

English II 085LE  
April 30, 2021  
Karoline Jeane Steckley  
Class Notes

Sources are imbedded in the titles/images.

## Part One: AOC and Ursula (Young People Rock!)



BBC

### [Sofagate: EU chief Ursula von der Leyen blames sexism for Turkey chair snub](#)

BBC is less kind here. April 2021

NYTimes

## [Chair Incident Was Sign of Enduring Sexism, E.U. Leader Says](#)

“Would this have happened if I had worn a suit and a tie?” asked Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, after she was left standing during a summit in Turkey this month.

[CLOSING THE GAP](#)

# [Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s response to Rep. Ted Yoho hits home for many other women in politics and business](#)

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[Courtney Connley@CLASSICALYCOURT](#)



MANDEL NGAN | AFP | Getty Images

On Thursday, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) took to the House floor to deliver a powerful response to Rep. Ted Yoho (R-Fla) after he aggressively

confronted her outside the Capitol, then delivered a non-apology defending his own behavior. She called out the ongoing acceptance of “violence and violent language against women” inside and outside of politics.

The 30-year-old congresswoman detailed how [earlier in the week](#), while walking up the steps of the Capitol, Yoho called her “disgusting,” “crazy,” “out of [her] mind” and “dangerous” for suggesting that poverty and unemployment numbers are causing an increase in crime in New York City during the pandemic. When Ocasio-Cortez told the congressman he was being rude, he walked away, calling her a “a f---ing b----,” which was overheard by nearby reporters outside the Capitol.

Admitting that she was not “hurt or deeply offended” by Yoho’s comments because she’s “encountered this type of harassment” before, Ocasio-Cortez said she wanted to address Yoho’s [Wednesday apology](#) where he said that “Having been married for 45 years with two daughters, I’m very cognizant of my language” and that he apologized if his words were misunderstood.

“I could not allow my nieces, I could not allow the little girls that I go home to, I could not allow victims of verbal abuse and worse to see that, to see that excuse and to see our Congress accept it as legitimate and accept it as an apology and to accept silence as a form of acceptance,” Ocasio-Cortez said, while adding that having a daughter or a wife does not make a man “decent.”

Ocasio-Cortez’s speech has since inspired other women in politics to come forward in her defense and to share their own experiences of dealing with sexism and violent remarks.

“Violence against women in politics specifically is a global problem,” [Rep. Rashida Tlaib \(D-MI\) said](#) on the House floor following Ocasio-Cortez’s speech. “I know. I would invite any of my colleagues across the aisle to answer the calls into my office for just one day to hear the vile sexist remarks made about me and other women serving in this chamber.”

Rep. Ilhan Omar also [chimed in](#) and came to Ocasio-Cortez’s defense, while explaining that like many other women, she too has experienced ongoing acts of sexism and violent remarks made towards her.

“In this body, we have seen men who are afraid of Muslim women like me and Rashida Tlaib because we say proudly that you cannot ban us from this country because we pray differently than you,” she said.



**Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., conducts a news conference to call for the extension of the federal unemployment insurance in the Capitol Visitor Center to on Friday, July 24, 2020. Reps. Richard Neal, D-Mass., left, and Dan Kildee, D-Mich., also appear.**

Tom Williams | CQ-Roll Call, Inc. | Getty Images

In a separate news conference, House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi weighed in](#) on her experiences with sexism in politics saying, “It’s a manifestation of attitude in our society really. I can tell you that firsthand, they’ve called me names for at least...18 years of leadership.”

Pelosi, who is a mother of five, went on to recall the time when Congress was debating about reproductive rights years ago and a GOP lawmaker said on the House floor, “Nancy Pelosi thinks she knows more about having babies than the Pope.”

“There’s no limit to the disrespect or the lack of acknowledgement of the strength of women,” she said, while adding that nothing will be more “wholesome for our government” than the increased participation of women in politics.

Linda Seabrook, general counsel and director of workplace safety and equity for anti-violence organization [Futures Without Violence](#), tells [CNBC Make It](#) that the sexism women experience in politics is no different than the sexism women experience in many other workplaces, especially those that are

dominated by men. Right now, women make up [23.7%](#) of the 535 members in the United States Congress.

“Sexual harassment, more than anything, is about power,” she says. “It’s not really all that much about sex. It’s a way for men to kind of check women and say, ‘Know your place. You’re in our space, we have the power and I’m going to use what I have as a man to take you down a peg.’”

To stop sexual harassment from taking place, whether it comes in the form of inappropriate remarks or acts of assault, Seabrook says a culture shift has to happen where both men and women call out this behavior.

“We have to change the fact that Rep. Yoho saying [those remarks] was treated as OK because his colleagues didn’t call him out,” she says. “That’s the norm that has to be changed. And, I think that’s changed through greater accountability. We need good men to stand up and say, ‘That’s wrong’ and hold other men accountable for that type of language and behavior.”

BBC

### [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez denounces 'sexist slur by congressman'](#)

BBC’s headline about sexist slur used against AOC. April 2020

NYtimes

### [\*Ocasio-Cortez Embraces a Republican’s Insult\*](#)

Representative Ted Yoho reportedly approached Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on the steps of the Capitol, calling her “disgusting” for her policies and uttering a pair of expletives.

# Part Two: Nothing Burgers & “Soy Boys”

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## Opinion: Conservatives serve up a scary dish of nothingburgers



Opinion by

[Molly Roberts](#)

Editorial Writer

April 27, 2021 at 11:18 p.m. GMT+2

The joke is so obvious it scarcely seems worth making, but here goes: The Republican Party is [throwing red meat](#) at its base.

This past week has featured a [carnivorous freakout](#) just in time for barbecue season. Contrary to all available facts, right-wing outlets and elected officials are warning that the president wants to ban hamburgers.

“Joe Biden’s climate plan includes cutting 90 percent of red meat from our diets. They want to limit us to about four pounds a year,” [tweeted](#) Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-Colo.). “Why doesn’t Joe stay out of my kitchen?” Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) dubbed the commander in chief “[the Hamburglar](#).”

“Idahoans also have beef with this agenda and for dinner!” proclaimed that state’s Republican governor, Brad Little. This came in response to Texas’s Gov. Greg Abbott, who declared with gusto that this encroachment on Americans’ civil liberties and cholesterol levels is “Not gonna happen in Texas!”

Well, no, it’s not, because it’s not going to happen anywhere. [The whole thing is](#), put simply, [a lie](#) — an imaginary proposal transformed by propagandists into a topic of impassioned debate. The burger brouhaha bears all the hallmarks of modern-day cultural war-making. The conservative media machine thrummed to life after the Daily Mail melodramatized some out-of-context numbers from a University of Michigan study: If *hypothetically* we reduced our meat consumption by dramatic proportions, the researchers said, *hypothetically* we could lower greenhouse gas emissions on a similarly significant scale.

Skilled sensationalists transformed the anodyne findings into something else entirely: The dictatorial Democrats *definitely* will restrict your diets to 0.18 ounces of meat per day, or four pounds per year.

Fox News took its cue and aired the claim on at least five of its shows.

“Get ready,” Larry Kudlow cautioned on his Friday show of the liberals’ plot to save the planet but spoil the summer. “You can throw back a plant-based beer with your grilled Brussels sprouts and wave your American flag.” (Beer is already made from plants.)

Does it matter that one Fox News anchor later issued a mealy-mouthed [correction](#)? Hardly. The “Up In Your Grill” graphic the network created had already gone viral, rocketing across the Internet from blue-checked Twitter celebrity civilians to Congress members.

The administration was even compelled to respond by sharing fact-checks — joining, in effect, in a battle over a non-proposal. The imaginary had become real. Look, press aides gamely

protested, here's Biden flipping burgers! And he's smiling! Would a guy like that really try to steal your sirloin?

Compared to fast-spreading fabrications, the truth moves slowly. Of course, there's another reason crazy narratives are tough to dispel: They're designed to inflame by warping a matter of policy into a matter of identity. Forget about any serious discussion of how to curb climate change. Meat has always been a favorite way in this country to perform masculinity. Men love to eat the stuff, women are often treated like it. Just take a look at 4chan's favorite term for an insufficiently manly male, a weak and submissive discredit to his gender: the "[soy boy](#)."

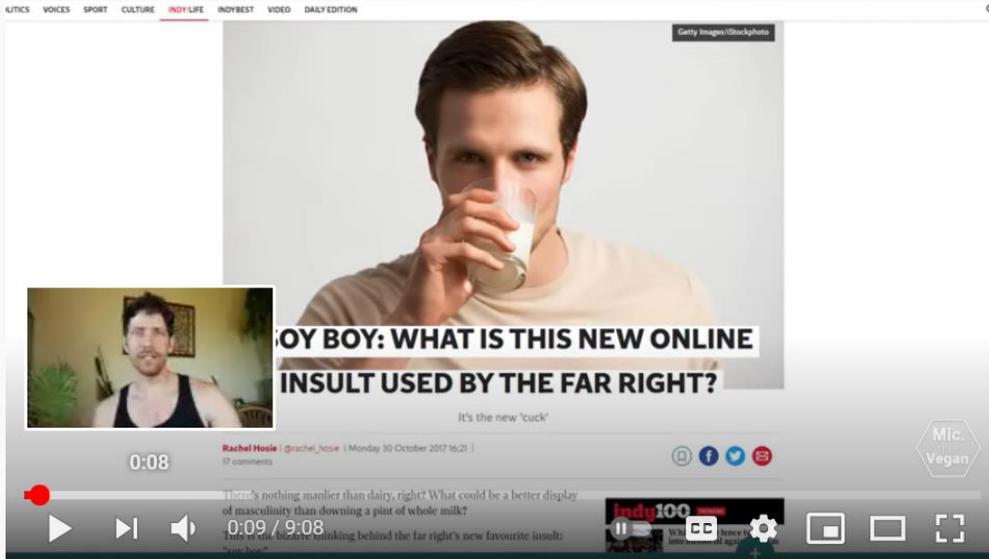
Now, the same kind of energy and display has exploded into a point of pride and even patriotism.

"I'm pretty sure I ate 4 pounds of red meat yesterday," bragged Donald Trump Jr. "My officially [sic] response today . . . "[tweeted](#) Matt Couch, a self-proclaimed "Political Analyst," "Investigator" and "Truth-Slinger" with nearly 500,000 followers, alongside a photo of what looks to be four pounds of cooked red meat sitting heavily on a dinner plate accompanied by a healthy helping of asparagus wrapped, also, in meat.

The [vast majority](#) of Americans eat meat; it's vegetarians and vegans whose meals buck the norm. But this is a typical tactic for conservatives to adopt in times that are a'changing: Take anything that has long been society's default, exaggerate the threat that someday it may be the default no longer, and — poof! — that thing becomes essential to *who we are*.

Think of the [Straight Pride Parade](#) that brought celebrants clad in ill-fitting jeans with signs reading "MAKE NORMALCY NORMAL AGAIN" to Boston. Think of the [white supremacist rallies](#) that seem constantly across the country to pop up and flop out. Think of the war on the war on Christmas.

Or think of a large piece of beef, without even a good sear to redeem it, daring the world to try to take it away — even though no one is actually trying to.



Am I A Soy Boy? My Testosterone Results After 8 Years Vegan

74,512 views • Jun 8, 2020

5.9K 405 SHARE SAVE

## Revenge of the Influencers!

Mic the Vegan reveals the truth about the "Soy Boy" myth.

2018

**From Rice Eaters to Soy Boys: Race, Gender, and Tropes of 'Plant Food Masculinity'**

Iselin Gambert  
*The George Washington University Law School*

Tobias Linné  
*lund University*

**Abstract:** Tropes of 'effeminized' masculinity have long been bound up with a plant-based diet, dating back to the 'effeminate rice eater' stereotype used to justify 19th-century colonialism in Asia to the alt-right's use of the term 'soy boy' on Twitter and other social media today to call out men they perceive to be weak, effeminate, and politically correct (Gambert and Linné). This article explores tropes of 'plant food masculinity' throughout history, focusing on how while they have embodied different social, cultural, and political identities, they all serve as a tool to construct an archetypal masculine ideal. The analysis draws on a wide range of material from the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as a qualitative media analysis of #SoyBoy tweets posted between October 2010 and August 2018. It argues that, given that we live in a world steeped in 'coloniality' (Grosfoguel), it is no wonder that sexist and racist colonial-era tropes are alive and well today, packaged in a 21st-century digital culture form. In the digital politics of the alt-right, dairy milk has become a symbol for racial purity, connecting pseudo-scientific claims about milk, lactose tolerance, race, and masculinity. The term 'soy boy' provides a discursive counterpoint, relying heavily on colonial-era stereotypes of so-called 'effeminate' plant eating, often linked to Asian and other non-white cultures. The article concludes by

arguing that for those working to reframe centuries-old norms and tropes related to race, sex, and humankind's relationship to other animals, part of that work may take place online using the tools of social media and reappropriation of derogatory language. However, ultimately the power of social media to change norms and minds depends on the power of the social movements driving those FROM RICE EATERS TO SOY BOYS 130 changes; success is likely to only come through a robust anti-racist, color-conscious, and gender-conscious vegan movement (Harper) Keywords: dairy, milk, plant milk, soy, vegan, masculinity, gender, racism, sexism, social media, alright, rhetoric, cultural studies, media studies, food studies, critical animal studies

## **Part 3: Art will Save us**

# **Everything Writes Itself: An Interview with Black Thought**

By David Ma  
April 29, 2021

AT WORK



BLACK  
THOUGHT.  
PHOTO: ERICA  
GÉNÉCÉ.

*In 2016,  
wearing a white  
shirt with tiny  
embroidered  
roses, Black  
Thought  
centered himself  
in front of a  
whispering  
audience at the*

*Harvard Innovation Labs. He had just finished a conversation with host Michael Keohane about the hand-painted clothing he'd made as a young artist, his rise within rap music, and his eventual aspirations as an actor. To the delight of the campus crowd, he asked, "I can kick a rhyme?" Nudging up his glasses, he then unleashed five minutes of complex stanzas, double entendres, and expository verses. Somewhere within the burst of sentences, he veered into the biographical. "I got to see how gangstas played at such an early age. What my father was into sent him to his early grave. Then mom started chasing that base like Willie Mays ... Trouble was my ball and chain." And then, after a pregnant pause—"Black Thought is what that all became."*

*Despite almost three decades of recorded material and myriad rhymes, Black Thought has remained low-key about his life offstage. Black Thought, a.k.a. Tariq Luqmaan Trotter, grew up alongside hip-hop itself. His first purchase at a record store was Afrika Bambaataa's Planet Rock. His early love of rap music gave way to an enduring interest in the written word. "I remember thinking how much I just loved writing," he says. "I'd write all kinds of things down all day long. I was around nine years old when I tried to write my first rhymes."*

*He spent his formative years at the Philadelphia High School for Creative and Performing Arts. During this time, a chance encounter with a young drummer, Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson, would change the trajectory of both their lives. The two, along with the rapper Malik B., formed the Square Roots, a name shortened to just the Roots by the time their first release, Organix, arrived in 1993. Running counter to hip-hop’s celebrated history with sampling, the Roots became known for their use of live instruments and a rotating lineup of band members. They experimented with sampling more in their later work, but live instruments were foundational to their ascent, and word spread about their exuberant stage show.*

*Their 1995 album, Do You Want More?!!!??!, and its 1996 follow-up, Illadelph Halflife, were springboards that took them around the globe for the next fourteen years—world tours, Woodstock, television, film, their very own music festival, even the White House—all of it halting somewhat when they became the house band for Late Night with Jimmy Fallon in 2009 (and eventually The Tonight Show). Collectively, the Roots have amassed more than twenty studio projects, live works, compilations, collaborations, and more. They’ve been nominated for fourteen Grammy Awards and won three, including one in 1999 for their juggernaut single “You Got Me.”*

*Throughout the Roots’ expansive catalogue, we’ve witnessed Black Thought’s maturation as an artist, his gravelly, aging voice and renewed boldness on recent material, all of it quite fitting of his sage persona and increasingly sermonic verbiage. There’d long been attempts made at solo projects over the years, but a perfect storm of industry semantics and gridlock deadened many would-be albums. The Roots’ Phrenology in 2002 was in fact a project whose entire framework was built around sketches intended for Black Thought’s solo debut. Phrenology signaled that Black Thought was undeniably emerging into his own, and his peers were taking notice.*

*In 2018, he released Streams of Thought, Vol. 1, the start of what has become a series of solo projects, each recorded with different producers. As expected, the Streams of Thought series represents a deviation from the material Black Thought has recorded with the*

*Roots. Here, he's more inward, more confessional, touching on topics like his family and his anxieties as an artist. To date, there have been three volumes, but a fourth is afoot—it seems to be ongoing, a living document that he's committed to for the longterm. "Am I a journal or journalist? Olympic tournament–level genius author? Affirmative," he rapped in a 2020 NPR Tiny Desk performance, sitting stoically in house slippers and dark glasses. He's also been working on a Broadway adaptation of George Schuyler's 1931 Afrofuturist satire Black No More, which he's producing, writing music and lyrics for, and costarring in.*

*From our respective corners of the country, Black Thought and I spoke a couple of times over the past year, discussing watershed moments of his artistic growth, important Roots history, and the nucleus of his whole enterprise: his use of language and the written word.*

INTERVIEWER

What are your earliest memories of rap music?

BLACK THOUGHT

I'm about the same age as hip-hop itself. Kool Herc and those guys started going back and forth on disco breaks in July or August of 1973, and I was born in October of that year. I was invented just a couple months after the breakbeat was invented. Some of my earliest memories are of breaks being spun at disco parties in the neighborhood. Music-wise, record-wise, though, it would be "Rapper's Delight," whenever that hit.

INTERVIEWER

When did your interest in writing begin? What sparked it?

BLACK THOUGHT

I was nine years old when I started writing. A rapper named RC LaRock got popular and really made an impression on me. He made me want to write actual rhymes. In 1980 he had a song called “Micstro” that was a huge influence in regards to my style. Then “Superrappin’,” by Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five, came out, and they did a particular style that was comparable to what the girl group JJ Fad popularized on the song “Supersonic.” Then Kool Moe Dee and the Treacherous Three came out and influenced me a lot, too. But I remember “Superrappin’ ” in particular because it’s a serious record that starts out at a moderate pace. By the end of it, the verses are lightning fast. I wanted to write my first song in that same cadence.

INTERVIEWER

Your writing has such novelistic detail. What subjects interested you most in school?

BLACK THOUGHT

I was always really influenced by what I had to read. Even more than English and literature, I was influenced by history and social studies. I’ve always liked to write about people, and the ways of people, and the way we are. I like to write about humanity in whatever narrative I’m telling.

INTERVIEWER

Walk me through your writing process. Do you actively take notes and mark things down for later use? Are you constantly connecting swirling sentences in your head all day?

BLACK THOUGHT

These days I sit down and write on the computer or in the notes section of my phone. I was late to the whole electronic writing game, actually. I made fun of my counterparts for years and laughed at all the rappers I’d see writing shit in their phones. I was stubbornly analog

for a long time. About a week ago I had time to go through all these old containers at my office. I found like twenty notebooks with original drafts of stuff I had written. A lot of Roots classics were in there—“Web,” “Rising Down,” “The Fire,” “Star,” and others. And that was just at first glance. I’m glad I held out for as long as I did because now I have all these notebooks to look at. It’s different from getting your music down digitally from the cloud. All that being said, I’m making a return to the pen and paper.

INTERVIEWER

When you write by hand, what do you use?

BLACK THOUGHT

I like to write in Five Star multisubject, spiral-bound notebooks. And I use a Pilot Dr. Grip retractable ballpoint. I also like the Fisher Space Pen. It’s what the astronauts use, and I like it because I can write upside down.

INTERVIEWER

How did you and Questlove first meet?

BLACK THOUGHT

It sounds cliché, but we met in the high school principal’s office. He was a year, maybe two years ahead of me. I was in trouble. He was not. [*Laughs*] He struck me as an odd fellow but also a serious musician. He had a super unique look, and his musicality really appealed to me. Then, when we kicked it, I noticed his extensive knowledge of breaks and how he knew the origins of so many songs that eventually became rap songs. He knew what that overall process looked like, and all of it was just the perfect missing piece to my personal creativity at that time. I was fourteen, I think.

INTERVIEWER

What were the early days of the Roots like?

### BLACK THOUGHT

Questlove and I founded the Square Roots in 1987, when we were in high school. In our earliest incarnation, we were a duo who had other musicians float in and out of the equation as they were needed. After high school, we all went to college elsewhere, so it required a little more effort to keep the band together. Ahmir worked with other musicians, and I worked with other ones as well. Primarily, for me, that person was Malik B. Malik and I worked a lot together in those years when we were in school in upstate Pennsylvania. Eventually we left Millersville University and came back to Philly. It was a reunion for me and a new connection for Malik with Questlove. That was the first time they met in person. But even before that, when we were away at school, we would rap over beat tapes that Ahmir would send me in the mail. So once we cliqued up, it became Malik, Ahmir, and me.

### INTERVIEWER

You mentioned Malik, and we'd be remiss not to bring him up, especially with his recent passing. Tell me about your relationship and what will stand out to you most about your time together.

### BLACK THOUGHT

The most striking thing for me—and I feel like for anyone whose life he touched—was that he was just a sweet person. He was gentle. He was always very curious, in a childlike way, his whole life. There's something to be said about maintaining that curiosity because it's something we lose as we become jaded adults. He never lost that. You know how when it comes to the stock market they say you should “ABC”—“always be closing”? Malik's ABC was to “always be creative.” He literally wrote rhymes on the walls and doors of his house. He would go to sleep with hundreds of pages scattered around him in bed and wake up surrounded by these pages and pens and start writing again.

## INTERVIEWER

I'd like to talk some more about the Roots' earlier projects, the ones you cut your teeth on. You mentioned *Organix* as sort of a demo that became your first album. How did that come about?

## BLACK THOUGHT

I remember having to record *Organix* out of necessity, because we had secured a gig to go perform in Germany and the people who hired us asked what kind of merch we had. At that time, we didn't have anything to sell, so that prompted us to get T-shirts made and press up CDs. While we prepared the CDs, we recorded a demo. It wasn't our first time recording—we had made rudimentary recordings and mixtapes and demos before. But this was the first time we went into an actual studio with a more knowledgeable engineer, and what began as just wanting to record five or six songs to burn CDs to bring with us to sell became something closer to seventeen or eighteen tracks. And what we thought would serve as our demo is now our first album. At the time it felt natural, and we didn't overthink things. We went into it without specific intentions and made the record in a couple weeks.

## INTERVIEWER

Looking back now, how did that time in your life feel? What do you remember most about that process?

## BLACK THOUGHT

It felt magical—recording all night until daylight broke, then going home to sleep, and heading back there again in the morning. We didn't know that that would become our eventual lifestyle, for all parties involved. We all sort of grew up from that point on and became studio rats. That approach to musicianship and creativity became a way of life. It became all that we knew.

## INTERVIEWER

When was the last time you heard *Organix*?

BLACK THOUGHT

I haven't heard *Organix* in years, but when I do, it's by default. I'll hear someone else listening to it, or someone sends me a link to something. It's a little painful to hear my voice before it was developed, in the same way it's painful for a musician to hear something they may have recorded when they were in school, or an actor to see their screen test reels. That said, I know what it has come to mean to so many people. So I don't downplay it. It's a part of my contributions to the arts. That's my history, and that began the trajectory of the Roots. You never know what or how something you may consider a throwaway, or something considered a spur-of-the-moment, is going to affect someone else for years to come—or even the rest of their lives.

INTERVIEWER

And your development as a rapper and writer has grown hugely through the years. Let's circle back to your rhymes and the process itself. You typically include a plethora of references in your stanzas. Do you consider yourself, for lack of a better term, a filter, of sorts?

BLACK THOUGHT

That's exactly how I think of it because if it's a play or a book or a song, whatever the medium is, it's culture at the end of day. And I go through life like a sponge that soaks up everything. And eventually I pour everything out in my verses.

INTERVIEWER

How does being such a constant and prolific writer impact your daily life? Or does it?

BLACK THOUGHT

I'm always searching for that one word or one sentence or one remark, and I'll let it sit with me, I'll think on it, and I'll later use it as a springboard for a verse. If I'm at an art exhibition, I'm closely reading the little description that accompanies a sculpture or painting. It just needs to be fly and maybe I'll use it in a song somehow. I listen loosely to conversations, too. There's something to be said about the conversational tone of a rhyme and how that can be the most accessible. That's something I always strive for. Sometimes it's more easily achieved than others. I'm always searching for what doesn't sound contrived, something that feels like an organic conversation.

INTERVIEWER

If we were to open up your notebook right now, what would we find?

BLACK THOUGHT

Last night I wrote these words, and I don't know what they have to do with one another, but I have a blank page, and in the center it says "vigilant enigma."

INTERVIEWER

What are some things you think younger writers and rappers should focus on?

BLACK THOUGHT

I think a writer should always be aware of his or her surroundings. The material is there. It's already in the world. You have to be in tune with it to hear it and see it. The best essays, the best books, all wrote themselves. Same with paintings and dances—all of the best art, all of that shit just comes from the universe. You have to master the art of being in tune enough when it's time to create.

INTERVIEWER

What's the process like when you're in the room with a producer?

## BLACK THOUGHT

Step one is really trying to dial all the way in to the emotion of the music that I'm writing to. There's a specific tone that's set by instrumentation, and I try to vibe with it on whatever level that resonates with me. So I basically try to rise to that same level of energy. I'm able to write or rap at the drop of a dime, but every verse isn't always the best verse. I'm also conscious of the story that's being told in the music before words even exist. I'm there to accompany it in the best way possible and to add my own color and dimension to the song. You can easily detract from the music if your approach isn't right.

Sometimes it begins with music that is already further along, but in other instances, it's a race against the clock in that I'm writing to something that has yet to reach its final form and my words are emerging at the same time as the track. The idea is that when the music takes its final shape, my words will be in the same place. What dictates one process or the other is the emotion and energy of the room and what happens organically between the producer and myself—or other musicians. It's all about chemistry in that way.

## INTERVIEWER

Does Black Thought get writer's block? What do you do when your ideas bottleneck?

## BLACK THOUGHT

I get writer's block, for sure I do. There have been times when I've tried to force things that weren't in the cards. But to me, those were just things that weren't destined to be created in that moment. When I'm able to pause and breathe and reflect, becoming one with the music and with the universe, everything just writes itself. People have said things like, How did you think of that dope verse? And I'll be like, I didn't. I might've just thought of something five minutes ago, but I've had things in my head much longer than that. I'm constantly jogging my memory, and I can always build a song out of that. I mean, I can

spit a verse and force something from nothing, but it wouldn't resonate with anyone, as it would or could have, if it didn't resonate with me first and foremost. Some stuff that you end up spending a lot of time on ends up on the cutting room floor. But sometimes the stuff you end up keeping is what just quickly occurs and comes to fruition on its own.

#### INTERVIEWER

Let's talk about your solo releases, the Streams of Thought series. You've released three volumes already. Tell me about the next chapters and the main concept behind those projects.

#### BLACK THOUGHT

For me they represent a different dimension, a different frontier as an artist, where I'm able to be more vulnerable and more personal and tell stories that resonate on a more emotional level than some of the Roots' stuff. I feel like I've built a career in the Roots in attempts of making myself a face for the faceless, or to represent the unseen, a voice for the voiceless. But this is my own voice, unadulterated and less compromised. I've intentionally made each volume an effort between myself and one other producer. The Roots has always boiled down to Ahmir and myself, and we've always had the majority vote even though it's a collective. This is less of a collective thing than anything I've done in the past. It's very personal. I would meet folks who told me they were fans since day one and always supported me and the Roots, but that in all of their years, they still felt like they didn't know me well as a person—things like what makes me tick, where I come from, where I'm headed, where I see myself, what my process is. I feel like the Streams of Thought series represents all of that.

#### INTERVIEWER

Have you been writing more with all that's taken place in the past year or so?

## BLACK THOUGHT

I haven't been writing more, per se, but I've continued to write. I've been slightly more productive overall because I can sit still and finish what I started. Salaam Remi and I work well together, so we completed a few songs virtually as well.

## INTERVIEWER

For me to get an even better sense of your process, can you share something you're working on?

## BLACK THOUGHT

Sure. The night before, I wrote, "We're our ancestors' wildest dreams. How we rose to the pantheon of kings, out of modest means. To advance beyond"—and then there's a blank and a last line that just reads, "... I believe." So I'll go back and fill in the middle portion that I left unfinished. From there, it might be tomorrow or six months from now, but I'll look at that and see what kind of headspace I was in, and I'll be able to construct a whole verse around it.

## INTERVIEWER

A Black Thought guest verse is highly sought after. Have you been doing more features recently?

## BLACK THOUGHT

Yes, I've been doing a lot on others' projects—like a lot of features. I have twenty or so verses that I've been able to do recently just from working at home. I guess I just have a hard time saying no. [*Laughs*]

## INTERVIEWER

Looking back just on the past few years of your career, how has your mental state been? Do you keep up with the news to inform your writing? In what ways do you think it's impacted your art?

## BLACK THOUGHT

With everything that's taken place, sometimes it gets to be daunting. I definitely don't watch the news as frequently or closely as I had before this past year because I feel like it's inevitable at this point to be exposed to what's going on even if I don't watch it. More recently, I'd say in the past few weeks, I've tried to wean myself off social media as well. That being said, because I have children and work at *The Tonight Show*, there's no escaping the news. The way it's affected my psyche is that it's pushed me into an ultracreative space. I've been writing and recording and reading as if the livelihood of myself and others depended on it—which it does, actually.

## INTERVIEWER

What goes through your mind when you contemplate your legacy?

## BLACK THOUGHT

I'm very conscious of what my legacy is going to be and what I'm leaving behind and what my contributions will be for generations to come. I've just been really conscious of that and just recording and being creative in multiple different mediums to solidify my legacy. I want to make sure I'm leaving my mark in a proper way that is most representative of what my evolution has been. This is as close to collapse as we've ever come in some ways, so I've approached this important time as I would if it were the end of the world.

*David Ma is a longtime journalist whose work has appeared in Wax Poetics, NPR, the Guardian, The Source, Billboard, and others. He is part owner of Needle to the Groove Entertainment, cohosts Dad Bod Rap Pod, and maintains Nerdtorious.com, a repository and remnant from the blog era. He writes from the Bay.*