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Black Like Me

What it's like to be an African-American in today's society **Page 6**



PHOTO BY WOO HAN | THE MIRROR

GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, RELIGION, AND RACE. What is Identity Politics and has it done more to harm or help America and our society today? **PAGE 8**

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!

Black 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.

I AM
NOT
DEFINED
BY MY
HAIR
OR BY
YOUA personal essay
about being black
by Devorah Porter

The routine of school is infamous for its spirit drainage of the young and ongoing strenuous workflow.

I was reminded of these factors every time I would walk through the metal gates of my middle school and throughout the day. There was never any deep-seated hatred for the place, but there was enough tension created by our expectations that I'd choke up and find myself struggling to stay afloat.

My steps through the crowded halls and narrow concrete paths were made less stressful by the presence of my friends. I could laugh and banter with my friends for hours on end as we'd always find joy in any topic we were sticking to.

As I sat through lectures in my history class, I found it tangling how my parents couldn't have had the same friendships I had today. The grueling details of segregation between colored and caucasian students seemed impossible to me, knowing I had plenty of friends of different backgrounds and ethnicities.

To this day I cannot fathom living in a state that separated me into a sector of living conditions purely based on the amount of melanin in my skin. The dividing mindset the officials of yesterday had seemed barbaric and unquestionably immoral.

I was raised among people who saw color as anything but a primary determination of character. As a child of both white and black heritage, I found no

issue in befriending a girl who might not have grown up with the same culture as me.

This stayed true through my middle school years as my favorite people to talk to were Armenian, Filipino and Hispanic. There were no noticeable differences between each despite how varied our races were. I saw my friends as people individualized by their personality more than anything. From my perspective there seemed to be little to no opposing views from the standard to be equal.

Little did I know I would come face to face with the oppression I made imaginary from my lack of experience. My encounter brought attention to the prominent oppression towards minorities that lingers to this day.

I chattered on with a few of my friends during passing period to occupy the leisurely stroll to my next class. I'd soon be greeted with the same class I associated with lectures about Thomas Jefferson and the haunting recalls of the Jim Crow laws from the African-American community.

As I approached my desk I glanced in front of it to see my classmate chatting with the student to the right of him. I gave little thought into what he was doing, as I only talked to him near the end of class out of pure boredom.

My neighboring classmate was a boy about a year older than me and pale-skinned with brushed blond hair. Our teacher sat at her table finishing the rem-

nants of her lunch before preparing the presentation for the day.

The lights flicking off must have been a signal to the student in front of me, as I saw his conversation with the other boy quickly wind down. As my neighbor's last conversation ended, he attempted to begin one with me. With the little time we had left until we started taking notes, my neighbor thought it was crucial to ask me something. As he turned himself around to face me, I was taken out of my daydream and into confronting him once more.

"Okay, so I was wondering during lunch..." He began placing his hands on my desk to flow along in different motions as he talked.

"Since I had a black friend with that weird braided-straight hair thing going on..."

As he muttered this phrase I was instantly unnerved. I was mostly confused as I tried scanning his eyes for any insincerity he might've been hiding behind the potent words he used.

"How can some black people have straight hair when yours is all, y'know, poofy?"

At first, this question left me without any clear direction as to how to handle it. I gave a nervous chuckle despite how offput I was by his sincere demeanor.

"I mean, don't white people also have some variety of hair textures?" I spoke as a subtle deflection of the boy's question. I could tell by his preemptively

open mouth that this retaliation didn't phase him. "But don't guys get that poof from where you were from?"

It was now clear that he had intent with what he said. I felt the realization sink into me as I sat there giving him a puzzled look for what felt like hours.

Time started to press me, so I blurted out, "That doesn't make any sense." I spoke with a sarcastic tone as a final attempt to distract him from confronting me. My efforts still weren't successful and I had to stop dancing around his topic.

"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.



"I WAS RAISED AMONG PEOPLE WHO SAW COLOR AS ANYTHING BUT A PRIMARY DETERMINATION OF CHARACTER."

provide the relief I was seeking either. Thoughts of obsolete racial standards from 20th century America crawled to the front of my subconscious and struck with a lesson I learned from the strife from earlier that day.

Living in a day where political feuds seem to take up a great amount of societal space daily has emphasized many outdated ideals unlike any other time in recent history.

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.