It's death do us part
 That's the only way I'll let things go.
 So it's you and me baby
 Sweetheart?
 Babe?
 It's you and me both
 Come on
 Come to bed
 Let me show you why I love you
 The million truths and lies
 Let me show you why I love you
 So I can say goodbye.

How did she get here?
 Yes I understand
 When you think of me
 You don't know that I can
 Do some pretty amazing things

Untitled (cont'd)

Braids

Alex-Maree Roberts '20

Not all are nearly fun
 But I've done what I had to do
 Since this story has begun
 Working at McDonald's
 To put food on the table
 And holding my mom's hair back
 As she throws it up hours later
 Telling my dad to put that down
 When he smokes a cigarette
 So he can pick up weed instead
 Giving my brother money so he can get a haircut
 Even though I know he will spend it on food come
 sunup
 Why would I blame him?
 There's none at home
 As there are some things I can't do
 And that's an unfortunate one

Every morning, deft fingers lace
 noncompliant strands of black and gold:
 a cloud melted to wreath my head.
 Every morning, mother's failed lesson plans
 come through the mirror with no gentleness,
 my own face stripped clean of patience.
 Every morning, I regret salty tears shed
 while sitting on a bucket between warm thighs
 having my hair braided before school.

Spoiled little girls don't braid
 their own hair knowing that mother
 will sit for hours begging them
 to pay attention to lessons they will need
 when one day they look in the mirror
 and mother's shadow no longer falls
 over their shoulder.

This morning, as I finish I study
 my profile blurred by straining eyes
 seeing two brown faces where there is one
 both tired, both proud
 of a morning's braids well done.

Election Responses

In the wake of the recent election season, many choir members are experiencing feelings of sorrow, despair, and uncertainty. For many of us, writing is a form of self-care though which we can release and record our emotions in this moment. We included some of these short responses not only so that we can recognize what people are feeling now, but also so that we can preserve these expressions of pain and doubt in a way that an ever-changing News Feed cannot.

Jasmin Stephens '20

I woke up realizing that I was too black, too mexican, too woman, and too poor for the country that I live in. I woke up realizing that Trump was elected. I will never call him my president but the shock, fear, and anger was still there. How could anyone have let this happen? Knowing that 52 million people have a very different definition of America and human rights than I do was, for lack of a better word, terrifying. What's scarier is that there are still Trump supporters that I probably run into in my daily life who don't tell me how they really feel. I don't know who to trust.

Today was my first time seeking a safe space within the Harvard community. I went to Quincy House with a friend and listened to a young woman explain how terrified she was to wear a hijab because her friend back home had a gun pointed to her head for wearing one. This is America. This is ignorance personified.

What makes me even more pissed is the fact that America's progress and my progress are at risk of being in vain. Did I struggle through homelessness, work, and high school just to make it to Harvard and have that all possibly shattered by a dangerous, disgusting pig that is Donald Trump? Is Obama's progress during his two terms going to be undone once Trump enters the office? I am in danger. My family is in danger. My friends are in danger. With police brutality against African-Americans and people thinking it's ok to violate women and walk around in KKK outfits, who will protect me? Who will protect everyone?

Toni Scott '20

Yesterday I saw a group of kids walking with two young women, I'm presuming for school or some program, and heard one of the kids say "Don't worry, Hillary will win!" The woman smiled at me and I laughed because I thought, hey, the kid is right.

At an after school program yesterday the kids saw my "I voted!" sticker and asked who I voted for and were excited when I told them Hillary. One of these kids was a 7-year-old who told me he doesn't like Trump because Trump hates black people. A 7-year-old believes his president hates him.

I have friends that have to worry about being deported even though they have lived here legally for years. I have LGBTQ+ family and friends that are in danger and have to worry about legislation that could actually pass because the Senate and the House are controlled by Republicans now.

But yeah. We got yes on question 4. Wow. What a silver lining.

Marcus Granderson '18

To those of you who are happy with what happened on election night, all I ask you to do is take a moment to step into someone else's shoes. I know it's so easy to brand those who are mourning right now as "whiny liberals" who don't know how to lose gracefully and accept what has happened. But I just want you to imagine what it will feel like to be an African-American living under a president who was officially endorsed by the KKK. I want you to imagine what it will feel like to be a Muslim American living under a president who suggested that Muslims should be banned from entering this country. I want you to imagine what it will feel like to be a Mexican American living under a president who sees them as a rapist, a murderer, or a criminal. I want you to imagine what it will feel like to be a little girl living under a president who not only rates women on a 1-10 scale based on their bodies, but has also bragged about groping them. If you can—after putting yourself into all of these different scenarios—still feel content with what happened on Tuesday night, I am beyond disheartened.

To be completely honest with you, my heart is so heavy right now. And I'm not just grieving for myself, as an African American. I'm grieving for everyone who is genuinely afraid to live in their own skin—embrace their own identity—because of what happened on Tuesday. You may say that I'm overreacting, but until you genuinely step inside my shoes, I don't think you have a right to judge the validity or legitimacy of my reactions to the results of this election.

Now, please don't get me wrong: I don't hate you for supporting Trump. And I have no desire to unfriend you or shut you out. I just desperately want you to take some time to step into someone's shoes—my shoes—and walk around in them for just a moment. That's all I want...



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