

# Liz

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

I climbed to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro two years ago.

I like colorful clothes.

When I was a kid, I wanted to be an astronaut.



*The New York Times* posts a list of “52 Places to Go” each year. Well, I’m Black, I’m female, and I usually travel\* alone. So, I look at this list, and I’m thinking, “I could not go to any of these places.”

I went to the Czech Republic in 1999. Eastern Europe had started to open up. It got weird; I had people asking to take my picture. I realized that I was the only Black person that they’d seen! I ended up leaving early because I didn’t feel like I could enjoy my time without being this object. Later, when I went out with some of my friends, they got mad on my behalf and were like, “All right, we’re going to start charging people!” They were hoping that that would be a turnoff, but people whipped out their wallets and were like, “How much again?” We were mortified.

Before I went to Australia, everyone was like, “Australia’s amazing, the weather is amazing, blah blah blah.” But it was so hard. If I opened my mouth and identified myself as an American, *then* I would be treated well. But if people just saw me, I’d get treated totally different. Once, when I was out in the botanic gardens, this guy

came up to me, he was a tourist, and he was like, “Can you take a picture?” And I was like, “Yeah, give me your camera,” and then he was like, “No, no, I want you to hold this thing I got, and I want to take a picture of you.” He thought he’d found an Aboriginal person.

When I went to East and South Africa, it was a little different. I’m Nigerian, and first generation, so I felt a sort of sense of belonging. Walking around, people thought I was from there. It wasn’t until then that I realized the burden I carried growing up in a space where I was outnumbered. Because, in the United States, even if people don’t point at me and take pictures of me, I feel their eyes on me. I feel the legacy of Jim Crow, of slavery—I always say that it was only a policy change, we didn’t actually change the people. So, in Africa, it was interesting because I was able to walk around and experience moments where I felt . . . well, *free*.\*\* But even that didn’t last: sooner or later, I’d run into the legacy of Apartheid, the legal racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa.

\* Have you noticed how most hotels don’t offer shampoos that work with Black hair? Or how the “main highlight at a resort is lying out poolside in the sun”?

\*\* “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings . . .” —W. E. B. Du Bois

*Autumn/*

*Pimikwusii/*

*Blue Spruce*

*Many Blue*

*Flowers*

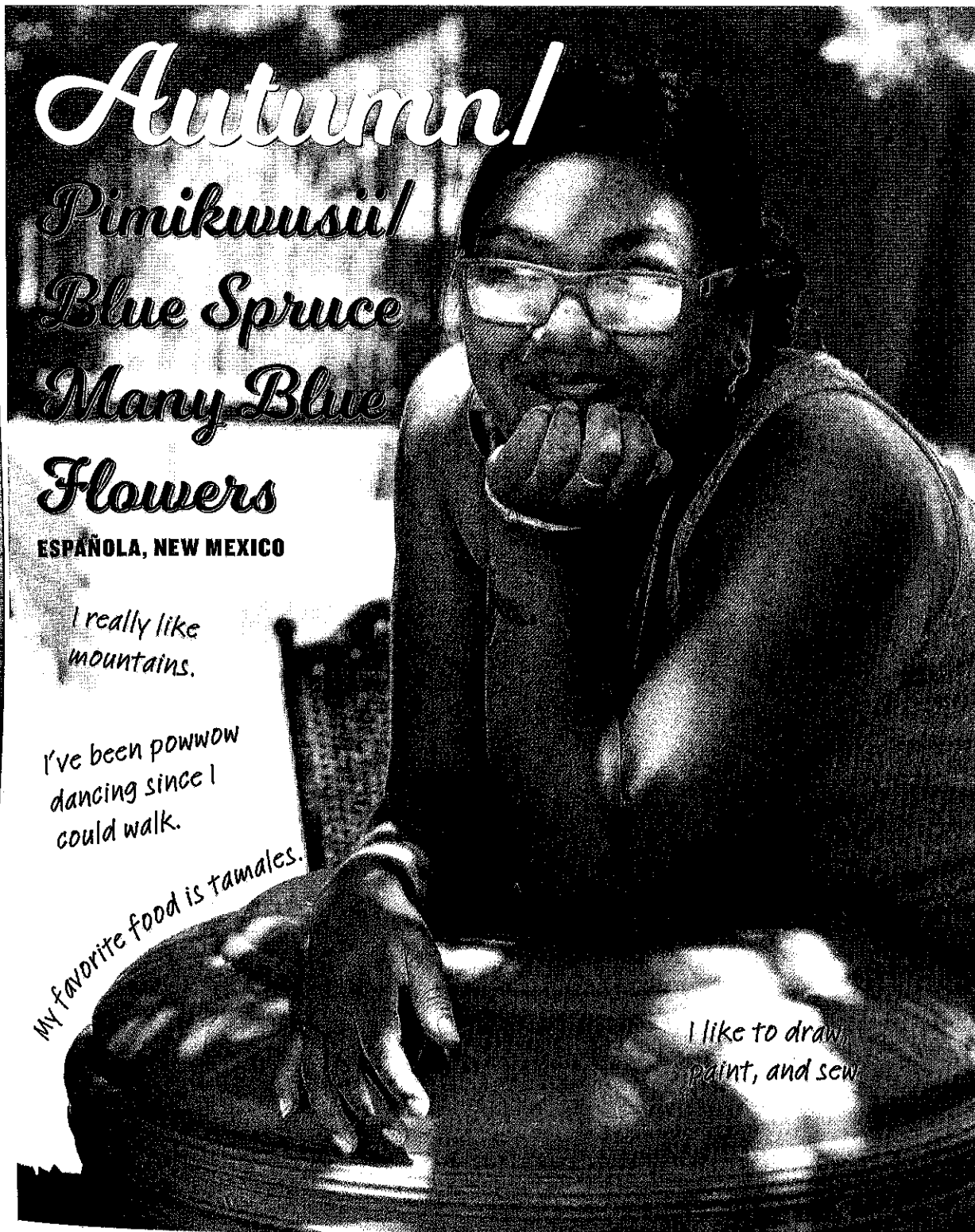
ESPAÑOLA, NEW MEXICO

*I really like  
mountains.*

*I've been powwow  
dancing since I  
could walk.*

*My favorite food is tamales.*

*I like to draw,  
paint, and sew.*



*By the time* I was in seventh grade, my dad had already given me the rundown about the Pueblo Revolt, along with the Alcatraz\* takeover—because my grandpa was part of that—and other really key things. So, I knew a good amount about our history. I was prepared for the constant erasure and denial I would experience for the rest of my life.

I remember my Hispano history teacher gave us this coloring page of a conquistador on a horse saying, “The mighty conquistadors are ready to take out the indigenous pueblo *savages*,” or something along those lines. And I was like, “Whaaaaaaat.” Thanks to my dad, I knew something wasn’t right. I took that coloring page home and showed him, and my dad was *not* having it. He reported the teacher, and it got handled, but still . . . what really bothers me is that that teacher had been teaching for *so long*, and *so many* kids had gotten that coloring page.

U.S. history is taught in fifth, seventh, eighth, and eleventh grade classrooms throughout this country, and hundreds of students are fed dangerous lies like this. If we don’t actively recognize and uplift the truths of Native history now, there might not be any people left with the knowledge to do so later.

Most pueblo kids didn’t know their own history like I did; they didn’t get to know how *awesome* our people are! But they *did* get that stupid coloring page.

I want other Native kids to know what I know. I want them to understand that we’re the Seventh Generation,\*\* the healing generation, so it’s time for us all to pick up the slack and start helping out, start learning to communicate well, start living as how our ancestors would’ve wanted us to live. Let’s respect the earth, and let’s respect each other. Let’s not take any fake crap from the history books, and let’s start telling the truth.

\* As of 2014, since it became a national park, more than 1.4 million people visit Alcatraz annually. If you look closely, you can spot some graffiti on the walls with messages like “INDIANS WELCOME”—residuals from the 1969 protest of 89 Native Americans who occupied the island for 19 months to reclaim their land before being removed by federal officials in 1971.

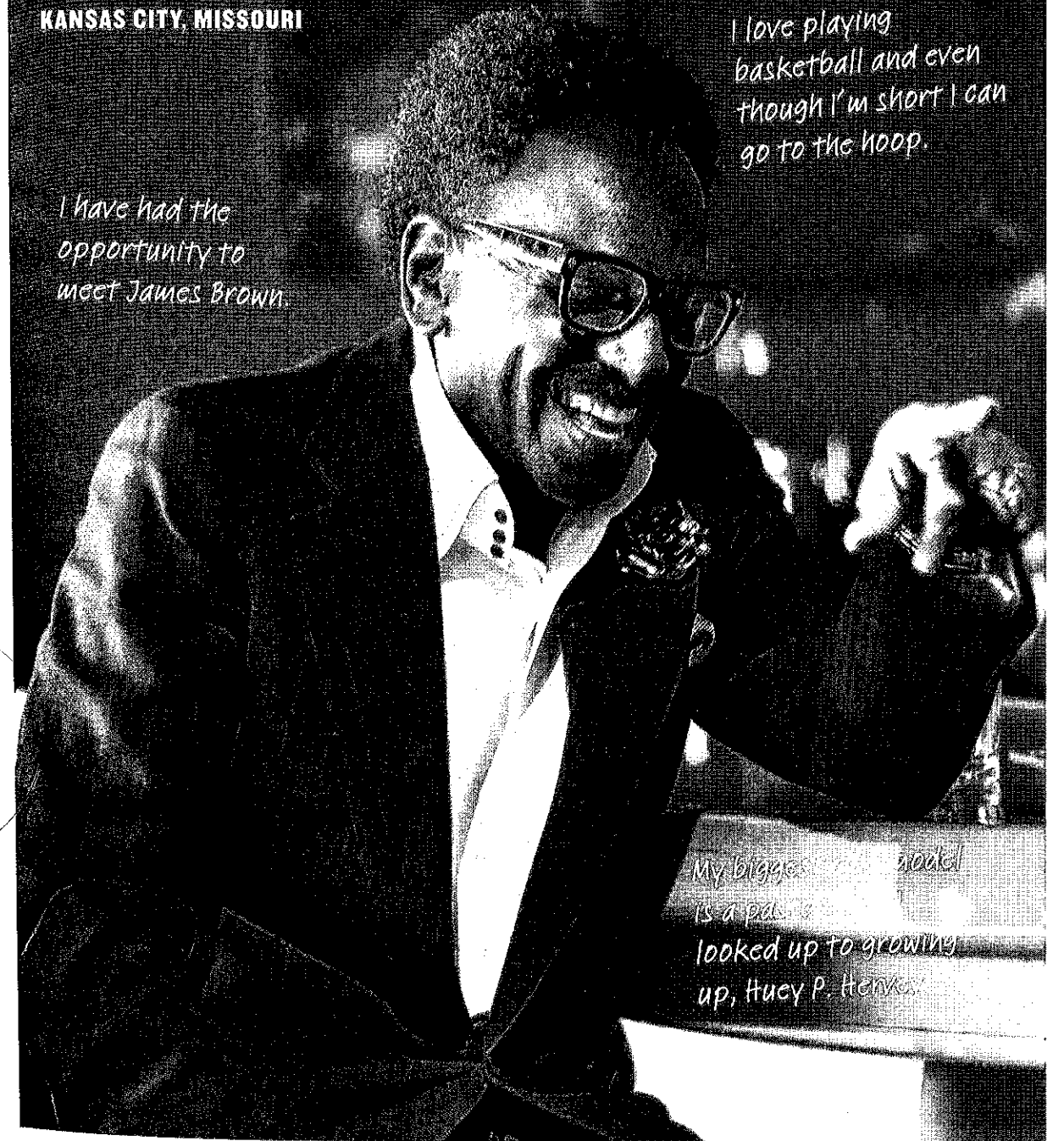
\*\* The indigenous phrase “Seven Generations” meant that “each generation was responsible to teach, learn, and protect the three generations that had come before it, its own, and the next three,” producing a less individualistic and more collectivistic culture.

# Ronnie M.

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

I have had the opportunity to meet James Brown.

I love playing basketball and even though I’m short I can go to the hoop.



My biggest role model is a person I looked up to growing up, Huey P. Rivera.

*I was born* and raised in Wichita, Kansas, as a *beautiful* young man. My mom says I was the best-looking child in the family.

We were eight boys and four girls, and we had a beautiful life. We didn't have much, but we enjoyed it. We was raised to respect one another and to be obedient to the family. We was always told it doesn't make any difference who you are or how much money you had. You must love and understand everybody. The old folk used to talk about how, back in the day, my forefathers was tremendously done bad, less than three-fifths of a man. But through it all, they overcame, through the power of God, of loving one another, relying on one another. That strengthened us.

When I left Wichita—oh *baby*, I thought I knew everything then! I came here to Kansas City, I did a lot of factory work for Milbank Manufacturing Company, worked different odd jobs, worked as a busboy. Ooh, I could bus them dishes, honey, I was good. Making seventy-five cents, a dollar, one dollar twenty-five an hour, that was money, man, I thought that I was rich. I enjoyed it.

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**The Three-fifths Compromise of 1787 counted every Black American as three-fifths of a person when determining state populations for choosing (all White) state representatives until the Fourteenth Amendment of 1868.**

Growing up, I knew that segregation was real. But we was poor and didn't know we was poor, because everyone was taking care of one another. We had respect, and you don't see too much of that no more. If you got a whoopin' in the neighborhood, everyone in the neighborhood gave you a whoopin'. If I was somewhere I wasn't supposed to be, someone would say, "Aren't you Leona's boy? Well, boy, you better get your butt back home." He had the authority to give me a whoopin' and then we got another whoopin' back at the house.

Times have changed. Before, once children left the home, I didn't have to worry. Now, we have to be afraid, because when you put an influx of drugs in a neighborhood, you mess up the fabric of the neighborhood. Children are not being raised properly, with lack of teaching, lack of history, role models. We delivered the generation now who do whatever they wanna do. As we're growing, we're trying to do everything we can do to prevent crime that could tear down our community. You know, when I first came down here, it was so quiet they would say, "There ain't no crime over there, because nobody is over there!" Now, a lot of people would love to come down here because they love our music, but we have to show them that it's not that bad.

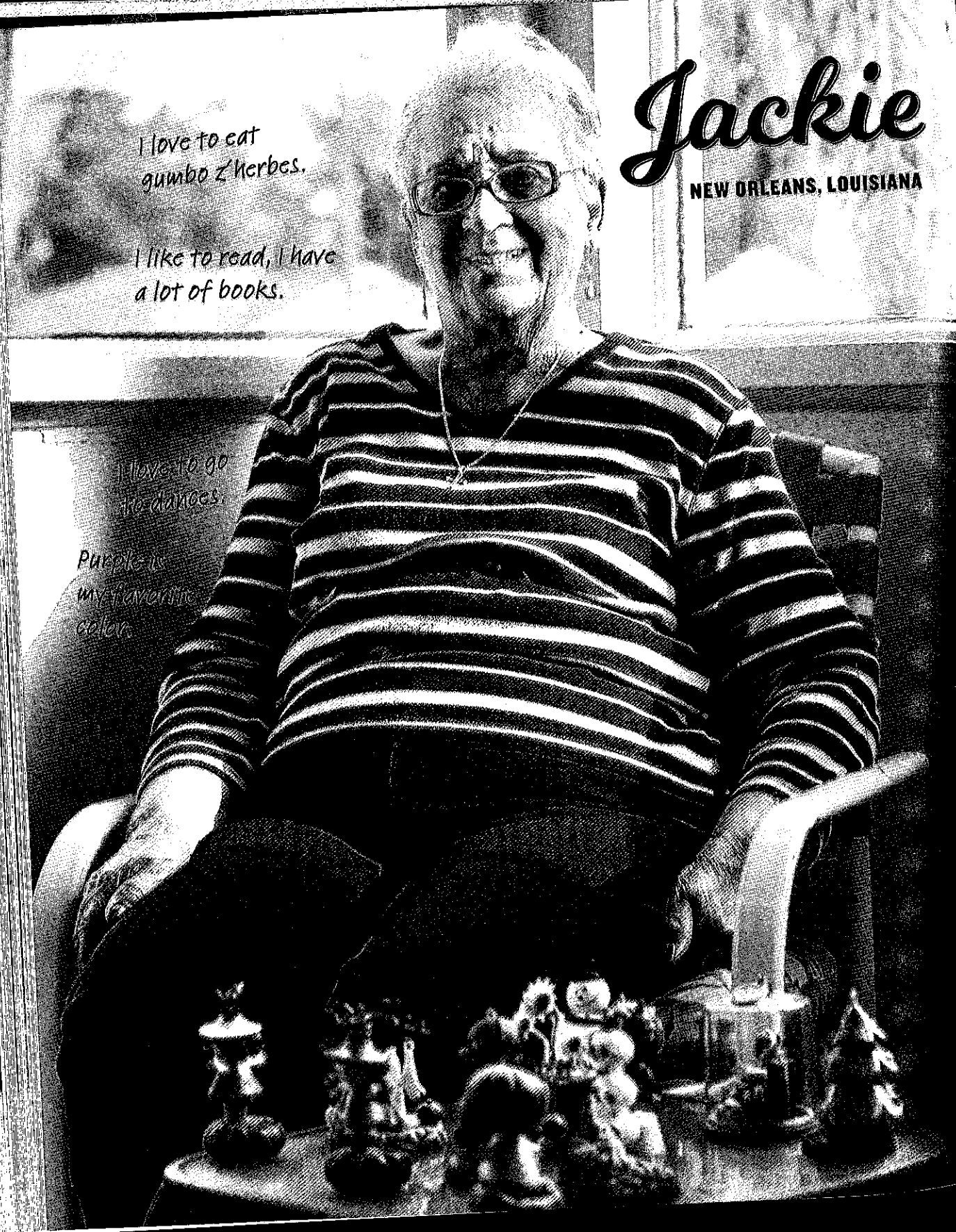
I'm currently the host of the American Jazz Museum and the Negro Leagues

Baseball Museum, and the guys who used to be here were educated, smart, and talented. They told stories. We're in the Blue Room, which used to be in the Street hotel. That's where your Blacks would come—your entertainers, your baseball players, people who had a lot of clout. They would always stay in the Blue Room, because at the time they couldn't go downtown, go past 27th Street. It would mean nothing for you to hang out and see a Count Basie and Duke Ellington, some of your baddest, baddest jazz artists, right where you're sitting! Oh man, the past is still all around us. Everything was alive. It's just so much culture. We was sharp, we

stayed clean. We used to dress up and just go to the corner and just look at each other.

The most dangerous thing in the world is to have the mind-set of being better than another person. I am more proud of this younger generation saying, *Wait a minute, something is wrong*. I'm optimistic. It's better, I can see it. Through every storm, the sun is going to shine. I don't care how long it takes, but when the sun come out, you can see how people come together and respect and love one another. That, to me, is one of the best things in the world. And sometimes we have to go through trials to really see that. But it's going to be all right. Trust me, it's going to be all right.





# Jackie

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

I love to eat  
gumbo z'herbes.

I like to read, I have  
a lot of books.

I love to go  
to dances.

Purple is  
my favorite  
color.

**I am Creole** Black. It's controversial, I know people who don't like the word "Creole." But, being honest, here in New Orleans, it is *the land* of Creoles and Cajuns.\* Though the Indians were already here, as we know. It's really their land.

I did my DNA test, and it came back with 30 percent West Africa, 1 percent Native America, 69 percent French and Spanish. If I lived in New York, I wouldn't be Black. But in Louisiana, if you have one *drop*\*\* of Black blood, you are Black.

On the buses, there was a screen, and colored people had to sit behind it. I sat behind it because that's what we do as

\* The word "Cajun" originates from the term "les Acadiens," used to describe French-speaking White colonists from Nova Scotia who settled in Louisiana between 1765-1785. "Creole" ancestry ranges, but many are the result of Black-White unions and have African, Caribbean, French, and Spanish heritage. Creoles were treated as Blacks by racist Jim Crow laws, and Cajuns as Whites—even though they were similarly socially and economically stratified.

\*\* Passed by state legislators in 1970, Louisiana law said that anyone having one thirty-second or more of "Negro blood" would be designated as black. It was repealed in 1983. Similarly, nationwide, the "answer to the question 'Who is Black?'" has long been that a Black is any person with any known African Black ancestry."

colored people. It didn't matter that I'm more White than Black, I had to sit behind the screen *or else*.

The Black people that were really Black in color, the really identifiable Blacks, had a harder time than I did. Even within the Creoles, we are prejudiced toward each other. We don't want our children to marry Black people, so those Black people were treated bad by both their own race *and* by White people. There were White-only bathrooms, yes, but if I really needed to go to the bathroom, and the closest one was a White one, I would use that one, no doubt! That's the advantage that I had, me with my light skin. My birth certificate also didn't label me as colored because I was born in a house, and my dad went to register my birth at the city hall, and since he didn't *look* Black, they didn't put "colored" on my birth certificate. It would've been different if I was born in the Black hospital.

A lot of people went to New York, or places like that, and crossed the colored line\*\*\* and just never looked back. But

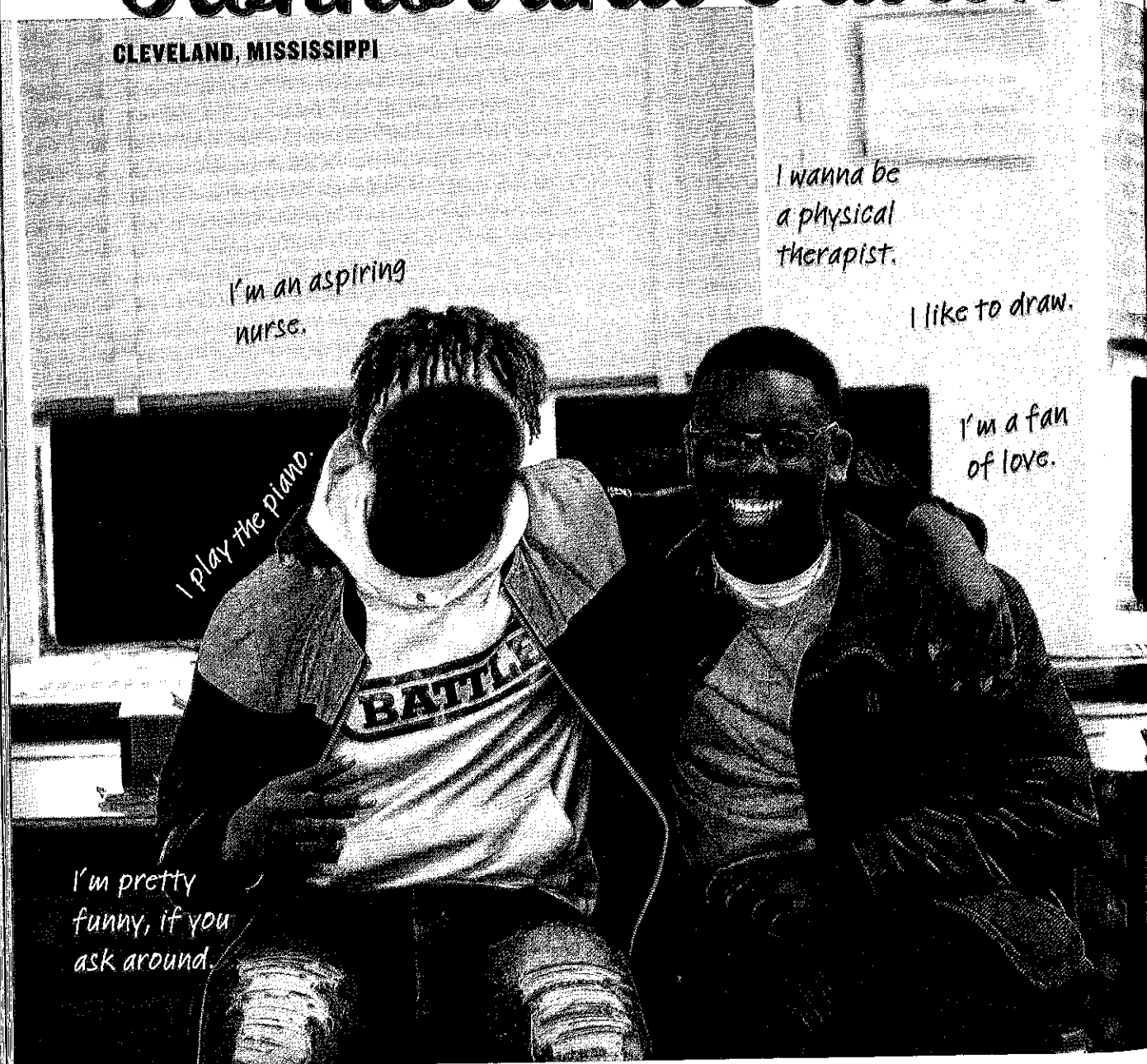
\*\*\* "Crossing the color line," also known as "racial passing": when individuals knowingly or unknowingly have non-White lineage but present themselves as "White" because of their physical appearance, thus adopting some of the privileges of having a White social status.

now the younger generations have computers. They go digging. See, we were all at this barbeque at my friend Lloyd's house once. We knew that all their children went way up North, away from New Orleans, to Minnesota, I think. Lloyd gets a call one day, and a kid says, "I was searching the computer and I found you, who are you?" Lloyd's like, "Who are *you*?"

Where did you come from?" Turns out this kid is his grandson. Lloyd's son went and married a White woman and never told anyone he was Black! There's a lot of people like this, they have children and their children have children, and they all don't even know that they are Black. It's a lot of secrecy; it's hard living like that. I would never do it.

# Konnor and Aaron

CLEVELAND, MISSISSIPPI



**Konnor:** There was Cleveland High and East Side High. East Side was known as an all-Black school, and Cleveland High was a mixture. We had like a fifty-year-long desegregation court order, so 2017 is the first year of the consolidation. Now all of us are at Cleveland Central High School.

**Aaron:** I went to Cleveland High. I just do my work and go home, pretty much. I don't really see a difference. We came together this year, yeah, but not like from one side of the track and the other side of the track.

**Konnor:** I see a difference. I went to East Side before they consolidated us. It's been an experience. It's been new. At first, I wasn't really too open-minded to it. I really wasn't optimistic about it at all, because I was used to what I was used to. I miss our traditions, like homecoming. We used to have a coronation the week of homecoming. We used to have a pep rally the day of homecoming. We didn't have that this year. This year there's also a larger population, which means larger class sizes, which means during classes you won't spend that one-on-one time with the teacher like you would last year. It's just making small adjustments like that. All the little things. They do matter. Also, you know, it hasn't really been a give-and-take. It's mostly been *give*, giving something up, for East Side students, and then they're mostly keeping the Cleveland

High traditions. But there's no purpose dwelling on it, especially something that can't be changed.

**Aaron:** Here, in the Delta, you don't really see much mixing. Like White people usually shop downtown, Black people usually shop uptown. A lot of the Black people work in the restaurants, as servers. Walmart, that's honestly where everybody shops at. That's pretty much it.

**Konnor:** I have friends that are in interracial relationships. And like, me personally, that's not something I believe in. But there are interracial relationships, and I've heard things said like, "Boy, you gon' get lynched!" or something like that. Why don't I believe in interracial relationships? Because I think Black is beautiful. Personally, I'm not attracted to White women.

**Aaron:** I don't really have a problem with interracial relationships. Love is love. You love what you love.

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**Desegregation does not equal integration. Segregation is the "separation of people on the basis of their race, or some other inappropriate characteristic. Desegregation is simply the ending of that practice"; it doesn't mean that integration, or "the conscious mixing of people on the basis of race," has been achieved.**