

Creating space for Black creatives

By Naomi Grant



(Caption: Protesters at BLM March by Simone Fischer) (Caption: BLM protest by Clay Banks)

Black History Month is undoubtedly a very important month for recognising and educating ourselves on the history of Black people. However, despite the notable changes which we have accomplished within society, it is still necessary to acknowledge that a vast amount of work still remains and cannot be fixed within a one-month period. Black creatives have been in a constant battle with social platforms over the past year, with many feeling as though their content has been intentionally restricted from reaching its viewer potential.

Algorithms are an impalpable, yet ubiquitous part of life as a creator. They are essential in dictating which content is displayed on search engines and social platforms, including the content that remains hidden. While many online spaces have turned unparalleled attention towards the callous killing of George Floyd, and kept users engaged and educated on institutionalised racism, in many ways the very same structural racism has tainted Black creators participation on these platforms specifically in the algorithm.

During July this year Black TikTok creators went on strike after arguing that their content was being culturally appropriated without credit and suppressed when posting Black Lives Matter content. TikTok apologised following this, promising to “do better”.

Despite this apology, many creators have still noticed that there has been no improvement on this issue and are still struggling with the algorithm.

Here at The River, we acknowledge the importance of creating platforms for Black creatives and have decided to create a space to highlight the achievements of our fellow Black students, encouraging growth and recognising excellence. It is crucial that despite Black History Month coming to an end, we still provide a place for Black students to be heard.

(Separation with design)



THE VENOM

By *Dionté Jean-Pierre*

You tell me black is ugly, but my skin's origin is from the land your nations stole from

I have so much to offer, and you're scared because you wish you could have so much value.

Black is only ugly to you because the jealousy inside of you has made you see a beautiful texture as thorns in the grass.

I didn't choose for the melanin inside of me to create an amazing shadow across my skin and have the sun's rays shine down and glisten on me like diamond pearls.

I didn't choose to be from a land where the soil is as rich as the skin.

And the treasures as vast as the ocean.

The hate inside of you is venomous.

But unfortunately for you, inside our blood is an anti-venom called strength.

Black is beautiful.

Black is strong.

Black is everything.

(Caption: Author of Venom, 'Dionté Jean-Pierre')
(Insta: @blackswann21)

During Black History Month I had the pleasure of interviewing an astounding and extremely talented upcoming poet from Kingston University. Dionté Jean-Pierre is a 20-year-old , pharmaceutical student at Kingston.

I first stumbled on Dionté work around August this year and felt immediately moved by her words. As a Black woman myself, it was both empowering and comforting to hear her perspective on being Black and the power that coincides with that.

When did you first start writing?

Dionté Jean-Pierre: My interest in poetry first sparked while I was in secondary school, specifically when we were studying anthologies. It was war poems which really intrigued me, particularly the way they used their language to express feelings and communicate their trauma. I was able to really empathise with them. Initially, I doubted that I would be able to do the same as in the past I had struggled to put into words how I felt about various topics.

During the pandemic, I believe around July 2020, I felt incredibly overwhelmed. I had so many feelings and emotions that I didn't even know how to begin explaining to anyone else. And then it hit me, I thought to myself: "Let me try to put everything in a poem," and so I did.

I spent a good two hours writing my first poem and it was like a book, undoubtably one of the longest poems that I had ever written. My mum was the first person I shared my work with.

What inspired you to write The Venom?

Dionté Jean-Pierre: This piece came to me while the Black Lives Matter movement had been in effect. It hurts so much as a black woman to see and hear about fellow black men and women dying because of the colour of their skin and I shared the same pain for those individuals just as we share the same colour of our skin.

I've always heard such negative connotation surrounding the colour black and one day all these emotions had built up inside me so I sat myself down and began writing. Venom is the quickest poem I've ever written and most definitely my favourite of my collection so far. I was so proud once I had finished and I didn't feel that it needed to be edited. In fact, I wanted it to be just as raw as my Blackness and it was beautiful that way.

What does this piece mean to you?

Dionté Jean-Pierre: Venom addresses any group or individual that dislikes blackness. Throughout the poem you can see that I have taken some of the things that are associated with blackness and deemed as ugly and I have written about the beauty of being Black instead.

Venom means a lot to me. My intent was to reinforce the idea that so many have tried to break down, which is that Black is powerful, natural and beautiful. It is not scary, threatening, aggressive or ugly. I hope that when people read it they can also empathise with my emotions and feel the vulnerability and purity of it.

What role does poetry have to play in helping you make sense of the world we live in today?

Dionté Jean-Pierre: Poetry is a form of expression for me. I like to write my poems in a narrative style, demonstrating the growth that can take place even amongst the worst of places. Hope is important and my hope comes from God which is illustrated throughout my writing style.

What does it mean to be a black woman?

Dionté Jean-Pierre: If I'm honest, I'm constantly learning. Through every encounter and each day that comes I learn more about what it is to be a black woman. But at this moment, I would say that to be a black woman is to be a woman who has to be strong in order to overcome and survive. As a black Christian woman, I know in my heart that my strength comes from God and, because of this, I have hope.

Who are some of your inspirations?

Dionté Jean-Pierre: One of my one of my biggest inspirations in the poetry scene is Rupi Kaur. I love how she expressed her pure and unfiltered emotion with her words. She inspires me to do the same with my own.

Are you working on anything new at the moment?

Dionté Jean-Pierre: I have a new poem dropping soon, which will be talking about the daunting journeys we go on while finding our forever friends.