EVENT TITLE: Trauma, Tresses, and Truth: Untangling Our Hair Through Personal Narrative

Event Description: Black women’s natural hair remains political and persecuted even now. Panelists are African American and Latina authors relating their real-life encounters through personal essays. Particularly relevant during this time of emboldened white supremacy, racism, and oppressive othering, panelists’ work explores how writing about one of the still.remaining systemic biases in academic and corporate America might lead to greater understanding and respect.

EVENT CATEGORY: Nonfiction Readings

Event Organizer & Moderator: 
Lyzette Wanzer: Lyzette Wanzer resides in San Francisco. She has received writing residencies at the Blue Mountain Center (NY) and KHN Center for the Arts (NE). She is the recipient of an Investing in Artists
grant from Center for Cultural Innovation (2012) and several IAC grants from the SF Arts Commission (2013, 2016, 2019).

Event Participants:

Dr. Adrienne Danyelle Oliver: Adrienne Danyelle Oliver, MFA, EdD, is a writer, hip-hop scholar and educator based in Oakland, CA. As an interdisciplinary writer-educator, she uses creative writing to theorize about a more just education system that honors hip hop culture. Her work is published in Storytelling, Self and Society.

Kelechi Ubozoh: Kelechi Ubozoh is a Nigerian-American writer and mental health advocate. She was the first undergraduate published in The New York Times and is featured in The S Word documentary. Her first book, We've Been Too Patient, features diverse voices of radical mental health.
Jasmine Hawkins: Jasmine “Mizz Jasz” Hawkins is an educator, writer, and community organizer who serves as president and founder of the non-profit Urgent 365 Inc., author of Urgent Conversations: Race, Reality, and Responsibility, and host of the Pecola Breedlove and the Freedom Party open mic.

Judy Juanita: Judy Juanita’s semi autobiographical novel Virgin Soul explores her time in the Black Panther Party. Her collected essays, DeFacto Feminism: Essays Straight Outta Oakland, explore her development as a writer, activist and feminist. Her poems and plays have been published and produced widely.

Housekeeping Announcement: Read AWP’s accessibility boilerplate text, required before each panel begins.

Opening Remarks: In her essay “Is Your Hair Still Political?” Audre Lorde explains how an immigration officer
objected to her dreadlocks. Natural hair, whether braids, afros, locks, or other styles, has always been political. Writing—aka narrative healing--about life experiences impacted by our hair illuminates both the absurdity of trying to enforce white hair care grooming standards on African American women, and the muted but invasive means by which society shames natural hair from infancy through adulthood.

**Panelist Introductions:**
I will briefly introduce each of the panelists, from left to right.

**Panel Readings:**
Each panelist will read their essays (or an excerpt).

**Panel Discussion:**
Panelists will engage in discussion with one another, with audience members, and will take audience questions. I will jump-start the discussion with these questions:
• What is your earliest memory of having someone touch your hair, without permission—just to “see what it feels like” or because they claim they “just had to touch it?” Do you recall how the encounter made you feel?

• In her 1990 essay, “Is Your Hair Still Political?” writer and civil rights activist Audre Lorde explains how she nearly missed out on a Caribbean vacation because a black immigration officer in the British Virgin Islands took issue with her locks. Why do you think the obsession with African American hair is so deeply ingrained in the American psyche?

• Have you experienced any undue reaction to wearing natural hair in your workplace, or in another professional or corporate setting? In the academy?

• How did writing about these experiences impact you? What did you realize, or what was unburied, during the writing process?
Describe some of the emotions that erupted for you.

HANDOUT
See the following pages.
Further Reading Resources


“Is Your Hair Still Political?” Audre Lourde. 
http://sites.middlebury.edu/africandiasporas/files/2015/10/POliticalHair.pdf

https://thefeministwire.com/2013/04/untangling-the-knots-understanding-the-hair-politics-of-black-women-revisited/

Further Reading Resources


“Is Your Hair Still Political?” Audre Lourde. [http://sites.middlebury.edu/africandiasporas/files/2015/10/POliticalHair.pdf](http://sites.middlebury.edu/africandiasporas/files/2015/10/POliticalHair.pdf)