SHADES OF BLACK

THE CONVERSATION

VOLUME ONE

SHADES OF BLACK

THE CONVERSATION

FOREWORD

50 SHADES OF BLACK is a multi-disciplinary art project that investigates the intersection of sexuality and skin tone in shaping identity. This project also offers new perspectives on beauty and expands the boundaries of the standard definition of diversity.

Contributions from people from all over the world in the form of scholarly essays, personal narratives, poems, photographs, paintings, and other artistic contributions are the basis of this project. **50 SHADES OF BLACK** is interwoven with voices from the LGBT and queer communities. It includes Latino, African, African-American, and Asian perspectives. Mixed with my own commentary and artistic contributions, I have curated the artwork and edited these written contributions with the goal of producing a FREE downloadable e-book, a printed publication, a traveling art exhibit, and maintaining the website www.50shadesofblack.com to continue to collect and share stories.

SEX

The title of the project and its subject matter (very loosely) are the result of a creative play on the title of the popular contemporary novel Fifty Shades of Grey by E. L. James. James' book is notable because of its explicitly erotic nature and its appeal to older women. **50 SHADES OF BLACK**, on one hand, seeks to explore the pervasive, complex, and influential nature of human sexuality. In doing so, it highlights and serves to celebrate the beauty, the attractiveness, the allure, and the sex appeal (for some) of people of color.

SKIN TONE & DIVERSITY

Unlike James' book where Grey refers to a character in the novel and not an actual color, **50 SHADES OF BLACK** is about color –a spectrum of human skin tone. Over a time period spanning from the 1920's to the present, this project highlights people of color across the African Diaspora who have various skin tones and shades and who have various national, international, and ethnic heritages. Therefore this project also offers a deeper understanding of what diversity means within a particular racial group.

FORMATION OF IDENTITY

But this project is not only about diversity. It is also a critical examination of the complexities and issues surrounding race and skin tone and how these complexities influence the formation of black identity. This project seeks to acknowledge humanity's distinguishing aspects as reflected in our skin tones and as reflected in our national, racial, and ethnic origins. It is in this recognition of difference, however, that this project also acknowledges the painful and historical role that race and skin tone have played in causing division among communities.

PERCEPTIONS OF BEAUTY

This division and the struggle to understand and come to terms with difference sometimes manifests itself in the form of discrimination, marginalization, and exploitation both among varying ethnic and racial groups and within groups that share the same racial and ethnic identities. This mixture of experiencing rejection and acceptance with marginalization and privilege, both inside of one's racial/ethnic group and outside of it, form the basis of the complex understandings of the self and the formation of black identity all around the world.

This complex understanding shapes the way one engages in the world and influences their view of what is beautiful, attractive, or "sexy" in others. It impacts their own perception of beauty and their understanding of their own individual self worth. It also impacts they way one interacts among other racial groups and within their own.

50 SHADES OF BLACK hopes to foster a healthy dialogue that serves as a catalyst for positive social change. I hope that this change manifests itself in the form of personal transformation for all who engage with it –both the readers and the contributors. I believe that there is something powerful and liberating about sharing stories about our experiences. By giving people a platform to publically share stories about issues that they often deal with internally, they are not only released from the burdens of holding onto their feelings, but their stories serve as a form of liberation for other people who have had similar experiences. People then realize that they are not alone.

I hope that this collection of personal, honest, candid, and challenging contributions will give permission for some people –maybe even for the first time to acknowledge and then begin the process of letting go of painful experiences from their past. It also serves to educate. Education leads to changing of perceptions. Changing of perceptions leads to more healthy interaction and engagement in the world.

And while some may feel that this dialogue is simply about and for people of color, that couldn't be further from the truth. In this globalized society, it is more important than ever for people of all races and ethnicities engage in serious dialogue about the historical and contemporary impacts of race. **50 SHADES OF BLACK** explores the role that patriarchy, heterosexism, racism (internalized and externalized) plays in the shifting understanding of identity of people around the globe. It is also an invitation to examine the intended and unintended consequences of re-enforcing standards of beauty through media, television. It requires of everyone who engages with it –people of all races and backgrounds, and all the people who love them (regardless of race) a true assessment of how they present themselves and how they are perceived in the world. It challenges us all to consider what conscious decisions we want to make and what responsibility we want to take as a result of that assessment.

50SHADESOFBLACK.COM

–an exploration of sexuality, skin tone, beauty, and the formation of black identity.

Created by
Carlton D. Mackey

CHAPTER 00 Introduction

Hue-Manity

Hue-manity finds its birth from the oldest and most well-known sex symbol of all: Mother Earth. She's black to the core in the dark. According to one old story Her "womb" is the place where all people came out of, and composes a full spectrum including black coffee, high yellow, and ivory cream.

WE are the children of Mother Earth and Father Sun, as these two might be considered our second pair of parents. We are Humus, us humans. Most certainly, science speaks a biological language of genetic inheritance, stemming from the union of egg and sperm. Now! Now is the time to celebrate a galactic lineage and hail the merging of Sun and Earth, as these two are equally vital to our life history as a collective family.

The Emergence Symbol, often called Labyrinth, began as ancient rock art. It reveals the miracle of conception as well as birth. Hot sex! Earth babies we are, whether we mirror the dark rich colors of the Nile Delta, the sun tones of the Grand Canyon, the yellow spectrum of desert landscapes, or the ivory tones of shell beaches. We are the people, we carry the DNA, and we are all included in the 50 Shades of Black.

Is it OK to say some of us are black Africans, some are yellow Africans, some are red Africans, and yes, some are white Africans? Don't leave white out. Our language gets in the way. I really like the image and taste of black coffee. Consider going all the way and paint us maybe yellow ginger, red pomegranate, brown syrup, and white wine. Help us taste the other.

-Joja horsestalkingj@gmail.com

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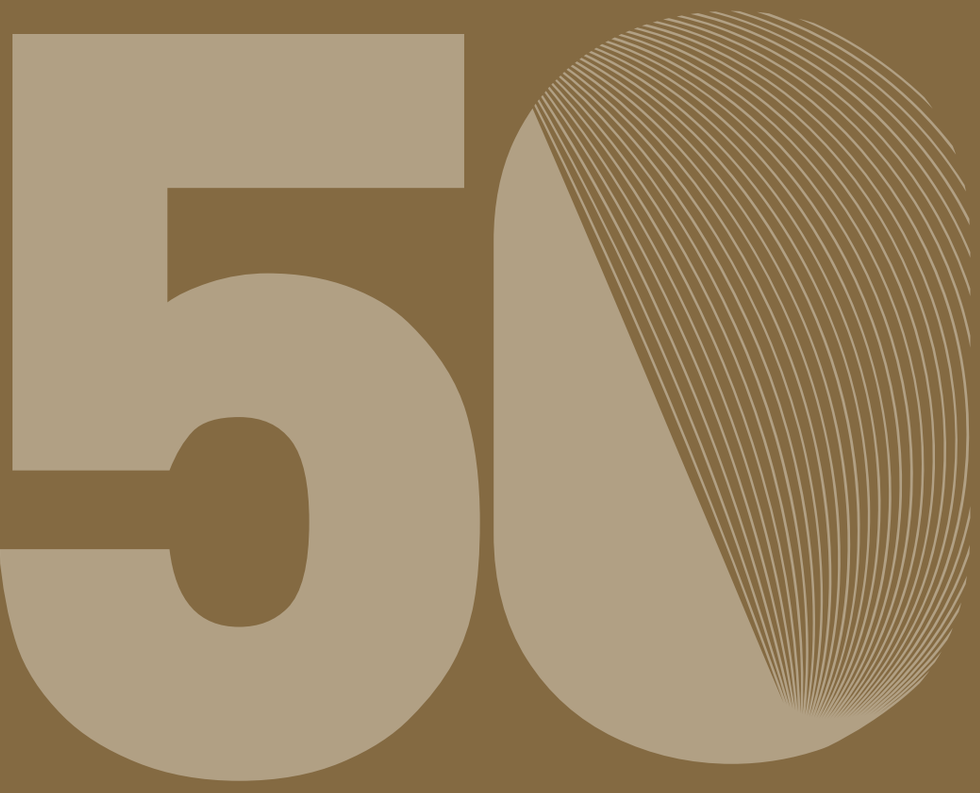

SHADES OF BLACK

THE CONVERSATION

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS BLACK

What is Black?

Do you know blackness when you see it? I always thought I could spot a black person anywhere. My eyes were trained in New Orleans—home to a historically preeminent group of folks who self-identify as "Creoles." A mix of African, Native American, French, and sometimes Spanish heritage, some Creoles are light enough to "pass." We call them "passé blanc." Many make it a point to announce their differentness—not white, not black, but Creole.

One of my favorite pastimes as a youth in New Orleans was "picking out black people"—people who everyone else might have thought were white or "something else," but who I knew for a fact were black. Somehow. Without even knowing it at the time, I had blindly accepted the "one-drop rule," the historic law turned social rule that held that anyone with any trace of "African/black/Negro" blood was black; or said differently, that anyone with even one drop of "African/black/Negro" blood could not be white. Somehow I made it my mission to identify that one drop any chance I could get. Maybe it was my way of retaliating against people I believed were rejecting their own kind—those who didn't want to be associated with people who were black like me.

In my limited experiences, it seemed that those with a physical appearance that gave them the "option" to be something else chose to be something else. So in my adult life, when I left New Orleans and began to meet people who were very adamant about their black identity, even though they could have easily identified as "mixed," "Latino," "Creole," or even "white," I found myself intrigued. On one particular occasion, I was on a panel discussing my work on skin bleaching and as "learned" and well-versed as (I thought) I was in global skin color politics, I found myself somehow taken aback each time either of my co-panelists, whom I would have identified as "Latino/a," referred to themselves as "black" and "African." In that moment, I felt ashamed of myself for questioning their identities based upon the stereotypical visions of blackness that lived in my head. Afterward, as I continued to struggle with myself, I knew that I wanted to do something with my feelings that could be useful to others. I wanted to explore the "other" sides of blackness.

So began my journey into the (1)ne Drop project.

Starting with my own personal contacts and snowballing into a pool of more than fifty contributors representing twenty countries, I have interviewed a variety of people who self-identify as "black" (or some version of it) but don't necessarily "look black," like my collaborator, photographer Noelle Théard, who identifies as both black and mixed, but is often assumed to be Latina.

I asked potential contributors a variety of questions, like:

How do you identify? Racially? Culturally?
What makes a person black? What makes you black?
Upon first meeting you, what do people usually assume about your identity?
Do people question your blackness?

These are all questions I have never had to think about, much less articulate answers to. Most everyone that I spoke with had the experience of complete strangers casually asking them, "What are you?"—another question I have never been asked. Whether they are from the United States, Brazil, or South Africa, all have had their identity called into question simply because they don't necessarily fit into the "black" box. Yet and still, they are all clear about their identities as people of African descent.

In the process of gathering and compiling stories about other people's experiences with their skin color and racial identity, I have been forced to reflect on my own.

The color of my skin is reflective of my Ghanaian ancestry and by its dark tone; everyone I encounter knows exactly what I am. Although I had lived most of my life acutely aware of the disadvantages assigned to my dark skin, especially growing up in New Orleans, it wasn't until I began having these conversations that I came to recognize some of the privileges my dark skin carries; the most profound of which is its ability to clearly communicate my racial identity, not only to other people, but to other black people. They know I am black. I can rest assured that when someone in the room is talking about black people, they realize that they are talking about my people. I also know that if I say "we" when talking about black people, no one looks at me like I'm crazy, no one laughs at me as if I am somehow confused about my identity, and no one takes offense because they suspect I am somehow perpetrating a fraud, which is what often happens when many of the people I interviewed claim their blackness.

I have never had to defend my blackness—my black is that black that everyone knows is black for a fact. But so what? Does that somehow make me blacker than someone of mixed-race or a lighter complexion? No, not necessarily.

Though peculiarly new in form, the question of "Who is black?" is hauntingly familiar in function—categorization for the sake of separation with the intent of domination. In the historical past, the

one-drop rule was functionary of white supremacy. It was predicated on the myth of white racial purity and thus served to protect and preserve whiteness. The logic was that the black race was an inferior race and as such, racial mixing lowered human quality and was regarded a threat to the survival of the white race. The one-drop rule, then, became critical in the defense of the white race.

Conversely, there now seems to be an effort to defend the black race. When people of African descent question or challenge the blackness of someone of mixed-heritage or light complexion, what is it that we are attempting to protect, and what is it that we stand to gain? True, we understand the racist notions of white racial purity and black inferiority that the one-drop rule implies, but does that necessarily mean we should reject it all together? Where would we be as a community if we had relied on skin color and phenotype to determine blackness a hundred years ago? No W.E.B. Du Bois. No Mary Church Terrell. No Malcolm X. No Lena Horne. No Arturo Schomburg. The one-drop rule aside, have we now abandoned our cultural and political understandings of blackness for more phenotypical ones? Do we mean to suggest that Herman Cain is blacker than Ben Jealous? I certainly hope not, or we're in a heap of trouble. For sure.

Without understanding how racial identities function as politicized identities, some folks might ask, "Why does it even matter who's black?" It matters. A lot. Although the one-drop rule may have been created out of bitter racism and ignorance, in many ways it served our community some good. It created the African American community as we know it. It gave us the parameters around which to recognize our brothers and sisters. Whether we like it or not, the one-drop rule united our community as a people and gave us the parameters around which to mobilize in the organized struggle against enslavement, Jim Crow, and racial oppression.

Am I suggesting that we continue to rely upon the one-drop rule as a measure of blackness? Absolutely not. What I am suggesting, however, is that we remain vigilantly mindful of the society in which we live. In a time when so many people would rather delude themselves into accepting the fallacies of "post-racial America" than to face the continued legacy of global white supremacy, we do not have the luxury to pretend as if collective group identity is no longer important. It is as important now as it ever has been.

For me, I'm no longer as concerned with "who is black" in the ways that I once was. Rather than focus my attention on those who seek to distance themselves from blackness, I'm now much more interested in connecting with those who embrace it. **-Yaba Blay, Ph.D.**

CHAPTER 01

What is Black?

About (1)ne Drop:

Combining candid memoirs with vivid portraiture, (1)ne Drop provides living testimony to the fluidity of blackness. Whereas, according to the one-drop rule, blackness is a matter of biology and the law, effectively leaving its subjects without voice (or choice for that matter), it is through the personal narratives of our contributors that we come to see multiple possibilities for blackness above and beyond the one-drop rule. Through their personal narratives, contributors provide insight into their own imaginings of black identity.

For more information about the (1)ne Drop Project, please visit 1nedrop.com.

Photos by Noelle Théard for (1)ne Drop. www.noelletheard.com.

Yaba Blay is an assistant professor of Africana Studies at Drexel University. Her research focuses on the politics of embodiment and African/black identities, with specific attention to skin color and hair politics. Blay is the recipient of a 2010 Leeway Foundation Art and Change Grant through which she embarked upon the multi-platform project, (1)ne Drop: Shifting the Lens on Race.

For more information on Dr. Blay, please visit
http://yabablay.com

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SHADES OF BLACK

THE CONVERSATION

CHAPTER 2

DARK SKIN

CHAPTER 02
DARK SKIN

BLACKER THE BERRY?

When I was growing up, black was not beautiful, no matter what anyone said. There was Grace Jones—exotic and wild. No one really thought that she was beautiful. Then there was Whoopi Goldberg—talented and funny. But, again, nobody really thought she was beautiful. They talked about how unattractive she was and funny looking. But, she looked like me. Blackie.

Tar baby. Black bitch. Then, during my second year of college, someone told me that he liked me because of my dark skin. My dark skin was beautiful. He looked sincere. I got up, walked over to the mirror, looked at myself in the mirror and wondered what he saw. I turned to look at him and then turned to look at the mirror thinking, I don't see what he sees. What does he see that I can't? The blacker the berry the sweeter the juice? Words. Just words. One day I was at work. Two guys stood at the counter staring at me for a long time. Then, finally I heard one say, she is pretty, but she is too dark. Pretty but too dark.

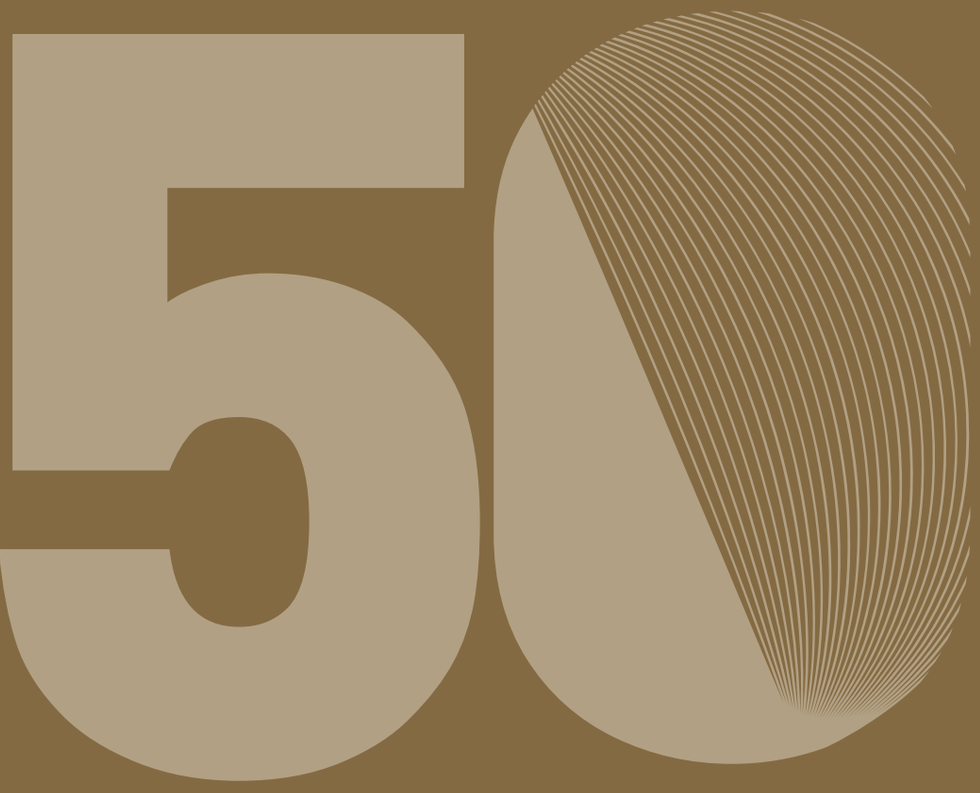
I live in an international house with scientists and doctors from all over the world coming to do research for a major research organization. The dark skinned African men seem to think I am pretty. Maybe I should have been born in Africa. -Crevans06

Little BLACK PRINCESS

"when I see little black girls I remind them how pretty they are and call them 'little princess'..."

Well- I am aware of this issue (colorism) and how it has affected the self-esteem of dark-skinned women. My mother is dark, as well as my close friends and cousins, so my awareness is peaked when I see little black girls. I remind them how pretty they are and call them "little princess" (where I live ALL the black girls need that affirmation, because they are truly neglected here—regardless of complexion).

I saw a little African girl one day in the store with her mommy and daddy (she was a doll with a little afro puff playing with the jewelry and talking to herself like a little fairytale princess). It hurt me to think that these little girls grow up feeling like they are not beautiful—it's not fair. Well, if I'm close by, I let them know how pretty they are. -Senita Jaunun Well



SHADES OF BLACK

THE CONVERSATION

CHAPTER 3

LIGHT SKIN

I DON’T THINK I’M BETTER THAN YOU.

Growing up, I was called names too.
like you, I had no control
over the shade of black
I was born with.
I do understand
'shadeism'
and reject any
privilege it has
afforded me over you.
Today I free
myself from any guilt
I may feel about being
light-skinned.

Loving me does not mean
that I don't love you too.

You are my sister.

—Light Skinned Woman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COLOUR
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TV

CHAPTER
03
LIGHT SKIN

LISA BONET

Lisa Bonet was the first time that I saw myself in the world. In her I saw an alternative black personality that was everything I wished my high school and college girlfriend could be. She was the girl I hoped the boy/man I was becoming would attract. She was probably the first woman I saw myself having a life with. Before her, I said Vanessa Williams, Vanessa Bell, or Shari Headley were the kind of beautiful women I was attracted to. But it wasn't until I saw Lisa Bonet in her first stint on The Cosby Show and on A Different World that I knew all the other prototypes upon which I might build my temple of beauty were wrong. Lisa was as right as it ever would be for me—or so I thought.

Let's be clear. She is light-skinned. She is biracial. She has curly straightish hair—sort of. I am aware of the fact that I may have just been attracted to the bohemian version of the light-skinned/long hair media standard.

But she was also the first person whom I became attracted to the personality of their phenotype more than the attractiveness of it. I know many thought she was gorgeous—including me. But more than that, I could tell in her smile that she had a worldview that I thought might be complimentary to mine. I could see in her facial expression that she had a healthy optimism for the world. I could hear in her voice that she had been exposed to many different kinds of people and places. And I could see in her hair, in her dreadlocks specifically, that she herself was connecting to a cultural expression of blackness that made sense to me in ways I had not yet begun to understand or explore—but, man did it make sense.

Now, I am married to a beautiful brown woman with dreadlocks—a beautiful brown woman whose personality is profoundly embedded in her aesthetic and phenotype—so much so that I had a sense of who she was and what she was like from the first moment I saw her. While she hasn't always had locks, she has always had natural hair, and that has always meant something to her. Being Jamaican, she has always been diasporically aware, and being a student of African American liberation history she has always been informed. Through all of that, she has also always been light, comedic, and buoyant. She grew up in Canada but was also raised on The Cosby Show, and you could see all that in her smile. You could see all that in the way she moved to dancehall and in the way she said "eh." In the poetry she spoke and the plaid shirts she wore, you could see the artistry, but in the way she kept her nails you could see her instinct toward maintenance and order. All of it together, in motion, was fetching and winning in a way that immediately started winning me.

And while I romanticized the "ideal" of Lisa's phenotype, I have realized that in real life, Lisa may not have been my ideal. She was probably the initial caricature that I created as a placeholder for the real life living breathing alternative black woman I was looking for. But what is interesting to me is that Lisa was not instructive to me in how a woman should look, but she was instructive to me in how a woman can communicate important things about herself through the way she looked. And that quality, at least for me, transcended skin complexion.

Throughout my life, the women I have found attractive have had less in common with regard to skin color or complexion than they have in the way that they rejected typical standards of beauty expression for much more personal and honest ways of representation.

In this conversation about beauty, complexion, and skin color, let's not forget that beauty is essentially a 3-D experience, and it is engaged in real time. And I know that the magazines and TV programs shape us amazingly, but not always in the ways that we think. Beauty is as much the resonance of a constellation of representational choices as much as it is the texture of one's hair, the complexion of one's skin, and the mold of one's features. I see pictures of "attractive women" every day, many of them with a fair complexion and straightened hair, and most don't do it for me. My wife does. And while Lisa's beauty is now nostalgia for me, she modeled the beauty that I would one day find for myself. And it had so little to do with her being "high yella." After all it was the 90's, and practically everyone on TV was.

-Okorie Johnson

CHAPTER 03 LIGHT SKIN

"Papa, am I black?"

"Papa, am I black?" I knew his answer would be yes, but I still did not believe it. I did not feel it. The world laughed and the earth trembled when I grasped at the color of night, filled with the stars of ancestors I knew shared my name and tried to make it my own.

It was under this blanket of night, far out between the earth's trembling plates, in the pit of the sea, where the moon stirred a tide that came rolling forth toward the shore. Miles of time it passed, patiently and restlessly pushing its way to the sands of the promise land. A wave formed and crashed violently against the earth. But when the water receded back into its own, it broke off a line of foam along the shore, and few would remember that they once were one.

"Papa, am I black?" I knew his answer would be yes, but I still did not believe it. I did not see it. The world shook its head and the earth trembled when I returned, "What are you?" with a color my skin would not produce, no matter how much time I spent under the sun.

He told me he saw it in the brown of my eyes, in the curl of my hair, and in the round of my nose. He told me he saw it in my determination, my resilience, and the warmth of my heart. He told me he saw it when I was accepted into schools he once was barred from, when I made grades he never had the chance to, and when I cross the stage to receive my ticket into the life he dreamed of when he marched beside Dr. King.

"Papa, am I black?" I knew his answer would be yes, and I became angry.

"Papa, how can you say yes? I don't feel it. I don't see it. The world does not believe it, and the earth trembles when I suggest it. And I tremble too, Papa, in fear of crossing a finish line that isn't mine—I think I'm in the wrong race."

He just laughed and shook his head.

"You are as black as I am black, as the night and the pit of the sea are black," he said. "Yes, my baby, you are black."

-Danielle Douez

SHADES OF BLACK

THE CONVERSATION

CHAPTER 4

SEXUALITY

COCK.
AIM.
SHOOT.

The confusion and contradictions from the attempts to achieve elusive patriarchal masculinity can clearly be seen in the behaviors of young black men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Ironically, this is also the period of black male development most often portrayed in the media. It is during this time that the young black man is at his most vulnerable. Feelings of powerlessness abound, and he feels trapped. In his home as well as the world-at-large, he is constantly bombarded with the idea that he is inherently flawed. As a result, he places no value on his own life. His desperation is manifested in self-destructive behaviors, all behind the façade of bravery. My latest work delves into this period of black male development and asks the question "When does self-preservation become self-destruction?" The series Hard to Death is broken up into four suites of paintings, with each suite addressing specific concerns within the larger conversation.

Cock, Aim, and Shoot is the suite that examines the relationship between sex and violence as projected onto and enacted by black male bodies. Of particular interest are the adopted stereotypes of black masculinity performed in popular film and music representations of black men.

-Fahamu Pecou

CHAPTER

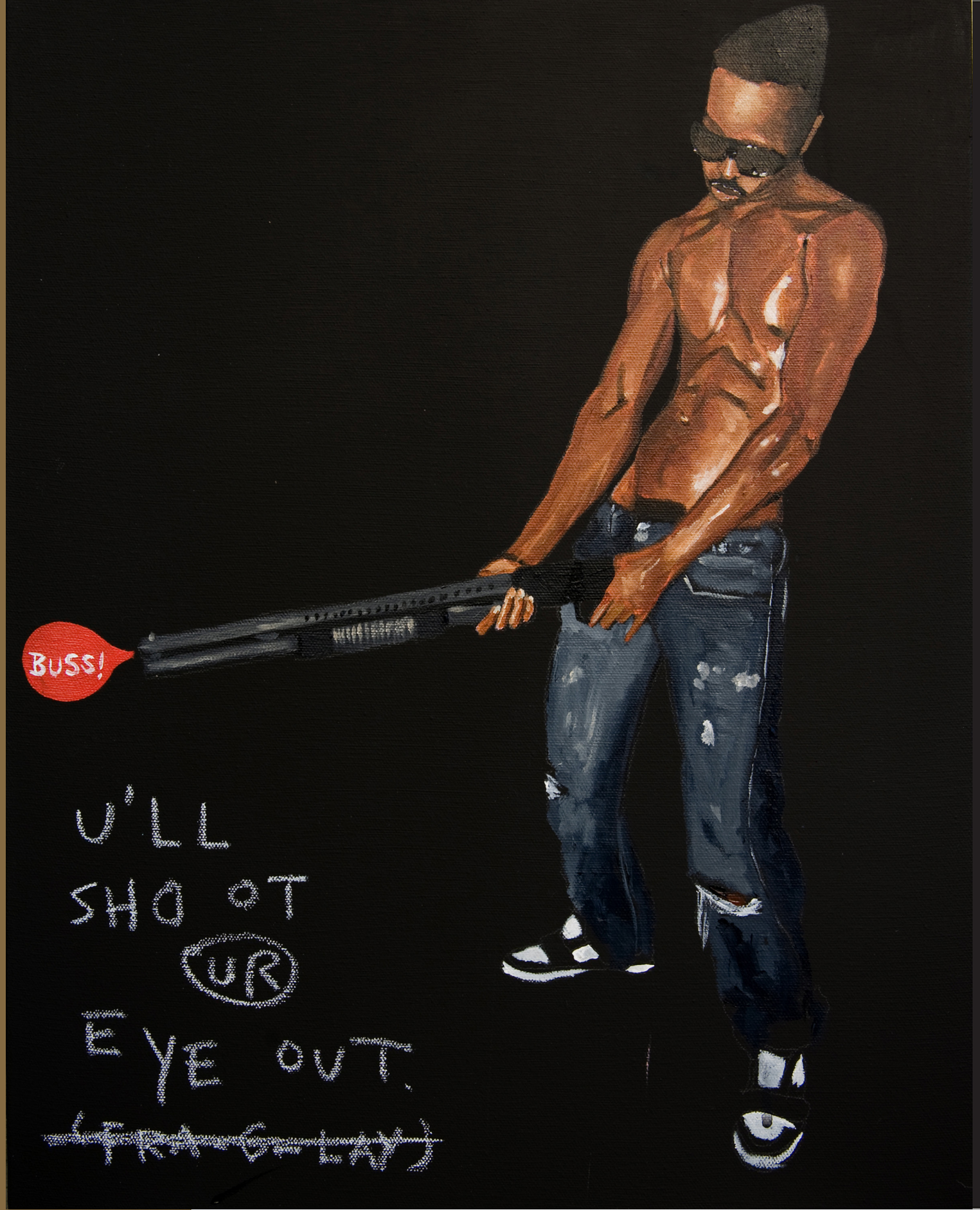
04

SEXUALITY

Cock.

Aim.

Shoot.


BUSS!
U'LL
SHOOT
UR
EYE OUT.


KINDA
LIKE
SHAFT..

MEMOIRS OF

A Ripped Soul

50 Shades of Black is proud to partner with Tamaji Magazine.

"50 Shades of Black | Africa" is a weekly column on the 50 Shades of Black Blog curated by Tamaji's founder Aminata Diop. The column features personal interviews with African-born men and women living throughout the Diaspora whose voices reflect a unique African perspective.

This feature of Gnagna Gna of Senegal was reserved exclusively for the eBook.

I've learned to fight in order to survive. Not because I was starving more than any other children or because I was worse off but only because I had no other choice, caught between my father's shortages and my mother's self-sacrifices. When I was younger, I asked myself a lot of questions but answers wouldn't always be readily available. I had to wait. When I grew up, I finally realized that I was blessed to have been raised that way. It made me the fighter that I am today.

I was a brilliant student at school. I thought I'd attend the greatest universities around the world, but life's vagaries decided other things for me.

I went from a disillusioned woman who thought her life was over with to a kind of self-made businesswoman who studied everything from Earth Science to Computer Science to, finally, communication. My dear Africa does not give enough opportunities, I used to hear. I finally had an eclectic itinerary on my trip to electric discoveries.

And it wasn't easy. So many times, I had to overcome discouragement and most of all heartbreaks, my beloved demons. And it's probably there that I find it most interesting to talk about my stories but I think the most beautiful and most meaningful out of them is the one I have with my skin color.

My name is Gnagna and that name in itself is a history, but most of all a mystery. From my youngest age up to now, no one has ever been able to give me a straight answer about its meaning or origins. All we know is that it's a common name in Senegal. I am like my name. I just know I was born in here but I couldn't speak about my origins, from Guinea to Liberia, traveling past Mali, the Ivory Coast or Niger. To be honest, it's not important.

I'm a kind of a homogeneous cocktail in appearance but one with enough shades to make people feel like giving me a thousand hypothetic origins.

I couldn't say specifically where I come from; my dear father has never really been eager to talk about that, and I had to suffer a lot from xenophobia in my own country and see strangers that found me exotic in my own environment to realize certain things. The only thing I know is all those unknown lands bubble in me and that they suit me really well.

My break-ups that are often so hard are, at the end of the day, the moments when I'm the most connected with myself. It's not an indication of emotional masochism or anything of the like, but it's just there. I didn't choose to be black, but I have to admit that I've wondered at times, what it would have been like if I'd been born different. Especially when I've had to renounce to a love from a day to another, just because I knew I didn't have the "right" shade of black. We're in the 21st century, and in Africa where mothers are sacrosanct and individual identities falling apart, this is the kind of scenario we live. Unfortunately, we can't yell "Cut" like in video shoots.
In those moments, the only thing I do is stare at myself in the mirror while coating my skin with Shea butter. It's psychological, but I have the strong impression that this butter which is known to perfect skin texture and tone despite having a smell so pungent, has magical powers if not mystical ones. Maybe it's a placebo. But I feel good in those moments, when I take care of my skin, that "thing" that is the "reason" of the tears rolling on my cheeks.

Am I just that? A disturbing color?

But I'm in love with it. It's just like when you hate something, you can give hundreds of thousands of reasons why, but when you fall in love with a man you never actually know why you do, even if you logically try to figure it out.

I still remember Tonton. Magnificent. He was just magnificent. An all-white Black man. And the white wasn't in his shade of Black...it was just him. I couldn't say why it was him, but it was just him. Today, the tears he hated to see on my face are the only things I got left of him, and maybe a sweet sadness. And at the end of day, there's nothing more to say about it. Memories should be kept sane and safe even in memoirs.

I guess that's life. It so happens that it takes directions we never meant it to or never wanted. And to be honest, can anything hurt you anymore once you've overcome a red odyssey at every dawn and find yourself lucky for it because the voice of the choir that had to sing the El Pater Noster requiem was not from the right ethnic group?

I live in Africa, the one where a single country can hold hundreds of ethnic groups that distinguish themselves from their skin tones to their scarifications and don't speak the same languages.

In here, shades of black aren't just an artistic concept but a sad reality that sometimes turns into reason for civil wars and genocide.

We aren't unhappy because we rub shoulders with hunger, thirst, and diseases. We drown because somehow, in the heart of every black human being there's a stamped regret, a fiber that vibrates at every gunshot in a civil war, for every small child's last whisper gone to starvation and disease, for every brother murdered for his skin color somewhere around the world, and every sister's tear rolling for no reason. We scatter apart with our shades only to be brought back together in our melanin, which in high or low dose is actually our common wealth.

And this is finally the treasure from the motherland, where once upon a time history began.

-Gnagna Gna

CHAPTER

04

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Foreword
CARLTON MACKEY

Intro
JOJA
Artwork
CARLTON MACKEY

Who Is Black?
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