

## More Than Words

I fiddled with the Master lock on my locker, as a hoard of middle schoolers were buzzing and fussing about in the musty school hallway. Out of the corner of my eye, I had noticed a girl in the hallway stomping over to me: my locker partner. I paid her no attention—I only gave her an awkward wave, as I was gathering my stockpile of binders for class. It was then that the girl, unprovoked, in the words of Countee Cullen:

“Poked out [her] tongue, and called me, ‘Nigger.’”

...

That utterance must’ve been a spell.

The unpleasant cacophony of the hall became garbled and distorted waves. My heartbeat had crawled to a stop with time before it made a slow and uncomfortable descent into my stomach. My breathing staggered as the air struggled to escape my lungs. The girl glared at me with what I can only describe as pure malice. I did nothing but stare back at the girl.

I did nothing.

I used to regret my actions or(lack of action), since I considered it a disservice to my people by not beating the ever-loving god out of that girl or forcing the principal to expel her. And I used to hate myself for that. I used to hate her for that.

Since I came from a not-so-culturally-educated, majority-white school, any racial or cultural minorities at my school were either suppressed of their culture and forced to assimilate or oppressed for choosing to have a culture. I rarely go a day without reflecting on that girl's remarks, and—more importantly—the girl herself. After all, she was an ethnic minority. She was Indian. She, like me, faced casual racism from her peers. She, too, felt shallow, like her whole being was being drained into a black hole with every painful recollection of her desire to fit in, as loneliness enveloped her heart. She shriveled up, reduced to minuscule proportions as her will to defend herself was gradually ripped from her. She was always desperately trying to change who she saw in the mirror, scratching herself saying her “skin didn't fit.” She hated every fiber of her being because she wasn't white. We had the same battles in our minds yet reciprocated their hatred in contrasting ways. Today, she renounces her culture, preferring to conform with the majority, and I understand why. It's more fluid to go with the current it is then against it.

Today, I pity her. I forgive her, for she knew not what she had done.

Woe was me, the only Blaxican in that school who thought being one of the top students in my classes and challenging myself with an AP class a school year early would eliminate any damaging racial stereotypes just to be reminded by the wolves—and even the sheep—that I'm just a black sheep. It was only that night, as I lay softly weeping in bed, that I'd recognized that going with the flow only amounted to me becoming the exception. If I wanted to be an example

of what the black and Latinix communities are, then I must change the current and carve myself a new path.

Today, I've accepted my Blaxican culture is a part of me, not all of me, and, most importantly, I've learned to forgive myself. I've taken verbal abuse but that one word was my tipping point. I had absorbed those words for an extended amount of time, feeling so helpless, self-loathing, so scared I'd break in school. Would I even make a sound? Though I imploded that day, I was remade. I crowned myself my biggest supporter. Only I can stop myself—but I don't plan on that.