

Black Joy

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SPEAKERS

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Ebonee Williams 00:02

Welcome to Triton Tools and Tidbits. I am your host, Dr. Ebonee Williams. This week our episode is on Black joy, featuring several components of Blackness in our community - current students, current administrator-slash-staff members, as well as alumni. We're gonna have a good time today and I hope you enjoy listening to what Black joy looks like. Today I'm joined by Porsia Curry. Porsia, will you introduce yourself?

Porsia Curry 00:30

Absolutely. Hello, everyone. I'm Porsia Curry - pronoun she/her/hers. I am an alumnus of UC San Diego. Go Tritons! And I currently direct the Black Resource Center.

Ebonee Williams 00:44

Thank you, Porsia. From there, I'd like to jump to Malia Henry.

Malia Henry 00:51

Yes, that's me. My name is Malia Henry. I'm an undergraduate at UCSD majoring in International Studies Economics, also minoring in African-American studies, so I'm really happy to be here. Also, my pronouns are she/her/hers.

Ebonee Williams 01:07

Excellent. So good to meet you for the first time today. From there, I'm gonna go to [?].

Fnann Keflezighi 01:13

Hi, everyone, Fnann Keflezighi. She/her/hers. Also, a UCSD alum - Marshall College, and Ethnic Studies Department, which I think take a lot of pride in. And I am a staff on campus as well. Thank you.

Porsia Curry 01:30

I forgot to mention that I'm a Sixth College alum. We got to turn up for Sixth College. Culture, Art and Technology.

Ebonee Williams 01:38

Here we go with the battle-of-the-colleges - part of UCSD campus and yes, the Black people play this game as well, okay? I think the shirts would be banging if they let us design them, but you know we'll take over the logos and everything. Next, I'd like Sam Tshibangu to introduce himself.

Sam Tshibangu 02:00

Hi everyone. My name is Sam Tshibangu, I am a fourth-year graduating transfer student on-campus. Marshall College student as well. And my major is real estate development. And I'm also the tech producer on this podcast.

Ebonee Williams 02:15

Okay, tech producer! No, I appreciate it. You being around, it's been amazing to find the hidden talents of our UC San Diego students. It brings me even more joy that you're a Black person who plays in this area of music and sound, so you've been bringing us new rhythms in the podcast. I think at some point, we'll settle on one, but you said you're gonna design me one. So, we'll see what that looks like. So, the first question I'd like to ask everyone here is what joy have you experienced by being connected to UC San Diego? Remember, we're on Black joy - you can chime in as you please. There's no order. Do like we do at the Thanksgiving table, please. Jump on in.

Malia Henry 03:02

I'll go first. So, I actually left UCSD and had to come back - and I think it's really hilarious. Because when I came back, my dad was telling me "You better find your community." There was no option, no choice, no nothing. So, we actually came on campus - both he and I - and we went to a BRC-BSU event. And it was really dope because I got to see not only the people in the community but how they acted. It was very pro-Black, it was very hype. Talking to like people like Porsia, and just seeing her not only in her element as director but also as a human being - that was really joyful for me.

Fnann Keflezighi 03:44

I love that. And I think similarly - I think the parts of my connection to UC San Diego that I feel like - it's something that other people are learning now, but just the ways that Black people have always had to hold space for multiple aspects of ourselves all the time, right? Like the joy and the excellence, the critique and the hype - making space for all of that. And I feel like that was very present in my experience. And I feel like as a post-college person, that's a life lesson I hold today that I feel like colleagues and friends are [only] coming to now. And I feel so thankful that we could turn up, and also do activism. That we've made space for that always. Yeah.

Sam Tshibangu 04:33

I can say that one of the many joys I've experienced being a black person on the UCSD campus is the fact that we actually have a resource - that we actually have the space to go to where we can be ourselves. You know, we have a place that we can commune. We've got a place so we don't have to worry about how people are gonna look at us. You know, we were just being ourselves - just like [?] said, and Malia said - unapologetically Black. There's not going to be any side-eyes, you know, there's not going to be any judgment. We have such a diverse community already in the world - but that gets even more diverse within our own space at UCSD. There are so many different points of view, so many

different things - culture - which we incorporate within our spaces on a daily basis. So that's a big joy for me.

Porsia Curry 05:29

Can I talk about two joys? Is that all right? Is that okay?

Ebonee Williams 05:33

Porsia you can have two joys.

Porsia Curry 05:38

All right, thanks.

Ebonee Williams 05:39

You were a student, and now you're staff. [So, you can have two joys.]

Porsia Curry 05:41

Okay. I want to talk about my staff joy first. I just - honestly, the fact that I am able to do dream work at UC San Diego - working at the Black Resource Center, supporting Black students, being the person that I needed when I was a student at UC San Diego - just fills me with so much joy. It is hard work, but it's also heart work. It brings a lot of joy and fulfillment to my life. I'm definitely grateful and blessed to be able to work in the type of work that I do, and with the people that I do. So certainly, my first joy. My second joy from my students' pool - so back in the olden days, Sun God Festival used to be lit. Back in the olden days, Sun God Festival was all over campus. I'm really sorry for the people who are students now because Sun God used to seep through all of the different crevices of campus. But I'll never forget my first year when I really didn't even know what Sun God was, and I showed up on a beautiful day in May, and someone had put bubble bath in the fountain. People were in their scuba gear, there were DJs on library walk, we were breaking it all down to the ground - and it was just the best day, and I just remember being so happy and so excited about how every Triton that day came together in celebration. So - one of the joys of my experience as an undergraduate student.

Ebonee Williams 07:50

I'm so happy you shared that. I'm laughing. As someone who has only been a staff at UC San Diego, I've heard that when you're young, not the olden days - the olden days, San Diego city used to show up to campus and it was held under the actual Sun God, and it was a lawn concert - but as a person who's never been a student here, Sun God is a little traumatizing because no one tells you what is about to happen. I used to try to take days off on the day y'all were having Sun God to not be a part of that experience - just to add a little something to the conversation. So, my next question for everyone is - what does Black joy mean to you? You can think about it as a whole, you can think about what it means right now with sustaining us and creating the resilience that we have - but really Black joy.

Malia Henry 08:46

Peace, tranquility, family, friends, community. Plant shopping on a random Sunday. Sunny walks - literally it means so much because I feel like our experience is completely different. But especially now - what do they call it? We're in a panoramic. So, I'm out here trying to find new things to do so that I'm not born in the house. Trying to find new ways to not be bored or have that Zoom fatigue? So yeah, I

definitely know the community, and being outside has helped me a lot, to see what Black joy means to me.

Porsia Curry 09:34

I'm not sure that I can define Black joy, but I am certainly someone who is dependent on humor. I love to laugh. I love to laugh unabashedly. And I love spaces like this, honestly - where we can breathe, and we can be ourselves, and we can be amongst each other and just enjoy ourselves, not have to worry about all of the external factors that may be impacting us. Whatever happened earlier in the day, whatever happened earlier this week, that might be impacting our energy, our spirit. But just being with people that you love, and enjoying yourselves - that, to me, is Black joy. Let me add - without concern for the external eye. Folks looking and thinking and judging and wondering. Us just being allowed to be us.

Porsia Curry 10:41

Yeah, that's beautiful - like outside of the gaze, you know? I think too, for me, it's like the embodiment of radical hope. That the work and all of that will continue. I know it will change, and therefore I'm just going to be present in this moment, in my joy. I think that that's been something that I've leaned on a lot at this moment. Black people have always found ways to stay joyful, despite the circumstances. So that is how we sustain it. I'm a plant mom - proud plant mom, so I feel you, Maria. Just finding time to laugh, and to hug, and to listen to music, and to stay unmuted on a Zoom call. I think all of those things are how we bring Black culture and Black presence and identity and voice into a space - and that's cool.

Ebonee Williams 11:34

Those are so amazing. Hearing just - regular walks, and just normal life - I'm hearing be present. But I'm also hearing one of the skills that I think Black people have, which is to be able to separate and silo some of their lives in order to have joy so that you can be in a space of not feeling the gaze. And it's just so funny - we find a group of people coming together, and you just want to be around them. So that's just fun. But - my brother, my brother - I need a brother's perspective on this Black joy.

Sam Tshibangu 12:11

Well, what does Black joy mean to me, correct? All right. So, to me, Black joy, means the Black person being able to feel everything. Black joy means the Black person being able to - again, like we've said before - unapologetically be themselves, which we so often get criticized for, which is why it's so important to have Black spaces. Black joy is - everybody else put it so well - being able to laugh, being able to feel, being able to go through our days. But it's also being able to ground ourselves as well in our way. Because, culturally speaking, we have a very extensive culture - we have very different cultures. So, our healing, you know, our grounding - may look different - a lot different to a lot of different people who aren't familiar with our community or our community and how diverse our communities are. So Black joy is everything. The comedy. Black Twitter, basically at least getting you through part of everyday. You know, you can always depend on that for a laugh or something. And just being able to embrace each other. It sucks that we're not able to be around each other - physically - at the moment. But because we can still interact with each other on the net, and even on Zoom calls - if we just want to have a Zoom where we just want to see each other's faces, you know, that brings joy too.

Ebonee Williams 14:00

I appreciate it. It is absolutely beautiful. And I appreciate all of what we've heard so far. And Black joy - I feel joy is just listening to y'all. This episode is about past, present and future - and so, moving into the future - Afrofuturism - what does our Black future at UC San Diego look like? I can add more to it, but I don't want to bias your answers, so I'm gonna leave it right there. Who wants to go first?

Malia Henry 14:34

I'll go ahead.

Ebonee Williams 14:36

Oh, this one - she's not shy at all!

Malia Henry 14:37

I'm not shy. Okay, so speaking of Black future, I'll point to something that I did recently have had the great joy to be a part of - African Black Coalition actually did a conference. So that was on a whole new platform. We said "We tired of Zoom, we tired of having y'all not show y'all's faces, we want engagement." So that was really cool to see. Because you're able to see - what does virtual programming look like? How do you build community, even if we're not able to be together? So just seeing that social aspect, that networking, that education, those speakers, that comedy - everything that we've already been talking about - Black joy, just seeing that virtually has been great. And then also speaking about Black Twitter, I feel like social media will always play a part in the future. I tried to take a walk down White Twitter the other day - we have completely different topics, we have completely different areas of joy. So that was a time I'd be like, "Well, I'm really happy to be Black, because this stuff is really funny to me." And it applies to me as well.

Porsia Curry 15:45

Thank you for that. I'm gonna just cheat and add that the ABC conference had over 800 people register - that had - was it 11, or 12 countries represented?

Ebonee Williams 15:59

12 countries represented. And not that people were in America, in these countries - we hit three continents. So just phenomenal work by phenomenal people. And that's one of the great things about UC San Diego and being at this space - I'm not giving UC San Diego, the credit of your blackness, what I'm saying is by you choosing to be here and working with the other individuals here, there's great things that have been able to happen. You both were dedicated - and everyone was dedicated to getting their education advanced. And then they all chose this location and then found a community and made an impact in that way. It was just beautiful.

Ebonee Williams 16:36

So - back to the future - what does a Black future look like at UC San Diego? Who's going next? I know who I want to call, but I don't want to do that to you. I'm gonna try to respect those who are choosing.

Porsia Curry 16:55

I'll go next. You know folks are uncomfortable with awkward silences.

Ebonee Williams 17:05

No awkward silences.

Porsia Curry 17:07

I'm working on it. But I have not developed that skill yet. Oh, gosh. Okay, what is our Black future? What does our Black future at UC San Diego look like? I think as someone who is involved in the work of building a Black future at UC San Diego so integrally, this is a really exciting question to me. I think that - understandably and rightfully - our Black students and Black staff, our Black community at UC San Diego has been critical and honest about our experience on campus. So, the idea that we get to talk about what we imagined as our Black future is, again, exciting. I think that our Black future includes a place where we can be ourselves - in this space, on this campus. We can be students - just regular students - or we can be activists, or we can be athletes, or we can do whatever it is that we want to do, right? I think - whatever affiliate status you are - when you're on campus, you have an idea of what that's going to look like, and how you'll be able to navigate campus. And I think we should be able to do that. We should be able to live out whatever that joy looks like.

Ebonee Williams 18:41

You mean we should be able to skateboard and snowboard and hike...?

Porsia Curry 18:46

And surf, and play kickball on a Tuesday, if that's what you'd prefer to do.

Ebonee Williams 18:52

I do like the ocean!

Porsia Curry 18:53

I do - I swim. But yes - go to class, and study Black scholars, and really feel integrated and appreciated, and as true parts of this UC San Diego community. We are scholars. We are brilliant. We are bright. We have so much to offer - we always have and we always will. But I think our Black future is when everybody recognizes that, and we can again, be free, be ourselves, be Black, in this UC San Diego.

Ebonee Williams 19:39

I really appreciate your answer speaking to the diversity of who we are and the way that it's been framed. We're not a monolith. Having in the future be colorful for all the pieces that we are - some of us are loud, some of us are extremely quiet. But that's really great to see a future at UC San Diego where all of that is good. All of that is a part of it. It is okay.

Sam Tshibangu 20:11

Well, think of another part of what our Black future UCSD would look like is more exposure to Black people on campus - because one of the objectives that is trying to be worked on right now is growing the Black population on campus. And you can't really have a Black future if you don't have growth within the Black population. So, allowing more Black people to be on campus and become more comfortable around each other will help forge that beautiful Black future that we're looking for. And our having a place where Black people can progress with the times on campus. That's basically what I see our Black future looking like at UCSD.

Ebonee Williams 21:02

All right, well - last but not least.

Malia Henry 21:07

Yeah, I was gonna share - our Black future at UCSD also looks like honoring all the requests, and work, and progress of the past. And then acknowledging that in the future, we will listen to Black people the first time. And I think something that I see in our future is honoring our voice the first time we say it - our truth. That's something I have hope in - in where we're going and how we get there. And I think the other thing is that, maybe for survival's sake, we have kept our excellence with each other and have honored it with one another. I just wish - in the Black future for UCSD - that other people get to experience us. It impacts the entire community. And I hope that our Black future includes people leaning into our excellence, and wanting to be in community and in collective with our excellence. I'm excited to be a part of that future.

Ebonee Williams 22:14

Those are such great answers. And I love that Afrofuturism is something that we've been looking at in San Diego as a whole - and is being led by one of our own. It's been great. And I really appreciate what you've been saying and sharing. The next question - actually - I'm going to ask our current students to respond to. We have a Black Resource Center on our campus. I won't go into the history of it, you can look it up; it's amazing. It was initiated by our students, and several individuals were able to support it coming to fruition. And [today] a lot of us go there - just to take a breath away from the stress of what it looks like. I know non-Black members who come and have office hours there, I used to hold office hours there. It just was a safe space to be, and affirm that there is something here with Blackness. But speak on whatever you'd like around the Black Resource Center as we begin to close out this this episode on Black joy.

Malia Henry 23:19

So if I were to do a pitch on the Black Resource Center - if you're looking for a place where you're comfortable to wear your bonnet, your scarf, your dew rag - if you're looking for a place to take a good old nap, if you're looking for a place to have a good debate about topic - not even just Black topics, because again, we're talking about the variances in our experiences; Black people talk about other things besides just being Black, I don't know why that's a new fact - but if you're looking for that, if you're looking for a place to eat some good food, and just enjoy some of the events, that is something that I would really like to say - and study! You know, I always talk about the fun stuff, but studying as well - that's, that's what I go to the Black Resource Center for. And I think it's great for Black people in community because you never know who you're going to see in passing. I met a lot of my friends now just coming in, and dropping by and saying "Oh, snap, you got time in between classes? Let's hook up after that." That's the Black Resource Center for me in my experience.

Sam Tshibangu 24:23

The Black Resource Center is the best place on campus, to be completely honest with you - for all the reasons Malia just said. But one thing I'll add in there is networking. Again, you never know who you're going to meet. Like she said, she's met she's met some of her closest friends there. Me, myself, I met some of my good close friends there - one of whom I work with on a daily basis. If it wasn't for the BRC, who knows where we will be. Shouts out to them. Shout out to Porsia, all the staff that has worked

there - that's helped us do more than just the daily stuff. The resources that we encounter there lead to other resources as well. There's a lot of things that we can go ask them that we probably wouldn't know to ask anybody else, and they will be able to properly direct us and point us in the direction of where we need to go, what person we need to speak to - if they can't help us themselves. It's just a dope, great place to find everything in a one-stop-shop. And struggling in college students - if you ever need a Cup 'O Noodles or something like that - a snack or something, they've always got your back.

Ebonee Williams 25:40

I really appreciate both of y'all sharing, because if I'm correct - Malia, you're a traditional student, and Sam was a transfer student - is that correct?

Malia Henry 25:49

I'm counted as a transfer student as well. I've been able to get a little bit of both experiences.

Porsia Curry 25:55

Technically you're a traditional student, right? A bit of a journey, you know, but you're a traditional student.

Ebonee Williams 26:14

Director Curry, would you please share any additional information our students haven't shared or that you would like people to hear as we end out our episode on Black joy?

Porsia Curry 26:25

Absolutely. I'd like to thank Malia and Sam for the kind words that they shared about the BRC. While I work for and direct the Center, I definitely agree. And it's really interesting, I think, being a Black alumna from UC San Diego and not having the BRC while we were there - and just seeing how it's impacting students now. I'm - again - very proud to work there and excited to be a part of the work. I guess I could share that, of course, we have a physical space that folks can walk into when we are back on campus - and we will be back on campus sooner rather than later - things are going to get better, and we're going to be back on campus. We are on the second floor of the Original Student Center, we are right above the Food Co-Op and the G-Store, or the General Store. Come by and see us. You can come in and do all of those things. We have a computer lab that you can use, we have a family room where you can come in and connect with others, study, take a nap, we have reservable space, and other resources. But one of the resources I think a lot of folks don't really realize or don't think about is advocacy. We are there at the Black Resource Center because we are dedicated to this work, we are dedicated to the students. The Black Resource Center is one of the many campus community centers - on campus. We partner to make sure that we are serving our students intersectionally. We want our students - regardless of how they show up, regardless of how you identify in your blackness - to feel like that space is yours, to feel like it's there for you. We also are one of the departments or units of equity, diversity and inclusion. We are supporting all of the work that comes out of that office - and they are supporting the work that we do - and we just want you students to know that we are there for you. We are fighting for you. We are advocating for you. If you need us, all you have to do is call. And when we're back on campus, all you have to do is come by. Just know that we're here, regardless of what you need. If we don't have an answer, we'll do some research, and we'll try and figure it out - get you

connected to who you need to be connected to. But just know that we're there. Do not suffer in silence. Don't think that you're alone. We are here for you. I'll leave it there.

Ebonee Williams 29:10

Well I'd like to thank you all for joining us during this beautiful Black History Month - though we celebrate Black History year-long. I really am inspired by what Black joy has been defined as and shared to be - individually, and in our connection to UC San Diego. I appreciate each of you for joining us today. My name is Dr. Williams, or Dr. Ebonee - I never go by Dr. Williams - who said that. I hope y'all have a great week, and we will see you next time on Triton Tools and Tidbits. Take care everybody, and thanks for joining us today.