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Uplifting Blackness Collection

Uplifting Blackness: A Showcase of Art by  
Western's Black Student Community

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Spring 2022

**W.E.A.N**

Sunday Ajak

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## W.E.A.N

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Sunday. Sunday Ajak, yes Sunday like the ice cream spelt like the day, and yes, I do have a cousin named Monday. Now that should answer all your questions about my name, and with that being said one of the more important things I want you to know about me. Is that I like to tell stories.

Happy stories, sad stories, stories that have a meaning, stories that don't, because stories have become a part of me. Some people call me a poet, some call me a motivational speaker, however I like to think of myself as a storyteller, but whatever it is you may call me tonight the premise will remain the same. I simply like to talk. I guess that's just who I am, so indulge me here tonight if you will, and let's have a conversation.

Now I don't know about you but over the years I've learned to value each conversation in its entirety because you never know what you could learn from another person. So tonight, I no longer wish to talk to you, no not you the individual, but rather I want to talk to you the person. Tonight, let's give ourselves the gift of letting go, and strip away everything you think that makes you; you. I don't care what it is that you do, I don't care about your reputation, and I don't care about your titles because despite what many people may think, it is not what you do that makes you who you are. Lay focus on my voice, as I ask you the most important question of all, who are you?

Seems like an easy question to answer right? I mean you hear it all the time but think about it like this. For as many times as you've heard that question, how many times have you told the truth? The truth is often the easiest thing to say but the last thing that comes out of our mouth. Because when I ask who you are, I don't mean who you are behind those titles. I don't mean who you are behind those positions, those suits, or those dresses. When I ask who you are I really want to know. If I asked you once, you'd probably tell me your name, if I asked you twice, you'd probably tell me what you do. But what if I asked you a third time, a fourth time, a fifth time, as many times as I needed for you to get passed all those titles, what would you say then?

Oh, seems like I got everyone's attention. I'm sorry but I'm going to put a little bit of pressure on your image tonight. Because in order to have the conversation I want to have, we need to be everything but fake. Tonight, I want to talk to you about what it means to be black, not a black artist, not a black entrepreneur, not a black leader, but a black person.

I mean that's why we're here tonight isn't it? To celebrate black excellence. We want to show everyone what it's like to be black. To be black comes with its ups, and it just as equally comes with its downs, and believe me I'll be the first person to tell you that events like this are of the utmost importance. However, I must be honest, I have but a small problem with nights such as these. Because showing black excellence isn't about producing a grand spectacle. No, showing black excellence is about symbolizing what a black person represents.

It's about the pain, the sacrifice, the inequality, the passion, and above all it's about us reaffirming who we are. Because the story of who we are has many times been told for us, but not by us. We've all heard the stories, the ones you find in documentaries, the commercials they air in February. We all know the stories, but I ask you. Have you ever heard the story of the slave with no name?

See back when the slave trade was at the peak of its existence and all the slave masters were happy with their way of living, content with how many slaves they had. Among the masters there was one particular slave that all of them knew, this boy in particular couldn't have been just 5 years old when he was brought in. Special among the rest of them because no one knew who he was, no one



knew where he came from, no one even knew his name. But he was the hardest working slave there was. He would never speak to anyone. When he worked, he stayed quiet. When they beat him, he stayed quiet. When they starved him and abused him, he stayed quiet. Never said a word, for 20 years a boy turned into a man and saw nothing but pain. Until one day, when his masters had died of old age, in an odd twist of fate the family had decided to let all of their slaves go. When they broke the news, the slaves left almost immediately without turning back or even saying goodbye. All of them left quickly, except for one, the slave with no name. The family came up to him and told him he was free to go, but he didn't move. They said it a second time, and he didn't move. They said it a third time, he didn't leave. They finally asked him "Why won't you leave and be free?" He looked at them and for the first time in 20 years, he spoke saying, "Because I'm scared, I don't know who I am; I don't even know my name, and this is all I've ever known." The family, in amidst their shock that he could speak, were amazed that he would decide to stay. They took him back and treated him all the same. They beat him, starved him, they abused him, and he lived and died without ever being free.

All because, he didn't know who he was, and couldn't see who he would become. So, I ask you again, who are you?

I wondered that same question for many years. Being black was the easy part, accepting that I was black was the hard, and quite frankly I still might not even be there. There are still so many things I want to understand. I want to understand why black males account for 37% of the total male prison population. I want to understand why 45% of young black kids live in poverty. I want to understand why as a black driver you are twice as likely to be pulled over than any other race. I want to understand why in Africa 10 people die from hunger every single minute. I want to understand why I get to live an average of 20 years more than another man in Africa. I want to understand why I thought I had the right to stand here from a point of privilege and think was doing enough.

See we are the chosen few, the lucky ones, fate has decided to smile upon every single one of you here tonight. There is someone out there who would die to have the same type of life that you have. And I don't say that to make you feel bad about the way that you're living. You're probably doing leaps and bounds over adversity every single day. I only say that, so we are all aware of the responsibility that we share.

It's no longer acceptable to attribute being black with pain. Being black with suffering. Being black and uneducated, being black with criminality, these characteristics do nothing but bring us division. Prince EA said it best when he said, "where there is division there will be conflict, and conflict starts wars". And the war that we think were fighting is "us vs them" but in reality, it is us vs us.

We need to finally understand who we really are. And as I said before who you are is not in what you do but it is in what you represent. So, I bear the question onto you, not who you are, but who do you represent?

Me? I got tired of not knowing who I was, so I stood up one day, looked myself in the mirror and said,

I am change, I am a chance, I am black, I am gifted, I am special, sure I may be struggling but I'm falling forward. I am not what you think I am, I am who I say I am and I say I'm worth it.

I think it's time we changed WEAN from Where We Are Now to Who We Are Now.

