

Biography

Carter Vidale is a sophomore from the Bronx, NY, majoring in African American and Diaspora Studies.

Title

Accessories and Tattoos as a Form of Self-Identity and Resistance

Artist Statement

Since I was nine years old, I've been a Black student at a PWI. I've seen the ways in which Black students are expected to, and in some cases forced, to conform to the expectations of the white elite. For some, accessories like jewelry may simply be meaningless pieces of metal. However, I assert that jewelry, whether customized or not, functions, for the Black individual, as a tool of identity-building and resistance in spaces where they are expected to be as minimalistic as possible. The expectation of Black minimalism in academic spaces comes from the desire to assimilate the Black student into the mold of what White academia believes a student should look like. Clean (which has its own racial connotations), minimal jewelry (chains and necklaces) and in applicable cases, little to no tattoos. Jewelry-studded and tattooed students may, at Vanderbilt specifically, be mistaken for student athletes or even visitors, an affirmation of the idea that "If you do not conform, you do not belong." With the Black population at this institution shrinking, it is more important now than ever for Black students to build not only community but strong self-identities. Through that process, we actively engage in resistance against socially reinforced respectability politics as well as the system that tells Black students to conform or leave. In this collection of photographs, I showcase the various ways in which necklaces, bracelets, beads, and tattoos work to not only showcase individuality but also self-expression. I believe that photos are the best way to explain what I mean, as simply writing it out could not possibly capture the beauty of individuality and of Black skin itself.