



# They Saw the Sun First

## Spelman SIS Young Scholar Writings

Spring 2020

# What the News Taught Me About Age and Ageism I Did Not Know

By McKenzie Clarke  
Spring 2020

I have learned several things in the newspapers over the course of the last couple of days that, although not all speak directly to age, the lens could certainly be applied. For instance, I learned that U.S. researchers of the virus are not yet seriously applying the lens of gender to the data they are gathering, thus already leaving a large gap wide open in helping to construct an understanding of how this epidemic influences the bodies and daily lived experiences of women. Apply the lens of age, and one realizes in turn that vital data on how the virus interact with elder women's bodies, data that might prove informative on how women as a whole might be stronger or more susceptible to the sickness, does not yet exist. I can only hope that not too many women, Black women in particular, suffer due to the negligence that our gendered and racialized bodies tend to receive.

I have also learned that the practice of "social distancing" can prove very harmful to the psychological health of elders who may suffer invariably from loneliness. Some countries like the U.K. have mandated that elders, in particular, should self-distance. I can only think how devastating it must be to be singled out by the government for being more or less a threat to public health because of your age. It is already a scary time for elders! Such mandates require them to be particularly strong to survive such societal suspicion.

# What Mrs. Callie Terrell Taught Me About Strength and Fragility That I Did Not Know

By: McKenzie Clarke  
Spring 2020

Who might better represent the embodiment of two seemingly oxymoronic words like “strong” and “fragile?” The beauty of spirit and mind lovingly intertwined into the person who is Mrs. Callie Terrell, a living testament to the unity of what many might assume to be impossible. I did not truly know, prior to talking with Mrs. Terrell, how the active living of those two terms might look or feel, but I encountered something profound in the (virtual) presence of Mrs. Terrell. What grabbed at me and lulled me into its comforting and fascinating presence as I listened to and spoke with Ms. Terrell was love. I felt the comfort and sadness of time with its mighty weight also the softness of wisdom and humor. I felt a deep, easy love that blessed me with this realization: strength and fragility together create a force that shifts worlds. They create love, and I had the divine opportunity to meet them both in one human being. Beautiful.

# Eye/I Log #4: What the News Taught Me

By: Rashah Neason  
Spring 2020

To say that this is an interesting time we're in would be an understatement. Although I have never been one to watch the news every day and every night, I do try to keep up with what's going on in the world. By choice, I haven't been watching the news during this pandemic in order to protect my mental health. However, because I'm not a hermit, I have seen unfortunate things on different news outlets that are truly heartbreaking. This pandemic has really shown how much humans lack compassion for their fellow humans. It is both sad and infuriating to see videos of people taking food from carts elders are using when they not looking and filming the act as if it is a joke. Clearly, people do not respect elders, and that is true not only about people in my generation, but also in other generations. This pandemic is showing true colors across all generations. Even older generations have adopted "it's a dog eat dog world." I'm not sure what the outcome of this pandemic will be, but I do hope it will help people realize that one of the simplest things we can do for the world is to show compassion to all the people in the world.

# My Visit to SIS Library

By: Alix Swann  
Spring 2020

My visit to the SIS Library was very enlightening, and I understand why Young Scholars are encouraged to spend time there. My visit was only a glimpse into the extensive body of literature that is available for our research. The library is organized into various sections: SIS Summa Readers and SIS anthologies, interview transcriptions, SIS history, and books for general reading across the disciplines.

One of the books that caught my interest was Soul Talk: The New Spirituality of African American Women written by Akasha Gloria Hull. I read this book after it was recommended by Ree Botts, a former Young Scholar in SIS. Because my research focuses on Black women's trauma, Ree told me that healing and resilience are excellent entry points to this type of research.

Of course I also saw an abundance of books on the art of oral history. In my multicultural education class, we are discussing how important oral history is in a study of Black culture. My research this semester is about Black women in prison, and I'm sure oral history culture plays a large part in research on the prison world. Most of the activities in prison are oral, so it will be interesting to know more about this research methodology.

Throughout the semester, I will be returning to the library to find additional sources for my independent research and, as well, for my class research. I hope one day to have a personal library that is as extensive as the SIS Library. It will be open to my friends as a lending library of love.

# Descendants of Love

By Rashah Neason  
Spring 2020

She called me La-La. No one in my family knew the origin of this nickname because the letter L is nowhere to be found in my first, middle, or last name, but I responded each time the name I heard her say: “La-La come over here and give me some suga.” She had a scent that lingered. You could smell it on her clothes, her jewelry, her wigs, and even on her plastic-covered furniture. I still smell it from time to time in various places.

She gave without expecting anything in return. I didn’t have to go on a pilgrimage, meditate for hours, or practice yoga for years to know what compassion is. I didn’t need a guru, or book, or a church to show me how love looks and what love does. She showed me. She taught me. For half of my life, her presence was a sacred place. Although her teachings did not find a home in my mind, body, and spirit until she was gone, I always knew there was a reason I was given the gift of a Granny like her.

Before marriage, her name was Nellie Gene Wilson. After marriage, her name was Nellie Gene Hayes. Her family and friends called her Gene for short. I called her Granny. Her face wore freckles that faded with time. Her hair was reddish-brown, she had bow legs and cheekbones like mountains, and a smile that could warm anyone’s heart.

She was born to Silas and Juliet Wilson on the red soil of Talladega, Alabama. She had three brothers. She made her way to Cleveland, Ohio at the age of eighteen. Not too long after she moved there, she met and fell in love with her neighbor, my grandad. They had three children—my mom and my two uncles.

My Granny was far from perfect, and she never painted a picture of herself as if she were. She wasn’t a meek woman who held her tongue and stood in the shadows of her husband. Her tongue was like a fire that couldn’t be extinguished. She said what she wanted when she wanted, and she didn’t apologize for saying it. Even when I was young, there was no topic too taboo for me to hear.

My Granny had an in-home daycare from the time my mom was little until the day it was time for my Granny to rest. For years, she cared for children in the neighborhood. Education was a top priority for her. She didn’t go to college and, let her tell it, the only reason she passed high school was that she got an A in flirting with the teachers. Another beautiful thing about my Granny was that she never claimed to be a saint. However, she never wanted her life to be the life her children experienced, especially not for me, her daughter’s only daughter. She wanted us to be independent and smart and to do more than what she thought she had done.

The first question my Granny would ask when I spoke to her on the phone or saw her in person would be, “How’s school goin’?” I always did well in school, and that always made her happy. She would give me a gift and encourage me to continue to do well in my studies, in dance, in piano, and in other activities in which I was involved.

I remember the last time I saw her. She came down to Atlanta with my grandad to see me perform in The Nutcracker at the Fox Theatre when I was eleven. I remember how big her smile was when I got into the car after the performance. I remember our last conversation on the phone a couple of months later. She asked about school, I told her about some new activity I wanted to do, and, of course, as always, she encouraged me to do it.

Ovarian cancer was what returned my Granny back to the soil. Her death was the second I had experienced. The first one was her dad's, whom we called Big Daddy. My Granny's death was the first I felt in my gut.

At the funeral, I saw the circle of people standing around my Granny's casket. Many of them I had never seen. I did not weep as I heard voices speak about the impact my Granny had on their lives, but I was in awe of what I heard because all my life my Granny was just my Granny. In that circle, she was also "Grandma," "Ms. Hayes," "Gene," and "Mama." I learned later that my Granny was made to feel less than. She didn't have a degree, she watched after other people's children, she worked from her home, she was from the deep South, she cursed like a sailor, she wore daisy dukes, and she wasn't "proper."

As I stood in that circle, all I could hear was testimony after testimony about my Granny as a woman who was loved. She didn't have a fancy degree, didn't have a platinum album, and didn't write a bestselling novel. She wasn't a T.V. star or a famous scientist. She wasn't known by millions or by thousands, but she had touched many lives. She cooked for those who were hungry, loved those who needed to be loved, protected those who needed protection, and cared for those without care. She always seemed content.

Was it her humble beginnings that shaped my Granny's outlook on life? Perhaps. Was there someone in her life who taught her how to walk with dignity in all places? Maybe. All I know is that, on the day of her funeral, on an afternoon in May, I realized how many people loved Granny for her compassion, her generosity, and her love. I experienced a change that some might see as an awakening.

It still amazes me how I became closer to my Granny after she was gone. I would wake every morning and greet her and tell her goodnight every time I closed my eyes. I would listen to countless stories about her from my mom, who began to look more and more like my Granny. I felt my Granny's presence, usually when I was in need of guidance or reassurance. Every year, without fail, I receive a gift of her visiting me in my dreams. She is constantly sending me messages. Some are encouraging. They tell me to continue to move forward. Some are warnings. I have stopped wondering if her guidance is real. I know that it is real because she is a part of me.

Many people want to know how they can find the joy and peace in their lives that they see in mine. They want to know if I meditated for hours. What books did I read? Was it my travels or my diet?

Yes, I meditated. Yes, I read books. Yes, travel and diet impacted my life. However, I know that my Granny's return to the Spirit World is the joy and peace they see in my life. On the day of her funeral, I made a vow to remember that love is more important

than material possessions, family is more important than followers, and generosity is more important than greed. My spirit is joyful because I am a descendant of Nellie Gene.



# On A Scale of 1 to 5: Research Logs

## Conversation with Her Maternal Grandfather

**EXPERIENCE, PLACE, PERSON, ACTIVITY:** Article in Yes! Magazine (sent by Dr. Gayles)

Click link to: [“What We Can Learn About Resilience from Indigenous Leaders”](#)

Log Inspired by my Indigenous Friends.

**DESCRIPTION:** This article is about the resiliency of indigenous people. They have been fighting a similar battle since colonists came to the new world. The article gives tips to people for resilience, such as practicing collectivism, staying connected, protecting the vulnerable, and finding goodness within the bad times.

### EVALUATION/CIRCLE

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most significant, how you would rate the importance of this place/person/activity to your understanding of age studies during the Coronavirus.

5

This article is important to my understanding of age studies during the Coronavirus Pandemic because it is about a community who is typically forgotten and marginalized within the United States. But even though they are forgotten, they have survived in spite of all the odds. If we followed the tips set out by indigenous people, the method in which the pandemic has been unfolding could have been different, and maybe more people would have survived.

The section about protecting the vulnerable focuses on elders, who are more susceptible to effects of the virus. It is a call to action to everyone to check in on elders, bring them groceries, and make sure they are doing alright. I will be sure to do this!

**EXPERIENCE, PLACE, PERSON, ACTIVITY:** Article in the New York Times [“Restarting America Means People Will Die. So When Do We Do It”](#). Log was inspired by a conversation with my grandfather.

**CREATIVE TITLE:** How Many People Are We Willing to Kill for the Economy?

**DESCRIPTION:** This article is an early take on the possibility of reopening various states. It outlines (hopefully) a proper way to reopen states. A panel of five people—which includes a reverend, various college officials, a journalist, and former government officials—discusses trade-offs for reopening the economy, what in the economy should reopen first, and long-projections of how the pandemic will change America.

**EVALUATION/CIRCLE** On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most significant, how you would rate the importance of this place/person/activity to your understanding of age studies during the Coronavirus Pandemic, April 2020.

This article is important to my understanding of age studies during the Coronavirus Pandemic because it shows the focus America's focus on profit rather than on people. Georgia has recently announced reopening, which means more people, specifically more elders, will be exposed to the virus. Unfortunately, some of these people will probably die. And the government officials do not care because they do not want to pay people for unemployment.

The conversation my grandfather and I had about this article and the NPR article from Log 2 focused on the heightened sense of social activism his generation had because of the Civil Rights Movement. He thinks that this could bring a similar sense of activism to our generation. I am not sure if I agree with him, because many people think that being socially competent on social media is enough. What we really need to create change is direct action, lobbying, pressure on our officials, or a revolution. We could achieve this through grassroots organizing. I believe we can do this through social media if we work hard enough.

Click link to: ["What Coronavirus Exposes About America's Political Divide"](#) / Source: National Public Radio

**CREATIVE TITLE:** Things People of Color Knew Already, but White People Are Just Finding Out

**DESCRIPTION:** This article discusses the political divide in America that is being "brought to the surface" by the coronavirus. Main idea is that people of color are "socially predisposed" to the virus because of multigenerational living situations, densely packed areas, and work arrangements. Not only does the article highlight these challenges, it also explains why racial attitudes support the thinking that the virus is "someone else's problem".

### **EVALUATION/CIRCLE**

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most significant, how you would rate the importance of this place/person/activity to your understanding of age studies during the Coronavirus Pandemic, April 2020.

Article references the U.S. Surgeon General's comments on multigenerational living and its effects on people of color. This information is important to SIS discourse on ageism. It reinforces my understanding that seeing concern for elders as "someone else's problem" can lead to ageist behavior.

# Ageism: What it Means...

By Rashah Neason  
Spring 2020

Ageism: What it Means, Whom it Hurts, and Why it Thrives

or

The Myth of the Undesirable Asexual Older Black Woman

In this society, we reserve sex and sexuality exclusively for the young. As a result, we view sexuality through the lens of gender, sexual orientation, and race. This is due partly to the fact that sexuality studies are a subdivision of gender studies. They were not included in college curricula until the late nineteen-eighties to early nineteen-nineties. They have evolved into a major course of study that tackles issues of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, identity, religion, and other issues. However, older Black women have not been included in the conversation.

What sparked my interest in this topic about two years ago was the Netflix show *Grace and Frankie*, starring Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin. The series follows two women in their late seventies or early eighties as they navigate through life after learning that their husbands had been secret lovers for decades. Their response to this knowing is shock and anger, and that response is followed by a curiosity about sex, and that response by ways that can liberate them sexually.

They talk about pleasure, independence, and surrendering to their ever-evolving body, something they never thought they would be doing at their age. In one episode, they attempt to create a vibrator and lube business designed specifically for older women. Although they started the business, they faced setbacks along the way due to both their age and their gender. The humor of the show is the deeper message that aging does not mean we should stop living.

Why was this the first time I had ever seen two older women talk about sex on a popular show on television, especially since I am living in a time when sex is such an open topic in society? I could not imagine this conversation taking place between two older Black women or two queer women in a television series. One very clear answer to most of my questions is both ageism and sexism. Both explain why we do not discuss that, for men, sexual performance decreases as they age. Viagra is proof.

And yet, it is not uncommon in television series and television commercials that older men date younger women. They are desirable as a “silver fox” indicates. By contrast, older women who date younger men are called “cougars,” which is negative in meaning. Although there are herbs and remedies that can help women as Viagra helps men, they are not advertised because ageist thinking tells us that older women should retire, knit sweaters for grandchildren, and not concern themselves with matters of sex.

We believe that menopause marks the end of a woman’s reproductive years. It also marks the beginning of the narrative of the undesirable asexual aging woman. For centuries, in patriarchal societies, sex for women is for one thing only, reproduction.

Therefore, once women become menopausal, they are sexually uninteresting. This is especially true for Black women. They are viewed as either hypersexual “welfare queens” or asexual mammy figures.

A study conducted by the Department of Psychology, California State University Northridge, between July 2009 and June 2020, has meaning for this research. The subjects were thirteen African American women between the ages of 57-82. Eleven women identified as heterosexual, two women identified as bisexual, and one woman as a lesbian.

Conducting this research was difficult because older Black women were not willing to talk about sex. It is a taboo topic in the Black community. Because most of the women in the study were heterosexual women, their responses to questions about their sex life were either that their husbands had passed and, therefore, they were no longer interested in having sex, or that there were not enough eligible men with whom they could develop a relationship. It is important to note that most of the women in the study equated sex with marriage or with a relationship, which is why many of them referred to husbands.

It is also important to note the difference in longevity of the four groups. White women live longest. They are followed by White men, who are followed by Black women. Black men have the shortest longevity of any racial or gender group in the nation. If this statistic were different, perhaps Black women would respond to the question with different answers. Perhaps if their husbands lived longer, they could find “suitable” older men who fit their tastes. Perhaps they would have the luxury to explore their sexuality further. Perhaps.

[This is a draft of the research paper I want to submit on the impact that racism, sexism, and ageism have on the sexuality of older Black women. The sources I consulted for this draft are listed below.]

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# Forgotten Elders: Black, and Aging, in Prison – Research Excerpts

By Alix Swann  
Spring 2020

*Wentworth. Jailbirds. Girls Incarcerated.* All of these are titles of popular shows on Netflix that portray life in prison. However, they are all missing one thing: documentation of experiences elders have in prison.

**Almost 2.3 million people** are incarcerated in our nation. The United States holds them in “1,833 state prisons, 110 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,134 local jails, 218 immigration detention facilities, and 80 Indian Country jails” (Sawyer et al.). Black people make up 13% of the nation’s population, but they are 38% of the prison population. A startling statistic about the population of imprisoned people is that, out of the current 2.3 million, approximately 246,600 are older than fifty (American Civil Liberties Union). Unless people outside prison know someone who is in prison or have had an experience that gives them awareness of life inside prison, they do not give much thought to living circumstances of people who are imprisoned. The first section of the paper will discuss conditions of Black elders in prison and why Black elders in prison are forgotten.

**The War on Drugs** that took place during the administration of Richard Nixon in the 1970’s is in large part responsible for today’s large prison population. It was riddled with racial disparities. One example of the disparities was the difference between sentencing for users of crack cocaine and users of powder cocaine. Blacks use crack cocaine because it is a cheaper than power cocaine, which is the drug more commonly used by White people. There is a 100-to-1 sentencing disparity between the two. Sentencing for distribution of five grams of crack cocaine is equivalent to the distribution of five hundred grams of powder cocaine (American Civil Liberties Union). This law is only one example of laws of racial disparities that are still in place today.

**Black people are four times** more likely to be arrested on charges for marijuana than White people. Although their rate of usage is equivalent to that of Whites, they are six times more likely than White people to be imprisoned for drug offense. Additionally, the average sentence Blacks are given for a nonviolent drug offense is the same as the sentence Whites are given for a violent crime. In 2011, Cornell Hood, a Black man thirty-five years of age, was sentenced to life in prison for four convictions of marijuana possession and intent to sell. The officers who arrested him performed a warrantless search and found that he had less than two pounds of marijuana (POW 420) in his possession. He was sentenced less than a century ago.

## Health of Elders in Prison

High blood pressure, asthma, cancer, and HIV are major health challenges Black elders face in prison. They will not receive the care good health requires because prisons were designed for young people, not for elders (American Civil Liberties Union). On average, the cost per year of a prisoner who is over the age of fifty is \$68,270. This cost includes additional staff and medical expenses (American Civil Liberties Union). However,

prisons are not healthcare centers. They are ill equipped to handle the healthcare needs of the growing population of prisoners. They are unhygienic places in which infectious diseases thrive. (Penal Reform International). That is why spread of the Coronavirus has started its rounds in prisons. Thousands of prisoners have tested positive, but, unfortunately, there is no way to know the exact number of cases or how many people have been tested (Park et al.).

Some people with mental illness are imprisoned for unruly behavior. In reality, they should be placed in psychiatric care (Penal Reform International). Their mental illnesses can keep them in a cycle of recidivism. If they are released, they return to prison and, once returned, behavior problems prevent them from being released again. Even if they were not mentally or physically ill before their incarceration, people who are incarcerated decline faster, mentally and physically, than people who are not in prison (Jefferson). Expedited aging poses questions about conditions in prisons and treatment of those who are imprisoned.

The recidivism rates for elders in prison are substantially lower than they are for younger people. By the time people in prison are fifty years old, evidence is abundant that recidivism rates lower immensely as a result of several factors: physical disabilities, mental disabilities, age, health problems, and lack of interest in committing crimes. For example, people released at age forty five and older, the rate of return was 56% lower than for people released between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four (American Civil Liberties Union). This minuscule recidivism rate proves that people who were in prison at older ages have less motive to commit crimes.

Although this paper focuses primarily on the population of Black people aging in prison, it does not include stories of Black elders who are in prison. They receive longer sentences than Whites, as statistics prove, but their invisibility prevents us from seeing them because as their invisibility: invisibility in the judicial system, invisibility in the legislative system, and invisibility in the place where they are living, their prisons.

All things considered, the incarceration of Black elders affects not only the individual who is imprisoned, but also children and grandchildren growing up without their mothers and their fathers and other family members and knowing them in visits to the prisons that are timed and guarded and lacking in privacy. All of this immense pain and loss and destruction of family is the result of a petty nonviolent drug offense. It is projected that by 2030, the number of elders in prison will be over 400,000 (American Civil Liberties Union). To stop this number from growing exponentially, the United States has a lot of work to do in order to end mass incarceration.

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# Learning to See: A Reflection on Intergenerational Experiences

By McKenzie Clarke  
Spring 2020



When I first came into the SIS Oral History class, I had little idea of what to expect. I expected to come away with a respect for oral stories and that I might even learn how to go about listening for them thoughtfully. Although not a required one, it was a class that I knew would be essential for any really thoughtful writing I might want to do in the future, as I hope to do research and journalism. I was secure in that this class would help me appreciate and develop an attentiveness for those stories that were not written, a legacy. I am a part of as a descendent of African slaves. What never crossed my mind, however, was the people. I did not really think thoughtfully about the sources from whence those stories might come. The elders, in particular, held no place in my thoughts.

With this class, I have come into much more than ideology and methodology. I have learned to see. Before, I think my appreciation for the oral story was too heavily rooted in what I could do with it, trying as I am to always work towards research and writing that will look good for graduate school. This is not to say that I was without empathy in my listening, but I was without stillness. In this current stage of my life, I often feel that I always am and always should be prepping for some obscure future. So, it is in those times when I am invited into moments of history and into the story of one's life that I am empowered with the ability to enjoy my present and more imaginatively contemplate my future.

I will share some things I have seen. My eyes have come to know the face of Erin Goseer Mitchell, an elder whose light frame and bright personality showed me that grace is not solely tied to youth, and whose book *Born Colored: Life Before Bloody Sunday* granted me some insight into the peacefulness and strength of African-American communities prior to one of the most volatile points in the nation's history.



And I have had the blessing to look upon the face of Mrs. Callie Terrell, a centenarian with beautiful hair and a wonderful sense of humor whose love of her family and friends have blessed me with wisdom and warm laughter.

I have also learned to be attentive to the faces around me, seeing those elder teachers, archivists, lunch ladies, and janitors on my campus with a greater desire to know them.

I can also speak of loss. There are many things that I did not get to experience in taking this class. There were lost experiences to travel and worship with other elder Black women, and losing a grandparent during this pandemic has made my ears all the sharper, more wanting of that time and stillness that elders with their wisdom can give. So, I am grateful for the women like Mrs. Mitchell and Mrs. Terrell that took the time to sit and share with me, for they remind me that I am still a collector of salvaged things. Their stories and mine will survive this moment and any future to come.

The difference in my looking for the story now is that I have a fuller understanding of why I want them. I have learned that I am looking for wisdom and stillness and glimpses into history that might inform the path I walk. The experience of the elder is one that is tied to history, to culture, and to phenomenal women with whose lined faces, all with their differing shades of brown, and whose knowledge root me in all planes of time. Past, present, and future.

# Youth Power Solidarity Meetup

By Alix Swann, Summa Scholar, 2019-2020  
Spring 2020



In Recognition of Her Commitment to Intergenerational Bonding

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Participation in the International Zoom Meeting on COVID-19

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Excellence in Research, Interviewing, and Writing

More than 175 people attended the virtual intergenerational Youth Power Solidarity Meetup that took place on May 20, 2020. I enjoyed participating in this experience with my maternal grandmother, Eileen Cooper-Reed, and my paternal grandmother, Marsha Swann, who joined remotely from Cincinnati, Ohio, and Oxon Hill, Maryland, respectively.

Participants hailed from Zambia, the Philippines, United Kingdom, Togo, and Kenya and from Nepal, Italy, Tanzania, and Canada. The conversation—which I thought would be only intergenerational—was also international. After we identified ourselves by name and by location, we split into breakout rooms where we were able to have meaningful discussions in smaller groups.

The conversations in the breakout rooms began with the question, “How are you seeing older or younger people portrayed in your home?” The second question was, “What can we do now/how can we take action in response to COVID-19?” In response to these questions, there was a euphony of voices that shared experiences. A central point of the responses was that young people and elders have one crucial thing in common: society does not value either group.

That is what my Nana, Eileen Reed, said. Adults, she said, do not want to be burdened by either group. My Grandma, Marsha Swann, shared stories about her father who was three years old and living with his parents in Washington, D.C. during the Flu pandemic. She explained, “At the time, the most profound spread of the virus was among troops headed to their positions in WWII.” Crowded conditions and movement contributed to many deaths among the troops. Similar conditions prevailed in U.S. urban areas.

The second wave of the virus was deadly because there were no vaccines or antibiotics with which to fight the virus. People fought with disinfectants, limited public gatherings, isolation — the same measures we are using today to protect ourselves from the coronavirus. Interestingly, my Grandma Marsha remembers that, although there was a shortage of medical personnel, African American nurses were NOT allowed to treat some patients.”

In the international zoom, elders asked us to consider elders who cannot drive and who can no longer take public transportation due to COVID-19. They asked us to consider elders whose routine health checkups have been delayed by COVID-19. They asked us to consider elders who are experiencing depression and loneliness because of safety measures all of us must observe during the pandemic.

I must confess that I once believed that dismantling systems of oppressions meant waiting for older people, through death, to be a small minority in the world. Then, and only then, would we see change. However, after my reading, writing and intergenerational experiences in Spelman’s Independent Scholars Oral History Project, I have reformed my way of thinking about elders and participating in this international zoom widened my world view on the focus of our research in SIS Seminar: Ageism: Whom It Hurts, How It Hurts, and Why It Thrives. It taught me that conversation is the key to bridging the gap between young people and older people. We need to spend more time together, share stories about life, and engage in discourse on how to change the world. This meetup was a call to action for me to do more. I was blessed to have heard the call from an international group that included my maternal grandmother Eileen Cooper-Reed and my paternal grandmother Marsha Swann.

# What the News Taught Me

By Rashah Neason  
Spring 2020

To say that this is an interesting time we're in would be an understatement. I've never been one to watch the news, although I do try to keep up with what's going on in the world. I have chosen not to watch the news during this pandemic in order to protect my mental health. However, because I'm not a hermit, I have watched different news outlets and, as a result, have seen unfortunate things that are truly heartbreaking. This pandemic has really shown how much humans lack compassion for their fellow humans.

Seeing videos of people taking food from elders' carts while elders are not looking and filming the theft as a joke is both sad and infuriating. It shows how this society views our elders. Clearly, people do not respect their elders, and it's not just people in my generation. This pandemic is showing true colors of ageism across the generations. Even generations preceding mine think "it's a dog eat dog world." I'm not sure what the outcome of this pandemic will be. I hope it will help people realize that one of the simplest things you can do for the world is to show compassion for all people and groups who inhabit the world.

# Eye-I Essay #2

By Rashah Neason  
Spring 2020

I remember watching her walk back and forth past the window. She walked with a limp at a steady pace, her eyes were wide and low, and she spoke to voices only she could hear. Occasionally, she would laugh to herself and smile a toothless grin. Her coiled hair was cropped to her head, grey, and patchy.

The time was two years ago. I was in a yoga teacher training in the West End on a Saturday morning. We were on our lunch break, and everyone had left except me. I sat in the empty studio with my packed lunch listening to the hustle and bustle of the morning West End streets. I heard a voice approaching the studio door. I watched as the short older Black woman with patchy hair and a toothless grin peak her head inside the studio. Her eyes were no longer low as she glanced around. And when they landed on me, I smiled. Her toothless grin spread even wider across her face. I suppose she took my smile as an invitation for her to come into the studio since that was exactly what she did. There was clarity in her eyes as she opened her arms, limped towards me, and exclaimed, "Hey you! I haven't seen you in a long time!"

I wondered who the "you" was she was referring to. I knew it wasn't me, and yet I opened my arms and hugged the small woman with the patchy hair and oversized worn clothes. She was warm and smelled of poverty. Her embrace was tight, like a mother reuniting with a daughter or grandparents hugging their grandchildren before sending them back home after a summer they spent together. The hug was long and intentional. She eventually pulled away and resumed talking to herself. I started to stretch, not wanting to disturb the woman who was deep in thought in a place only visible to her. The owner of the studio/yoga instructor and some of the other students walked in the door. They looked at her with disgust, as if she were polluting the "sacred energy" of a yoga studio. They shooed her out the door without a hello. And once she had gone, it was as if they could all breathe again.

I often reflect on this encounter with that elder. In the brief moment with me, she never asked for anything. Not money or food. She was content with my hug, with being invited inside, and perhaps with being seen. To be a Black woman elder who is homeless and mentally ill is to be in a constant state of invisibility. It is to be shooed away by a society that wishes that people like you would find a place under a bridge, in an alley, or behind an abandoned building.

Now, because I am also a product of this society, there have been times when I, too, have avoided the eyes of those asking for money or sitting on the side of the road. Sometimes I have turned away out of guilt, sometimes out of fear. Not until three years ago, when I was working as a canvasser on the streets of Oakland and San Francisco, was I forced to confront my biases against homeless people, or houseless individuals. Not until I had conversation after conversation with these individuals, most of whom were elders, did I begin to see them.

But the woman with the toothless grin, worn clothes, and warm hug was the first homeless Black woman elder I had seen. I wondered what was her name. Did she have any family? Did they know where she was? Did they care? What did she like to do when she was a child? What was her favorite food? Who were her parents? And how did she end up where she is today? I think about how many women like her are out there, wearing stained clothes and wandering without knowledge of where they are going or where they have been. I hope someone sees them today and perhaps invites them inside.

# Peer Interview Script

By Danielle Mitchell  
Spring 2020

1. **Please give me your name, birthplace, age and whatever else you want to share.**

*My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I was born in Silver Spring, Maryland and lived there until I was about ten years old. I moved to Concord, North Carolina with my mom and have lived there since I came to Atlanta for college.*

2. **Tell me about the **elder community in Maryland?****

*Where I'm from, in Maryland, the elderly are very prominent, a lot of old money. It's a good mix of races, but Black and White are the big two, and they're equally financially prosperous. Some of them are warm and friendly, will wave when you walk past, and even lend a story if you ask, I love that. North Carolina, however, where I now live, is mostly white and suburban. There's a bit more racism here and a little less friendliness. You feel targeted as a young Black person here more often times than not.*

3. **Can you describe the eldest living generation in your family?**

*My grandmother who lives with me would be it. She lives with us now. She developed early Alzheimer's, I don't know, maybe like two years ago. She lived back home by herself, but when it got a little bit too much for her to do so, we decided it was time. She's very old Black money, very uppity and old school on things like tattoos and music and social issues. We're not as close as I'd like to be, but we're also drastically different. I think this was a lesson for me to learn.*

4. **What are three words that come to mind when you think about age?**

Relative, Number, Old ?

## **a. Aging?**

*Wisdom, confusion, responsibility*

5. **What is your perception of the elder community in America?**

*Oh, I feel like, as a whole, in America, that our elders are respected, but not at as high a caliber as other regions and countries. I feel like more often times than not, not always, but that elders in America are unfortunately and sadly looked at as more of a... yikes. I hate to say this . . . but more of a burden and hardship versus elders we can learn from.*

## **a. In the Black community?**

*I do feel like the Black community respects our elders, I feel like there are two sides. The first : the elders you really respect who pass down stories, who give knowledge to the youth, very Grandma's hands-esque. Then there's the other side of the Black elder*

*community that kind of looks down on the youth, especially my generation. Like, they don't necessarily respect our independence or choices and they're very vocal about it.*

**6. Describe ageism in your own words.**

*Being negative or cruel towards someone at a varying age than you just because you guys differ in age.*

**7. Can you think of any examples of ageist behavior that you may be guilty of?**

*I'll admit sometimes I don't take into account what they had to see and endure to get to where they are today, so their opinions, though sometimes a bit what the f\*\*\* to me, are really just how they were conditioned to be. I also talk in a voice I would talk to a baby in, and they've seen more than me so why am I doing that?*

**8. Can you think of any social changes that aging brings?**

*People listening to what's best for you, like I feel like, even subconsciously, that we feel like we're taking care of our elders by telling them what WE think is best for THEM, but we're really taking away their sense of self. I guess.*

**a. Any mental?**

*I mean Alzheimer's runs in both sides of my family, so I mean a loss of memory is what I associate it with a bit. But also I feel like your whole mindset on life and living is drastically different the more you age.*

**b. Any physical?**

*Maybe not being able to do as many things as you once could due to body limitations.*

**9. Do you think of aging as a positive or a negative experience?**

*Positive.*

**10. Why?**

*Always more to learn, you can also do so many more things, like travel alone or have your own place. Independence is the word I was looking for . . . just being whole to be an adult and be independent is a blessing, no matter the trials and tribulations of adulthood.*

**11. What do you look forward to about getting older?**

*I look forward to the life that I'm manifesting and putting in work towards. I look forward to having a family of my own, with children to teach and watch grow and blossom from me into their own people. Like motherhood is one of the most beautiful things.*



**12. What do you fear?**

*The possibility of losing memories.*

**13. Why?**

*Since the Alzheimer's runs on both sides, genetically.... I don't want to say it, but you get what I'm saying. So, I just live the healthiest and most active life I can so that my brain just...I dunno...would be used enough to surpass it?*

**14. What have you learned from the elders around you?**

*That you are your choices.*

**15. What advice from an elder has impacted you the most?**

*My Nana used to tell me all the time to do whatever made me happy, no matter what someone. That and always being your own person, because I've always gone against the grain. Being a Black woman is the best thing to be, and I wouldn't want to be anything else, but it comes with its own package of things to deal with in this world.*

**16. What are three things that you think happen in the typical day of a sixty year old Black woman?**

*Wakes up at about 8 or 9 am. Makes breakfast for herself and her partner or just herself, washes clothes, goes for a walk outside, reads or does some sort of crossword, talks on the phone to family or church friends, watches tv, has to watch Wheel of Fortune at 6. Haha. Makes dinner, watches more tv, goes to sleep.*

**17. In the typical day of a 60 year old White man?**

*Wakes up, has someone make his food for him, watches tv, drinks, more tv?*

**18. How do you stay involved with the elders around you?**

*I call them more often now. My nana and I used to write letters.*

**19. Has this interview changed the way you think about age at all?**

*It definitely has made me more aware of my actions toward them.*

**20. If you could choose one word to describe this experience what would it be?**

*Fun!*

# Unwell: A Study on the Perception of Black and Aged Bodies

By McKenzie Clarke  
Spring 2020

As the world navigates the unprecedented spread of a new, supposedly “non-discriminating” disease, it proves worthwhile to mine those instances throughout history in which epidemics and/or pandemics have shaken the world (or portions of it) to excavate what lessons they may harbor for this present moment. This research explores the various ways in which Black people’s racialized bodies have invariably been viewed as epidemics unto themselves, as well as how narratives of disease are imposed onto aged Black bodies.

Historically, African-Americans have had to contend with efforts by their government to ethnically cleanse their communities or for their bodies to be used as experiments. More specifically, this research will attempt to provide an emphasized focus on the way the Black woman’s body and, by extension, the aged Black woman’s body, has been forced into an imaginary of disease.

To start, it is helpful to look for those instances of rhetoric that influence how the Black body has been perceived historically, so as to more keenly analyze how it continues to be viewed currently. Former President Thomas Jefferson, who held slaves, was quite clear in describing the Black body in racialized terms. “Besides those of colour, figure, and hair, there are other physical distinctions proving a difference of race. They have less hair on the face and body. They secrete less by the kidneys, and more by the glands of the skin, which gives them a very strong and disagreeable odour. This transpiration renders them more tolerant of heat... [and] they seem to require less sleep.” (Jefferson 7).

This rhetoric of the “other,” that the Black body is heartier and more resistant to any kind of deterioration, encouraged white slave owners to regard Black bodies as inherently “diseased” and “foreign” vessels, a perception that was useful in ensuring that issues of morality would not cloud the “need” to build the American economy on the backs of other human beings. Language surrounding the supposed “superhuman” quality of the Black body is particularly dangerous, however, for the way in which it veils the nature of the health issues that harm the African-American community today. Pointing my analysis toward this current historical moment, I will focus specifically on how such language continues to influence the way in which Black bodies, and aged Black bodies, are perceived.

The coronavirus, also referred to as covid-19, has inspired similar rhetoric that the Black community holds a unique immunity to the virus. Not at all rooted in evidence, language like this has led to the existence of statistics in which predominantly Black communities suffer more harshly in comparison to others. The Huffpost reported that many covid-19 cases “are heavily concentrated in the Black population. In Chicago, 23% of residents are Black but account for 58% of COVID-19 deaths. In Milwaukee, Blacks are roughly one-quarter of the population and roughly one-half of COVID-19 cases. In Louisiana, 7 out of 10 COVID-19 victims have been Black. Coronavirus hot spots include a number of cities

with large nonwhite populations, such as New Orleans and Detroit, as well as the majority-minority New York City boroughs of Queens and the Bronx” (Ignaczak and Hobbes).

Data like this is being analyzed intersectionally, but experiences like those of Zoe Mungin, a 30-year-old student who passed away due to coronavirus after being turned away twice for testing, reveal that the insensitivity embedded within Jefferson’s statements are still ingrained into the logic of the healthcare system (Robinson). And it is Black aged bodies in particular that tend to suffer more acutely.

One might take the example of Deborah Gatewood, a 63-year-old healthcare worker from Michigan who passed away from complications due to Covid-19 in late April. Gatewood was turned away four times for coronavirus testing from the hospital at which she had worked for 31 years. “The next day, Gatewood went back to the hospital to be tested. They acknowledged she was showing signs of COVID-19, her daughter told Fox 2 news, but they still told her to take cough medicine and rest” (Robinson). Gatewood’s experience demonstrates the pervasiveness and unfortunate effectiveness of such myths as “Black people cannot get/do not suffer as heavily from covid-19,” and her repeated dismissal from the place to which she dedicated most of her working life also underscores Jefferson’s seemingly outdated statements about the Black body’s “otherness.” According to such logic, it seems to follow that people like Gatewood or Mungin “require less” healthcare for ailments against which they are supposedly reinforced.

In the SIS anthology—*Their Memories, Our Treasure*—community activist Faye Bush, who has dedicated her life to health issues and environmental injustice practices that plague her community, describes how many of the problems that come to visit the African-American community are dismissed by others, mainly by white people, who argue that Blacks are at fault for their circumstances. “They said the problem was our lifestyle . . . but some of the people who died didn’t even have a lifestyle, you know, because some of them died when they were young...(Bush 66). Although referring to how “they” attempt to justify how harmful environmental injustice practices cause severe health complications to both young and old in the Black community, her words still point one to the unfortunate reality in which “they” disadvantage Black bodies with the perception that they are both more vulnerable to maladies and yet have otherworldly capacities with which to combat them. Employ an intersectional perspective, and one might understand how Black women’s bodies and, in particular, Black women’s aged bodies, become figures of both the supernatural and the diseased.

Going further, by examining the language of Spelman students to the aging process, one can gain insight into how aging has been viewed as a difficult, undesirable process. When asked what image the phrase “old woman” evokes in the imagination, one participant said, “A woman in a wheelchair, wrinkles, and a shaky voice.” The participant’s response suggests that aging naturally involves an unavoidable onslaught of vulnerabilities and, by extension, their comments also signify that they are in some fashion victim to similar rhetoric surrounding aging that surrounded Black people during slavery — that there is an othered, diseased quality to the aging process. Ideas like these can impact empathy and attention given to elders (The same participant shared that they do not interact with elders on a daily basis), and they inevitably contribute to harmful perspectives like “Old people are more susceptible to Covid-19,”

even as growing research begins to suggest otherwise. Other responses like, “I do, at some sense, fear growing old because, on the one hand, I want to experience life to the fullest, but also I don’t want to grow old and look back like I have missed things.”

Historically, Black women’s bodies have taken a hit, from the mistreatments of such scientists as J.Marion Sims, to the pervasive idea of the “matriarchal,” and with the sterilization projects of the 1970, all events or instances of language that cast them into a simultaneously “strong, yet dangerous” imaginary. However, despite some of the aforementioned responses, there are still more nuanced, productive ideas amidst the population of Spelman women. Another participant, when asked the same question about what images come to mind when one hears the term “old woman,” said “Cicely Tyson.” Attempting to communicate ideas about grace and strength, said participant also fully embraced aging, saying that “I can’t wait to get older!” because she perceived other modes of power, such as self-confidence and freedom—as being associated with the aged Black body.

Although occupying a unique historical moment, remaining vigilant towards identifying and excavating those instances of rhetoric that prove harmful and dismissive will aid in the quest towards equality, as treatments of Black bodies during the pandemic prove to make it more discriminating than it first appeared.

# Lost Light

By Kayla Shaw  
Spring 2020

There is sadness in her eyes. Her voice quivers as she speaks. She sleeps to escape reality. As the coronavirus sweeps the nation, she is depressed. She does not get up in the morning. She does not want to look outside. She wants her room dark and the door closed to discourage visitors. The lady who was once an independent force to be reckoned with has become almost childlike. She does eat. She does not want to take her medicine. She does not get out of bed unless she needs to go to the bathroom, and she does not comb her hair. The Josephine that I have had the privilege of knowing my entire life, the woman I called the Queen of Perfume, The Hair Dye Goddess, and “Grandma,” has no desire to be the independent woman I worshipped.

My Grandma, JoJo Jam, has faced cancer three times in the past four years and has had multiple surgeries for various forms of cancer. Although she has been through so much, she maintained her independence until the recent discovery of cancer. It was only then that she began to live with us. She was doing well until she learned that the chemotherapy did not completely remove the cancer. Although terrified, she was brave enough to say yes to a new treatment plan.

News about the coronavirus and its effect on elders have encouraged my grandmother to watch the news more and to open the door to her room and invite us in to talk to her. She calls us “my guests” when we enter the room. My aunt and cousins would come over with masks and sit and talk with her for hours. It seemed that the light was slowly returning to grandmother’s eyes.

She would walk her “guests” to the front door and wave as we drove off. When I asked her what caused the dramatic change in her behavior, she said, “Seeing all the old people on television waving to their kids and families through a glass just didn’t sit well with me when I got y’all here. I wanna get better.” The light is slowly returning to her eyes. She is becoming her old self again. My Queen of Perfume. The Hair Dye Goddess. My Grandmother.

# Hall Street

By Danielle Mitchell  
Spring 2020

As I walk down my driveway, I see her sitting and soaking in the sun. Relaxed. Although there is pollen in the air, she seems perfectly comfortable as if there were some protective shield around her. The tall trees provide shade so that the sun is not overbearing, but more like a caress of the skin. Although I have not learned her name, I have missed her. When winter came, she went inside, leaving her usual post on the porch. Now that spring has returned, she has returned to her yellow and faded white striped lawn chair. She is wearing a white t-shirt that seems too big on purpose. The kind of too big you wear around the house, but it does not get in the way when you are washing dishes. She wears capris and sandals. Her hair is braided in two pigtails that, by the look of them, had been in for a day or two. Her appearance brings me joy because it just feels right. Coming out of the house and surrounded by green, to the sight of her sitting comfortably, was like attending an event on Groundhog Day. When I saw her, I knew that new beginnings were coming.

# Excerpts of Interviews with Peers

By Danielle Mitchell  
Spring 2020

*Name of the narrator is not included in this abridged transcription.*

## Peer Interview 2

### 1. Let us begin. Tell me your name and where you were born.

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I was born and raised in Greenwood, Mississippi. I am twenty years old.

### 2. I'd like you to describe the elder community where you grew up.

The elder community is pretty large in my town. It's a slow town with quite a few nursing homes and at-home care organizations that assist older people. I would say that the majority of people you will see around town are elderly.

### 3. Who is the eldest person in your family?

My grandmother on my dad's side is the eldest living generation in my family. She's eighty years old and has beaten type 2 diabetes but still has some complications. So, she goes to rehab to keep her body moving and her health is checked regularly.

### 4. What three words come to mind when you think about age?

Experience. Decision Making. Health.

### 5. Three words about aging?

Health. Physical Activity. Comfort.

### 6. What is your perception of the elder community in Black America?

In the Black community? In the Black community, elders are looked at as a jewel to most because of what they have to say to those who sit on the porch and talk to them for a minute or two. But there are still some elderly folks who get treated pretty poorly in

the Black community because of the circumstances they may be in at the moment (drugs, homeless, disabled).

**7. Define ageism. In your own words.**

I would say ageism is simply discrimination against a certain group of people due to their age and their health.

**8. Can you think of any examples of ageist behavior that you might be guilty of?**

I tend to sometimes talk in a “baby” voice or take some liberties away from my grandmother to make it easier for her to do things. However, I always saw it as being helpful and considerate, where she sometimes feels like a child again.

**9. What are some of the social changes of aging?**

I see children, housing, employment, health care.

**10. Any mental changes?**

Maybe memory troubles, different phrases and lingos that might be confusing.

**11. Any other changes?**

Slower metabolism, lighter appetite, maybe more bathroom breaks, and other changes that are common for older people who aren't in their “prime.”

**12. Do you think of aging as a positive or a negative experience?**

Positive!

**13. Why?**



With aging comes many opportunities to change the outcome you had and make it better for those who are younger. To me, that's the most humbling and worthwhile thing about aging.

**14. What do you look forward when you think about getting older?**

CHILDREN!

**15. What do you fear?**

Not leaving a legacy for my off springs.

**16. Why?**

It would hurt my heart knowing that in this world as a member of the Black community, that I do not have any wealth or assets for my children and my children's children because that increases the burden put on from generation to generation.

**17. What have you learned from the elders around you?**

The power of patience and a good listening ear.

**18. What advice about life has impacted you the most?**

A wise man learns from the mistakes of others; a fool learns from his own.

**19. If you could choose one word to describe this experience, what would it be?**

Humbling.

**Peer Interview 3**

- 1. Please tell me your name, your age, where you were born, and whatever else you would like to share.**

My name is \_\_. I was born in Silver Spring, Maryland and lived there until I was about 10 years old. I moved to Concord, North Carolina with my mom and have lived there since I came to Atlanta for college.

**2. Tell me about the elder community where you live in Silver Spring.**

Where I'm from, in Maryland, the elderly are very prominent, a lot of old money. It's a good mix of races but Black and White are the big two, and they're equally financially prosperous. Some of them are warm and friendly. Will wave you walk past and even lend a story if you ask, I love that. In North Carolina however, where we live is mostly white and suburban. There's a bit more racism here, and a little less friendliness. You feel targeted as a young Black person here more often times than not.

**3. Tell me about the eldest person in your family.**

That would be my grandmother. She lives with us now. She developed early Alzheimer's I don't know maybe like two years ago. She lived back home by herself, but when it got a little bit too much for her to do so, we decided it was time. She's very old Black money, very uppity and old school on things like tattoos and music and social issues. We're not as close as I'd like us to be, but we're also drastically different. I think this was a lesson for me to learn.

**4. What are three words that come to mind when you think about age?**

Relative, Number, Old.

**5. Aging?**

Wisdom, confusing, responsibility.

**6. What is your perception of the elder community in America?**

Oh, I feel like that our elders are respected, but not at as high a caliber as they are in other regions and countries. I feel like more often times than not, not always, but that elders in America are unfortunately and sadly looked at as more of a . . . . Yikes. I hate to say this . . . more of a burden and hardship.

**7. In the Black community?**

I do feel like the Black community respects our elders. I feel there are two sides. First: The elders you really respect who pass down stories, who give knowledge to the youth, very Grandma's handsque. Then there's the other elder in the community that kind of looks down on the youth, especially my generation. Like, they don't necessarily respect our independence or our choices and they're very vocal about it.

**8. In your own words, define ageism.**

Being negative or cruel towards someone at a varying age than you just because you guys differ in age.

**9. Can you think of any examples of ageist behavior that you might be guilty of?**

I'll admit sometimes I don't take into account what they had to see and endure to get to where they are today, so their opinions, though sometimes a bit \* are really just how they were conditioned to be. I also talk in a voice I would talk to a baby in, and they've seen more than me so why am I doing that?

**10. Do you think of aging as a positive or negative experience?**

Positive.

**11. Why?**

Always more to learn, you can also do so many more things, like travel alone or have your own place. Independence is the word I was looking for there, just being whole to be an adult and be independent is a blessing, no matter the trials and tribulations of adulthood.

**12. What do you look forward to as you become older?**

I look forward to the life that I'm manifesting and putting in work towards. I look forward to having a family of my own, with children to teach and watch grow and blossom from me into their own people. Like motherhood. That is one of the most beautiful things.

**13. What do you fear about become older?**

The possibility of losing memories.

**14. Why?**

Since the Alzheimer's runs on both sides, genetically—I don't want to say it—but you get what I'm saying. So, I just live the healthiest and most active life I can so my brain just. . . I don't know . . . would be used enough not to get Alzheimer.

**15. What have you learned from the elders around you?**

That you are your choices.

**16. What advice has impacted you the most?**

My Nana used to tell me all the time to do whatever made me happy, no matter what someone else wanted me to do. That and always being your own person because I've always gone against the grain. Being a Black woman is the best thing to be, and I wouldn't want to be anything else, but it comes with its own package of things to deal with in this world.

**17. How do you stay involved with the elders around you?**

I call them more often now. My Nana and I used to write letters.

**18. Has this interview changed the way you think about age at all?**

It definitely has made me more aware of my actions towards them.

**19. If you could choose one word to describe this experience what would it be?**

Fun!

# The Forgotten

By Kayla Shaw  
Spring 2020

Each time I enter the Grandview Cancer Center, I see African American women and African American men, all of them elders, sitting alone and waiting to be called for their appointment. Grandview is where I take my grandmother. Each time we are at the Center, another patient [I shall call her Ms. Russell ]catches my attention as my grandmother walks to the chair a few feet away. She begins to ask my grandmother the typical questions that are asked in this center:

“How old are you?”

“What kind of day did you have?”

and

“How long have you been on chemo?”

My grandmother knows that Ms. Russell has three adult children who live not too far from her, but they do not visit her often. However, she tells my grandmother about a great team of family supporters who are always there for her. I wonder who brought her to the Center today. I overhear her telling my grandmother about transportation from the nursing home where she lives.

As my grandmother and Ms. Russell prepare for the chemo, I think about similarities they share. Both are retired nurses, and both have cancer. I see the way their shoulders hunch and I think about how, like so many Black women, they carried so much on their shoulders. I hear the way they speak in that old country slang and how both of them are finding the strength to beat cancer. I listen with respect as my grandmother and Ms. Russell talk about past struggles of nursing and parenting.

# In the Garden

By Danielle Mitchell  
Spring 2020

Brown hands. Soft and smooth like the icing on a maple donut. Slow, but steady sure to handle every leaf with care, tearing away any weed that would prevent a young one from growth. She is focused. As she works, I am hypnotized. I watch her and after she finishes each pot, I find myself still seeking more knowledge. She has put on gloves now. The lavender base contrasts well with the flower patterns. The pastels improve my mood. Watching her open the bag of soil, I am filled with a sense of child-like wonder. My mind automatically shifts to digging in the dirt and seeing fingernails messy with mud.

She is anything but messy as she begins to rearrange the dirt. She digs out a spot just the right size with her shovel and lightly places the sprout in the dirt. Carefully, she covers each root and, pats it all in place when she is finished. I think that is my favorite part. For some reason, it is simple and seems important as if the dirt being patted into place secures the plant's future.

We have been here for about an hour and we have exchanged only a few words. As she removes her gloves and moves to the next pot, I am aware of the silence. It feels natural as if all that needs to be said is being planted along with the sprout. Left in the earth to grow, Grandma's love blooms at just the right time. A few slices of refreshment when I need it the most.