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### 4:44

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Meyer, Matthew, "4:44" (2024). *School of Art, Art History, and Design: Theses and Student Creative Work*. 184.

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*4:44*

By

Matthew Meyer

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Santiago Cal

Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2024

## 4:44

Matthew Meyer, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2024

Advisor: Santiago Cal

As a multimedia artist, I create using practices of painting, photography, drawing, sculpture, and digital methods. The conceptual basis of my work explores the specific relationship between material, process, and idea. **4:44**, the title of my thesis exhibition, refers to Jay-Z's 2017 critically acclaimed album. This album has a lot of influential moments within it; however, one song embodied the ideas that I was researching while at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. "The Story of O.J." contains different aspects of Blackness, whether how we treat each other, think about the future or just the different skin tones within the community. My thesis exhibition is the culmination of ideas expressed in this song, community engagement projects, and personal experiences. All of these come together to create a moment of education, expression, and truth.

Within the **4:44** exhibition, the placement and materials choices of the works are purposeful. Some ideas call for an in-the-round experience that demands the viewer's spatial awareness. These works are precariously balance on undersized pedestals or invasive of viewer space through proximity of the two-dimensional works. Other ideas require flat or illusionary spaces. They invite the viewer to enter their space through present but hard to read images. However, there are always moments where both exist. Each material used in the exhibition relates to how I view Blackness and Black identity. I insert meaning into material, they act like afrotropes. An afrotrope is an object or idea that somehow relates to Blackness. Trompe-l'œilness, or the ability to make something appear to be something else, is essential to my work. Plaster becomes a memory or cloning device. Paper and canvas connect past and present with the cotton and labor that comes with them. Wood is challenging and can relate to a certain sense of class, yet whether it can withstand time depends on how you treat it. What do all of these have in common? Everything I use allows me to manipulate it into a sculpture, giving me the freedom to deceive the eye.

My research deals with personal and communal aspects of the Black American experience through vulnerability. Subjects related to apprehension and elation are the two main concepts in the work. These are two separate feelings, yet sometimes they can intertwine. The Black voice is often stifled or spoken for by outsiders. Many things go untaught, unseen, or downplayed.

The work generally aims to inform and educate the community just as much as anyone else. Ambiguity acts like an attention grabber, causing viewers to want to find out more and, in turn, allowing free will to be vulnerable with themselves. When you get into the personal, you realize the in-your-face experience. As a child, my parents and other family members taught me about Blackness through books and stories. The lack of this information throughout school led me to create this way. The small glimpses into the Black experience in school textbooks touched on glimpses. I look to speak on more than just a taste of the Black experience; I want to do it

through my lens. I am not the spokesperson for Blackness; however, the incorporation of the multiple allows me to gain different views. Within this, the viewer can see many areas of the Black experience.

### **Ideas and Inspirations**

When creating my work, it all begins with an idea. This idea can deal with an event, theory, need, or personal memory. Books, articles, movies, music, and experiences. I have thought about or been through inspire my research. There is never one specific type of Black person, no specific way to be Black. While I create based on my lens, I touch on multiple aspects of the diaspora.

Interestingly, we all share similarities, including things pertaining to home life, school, worries, joys, dangers, etc. This show compiles all of this. Each work has a story, method, metaphor, and educational aspect.

### **THE BLACK VOICE**

When it comes to history, past or present, within the community, certain aspects still have been kept in the dark and have come to light. You may see outsiders commenting on Blackness as if they know the person better than you. The media also plays a big hand in what is shown today and what was in the past. The news would often show the negatives within the community, almost painting a certain picture of it. Even movies would display a motion of evil or anarchists. With social media acting as the news, we are beginning to see more of the truth of what has happened. Even in film, we see more “educational” ways of displaying Black history. Since we are not taught much of our history in school, it is up to us, young Black adults, to find ways of educating ourselves and others. Education through expression, through reading, and more. Aside from the Black Voice as entity I wanted to touch on the Black Voice as a personal. Within my work I tend to include dialect that acts as not only a conversation within the work but from artist to audience. These can range from my own words, quotes from civil rights leaders, or conversations that I hear. I it is important to my work to combine imagery and verbal’s.

### **Conclusion**

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, *vulnerability* can be defined as the quality of being vulnerable: able to be easily hurt, influenced, or attacked. As it pertains to Blackness, vulnerability is the ability to allow others to look in and understand. **4:44** is a vulnerable and visual interpretation of Blackness within America through my lens. It is my intention that we can begin to understand things that have happened or are happening through creation.







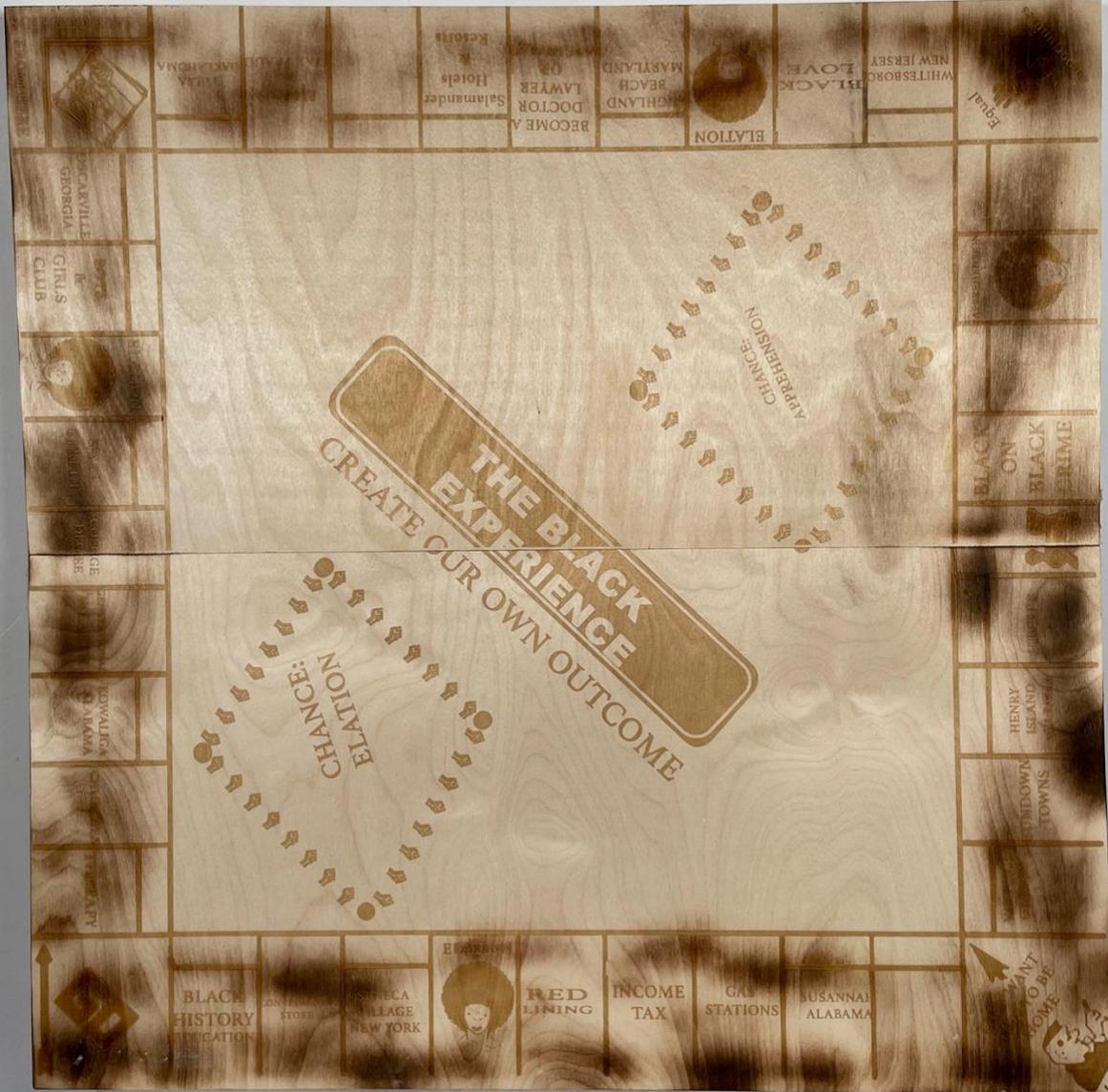
DESTRUCTION OF BLACK LOVE  
REDLINING  
THE COMMUNITY  
EDUCATION COPS  
PRISON  
RACISM LOCATION  
ALCOHOL





BLACK CYCLIST  
OUR OWN PEOPLE  
LACK OF SELF LOVE  
COLORISM  
ASKING/OFFERING HELP  
DECIDING WHO'S BLACK ENOUGH  
COONING





**THE BLACK EXPERIENCE**  
CREATE OUR OWN OUTCOME

CHANGE: APPREHENSION

CHANGE: ELATION

BLACK HISTORY EDUCATION  
REDFLINING  
INCOME TAX  
GAS STATIONS  
SUSANNAH ALABAMA

BLACK ON BLACK CRIME

HENRY ISLAND

DOWN TOWNS

WANT TO BE

GEORGIA GIRLS CLUB

BECOME A DOCTOR  
SALAMANDER HOTELS

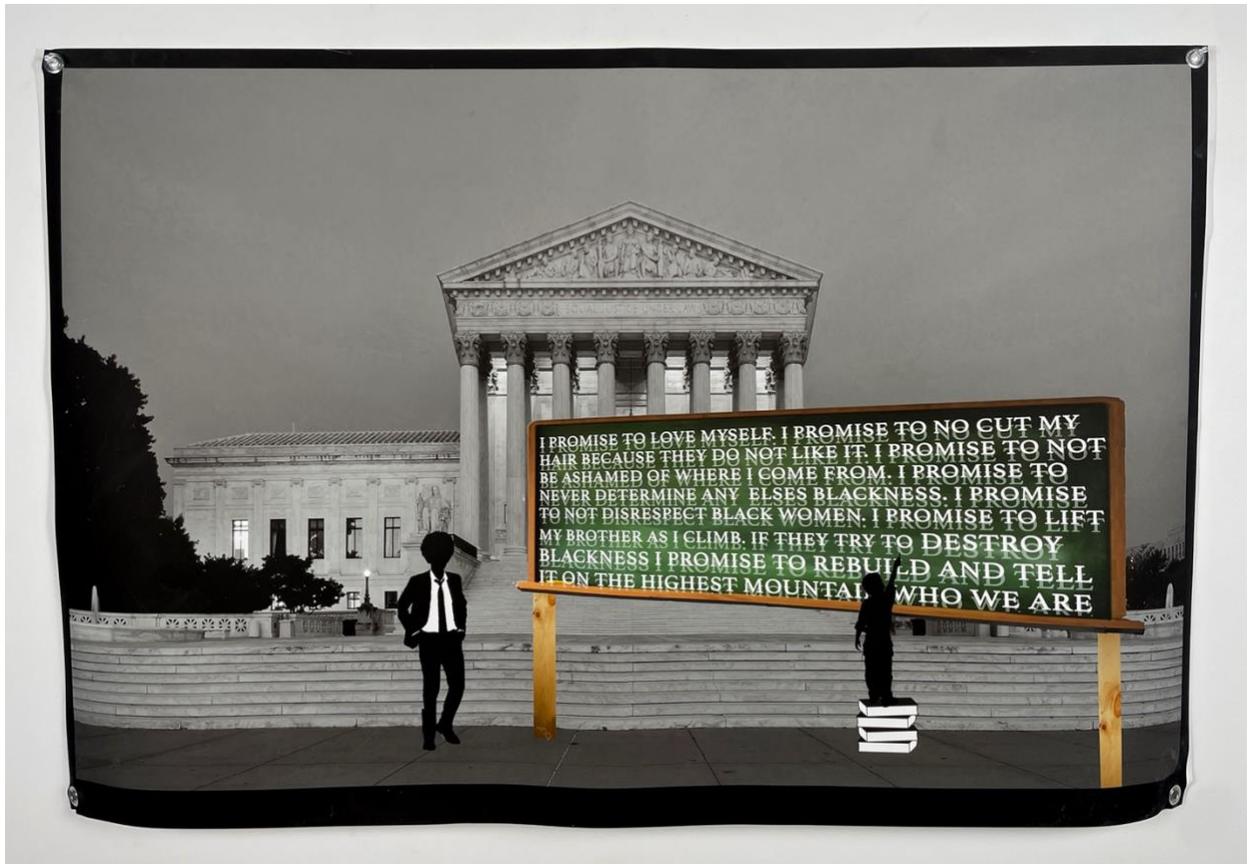
HIGHLAND BEACH MARYLAND

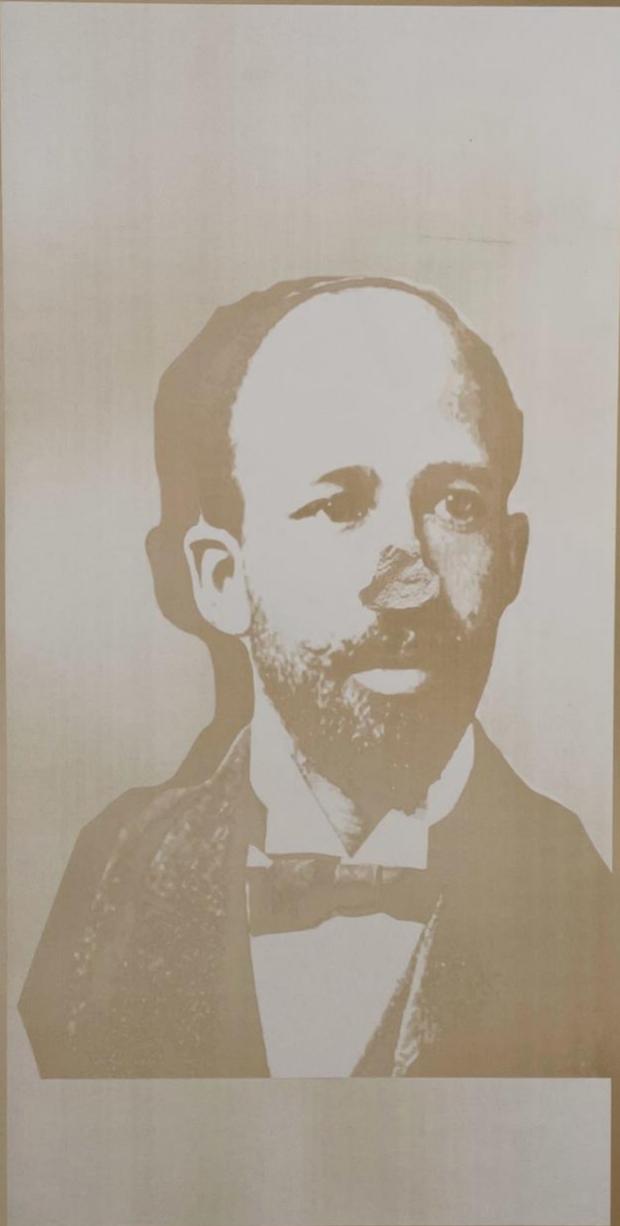
BLACK LOVE  
WHITESBORO NEW JERSEY

ALABAMA

EQUAL







W.E.B. Dubois

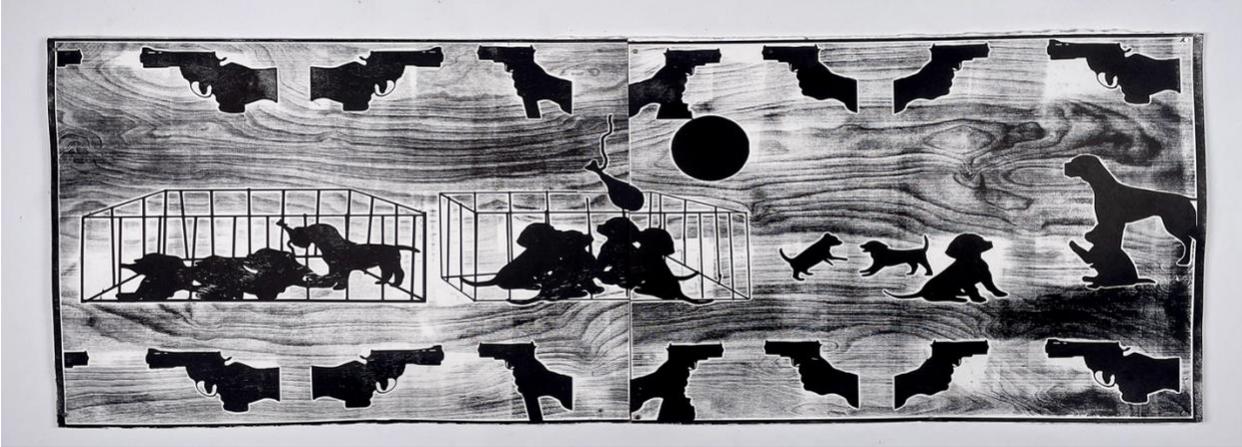


Rosa Parks

















Keionne: safe place + quiet mind, microa

Frieda  
worry - not be good enough  
Joy - my family

Kaleb - Outside near a river; annoyed

Bousaina Ibrahim  
anywhere in nature, Sudan, my home + my sisters  
disrespected, angry, ready to get violent

lack of opportunities  
worry: there

My aunt's house - my black side  
of the family always gathers here  
Microaggressions: people always  
tell me "you're not really black"

Gordon Taylor  
no where on campus, my house  
angered, unjustified

Manish May  
Worry: Not finding my place in society with my cousins  
Joy: Being surrounded by my friends in college, supporting  
each other, and pushing each other to succeed so we can  
make a name for ourselves

My team at my safe haven and the most  
comforted comment  
I first feel shocked and quickly change  
my surroundings to see how best to respond

Ahmed Alsalhi  
my house is my safe space, I feel comfy  
when I experience microaggressions I feel  
lost + confused, but relying on my friends  
helps, angry + hurt

Blk - lack of opportunities, worried, joys: most called  
culture

Acid Ibrahim - my house, keeping my hands on my pen  
Adithi Dutta - Joy - is being able to wake up  
and not making the world better

Iti Yusuf  
Worry: that I live a life that's unfulfilling  
Joy: how much influence African my culture has had on  
society

Nyankor Timothy  
Safe Space -> My house, Gaughn, Banhwich  
Microaggression -> Confused, angered

Laqueedah  
Worry: I worry about disappointing my parents.  
Joy: I enjoy listening to music.

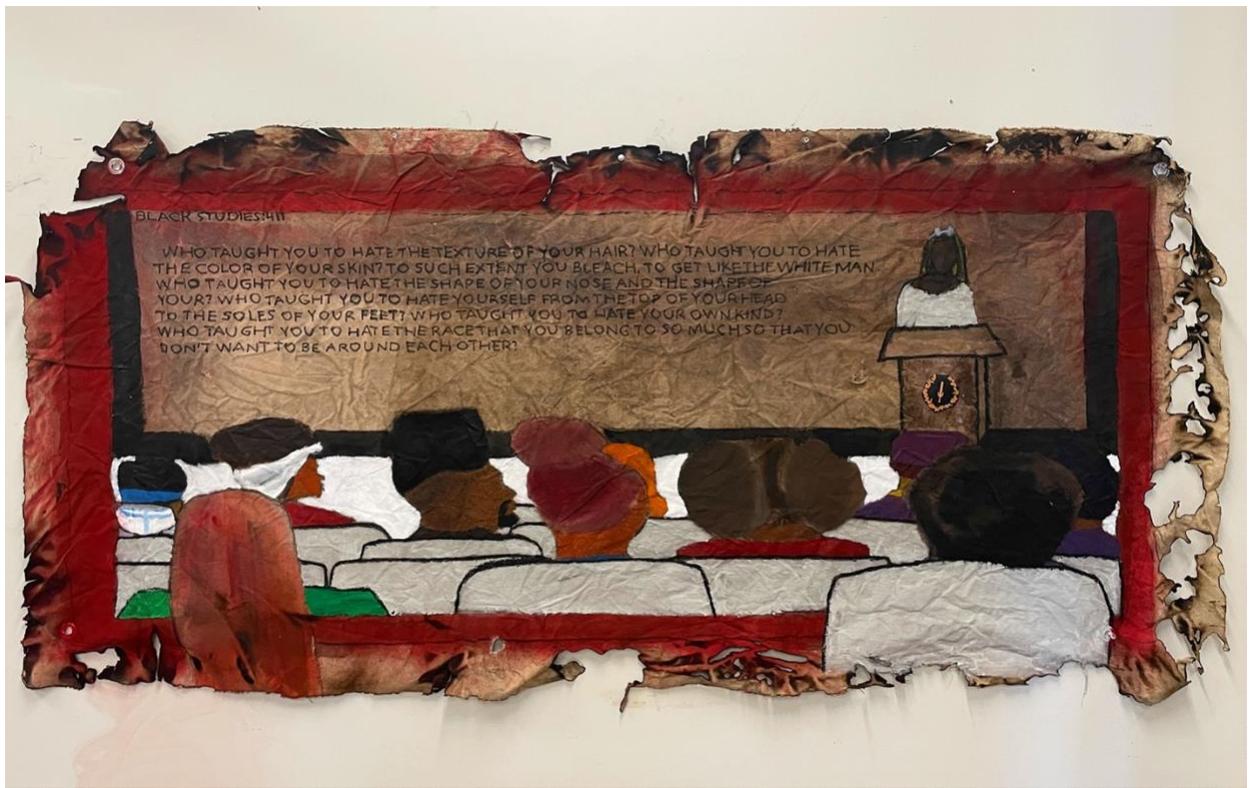
CHIKA ANWANI  
Worry: Not living up to my own expectations  
Joy: I know the future holds a lot of possibilities

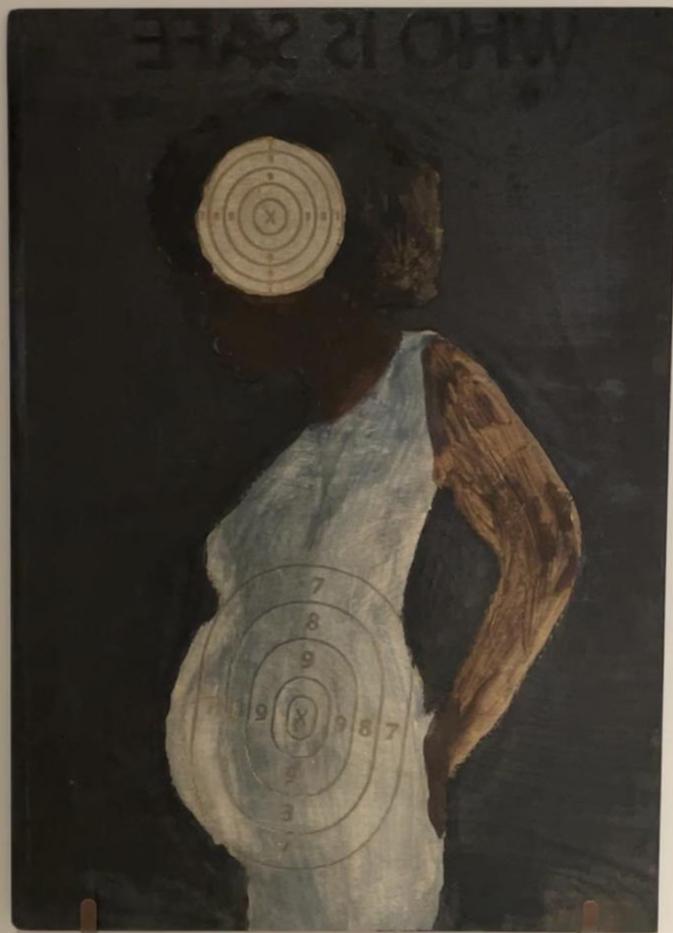
*[Background notes and smaller text fragments including names like Keionne, Kaleb, Bousaina, Gordon, Manish, Ahmed, Iti, Nyankor, Laqueedah, Chika Anwani, and various reflections on microaggressions, safe spaces, and cultural identity.]*



IT WAS MY MIDDLE FINGER. IT WAS A TOY. IT WAS CANDY. IT WAS SUNGLASSES

IT WAS FEAR. IT WAS A WATERBOTTLE. IT WAS MY PICK. IT WAS ANXIETY











# Thank You Black Women

For Being Unapologetically YOU

P.O.P.E

THE BLUEPRINT

Black women are  
Still the most  
Disrespected and  
Least protected  
Person in America

[www.popmag.com](http://www.popmag.com)



00041100







WORRYING ABOUT  
WHAT WE'RE DOING

I AM A REVOLUTIONARY:

P.O.P.E

CHANGE AND  
HOPEFUL BEGININGS

Inside

HOW  
STICKING TOGETHER  
& UPLIFTING EACH OTHER  
CAN PROGRESS OUR  
COMMUNITY



00041100

**BLACK  
People  
Needed!**

For an art project I'm doing

Matt Meyer First Year sculpture Gnu-MFA  
School of ART, ART History, and Design