

Biography

Sonji Hargrove is a senior at Vanderbilt University with a double major in African American and Diaspora Studies (AADS) and political science. Hargrove's academic interests center on Black political thought, organizing traditions, and the ways Black communities have produced knowledge within and beyond institutions of higher education. At Vanderbilt, her work and leadership have consistently focused on questions of equity, accountability, and how students are shaped by the intellectual environments they move through.

Artist Statement

This piece was inspired by my experience studying Blackness at Vanderbilt at a moment when Black Studies and DEI initiatives are increasingly treated as optional or expendable. I wrote this piece as both a reflection and an intervention. It is an attempt to name what is at stake when fields rooted in Black intellectual traditions are framed as secondary within the academy. The question, “Who are your people?”, drawn from the organizing and pedagogical legacy of Ella Baker, guides this work and shapes my understanding of education—not as credentialing, but as responsibility.

I am grappling with tensions between institutional narratives of inclusion and the material realities of support for Black Studies on campus. The piece explores who knowledge is produced for, whose histories are protected, and how students learn to understand power when critical frameworks are marginalized. I am particularly interested in how Black Studies undergirds my political science education, offering the historical depth and ethical clarity necessary to analyze policy, governance, and inequality honestly.

I chose the op-ed form because it allowed me to write directly to the Vanderbilt community while blending personal reflection with public accountability. Writing this piece left me wondering what Vanderbilt might look like if Black Studies were treated as foundational rather than disposable, and what responsibility students carry once they are given the tools to see the institution clearly. It also surfaced gratitude for the Black intellectual traditions, faculty, and staff at Vanderbilt that have shaped my education, even in moments of institutional uncertainty.