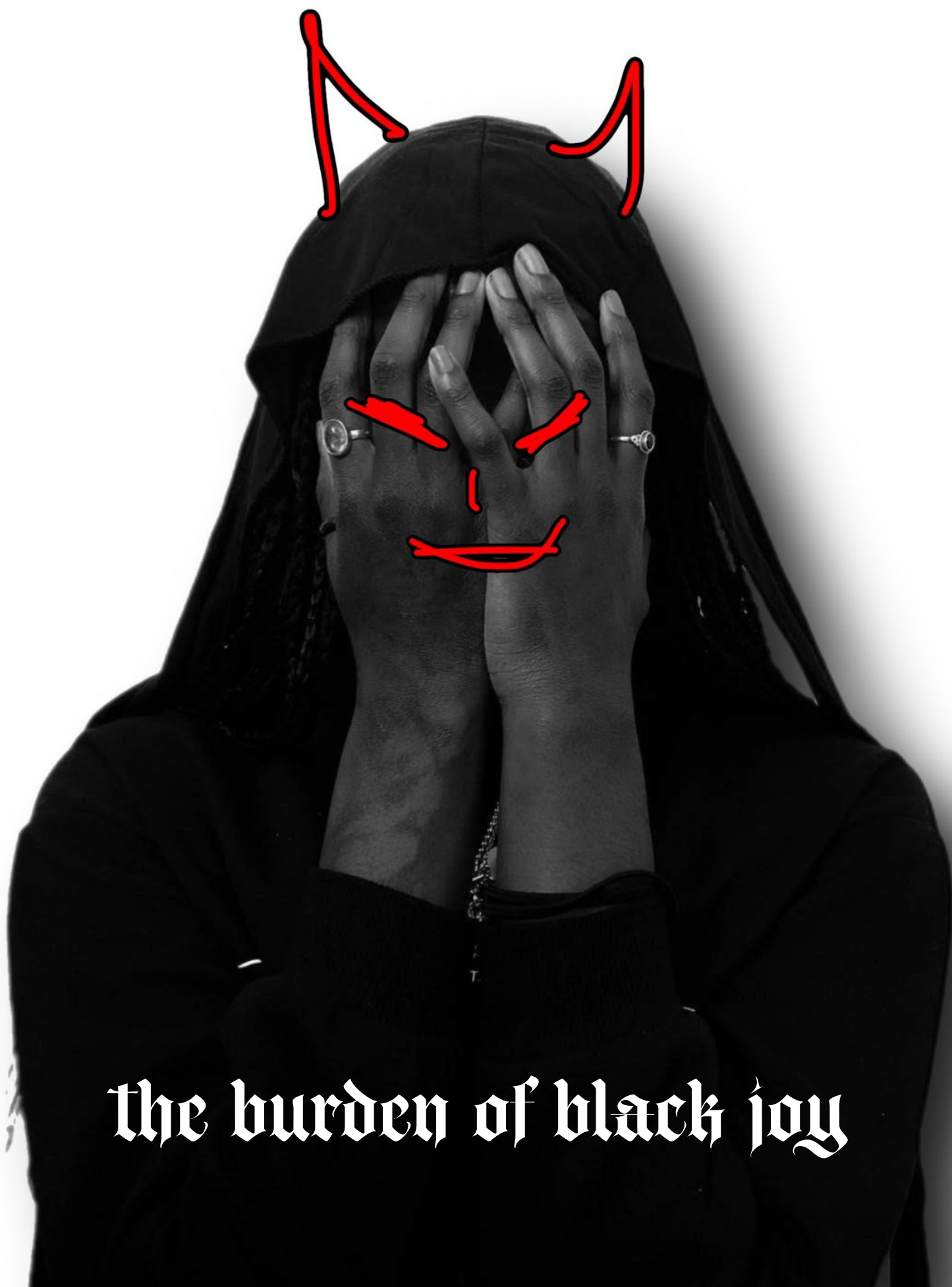




the burden of black joy

I get it.

I understand.

I know the grief that comes with having to witness the consistent portrayal of Black pain; of Black death. I know how one dimensional my existence as a Black person is and how this dimension serves the incessant appetite of whiteness. I've witnessed the way black pain feeds this empire. How Black Death keeps the conscious of a twisted global capitalist agenda grounded; how Black Death keeps it inspired.

I know the negrophilic imagination of the non-black and how this imagination is rooted in the performance of Blackness as a caricature. I know the way the non-black agenda finds momentum in its resented hyper-visibility of Black suffering; all while simultaneously performing an allegiance to Blackness in order to benefit from both its political and social capital. I've experienced many institutions' reliance on Black suffering. How they wrap this suffering in a shiny red bow, box it, and package it for consumption in order to advance their neoliberal agendas.

I've witnessed the psychological turmoil that the characteristics of the exploitation and consumption of Black suffering creates; I witness it everyday. I know that in the face of pain, suffering, and death, all of the beauty and multifacetedness of the Black psyche is forced and trapped into a state of double consciousness. I've explored the idea of what it means for me to exist in a state of double consciousness. While, yes, W.E.B Du Bois described this experience so effectively—the idea that one of the negro's burdens is having to see themselves and experience life in this settler colony through the anti-black imaginations of those who pity Blackness—there seems to be another state of conscious I'm being asked to perform as a Black person. This triple consciousness consists of what I call "the burden of Black joy".

It is a terrifying sensation, this triple consciousness, the sense of having to violently self-regulate in the midst of anti-black violence and being denied the right to exist in a multifaceted and fluid state of being in response to this violence. The three-ness, an American, a Black person, a Joyful Black person living in America. The three souls, the three thoughts, the three temporalities. The third, in response to the unconsenting colliding of the two. The third being paraded as a state of resistance in response to this collision. The third being a trap. An armor in the face of psychological terror; an understandable one. But one that punishes Black hopelessness and despair. One that simplifies and commodifies Black expression and vilifies Black rage.

The burden of Black Joy is this...Black people are told that our existence is resistance; that couldn't be more false than flat earth itself. This fungible existence of Blackness is the functional root of our global economy. Black existence is not inherently resistant to this oppression, it's foundational.

Of course I have seen and known the utility of Joy. Joy is a verb, a discipline, an undoing. Therefore, my struggle against the state is Black Joy. My righteous rage at the systemic oppression and political repression of Blackness is joy. The way my despair moves me to question the selling of my labour, leading me down a more radical relationship to employment is Black Joy. The enduring anger & grief of Black existence and my sharing of this grief in community...from fuck the police lyrics to sitting on the porch crying to the sound of southern cicadas is Black Joy.

What is not Black Joy is the co-optation of a genuine and fluid emotion for the purpose of regulating the way the Black masses respond to their suffering in order to sell a pacified expression of existence as one Black people should strive for. Cupid shuffling in the middle of bloodstained streets with agents of the state during a Black Lives Matter protest is not Black Joy. Choosing to rid myself of despair for a more seemingly healthy emotion of hope in movement spaces in order to be emotionally productive enough to be radicalized is not Black Joy. My despair has radicalized me. My despair is my hope. These spaces must make room for me to feel the weight of the ever-flowing range of emotions that my arrival to my Black existence brings.

The burden of Black joy is this.... hashtag Black joy is nothing more than the political weaponization of Black joy as a performance for the non-black gaze. For the all consuming, covetous capitalist gaze. My defiance to this capitalist gaze is my refusal.

Black refusal is Black joy. Therefore Black joy should not celebrate and make space for the assimilation and celebration of a brand of Blackness that caters to, and/or builds an allegiance with capitalism.

The burden of Black Joy is this....all aspects of my arrival are necessary, whether I arrive to a strategic understanding of my suffering with rage or joy. Grief or apathy...my expression of the understanding of this suffering requires me to be fully present with the way my body and psyche reacts to it. And that reaction cannot always be joy.

The burden of Black joy is this....It is often a political performance for the non-Black gaze of my pleasure in response the narrative of Black pain, trauma, and death. My ability to experience pleasure in spite of trauma, oppression, and marginalization should not be branded and romanticized as Black joy. I cannot turn on Black joy like a light switch. I cannot suddenly shift from grief to joy. What I can do is house both deep and necessary emotions simultaneously in my body and my psyche.

When I dance I feel the joy in my legs and the grief in my heart. When I rest I feel the calm in my spirit and the vigilance in my feet. When I walk past a cop I feel the confidence in my fist, the anger in my throat, and the fear in my bones.

The response to the persistent narrative on and display of Black suffering, trauma, and death should not be Black joy. It's as equally dehumanizing. The response should be the focus on the multidimensionality of the Black psyche and the versatility of response by Black people to Black suffering.

You know this already...Black people are not a monolith, and neither is Black Joy. Black joy is unspecified. Forever fluctuating. Varying and sometimes inscrutable.

The burden of Black Joy is this...a constant expectation of joy as the healthiest emotion i can house in the midst of unbearable suffering.

I choose Black rage...Black Rage is Black Joy.