

# YOUNG BLACK DARKNESS

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE DARK COMES TO THE LIGHT



# ABOUT OUR ZINE

Hello! The zine you are about to read was created by young people who deeply care about ending gun violence in our communities. We come from neighborhoods such as Bed-Stuy, Crown Heights, Flatbush, and East NY. We range in age from 16-22. We traveled around to various businesses and community resources in Bed-Stuy and Crown Heights to interview community leaders. Some of these stories are also written by the youth themselves about their experiences in their community. Below are highlights from these interviews written in their words along with poetry, youth testimony, and photos, we took to document our community. We hope you enjoy!



Our Teen Zine team is pictured above (clockwise):  
Amari age 18, Bed-Stuy, Keino age 18, East NY,  
Bishop age 22, Crown Heights, Reem, 20, Crown  
Heights, Simoya, age 17, Flatbush, Jahyrah, age 18,  
Bed-Stuy, Gariyana, age 20, East NY



# COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHTS

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## S. DESIGN & ASSOCIATES



AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL SPENCER, OWNER OF S. DESIGN & ASSOCIATES  
INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BINTA  
PHOTO TAKEN BY CORIQUE  
AUDIO RECORDING BY BISHOP



### On The Importance of S. Design & Associates in our Community:

We provide architectural services for the community. We do residential and commercial business. It's not a money making venture for me. I provide facts so people don't have to travel all the way to Court Street for basic things. Most of the time you'll find me in the community. But most of the time, people don't look to the community for these things, they look elsewhere. The community today is different from ten years ago or 15 years ago. I think the community is getting progressively better because we have a lot of different people coming into the community and spending money in the community and that's progress in one way. On the other hand, I'm very glad to see these young men taking an interest to what's available for them in many ways. They can step away from whatever has taken them down. There is a long history that they can follow to show this isn't progress. This part of my community is very small. You don't have to travel too far to get something decent to eat. I would like more of a variety of restaurants for the community. I would like to see more job resources. So young people can walk in off the street and get help. Our government should provide training for youth. It's very difficult to get young people engaged in something productive.

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# THE BLACK LADY THEATER

**A LIVE PERFORMANCE VENUE THAT PRODUCES AND SHOWCASES THEATER, DANCE, AND FASHION PRODUCTIONS, AS WELL AS ART EXHIBITIONS, LIVE POETRY, AND INDEPENDENT FILM SCREENINGS. ACCORDING TO THE WEBSITE, "THE BLACK LADY THEATER, ALSO KNOWN AS SLAVE II, WAS DEDICATED TO THE BLACK WOMAN TO HONOR HER AS THE BEGINNING OF ALL MANKIND AND TO SALUTE HER SACRIFICE AND COMMITMENT SPECIFICALLY TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY."**

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AN INTERVIEW WITH SHERESE PARRIS,  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR FOR THE BLACK LADY  
THEATER

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY GARIYANA  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DESTINY  
AUDIO RECORDING BY SIMOYA

## *On The Importance of The Black Lady Theater in our Community:*

The Black Lady Theater provides a platform for young and aspiring new people to come and create. That's why this theater was founded. Judge Phillips made this place for entrepreneurs and artists to come and portray their art and screen their movies. This artwork has been here since 1984. The original artist was Kinrod Johnson. He used to have his art displayed all over Brooklyn, but now they've covered it up. We are the only establishment that still shows these paintings. We need art. We are a very creative people. If we don't have no outlet then what do you think is going to happen? It's gonna be destruction. We only vibrate positive energy up in this building. Everything we do is to lift up and empower the community.

## *On why violence happens in our community:*

I think the thing is that we're in a community that has suffered a lot of trauma and we need to heal. I think we're in a healing phase right now. I don't think there's one establishment that's an issue. I think we don't make enough human connections so we don't mind taking a life. But I feel safe everywhere I go because the ancestors walk with me. A lot of these people know me and I feel like people look out for each other here. I don't know what it feels like to be a stranger in this community. But I will say that I feel extra safe at The Black Lady Theater. I really do mean that because there's a certain spirit that lives in the building that protects everyone who steps in here. It doesn't allow negative energy to come through the threshold of this space.

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# CAMPAIGN AGAINST HUNGER

AN INTERVIEW WITH SABEN DURIO,  
VOLUNTEER AND PROGRAM RESOURCE COORDINATOR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BINTA  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CORIQUE AND  
AUDIO RECORDING BY GARIYANA

## *On the Importance of The Campaign Against Hunger:*

We were founded in 1998 by Dr. Melanie Samuels. She saw there was hunger rife within Bed-Stuy and so she decided to open up a food pantry based out of her church. As the years progressed she saw the needs were more diverse than just hunger. We now have two urban farms, a clothing boutique, HIV and AIDS testing, and tax instruction. This community has the opportunity to grow and really be something beautiful but due to systematic and efforts outside of their control they've been limited. Bed-Stuy is a food desert which means there's a lack of options for healthy food so people often have to leave the neighborhood and go outside of their means to get healthy food. Our organization tries to combat this. We operate a mobile food market where we offer different food options in different neighborhoods that accept EBT and food stamps. We have a chef that offers different programs like health 360. We teach families how to cook healthy recipes from the parents to the kids so they can have that knowledge shared through the generations and not just limited to one person. If you name it we probably have it. We feed 10,000+ people each month with our food pantry. Anyone who walks through the door can use our services. Anyone can register. We don't turn away volunteers. We operate as a client choice pantry and they choose the food they want based on their points unlike other pantries with pre-made grocery bags. We're currently petitioning to acquire an empty plot of land to be our central headquarters that would be more accessible for our members.

## *On why violence happens in our community:*

Is anywhere really safe? Just recently we had how many mass shootings? So to ask if I'm safe is a loaded question because regardless of where you are, whether it be church or it be daycare or it be elementary school, you have a chance to be in danger due to gun violence. But the positive energy we put out here [at Campaign Against Hunger] comes back and so the people who come don't threaten anyone.





# COCOA GRINDER ON KINGSTON

AN INTERVIEW WITH SANAE, GENERAL MANAGER OF COCOA GRINDER  
(KINGSTON LOCATION)

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BINTA  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CORIQUE  
AUDIO RECORDING BY BISHOP

**On the Importance of local businesses in Crown Heights :**  
**You have to be a part of the community even when you're a big business. It's a really good community, really helpful. I want to see more rehab centers and restaurants because everything is on Franklin. We should have different types of coffee shops and restaurants because it's mostly just kosher ones.**





# WEEKSVILLE HERITAGE CENTER

I learned there was an independent community of African American individuals living and working together right in Crown Heights. It informs people of our generation about some history that they might not have known.

--Binta, Youth Facilitator, age 16

"History is anything you save." This quote resonates with me because it means I have a chance to make history. One thing that resonated to me about Weeksville is the living quarters they took back then. One question i still have is what happened to black owned land over the years.

-- Keino, Youth Participant, age 18

Neighbors in Action Youth at Weeksville



# COMMUNITY DISPATCHES ON IMMIGRATION



AN INTERVIEW WITH KAROLIN  
BETANCES, RISE COORDINATOR,  
INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BINTA  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CORIQUE  
AUDIO RECORDING BY BISHOP

**KAROLIN'S STORY: SHE WAS BORN HERE IN CROWN HEIGHTS AND HER MOTHER IMMIGRATED FROM THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC IN THE 1980'S.**

THIS COUNTRY IS LEGIT BUILT ON IMMIGRANTS. EUROPEANS STOLE PEOPLE'S LAND. PEOPLE SEE ME AS AN IMMIGRANT. IT'S A PERCEIVED IDENTITY DUE TO MY ETHNICITY. THEY ASK ME, DO YOU SPEAK ENGLISH? AND WHAT I TELL THEM IS, I'LL GO BACK WHEN YOU BACK. IF YOU GO BACK, WE ALL GOING BACK. ME AND MY MOM HAD A HARD TIME A WHEN I WAS YOUNGER BECAUSE I COULDN'T SPEAK SPANISH AND SHE COULDN'T SPEAK ENGLISH. SO WE HAD TO COMMUNICATE THROUGH MY SISTER. I DON'T WANT TO USE THE WORD BRAINWASHED, BUT DOMINICANS HAVE BEEN BEEN A BIT BRAINWASHED TO THINK THEY'RE NOT BLACK, NOT AFRICAN. BUT I ALSO WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW THAT THERE ARE THOSE OF US WHO ACKNOWLEDGE OUR AFRICAN ROOTS.



# **Lisa's story:**

## **She moved here at 17 in 2015 from Trinidad.**

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Trinidad is a nice country. They work really hard like night and day. We very intelligent and we bring success. We get things done.

I miss the food, the fun, the freedom, the time to rest. Over here be killing you. Every minute you have to be up doing something. Over here is fast life. Everything moves too fast. Like the school over mad late. The periods are mad long. It's exhausting. In Trinidad we have three breaks. It's over earlier. Also, we more advanced in Trinidad. In math. Say somebody going to 9th grade--we learned it already in Trinidad. In Trinidad you can graduate at 16 if you don't plan to go to college.

Here I have a lot of places to explore. I like that I get to wear casual clothes to school instead of uniforms. People kinda nice here but they very mixy. Over there people will talk to you in your face and tell you how stupid you is. Here people will talk about you behind your back and then laugh at you without caring how you feel. So here they scared.

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Simoya's story: Born and raised in Flatbush. Her father immigrated when he was a teenager in 1989. He is from La Brea Trinidad.

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Growing up as a child of immigrants, they don't allow you to go outside looking any type of way. You have to look decent. Your hair gotta look nice. Immigrant parents are more strict than American parents because if you're doing school work at home, you better not get an answer wrong. You need to clean and follow the rules. But if you need food, they give it to you. Trinis love their plants and their dogs. Trinis are very family oriented because they like coming together as a group and having family time. We have curry day where we just cook mad curried food.



# The story of Binta Diallo

Born and raised in Flatbush, Brooklyn. Both her mother and father immigrated from Guinea Conakry to the United States 20 years ago.



GROWING UP AS A CHILD OF IMMIGRANTS. IT'S A VERY STRICT AND ORGANIZED HOUSEHOLD. THEY DON'T ALLOW US KIDS TO DO THINGS THEY THINK "AMERICANS" DO. IT'S ALSO VERY TRADITIONAL. WE HAVE TO RESPECT OUR PARENTS. GIRLS ARE TAUGHT AT A YOUNG AGE HOW TO COOK AND CLEAN AND HOW TO TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES. BOYS ARE TAUGHT HOW TO RUN THE HOUSEHOLD BY SHADOWING THEIR FATHERS AROUND AND DOING BOY DUTIES. GUINEANS ARE VERY FAMILY ORIENTED AND DOES EVERYTHING FOR THEIR FAMILIES. THEY ALSO COME TOGETHER ON HOLIDAYS LIKE EID.



AN INTERVIEW WITH ELIKA NERELLE, RISE PROGRAM MANAGER (CCI  
PROJECT)

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BINTA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CORIQUE

AUDIO RECORDING BY BISHOP

## Elika's story, from Haiti, immigrated in 1998:

Yesterday they sent me a clip of something.  
A young woman was saying how her whole family was killed and then Trump says, "Well where are they now?" I've done a lot of work with immigrants and that was really hard. People are trying to find ways to live their lives. People are fearful of the whole process. The emotions of fear paralyzes people with the false information people are getting. You have to be able to manage people's emotions around the whole process.

Personally I have some people who came from Haiti after the earthquake through TPS.

Some countries have had that for like 20 years. They basically had their whole lives in Haiti. They studied their career in Haiti or the DR. My friends were on vacation in Miami

when the earthquake happened and then they had to rebuild their entire life. The way Trump is doing it, it could be cut in half. One friend is now managing a spa but now that could all be gone. I have a gay friend who is in a fake marriage because that's the only way out.

I think it's hard to be Haitian sometimes. A lot of people make a lot of fun of Haitians. A lot of people look at Haiti as a lesson. We were the first black nation to be independent. and we are still paying for it. People think we are the poorest nation by mistake, but it's not. It's by design. We are paying for what we have achieved. It's an example right in front of our eyes. It's not a laughing matter.

Part of my immigration journey is my parents were citizens, my siblings were here. I would think, what would it mean to be sent back to Haiti? I came here on a green card and then they closed my file and so we had to hire a lawyer to reopen my file. And when I finally found an apartment, they looked at my file. They told me that according to the law they I was technically already eligible to be a citizen from the time I arrived. At the time if your parents were citizens, you could also become a citizen. But I didn't actually become one for many years due to all the misinformation.





Trump's policies isn't affecting me personally, but I really feel for the people who are. He is implementing policies when his parents were in a similar situation. Some effects of these policies could be undocumented people not feeling safe to call the police and report a crime if a crime happens because they can be in jeopardy so there's going to be an increase in crime.

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICKY SCATT, OWNER OF GERIZM  
BURGER FACTORY  
INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BINTA  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DYNASTY  
AUDIO RECORDING BY CARIYANA



## FROM THE CURE VIOLENCE TEAM

### Davonte D-Boy Dudley, Violence Interrupter (Interview conducted by Gariyana)

My name is D-Boy. I work at S.O.S Bed-Stuy. I'm a Violence Interrupter. My job is to reduce any kind of violence that could lead to more gun violence. We walk around. We build relationships with people in the community. We're not just saying something, we're doing something. We are over 400 days without a homicide, baby! A lot of the high risk individuals in my community haven't been high risk this summer. My generation of youth we more subtle. The generation under us they kinda less guided and more out of pocket. They go off of the representation and say so of their peers rather than their families. But I feel like every older person is a role model. The younger folk just gotta be ready to receive it. A lot of times we dont wanna listen to older folks because the timing is different. You can't compare the 80s and 90s to 2019. But I rely on the wisdom of the youth that are coming up under me and the ones that came before me. If I could add something to the community, I would add more opportunities. I would give them more reasons to not have to wander the streets and go outside. If they love music, let's build a program or space that interests them. I'll build an actual youth center, not just a PAL or S.O.S, but a real youth center that caters to the needs of the teens.



Photo of Youth Facilitator Gariyana  
with Employment and Education Outreach Specialist,  
Shnequa Coco Purvis.  
Photo taken by Corique

## WHAT IS CURE VIOLENCE?

*By Gariyana Williams,  
Youth Facilitator*

When I was growing up my mother told me who was who and who to stay away from because she knew the neighborhood, but I feel like people don't interact in the community enough to know who anyone is, so there is no connection and distrust. It's just making people feel unsafe because you don't know if someone is a threat or not. Cure violence to me is when you take all the skills and experiences you learn like conflict de-escalation to help put an end to the cycle of violence and then pass those skills on to more and more people. According to the website, "Neighborhoods with cure violence programs had an 18% drop in homicides while in comparison the homicides in the neighborhoods without programs." According to the NIA website, it's been 62 days since last shooting in the Bed-Stuy catchment. Organizations like Campaign Against Hunger helps to reduce violence by feeding people in need so no one has to go without food and its less pressure to do violent things if you don't have enough money for food. Reconnect Brooklyn. Reconnect Brooklyn is a restaurant that offers entry level employment through social enterprise that leads to further employment and education for young men looking for change. Reconnect Brooklyn help reduce violence by just offering young men something that's going to build their future instead of trying to get money on the street in a more dangerous way.





**On safety, community and why people join gangs, By Jennie, age 19**

People join gangs because they looking for homes. They want some money and sometimes it don't be a gang at first, it just be like I don't like this person and they connect off of that. Gangs are like bullies because if you have a problem you jump them instead of a one on one fight like it was back in the day. Sometimes gangs be like family because that's all you know. But most of the time that's not good. I first joined this program because I needed a job. Once I figured out what it was I wanted to keep doing it. You can't go wrong with making your own money. In the summer program, I can talk about my problems. They help with my problems. Instead of going to beat up somebody I come here to work. When I hold it in I'm a ticking bomb and being a ticking bomb is not good. I gotta lot of anger, but I still get up and come to work. This place is like my own therapy. I come to talk to Ms. G., one of the staff.

At S.O.S, they do block parties to get teenagers active because if a teenager's not active they more likely to fight. If they don't have something to give them energy it's gonna be a lot of violence. The S.O.S people know what it's like being a young black person doing the violence. In order to reduce gun violence, I think we should get parents involved. If parents are more involved in their kids lives they wouldn't do what they do. People do it to get attention. They just looking for love. But they looking in the wrong places.

Also, I think there should be less police. If there were less police there'd be less violence. Cops trigger young black people just by saying the word cop. I've witnessed a lot of things when cops are around. Like when there was a shoot out on Lexington there were cops on the corner, but they didn't do nothing until their captain got called. Two people got shot. The precincts are like another gang. They get away with murder, even the Black cops. I think without cops we would have more cookouts and block parties because people wouldn't be so scared to be outside.

Going clockwise, photo of Davonte "D Boy" Dudley, Violence Interrupter, Youth Facilitator, Binta Diallo and Education and Career Specialist, Shnequa "Coco" Purvis at the 79th Precinct's National Night Out at Restoration Plaza  
Photos taken by youth leaders, Bishop and Corique

**People join gangs because they're looking for validation, people join because they are sheep. But the truth is that. You need to validate you. You gotta make a decision for you. To reduce violence, go to your community board and your precinct meetings to find out what's happening in the community. Everyone needs to come together.**

**--Shnequa "Cocopuff" Purvis.**



# Creative Works



## IMPERFECTION BY BINTA (INSPIRED BY THE FIRST ABOVE PHOTO)

IMPERFECTION'S NOT PERFECT BUT PERFECT IN MY  
EYES/ IS IT BECAUSE IT LOOKS SO ANCIENT AND WORN  
OUT/WELL I LIKE IT/I LIKE HOW THE RED IS FADING  
AWAY/GIVES ME A SIGN OF SECURITY IN  
MY NEIGHBORHOOD./ TELLS PEOPLE, "HEY DON'T MESS  
WITH THAT LADY, SHE BEEN LIVING HERE FOR A LONG  
TIME"/I MIGHT BE POOR AND CAN'T AFFORD, /BUT I SURE  
LOVE THE LOOK./ IMPERFECTIONS. IMPERFECT./ NOT  
PERFECT, BUT PERFECT IN MY EYES.

## El Diablo By:Simoya

A Republican you voted for is a president, you can't depend on  
Yet you want to bow down to the fourth of July,  
To the cries of the ninos to the padres in cages.  
To build the wall is the end of free trade.  
To bring the race together would be the end of this country's praise,  
The end of the charade for the man who only likes the money.  
Did you think he loved us just cause the mask  
On screen said he would fulfill all our dreams?  
El Diablo didn't shock all our eyes;  
We knew it was a front just to feel all mighty--  
Messing up lives for the ones in need just to feel loved by  
The Republican treaty only to think America is not great again.  
The feelings inside of hurt and disgrace is a side of hope  
that this sh\*\* fades.  
My love for this flag sunk but the love for the people still floats.  
Would I say life on this earth would change  
Or do I have to see threats to El Diablo from the press?



# A MYSTERY OCCURED

By Simoya, a poem inspired by the photo below  
Photographs by  
**Neighbors in Action**

WHAT HAPPENED TO HAVE A  
CAUTION SIGN THERE? IS THERE A  
BODY BENEATH OR SOUL THERE TO  
KEEP? I WONDER DO THE FLOWERS  
HELP SOMETHING RISEN ABOVE OR  
DO THE EYES OF CROWN  
HEIGHTS MYSTERIOUSLY KNOW  
WHY THE CAUTION TAPE APPEARS? I  
SEE WHY CAUTION APPEARS BUT  
CAN YOU TELL THE THOUGHTS OF A  
DREAM? THE NIGHTMARE  
UNDERNEATH WOULD BE A  
MYSTERY YOU WON'T NEED TO SEE.





# PORTRAITS OF THE YOUTH!



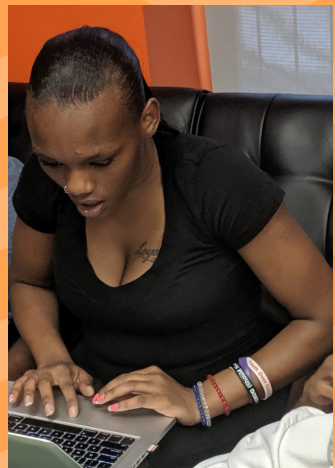
My neighborhood is crown heights I'm 22 years young. One thing I like about my community is that there's a lot of black owned businesses. My friend is the same age as me and just opened up a store. -- Bishop, Crown Heights



The barbershop is a necessity in the community. Coming from a barbershop have you feeling brand new. Also, the for rent sign on the barbershop reminds me of the gentrification happening. -- Keno, 18, East New York



Reem, age 16, Crown Heights,



Dynasty, age 19, Bed-Stuy



Youth brainstorming story ideas! Pictured clockwise: Soraya, Flatbush, (staff point person), Bishop, age 22, Crown Heights, Destiny, age 19, Bed-Stuy, Simoya age 17, Flatbush



Youth out documenting the community! Pictured clockwise: Vanaysia, age 18, Bed-Stuy, Destiny, age 19, Bed-Stuy, Binta, age 16, Flatbush, Corique, age 17, Bed-Stuy, Soraya, Flatbush, (staff point person), Simoya age 17, Flatbush



# Major shout out to our AWESOME YOUTH Editors in Chief!!!



Gariyana,  
age 19, East NY,  
Youth Facilitator



Binta, age 16, Flatbush,  
Youth Facilitator

Photo cover designed by Corique and Dynasty

# WHO ARE WE?



## PICTURED HERE ARE YOUTH PARTICIPANTS DESTINY, SHELLECE, MIRACLE, DYNASTY

Greetings and Thank-you for reading! We are the Neighbors in Action (formerly known as the Crown Heights Community Mediation Center) Youth Center located at 1644 St. John's Pl. Brooklyn NY.

At Neighbors in Action, youth are central to our work of building safer and healthier neighborhoods. Each Summer, we engage young people in creating new and innovative ways to spread our message of social justice, community mobilization, and anti-violence.

For more info, go to [neighborsinaction.org](http://neighborsinaction.org)  
Follow us on Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter @youthorganizing  
or on Facebook at NIA Youth Center