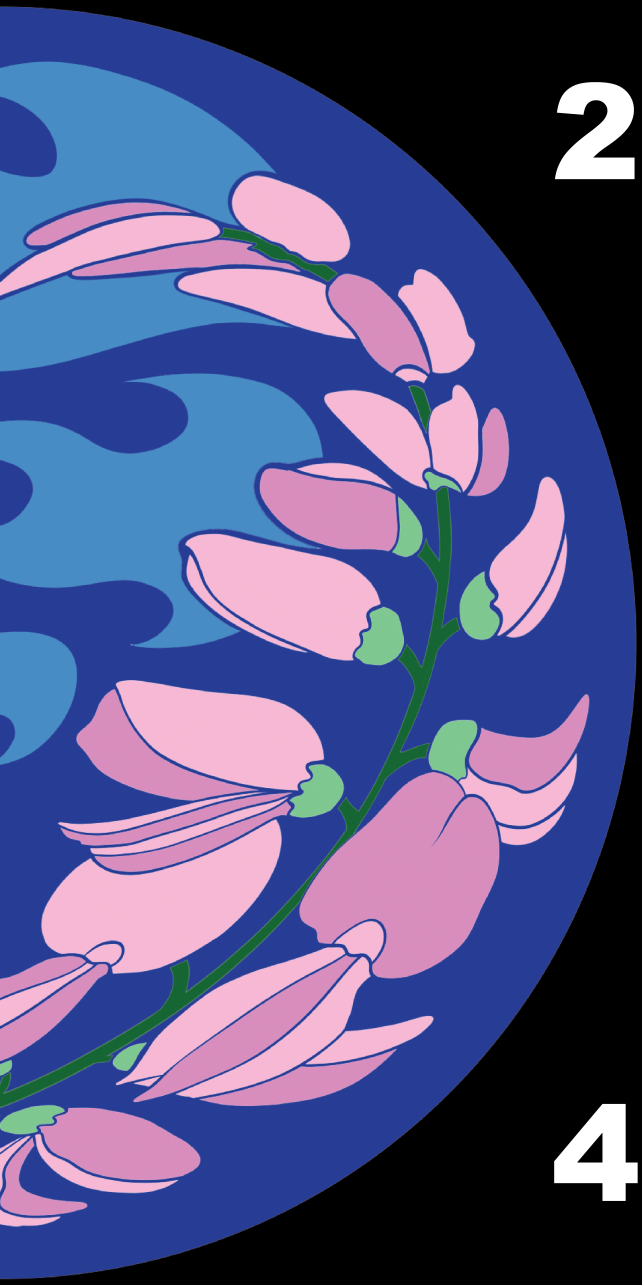

SPECIAL TRUE BLUE
ISSUE: 000

Indigo Magazine

True blue is cool as water from the mouth of a fish; a Dashiki made in China; and sit with and dip the cloth in for days to make it almost black, not that fake German stuff that made your jeans blue; hushed voices; pain; Yesterday, Right now, And tomorrow, too; lonely, but not alone; Ray Allen's jump shot; you, if you're cool; a home for Black dreams. dad lecturing you about Richard Pryor; real Indigofera tinctoria, the type you have to mash he aching that comes after the sun sets; Rihanna; dark skin being loved; your sound that you can see, sight that you can hear; recognition but also opacity; blue notes; t

TRUE BLUE IS...



BURN BLUE

A Letter for *Indigo*

words by
Malachi Robinson

Dear *Indigo*:

I might just be crazy, but I think that I can finally hear your voice. Are you at last, like *Fire!!*, a magazine that "speaks for itself"? I doubt it, not necessarily because that would defy the laws of psychiatry, but because magazines just aren't made out of what they used to be. It used to be that a magazine knew how to pick up the phone when you called them. But I understand, you know, times are changing and maybe you've been out of town for a while. I also did dial the wrong number a few times, for sure, and had to hear some other pubs ramble on about being the oldest this and the whitest that. I must confess that I did listen to them, at one point desperate for their approval and at another angry because of their rejection, and it took me a good while to hang up the phone.

Now that I'm listening, though, I think that I can hear you clearly.

I hear you laughing at how earnest I am. Questioning my need for answers. Carrying the truth of life in your timbre and refusing to bow for approval or power. Knowing that the knowledge of beauty begins within. I hear you saying you are not my toy, though I often seem to forget it. I hear you telling me to remember who you are. I hear you telling me you are no forum for my manifestos, that you care far less about my problems than you do about the needs of my people. I hear that you don't belong to any campus or country, that your allegiance lies only with the beauty of Black

culture. That you stand on the wings of the dream singers and miracle workers that came before you. I hear Sir Duke feeling your mood into melody and moving air. I hear you raising the tale from Liberia of the days when the sky could be eaten and a woman drank too much from them, of how the sky left your namesake behind when it fled human reach and blue entered the palette of the world. I hear you sing to me of crushed leaves and deep seas, of fire and beauty from the ashes. I hear you telling me to be angry sometimes, that it's ok to burn a bit. To burn for truth, for justice. To burn with passion and love. But never to let the flames consume me, to never let my blues become hatred. That every moment of our lives may not be lovely, but that you hope the fire in you—your blue pulse—will spark the hearts of my beloved and release them from beliefs that do not believe in them.

Burn Blue,

Malachi

Untitled (Mom and I), 2021
Claudio Eshun (aka Don Claude)
Photograph, archival inkjet print
18" x 24"

Darker Than Blue

words by
Jamila O'Hara

Blue has long been a means of expressing the inexplicable, the complex, and the contradictory. What Ralph Ellison called the "blues impulse" is not simply the impulse to "keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness": It is a means of transcending one's pain to engage simultaneously with the tragedy and comedy of the human condition. This, of course, is a central tenet of art — and it is the very tension that makes blue a worthwhile muse.

The history of Black artistry across the diaspora has allowed blue to be both seen and heard, from the the haunting strains of Ellington's "Mood Indigo" to the recent revival of the centuries-old indigo-dyeing practices in West Africa. And with the advent of new technologies came new possibilities for Black visionaries to retell histories and envision futures in camera lenses and silver screens: Black cinema was born out of a need for self-determination in an industry that fed its disregard for Black life and thought through reel projectors for the masses to see. Counter-cinema became a brand new blues impulse.

In many ways, Black filmmaking is a legacy steeped in blue. Indigo, for example, is a crucial thread that runs through the first feature film directed by a Black woman to be distributed theatrically in the United States. Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) tells the story of three generations of Gullah women living on the South Carolina Sea islands at the dawn of the 20th century. The film's engagement with history, familial ties, and

folklore is inextricably linked to indigo's storied history in the Southern United States.

In *Daughters of the Dust*, indigo colors both pain and beauty. It adorns and it stains. While the younger members of the Peazant family desire to leave the island in search of "modernity," matriarch Nana maintains a firm grasp on her community's ancestral history: at one point, she calls upon the spirits of the family's ancestors, who were enslaved people working on the island's indigo plantations. Dash finds the enduring legacy of slavery not in the cold steel of whips and chains, but in permanent stains of precious dye on weathered hands: Throughout the film, close-up shots of ancestors' purpled palms — and Nana's own fingertips — remind us of the crop's inextricable ties to slavery.

But, as Dash shows us, these hands found ways to fashion meanings from the same crop that symbolized their enslavement: In many scenes, Nana wears an intricately detailed dress dyed a brilliant shade of deep blue. In another sequence, she delicately folds an indigo charm that she later gifts to her granddaughters.

Still, new creations cannot be washed of history, and the film's nonlinear storytelling shows us that time is endlessly cyclical. In one single, stunning sequence, Nana explains the history of indigo on the island, and the voiceover conjures images from across time with a poetic fluidity. In one moment, enslaved islanders dip fabrics into pots of deep purple dye. In the next, we are brought back to the present as silhouettes sway on the beach bathed in a dusky blue light.

The brilliance of Dash's film relies on this complex, and often hidden, legacy. *Daughters of Dust* was nothing short of a cultural milestone, and in the decades since its release, new generations of directors have inherited the palette of blues and intricate visual logics through which Dash presented alternative images of Blackness and Black heritage. And though many films since 1991 have done the same, I find myself returning time and time again to Barry Jenkins' *Moonlight* (2018) and the effectiveness with which it does so: a radiant portrait of identity and self-discovery told in three acts, Jenkins' masterpiece seeks to reframe Black masculinity onscreen. Blue, as it turns out, is essential to this project — and Jenkins' meditation on human connection and queerness may help us further understand the lineage of blue that is essential to Black film.

Moonlight is based on Tarell Alvin McCraney's semi-autobiographical play "In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue" — a title that would later lend itself to dialogue spoken by Mahershala Ali's Juan. Although McCraney's play went unproduced, Jenkins later got hold of the text through the Borscht arts collective, and became interested in adapting the story into a film. This junction of creative minds – the inheritance of vocabulary and ideas – shows us again how blue is a muse that is transcendent and transformational.

In the aesthetic and thematic landscape of *Moonlight*, to be blue is to be many things at once. Like Dash before him, Jenkins articulates a nuanced relationship between the film's natural motifs: The ocean, the sky, and moonlight itself, all of which are

graded in – or associated with – blue. In nature, it is the moon's gravitational pull that generates the tidal force — and in Jenkins' world, it is the transformational power of blue that draws out the film's searing intimacy.

Jenkins seeks to affirm the relationship between color and visual texture, acquainting us with the fluid freedom that blue can represent. In one sequence, we witness a baptism of sorts as Juan teaches Little how to swim, cradling the child's head in his hands as he floats on his back. The camera is half-submerged alongside Little – we the audience bob up and down, too, as waves gently lap the camera lens, tilting us slightly upwards towards a cloudy blue sky. Blue is cleansing; blue is rebirth.

Black boys look blue in moonlight, it is basked in moonlight that the teenaged Little – now called Chiron – experiences true emotional and physical intimacy for the first time with his friend Kevin. We see that to be under the moonlight (that is, to be *blue*) is to be the truest version of oneself: vulnerable, unrestrained, and unencumbered by the weight of social expectations. The blue of a moonlit seashore is the cure to the concrete rigidity of the city block. In moonlight, Black boys are *allowed* to be blue — to experience, embrace, and embody their complicated selves without shame.

In blue, we're allowed to be. In film as in other art forms, blue is a means of practicing introspection; of exploring contradiction; of translating feeling into words, notes, and portraits. Blue is a truth and a tradition that Black artists have held for centuries. It was through indigo that we first harnessed the potentiality of

blue. As the first and only colorfast blue dye in existence, indigo brought blue under human control — and the history of indigo in West Africa and the United States is one of both repression, resistance, and radical creativity. We might dredge cauldrons of indigo dye or seek peace in cerulean landscapes — but, in either, we will encounter ghosts of the past.

Interior Red

—after Yusef Komunyakaa

poem by
William Lohier

I am twenty
When my hunger
Grows a body, it's
Mine and spits blood
And takes pleasure
In tearing your white
Throat out

The readers gaze
At me like red meat
Hook two fingers
Behind my two
Front teeth and
Pull me outside
Myself to die and die

A queer black
Body stays black
And dies bloody
Embers plant voices of
The dead in my throat
That call things
What they are

All my friends are
Roses hung by the feet
To dry, each morning
Wakes me with
Its hands around
My ankles rough
As coral

At sunset we watched
Our bodies float belly
Up on the river
My rose tattoo matches
Your ear cuffs and all our
Hungry mouths
Disorder

The evening and
The morning and
The night. Nati
Asks where I come
Up with all these
Angry hypotheticals like
If your hunger grew

Your body would
Your cheeks still flush
And dimple the skin
Around your eyes? Would
Your hunger still, like
At its worst, still
Be love?

Untitled (Don Claude), 2020
Claudio Eshun (aka Don Claude)
Photograph, archival inkjet print
18" x 24"

Throw Your Lot: An Interview with Diallo Riddle and Bashir Salahuddin

conversation by
Karson Baldwin & Becca Cadenhead

Diallo Riddle and Bashir Salahuddin have probably been taking over your T.V. screen. The pair — who met at Harvard, where they were both part of the Kuumba Singers – are now writing, directing, and starring in Southside on HBO and Sherman's Showcase on IFC, and have collaborated with each other on many, many more creative projects. A few weeks ago, Indigo staff members Chet Ellis and Emmanuel Effiong met (over Zoom) with Riddle and Salahuddin to talk about black art, pursuing creativity professionally, and being black at Harvard.

Chet: Did y'all both write comedy before linking up?

Riddle: Yeah. What's interesting about that is I was writing for the Harvard political review. [...] I was a writer, but total nonfiction. And Bashir and I were friends in college, though we didn't do a whole lot of work together. It was actually after college, that we both found ourselves in L.A. and that we started working together in the capacity that we do today.

Chet: So did you just pick up comedy while you were in LA?

Salahuddin: I think we were always like we were funny, right? Diallo's from a big family, I'm from a big family. I think that's where it all comes from; it comes from having to entertain six to eight siblings and parents and because of that you learn how to make people laugh. In college, both Diallo and I would be entertaining

at the lunch table, we would be telling jokes, and there were a lot of cool people around who would be laughing, too [...] But we never did anything officially within school. I was pre-med.

Riddle: I was a history major. I think to a certain extent, I ran away from the arts my entire life until about the age of 24. My father had been a painter, and I've seen that being an artist is like, the least stable career path that one could ever take. It was feast or famine. Some years dad would sell a lot of paintings, other years he wouldn't. I thought of my job, if you will, as lifting my family out of poverty. So I was like, “Okay, well, I'll do history,” but when I get to junior year, I'll work, or I'll do a summer at a consulting firm, and I'll make a lot of money and buy my parents a home. Ironically, when I started working with Bashir in the arts we always joked that it's like coming out to your parents. Like, “Mom, Dad, I am an artist.” Eventually, I still got to that place where I can look out for my family, but for a long time, I thought it was selfish to want to create stuff.

Salahuddin: I couldn't agree with that more. Both of us come from working class backgrounds, and you don't go to Harvard with a working class background and then throw your lot away. It's like “spitting in the face of your ancestors” kind of vibe. For me personally, I think my big artist coming out was my junior year. I was like, “I don't want to be a doctor or lawyer. I want to play one.” [Before then] I was always saying, “I'm gonna go to

medical school." But what was I actually doing at Harvard? I was doing plays. I did plays all four years. [...] So finally, I was like, "you know, I keep saying what I'm gonna do, but the thing I keep doing is theater." So I called my dad and I was very fortunate that he helped me pay for a summer theater internship in Ithaca, New York called the Hangar Theatre Lab Company. It wasn't until I was going to LA years later doing theater that somebody introduced me to sketch comedy and the minute I did it, I loved it.

Chet: Is there something you wish you had known earlier?

Riddle: Honestly, this whole conversation could be called, "What I wish I knew then" because I would've started way earlier [...] But sometimes you got to take 10 years to figure out what you're going to do. [...] I think that one good thing is that we definitely got to have some life experiences. I mean, I for sure did a whole bunch of stuff. So I do think that that colors our writing as well. I think to a certain extent, because we're not *Harvard Lampoon* guys, our comedy manifests itself in a different way; we didn't come up with their bag of tricks.

Chet: So we're young people, right? We have no clue what's going on anywhere. So I like y'all saying that we can stumble upon it. Do you feel like it's important to prioritize getting those skills early, [in college]?

Riddle: I think the short answer's yes. I think if you think it's something you want to do, there's nothing stopping you from getting started on it today. Use this time right now, because you don't know where your life is gonna go. [...] Use this time to develop your voice.

Salahuddin: Knowing what I know now, I definitely would have tried to leave college with a couple screenplays and maybe one or two films. Because you have no barrier to entry. There's no penalty for failure, right? Just try shit. So by the time you graduate, you're ready to hit it, you're ready to take on this very difficult thing which is the arts.

Chet: You're giving me an existential crisis. In a good way, though. I love it.

Emmanuel: What motivates you guys to get up every morning?

Riddle: I know that when I first got started, my main motivation was just that people got to see that what we were doing is different. [...] I still feel that way about some of the projects that we're working on, like, “why has nobody else done XYZ?” A lot of it comes back to being black [...] there are so many different things that we haven't seen with people who look like us.

Chet: Do you think that art can really change the world? I know, that's a little vague. But when confronting all of these negative depictions of blackness in the world, do you feel that your work is like a counter narrative? Or is its main purpose just to distract people from that hardship, from our material reality?

Riddle: I think you could probably do both, right?

Salahuddin: I feel like comedy specifically is a medicine for a lot of people. And so I really feel blessed that I work in a medium that makes people feel better when they deal with [hard things]. I think as I've gotten older, I've definitely become more and more aware of how tough this world is. [...] I think there's a reason why the best comics are very highly regarded in society. They have a way of taking the world and making it understandable and relatable and saying, “Hey, we all get it, hey, we understand what you're going through.” As a human being, sometimes you need to know that people understand your struggles.

Emmanuel: Do you feel like you're writing for black people? Or is the audience you have in mind wider?

Salahuddin: I would say to any artist, especially as a black person, you certainly got to write what you're passionate about. And you gotta hope that it brings people to the table who you want to bring. I don't necessarily approach it as, “Oh, I'm writing this for

black people," because black people are all very different. We're talking about millions of individuals who have individualized tastes, individual points of view.

Riddle: I think we kind of write for ourselves. It kind of goes back to what we were saying before, like, we write stuff that we want to see. [...] We come from these big black families, and so we grew up knowing that there was diversity of thought within the black community. To a certain extent we're just writing what makes me and Bashir laugh.

Chet: You guys are definitely people that are opening that door for our next generation. I used to sit on the couch with my dad, we used to laugh at Sherman Showcase like crazy. You'd have us rolling. Truly, I want to thank you all so much for everything that you do, for being black creators. Thank you so much for taking the time and for all your work. Good luck with Southside, good luck with Sherman Showcase and other projects. Thank you.

Indigo Magazine

Donations

The Vision

Imagine a network of Black artists and activists at colleges across the nation with the financial support they need to pursue their dreams. Imagine a global forum for artistic development and exposure. Imagine a new pipeline into the entertainment and media industries. Imagine *Indigo Magazine*.

The Problem

The problem faced by Black creatives at Harvard is the problem faced by Black creatives everywhere: We have no creative home. Even as efforts to integrate the established creative house have progressed, Black creatives still often feel culturally homeless. Though the public demand for Black production has grown in the wake of George Floyd, the necessary structural support lags far behind. We need a stable, loving network of our own if we are to develop and refine our voices.

The Ask

We hope to raise at least $45,000 in donations from the first wave of fundraising, which, based on our projections, should cover our expenses for our current semester and the two subsequent ones. We plan to generate revenue primarily through grants, advertisements and subscriptions going forward, but we will continue to seek donations so that we can establish a financial aid program and create the most sustainable financial foundation possible.

Donate via Cash App using the QR code here.

Please email editor@indigomagazine.org
with any further questions.

To Look and See the Truth: Zanele Muholi at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

words by
Zoë Hopkins

Siphilile Muholi, Quarter Hampton Inn, New York, 2016
Photograph, archival pigment print
Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson Gallery New York,
Stevenson Gallery Cape Town/Johannesburg

This image is a moment of multiple captures. I stand in front of the portrait captured by their gaze, the intractable whites of their eyes shocking yet beautiful, arresting yet forbidding. They stand in front of a mirror, captured by their own image, in what appears to be full awareness of its power. And then finally, the camera captures this whole arrangement of recognitions, gazes, exchanges, and apprehensions. I let this portrait—titled *Siphilile Muholi, Quarter Hampton Inn, New York* (2016)—hold me. This was not an image that would let go of me and I could not let go of it.

Zazi II, ISGM, Boston, 2019
Photograph, archival pigment print
Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson Gallery New York,
Stevenson Gallery Cape Town/Johannesburg

This feeling of mutual suspension surfaces anew each time I encounter the work of Zanele Muholi (they/them), who creates not only photographs but also ways of seeing. Born in Umlazi, South Africa, Muholi has dedicated their life to capturing the country's Black queer community. In the face of immense violence against Black queer people across the globe generally and in South Africa in particular, Muholi's camera is a disruptor,

an activist, a magnetic field of force and power that makes us look, and look with deep care and attention. In recent years, Muholi has turned the camera onto themself, creating self-portraits that often embrace theatricality as a mode of self-assertion. Muholi's self-portraits, including *Siphilile Muholi*, are shot through with the tension of looking inward while gazing out, of recognizing the self through addressing the other.

In the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum's exhibition "Being Muholi: Portraits as Resistance," *Siphilile Muholi* is one of many images where mirrors intercede. As an iconographical device, mirrors are loaded with signification: vanity, self-fashioning, and reflection. But on a practical level, their purpose is straightforward: to see yourself. The same could be said of self-portraits. In fact, before the advent of photography, painters would use mirrors to record their own likenesses in self-portraits. But in the age of the camera, why choose to construct an image around two devices of self capture? On the one hand, the mirror alienates, intensifying the mediation between the artist and the viewer that the camera already sets into motion. But on the other, the mirror stages a doubling of the self, an infinite multiplication and enunciation of presence. To look at oneself in the mirror is to confront one's own being, to come to terms with the truth of one's flesh and consciousness. Muholi's portraits are not just images of self-fashioning but documents of self-recognition.

The mirror is also a prop. In Muholi's photographs, it proudly announces the fact that these images are choreographed: it acts

as a frame for their face, heightening the theatrical drama of the portraits. But while they are performative, they are also piercingly honest. Our encounters with the artist captured by their own lens are full of inescapable immediacy, full of a kind of truth telling, full of presence that feels almost palpable.

Gazing at these refracted images of Muholi, I kept getting tripped up by their doubling. Seeking to find ground, I found myself turning to Du Bois' oft-cited idea of double consciousness. Muholi looks at themselves in the mirror and shatters the eyes of others, devastating the white gaze, stripping it bare. A new form of consciousness emerges in its wake. Muholi envisions themselves as doubled, but not because of the gaze of the other. Rather, it is because of their own gaze. Although not all of Muholi's images include mirrors, each portrait is resplendent with a sense of Blackness that is defined on its own terms. Instead of submitting to an existence behind the veil, Muholi multiplies their being by standing in front of the mirror.

"I'm reclaiming my Blackness, which I feel is continuously performed by the privileged other," Muholi writes. "My reality is that I do not mimic being Black; it is my skin." Skin. One cannot ignore its presence in the images on view at the Gardner. Not simply because Muholi is Black, but because of the way Black skin shines in these photographs. The way that its texture simultaneously glistens and withholds. The way that the intensity and depth of its shade is both impenetrable and infinite. It is a shade and an affect of Blackness that refuses to surrender, that refuses to grant

access, that revels in opacity. Muholi takes the vocabulary of the black and white photograph to the extreme: it is the intensity of contrast in each of these images that grips us. Which is to say, the intensity of their Blackness. We are arrested in the undeniability of Muholi's Black shimmer.

I am still held in the uncompromising universe of Muholi's portraits as I write this, undone by their ricocheting gaze, the frankness of their presence. I can't help but feel that their portraits suggest the promise of a world unveiled, and I wonder how to inhabit it.

Inile II, London, 2019
Photograph, silver gelatin prints
Courtesy of the artist, Yancey Richardson Gallery New York, Stevenson Gallery Cape Town/Johannesburg

Draped in Indigo

words by
Onyx Ẹwa

Iya Mapo, the Yoruba protectress of women's crafts, is said to have taught the divine art of indigo dyeing to womankind. For West African women, who traditionally produced indigo dye and textiles, indigo and its associated wealth was an important manifestation of feminine agency. Textiles and garments have historically had substantial significance for women, because even in instances where women have been deprived of their rights and personhood, they have still been able to use the textiles that adorn their bodies to produce agency through self-fashioning. In the Americas, enslaved women who produced indigo used their dyes to enhance and fortify the low-quality cloth and clothing they were allotted, and they then used this newly dyed cloth to produce beautiful garments that affirmed their identities and individuality.

Iya Mapo is worshiped by the *alaro*, West African indigo dyers, to ensure the success of their indigo vats. She has a strong association with water, which, like indigo, is a site of healing, creation, and nurturing. The literature on indigo describes the dye as "blue gold," "the color of love," "God's color," and "the color of heaven." Indigo is special, and the production and use of its dye is deeply rooted in a number of West African cultures and traditions. The first known indigo cloth dates back to the 11th century, and was found in Mali's Tellem caves. In the fifteenth century, Kano, a legendary center for indigo dyeing that remained active for centuries, was established. In various societies, indigo has been associated with changes in life stages, death and mourning, gravitas, and spiritual leadership. Indigo dye is obtained from indigoferearsa plants, and

it is the only naturally occurring blue dye. It is also one of the only dyes that forms a physical bond with fibers (as opposed to a chemical bond), and as a result, the dye actually helps to strengthen cloth, giving it practical utility in addition to its aesthetic appeal.

The first successful indigo farming in the New World began in the 1730s, when enslaved people at South Carolina plantations owned by Eliza Lucas and Charles Pinkney figured out how to successfully grow and process indigo. Though this accomplishment is often credited to Lucas herself, the production of indigo required an immense amount of knowledge and skill, which was likely carried over from the West African societies that had historically produced and utilized indigo. The knowledge of enslaved indigo farmers was essential to the profitability of indigo production.

Not only was indigo valuable as a dye, it was also a natural repellent for malaria, which was the cause of death for many enslaved people. The crop became so popular in South Carolina that at one point, cubes of indigo replaced paper currency in the state. Once indigo became a staple export in South Carolina, its importance spread across the region, and indigo remained an integral part of the transatlantic slave trade until 1774, when the invention of the cotton gin made cotton a much more profitable crop than indigo. Shortly thereafter, the American Revolution caused England to turn to India for its indigo needs, where the British continued to force sharecroppers to grow the plant.

Many enslaved people used the products of their labor to enhance their lives. Some started home gardens using seeds from

plantations' food crops, and then sold the items they grew. Others made fabrics from the cotton they grew, and then dyed those fabrics using plant byproducts, such as indigo. Plantation owners often provided very minimal rations of clothing to enslaved people, and it was generally ill-fitting and made out of cheap, low-quality, uncomfortable fabrics, such as osnaburg (woven from flax and hemp) and homespun cloth.

The low-quality clothes that quickly became ragged "reflected and reified slaves' status and played a role in their subjugation," according to Stephanie M. H. Camp, author of *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*. Camp's work examines the ways in which enslaved people resisted colonial domination through dress, among other means. She explains that because enslaved people "were made to suffer domination largely through the body," the body itself was an important site of resistance. Creating clothes that fit well, and that were both comfortable and fashionable produced an embodied form of resistance against the degradation and devaluation of Black people.

Dyeing textiles was one of the many ways that women engaged in adornment, and indigo and other natural dyes were essential parts of the color story. Indigo-dyed fabric was commonly used for both working and leisure garments, and women took great pride in using natural dyes to create beautiful, brightly-colored, and sometimes patterned garments. In Georgia and South Carolina, there is documentation of women raising indigo for dye, and then selling it at markets or to other enslaved women.

The money they earned from the sale of dye could then be used to purchase colored or patterned textiles, ribbons, buttons, jewelry, and sometimes, manufactured garments to supplement the plain fabric and clothes they had been allotted.

The liberatory power of clothing cannot be overstated. In addition to producing agency over the body, having "respectable" clothes could also assist in running away, as new clothes could help the formerly enslaved blend in with free people. Enslaved people sometimes stole fabrics, and even silk or calico gowns from their owners, but often, these items would be those that enslaved women had themselves produced. Thus, the "theft" of garments for the purpose of self-fashioning was really a means of reclaiming the products of the womens' own stolen labor.

However, theft was rare, and most women acquired nicer garments by making them themselves, at night. Networks of women developed around textile production, creating small communities surrounding material culture and adornment. The women in these communities developed their own distinct style, which did not necessarily reflect that of white women of the time, but which instead combined formal and informal elements, natural and manufactured items, African and American aesthetics, and a variety of colors, textures, and patterns. Many women would assemble just one special outfit that could be worn to church, parties, weddings, and other events.

The story of indigo is complex and fraught with its ties to enslavement and colonial control. However, its roots in West African

traditions and its role in providing agency to women both in Africa and in the United States are much stronger than its colonial legacy. Dyeing with indigo was a source of strength and empowerment, as it gave women control over their labor, their bodies, and their presentation. It is only a small part of the realm of self-fashioning in which enslaved women engaged, but its story provides a glimpse into the incredible importance of adorning the body to produce agency and resist colonial domination.

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Untitled, 2022
Abel Berhan
Photograph, glossy print
16" x 20"

Our Sunset

—after Jerico Brwon

poem by
Mia Word

My ancestors live with me at home
I reap their protection and suffering

Protective hymns remind us we are suffering: We
still sing them same songs

The same songs to fight the same devil.
We've made art from our sorrow

They've made a new art form: our sorrow
Profits now that our bodies are less accessible

He viewed her body as accessible for profit
She feared the terrors of the night time

My grandma told me come home before night time.
Fair skin can whisper dark secrets.

My family comes from dark secrets.
My ancestors live with me at home.

Cleanse, not to be, 2020
Claudio Eshun (aka Don Claude)
Photograph, archival inkjet print
24" x 18"

Trippin'

words by
Chet Ellis

I take the key to my Wigglesworth dorm and scrape the last dust of kief into my Black power fist shaped bowl. I light it, inhaling the butane for good measure, coughing more than I usually do. *I didn't pay $35 a g for this indigo berry kush to not hit.* I stumble out of my dorm to a crowd of tourists taking pictures of a rare sight on Harvard's campus, a poorly dressed Black man. I smile at them, my teeth much whiter and civilized than they expect, and pick at my tightly coiled afro. A German tourist mutters something with the word "negro" under his breath. I'm looking kind of cute today, so I take it as a compliment.

As I walk into the yard, I pass a pack of white women, each looking more like the last. One of them approaches me and asks to touch my hair. I say yes, and as her hand navigates my dreading locks she tells me how Wiz Khalifa is the best rapper of all time. When she mentions Young Thug and tries to compare her tan to mine, I've had enough and politely shake my head to dislodge her fingers. She tells me how soft my hair is and asks how she can get an afro herself. I respond that she'd have to date a Black guy, chewing my bottom lip like a true lightskin. She cringes, wipes her hand on her shirt, and says that her dad won't let her date Black guys after the last four.

Stepping past the John Harvard statue, I see a tourist shining his shoe, and think about all the slaves who walked this campus. We know two of the past presidents were slave owners and that many early donors got their money from the slave trade. I try to put on the perspective of a Black econ major to give them the benefit of the doubt, *shit I'd own people too if it gave me that Harvard money!*

Half this campus is named after trifling ass white people: Brattle Street, Holyoke Street, Winthrop House, and Mather House all get their names from slave owners.[1] Harvard says they won't change the names of Mather or Winthrop because they think it's funny seeing Black people in them. That being said, they've proved more woke as of recent. Last year they changed the Thomas Jefferson Center for White Supremacy into Jeffrey E. Epstein Memorial Hall.[2]

The weed starts to kick in as I reach the Science Center. *Shit, I've gone the wrong way*. I open Google Maps and spin around to orient myself, catching a senior laughing at me. She's Black so I know she doesn't mean any harm, and I smile a little. She's the cutest girl I've seen on campus, but I can't tell her that. *I'm not allowed to gas up Black women according to Article IV Section II of The BMF Constitution*.

I eventually find Sever Hall and walk up the stairs into room 204. The class is called "Blackness in Black America: A Study of the Negro in Its Natural Habitat." The professor is the whitest man you've ever seen. He's a wirey New Yorker (Upper East Side) with blindingly blonde hair, sickeningly blue eyes – and of course – he's wearing a dashiki. From the sleeves of his red and gold pullover, I notice that his arms are littered with tattoos. On his forearm I see a white fist crossed out and encircled with

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[1] Beckert, Sven., and Katherine. Stevens. Harvard and Slavery: Seeking a Forgotten History. Harvard University, 2011.

[2] Look it up bruh!

the words "Black Lives Matter and mine doesn't." I support the message, *but damn do white people be tripping*. From behind me, I feel someone's breath loudly whisper "Nigga you're lost, too high a cost in the ashy village. Winter brings frost!" But when I turn around, I notice that I'm the only one in class.

The professor introduces himself with a name so white that I can't pronounce it, but says I can just call him Gilbert. He begins class by talking about this one time he almost kissed a Black girl, and keeps asking me what went wrong. When he turns to write something on the board, the voice behind me whispers again, "The road is long when you are where you don't belong." I turn around and bat the air. I ask the teacher if he had heard anything, and he responded that he always listens to Black voices, clearly not understanding what I meant.

Mr. Gilbert writes in large letters on the board "Nigger or Nigga?" and explains to me how white Af Am teachers are allowed to say the n-word as long as they don't use an e-r. I tell him that if he uses either, he'll end up in the ER. His face hardens and he starts in on a rant about how the angry Black stereotype is the one true stereotype about Black people – that and the fact that we like fried chicken. While I agree about the chicken (and add that we also like watermelon) I push back on his dismissal of Black anger. *Don't we have a right to be angry?* He contends that 17th-century Black folk had the right to be upset because of the "lack of barbers and everything," but that modern Blacks need to stop complaining. He asks me if I'm aware that Kanye is a billionaire.

"Negro please don't talk to this pale ass man, whiteness rules his thoughts like police, listen too closely to his words and you'll never find inner peace." This time the lights flicker in the room. I look over to the light switch and see a 5'11 Black woman in a leather jacket and perfect afro. *Damn, the Panthers*. She kisses her teeth, "Black fool in this white ass school, don't you have no self-respect?" I tell her that it's actually supposed to be 'any self-respect' not 'no self-respect.' She rightfully slaps me upside the head.

I rub my bruised temple as she reaches into her jacket pocket and pulls out a copy of Kwame Ture's *Black Power* and asks if I've read it. I say that I have and she steps toward me, claiming that the unopened copy in my dorm room proves otherwise. She opens the book and begins to read a passage,

> "'Integration' as a goal today speaks to the problem of blackness not only in an unrealistic way but also in a despicable way. It is based on complete acceptance of the fact that in order to have a decent house or education, black people must move into a white neighborhood or send their children to a white school."

she continues,

> "those token Negroes —absorbed into a white mass— are of no value to the remaining black masses. They

become meaningless show-pieces for a conscience-soothed white society."[3]

I ask her what this has to do with me, and again, she slaps me upside the head. She tells me how she's been sent to guide me, and explains how my negro soul is becoming lost. "You can't even dance anymore," she cries, "prancing around white functions to EDM – you should be ashamed. Jumping and bumping, got white folk cheering 'this negro has been tamed!'" I tell her that Avicii has some good music and that I don't need her help. This time I catch her hand before it strikes my afro (*I can't let her know how dry it is*) and ask her to leave. She says that she can't go until I'm saved.

I ask her if she really believes what she read from Kwame – that the Black people absorbed into white masses are of no use to Black society. She shakes her head, "it's not about the words, open your eyes child. Blackness is a mental state, you're either us or the exiled." I ask her if integration is really all that bad, because at least I'm helping myself. After these four years, I'll get a diploma that says I'm not just another nigger – I am a nigger who went to Harvard. She asks me what I'm trying to prove, and what I'm pushing away from. She asks me why I don't want to be seen as just another nigger. I tell her that I don't know.

We sit in silence for a moment before she reaches into her flawlessly round afro and pulls out a metal pick. As she looks into

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[3] Ture, Kwame, and Charles V. Hamilton. Black Power: the Politics of Liberation in America. Vintage Books, 1967.

my eyes, her face softens almost to a smile, and her hand comes crashing down, plunging the pick into my throat.

As I come to, I find Mr. Gilbert picking lint out of my afro. "You're high as fuck aren't you?" he asks sounding almost impressed. I tell him that I am and apologize. He replies that I'm 'straight trippin' and asks what strain I've smoked. I tell him

Indigo.

Interest

Indigo Magazine is not as an island... but a vessel of creative transformation for Black creatives. Submissions, therefore, are open to the entire Black diaspora and individuals outside of it who create art. Each issue will also consist of pieces from our five writing boards, which specialize in different content areas, and art solicited by Indigo's art editors relating to the theme of each issue. Our five writing boards include:

1. *The Message* publishes pieces of argumentative writing, including direct, scholarly "Cases" and more literary, broad "Meditations". Its mission is to highlight and foster discussions of race on Harvard's campus, across the nation, and around the world.

2. *The Symphony* publishes pieces that uplift Black art across mediums through criticism or personal reflection, as well as original literary and visual art.

3. *The Jam* publishes humor pieces by, for, or concerning the Black diaspora. It aims to earn a laugh, and maybe someday a living.

4. *The Renaissance* explores Black fashion through a historical and socio-political lens. It will take style seriously, and might even help freshen yours.

5. *The Mic* celebrates Black voices by doing what most people don't do, actually listening to them. It will publish interviews of a variety of Black folk, seeking to share their stories and wisdom with the world.

If interested, please email editor@indigomagazine.org.

Indigo Magazine
Species: True Blue
Issue 000