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New Society Rules | A We Are Pi Publication



The Cultural Uprising

A guide to a new generation of culture. This publication is brought to you by We Are Pi, an Amsterdam-based ideas company. Get in touch with alex@wearepi.com

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Editor's Note



How the Power is Shifting in Popular Culture

In the months that followed the tragic killings of George Floyd, Brianna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, there was a dramatic shift in the cultural climate. Not only individuals and governments, but brands and organizations found themselves being held accountable—and scrambling to react. We seemed to jump full force into a new era where everyone around the world was being directly confronted about their stance on race and racism.

Sadly, these killings were far from the first of their kind; so why did these deaths spark such a pivotal shift, and what does it mean for the future?

This moment in history has been a direct demonstration of the growing cultural power of Black Voices today. Important issues of racial injustice that may have once been overlooked are now in the spotlight. That's because Black and other non-white voices are finally getting more seats at the table, and are exerting more influence over what appears in our feeds, shows up on our screens, and takes place in our public squares and museums.

It's an important tipping point in both popular culture and society. For most of modern history,

white, Western perspectives have held a near monopoly on global culture. They've been extremely successful in promoting their own ideas and values, often at the cost of others.

While the white mainstream remains the dominant force in cultural life today, this moment has demonstrated that its grip on popular culture and the way we see the world is finally giving way. This movement is making room for more voices to have a say, and tipping the balance of power towards a vision of mainstream culture that is more equitable.

In this volume of *New Society Rules*, we sat down with a range of influential Black thought leaders to discuss the historic resurgence of the anti-racist movement, how the power dynamics in mainstream culture are shifting, and where we go from here.

These shifts affect people of every race, but we've made the choice to focus on Black Voices for this volume, to honestly reflect the nature of this moment.

Table of Contents



08

The Power of Culture

We spoke to a museum curator about today's cultural power struggle and how our institutions are being forced to adapt.



14

Decolonizing Food

We spoke to a chef about how every element of culture, including what we eat, is being 'de-colonized'.



20

Finding Our Blind Spots

We spoke to a publisher about the importance of taking a second look at what's on our bookshelves and figuring out where our blind spots are.



26

Allyship in the Digital Age

We spoke to an anti-racist activist & author about today's culture of allyship, and what it truly means to take an 'anti-racist' stance.



32

Understanding Black Joy

We spoke to a director & photographer about how understanding Black Joy, as well as Black trauma, will be essential in the new cultural landscape.

The Power of Culture

We spoke to editor and curator *Ayoko Mensah* about today's cultural power struggle and how our institutions are being forced to adapt.



A view of the collection
Unrivalled Art at the Africa
Museum in Tervuren, Belgium.
Photo by Jo Van de Vijver

Ayoko Mensah is a renowned French-Togolese cultural expert and journalist. She has advised the Belgium Africa museum on its now famous redesign, which sought to shed its racist image. She's also co-authored many books and served as a cultural consultant to several organizations, including the European Commission and UNESCO. Since 2016, Ayoko has been working as a curator at the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels, BOZAR.

You've written a lot about the impact of 'Western Cultural Domination', when did you first become convinced of its existence?

When I began my job as a journalist, in the late 1990s, I witnessed the beginning of what we call now African contemporary dance. It was really interesting because it was a completely new type of aesthetic and choreographic movement at the time. But, what I ended up seeing was European choreographers and dancers—who knew nothing of African cultures—travel to Africa to impose their vision of art.

They told African dancers that their approach is old fashioned, and that they need to adopt the European way of dancing to be contemporary. They arrived in Africa full of prejudices and good intentions; they knew nothing about the local artistic expressions and came to impose their vision of art... it was violent.

Most of the African artistic and cultural expressions have consistently been neglected, forgotten or denied because they are considered unimportant. But the truth is that people don't understand them. This is Western cultural domination.

Is the colonization of culture by the West something you still see as being just as prolific a problem today?

Western nations have always understood the soft power of culture, and they've supported their view of the world by funding cultural institutions with international reach. Relationships to power and dominance are very important and strong in the cultural field. For Europe, it is really something in its DNA. This dream of bringing 'progress' and 'light' to the

rest of the world through culture is still very present.

There is still a domination of Western culture in terms of not only culture and aesthetics, but also recognition. I still see it in almost every artistic field—in the literary field, visual arts, performing arts—it's strong. But it slowly changes. The mythical fascination for Western culture is cracking. Young people no longer want to be culturally colonized.

The mythical fascination for Western culture is cracking. Young people no longer want to be culturally colonized.

Is this idea of using culture as a form of power viewed in a similar regard across Africa as it is by the West?

I think that the problem, especially for Africa, is that their cultures have been denied for decades and decades. Even if now a lot of artists are aware of their richness and value of their cultures, they don't have enough support.

There is a real problem of the independence and funding of the culture sector in Africa, so there is such a fragility of artists. For most of the artists, the only way to earn their living is to have support from the Western world—to have a tour in Europe or North America, which naturally creates pressure to conform to what the curators and audiences from these continents expect.

Have you seen any promising signs of this relationship starting to rebalance?

Social media has become a positive tool. Because this rebalance is very slow in mainstream cultural institutions and in the media world in general, social

media is allowing for direct amplification of African artists and cultural contributors.

I am noticing a new kind of pressure now of these voices on the mainstream cultural institutions. So it's a good evolution, but it must be followed by decolonization and inclusivity from the main institutions, otherwise these voices will remain at the margins.

You've done a lot of work with European-based museums and rethinking their view of Africa. What have been some of the biggest challenges in this work?

One of my main challenges is to contribute to the decolonization of these cultural spaces. It's really

a period of critical change. Cities have become completely multicultural, and if museums don't succeed at integrating these new faces of our societies they will have failed in their mission to gather people in a kind of shared vision.

So, museums are being confronted with coming up with new narratives and visions, ones which can include all the different social groups of our societies, but most of the time, they don't know how to build or articulate this new narrative, because they have no one from the new communities on the inside.

So, it's really important we are inside these cultural institutions to make them change, to make them understand our point of view. You can't change them



Ayoko speaking at the Afropolitan Festival 2018. An annual festival hosted by BOZAR, dedicated to Afropolitan art and creativity. Photo by Gilles Geek

from the outside. But I am not naive, the decolonization of Western cultural institutions will take time and will not be a smooth process.

It's really important we are inside these institutions to make them understand our point of view.

It sounds like an incredibly challenging task. Have you found museums to be receptive to this sort of change?

It is really difficult. But yes, I have. One interesting example is with the African Museum in Tervuren, Belgium. Because of its deep colonial roots, it shares a very traumatic history of the Belgian colony in Congo, and for most Congolese people in Belgium, going to Tervuren is a nightmare. They see all these thousands and thousands of looted objects and artefacts of their cultures; it's such a shock for them, and many are rightfully angry.

So, that's why I think that it was a mark of courage and change from the director of Tervuren to open the museum to the Congolese diaspora to help reimagine the museum, because it was previously just the place of colonizers. This experience has partly failed, and the relationships between the Congolese diaspora and the museum remain very tense. Two opposite social groups claim, 'This is my museum'. The ex-colonizers are completely wrong, but if you say it's a Congolese museum, it's also in a way wrong, because it's not the history of the museum, and it also doesn't then reflect the violence of the colonial history of Belgium.

So, then the question becomes how do you anticipate these contradictions and also their opposite visions in a common narrative? For this, the privileged will have to agree to share some of their power.

After a summer of anti-racism protests around the world, it feels like the West is in this period of critical change of how we see race and our colonial history. Are you optimistic for the future and where we're headed?

I was really happy and pleased to see all this mobilization to support the Black Lives Matter movement after the death of George Floyd. It shows that on the ground, the anti-racist movement is strong and can challenge the right-wing movements.

But for the short-and mid-term, I'm not really optimistic. I think regarding the growing political ideology of racism everywhere, we are not yet at all at the level we should be. For me, racism is a scandal because I sincerely believe that if politicians decided to make its eradication a priority, racism could disappear in two generations.

Today, I see societies everywhere that are becoming more radical and polarized. Many people don't even want to talk to their 'enemies' anymore. But one of the mottos that I keep in mind and that guides my life is this phrase by Martin Luther King: 'We must learn to live together as brothers or we will perish together as fools'.

You can follow Ayoko on Twitter at [@AyokoMensah](https://twitter.com/AyokoMensah)



Afropolitan Festival 2018
Photo by Gilles Geek

Decolonizing Food

We spoke to chef & writer *Zoe Adjonyoh* about how every element of culture, including what we eat, is being 'de-colonized'.



Photo by Nassima Rothacker

Zoe Adjonyoh is a writer and cook from South-East London. Her restaurant Zoe's Ghana Kitchen and supper club have been making waves in the foodie scene. This year Zoe co-founded BlackBook, an organization whose stated focus is 'Decolonizing the Food Industry'.

It already feels as though a large part of 2020's legacy will be about the way it brought every corner of life and culture into mainstream conversations about race. Why do you believe it's important to talk about food when we talk about racism and anti-Blackness?

Food is the cultural currency that everybody has, right? Each culture holds their cuisine very dearly. But there is a bigger conversation happening about how colonized food is, as an industry, product and service. Those of us who work in food, who are food writers and chefs, who are stylists or photographers, have been discussing the limitations of the white gaze. We've discussed the fact that our voices aren't perceived to be as valuable as our white peers who have less experience, and how there only ever seems to be space for one Black voice at a time, or one Black cuisine at a time, and how reductive the narratives are about those cuisines. It's very frustrating, and it's important, because there isn't anybody in the world of food who's Black or non-white who isn't affected by this issue.

Your organisation BlackBook's stated focus is to 'Decolonize the Food Industry'. Can you tell us what that means to you?

Decolonizing the food industry, in its most simple definition, means removing the white gaze from food, that's it. It's asking the question: What does the food industry look like if we look at it through a completely different lens? If we take the whiteness out of the lens, what are we left with? The minute you pick up a knife and fork, that's colonized food, right? The act of so called 'civilized dining' is colonization of food; the language, the description of food, the English name for an ingredient, the desire to keep replacing the actual ingredient with something the white gaze is familiar with, the desire to make a recipe fit into

the white gaze's understanding of what a recipe should look like.

Decolonizing the food industry, in its most simple definition, means removing the white gaze from food.

In addition to being a chef you are also a writer and author of a cookbook, Zoe's Ghana Kitchen. What has it been like to navigate the white gaze's understanding of what a recipe should look like in your own work?

Writing about food still continues to be a political act, because of that relationship with the white gaze and the white publisher and the white editor. I'm a third-culture kid from two immigrant parents, I'm a lesbian, I'm Black and mixed race. All of that affects everything I do and say, and everything I cook.

I want people to understand all of that, my journey, my traditions and how I've moved them forward, and you can't do that in thirty to fifty words, before a recipe. I need those extra couple of hundred words to introduce a recipe, and position everything in exactly the right way.

And that's a continuous, evolving thing, letting your work breathe and trusting that the audience will go there with you. That's another big piece that the industry as a whole has to do, is just trust the audience more. Trust that if they don't know what an ingredient is they can Google it!

You've been recognized by some of the most powerful institutions in food, including the James Beard Foundation. Is gaining more recognition from these traditional institutions important to you, or do you believe it's time to build new, more inclusive rubrics of excellence?

Zoe founded Zoe's Ghana Kitchen in 2010 with the intention of helping push African cuisine into the mainstream.
Photo by Clay Williams





You know, when I started my little restaurant in Brixton, it was always meant to be a fast, casual thing. But, I'm not gonna lie, I did have an ambition to one day open the first Michelin-starred West African restaurant in the U.K. It felt important, not because it was important to me necessarily, but because of what that would mean for West African food as a cuisine. That Michelin star is still up for grabs. And I would like to see somebody get it who was a Black African, making banging West African food of that standard. It would be an important thing for the industry, mainly, for them [Michelin] to see that this is what we're capable of actually, and to show people that they should be paying more attention to this cuisine.

For so long success and attainment has only been shown through one lens.

But equally, that whole Michelin standard is annoying. It's like, a tire company decided what food is tasty? Suddenly it's the standard of what great food is, but who created that standard? And for whom? It wasn't for me, it wasn't for my people. That's for sure.

So, some people still want to work within these systems and power structures, and I'm sure this isn't a negative thing. But you know, we as the Black and BIPOC population of the world, some of us, including myself, have a tremendous amount of work to do around decolonizing our own minds, right? Because, for so long, success and attainment has only been shown through this one lens. It's why I'm very much more in favor of creating our own standards of black excellence because we are the best people to set that standard.

What advice would you give to other BIPOC people looking to get into the food industry?

Because I didn't go to culinary school, I advocate for people to make it outside of the lens that exists. I tell people to look outside the existing systems, at social media: Instagram, YouTube, even Tik-Tok if you're the right age! They're all valid ways to get into the industry. Use whatever you can that's out there. Use whatever is accessible and free to tell your story, and find your tribe.

I would also encourage people to start writing about your food the way you want to write about it. And if you develop an audience around your style of writing, that's your tribe! You don't need the white gaze. And if they want to come over and join you, then great, welcome them in! But don't exclude yourself from what you're writing about. Cook for everybody, if that's what you want, but don't exclude yourself from what you cook.

You can follow Zoe on Instagram at [@zoeadjonyoh](https://www.instagram.com/@zoeadjonyoh) and check out her organization BlackBook at blackbook-global.com.

Finding Our Blind Spots

We sat down with publisher *Gunifort Uwambaga* to talk about taking a second look at what's on our bookshelves and figuring out where our blind spots are.

Photo by Thibault De Schepper





Gunifort Uwambaga is a publisher and co-owner of Amsterdam-based independent book store & publishing house Mendo Books. He arrived in Amsterdam as a child refugee from Rwanda and is now recognized as one of the only Black book publishers in The Netherlands.

Where did your relationship with books begin?

I'm from Rwanda originally. I came to the Netherlands, to Europe, as a refugee, and you just have this practical limitation when it comes to books in those settings. They're heavy. Even the most diehard book-lover does not flee with a book bag filled with heavy editions, right?

So my love for books started when I arrived in the Netherlands, you know, going to the library was the main activity that I used to do with my mom and little brother. I didn't like playing outside, I'm still not the most athletically gifted person [laughs], but I enjoyed reading in my bedroom.

There's magic in this portal you can use to escape to different realities, or uncover worlds that you've never heard of. Having writers narrate that to you, or inform you with their knowledge, like they're your friend, you know, or somebody that cares, I think that has always been the foundation of my love for and relationship with books. Before I knew it, my new self was born; 'Mr. Bookmaker'.

As people looked at their bookshelves this summer, many saw for the first time how few Black voices were sitting on them. We saw calls to 'decolonize your book-shelf' gain popularity. Can you share what that phrase means to you?

I think with the phase we're in at the moment, it's not about being overly critical of yourself in terms of 'why does my bookshelf look like this?'. One of the things about colonialism is that it's institutional, it's a little bit bigger than yourself. It's actually normal that you're not aware, that you have blind

spots, because that's how the system is set up. And that's what hopefully all of us are trying to correct.

So, don't waste your energy on the self-criticism of, 'Why aren't my spending habits, my diet, my bookshelf decolonized?'. We've been colonized. And we're all learning, even if some of us are figuring it out a bit earlier than others.

BLM showed us that the Western world has a big blind spot when it comes to the Black experience.

So yes, decolonize your bookshelves. If you purchase two or three books about the Black experience, about institutional racism, man, whether you read them or not, I know it advanced you as a human. Next time, buy one from a female author, or an LGBTQ+ author, or any other marginalized voice. Even if you don't read it, you have supported somebody that's marginalized. And if you read it, it will increase your understanding of how others experience this world we all share.

BLM showed us that the western world has a big blind spot when it comes to the Black experience. But now, let's not wait for something tragic to happen to address all of our other blind spots, as it relates to other marginalized humans. Let's proactively start checking ourselves. I think everybody, whether as a company, a creative or as a human, should be asking 'What are my blind spots?' And then do something positive towards whatever blind spot was identified by posing that question. Because there is no activism without the word active.

This year, we saw almost every brand try to become an activist. Many of them did so with temporary statements on their social channels. You work with brands on their books, where a statement is permanent. Did you see as many messages of activism there?

You saw this with a lot of companies after BLM. Many companies felt 'statements needed to be made'. However, most brands used the same medium [social media] as the platform to communicate about BLM. In those statements, you could really see the value of real estate.

I think everybody should be asking 'what are my blind spots?'

Nowadays, and you know from your industry [advertising] if you're an online publisher like Vogue, you could put a statement out online, but who says that that page has even been displayed to all the visitors of vogue.nl? It could even just be targeted to a specific demographic.

To make a statement on your Instagram, which you can delete after, or even on your website, is less skin in the game than if you would publish that statement in Vogue's book.

And I know that I would propose 'Hey brand, let's add your BLM statement to your book. Or lets add a piece of text that touches on how your brand has benefited from Black culture' — this would not be an easy ask. This hypothetical scenario would lead to more meetings, more convincing and explaining.

I believe that has to do with the value we give that real-estate (book vs. social media content) and the subsequent sunken costs it takes to make a statement truly permanent. And that has to do with the value we give that real estate, the sunken costs it takes to make that statement permanent.

In the wake of such a destabilizing year, has the role of books become stronger in helping us to make sense of the world?

I think we can honestly say that 2020 was one of the most challenging, crazy, dramatic, tragic, whatever-adjective-you-want-to-use, years. I think a whole lot

of people found themselves in the situation I was in 20 years ago. Your life is turned upside-down on its head. The lives of people around you are in turmoil, and no one has a clear idea what the future will bring.

So yeah, you better find good resources and inform yourself. Level up by consuming some content that can help get you inspired and make sense of this new reality. For me, it wasn't a big surprise, actually, that there was this huge run towards books after what's happened this year.

You can follow Gunifort on Instagram at [@gunifort](https://www.instagram.com/@gunifort) and the publishing company he co-owns at [@mendobooks](https://www.instagram.com/@mendobooks).



Allyship in the Digital Age

We spoke to activist & author *Sophie Williams* about today's culture of allyship, and what it truly means to take an 'anti-racist' stance.

Photo by Lawrence Brand





Sophie Williams is a leading anti-racism activist and founder of the internationally acclaimed anti-racism Instagram account, @officialmillennialblack. She recently published her first book, *'Anti-Racist Ally: An Introduction to Activism and Action'*.

Your now-famous anti-racism Instagram account @officialmillennialblack went viral following a post you made in the wake of the killings of both Brianna Taylor and George Floyd at the hands of police. Can you share with us a bit about how that unfolded?

Following their deaths I felt entirely helpless and like this just can't keep happening. So I asked myself, what can I do? I decided to make a post about allyship and it just immediately took off. I suddenly went from a couple hundred followers to an audience growing by tens of thousands each day. People were messaging me saying things, like 'I've signed my first petition', 'I've been to my first-ever protest' and 'I've made my first ever donation.' So I thought to myself, okay, if these people are willing to engage in something that they haven't engaged with before, in ways that they haven't thought of before, then I have a responsibility to continue to try and maintain the momentum of this previously disengaged group.

What was it like to wake up one day to an entirely new audience looking to you for guidance?

The biggest change was the demographic of my audience, previously I'd been speaking to Black women, but when I'm talking about racial allyship, Black women are not the people needing that message. So, because the people I was speaking to really changed, I quickly needed to figure out how to speak to them and meet them where they were—which was at a sort of very entry level stage of the conversation around racism and how to be an anti-racist ally.

In the first few weeks of your account taking off, you made calls for people to take action by decolonizing their feed. For those not familiar with the idea, what does it mean to decolonize your feed?

It means following some people on social media who don't look like you. It's really easy and comfortable to follow people who remind you of you, but when you follow people with diverse appearances to your own, that means you get to see the world through their lens and their lived experiences.

Follow some people on social media who don't look like you. You get to see the world through their lens and their lived experiences.

You're now at over 180k followers. What sorts of conversations are you having with people?

I have something called 'Allyship Actions' that I do every Sunday, where I ask people to post the things that they've done that week in order to be good allies. People say that because they know I'm going to ask, it encourages them to do something during that week.

People have shared stories like, 'I am a school librarian and I have made sure to diversify the types of books that I have', or, 'I am a teacher and I have fought to put Black Lives Matter on this year's curriculum', or even, 'I've decided to run for public office'. I share every single answer I get and it really helps people stay inspired and learn about things they can put into practice in their own life.

How important do you think Instagram's role has become for activism in 2020?

It's a really interesting shift, isn't it? It does seem to have become this hub in a way that it wasn't before. It used to be that Twitter was where these conversations would happen and that Instagram was just inspirational content. But Instagram has really taken on this new role as an educational tool, and these

feeds and conversations are getting a huge amount of engagement.

Do you see any limitations to using Instagram in this way?

Being able to shift Instagram from just a communications platform to an accountability and action platform is such an important piece. The way we

Allyship is not what you think, it's not what you know, it's what you do.

are sort of encouraging people to seek applause for reading a book is worrying. Inspiring one another is really good; putting it into action is more important.

When we don't turn it into action, we're treating it as a self-improvement program which it's not. Allyship is not about how good you are as a person. It's not what you think, it's not what you know, it's what you do.

This increasingly preformative culture of allyship seems to be a big issue on social media these days. What are some of the other flags you've seen pop up as people are looking to get involved in the conversation around BLM?

I get asked so many times about this 'new' conversation, this 'new' thing that we're all doing—but it's not new. Black people have been trying to do this forever.

So, I think where people from non-marginalized backgrounds go wrong is thinking that it's a 'new' thing that they should start from scratch. That it's something they should be the leader of, instead of learning the history, amplifying underrepresented voices and figuring out how to actually be a part of the long-term conversation.

Blackout Tuesday feels like a relevant example of an action that may have been intended as

a form of allyship, but ended up drowning out the very voices it sought to amplify. What did you make of it? [For those not familiar with the criticism, when millions of Black squares flooded the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on June 2nd for Blackout Tuesday, they effectively flushed out all the important resources that had been circulating within the movement beforehand.]

Yeah, Blackout Tuesday was weird wasn't it? I think people were looking for ways to be involved without having to go through any inconvenience—and posting a black square is really easy.

When I posted a pink infographic tile on that day, I got comments being like, 'you shouldn't be talking today' and 'you should take this down.' I was like, absolutely not. I am a Black woman, and I am sharing important information about the conversation that we're having. I think things like that are more linked to virtue signaling and trying to look good without then having to follow that up with any independent thought or action.

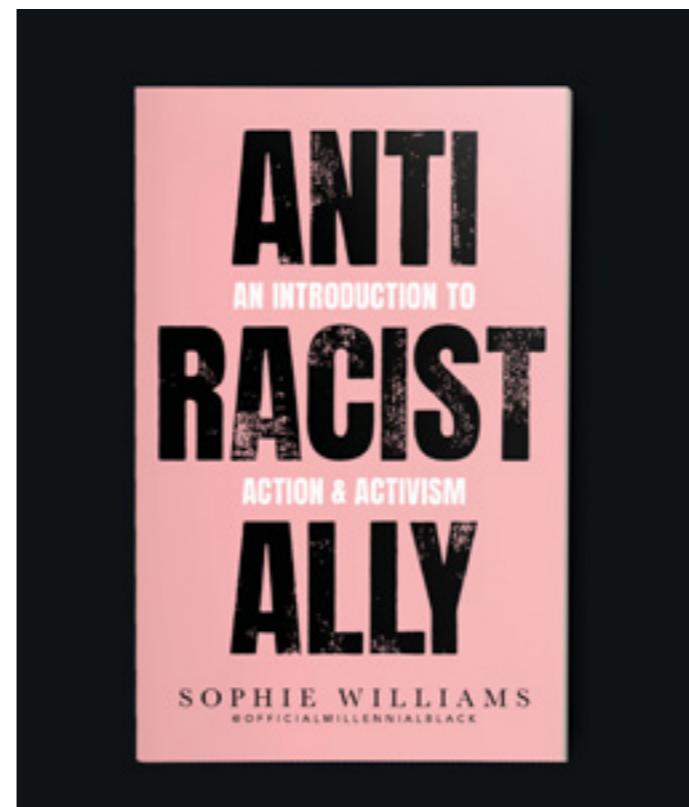
As more and more of us turn to Instagram as a source of education and a form of activism, how can we make strides to improve our allyship on the platform?

I think having offline accountability check-ins and accountability buddies is really useful because it keeps you in check. You need someone who can be like, 'I know that you thought that was a good idea, but actually you shouldn't have done that'. It's great to have an online community, but you also need a strong physical community to keep inspiring you and to help you put things into action.

Some prominent anti-racism voices on Instagram have come forward in the last few months saying that they are starting to lose more followers each day than they are gaining. It's a troubling sign, and we were wondering if this is something you, too, are experiencing?

Yes. I've also noticed that my engagement on posts is dropping, too. It really worries me that the conver-

sation is dying down and it worries me that people are losing interest and might be satisfied that they've done the work. If the sentiment is, 'I've done my bit. I've done everything I need to do', that could leave us worse off than we were before. So yeah, this is



Sophie's newly released book on Anti-Racism.
Book cover design by Rebecca Petts Davies

something that is definitely playing on my mind. What I don't want to happen is that someone else has to die for people to start caring again.

Last question: You've recently released a book on how to be an anti-racist ally. Is the hope that this book will take more of the conversations happening online, offline?

Exactly. It's deliberately a small book that could fit in your pocket, and I made it as cost-efficient as I could [it only costs six pounds]. Those decisions, to me, were just a way of making something that people can share easily in the same way that they chose to share posts, but in a physical way, so the conversation can become broader and touch more people.

You can follow Sophie's anti-racism account on Instagram at [@officialmillennialblack](https://www.instagram.com/officialmillennialblack) and purchase her book, 'Anti-Racist Ally' on her website sophiewilliamsofficial.com.

Understanding Black Joy

We spoke to director & photographer *Lou Jasmine* about how understanding Black Joy, as well as Black trauma, will be essential in the new cultural landscape.



Photo by Adama Jalloh

Lou Jasmine is a London-based photographer & director, specializing in culture- and music-based documentary, portraiture, and visual content. Her recent work has explored positive themes like Black pride and joy in the midst of a challenging year.

You left your job in the television industry to go out on your own as a freelancer early in your career. What led you to make that decision?

I felt like I had no choice, it was either my career or my mental health. I left because I had to watch my white peers progress at levels I wasn't able to. I left because I had to deal with microaggressions and ignorant comments like, 'You're very well spoken for a Black person. I grew up always being told that I could be whatever I wanted to be. The idea that I couldn't, because I was a woman, or because I was Black, never crossed my mind—until I started working in television. As I progressed, I realized that the same labels that were being attached to me were attached to people who look like me.

What do you think experiences like yours say about the current state of the TV and film industry, and where it is headed?

Broadcast panels are saying, 'We have more diversity on screen', but who's behind the scenes making these programs? A bunch of white men and white women. Again, there are no non-white people at the decision making level, so it feels dishonest. It's incredibly sad that people get to a certain level, and they feel like they can't progress any more, and like they are being forced out and left to work it out for themselves.

Do you see this type of racism burnout as a systemic problem among young Black professionals?

I did a project with WeTransfer called 'Make It Real' that looked at how Black women are the fastest growing demographic of entrepreneurs. There's a reason for that—it's because we're not getting opportunities from the system, so we're creating them for ourselves. As a freelancer, I'm no longer

beholden to people anymore. I have no one dictating the stories I can tell or stunting my growth because of their unconscious bias. When people want to work with me, they know what they're going to get and they understand my ethos as an artist.

On your Instagram profile, you have a powerful highlight on your stories entitled Black Joy. Can you tell us about it?

When the protests were happening this summer, so many of us came out and said, 'You know what, I'm tired. I'm so tired'. Black people have been protesting and processing for years. We know the stories, we know the books, we know the lingo. So what I decided to do instead was create a feed on my Instagram stories called Black Joy, where every day, all day, I dug out images I loved of Black people and posted them. The feed got shared with a lot of people, and it ultimately served as a form of respite for those of us who needed some time out from all the trauma.

I define Black Joy as truth and freedom. It reminds me to always be myself, and that being myself is brilliant.

For people that are hearing the term: Black Joy for the first time, can you share what it means to you personally?

I define Black Joy as truth and freedom. It's bright, brilliant and that's why we love to look at it and love to see it because Black people are all so used to being slightly policed in one way or another. We are used to putting on different masks for protection when we are in society. Black Joy reminds me to always step into my truth and always be myself, and that being myself is brilliant. It shows me there is no pressure to aspire to be something





that I'm not, that I am enough and so are all the amazing other Black people that we see.

What role does documenting and portraying Black Joy play in your work as a visual storyteller?

Black Joy is a huge part of my work. It's integral. I'm quite an optimistic person anyway, and so I like to bring that sense of joy and freedom to my work. It's really important to me as a storyteller because this is what defines us and it's also how people will look back at my work in 10 to 20 years. I want them to see that amongst the pain and the struggle and the difficulties, that there was so much joy, truth and freedom. The fight for freedom doesn't always look like a battle, the fight is in the documentation of it. It's saying, 'We were here, and this is what we looked like at this time—and our history is a lot more diverse than many would have you think'.

Is the world seeing enough Black Joy represented in the shows, movies, books and magazines we watch and read?

Not at all. Black Joy is incredibly important for the world to see more of, and we need to be really relentless in that pursuit, because the narrative that we see more often than not in the mainstream media doesn't support that. It doesn't support that we can be joyful and brilliant and beautiful, and it doesn't always support that our lives can be wonderful and filled with positivity and light. So, we need to be taking control of that narrative ourselves. Pain and struggle is part of our story, but there is so much more to our stories and we need to show the diversity of our people and community.

This is such an important point, yet one that doesn't seem to be coming through enough in the current conversations non-Black people are having around anti-racism allyship right now. Why do you think that is?

If you look back at what's been in mainstream culture about the Black experience for decades, it's trauma. And so, collectively, and culturally, if

people only see Black trauma throughout the ages, they only know how to process that. They haven't seen Black Joy very often, and so they don't know what to do with it. A lot of people think, 'Oh, I can read some books', and, 'Oh gosh, isn't that sad? I'm going to do my best to change'. Which is good, we absolutely need that. But, how about you understand me on a cultural level too, as a person? I want people to understand the cultural importance of the electric slide, for example. That's the type of thing people aren't consuming on social media and in the news right now, but should be.

People need to be consuming Black Joy alongside books about racism.

People need to be consuming Black Joy alongside books about racism. Because then it's not about trying to read up on the history of something, it's about talking to Black people, watching movies, listening to music. It's the whole thing, because we are a whole culture. And this is why we need to keep pushing the joy, and one really important way we can do that is through the media.

For young Black creators who are aspiring to be in—or are just starting out in TV and film, what one piece of advice would you give them?

Believe in your art. Don't focus too much on what other people do or think, and don't diminish the value of your Black perspective. Until more Black people and people of color are represented at all different levels behind the camera, we will never be fairly represented in front of it.

You can follow Lou on Instagram @missloujasmine and view her portfolio at loujasmine.com



Jayda G, 2020 / 'Carni Boys, 2019'



'Sunset in Venice, 2019'



BTS Poppy Ajudha & her Gran on the set of 'Watermelon Man (Under The Sun)' 2020



Timmy Carnegie of Ruby Rushton at Abbey Road Studios, 2018

Tools to Take Action

A few of the voices we most respect, to keep the conversation going.

Follow



Official Millennial Black

A step-by-step account for those wishing to educate themselves on how to improve their anti-racist allyship.



Rachel Cargle

A thought-provoking account sparking daily self-reflection in the fight for racial equality.



Black Foodie

A delicious and informative account exploring food and culture through a Black lens.

Read



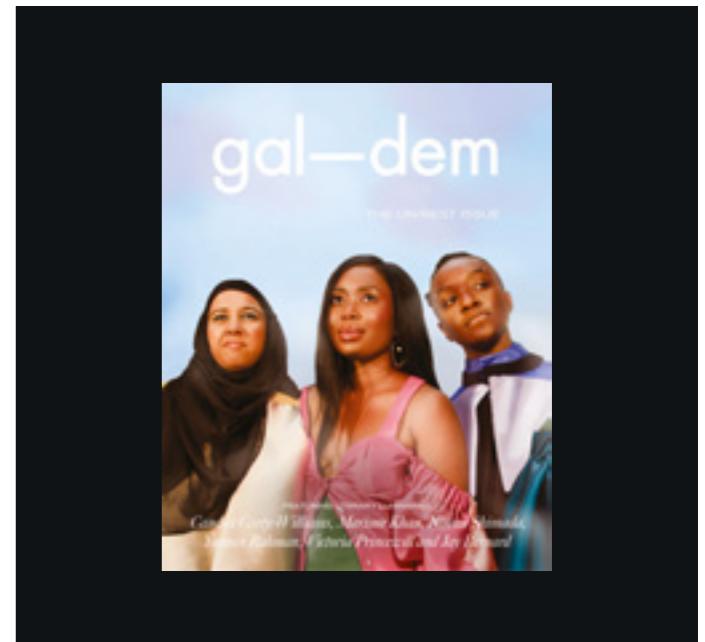
Anti-Racist Ally: An Introduction to Action and Activism

An actionable book guiding readers on how to build anti-racist allyship into their personal and professional lives*. Written by one of our interviewees, Sophie Williams.



Black Futures

A mixed-media archive of over 200 Black creators who answer the question: what does it mean to be Black and alive right now?



Gal-Dem

A Black-founded independent media platform committed to sharing the perspectives of women and non-binary people of color.

Listen



Still Processing

An insightful podcast inviting listeners in on a never-ending quest to process, critique and make sense of modern day culture and society.



Good Ancestor

An intimate interview series with BIPOC change-makers unpacking the deeply personal experiences which have shaped their identity.



Baited With Ziwe

A bold and unabashed IGTV show hosted by comedian Ziwe Fumudoh, where white guests are invited to have confrontational conversations about race.



Make It Real

A four-part series charting the rise of female Black entrepreneurs.

Watch



Insecure

A refreshing and insightful comedy series capturing a look at the modern Black experience rarely told on TV today.



Code Switch

The breakout podcast of summer 2020, exploring the shifting landscape of race, ethnicity and culture in modern society.



Migrant Sound

A four-part documentary series exploring the impact of migration on music and culture in the UK.

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