

# PREJUDICE AND HEALTH

**Global Health in  
Action Newsletter**

SPRING 2020

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# prejudice

'predʒ.ə.dɪs

noun [ C or U ]

"An unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially when formed without enough thought or knowledge."

Cambridge Dictionary

We are all prejudiced. We all make assertions about different types of people with no real evidence to back it up. Prejudice can be obvious or subtle, influencing our everyday interactions with others. It can even impact our ability to fulfill our right to life and health. In this edition of the Global Health in Action Newsletter, we seek to bring greater awareness to this deeply-rooted problem, ***focusing specifically on racial prejudice.***

It is my hope that our work sparks conversations within the Macon community about our own prejudices and ways in which we can fight the negative effects that undue prejudice creates.

– Moriah Roycroft, Chief Editor

# THE CORONAVIRUS

## AND RACE

COVID-19 deaths are disproportionately higher among people of color

### DID YOU KNOW?



- People of color are more likely to be essential workers and therefore cannot work from home.
- People of color are more likely to be segregated to crowded neighborhoods and housing conditions.
- Early on, rumors circulated that African Americans were immune to the virus.
- Black men are fearful of wearing a mask that is not clearly a surgical one, for fear of police profiling; surgical masks are almost impossible to come by.
- African Americans and Hispanics bear a disproportionate burden of pre-existing conditions such as asthma, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.

African Americans account for **43%** of Coronavirus deaths in Illinois!

**14.6%** of the population of Illinois is African American.<sup>2</sup>

**18%** of Coronavirus cases in Massachusetts have been among African Americans.<sup>1</sup>

African Americans are **2x** as likely to die from the Coronavirus in New York as others.<sup>3</sup>

African Americans account for **72%** Coronavirus deaths in Chicago.<sup>1</sup>

**29.3%** of the population of Chicago is African American.<sup>2</sup>

**23%** of Coronavirus cases in Massachusetts have been among Hispanics.<sup>4</sup>

In New York, **14%** of Coronavirus deaths have been among Hispanics.<sup>4</sup>

1. New York Times 2. US Census Bureau 3. ABC 4. USA Today

# DEATH IN OUR SYSTEM

SHREYA KANUKUNTA & MORIAH ROYCROFT

**Race is still the elephant in America’s living room. We can talk politics all day, but when it comes down to life or death, we need to pay more attention.**

Did you know that around 83,000 more African Americans die each year as a result of racial disparities than white Americans? At least that’s what the Journal of Health Affairs claims.

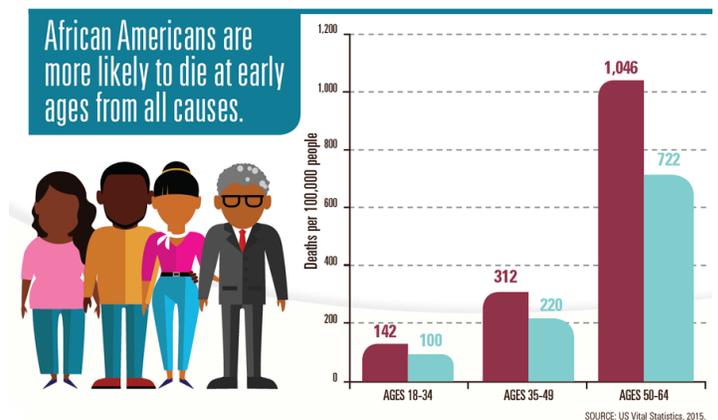
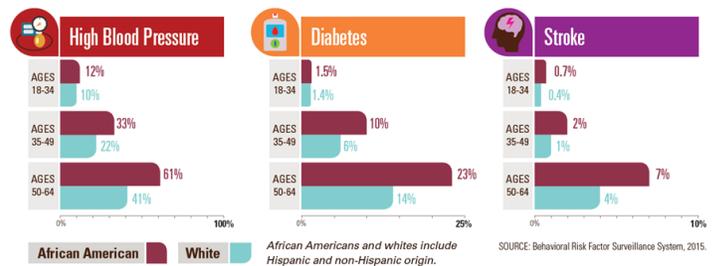
Health experts have recognized race as a social determinant of health for many years, meaning that the color of our skin directly impacts our ability to experience wellbeing. Compelling literary evidence indicates that racial discrimination has detrimental effects on the physical and psychological health of ethnic minorities. Prejudice is the culprit for these outcomes.

Americans experience prejudice as unconscious attitudes and actions that are negative toward a certain group or type of people that has no real backing. We may or may not even realize that we are doing it. It can be a socially-taught idea (like being afraid of dogs because your mom told you she was bitten once even though you have never met a mean dog). Governments, politicians, health care providers, and even patients are all prejudiced in some way. We all are.

There are many forms of prejudice. Sexism, racism, islamophobia, and anti-Semitism seem to be the ones that we see highlighted most often in the news.

Dr. David Williams, a sociology professor at Yale, argues that the biological racism of the past has become culturally-ingrained racism in the present. Some narratives in society claim that the Black community is not instilling the right morals into their children or do not value hard work. Negative emotions associated with black people are still deeply entrenched in our everyday culture. It is not that the people who think this are “bad,” they are just conditioned to what they are taught. That’s why we see “internal prejudice,” or people within an ethnic or racial group holding negative attitudes towards members of their own group.

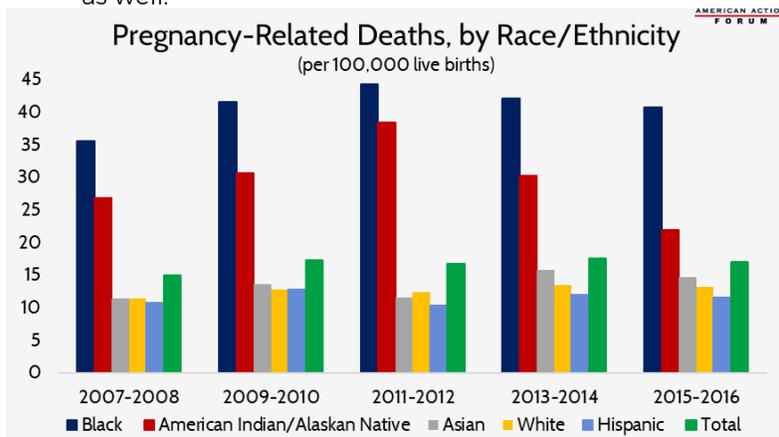
Due to the progress made in the world of civil rights over the past 50 years, Black Americans are living longer, healthier lives. From 1999 to 2015, the death rate for African Americans decreased by 25%. Even still, white Americans are expected to live 4 years longer on average. African Americans are more likely to die at younger ages from all causes.



Racism is a source of chronic stress for African Americans. This race-related stress adds to the allostatic load of the body, leading to negative health outcomes such as heart disease, obesity, depression, and anxiety. Regular exposure to microaggressions places the body in a constant state of stress, which leads to the worsening of an individual's physical and psychological well-being.

A huge burden of black deaths include our mothers. It's a well known fact that black mothers are 3 times more likely to die than white mothers. So why do we care about maternal mortality? Mostly because it is an important health status indicator for the rest of our lives as well.

The rates at which our mothers die can warn public health workers to investigate health care access, behavioral risk factors, and even the environment. The rate of maternal mortality in the United States is the highest in any developed country and is steadily increasing. In fact, it has been 25 years since we have seen any form of mortality reduction. While some of this is partly due to better reporting, the more distressing part of this story is the mortality gap between black women in rural areas and all other women in the US. Nationally, from 2011 to 2015 the pregnancy-related mortality ratio among black women (42.8 deaths per 100,000 live births) was over 3 times higher than among whites (13 deaths per 100,000 live births).



Source: American Action Forum - Maternal Mortality in the United States

Also known as death related to pregnancy, maternal mortality is defined as the death of a woman while she is pregnant or within one year after the end of her pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management.

Maconite Katrina Johnson, a type 1 diabetic, died 22 weeks into her pregnancy after forgoing her prenatal appointment with her doctor. A few weeks before, she had been told by that healthcare professional that she would not be able to instill the values into her child that would make her child a productive citizen of society. Shocked, she refused to get care and faced death as a result.

But, prejudice goes both ways. Last year, 59% of healthcare providers in the US heard an offensive remark made about their personal character from a patient according to a study conducted by Medscape. Prejudice against a doctor or nurse can affect the quality of treatment for the patient and the mental health of the provider.

**There is an urgent and growing need to understand the reasons behind this vast inequity and examine broader societal and structural conditions that potentially contribute to excess mortality, specifically the role of one form of prejudice—racism.**

# The Bio-Psychosocial Pathway of Prejudice and Health

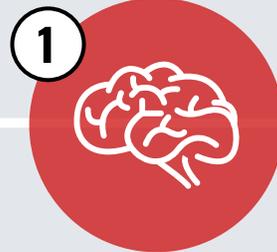
A look at how prejudice and discrimination directly affect health and well-being.

Maggie Porter



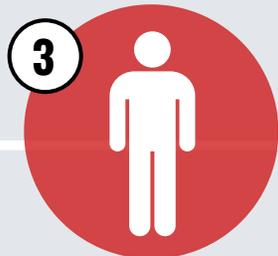
## Mental Toll

Negative feelings, attitudes, and sadness that does not go away.



## Chronic Stress

Often stemming from the burden of dealing with discrimination, prejudice and racial bias, and lack of access to resources & networks or care.



## Bodily Reactions

The body releases the stress hormones cortisol and catecholamines.



## Physical Toll

Stress hormones bring wear and tear to body organs and systems. The immune system becomes suppressed.



## Health Vulnerability

Constant suppression of the immune system makes people vulnerable to a wide range of health issues.



## Immune Toll

The body's ability to fight diseases is severely reduced.

**Cancer, Stroke, Diabetes, High Blood Pressure, Heart Disease, Kidney Disease, etc.**

# MERCER

## Experiences with Prejudice and Health

— “ Many minorities, such as myself, have dealt with **PREJUDICED TREATMENT** in the **WORKPLACE** or they've had to deal with being **DISCRIMINATED** against with **LAW ENFORCEMENT**. This treatment, when it's perpetually inflicted onto someone, can **AFFECT THEIR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATE**. — Mercer Senior ” —

“ The systemic **RACISM** and **CLASSISM** that **PLAGUES OUR SOCIETY** has affected my own health negatively, among millions of other minority children who grow up in low-income areas with low quality of living, where **HEALTHCARE** is **NEITHER AFFORDABLE** nor **ADEQUATE**.

It isn't a surprise that according to the CDC, Black and Hispanic-American children are **DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED** by asthma. I, unfortunately, was one of these children. It has put me at a disadvantage in more ways than one. — Geneis Crimé, Sophomore ”

“ I have not personally experienced prejudice regarding health, however, I have **WITNESSED** it. I used to work at a Nephrology doctor's office who would not accept Medicare or Medicaid, causing **AFRICAN-AMERICAN PATIENTS TO PAY MORE** for services than white patients. It has not affected my health personally, but it has affected how I will practice medicine whenever I am a health care provider. — Chrisalyn Ridgeway, Sophomore ”

# MER CER

## Experiences with Prejudice and Health

I have been in the hospital a decent bit of times including just last year and they **DISREGARDED ME** when I have been in pain. That has affected my health in an institutional sense. In a mental health sense, it makes me feel like I have **NO PLACE IN THIS SOCIETY** at times. The ability for people to refuse you business just because you are black really messes with your head at times and makes you feel like you're inferior. **I KNOW I AM AMAZING** but it seems some of the world doesn't agree just yet. — *Camryn Bierria, Sophomore*

I've **EXPERIENCED PREJUDICE** before, not so much as to affect my own health though. But I have seen **DISTURBING PRACTICES** that treat people in hospitals **DIFFERENT** based on their race/color of their skin. I saw a textbook published within the last 10 years that differed treatment of people according to their racial background. — *Devin Dickinson, Sophomore*

I recall a time going to the hospital and complaining of eye pain. The receptionist said that I probably have an infection because I have false eyelashes, and they need to take them off. **BEFORE I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE A DOCTOR**, the woman walked in with a kit to remove my lashes. I requested to see the doctor first. She insisted that it wasn't necessary because she was certain that I had an infection. I reiterated that I would like to see the doctor first. The doctor came and he confirmed that I did not have an infection but a scratched cornea. **MY CONCERNS WEREN'T TAKEN SERIOUSLY** and I felt like individuals in the medical field **SHOULD KNOW BETTER**. — *Ja'Diyah Shamsiddin, Sophomore*

Parneeta  
Mohapatra

# VICTIMS OF RACIAL PREJUDICE

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. FONTENOT



### 1) How would you define prejudice?

Prejudice is really an attitude or judgment about the “other”— people who are not like you. It may or may not be based on substantive information. It tends to guide decisions, actions, and interactions with other people.

Racism, on the other hand, involves taking prejudicial attitudes to then impact those people’s lives in some way. For example, denying them opportunities, jobs, education, the ability to marry who they want to marry, or live in certain places. Racism often becomes systemic. It can become so ingrained in a culture that it almost becomes unconscious. It plays out in many ways in a culture, and people do not even think about it.

In the present panic surrounding the coronavirus, there is news of Asian-Americans being accosted as if they are the problem. These prejudicial attitudes have been there for some time against Asians. Now we have racism reaching out from its systemic base that is allowing people to act negatively towards Asians. Most people have some prejudicial attitudes, not all but most. But then some people take these attitudes and embrace them such that the beliefs become the drivers of their interactions with others and structures their lives and decisions.

The most destructive thing in America is that our country has been founded on racist notions, which led to the genocide of Native Americans, the oppression and slavery of people of African descent, and the discrimination of just about every other ethnic group that came here but didn't look like the White majority. America has a systemic race problem; it's ingrained.

## **2) How does prejudice impact the lives of people in Macon?**

It's laid a baseline for inequality. When you look at the documents and organize everything in a spreadsheet, you see the names of White families were very much involved in the slave trade, purchasing and selling Black people in Bibb County. Many of their descendants still live in Bibb County and are doing quite well financially because they inherited wealth from their slaveholding ancestors. One of the real estate and architectural firms in Macon is tied to the slave trade. And on the other side, there are Black people in Bibb County whose ancestors were bought and sold as slaves. They've continued to struggle to achieve some measure of economic stability.

## **3) How has the history of African-Americans put them at a disadvantage compared to whites in America?**

Let's take two children, one Black and one White. They're the same age, and both grew up in Macon. The White child is the descendant of slave owners; the Black child is the descendant of people who were slaves. The White child grows up, enrolls at Mercer, and comes to campus driving a new Range Rover, a \$1,000 a week allowance. Also, his parents pay for his tuition, fees, room and board. The Black child enrolls at Mercer with either no car, or a used, inexpensive one. He's a Pell Grant recipient, and has to work since his parents aren't able to help him financially. Both of these young men mature, have their own families and careers, and eventually die. The White male passes down his wealth to his children, and this allows them to get a head start on building their own wealth. The Black male has no significant wealth to pass down to his children other than a minimal life insurance policy that offers little once his funeral and other expenses are settled. Instead of being able to build his personal wealth, he has spent most of his adult life and career repaying student loans. Every generation of Blacks starts from ground zero.

## **4) How has racial prejudice affected health outcomes?**

I've seen this happen with people I know, especially Black women who go to their doctors and receive racist statements and behaviors from them. Even though there are some minor biological and physical differences between different ethnic groups, all this means is that our ancestors lived in different parts of the world where the environment required our bodies to adapt in different ways. And there are biological and physical difference between males and females. This does not mean that either sex is superior to the other.

But, Black women are reporting that their gynecologists, some of whom may subscribe to racist and sexist beliefs, trivialize the complaints of Black women. These women have told me that doctors have told them that "you're making too much out of this...suck it up." What is the impact of this interaction on Black women? The failure to take their medical issues seriously often leads to late diagnosis that results in breast cancer, endometriosis, or another illness that could've been treated and prevented if these Black females had received immediate care. And if she complains about not receiving treatment, she is brushed off as an angry Black woman, dramatic, and too emotional.

We've seen this in the area of chronic pain as well. This is something near and dear to me since I suffer from chronic pain. Many physicians have been less willing to prescribe treatment, including effective pain management, for African Americans because they believe that our bodies are better able to tolerate pain than Whites. So yes, race impacts health. You would think it wouldn't, and it definitely shouldn't, but unfortunately it does.

And then you have the systemic issues that contribute to a lot of health problems. We know what we need to do to be healthy. People who are economically disadvantaged develop poor people's diseases: high blood pressure; diabetes; heart disease; etc. Often without health insurance, they tend to get a doctor too late to manage and treat the disease that could have been prevented with timely medical treatment. It's more expensive to eat healthily and eventually organs are at risk. They have plaque and fat build-up, and they go to the doctor, but by then it's too late. Organs have started failing. You trap people in poverty because of their race and keep dumping stuff in there—poor health, poor education, lack of resources—and they can't really do anything about it.

#### **5) How do you think this problem can be alleviated?**

Well we can't legislate people's attitudes, but we can deprive them of the ability to affect other people's lives. We have laws enacted specifically for that purpose. They say, "No, it's not okay to call black people the n-word and accost them because they're a minority." If you do, there's a penalty for that.

But then there's prevention which involves education. As kids grow up, teaching them that people who are not their race or ethnic group, religious background, sex, etc, are their equals, fully human, and deserve equal treatment offers us a chance to choke racism out at its roots. I've been a professor for a long time. I have experienced students who came from very racist families. I've had some of these students enroll in my classes because they wondered if the things their families said about Black people were right. They came to me and said: "The stuff that my family has been saying and teaching are wrong and I can't even repeat what they say about Black people to you. That's how bad it is. But I'm not going to do that." I've had many students over the years who decided not to continue that behavior. Education is the key to this change because prejudice and racism are learned behaviors—people aren't born that way.

To achieve economic justice, there has to be away of leveling the playing field. I don't have all the answers to that, but one way is to develop and build our own business communities. I use for an example the Jewish community. They see themselves as a community. I lived with a Jewish family. And I saw that they have their own economy. They build up their own businesses and they support their own businesses. They even have their own education system as a part of their synagogues. I am a firm believer that if we're looking for someone else to save us, it isn't gonna happen. We must do it ourselves.

**"So yes,  
race  
impacts  
health,  
you know,  
there is no  
question  
about it."**

# MICROAGGRESSIONS

Sejal Patel

**Microaggressions are verbal or behavioral actions towards people that can deter mental health and well-being.**

## HOW TO STOP MICROAGGRESSIONS:

- Call out injustice when you see it
- Self-reflect on your own attitudes. Don't contribute to the problem.
- Modify racially-prejudiced policing practices
- Improve access to maternal care for all



## WHEN EXPERIENCING MICROAGGRESSION TRY:

- **REPHRASE OR RESTATE:** “I think I heard you saying \_\_\_\_\_ (paraphrase their comments). Is that correct?”
- **SEPARATE INTENT FROM IMPACT:** “I know you didn’t realize this, but when you \_\_\_\_\_ (comment/behavior), it was hurtful/offensive because \_\_\_\_\_. Instead you could \_\_\_\_\_ (different language or behavior.)”
- **CHALLENGE THE STEREOTYPE:**
  - “Actually, in my experience \_\_\_\_\_.”
  - “I think that’s a stereotype. I’ve learned that \_\_\_\_\_.”  
“Another way to look at it is \_\_\_\_\_.”
- **ASK FOR CLARIFICATION:** “Could you say more about what you mean by that?” “How have you come to think that?”

# MERCER

## Perspectives on Alleviating Racial Prejudice

“

The things we keep **QUIET** about are the things we need to **START TALKING ABOUT**. — Mercer Sophomore

”

“

A method for eliminating prejudice is not to ignore skin color but to **ACKNOWLEDGE** and **STUDY OUR HISTORY** in order to have a better understanding of why things are the way they are today and fix those issues by **DECONSTRUCTING** the original problem. — Devin Dickinson, Sophomore

”

“

People need to be more **OPEN-MINDED** and **CELEBRATE ALL CULTURES** that we have in America. Spend time with different cultures in order to **APPRECIATE** them. It could be something as simple as visiting a traditional restaurant or joining a club/group. — Victoria Bahena, Senior

”

“

It's important to start **EDUCATING** the children of our generation and teaching them that **PREJUDICED BEHAVIOR SHOULD NOT BE REWARDED**. — Sonny Patel, Sophomore

”

## Perspectives on Alleviating Racial Prejudice

“

More health care providers that are **DEDICATED TO SERVING MINORITIES** and not caring about skin color is a start to fix society in the medical field. Physicians should make a point to **ESTABLISH INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS** with their patients to unpack their emotional feelings and symptoms. – *Chrisalyn*

*Ridgeway, Sophomore*

”

“

There is still literal segregation in places even though it is **MORE SUBTLE** than it was in the past. There needs to be **MORE INTERACTION** with different cultures and ways of life between different types of students. Also people need to **LISTEN TO PEOPLE OF COLOR** when they have issues and not just claim people are "trying to make things about race." – *Camryn Bierria,*

*Sophomore*

”

# PUTTING IT IN WORDS

POETRY  
BY:  
CEFARI  
LANGFORD

Parneeta Mohapatra  
Jen Jones



Cefari D. Langford is a senior majoring in Africana Studies and Global Health Studies. After graduation, they plan to work at an internship in Germany for a year. Their favorite poem is "Nancy Meyers and My Dream of Whiteness" by Morgan Parker.

## "CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING?"



CHECK OUT TWO  
OF CEFARI'S  
POEMS ON  
PAGES 16-17!

Having difficulty playing the  
video? Try this QR code:



# What Do You Think?

Cefari Langford

“Do you wash your hair?”

*Calm down*

*I know you are offended*

*But remember where you are*

“You know, you’re kind of intimidating?”

*That hurt more than it should have*

*I had no idea cartoons were scary*

*I don’t care but I do yet I don’t*

\*Gets in trouble for something I didn’t do\*

*Just explain the truth*

*He isn’t even paying attention*

*He obviously doesn’t give a damn*

\*Being followed by campus police\*

*Breathe, one-two, breathe*

*You are going to be fine*

*Just mind your business and keep walking*

“Oh, I didn’t know y’all went to counseling.”

*This place is raising my cortisol levels*

*My mental stability is laughable right now*

*But you don’t ask me why. Too surprised?*

“Oh, I didn’t think that would hurt.”

*Excuse you?*

*A needle went in my arm incorrectly and was adjusted inside*

*Yes, that freaking hurt*

“You have to have insurance....come back then.”

*I do have insurance*

*So, this is what we do*

*No apologies, okay, no second visits either*

\*Waits six hours to be seen\*

*I should just leave*

*But I have been waiting already*

*So, might as well stay*

# Hypocritically Juxtaposed

My issue is this feeling  
The thoughts that come from isolation  
The loneliness at the intersection

Being educated is not the problem  
But being Black and educated is.

Home,  
The place where I am looked at as an outsider  
A wolf in sheep's clothing, if you will  
Despite the entirety of my life being lived here  
Assumptions assume I am superior, I am better  
And even though some have said it,  
Implications hold lecherous in the mind.  
It is in the way they speak to me, or not,  
Of me  
Present in every interaction  
And each second becomes more nostalgic.

School,  
The place where I am not good enough  
And the privilege is stifling  
But the privilege isn't mine  
Every move I make, every suggestion,  
Every piece of work, every effort  
Is second-guessed. Overlooked. Or Ignored.  
False beliefs, misconceptions, stereotypes  
Those are the basis of every conversation I find  
myself in.

Being Black is not the problem  
But being queer and Black is.

My fellow brothas and sistas do not understand  
And because of their ignorance  
I have to smile in the face of prejudice  
I have to listen to those offensive comments  
I have to explain that queer is not synonymous  
with white  
I have to dim my light, so I won't get hurt

Because words may not break bones  
But they prelude what will  
I would have thought people would be tired  
Of discrimination against us  
Not perpetuate it.

What hurt the most is being Queer  
Because I thought I was the safest here  
I had more hope for my communities  
I should have learned from my blackness  
I am tired of defending myself against  
discrimination  
From those who supposedly understand  
Yet subject me to more of it  
It is funny though  
My existence, I am a human juxtaposition

Being queer is not the problem  
But being Black, educated, and queer is.

Having to pick your labels before they are  
assigned  
Losing my humanity as I become nothing  
More than a resource, a tool.  
Having very few role models like me  
I know I am not the only one  
But it feels like it

And as I overthink, I find myself lost  
Stuck in a haze of self-deprecating thoughts  
And inspirational quotes  
Because I do not thrive under pressure  
But that's how diamonds are formed  
It is my fault that I am uncomfortable  
Yet greatness isn't found in comfort zones  
these words say plenty and mean much more  
But they do not tell me how to rid this feeling

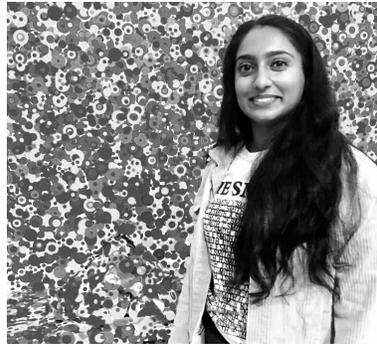
- Cefari Langford

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