

Errbody Know What Dis Song's About

By Sedenia Dawit

First Place Reflective Writing

Black Lives Matter Blvd. had never been so busy. Though I was in fear of the virus, the fear of staying silent haunted me even more. I was pushed up against strangers as the beaming June sun fused us together through sweat and tears. On both sides of me, stood my best friend and my brother holding bright signs that read, “NO JUSTICE NO PEACE” and “I STAND WITH MINNEAPOLIS.” The flooded DC streets brought back memories from before Covid-19. My brain wanted to register it as a parade, a joyful celebration that I had not experienced in so long, but it was hard to find joy when fighting for our fallen brothers and sisters. As we were approaching the fifth mile, I could feel my arms get weak and my legs go numb. My backpack felt as if it were stuffed with bricks, and I struggled to keep my hands from shaking. However, the thought of giving up and going home never crossed my mind. It was the pain that pushed me. The heat had melted my mask onto my face as if it wanted me to stop yelling, stop screaming, and stop fighting, but I was nowhere near the end for this was just the beginning. As the sun was setting, it was as if the light was choosing to illuminate truths I had not realized before. The march for our freedom was still being overshadowed by the silhouettes of uniformed officers lining the rooftops. Their presence was a symbol of a revelation that I found myself at the center of. Just as the setting sun chose to reveal what I couldn't see before, I also chose to no longer allow these uncomfortable truths in my life to stay hidden. To battle the ‘syndemic’ within myself, I grew to become confident in my own skin and deepened my understanding of my community which gave me a new lens with which to interpret the world.

The lockdown was only supposed to last two weeks. Two weeks away from my friends, my homework, and my primarily white high school. But as I sat at the foot of my mother's bed, she read out an email, “All PWCS schools will be closed for the rest of the year.” I was overcome with joy and relief only for those to be followed by fear and isolation. As a 15-year-old in lockdown for months, I resorted to my phone. It was an escape that kept me entertained for hours. I was sucked into a different world that had been handcrafted specifically for me. I remember seeing so many beautiful black women with braids like Rapunzel and skin

shining in the sun like golden honey. However, I found it so frustrating that even though we shared the same basic identity, it seemed as if they had a better grasp on it than me. It wasn't jealousy or envy but more so a desire I wished so hard to attain but feared that I would never be able to. For the past 15 years of my life, I was so accustomed to straight hair, skinny jeans, and a t-shirt, never because I liked them but solely just to fit in. But as I sat in my desolate room, I came to the realization, in such a time of isolation, who else is there to fit in with other than myself? This one simple question led me down a terrifying testimonial of a journey. I began to braid my hair and worked on healing my damaged curls from the years of straightening and relaxing. I stopped using lighter makeup and let my beautiful melanin shine through. It wasn't as simple as the words on this page; however, I fought mental battles with myself and often lost to the version of me that didn't like change. It took rivers of tears to even allow myself to put to action my thoughts. Looking back, it was as if my tears were raindrops feeding the dry and rocky soil of my soul, giving it the nourishment it had been longing for. There grew red roses, yellow poppies, and green hydrangeas in a place that had been withered and dead for so long. Finally breaking free from the rigid and repetitive schedule I had created for myself in accordance with my society was terrifying and in the words of Sigmund Freud, "arouse[d] dread and horror." I had opened a door to a new space and a new world where I was in charge. Although I was greeted with such horror, dread, and fear, I stood joyful and relieved that I pushed myself to step into the light and embrace the black beauty that lay within myself.

After reaching such an enlightenment within myself, I began longing for a community that shared the same fulfillment as I did. I remember listening to a song by the influential singer-songwriter Erykah Badu, and the lyrics stuck with me. Her song, "Soldier," was written over such a cheerful beat, and she sang with such a soulful voice, "then everything changed, cuz he saw his own wings and his mother was sad." It was a simple lyric that didn't produce much thought, but she began to repeat herself in the chorus singing "what I'm talkin' bout, errbody know what dis song's about, 'and this line made me really ponder what Badu was trying to say. I listened to the song on repeat with open ears, an open mind, and an open heart. Once I realized Erykah had hidden such a deep, dark truth over a joyous and lighthearted song, I found myself in the dark once again although it was different this time. I wasn't in the dark because I was lost but because I was fearful about the community I had found within this song. My mind had resided in the mutual understanding of "knowing what dis song was about"—the normalcy of losing a

brother or sister to police brutality. Finally wrapping my mind around how Badu had structured the song pierced through my heart as a needle through thread. She described how a young man in her community had such a bright future ahead of him, but it was taken away from him in an instant. The way she changed the subject so swiftly and unnoticeably made me reflect on the world we live in now. I did my own research and read over 400 names of innocent black men and women murdered by those who took an oath to protect and serve. Over 400 names, and not a single arrest. Part of me wished I had never gone this deep and wanted to turn around and return to the girl who was too afraid to show her voluminous curls and colored skin. I figured if I separated myself from this community, I wouldn't have to deal with the pain that came with it.

Then May 25th, 2020, came around, the day that would change everything. The video of Officer Derek Chauvin digging his knee into the neck of the 46-year-old father George Floyd spread faster than the COVID virus itself. It was the topic of every news outlet and reposted on every single social media platform. Although it was used to expose truths of our society that had been hidden for so long, I couldn't help but look away every time I saw it. The video had been engraved in my mind, and Floyd's voice calling out to his mother echoed in my ears. It became so overwhelming to even turn on the TV or pick up my phone because I knew the video would find its way to me again. I gave myself time to think about Erykah Badu's words, Floyd's death, and how they all tied into me, a 15-year-old girl in the middle of Virginia. My initial instinct was to move on, but the song, "Soldier," still rang in my ears. Erykah had already warned me of the dangers that came with staying silent. Similarly, the thought of Floyd leaving his home on May 25th and not returning due to this country's systemic racism enraged me for it could've been my brother or dad on that pavement crying out for their mother. I had already opened the door and was faced with two choices, to fall back or push forward, and I would be ignorant to turn my back on the community I had longed to be a part of. I spent the following weeks making signs, walking miles in the heat, and screaming until I physically could not make a sound. I felt as if I had finally opened my eyes after being asleep for so long.

Looking back, I wish I could explain to that 15-year-old girl that she wasn't alone and that there was a whole community that welcomed her with open arms. I want her to know that her voice is as powerful and resounding as the beat on a traditional drum and that she shouldn't hide the ethnic features God had blessed her with. Most importantly, I wish I could give her a warm, long hug. Having to experience such mental strain and suffering all alone cut deep and left

scars that I'm still dealing with. However, I stand here today prideful as ever in my own skin and my community. I have finally found my place under the sun, and I am grateful for the pain that led me down this path of discovery.

To the blinded 15-year-old girl, I hope you're proud of me.

Work Cited

Badu, Erykah. "Soldier." *New Amerykah Part 1 (4th World War)*. Universal Motown. 2008.

Sedenia Dawit is currently a second-year student at VCU, majoring in Pre-Nursing. She composed "Errybody Know What Dis Song's About" for Professor Christopher Martiniano's UNIV 111 in fall 2022. She likes to spend her time making lifelong memories with friends, growing her mind, and immersing herself in her Ethiopian community and culture.