

Resilience

by Arianna Shaprow, age 12, grade 7, Nevada.

“Resilience” explores the African Diaspora and chronicles the struggles of the vibrant, defiant members of my family. In the midst of our tragedies, my ancestors were able to find peace and navigate the rough terrain that lie ahead. They were slaves in Holly Springs, Mississippi. After the Emancipation Proclamation, they migrated to Chicago for more opportunities. In Chicago, they had to endure racism and segregation, which negatively impacted their employment. My great grandmother became a maid at a hotel and raised 13 children. She had to endure an endless cycle of poverty. Much of our history was lost, because we were stolen from our homeland. Even though our cultural identities were dismantled, my ancestors found comfort in music, stories, and our love for one another. We are resilient, and we are survivors. I know that I am a survivor, because I am here to tell you my story.

We were taken
from our homelands
our prosperity and sense of community
stolen from us
our families torn apart
cultural identities dismantled
forgotten...
forced to work all day
beneath the blistering hot sun
dehydrated and burned out
bruised knees, scraped elbows
wounded from whips
desperately yearning for a way out
but their cries were never heard
They locked us
in an endless loop of poverty
mental illness
disease
and depression
from Holly Springs, Mississippi
and the shackles of slavery
to Chicago
seeking independence
and “liberty”
this was the journey of my ancestors
We were never freed
after the Emancipation Proclamation
never freed
from generational trauma
and pain
rejected
from schools
unable to receive the education
that we deserved
Oppression
Segregation
Stereotypes
and racism

Poverty naturally followed
Haunting us...
A never-ending maze
with no exit
only dead ends.
My relatives suffered
rat bites and tuberculosis as babies
gunshot wounds and addiction as adults
no money for doctors
unstable living conditions
poor ventilation
never knowing
what’s next...
Surviving paycheck to paycheck
Food stamps, welfare
Evictions and discrimination
13 of my aunts and uncles
lived in a tiny apartment
5 slept on a single, soiled mattress
a drumline of tragedies
Many of them
broke the cycle
my grandmother became the first African
American female Assistant District Attorney
in El Paso, Texas
scholarships and hard work paved her way
My mother is a survivor
of PTSD and panic attacks
a single mother who cares for me
with unwavering love
We don’t know
much of our history
or where in Africa
we come from
The knowledge of our history
was stripped away from us
buried deep in our family’s past
it remains a mystery...

One thing that will never
be taken away from us
Is our culture
We have created
a rich culture
Through centuries of oppression
our coping mechanisms
soothed us
comforting melodies
gospel
jazz
blues
and soul
What do we have?
We have our imagination
We redefine and reframe
To make us sane
documents detail our ancestors’
stories
Defiant
And bold
full of vibrant characters
riveting music
and soulful dishes
When I am fearful
I remember to be courageous
I remember I have ancestors
who were beaten and lynched
My ancestors were
Slaves
Survivors
Refugees
Migrants
This is my lineage
This is my history
We are resilient
Resilient survivors

—Arianna Shaprow, age 12, Nevada.