

“Outsiders and Forgiveness”
The Aftermath of Slavery

*“Don’t forget, you must pitch the **OLD** black male vs. the **YOUNG** black male, and the **YOUNG** black male against the **OLD** black male. You must use the **DARK** skin slaves vs. the **LIGHT** skin slaves, and the **LIGHT** skin slaves vs. the **DARK** skin slaves. You must use the **FEMALE** vs. the **MALE**, and the **MALE** vs. the **FEMALE**. You must also have white servants and overseers [who] distrust all Blacks.” -- William Lynch, 1712*

I love my black skin, but I fear my shattered reflection. 300 years ago my people sold me and White people destroyed me. 300 years ago the poisonous words of William Lynch spread throughout the United States: “How to make a slave,” giving slave owners specific instructions on how to change the Black experience from a sense of humanity and community to fear, sweat and scars. My reflection lies shattered and as I pick up the pieces of my past, present and future the shard of glass pricks me, revealing the blood that runs through me, through all of us; Whites and Blacks alike.

My grandmother used to tell me stories when I was younger about her experiences with adversity and the Black experience. In my youth I could only reflect in the simplest and most childish of ways. What did this strife mean to me? It could only mean one of two things: fear the White man or hate the White man. It took me into my later years to realize that the slave mentality that had developed three centuries ago still exists today. The shattered pieces of the Black community expose the divisions of female v. male, light-skinned v. dark-skinned, old v. young. We are outsiders within our own community. Our sense of forgiveness has slipped through the cracks.

Although our humanity was taken from us in the past we have it now. We can continue to maintain our humanity and our identity. When we strive to know ourselves and our God there’s no need to blame. Acknowledging our beauty, strength and pain can help combat the cold hard grips of the slave mentality.

My experience as a light-skinned Black has often left me feeling like an outsider. As a teenager I grew up not fearing or hating the White man but instead, wanting to be them. As a woman I’ve overcome that deadly desire and have fully embraced my Black identity. It’s hard for me to face my own prejudices and frustrations towards the Black community but I feel at times we refuse to see the light through the darkness, to move away from the negativity and celebrate our forthcomings. The battle within me has yet to be resolved but I have forgiveness, for Whites and for Blacks. With my Black skin radiating with love and forgiveness, I can begin to face my fears and piece together our shattered reflection. Why? Because there are people of all colors who share one thing, compassion. These people as well as my God will help me with these shattered pieces.

My experience in the Third Ward has allowed me to understand, first-hand, the true character and heart of a community without the influence of preconceptions and mainstream media. I want to specifically thank Mr. Pierce from the Jack Yates High School who introduced me to the Willie Lynch letter and to Julie Johnson and her beautiful daughter Callie who showed me love and allowed me to see the Third Ward in a way that I would not have seen otherwise. It's funny how I went into this project assuming that I was focusing on a bigger picture. I came into this project believing that this story was about everyone else but I soon realized that my exploration of the Black identity was all about me. My photographic work shows where we've been and how far we have come in the Black community: from pain to achievement and a sense of peace. With this, I would still like to focus on what is ahead of us and what we can do to continue or start, to live long, prosperous and healthy lives. I also can't thank Sara Terry and Jeff Jacobson enough with this project. They showed me it's okay to show the pain because that can morph into a power that can touch many people and they way they see the world today as well as how they see our history.

Mr. Pierce said to me, "We as a Black people must not allow our minds to be in arrested development." In many ways, this quote applies to other races as well. Our job, as the generation of tomorrow, is to take the sentiments of strength and openness to acknowledge the sameness of humanity and to fight for change.