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Sisterhood & Scholarship While Black

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Sisterhood & Scholarship While Black

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The summer of 2020 was a challenging period for Black women. This population experienced a disproportionate number of deaths from COVID-19. One of these women includes Rana Zoe Mungin, a 30-year-old well-educated writer and teacher, who died after being denied a COVID-19 test twice. Her achievements exemplified Black female excellence, yet her life was cut short due to the implicit bias and systemic racism embedded in our nation's healthcare system. The disenfranchisement of Black women motivated my summer research project. With the support of various sisterhoods in the form of a writing partnership, #WriteWithAphra, fifth-wave feminists, and the spirit of Audre Lorde, I processed the complexity of Black women's identity through research, scholarly writing, and creative works.

I spent the summer combing through a collection of archives entitled *Born in Slavery: Slave Narrative from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*. This collection attempts to chronicle the experiences of former slaves through narratives and supporting documents. With each artifact, I felt connected to the humanity and the history of Black women. My writing partner encouraged me to write about the women buried in the archives, even the stories that felt emotionally difficult to process, such as the slave deed that declared an 18-year-old woman and her 7-month-old son and all future offspring slaves for life: in other words, in perpetuity. Weekly we swapped imperfect drafts of our summer writing assignments and processed the emotions that come from uncovering the lives of women.

I also joined #WriteWithAphra, an international writing community of women scholars, and I committed to writing daily. No matter what was occurring in the country, I sat at my kitchen table and wrote for at least two hours daily. I wrote on the darkest days of summer, during mass protests, police violence, government-sanctioned 4PM curfews, COVID-19, and looting. I wrote to honor the

dozens of Black women who died in police conflicts: Tyisha Miller 1998, Atatiana Jefferson 2019, and Breonna Taylor 2020. I wrote to honor the little girls who were killed heinously and unjustly, such as Latasha Harlins 1991 and Sherice Iverson 1997. I wrote for the same reason that people rioted: so that the voices of disenfranchised groups will be heard.

#WriteWithAphra provided me with the additional support needed to understand my identity as a feminist scholar of color. During a workshop for underrepresented female and international scholars, women from around the world shared their *testimonios* in a nonjudgmental space. After this workshop, fellow scholars of multiple identities and I connected based on shared research interests. Most importantly, #WriteWithAphra shaped my identity as an emerging scholar.

My summer writing groups helped me prepare the next generation of fifth-wave feminists to address the issues that disproportionately impact communities of color. I had an opportunity to teach a research class as part of an Upward Bound program at the University of Southern California. My class consisted of 17 young feminists who already understood that institutional bias and systemic racism disproportionately affected the long-term trajectories of minority populations. Using feminist research methods, these young activists addressed environmental racism, conversion therapy, education disparities, food justice, universal basic income, and police reform. Now, a group of fifth-wave feminists are better prepared to dismantle the institutions that perpetuate inequality.

“I am deliberate and afraid of nothing.” These words, meticulously inscribed on a post-riot mural that adorns a neighborhood storefront only a few blocks away from my home, invoked the spirit of Audre Lorde. Her words and spirit remind me to write about the intersectional inequalities that have impacted Black women. I have feared that writing the research that matters to the

Black community will be perceived as unaligned with my department or the mission of the university.

During the summer, I wrote from a different mindset. In doing so, I drafted stories, research, and federal grants that honor the lives of women and people of color. Through communities of sisterhood, I recovered the excitement that once came from writing. I developed the structure and support to be deliberate as a scholar, writer, and professor. By writing deliberately, purposefully, and mindfully, I claimed my voice and my identity as a Black/Creole feminist scholar.