

The Listen Up Project presents:

BLACK VOICES *of Vermont*



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

Cino: Being a teenager in Vermont nowadays means a lot to me. I get to be a rare gem amongst the mass majority. A fresh breath of air, even. I feel as if it's my job to stir the pot; to bring some difference and change to Vermont. My racial identity adds to it simply by just being different from so many people that are here right now.

What does centering and celebrating Blackness mean to you?

Cino: During Black History Month this year, I found a lot more activism throughout our community. We had conversations at school where we got to explain different experiences from our lives. It was quite emotional telling people about some stuff I've been bottling up inside of me throughout the years and people seemed pretty impacted, which is how I know my message got across to them. Social media even seemed more accepting and inviting to the month than it's been in the past years. I felt so loved as an individual; getting to share my stories and life moments to people who would never experience such a thing.

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

Cino: I draw strength from music; more specifically artists. I listen to so many different varieties of artists and they're all different nationalities too. I look the most up to people like SZA, Ariana grande, Mac Ayres, and lots of others. Artists like them fuel my soul, and give me ideas that reach as high as the horizon. This one also maybe random, but I look up to my music teacher, Mrs. Koch. She's such an inspiration to me, and she doesn't even know it. She does so much for me and other students throughout a singular day, and juggles so many different activities and STILL shines through and completes that at the end of the day. I wish to one day have a motivated drive like she does, even if it's tiring.

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

Cino: Give us more platforms! If you haven't noticed, Vermont is majority white. There's no doubt about it. A lot of the platforms here feel as if they're not necessarily gated off from people of color, but they just feel too crowded. They feel as if they've been taken over, and seeing something like that makes me almost feel as if there isn't a spot for me. That's why I think we deserve more spots in the media, spots in jobs, spots in business. We just need more spots in general. I shouldn't have to feel like just because of the color of my skin, I won't be able to fit anywhere. Even if that's not said to me directly, that's really what it feels like.

What are some of your passions? What do you care about most right now?

Cino: So, back in 2019, my cousin passed away in a car accident. I don't want to get much into how it happened, but I'd rather get into how it made me feel. He was 23, and was in nursing school. He was funny, more than caring, had a great personality, and he had the brightest smile. To think that he was doing such great things with his life and still ended up being taken away to such a tragic fate still leaves me in shock till this day. I catch myself staring at the floor, or holding my hand as coping mechanisms if I start thinking about it too much. This is someone I grew up with..and he was just taken away from me. Even through all of that negativity that I felt, and am still feeling, it gives me hope inside. It pushes me to do the things I'm passionate about with as much energy as I can. It makes me want to be confident about myself and love myself more. It taught me to note mope and whine about the little things, and to rather find the brightness and light in them. He was such a positive person and that taught me to smile rather than to frown. You never know when you'll take your last breath, so that's why I do things to the fullest extent. Why wouldn't I when life is so short?