

BLACK VOICES

of Vermont



Featuring:



Tojo Michaelson

What's it like to be a teenager in Vermont right now? How does your racial identity impact your experience?

Tojo: Being a teenager right now during Covid has been hard because there's so much I want to do, but I have such little motivation to do anything at the moment. I'm a very social person and with Covid, it's been hard to feel motivated to stay in touch with reality but with everything going on in the world I feel like it's important to keep fighting the voice in your head that says just stop fighting for your voice.

What does centering and celebrating Blackness mean to you?

Tojo: Being a black teenager at the moment is honestly hard, but also it's such a good time to be one. I feel like I've never had an understanding of how important it is to celebrate being black, which is such a beautiful thing. I know this might sound weird but I feel like I think of my life being more important because every day it's a fight, so when I think of celebrating blackness I think of all the people who have made me feel worthy of my skin.

Who are your role models? From whom do you draw strength?

Tojo: I've always drawn strength from my mom, even though she's white. She always taught me to hold my head up and shine. I've definitely seen white parents of black kids who sorta hide the fact that their kids are black, but my mom never lets me forget who I am every day. She has connected me with some of the most important people in my life, my little sisters who i've learned so much from and continue to learn from them every day.

What can the state of Vermont do to actively support young Black Vermonters?

Tojo: I definitely think that having schools educate kids is one of the best things because you never know what they go through at home. Making sure that kids know their worth is so important.