

Newsletter of the Kuumba Singers of Harvard College  
Established 1970 Spring 2017



# VOICES



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“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” – Nelson Mandela

I have never been certain if spring is truly the season of beginnings. Flowers bloom. Grass grows. Birds sing. But I can't shake the feeling that this is somehow an ending; probably because it still feels Graduation is like spring in this sense. It's the end of many things, but the beginning of so many more. Looking back at my time at Harvard, I was provided with the opportunity for a multitude of new beginnings, many of them through Kuumba. I could write poetry, I could sing, I could dance (none of them very well). But more important than the quality was the opportunity. Growth was more important than anything. I tried. And I failed. Over and over again. But I was given the chance to learn more about myself than I ever thought possible.

Kuumba is more than just a choir. It's a classroom. We have professors, and teaching assistants, and preceptors, and PhD students all filling the same sections. The space is valuable, not only for the things it can do, but also for the people inside.

Through Kuumba I learned patience, exemplified in the moments when the alto section was called out for the umpteenth time. Patience that I was (un)fortunately given the opportunity to practice on many occasions, but for which ultimately I am a better person.

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But perhaps the most important thing that I was able to learn was that endings are complicated to say the least. They can bring tears of happiness and tears of sorrow, and can do both at the same time if the moment is just right. With the end of Barack Obama's term as president and the start of a new presidency began, many tears of sorrow were shed. There was great uncertainty as to our future, and sadness over what we had lost. But with every tear of sorrow there was a flicker of hope; we had seen greatness in our past, and now that we knew it was possible, we would never be satisfied until we could achieve it again. Every setback begets triumph. No matter how steep the obstacle, no matter how dark the tunnel, no matter how vast the desert, remember that a land filled with milk and honey is always on the other side.

So yes, this is an ending. But endings can still be beautiful. Inside you'll find stories of beginnings and endings. Of pain and struggle. Of turmoil and triumph. Stories like mine, of growth and opportunity, stories you may have never heard before. We live through our language. So take these stories, and let us live together, if only for a little while longer.

Respectfully,

Ryan Boyland

President, 2016-2017



## Kuumbabe Reflections

### The Gift of Grey

*Marcus Granderson '18*

Grey (Written on January 10, 2017)

I turned 20 exactly a week ago today. I'm entering my third decade of life. I've been on this planet for over 7,300 days, 175,200 hours, and 10,512,000 minutes. I can't believe that. Yet, here I am. Fully 20.

When I think about the past two decades of my life, and what living on this strange planet has taught me, I think about the color grey. It lies in the tension between two disparate hues. It's the product of two absolutes, two competing forces, two opposites. It's not black. It's not white. It's grey. And the more life I live, the more I realize our existence on this planet is defined by this seemingly unremarkable color.

As a child and young teenager, I thought so many things in life were black and white: my faith, my friendships, my career goals, my beliefs about dating, my understanding of myself, my views on race, just about everything. But as I've matured—made more mistakes, gained more experiences—I've come to realize that our lives are populated by grey areas. What we think is absolute, two-sided, simple, and easily understood is, in actuality, relative, multi-faceted, complex, and elusive. As sure as we would like to be about our views on careers, relationships, friendships, and love, life always has a way of illuminating the nuances of our convictions. It has a peculiar way of revealing to us just how stunningly complex the nature of our existence on this planet truly is.

Grey areas use to frustrate me. I wanted everything to be absolute. I wanted my choices to always be simple—cherry or strawberry starbursts, chocolate or vanilla ice cream, gushers or fruit roll-ups. But as I've grown older, I've learned to appreciate grey areas, hard decisions, multi-faceted issues, and ambiguous scenarios. I've come to appreciate how life manages to complicate those neatly folded, perfectly packaged views we subscribe to when we're young and impressionable. I now realize that it is in the tension between black and white that we grow. It is in that tension between justice and mercy, faith and reason, idealism and practicality, intuition and calculation that we complexify and metamorphosize into the alluringly mosaic beings we're destined to be.

Today, I still have my strong convictions; don't get me wrong. My faith in God is stronger than ever before. I still believe real, authentic love exists in this world. And I'm still crazy enough to believe I have a soul-mate out there who's waiting for me. But now, unlike before, I'm not disheartened or discouraged when grey areas emerge in my faith or my beliefs about relationships, career choices, or love. I embrace it because I finally understand the purpose of grey areas: they aren't burdens—they're gifts. And, at the end of the day, they're aiding us in our maturation, our metamorphosis, our coming of age. They're pushing us to see the world in all its color, splendor, and complexity. Grey areas, when we fully embrace them, are the very things that make this life worth living.

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## America! Did you Forget?

### *Ayanna Dunmore '19*

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I remember seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time as a child.  
 She emerged from the smooth surface of the sea like a goddess,  
 Powerful.  
 Resolute.  
 Beautiful.

It was in that moment I could understand why millions of immigrants would risk everything just to catch a glimpse of her,  
 Just to hear the whisper of freedom slip from her lips.  
 It was in that moment I felt so proud of my country.

“Give me your tired, your poor,  
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” [1]  
 America. Did you forget?  
 Did you forget this promise?  
 Why are your Muslim brothers and sisters cast aside from your shores?  
 How can Lady Liberty be the Mother of Exiles  
 When refugees – the ones left homeless in their own homes –  
 Are denied her embrace?  
 Since when did your sunset gates get replaced with a wall and a sign saying “Only some may enter.”  
 America. Did you forget?  
 Did you forget your past wasn’t always great?  
 That your very existence came by stealing the land from those before.  
 That your labor was provided for by Black bodies in chains!  
 America! Did you forget?  
 What happens when you try to decide who can use what bathroom?  
 America! Did you forget?  
 That time is not stagnant  
 No! What you did in the past haunts your present and creeps into your future  
 America! Did you forget?  
 That history repeats?  
 That the chains you forged did not disappear  
 No!  
 They have just transformed, and come in new names,  
 But they still hold fast to their slaves!  
 America! Did you forget?

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## America! Did you Forget? (cont'd)

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That you can only be the land of the free and home of the brave  
 When everyone is free to be who they are, love they love, believe or not believe in whatever religion or faith they please. When everyone can feel comfortable in their own skin  
 When you are brave enough to befriend those who are different from you.  
 America! Did you forget?  
 That you can't keep taking from the Earth that provides for you without giving back.  
 Because if you keep taking, and Taking, and TAKING, and TAKING!  
 Then what will be left?

It was sunny when I saw Lady Liberty  
 But there is a storm coming now...  
 Its winds howl with ignorance  
 Its waves crash down with hate and distrust  
 It swarms around our Lady Liberty  
 Turns the sky dark  
 And threatens to topple her down.  
 But I also remember learning that the statue was built with copper plates that move to adjust to a storm.  
 Indeed I can see by the gleam in her eyes and the defiant smile on her lips that she is not afraid.  
 We have seen many storms before.  
 And we will see many more.  
 So bear down my brothers and sisters!  
 Hold tight to Lady Liberty and move with her!  
 For a storm is coming.  
 But do not fear –  
 No matter how the winds may howl or the rain may pour  
 We still stand strong.  
 WE COME THROUGH THE STORM!

[1] from *The New Colossus* by Emma Lazarus

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 Untitled
 

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*Jasmin Stephens '20*

Never realized breaking myself would be so easy  
 See  
 Being homeless in the middle of winter  
 Is a lot like  
 feeling your body dismantle itself  
 in slow motion  
 From the inside out  
 The first thing to go is your stomach  
 Try finding new things to eat  
 Like  
 your feelings  
 Or  
 your fear  
 Whichever is the most filling at the moment  
 Then the dismantling will move to your liver  
 Drink away the pain  
 as if you won't continue to live another day  
 Because  
 Face it  
 You probably won't  
 Next to go is your voice  
 As you scream yourself awake in the middle of the night  
 As the memories of home haunt your dreams  
 Then it's your mind  
 Sleep deprived and tired eyes  
 When all you want to do is lay down and die  
 Your mind  
 will try to leave you  
 An encroaching hand will seek refuge  
 In the most private parts of you  
 As if you hadn't been violated before  
 See  
 Being homeless in the middle of winter  
 Does strange things  
 to your decision making  
 The first thing you will do  
 Is ask to room with a friend  
 First they will say yes  
 Then their parents will say no  
 Because you must've done something wrong  
 (continued on next page)

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 Untitled (cont'd)
 

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For your dad to kick you out  
 This is when you go visit your ex  
 Because you know he won't ask questions  
 Later you will realize why  
 It will be 2am  
 You will be warm in his bed  
 Safe and sound from the winters you never liked  
 Never cared for  
 He will seek refuge in the most private parts of you  
 As if you hadn't been violated before  
 Hadn't experienced a winter this harsh  
 Before  
 And now  
 You wonder how the cold can ever leave your body  
 The bittersweet frostbite finding its way in between your legs  
 Ice cracking  
 Snow melting  
 Mother nature giving way  
 A mercy killing  
 A familiar pain  
 Unwanted  
 but you decide  
 Very necessary  
 Because being homeless in the middle of winter  
 Is a lot like  
 Well  
 Being homeless in the middle of winter  
 And then you will get into Harvard.  
 And you think everything will go away  
 And you will try and cast memories to the side  
 Because everything is better now.  
 Isn't everything better now?

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## "Is it really that complicated?"

*Antonia Scott '20*

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Curly hair takes patience, care, diligence, loyalty, faith, prayer, determination, self-respect, self-worth, hope, will, trust, time, reflection, knowledge, practice, guidance, love, tenderness, passion, concentration, rigor, grit, spirit, soul, pain, agony, tears, suffering, research, conditioning, training, resolve, character, strength, calculation, divinity, drive, power, dignity, purpose, guts, heart, mind, resolution, bravery, courage, fearlessness, fortitude, control, conviction, energy, desire, fortitude, and dedication.

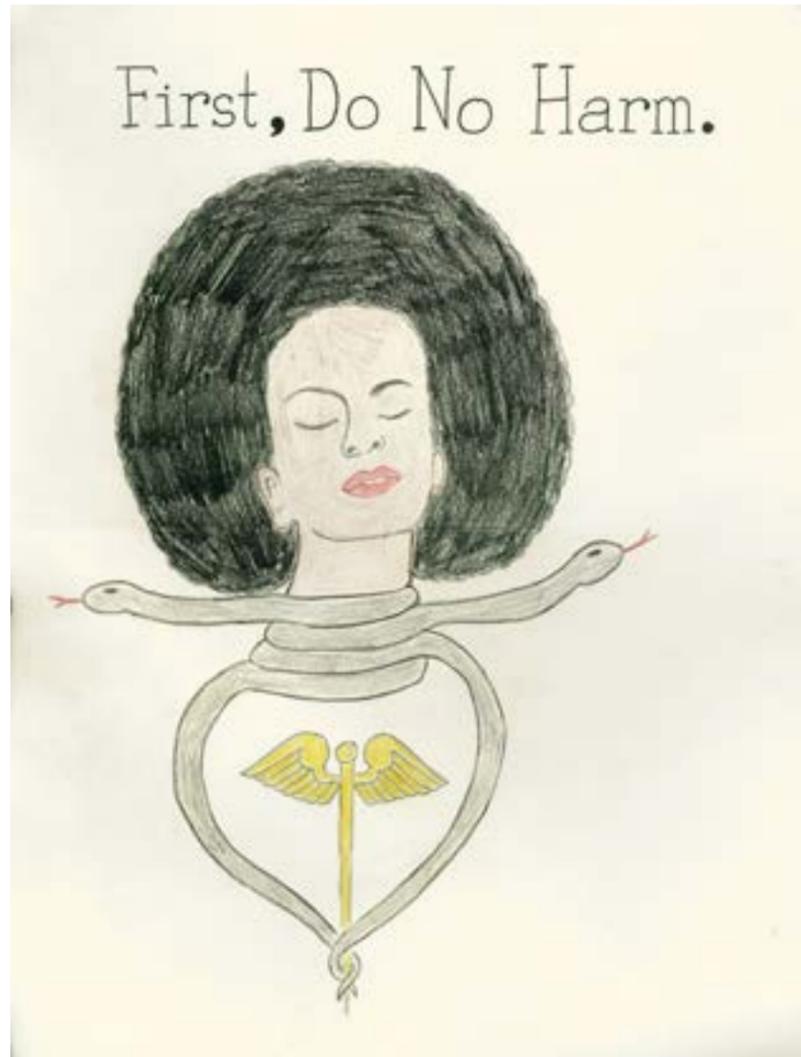
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## "Perspective"

*Alexa Slaughter '20*

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broken  
and i refuse to be  
alive and energized  
because who i am is  
suffering everyday  
by drowning my sorrows in alcohol,  
but nothing changes  
everything can be over  
in one small instant  
i can get to know God.  
so now i'm letting it go  
the pain is overwhelming  
i cry every night  
and i'm over it  
i haven't always been this way  
today is the day  
now read it upwards



*Tania Fabo '18*

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## Untitled

*Anonymous*

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When people ask me how I write, I never quite know what to say. Starting a poem is easy. But ending...ending is difficult.

See I can talk a good game at the beginning. I can create beautiful pictures with my words. I write myself a bed to lay down in, a home to take solace in. My words become the support I wish I had in the space that I wish I could call my own. I write poems of the love that I wish was mine. Moments that I wish I could do again. But these stories...they never have happy endings.

My words aren't bullet proof. My poetry has never saved a life. It's never talked someone off of a ledge. Never fixed a broken marriage. They've never been anything worth keeping.

I've never written a poem about depression. Maybe because it feels too much like an ending. And like I already said, I'm not good with endings. So I don't bother with them. Instead I write myself supports. To prop me up on days when I'm feeling down. For the moments when I feel like I can't find a shoulder to lean on because most days there isn't one. When it feels like the sky is falling, I write myself an umbrella. And when it gets too heavy to hold on my own, I look for help. But help doesn't always come.

In high school, when I was feeling depressed, I told my parents. My father told me that it wasn't his job to make me happy. It was his job to make me successful.

It's times like these that make me feel most alone in this world.

There are days when my depression feels like the only thing that I have left. And those days, it keeps me awake at night. Reminds me of all of my failures. Holds a mirror up to me and asks what would make you think they love you if you don't even love yourself. It's the uninvited guest in my mind. It's already over stayed its welcome. Ignored eviction notice after eviction notice after eviction notice. It never responds. Is determined to stay here until every last piece of me crumbles apart from the inside. It rejects help.Laughs in the face of hope. It's the obsessive lover that I've tried to rid myself of more times than I can count. It whispers in my ear. Reminds me of all of my failures. Tells me about every last one of my flaws. It washes over me in waves. Fills my lungs. Drowns me in my own words. I've been so cold for so long that I'm starting to go numb. Some days I'm willing to do anything I can just to feel again.

I've been broken for as long as I can remember. But no one likes feeling broken, so I drink. I fill the empty spaces of myself until I am whole again. Some days the burning in my chest is the only warmth I feel. As if I could buy a moment of happiness with a few dollars and a fake ID.

But I'm a broke college student so the alcohol eventually runs out and when it does, I go for walks. I don't know where I'm going but I'm okay as long as it's anywhere but here. As if my legs can lead me to answers that my mind couldn't. Searching for them everywhere from the cracks in the asphalt to the undersides of park benches. I still feel so cold. But I keep walking. Keep moving. Keep running away from every voice in my mind telling me to step into oncoming traffic.

See the worst part about writing a poem about depression is finishing it. Because I never know how it is going to end.

I am not okay. I am not now nor do I ever remember being okay. And I'm not okay with not being okay. But the places I turn for help only ever always seem to leave me with more questions than answers.

My mother says that my happiness is a decision. I can't help but wonder when I decided to start feeling this way. What she doesn't seem to understand is that my happiness is the horizon. It's the wind. It's the moon. It's everything I've been chasing for so long with no hope of ever catching. But I'm trying. I've tried clawing away at the broken pieces of myself hoping that the light will shine through but finding darkness instead. I've searched through every fiber of my being hoping to find any reason to continue.

I still feel cold.

I'm drowning in an empty sea, choking on my own air, struggling to take another step when it feels like the sky is falling apart around me.

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 Untitled (cont'd)
 

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I don't know how I'm going to end this story.

My grandfather says the only things I need to do in this world are stay black, pay taxes and die, and one of those seems much easier to do than the others.

I still don't know how this is going to end but on days like today I'm not even sure if I'm still talking about the poem.

But one thing I know for certain is that I can't wait to write that last line.

Maybe...maybe it'll end with me happy. Maybe it'll end with blood splattered across my keyboard.

Maybe.

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...CDs: Our Spirit Stands (2007)  
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Rooted in the Spirit (2001)

For more information please contact  
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Merchandise Photos by Dawn Anderson



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Questions? Contact  
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