**Redefining Identity: African Americans Navigate Stereotypes**

by Bithiah Boham

[Visual Poem](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1PHVYPVkDX3eVEPqCjBMmYVlPgY9jPkQ3)

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Who are we, really?

Are we the stereotypes that society has placed upon us?

Or are we something more?

We bear the weight of history and the scars of discrimination.

We are defined by stereotypes and reduced to levity.

We struggle for acceptance and recognition.

Our history is one of oppression and resistance.

Of struggle and triumph, of pain and perseverance.

From Emmett Till to Trayvon Martin, from Sandra Bland to George Floyd.

Our people have suffered and died because of stereotypes.

Because of the color of their skin, they were seen as a threat,

And their lives were taken, their futures unmet.

Let us not forget about the recent shooting of Ralph Yarl.

When will justice prevail?

How long will we stay invisible?

We've come so far, yet we still have a long way to go.

The impact of stereotypes on African American identity,

Is a wound that cuts deep and leaves a lasting scar.

It tells us we are less than, not good enough,

That we are defined by the color of our skin.

The history of racism and prejudice is a heavy load.

It's shaped our identity in ways we don't even know,

But we're stronger than the stereotypes we've been told.

We've been told we're lazy, we're criminals, we're poor,

But we know that's not true, we're so much more.

We're doctors, we're lawyers, we're artists, we're teachers.

We are anything we wish to be; we are limitless beings.

Our identity is powerful, it's something to celebrate.

Our culture is rich, it's something to elevate.

We're more than our skin color, more than our past.

We're the future, we're the change that's going to last.

We are the children of Africa, the heirs of a legacy

We are a people with power and purpose

A people with a destiny and a dream

A people with a culture and a heritage

A people with a voice and a vision

And we are proud to be

To overcome stereotypes is to redefine our identity

To reject the lies that seek to hold us back

To embrace the truth of who we are and who we can be

To celebrate our diversity and our unity

So, let's redefine our identity, let's break free from the mold

Let's challenge stereotypes, let our stories be told

Let us rise and claim our place in history

Let us embrace our identity and our destiny

And let us be the change we wish to see in the world.

**CREATOR’S STATEMENT**

My intention for writing my poem titled "Redefining Identity - African Americans Navigate Stereotypes" is to raise awareness about the impact of stereotypes on identity and to provide a new perspective on how African Americans can redefine themselves beyond those stereotypes. I became interested in this topic since I am an African who recently arrived in America. Knowing that these preconceptions persist, I feel I cannot be myself around many people here in America. I have also seen that some people do not even bother to understand me when I talk. As a result, I chose to keep to myself and avoid the burden of repeating my comments. Also seeing the amount of killings and shootings on my people because of the color of their skin or the negative image created by the media about other people who looked like them was unjustifiable. I believed that exploring this topic would lead to greater understanding and positive change.

For this project, I initially considered making a photo essay. I was expected to interview African American youths about their own experiences dealing with stereotypes and photograph them. I thought it would be strange to do such a thing, and I was not comfortable, so I began to consider other options. I remembered seeing an example of a visual poem on the assignment web page and went back to look at it. After watching it, I decided to do something similar because I would only need to download videos related to my work. I was also comfortable with the fact that I only had to record my voice saying my poem rather than displaying my face like in a TED talk or interview. I also did not want to write an Op-ed since I was tired of writing. I wanted to do something straightforward and effective in communicating my message. So, I chose to create a visual poem because I thought it would be the most effective and simple approach to convey my message.

Poems, in my opinion, are straightforward, and when written with an explicit purpose, they immediately capture readers' attention. I believe poetry can be a strong tool for conveying complex thoughts and feelings, as well as emotionally engaging readers. I think that my visual poem will provide viewers with a special and engrossing experience that will immerse them into the poem's world and entice them to engage with its themes and ideas.

In my search for a mentor text poem, I stumbled upon Amanda Gorman's poem "The Hill We Climb." I had to modify my search several times until I found this poem. I was looking for a recent poem about my topic, so I was delighted to find it. She read her poem at President Joseph Robinette Biden Jr.'s inauguration. I was surprised that they chose her, a black woman, to speak at such a significant event. It was fantastic to see her read her poem with such confidence in the video; I was so proud of her for making it this far. Her poem was about unity and justice, which is similar to mine, and it greatly motivated me. In her poem, she hooked her audience by starting with a question. I chose to start my poem in the same manner she did in her poem to grab the reader's attention. She was also talking about all of us celebrating our differences, which was exactly the message I intended to convey to Americans in my poem. The line “For there is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it. If only we’re brave enough to be it,” from Gorman's poem resonated with me. It reminds me that even in the darkest moments, there is always hope. It tells me that I have the ability to affect positive change in my life and the lives of others, but it takes courage and dedication to do so.

Seeing how former President Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, and other famous people reacted to Gorman’s poem also lifted my spirit. Gorman is currently known as "The youngest inaugural poet in U.S. history." Amanda Gorman is an outstanding example of how Africans, regardless of age, can rise to whatever position they desire.

My target audience consists of both African Americans and Americans. I chose African Americans as my audience so that they would feel validated and empowered by the information I provided, as it will help to shine light on the ways they can fight prejudices and redefine identity. I want this poem to encourage them and remind them that they are limitless beings. I chose Americans as my audience so that they would see the value of cultural sensitivity and respect, as well as try to create a more inclusive and equal society for all. I want them to be open-minded so that we can all celebrate our differences.

My purpose of creating this visual poem is to raise awareness about the impact of stereotypes on African Americans, and to promote greater empathy and understanding among people from different backgrounds. To promote social justice and advocate for greater representation and diversity in media and popular culture.

I am pleased with my work and believe I did my best. I am surprised I was able to create such a project given how indecisive I was in the beginning. This was not an easy project for me to do; it required a great deal of thought, so I am delighted it turned out the way it did.

My poem took a whole day to write. I began by drafting an outline, which assisted me in developing my poems. I went to the assignment website in search of materials to utilize for my film. On the Genre project resources page, I discovered a website (purple planet) where I could get free music. The music for the background of my visual poem was downloaded from the website I discovered. I also discovered an URL where I could download the Audacity program to edit my video. I downloaded the app and was almost through editing the clip when I realized the program didn't allow me to perform a voice-over, so I had to start over. I attempted to use the CapCut program online to edit my video after I had completed trimming audio for the background music. I discovered that I had to download the app to record a voice-over for YouTube, so I abandoned what I had previously started and began again. I downloaded the CapCut program and began editing my movie again. I began by editing my background music and then moved on to my voice-over so that when I begin incorporating videos, they may be linked to the context of my poem.

I explored YouTube for the best places to download free stock videos and came across a video that listed the top five. I chose the first website the man suggested, Pexels. I picked videos that I believed related to the words in my poem. Even though some of the videos are unclear the first time you view my visual poetry, I have explanations for why I utilized each of them in the areas I did. I watched a lot of YouTube videos to learn how to edit my video because it was my first time, and I was completely lost.

Overall, I think I have been convincing and clear enough for my target audience to understand the information I am presenting and be influenced by my ideas.