

# I AM NOT DEFINED BY MY HAIR OR BY YOU

A personal essay about being black by **Devorah Porter**

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"Well... not all black people have the same kind of hair, just like others' races." This answer felt reasonable in my mind as I uttered my official reply. Looking at my neighbor's perplexion, he still seemed to approve his own notion of what "my people" are supposed to look like.

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The rich assortment of racial backgrounds has undoubtedly been beneficial to our country's growth, but it has also brought about an ongoing era of shallow disputes.

Although constant arguments about skin pigment aren't favorable ones, they have made their way to being a staple in American life. Sweeping this clash between ethnicities under the rug is worse than taking the subject as what it is.

On my ride home I looked towards the clouds as these conclusions scrambled to be true.

At face value, my class neighbor had more of an ignorant perspective than a malicious one. Being challenged by his contentious questions just showed how many American people are bewildered by diversity.

Whether or not the bewilderment of race-sensitive eyes is coarse, it seems to me to be another sign that our country is indeed a melting pot.

Devorah Porter is a student at Van Nuys High School.



## COVER STORY

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE  
BLACK

BY THE MIRROR STAFF WITH PHOTOS BY THERESA NYUGEN

**Matthew Egu** The black community needs to step up and show that the stereotypes are not true. Stereotypes are one of the biggest struggles a black person could come across. Many people are close-minded and it hurts me, as well as other blacks, to see how ignorant some people are. Diversity means much more than different races. Diversity shows all of the qualities that make each and every individual unique. Diversity allows respect and acceptance of those unique qualities. For all the black people that are too scared to show off their culture, don't be scared of what others think about you when you present who you are and what shapes you. Be proud of who you are and stand strong!

**B**lack history is American history. From government official to military general to president of the United States, the African-American community has become a vital aspect of the planning, maintenance and execution of our country's ideals.

According to recorded historical texts and evidence, African-Americans have fought in every war that the U.S. has been involved in since the colonial period.

Blacks have served our country at a rate higher than other ethnic group of the U.S. population after the desegregation in the military with President Truman's Executive Order 9981 made in 1948.

Today, 20 percent of active military is black, while they make up 13 percent of the nation's population.

"We helped to build this nation," said Dr. George McKenna, a sponsor of the resolution and the only African-American member on the LAUSD School Board. "We are an integral part of the fabric of this country. The study of our role in the history of the United States leads to broader respect and perspective."

February is dedicated to honoring the achievements and recognizing the contributions African-Americans have made to the history of the United States.

LAUSD has decided to acknowledge important but forgotten black figures by celebrating this year's

Black History Month by specifically honoring African-Americans in times of war.

Take Crispus Attucks for example. Few know the name of the former slave who was killed in the Boston Massacre. But even fewer know that Attucks was the first African to be killed in the American Revolution.

"It directs the superintendent to work with educators, librarians, all the schools of the District, and the community to recognize and celebrate this month with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities that generate in-depth discussion of the complex factual history of the United States and legacy of Black Americans," said McKenna.

The School Board unanimously voted for the theme African Americans in Times of War to bring to light African American contributions to our history.

"Students in L.A. Unified learn about the history and achievements of African-Americans throughout the school year," stated Interim Superintendent Vivian Ekchian.

"Recognizing Black History Month provides additional opportunities to focus on a part of American history that, too often in years past, was ignored."

As one of the most culturally diverse school districts in the nation, LAUSD has in its care approximately 60,000 African-American students.

The celebration of Black History Month is an event set with the mission of motivating them to reach for their best and achieve great things; continuing the line of their predecessors.

"During this tumultuous time in our country—in which the contributions of certain groups are being ignored, misinterpreted, and dismissed—it is more important than ever that we remember and celebrate the contributions of the African-American community," said School Board Vice President Nick Melvoin, a co-sponsor of the resolution.

—Tommy Chan, *The Mirror News Editor*

**Ruth Haile** Something that needs to change in the black community is colorism. There is a huge stigma in the black community where lighter skin tones and those features correlated with it, such as curlier hair, is seen as more beautiful while those of a darker shade are seen as the opposite. Many black people grow up hating their own features. All of these problems are need to be fixed. Don't let anyone undermine your abilities. You have the strength to achieve anything. Be proud of your culture. Don't ever change yourself to please others. You are black, independent, beautiful and strong.

**Kezai Jones** Growing up as a child, I didn't love myself enough to be proud in my own skin and that amongst itself is a challenge. I feel like even in educational institutions, the minute I walk in people already create an image of me. When I talk about something I'm passionate about like dance or math, they say, "Oh. He's smart." I just strive to be a more intelligent person and a better dancer. You can be in a room with other ethnicities and other people of different races and coexist. Diversity is about acceptance; it's about understanding and not being judgemental because of someone's skin color. Love yourself. Learn to love yourself because that's the best thing you can do for yourself as well as those around you.

**Sabreena Tejeda** I think the concept of stereotyping within the black community should change such as boys being thugs and girls being oversexualised. As black people, we should love ourselves and each other rather than have stereotypes like that. We are intelligent, compassionate and hardworking. Diversity, to me, means that everyone is different. There is such a wide array of people, whether it be by looks, personality, talents, and things of that sort. Everyone should be proud in their own skin, no matter what people think.



**Alexis Davidson** Cultural appropriation is not okay. People need to be more aware about black, or African, culture. People know about the bindis, but they don't know about the face paint. It's disappointing to see people say, "Oh, it's cute if you're not black." Diversity means including everybody and being aware of everyone's culture. [It's about] appreciating, not appropriating.

**Morgan Agee** African-Americans are hard-working people and have the same aspirations and goals as everyone else. There's millions of African-Americans who are educated and smart; we are good people and strive for great things. I have many friends that are from a different backgrounds and it's amazing to learn their culture and hear the different languages and see the beautiful traditions. [Listen to] Tupac Shakur's inspiring words in his song, "Keep Your Head Up" about never let anyone bring you down as well as empowering women!

**Kenny Fields** People thinking it's okay to say the "n" word, especially with the "er," is a major problem. One main struggle I've faced is being judged by people. People tend to think that because I'm black, I can't act smart or that I can't speak English well. When I tell people that I speak fluent Spanish, it shocks them. They don't believe me until they hear it coming out of my mouth. I've learned over time though, that people's opinions shouldn't matter. Diversity is the range of things someone is capable of, and it's possible for anyone to expand that range. You don't have to be what people want you to be. You just have to be you.

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