

@BLAKMENBUILD // 2021 // BLACKMEN: BUILD // AN OPEN LETTER TO MY BLACK SISTERS

*An Open Letter to my  
Black Sisters*

By Charles Davis | Photographed by Kirby Griffin

# Sisters,

One might have hoped by this time, by this day-in-age, that the very mention of what seems to have become merely the evening news would be so intolerable amongst us brothers that we might raise our fists for you and with you rather than ever again raise them against you. But, of course, it would then require us to confront ourselves with the time old question of "how does it feel to be the problem?" No doubt these last few years have been particularly unkind to us, to Trayvon, Mike, Freddy, Philando, George, and Ahmaud. But, they have been especially unkind to you, to Aiyana, Sandra, Crystal, Jazz, Mia, and Breonna too. Saying your name is not justice because justice is you still being here. But, we must say your names, all of them, so we remember and never forget.

And yet, through all of it, you never stopped fighting for us. You never stopped loving us, not in private and certainly not in public, even when we have not loved you or ourselves. You never let us forget whose we were and that we matter. All this despite the countless times we crossed the bridge that is your back, simply trying to find ourselves in the fruits of your thankless labor and love. This letter, then –a little thing– to let you know we (more than a few of us, I hope) listened when you spoke. We learned when you taught us how our liberation was inevitably tied to yours.

Since the point of these words –however few, or many, or inexact in their arrangement– is to express love, let me first say it plainly: I love you. After all, it is in your multitudes where I found my own humanity. At every impasse, your brilliance has eclipsed my ignorance; your uncompromising humility has overtaken my peculiar arrogance; your courage has strengthened my cowardice; and your steadfast compassion has turned my selfishness into altruism.

But of course, I also love your simplicity too. Like the endless complexions of melanin as it changes with the seasons; your hair in its wondrous, ever-changing styles and textures; your sartorial fashions and imitable patterns of speech. Although what I love most about any of these things is, for you, they have been chosen on your own terms. In whatever way you self-identify, it is without regard for the narrowness of my gaze. Be you masculine of center, distinctly feminine, or anywhere along the named and unnamed fluidity in-between, I love that who you are is your own definition in whatever ways it suits you. Let it be said, again, I love you. And although we continue to wrestle, to give up parts of the men we are for the men we should be, I am hopeful for the future. To imagine it is to dream of a time in which we, as Baldwin wrote, will fight for your life as though it were our own –which it is. Because when and where you find freedom, then and there the entire race finds freedom too.

Love,

*A Black Man*

**AYANNA JONES, KILLED BY POLICE DURING A RAID IN MICHIGAN IN 2010.**

**SANDRA BLAND, DIED IN POLICE CUSTODY IN TEXAS IN 2015.**

**CRYSTAL HAMILTON, KILLED BY HER HUSBAND IN VIRGINIA IN 2016.**

**JAZZ ALFORD, BLACK TRANS WOMAN MURDERED IN NORTH CAROLINA IN 2016.**

**BREONNA TAYLOR, KILLED BY POLICE DURING A NO-KNOCK RAID IN LOUISVILLE IN 2019.**

**MIA GREEN, BLACK TRANS WOMAN KILLED IN PHILADELPHIA IN 2020.**