Issue #5

2/11/2021  0 Comments

Featured Authors

Regan Strauss, Staff Writer.
To the student body and faculty of the University of Puget Sound,
Happy New Year!

We deliver you something sweet and simple, Issue #5. Thank you for your patience and your perspectives of 2020. Follow us here as we celebrate the revival of The Trail and Black History. February is filled with informative and searing events, hosted by the Black Student Union and the African American Studies Department. Come through! Lean in and listen.

This issue features the new voices of Regan Strauss and Logan Canada-Johnson.

Regan's piece "Coming Out as a Third Gender in The Public Eye" engages with trans-rights and recognition of Elliot Page while maintaining a level and empathetic perspective.

Logan reviews Oscar-winning actress Regina King's directional debut, "One Night in Miami" (2020) and offers a passionate analysis that may convince you to click 'play'.

Lastly, The Trail features a re-cap of last Tuesday evening's BSU event, "Navigating Anti-Blackness: Our Resistance in Academia," where Dr. Latoya Brackett, Prof. Renee Simms, Prof. Grace Livingston and Prof. Dexter Gordon advise the audience and their students to recognize the legitimacy of Black identity, specifically throughout higher education.

Comment down below which piece was your favorite!

Thank you for your read,

Kindly,

Checks, Editor-in-Chief
Rachel "Checks" De Guzman, Editor-in-Chief

Rachel “Checks” De Guzman writes from Southern California, just north of Los Angeles. She writes satire, book reviews, performance features and op-ed pieces on current events and social media movements. At the University of Puget Sound, you’d find her walking around North End or touring larger Tacoma on public transit.

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Featured: ‘Navigating Anti-Blackness: Our Resistance in Academia’ hosted by BSU

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In celebration of Black History Month, the African American Studies department (AFAM) and the Black Student Union (BSU) generously organized a series of events and lectures that are open to the entire student body. Last evening’s discourse of “Navigating Anti-Blackness: Our Resistance in Academia” welcomed voices of student and faculty panelists and BSU co-presidents Mimi Duncan, a third year, and Christina Mills, a third year, facilitated the discussion.

“Anti-Blackness,” Dr. LaToya Brackett, AFAM professor, said, “is a theoretical framework that illuminates society’s inability to recognize our humanity.” The privilege of non-white identities in America, in other words, explicitly attaches itself to the debasement of Black people who live in America by the delegitimization of black people’s humanity. Society fails to recognize their humanity if it continues to invest in an anti-black haven, one that is framed as an “at least I’m not black” space which resides within the mind and the personal domain of perception. Anti-Blackness, as established by Brackett, is a theoretical framework that illuminates, or highlights, the lack of intentionality through exclusion to society’s attention.

She offered this definition after Professor Renee Simms responded to a question about navigating Anti-Blackness in academia. Simms first drew on current debates around Classics Studies that Eurocentric and white worldviews dominate. Then, she encouraged the students in the audience to question their syllabi and appeased any panic by assuring that “this can be done in a respectful way.” By questioning the assigned material on any syllabi, a student not only applies a “critical cultural lens” to their education, but also affirms their own experiences that may not be defined by a “classic” worldview. Students want to learn as pupils and pursue their own curiosities. College campuses, generally, are perceived to be a malleable and forgiving space where students can learn more about themselves and develop self-sufficiency, but how can black students do that if they are expected to read, memorize and apply information that never sought to include them?

“No one confronted the white identity which just is,” Professor Grace Livingston said. She shared several dichotomies around contradiction, confrontation and struggle, such as hypervisibility versus visibility and surveillance versus precarity. When universities promote themselves as “safe spaces,” Livingston speaks not just for herself when she responded,
“safe from who?” Black Studies professors like Livingston, Simms and Brackett face these institutional pushbacks on a daily basis. They are, as Livingston said, “expected to hit the ground already running … to play the game and establish the game all at once.”

Supporting a department while empowering young students’ experiences cannot be done without recognition. Brackett spoke on this point too: “Black Studies is not a place for service.” She shared portions of her experience within academia as a back-to-back Black Studies scholar. Brackett dedicated her undergraduate and graduate studies to this scholarship, so she had identified its rejection from both academia and students. With a tone of finality, Brackett defended Black Studies as “activist disciplines” and reframed Black Studies professors as “scholars” who deserve respect for their time and dedication. Brackett warned that people should not be elected to teach or “prescribed” the responsibility to teach, based on their identities for the same reason that Livingston explained. A department cannot sustain itself if its professors must legitimize themselves before diving into their respective specialties.

The evening ended with a few readings from Professor Dexter Gordon and an exchange of wisdom from BSU’s student panel. Gordon did not disconnect what he described as the “thick and thoughtful grappling of this department.” Rather, he encouraged the audience to “be passionate, thoughtful and searing.” And though Black Studies and black people continue to be challenged as legitimate, he redirected the attention to the prospective students and faculty and asked “Are you rigorous enough?”

As COVID-19 carries on, the necessity of community forces us to change our behaviors in isolation. The Zoom setting of the lecture, and of the remaining lectures of Black History Month, could substitute neither the warmth of a crowded classroom nor the wall behind this computer screen. So, showing up to class feels different. Let this be the chance to make a mistake, get new information and start again.

Rachel "Checks" De Guzman, Editor-in-Chief
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current events, social media movements and radical art and literature. At the University of Puget Sound, you'd find her walking around North End or touring larger Tacoma on public transit.

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"One Night In Miami" (2020), the directorial debut from Oscar-winning actress Regina King, is a joyful and affecting celebration of Black culture and a timely retrospective on Afro-American relations in the turbulent 1960s. The film provides a fictional account of the meeting between soul singer Sam Cooke (Leslie Odom Jr.), world-champion boxer Cassius Clay (Eli Goree), Hall of Famer-turned-Blaxploitation-Icon Jim Brown (Aldis Hodge) and civil rights activist Malcom X (Kingsley Ben-Adir) in the hours following Clay's victory over Sonny Liston. The script is adapted from a stage play, both penned by Kemp Powers, who made a formidable entrance in the screenwriting sphere this year both with “Soul” and this film.

Written by Logan Canada-Johnson, Staff Writer, Film Analyst.
Having been largely unacquainted with the histories of these Black icons, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the film provides context for those unknowledgable without resorting to heavy-handed expository tropes. Clay has just been knocked out, X arrives home after delivering a speech, Cooke bombs at the Copacabana Club and Brown visits a family friend. Beginning in media res (literally in the middle of things) allows the characters to exist as they were and create the immersive environment necessary for the audience to sympathize with the struggles of these men. We simply walk in on these men going about their lives. This film lives and dies by the strength of its performances; in that sense, “One Night in Miami” thrives. Eli Goree as the boisterous and charismatic Cassius Clay is worth the price of admission alone, but newcomer Kingsley Ben-Adir is riveting as a deeply intellectual but capricious Malcolm X. As is any other film adapted from a stage play, “One Night in Miami” would be nothing without its powerhouse performances, but the cast here met and easily exceeded my expectations.

King is an observer in the directorial chair, getting out of the way of her actors and letting them do the work for her. Regina King, who has been a household name since her rousing performance in “Jerry Maguire” (1996), has an instinctual knowledge of how to get what we need to see out of her actors. King doesn’t concern herself with flexing her directorial chops on this proving ground because she knows that this story is about bringing these men to life. There are simple set-ups, conventional shot-reverse-shot conversation angles and some handheld camera style when the intensity of say that King’s virtuosity is not
there. In his opening dialogue with Mr. Carlton, a seemingly genial and paternalistic friend of Brown's, King evokes the division between their ideologies and provides an aesthetic delight by framing the shot through a three-pane window. Each man is squarely framed in the first and last third, respectively leaving an empty middle-third symbolic of the ever-present but hollow divide between races. Symmetry is evoked again in a couple of gorgeous aerial shots: once during Clay's fight with Sonny Liston and again when the four men exit the car. These directorial decisions have allegorical meaning in the aforementioned case but also add refreshing perspective to what could become a dull shot structure.

In making a concerted effort to avoid the perceived dullness of two hours of talking, “One Night in Miami” imposes a Hollywood structure to a story that is anything but. Talking about this film, I am reminded of the effervescent and serendipitous “My Dinner with Andre” (1980). In that film, character actor Wallace Shawn sits down for dinner with his friend and famed theatre director Andre Gregory. The film is their simplistic odyssey through a meal with good conversation, all in real time. “My Dinner with Andre” explores the magic of that immutable human power for fulfilling social interaction and exchange of ideas. “One Night in Miami” purports to accomplish the same, but where it fumbles the ball in this attempt is snuffing that magic out with melodrama. In the age of rapid editing, orgasmic visual effects and revolutionary film technology, audiences have lost their patience. The film panders to this impatience by introducing tertiary subplots and fabricating drama between the four men. More than once does a character physically attack or threaten another character when they feel insulted, especially when discussing political philosophies. Undoubtedly the tension of race relations would heighten people's reactivity about such subjects but having known that the account is speculative in many aspects made me question what the intentions of such melodrama were. More often than not, this melodrama prevented the fascinating intellectual discussion that I was craving to witness among these giants of Black culture.

In the same year as “Da 5 Bloods”, Steve McQueen's five-film opus “Small Axe”, “Soul”, “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom”, “The Trial of the Chicago 7” and “The Forty Year-Old Version”, “One Night in Miami” is another addition to one of the most venerable years of Black cinema in history, even if it does not rise above the rest.
Logan Canada-Johnson, Staff Writer, Film Analyst

Logan Canada-Johnson is a Communication Studies and Philosophy double-major from the East Bay, California. He primarily writes about film releases and film culture, but is also interested in philosophy. He performs a number of other roles on campus, including Campus Films Programmer, President of UPS Film Club, officer in Sigma Alpha Epsilon, and debater in Ethics Bowl. He plans on obtaining a Doctorate in Cinema Studies after his Bachelors.

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On Dec. 1, 2020, one of the only positive things to come from this year was tweeted: Elliot Page came out as trans non-binary and is going by he/they pronouns. I've loved Elliot Page’s movies for a long time, I'm not on social media, so the first person I heard it from was an older family member while we were walking the dogs.
Out of nowhere he declares “E**** Page is a man now and is going by Elliot.” (Which I found out later was plainly inaccurate and over simplified).

I would be lying if I didn’t say I was shocked and confused. I knew anything with gender and sexuality made him uncomfortable, so right when I got home I looked up the instantly trending tweet and several videos of people's reactions. I have been a long time supporter of the trans community, since I’ve watched heartbreaking films like “Boys Don’t Cry” with Hilary Swank and youtubers’ transition journeys like those of Alex Bertie, Gigi Gorgeous, Ash Hardell, etc; but I was kind of speechless during the first 24 hours as I grappled with a new image of someone I recognized in a very particular way. I learned about Elliot Page like many people my age, in the 2007 classic “Juno”. When I would think of them, the first thing that always came to mind was a witty, strong, unconventional pregnant teenage girl. Even
with nothing else to go on, it’s almost subconscious.

For any who don’t know, labels like non-binary, genderqueer, agender, genderflux, genderfluid, greygender, and demi boy/girl describe the experience of being inbetween the spectrum of man and woman (a mix of both) or no where near it (you feel like neither or gender just isn’t a thing you think about/are attached to). I believe that these are beautiful and just as valid as being a cis man or woman and a trans man or woman. I never once hated or felt disgusted by Elliot as I continued to think about his coming out and how it changed everything, as well as nothing. Despite my support of his honesty and vulnerability, it was still a thing to get used to. When many people come out, family, friends or strangers can have a very hard time getting used to a new name, new presentation and new labels. I used to be quite judgemental of that buffer people many people need, but now I realized I sometimes need one too.

Elliot Page still gets dead named/misgendered daily on the internet (and possibly in his personal life), even when making their intentions plainly clear in the first line of their tweet.”"Hi friends, I want to share with you that I am trans, my pronouns are he/they and my name is Elliot.” I myself, who has seen countless coming out videos, have friends in the LGBTQ+ community, and am on a journey with my own gender identity still slip up and have to sit back to take it all in. I had to question and come to terms with why everything I saw on the outside for a decade didn't match what Elliot must have been feeling for just as long. Because of this disconnect, it’s easier to just erase it and claim it isn’t real, instead of trying on someone else's shoes. First the ones that are two sizes too small, the ugliest shade imaginable, and squeal with every step and then the brand new pair that smell like fresh leather, is snug but allows wiggle room, and is something you actually like. At a certain point, I had to get over myself. Everyone is on a continuing journey of self discovery. None of us knew who we were as kids, teens or even young adults. Many who are in their 60s still haven’t a clue. Just because you looked or identified a certain way for most of your life doesn't mean this new label you've finally embraced isn't valid or right. No matter how proud everyone is of Elliot, no one will truly understand what it was like to live inside his head for 33 years. The uncertainty, self loathing, shame, and endless effort to fit into the world’s miniature binary boxes are heavy things to be expected to carry for that long. It’s a weight no one should have to bear, but more do then you think.
In the current, booming coming out culture, many outsiders, as well as insiders, are heated about the word non-binary and any words that blur the lines of the familiar. We, as a society, are bombarded with “There are only two genders”, “This is just a stepping stone to being a man or woman”, “They/Them can’t be singular pronouns”, “Why do you have to make gender so complicated.” People say the LGBTQ+ push their agenda, when straight/cis culture is shoved down our throats on day one when we get our first pink rabbit or blue truck with no chance to ask why. Though we don’t like to admit it, gender expression and roles aren’t and never has been a straightforward thing. Native Americans have “Two spirit” which is still a celebrated concept of a male and female spirit inhabiting the same body. Plays thousands of years ago in Europe and Asia had men playing women in full drag. Blue used to be a girls color because it was considered softer and angelic. Men used to carry purses with masculine pride because it showed off your wealth. In many cultures, men wore and still wear skirts/dresses like togas in ancient Rome and kilts in Scotland. Women chopped off their hair, drank and smoked and wore dresses that hid their curves in the 20s to rebel against the strict female standards. Biologically it’s the same. There are hermaphroditic animals with both sex organs like snails, earthworms, starfish, and parrot fish, as well as ones that can change sex completely or take on the characteristics of the opposite sex like clownfish, lions, red-sided garter snakes, spotted hyena, and Asian Sheepshead Wrasse.

A big thing this has taught me is when someone comes out—especially as a label society is trying to understand all the nuances of—the focus is on them, not you. You are allowed to feel whatever way you want, but remember, even if they came out as more general, accepted labels like gay or trans, only the person internally experiencing it understands what it is like. It will never make as much sense to you as it does to them. The best you can do is listen, ask questions, and accept. Just because you don’t “see it,” doesn’t mean it’s not reality. If you really try, it will also become normal for you.

On the other side, for those who want to come out or just have, it’s imperative to be patient of family and friends who don’t understand right away. Because no one else is given permission to your brain and the constant flow of internal thoughts, it will feel like a complete 180 (especially if you completely hid it from everyone up until that point). Some can get used to it right away, but not all, especially when it’s something circulated with so much assumptions and misinformation like bisexual, pansexual, ne person to your core. Things
may be physically and emotionally different, but you are no stranger. You
deserve respect, love and safety, but if people you tell don’t understand to
the degree that you do, that doesn’t mean they hate or don’t believe you. It
all takes time. It’ll probably take more then 24 hours, like it did for me after
I heard Elliot’s announcement, but that doesn’t mean it’ll never happen.
Unfortunately, everything in our society takes a lot of time and effort to
fully develop. We are nowhere near done, but Elliot Page embracing his
truth and allowing us to be a part of it is another step forward.

Regan Strauss, Staff Writer
I am an English Major with a Creative Writing Emphasis. I’m in LA, California
this spring 2021 where I was born and grew up. I am interested in writing about a
majority of social issues (Frankly too many to list), music, and movies through this
publication. Might get a graduate degree in creative writing (undecided). I want to
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opinion/research essays after I graduate.

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