

Black Joy

Joy can be defined in many terms and can mean different things from one person to another. Joy can be found in people, places, art, and many other things. According to the UCLA Black, Bruin Resource Center, Black joy is defined as possessing a range that is boundless and not easily defined. Black joy is anything that inspires, supports, and uplifts Black culture.

Finding joy in things or in people is difficult nowadays, especially for the Black community and culture. For years, the Black community has suffered to fight for their rights and their culture. Things accomplished in this world consist of the process of getting to the endpoint. For certain people, the process can be easy, less time-consuming, and enjoyable. But achieving Black joy consists of a process that isn't the same for everybody. For some people, it might take a whole lifetime to achieve Black joy while, for some, it might be a process that they work on every day of their life. "Black children need to see themselves reflected in the world around them, inviting a true sense of belonging and cultural pride. Black joy means embracing and appreciating blackness in its authenticity and fullness, which is critical to instilling a healthy sense of identity in Black children" (Dana).

Many people who identify as Black are not taught from a young age how to express Black joy and what it takes such as the process to embrace authentic self-joy. For many people, joy can be expressed in many different ways. The younger generation seems to enjoy or express joy through art such as dancing and music. When a person is able to express their authentic joy one seems to be healthy mentally and physically. There isn't a specific process that is followed to achieve the goal of joy in life. Many learn the process as they grow up, from experienced older individuals, educated Black individuals, and from trial and error.

Danielle Brooks is a Black American actress and singer, and like many other Black actresses, she had her success as well as her tough times in life. Brooks' process of Black Joy was unique and known to the world. In 2019, Brooks welcomed her first child, announced a surprise engagement to her fiancé, and had a great career-making turn on her Netflix show. During these amazing times in her life, she encountered a difficult time when the pandemic hit like it did to many other people. Danielle mentioned in an interview, "This year was probably the hardest time for me to hold on to joy." During those times, many people encountered very difficult times, and expressing joy was one of the most difficult things to do because people had so few opportunities for human interaction and the ability to express freedom. At the same time, the pandemic created the opportunity for many people to redefine their goals, find purpose in life, and find their inner joy. Danielle Brooks "journalled, listened to God, cooked more, and held her family closer. In the process, she found clarity, a new perspective, and hope" (Penn).

To be able to live a happy life, do the things you enjoy, and connect with people are some of the aspects of Black Joy that many Black people strive for. Octavia Ink stated in an article written by the American Civil Liberties Union on the importance of Black joy stated that "Black joy is freedom. Black joy is radical. The Black joy coming from systemic equality would change the world. For my personal journey as an artist, I've been given opportunities I never imagined with the help of my community, family, and friends. Black joy leads to liberation and the freedom of self-expression" (Three Artists Explain and Visualize What Black Joy Means to Them).

As expressed above, the importance of Black joy is defined in many aspects and defined differently for Black people. For some people, it's the equality given to people, equal opportunities in the freedom to self-express. According to Gloria Oladipo, "Black joy is

revolutionary. Black joy is essential. Black joy reminds us that there's more to Black life than pain and suffering, even if the world tries to convince us that Black life can only be agony. Black joy inspires us. Black joy rejuvenates us. Black joy—Black community, Black art, Black people dancing, Black people partying, Black people just being happy and free reminds us what we're fighting for.” Oladipo's description of the importance of Black joy is truly the authenticity and importance of expressing your inner joy.

Black joy has such a significant impact on the Black community, and it also greatly impacts people in higher education. For example, Black students who attend a predominantly white institution do not have the same experience as students who attend Historically Black Colleges & Universities. That causes many differences between these two students and their journeys in obtaining degrees. As part of their journey, the students who attend Historically Black Colleges & Universities often have the opportunity to express themselves in ways that facilitate their authentic Black joy. Because they have more students that look like themselves and therefore, they don't have to feel a sense of trying to fit in or having to code-switch in interactions with white people.

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