

Black Lives Matter Saved Me from Hating The Color Brown by Luke “Skippy” Betsey

The brown marker remained in the bin up on the teacher’s desk when everyone could pick their own colors for whiteboard time. I resented brown, my heart sinking whenever I chose last, all the bright, unique colors gone besides black and brown. The color of the cap matches the shade of my umber skin as my little hand picked up the last black marker.

My favorite color used to be red. My mother loves red, it’s the color of an apple, a ruby, sweet tender strawberries that were sometimes in the refrigerator in my aunt’s kitchen. Whenever a red fruit had a spec of brown, I’d throw it out, never letting it reach my mouth. Brown represented filth, dirt, bodily waste in my mind. I never wanted to associate with brown. I washed my umber hands in the sink, watching the dirt get sucked down the drain, looking at my peach palm fondly, wondering why they weren’t the same as the back of my hands.

Soon, I started loving purple. The color of grape jelly slathered on white bread, the color of blueberry pie filling peaking through golden, lattice crust. My father told me purple represented royalty, that I was the descendent of an Egyptian Queen that lived thousands of years ago. A black person’s color would always be purple, that purple represented the wisdom of our black ancestors and he was proud to hear I shared his love of the color. That night, I lie in bed and realize I didn’t like purple anymore.

My favorite color became black, the color of an empty night sky, tar plagued lungs, the color of the crows sitting in the dead birch tree by the same house, every winter, their jet-black wings contrasting with the fresh blanket of snow. Oh, how I wished the black t-shirt I wore looked like that. The colors of my wardrobe afflicted with a black plague, almost as deadly as the one we all know. My heart blanketed in the all too comforting depression and pessimism; my own self-hate deflect by how my mannerisms and speech pattern were as white as my skin is black. A blanket that isolated me from my community.

I got stuck in a web of purple. From the purple and gold of the Ellington Knights to the purple and black of the Knights of Bridgeport. My once predominantly white school became a melting pot of different people around from the world, where the color of my skin didn’t matter but rather the color of my soul, but I didn’t know my favorite color anymore. The black and gold knights battled for dominance, purple sparks flying as my new life battled the old, as

my self hate battled for control. But soon, the familiarity of what was considered my normality dulled like the steel of the gold knights' blade, and the black knight peeled back the blanket from his Kings suffocating heart and freed him from loving a world devoid of color.

The bright beam made my skin glow like a new bottle of syrup, my eyes the color of a dripping spool of honey, and my hair the color of copper, the yellow glow enveloping me with clarity and newfound honor and loyalty to be who I am. My favorite color is yellow. The color of the new Black Lives Matter mural on the streets of NYC stretching across the black tar of the streets, it's large letters contrasting with the obsidian darkness that once trapped me, the yellow paint permanently stains the street and me. The color my people wear proudly, their dark skin contrast beautifully, a contrast I always longed to have. The color we use to end white supremacy, the pictures of the deceased, those who motivate us to continue this movement, their black and white faces on the yellow posters to remind of their crimson blood that fertilized the soil to help strengthen black voices of the red, white, and blue.

Without Black Lives Matter, my heart would still be filled with hate for myself and a lack of sympathy for my community. I'd be teaching my kids lies that we're fine and that we live in a country free of judgement and injustice. Black Lives Matter to me means freedom, freedom to love, freedom to live fearless, freedom to walk into a store, down the street and to work without feeling like you're being watched. Freedom from guilt, freedom from injustice, freedom from all the pain and anguish we feel every time our sons and daughters walk out the door and we wonder if their faces are going to be the next one a poster held up high outside of a courtroom. Black Lives Matter to me is the ability to finally release the breath I hold everyday and walk out into the world shamelessly loving the color brown.