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Seeing their parents in school
is the norm for these students

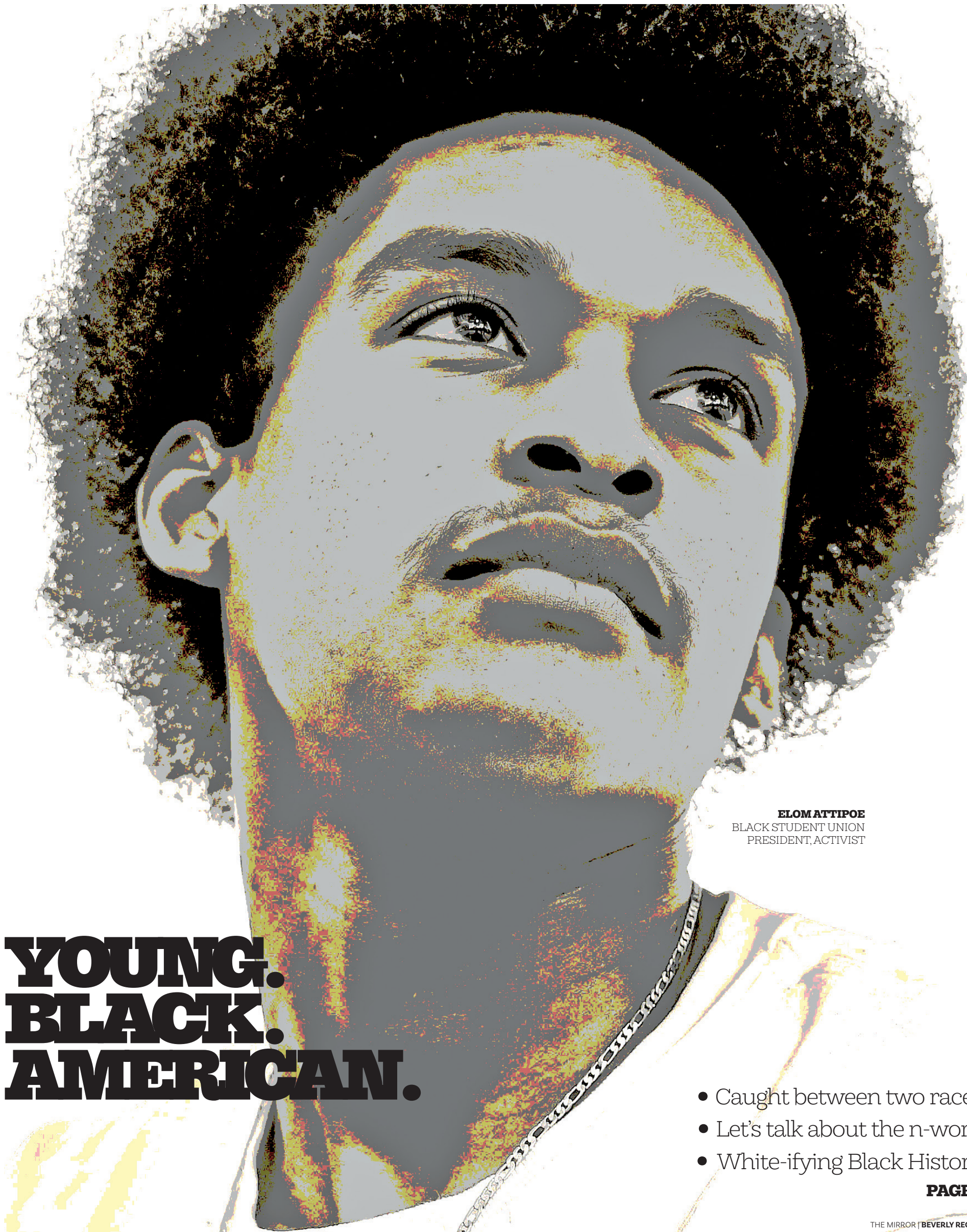
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the MIRROR

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ELOM ATTIPOE
BLACK STUDENT UNION
PRESIDENT, ACTIVIST

**YOUNG.
BLACK.
AMERICAN.**

- Caught between two races
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THE MIRROR | BEVERLY REGINO

Living at the intersection of two races

Being biracial means sometimes feeling like I don't fit in anywhere
By Isabella Thomas



AT A CROSSROADS Isabella Thomas struggles to define herself in a mixup of black and white. PHOTO: THE MIRROR | BEVERLY REGINO

“Too white for the Black kids and too Black for the white.”

I remember listening to these Earl Sweatshirt lyrics a few years back and thinking I really related to them.

As a biracial person, I have always felt out of place in life.

I grew up surrounded by one culture more than the other. My dad, a Black man, has lived in Los Angeles since he was nine years old. The majority of his family lives in Chicago so we rarely get to see them.

My mom's side of the family — who are white — are all over the map, but despite that, I find that I talk to them more than my dad's side.

In August, my family and I visited my Black family in Chicago.

I was so excited to see them. Many of them I'd either never met or don't remember.

As excited as I was, I was also incredibly nervous. Would I fit in? What would they think? I don't talk like they do. I don't eat the same foods as they do. I don't have the same hobbies. I don't shop at the same stores.

I had never really noticed how disconnected I was with my Black side until fairly recently. I used to be contempt in my own skin. Growing up surrounded by different races and cultures allowed for me to learn more about other people than myself. I started to realize everyone around me knew exactly who and what they were, while I grew up ignorant to my own identity.

During the pandemic, I had noticed that a lot of my hair was dead and I did not know why. I did hours of research on Google, TikTok and countless other hair care websites to learn about hair types and different hair products I should and should not be using. My mom did an amazing job using proper products when I was a child, but as I grew up and it became my responsibility, I didn't know where to start.

Being biracial means having a lifelong identity crisis. It means being called the n-word by white people. It means being called “whitewashed” by Black people. It means not truly knowing where I fit in. I am told that I am Black, society labels me as Black, but I don't always feel Black.

When applying for college and filling out forms, I am always told to put “Black” first and then if, given the option for a second choice, I put white. But sometimes, I feel more white. I don't even know how, I just know that I don't always feel Black. There are days when I wish I was fully Black or fully white, just so that I can have a clear label.

My dad was surrounded by a lot of white people while he was growing up and from preschool to middle school, I found myself in that same situation. The difference between us was that he and everyone else knew that at the end of the day, he was Black.

His mom died shortly after he graduated college and I never got to meet her. She was a single mom and the way he speaks of her, I always wish I had known her. The closest person besides my dad who could give me guidance is out of reach.

My dad has never gotten any DNA tests despite my attempts at persuading him to. I have come to realize that my constant badgering was because it was a chance to know who I was. I felt that a DNA test

would finally be the thing to tell me who I am and who I should be and maybe then I would have a sense of security.

In 2020, while people protested and fought for justice, I sat on my phone and watched. I felt guilty for not being out and speaking up. In the past, I had felt like my voice didn't matter as much. I felt like it didn't have as much power as a voice like my dad's. I felt like no one would want to listen to someone who is only half Black.

I have come to learn that it doesn't matter. Despite my lighter shade, I have family who are one broken tail light away from being another name on a cardboard sign. I think about my 92-year-old uncle, Teddy, who was in his 30s when segregation was still around. The idea that he, or any other family member could be next, terrifies me.

Even though I am torn between two races, no matter how draining it can be, I know my family has and will always accept me.

Despite what society makes me think and what people may call me, at the end of the day, I am still Isabella Thomas, a person who doesn't need to check any boxes.

AFRICAN AMERICAN VOICES

How can schools create a more inclusive environment for Black people?



By taking the things that kids say about microaggressions or other racist comments seriously. Administrators should take them as seriously as they take having phones in the class and other insignificant rules.
OCEAN THREATS



Schools can make a more inclusive environment by teaching about African American History as well as discussing the morals that are relevant to this day, such as what it means to touch a Black person's hair.
JAIREE GRANT



A more inclusive environment can be created by schools acknowledging things that make us as a community uncomfortable and actually make an effort to get rid of the causes that make us feel that discomfort.
DJAEDA HALL



Incorporating Black history throughout the whole of US history and treating it as a vital part of history instead of briefly making it a small unit and cutting topics out would help Black students feel more important.
LAVARRA HENRY



Stop trying to coddle the white children when teaching Black history because all it does is dilute our history and lessen the severity of our issues.
SAMARA AUGUSTINE



The only time Black history is mentioned in the education system is in relation to the most traumatic events. I feel that more positive enlargement about Black history would help Black students feel safer and more appreciated.
JAYA DARRINGTON

A CURRICULUM WITH ONLY FRAGMENTS OF BLACK HISTORY

Students and teachers want to be taught and teach history that integrates Black voices every step of the way

By ANI TUTUNJYAN
THE MIRROR EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

States across the country are trying to ban books about race. Proposed bills target Black authors such as Toni Morrison, most notably known for “Beloved,” and Nikole Hannah-Jones, developer of The New York Times “The 1619 Project.” Bans aren’t just going after books that talk about racism but also books that express the Black experience. “Banning access to information doesn’t work because people, especially young people, will always find a way around it and if you have the entire internet at your disposal, what good is banning a book in a class?” AP U.S. History (APUSH) teacher Ms. Aditi Doshi said. “I think it’s really important to frame texts that can be problematic with their use of language or their reference to material that could be disturbing or traumatic to some students. If we frame those texts appropriately, they allow us to place

ourselves inside the minds and inside the shoes of people who lived in this era that we don’t have a reference point for.” Black history is often taught in condensed form, being just a chapter in a U.S. history book and almost always only about slavery. Nothing more is required by the curriculum. “Reconstruction is actually a standard that California has to teach, which, yeah, that’s great, but the textbook has one paragraph on it when it might actually need a whole chapter,” U.S. history teacher Mr. Robert Docter said. “That’s what’s frustrating because an accurate look at U.S. history is Black History. It’s not a category in itself; it should be interwoven throughout the entire history of the country, rather than being a unit, and you get a test on it, and then it’s done.” Ms. Doshi also believes that Black history shouldn’t be taught as just one unit. “As a teacher and a student of American history, Black history and American history are one in the same,” Ms. Doshi said. “They are synonymous you cannot understand narrative or themes or connections throughout American history without understanding Black history.” She thinks teaching anything less is a silencing of Black voices. “If you’re truly trying to understand American history accurately, black history has to be incorporated every step of the way, in every historical era, in every

time period in every major theme, and this is not just limited to the topics that we traditionally associate with history, like example slavery or the civil rights movement,” she said. “We have to understand that African Americans have been president America since the country’s founding since the first slave ships landed in 1619, and if we remove both people’s voices and their stories from the curriculum, that means that we are erasing them from a history that they were actually part of.” Black students are tired of only being taught about the pain and suffering of Black people. “A lot of people when they talk about black history, it’s just Black struggle. There’s more to Black people than us struggling,” Samara Augustine said. “Everyone was raving about ‘The Hate U Give’ and yes that’s a great book, great movie but why is it all just struggle? It’s all movies show, it’s all the media shows.” “I’ve only ever seen one movie come even a little bit close to actually talking about black successes in a black struggle and that movie was ‘Hidden Figures,’” Djaeda Hall said. And even in that movie, the woman was still struggling, not only because she was a woman, but also because she was Black.” And even when teaching about Black struggle, the lessons often fail to capture just how bad it was. “In school, they would just say they made

them [slaves] pick cotton but I learned on TikTok that white owners also used to eat slaves and do other cruel stuff to them,” Brianna Fenders said. “We never learn about these things in school. They just say, oh, it’s [slavery] bad and move on.” Students want to learn more about Black empowerment and current issues, not just slavery. “I have one teacher who teaches us about current popular Black figures and also the Black LGBT community and he teaches it in an empowering way,” Devin Brown said. “He’s the only teacher that I’ve really seen do that. I think that should be part of the curriculum, and we should learn from what he’s doing. The curriculum should require teaching more Black figures, historical and present, rather than just being optional.” Ms. Doshi believes teachers are responsible for making up for the content the curriculum lacks. “I’d say that that’s a constant struggle probably for most AP history teachers, but especially for APUSH where the curriculum is so wide and there is so much to cover. The College Board framework is actually quite frustrating because it de-emphasizes aspects of Black history that I think personally deserved more importance and more time and that in an honors US history class we would absolutely delve into more detail,” Ms. Doshi said. “So I think as a teacher, you have to realize that the APUSH framework is inherently limited, that it does not encompass all of the people or themes that make up like history, and that if you’re going to teach

American history, it’s your responsibility as a teacher to acquire that knowledge on your own and then bring it into the classroom.” In the early 1900s, African American leaders such as Ida B. Wells, Booker T. Washington, and W. E. B. Du Bois began the Black Freedom movement which was the beginning of the long Civil Rights movement. The College Board framework only has a brief reference to the framework without any mentions of the figures involved in it. If students are to learn about these individuals from their textbooks, it is typically a short-paragraph description of each. “My teacher hasn’t gone over anything related to Black History Month and February is almost done,” Nathan Harkless said. “It’s not just the curriculum to blame.” “Some teachers treat Black history as something they just have to teach because it’s part of the curriculum and they want to get it out of the way and skim through it,” Brown said. “Some teachers would just go into a topic relevant to Black history they thought was important then decide that’s all you need,” Mohanna Finnikin said. “But there’s way more than just that one topic we’re talking about.” Mr. Docter tries to find a balance between meeting the standards while also teaching history he deems valuable by providing a diverse amount. “My job is to teach those standards by the state of California, that’s what I’m hired to do. What’s great about teaching history is you can bring in a lot of topics that still fit those standards,” he said. “I’m able to fit in a lot of things that I personally find interesting and important, that also fit those standards.” Teaching or learning Black history doesn’t

have to be comfortable. “The more we try to sugarcoat things, the less that’s getting done, because we can try to explain it in the simplest of terms, but that will never get the point across,” Augustine said. “We got to make them uncomfortable. There’s no other way to get the point across because we’ve been sugarcoating all of our struggles, all of our history and where are we right now? We’ve barely made progress.” “A little discomfort is nothing like what we go through on a daily basis. When I walk out of the house I think that if I get angry or if I make a mistake or if I get pulled over, I could die,” Elom Attipoe said. “So some discomfort for non-black people to learn about our history and I don’t have to worry about dying every day, it’s a trade-off I’m willing to make.” Mr. Docter agrees that his lessons should challenge his students’ ways of thinking and get them out of their comfort zone. “Learning anything is a sense of discomfort. Learning is when you’re experiencing something that is different than what you’ve been introduced to,” Mr. Docter said. “That would include Black history too, but learning, in general, should do that.” California is adjusting the curriculum to include more thorough and empowering Black history by being the first state to require students to complete an ethnic studies course to graduate high school. While African American history isn’t the only course to choose from, it’s an option students have when trying to learn more than the history taught in regular history classes.

BLACK HISTORY IS MORE THAN WHAT’S IN THE HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

By ELOM ATTİPOE
THE MIRROR STAFF

When Black History Month begins, non-Black people often think of only two people: Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. And if you were to ask them what they associate with the two civil rights figures you’ll often only hear “I have a dream” for MLK and “sat in the front of the bus” for Rosa Parks.

While MLK advocated for nonviolent protests, he was also a strong critic of the white moderate for their passive acceptance of racial inequality and was against the Vietnam War and other forms of militarism. This isn’t common knowledge for most people because schools teach us Black history written by white Americans. The US history curriculum frames slavery as something that happened a long time ago and racism as something that has been eradicated. That’s because teaching sugarcoated Black history makes white people more comfortable in the fact that their ancestors were oppressors and that they continue to perpetuate this oppression by not speaking up or fighting for equity.

Teachers who do not go beyond teaching basic Black history are part of the problem. Teachers are responsible for progressing the younger generation beyond the mistakes of the past and that means actually acknowledging them. Education shouldn’t be American propaganda, it should teach students real facts. We are forced to listen to non-black teachers tiptoe around the word “Black” when referring to us and try to describe an experience they know nothing about. They’ll recite the same out-of-context MLK quotes about nonviolence out of a textbook from 2004 and think they’re the second coming of MLK. They expect every black student to drop to their knees and say “thank you so much for verbalizing my own oppression to me because I lack the cerebrum and vocabulary to explain something that happens to me on a daily basis.” When it comes to the surface-level topics, teachers are usually able to

explain them well enough, but when it comes to the more complex roots of our oppression, they are unable to understand. They are speaking about an experience that I and every Black person have known since our first breath and will know till our last. We sit in class listening to teachers word vomit misinformation about the Black experience in America. Black history shouldn’t exclusively be talked about in the month of February, nor should it exclusively focus on our

oppression and subsequent trauma. When we hyper fixate on only this part of our history, it becomes all we are known for. We are much more than our enslavement. We are artists, musicians, writers, poets and athletes. Black people are left to correct white ignorance but are quickly shut down by white fragility. “How dare you! I’m not racist. It’s because of Black people like you, there’s division in this country.” So while you may have not been taught this at school, here are some systemic issues harming Black people that need to be addressed. In Los Angeles, 1.2 million people live near toxic waste facilities, 90 percent of whom are people of color.

Living near these facilities causes a high risk for cancer, birth defects, developmental disabilities and other physical and mental health challenges. African Americans are 5.9 times more likely to be incarcerated compared to white people and we make up 50 percent of the miscarriages of justice, in which people are convicted of crimes they did not commit. This statistic doesn’t include Black people assigned to a public defender with an overload of cases, who convince them to take plea deals for a shorter sentence. We also need to combat racism in the medical field. According to a 2016 study by the Association of American Medical Colleges, 40 percent of first- and second-year medical students thought that Black skin was thicker than white skin. Black history is American history and should be treated as such. We need to teach the good, the bad and the ugly.

WHAT IS A MICROAGGRESSION?

Microaggressions are everyday verbal and nonverbal slights or insults that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative attitudes toward marginalized groups whether intentional or unintentional. They can make a snide at someone’s race, gender or sexuality. A common racial microaggression used by non-black people is “I’m not racist. I have Black friends.” Having a Black friend, neighbor or relative does not disqualify a person from being racist. Being a gender or sexual minority also does not mean you’re safe from making racist remarks. Racial oppression is different from other types of oppression. People should still be educating themselves about racial discrimination but not trying to insert themselves into conversations about race they do not understand to feign sympathy.

TEACHERS NEED TO DO MORE Black Student Union board members Samara Augustine, Trace Hernandez, Lavarra Henry, Java Darrington and Elom Attipoe (L to R) want teachers to make a greater effort to teach the Black history missing from books.



SOURCE | CREATIVE COMMONS



A WHITEWASHED HISTORY

The curriculum of black history that mentions only Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., top, and Rosa Parks censors the struggle of Black people.

GROWING UP BLACK MEANS GROWING UP FAST

By **ELOM ATTIPOE**
THE MIRROR STAFF

“Look! It’s your dad, Elom.” “Your dad finally came back!”

I flipped through my notebook, searched through my bag, doing anything I could ignore them, hoping they would stop.

They didn’t. They continued to make jokes.

They were laughing about the fact that my seventh grade substitute teacher was a tall Black man with a thick African accent, apparently finding a resemblance between us.

It went from jokes to insulting my skin color, hair texture, and ethnic features to calling me slurs. Most of the class joined in. No one stood up for me.

Finally, I couldn’t take it anymore. I ran into the hallway sobbing. A few of my teachers came out of their classrooms and tried to calm me down but I was inconsolable.

I felt like I wasn’t only crying over this moment. I cried for every microaggression, joke, comment and slur ever said to me.

Everything just came out at once. People who I thought were my friends treated me badly.

The teachers didn’t contact my parents so they could comfort me or even inform them of what had happened. Instead, they made me spend the rest of the day at school in class with the kids who attacked my Blackness — a characteristic I cannot change .

After a couple of days, I built up the courage to report this incident. I sat down with the dean and he asked me to explain the incident so I did.

The dean kept making excuses for the students’ actions: “They made a mistake, its happens to the best of us,” “You should have said something to an adult as it was happening.”

He was more worried about the reputation of the other students and the school than my feelings. He made it seem like it was my fault that it happened to me.

Being one out of only four Black kids at the school with no one to turn to, I listened him and never brought it up again.

Just because I didn’t talk about it, doesn’t mean it didn’t affect me.

While I’d experienced microaggressions for almost my whole life, being dismissed like my feelings and experiences were invalid opened my eyes to how little America cares about Black people.

We don’t get to experience a childhood. We are forced to deal with microaggressions, casual racism and classmates with different “opinions” we have to respect.

But it’s much more than insensitive comments.

We are forced to face the daily reality that we can die at the hands of the police just because an officer had a bad day.

We are forced to face the fact that we can go to jail for the rest of our lives for a crime we didn’t commit because we “fit the description.”

We are forced to live in the conditions that 400 years of oppression and brutality have imposed on us.

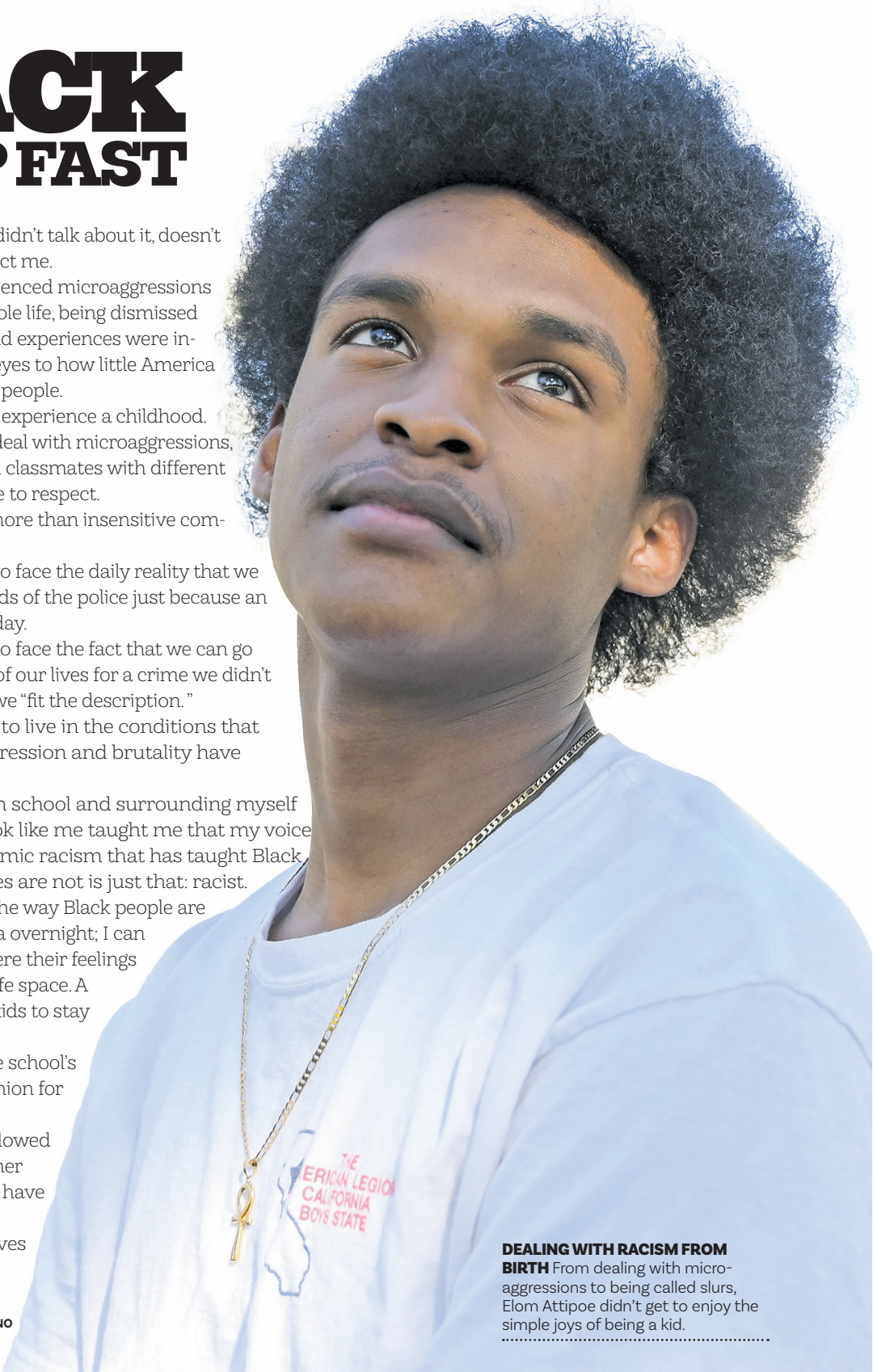
Coming to high school and surrounding myself with kids who look like me taught me that my voice is valid. The systemic racism that has taught Black people their voices are not is just that: racist.

I can’t change the way Black people are treated in America overnight; I can create a place where their feelings are validated. A safe space. A chance for Black kids to stay kids a little longer.

I cofounded the school’s Black Student’s Union for just that.

The club has allowed me, along with other Black students, to have a space to be our true authentic selves and celebrate our culture.

THE MIRROR | BEVERY REGINO



DEALING WITH RACISM FROM BIRTH From dealing with micro-aggressions to being called slurs, Elom Attipoe didn’t get to enjoy the simple joys of being a kid.

Dear nonblack people, STOP saying the N-WORD. It’s not hard.

By **FATIAH LAWAL**
CONTRIBUTOR

“Can I get the n-word pass?”

Black people have been asked this at least once in their life, occasionally by complete strangers.

When I first moved to the U.S. from Africa, I heard the n-word being thrown around often whether it was in music, shows or real life.

I had no idea what it signified, nor did I know its history or intent.

When my nonblack “friends” or classmates demanded an n-word pass, I would easily grant it because I thought it was just another word.

It wasn’t until an older white person called me the n-word in an aggressive tone that I realized it wasn’t just another word.

The n-word was derived from the term “negro,” meaning “black” in Spanish and Portuguese. The word was used to describe African people

THE MIRROR | ISABELLA THOMAS



YOU DON’T HAVE PERMISSION Only Black people can use the n-word, even if you hear it ten times in a rap song, says Fatiah Lawal.

who were forcibly brought to the Americas as slaves.

Negro eventually evolved into the n-word we know today—which white slave owners used to dehumanize Black slaves.

Black people have come to reclaim the word and transform it into a

term of endearment reserved for other Black people. The reclaiming of the word has also made it mainstream because of it’s frequent appearances in Black artists’ songs and Black producers’ shows.

You might hear the n-word ten times in just one of your favorite rap songs but you still can’t say it — even if you’re just singing along.

There are over a million words in the English language. Remove this one word from your vocabulary.

When non-Black folks use the n-word, it violates the space we — Black people — have created for ourselves.

Growing up in the “hood” or “ghetto” neighborhoods or surrounded primarily by Black people is still not an excuse for using the word. No matter how many times you hear your Black friends saying it, doesn’t mean you can.

This applies to Hispanics and Asians. Oftentimes other racial minorities think it’s okay for them to

use the word just because they’re not white. Saying the n-word as a non-Black minority is just as disdainful, even if your ancestors weren’t slave owners.

And just because ONLY Black people can say the n-word, doesn’t mean they have any obligation to.

In the internet age of the 21st century, it’s not hard to educate yourself.

Watch videos or read articles about the history of the n-word or listen to Black people share their experiences with racism to understand why it’s so much more than just a word and why it really is that deep.



THE MIRROR | BEVERY REGINO