

**TESTIMONIES FROM THE TABLE**

testimonies' from the table

I, a Pakistani woman, was offered a fairly open-ended opportunity to conceive of a project related to Solange's 'A Seat at the Table.' Though making a project about women of color may have seemed natural, I wanted to honor that 'A Seat at the Table' is an album expressly for Black women.

Herein lie the testimonies of 61 diverse Black women living & breathing in America.

My intention with this visual & written tapestry is manifold;

To create a sense of community, solidarity, & healing amongst contributors, Solange, & the broader sphere of Black women in America;

To engage in a dialogue with Solange & the topics presented on 'A Seat at the Table.';

To shed light on the challenges Black women face to exist peacefully;

To create space for Black women to express & even boldly declare how they envision their own healing, joy, & liberation;

To celebrate & support artists like Solange who use their platform to exemplify bravery, authenticity, vulnerability, & social advocacy.

Though in one way this is for you, my Black sisters —  
in the end, this is for us.

  
SEHER

for Solange

im gon look  
for my glory yeah,  
ill be back  
real soon.

My  
light  
IS  
NOT.....



Your  
DARKNESS.  
I cannot + will not  
manage your  
insecurities.



I am source energy  
and derive my own  
power, confidence  
and love from  
WITHIN.

Jy/17/20, 31

FEAR OF MY SACRED  
WITH (IN) DARK BODY  
TROUBLES A SOUL

LONGING TO FIND WAY...  
HOME. 0



(With In) THE HEAVENLY WOMB OF  
DARKNESS

SPRIT TRANSFORMED MATTER

(IN) TO LIFE... THAT WE MAY

REMEMBER LOVE



My humanity  
is  
NOT  
a topic for debate

When I walk into a room  
I carry my mother, my grandmothers  
my ancestors and all of the  
women who have poured into me  
and created a way out of no way.  
I come from warrior women.  
My crown has been bought and  
paid for. I AM FREE so I  
wear it proudly and pass it on...



Simone, 36



Our lips, our arched, our hairstyles  
are removed with surgical precision  
from our essence as women.  
They traffic our fierceness and  
confidence, but they leave the  
tension, the loneliness,  
and the dog tiredness from  
the fight.

I openly reveal  
my shame  
and hurts.



Lidia, 38

I  
State  
my  
Truth.

I smile when I want and because I want.



New mother, a son  
To maintain his peace, I pray  
Warrior woman

I am the softest warrior.  
I am the ocean.  
I am the universe.  
I am love.  
I am.



Shayla Miles, 34

I CARRY LOTS STRAIGHT MEN. THEIR  
LABOR & VIBRANCE. THEIR SHOCK  
OF CALLOUS. MY DAD'S CHILDHOOD. HIS JOY  
& FUNY. THE MEN ON ANY GIVEN  
AMERICAN STREET

WHO KISS AT MY DIRECTION.

WHO SPIT AT ME,

STARE AT MY  
BEARD.

WHO CALL ME BITCH.



[AZIZA, 24]



RITUALS:

BASKING IN CANDLELIGHT.

BUYING SUCULENTS.

SHEA BUTTERING MY LIL' BOO.

CALLING MY PARTNER.

READING EARLY, EARLY IN THE MORNING

(SAM). LAUGHING AT A WOODEN  
KITCHEN TABLE w/ MY TITZ IN QUEENS.

HOT YOGA BEFORE THE SUN OUT.

CALL MY HOMIES, MY CHOSEN KING.

DANCE. DANCE. DANCE.



Bitter PILL,  
FULL OF UNFETTERED  
RAGE,  
TOXIC  
resentment and  
insistent  
INVALIDATION,  
it burns.



CLARIVEL, 43

T T T WARRIOR Queen!  
H H H U NO LONGER ND  
A A A 2 BE  
N N N "WARRIOR Queen  
K K K Who CUTS OFF  
Y Y U PPLS HEADS"  
O O U TAKE CARE of U.  
U U



I was born to be  
so much more than  
"the help"  
or a vehicle for  
your success

My dreams & aspirations  
are VALID

My greatness is  
REAL

I create a way  
to pay it forward



Jennifer, 35

Everytime you ask me to translate Black pain  
into white language for the benefit of white ears  
I choke, gag, sputter for breath...

But all you'll see is my  
frozen smile.



I am learning  
that my vision and desires  
are enough.  
That my desires hold  
authority.  
That my vision compels.  
That when I call out  
for others to join me  
they will do so joyfully, gladly.





Every day I carry the extreme weight  
of needing to be fierce and the held  
together Black Superwoman. I need to  
carry and care for my family, protect  
and uplift my community, excel in  
my profession and look great  
while doing it all.

My best is enough.  
My extraordinary  
is my choice.

Everyone and  
Everything  
doesn't deserve it.



LaJoy - 38



IFE, 34

I FOCUS MY LIFE ON  
SHATTERING EXPECTATIONS  
BECAUSE I HAVE TO

I HAVE NOTHING  
TO PROVE  
AND EVERYTHING  
TO TEACH





The burden is to survive America,  
The challenge is to sing  
while surviving America. My first  
word was a grunt / was a blues /  
was a black & blues / Born dead  
but Alive after all.

A quick list: strong boundaries  
& community, laughter &  
lavender & horoscopes &  
Yes, a sip of whiskey & a  
little bit of weed. On my  
notebook, my mama, my sister-  
friends, my music, my  
joy, myself, my own face  
in the mirror smiling  
back at me again &  
again. ♥



Lauren, 32

My Blackness does not exist for profit,  
for exploitation,  
for experimentation.  
It does not exist for curiosity,  
to ease guilt,  
to meet your quota.  
It exists solely  
FOR ME.



DOMINIQUE DASEE, 22

I deserve  
to LAUGH.  
To Laugh  
LOUDLY,  
To Laugh  
BOLDLY,  
I deserve  
to LAUGH  
UNAPOLOGETICALLY.



Mia, 32

I don't speak for all Black women.  
We are not all the same.

There are h E V E L S. shades, & textures to this shit.

I find peace in loving myself without condition.  
... freedom in unsubscribing from other's expectations.  
... healing in my fierce pride as a Black woman.

There's nothing more dope.



Being  
A  
BLACK WOMAN  
IS  
WORTH IT  
♥

To be Dmicka + Donovan's daughter,  
progeny of imperialism, slavery +  
migration; To be Black + Brown +  
short + big; To be all these at  
full volume, and to respond to the  
world's request that I shush with  
a firm "NO."



I accept myself fully.  
I trust myself fully.  
I am certain of myself, fully.  
I am self-expressed, fully.

I LIVE A LIMINAL LIFE AS A MIXED  
WOMYN, INVISIBLE/MUTED ACROSS GROUPS.  
A **BLACK** BODY IN WHITE SPACES/NOT **BLACK**  
ENOUGH IN **BLACK** SPACES, I EXIST AS A  
**POC** WHILE STILL AN **OTHER**. MY HAIR,  
SIGNIFIER OF MY **BLACKNESS**, I USED TO  
HIDE/TAME, ONLY TO BE REMINDED THAT  
MY SOUL/MY POLITICS ARE STILL VERY **BLACK**.



THE 1<sup>ST</sup> LAW OF THERMODYNAMICS STATES  
MATTER CANNOT BE CREATED OR DESTROYED,  
ALL THINGS THAT EXIST TODAY HAVE  
EXISTED SINCE THE BIG BANG TO FORM  
THE STARS, THIS EARTH, THESE BODIES...  
I AM CREATED FROM stardust + WILL  
EXIST FOR ALL TIME. BLACKNESS IS NOT  
BY ACCIDENT & THAT GIVES ME COMFORT.

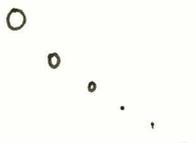


RABIYYAH, 33

The face you make  
when you discover  
I'm not my name.



I'm working on  
making my thoughts  
become things.  
Materialize inner  
peace.



When I was **FIFTEEN**, a young Caucasian boy repeatedly shouted "UGLY BLACK GIRL" at me as I walked by. It struck me in my **CHEST** that day: the color of my **SKIN** may "speak" for me before I can utter a sound - and it may cause **PAIN**.



(C A L A N D R A)



I've learned to find comfort & confidence in knowing  
I AM ENOUGH.

I have everything I need to succeed. Resources, talent, love.  
THERE IS NOTHING I TRULY LACK.



My curves and my body type are stigmatized because of negative images in the mainstream media, both men and women consider me to be hyper-sexed.



Being without judgement based on my physical appearance.

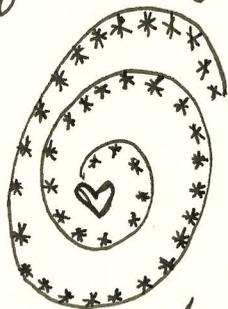


eyes too bright, mouth too big. Keep quiet.  
 Be in the bubble. You cannot sing and be a SCHOLAR  
 Put that JOY a 36x



locked lips

guided by the stars



I found my treasure



I have the key



Olivia, 24

NEZ-PAOMOR-TUSUMZEW

i see the hurt you carry  
 let us link arms

being for those who will come.



being the workhorse of  
the world without the world  
having a place for my dreams

i find healing in sharing  
laughter with friends,  
peace in listening to my  
own breath, and freedom  
in my curly hair.



Da'ina, 37

My mind is not your

Public Space

My body is not your

Project

My ass is not your

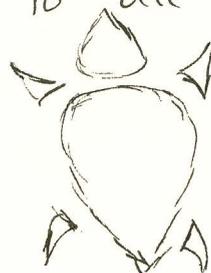
Playground 1/2

My pussy ain't your

Palace



I,  
like my ancestors,  
refuse  
to die





I AM A BLACK WOMAN WITH DEPRESSION.  
SOMETIMES I'M CAPTIVE.  
OTHER TIMES I'M SO FREE OF IT  
THAT I FEEL WEIGHTLESS.

WHEN IT PULLS ME DOWN INTO  
ITS DEPTHS, I REMEMBER  
ITS INVISIBILITY.

THERE ARE NO SIGNS TO  
WEAR AROUND MY  
NECK.

---

FORGIVENESS HAS CHANGED MY LIFE.  
FORGIVING MY FATHER, FORGIVING  
THOSE WHO PLACE ME INTO  
CONTAINERS I DON'T BELONG IN.

I FORGIVE MYSELF 20 TIMES A DAY.  
I REMIND MYSELF THAT I AM  
WHO I THINK I AM AND THEN  
SAY OUTLOUD TO MYSELF,  
"I FORGIVE YOU."



Ashley, 32



How is it that I am at the same  
time

Too black / much of a woman  
Not black enough / of a woman

I am invisible until  
I am all they see.



When I am out of doors  
and I'm in the trees or  
on the water  
and the sun kisses my skin  
and  
my soul shines shines shines  
and God whispers,  
"You're Perfect"  
and I smile back,  
"I Know"

Allison 320

I'm expected to be the black friend  
I'm expected to fill the "black quota"  
in a white industry.

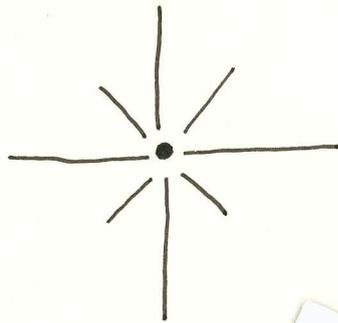


I refuse to over explain who I am.  
Always being at peace with the last words  
of encouragement from my mother.





my spirits always felt ill at ease  
in this land. often experiencing an  
unexplainable energetic pull to leave.  
a displaced disconnectedness at the  
level of the soul, that comes from  
it not fully being my home...



healing looks like a  
remembering... of our  
divinity, our ancient healing  
practices. of coming home to  
our true selves and embracing  
every part of who we are —  
from our innate magic to the  
lessons + strengths birthed from our pain...



agreeing comes too naturally - the work lies in unlearning. being less concerned with the comfort and response of others. my focus is being honest. my feelings first. owning



i work the muscles that strengthen me to face the people, places, and things that scare me... practice aids in my performance.



Pamela, 33





Having to choose  
"woman" constantly in  
order to engage the  
world as someone who  
isn't "man". Often I'm  
genderless. Typically,  
I'm a girl. However  
that looks. 99% of the  
time, that's with a  
beard.

I heal by  
saying "No."  
It's a complete  
sentence.



Zerandrian, 37

Being light-skinned comes with its own set of challenges that, of course, no one is that interested in.

I've struggled with others' projections; but still smile politely while answering the most ungracious queries about my complexion, hair and eyes.



I move with grace  
and confidence.  
I am a who,  
not a what.

Nicole, 39



I never know when im  
being SHUNNED or WELCOMED.

As a BLACK WOMAN,  
I exist to be STRONG for  
everyone - UNTIL - I'm told  
to SHUT UP!

AND Then, I GET LOUDER!

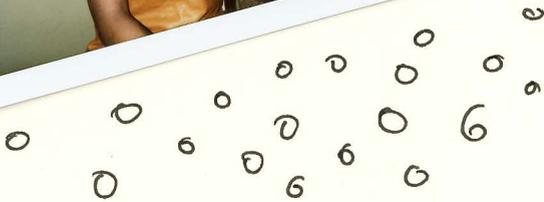
NO more:

- code switching.
- explaining.
- masks.



Just  
Being.  
Just  
Breathing.

Just. Be. FREE.



TO BE MY HONEST,  
ORGANIC SELF.

FREE OF ANY EURO-CENTRIC  
AND PATRIARCHAL STANDARDS  
AND PARAMETERS.

THE OPPORTUNITY AND  
ABILITY TO MAKE WORK,  
UNENCUMBERED BY THE  
CONCERN OF WHITE  
LEGIBILITY AND/OR  
COMMERCIAL VALUE.



I am young, Black, & disabled. Between those who see Black bodies as disposable & those who see disabled bodies as broken & useless, it can be a real struggle to metaphorically stand up & feel safe in claiming any space as my own.

THEN I REMEMBER...

I may be disabled, but I am NOT broken. I have rhythm, power, & soul. I am brown, beautiful, creative, & fierce. I may move slowly, but I still move! I am my own woman, & remain a force with which to be reckoned. Underestimate me at your own peril.



Alena, 37

I was on a competition show and I was the 1<sup>st</sup> person voted off by my teammates. Some later confessed that despite liking me and viewing me as an asset, they were intimidated. I feel people generally lack empathy towards black women.



Francesca, 42

I am more than enough!  
I know that, and one  
day everyone else  
will catch up. ♡

she is  
**TOO DARK**  
for TV



my skin  
is my  
inheritance  
and my  
Power



Atima, 27



I am not a black face,  
friend or co-worker  
that you can use  
when convenient...

True acceptance of myself  
teaches me daily to  
honor me and the  
God that created  
me.



Rai Arthur - Mensah, 33



to be black + a woman in this society means to always be second guessing others + their attitudes towards, interests in, + perceptions of me...

...but then I remember that the burden of other people's racism and/or misogyny is not mine to carry. instead, I choose to PACK LIGHT +

love myself UNAPOLOGETICALLY



zephyr, 27



Anastasia, 30

Sometimes I don't want to be a "BLACK" woman. Just a woman. I don't think that will ever happen. I LOVE my BLACKNESS, but sometimes I get tired of fighting, being the "BLACK" voice in a room, being the 'example'.

Knowing that I AM enough -  
Internalizing MY worth.

Being patient with MYSELF  
as I get to know me.

Knowing I AM worth

the time + effort in love, career, self-care - Everything



I have bipolar disorder  
and it can be a struggle.  
I'm supposed to be a  
Strong Black Woman<sup>TM</sup>  
but sometimes I'm not strong.  
Sometimes I need  
to cry it out.



Tanya, 33

Sisterhood  
is my lifeline.  
Black women love each  
other in a special way.  
It's almost unspoken, but  
it's there, and we find it,  
even in a stranger,  
who's feeling your outfit.





Am I black enough for you?  
Every day, people "decide"  
what they want me to be  
and when I don't fit  
their ideal, they become  
perplexed.

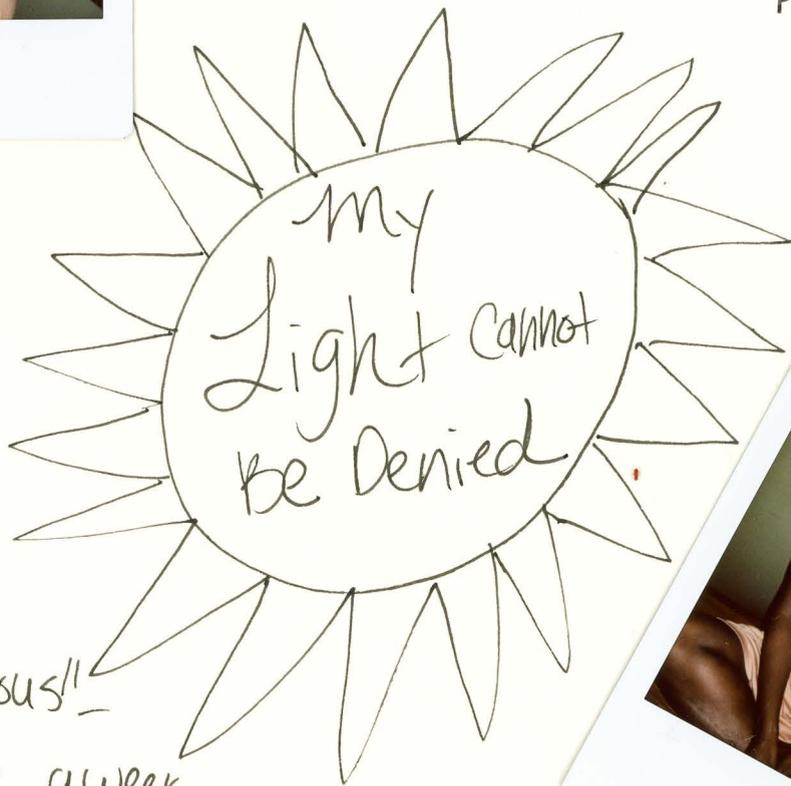
The way people act  
towards, think, and  
feel about me, reflects  
them. Not me.



# DARKNESS

My mother's mother Myrtha didn't like  
to take photos. She wasn't  
sure her dark skin was  
welcome in this world.

This MELANIN can be  
**HEAVY**



"You are luminous!"  
- Oprah to me a week  
ago. My grandmother  
smiled in heaven

Chameah  
Katie  
Jackson, 32



Oh how sweet it was when I was able  
to transition.

Oh how sweet it wasn't when I wanted  
to find love.

My skin and my identity make it damn  
near impossible to be in love.

When I am dealing with heartbreak  
I give myself that day or night to  
feel it all.

And the next day, I try to move  
forward because, I don't want to  
miss the joy, that might be just  
around the corner!



Nyala C, 25

Having a black son has been incredibly challenging.  
The premature assault on his innocence as a young child (5 years) are things I will have to defend on a daily basis.



Jinsey, 29 weeks

The potential threats to his mere existence are terrifying!



Healing, peace & freedom as a Black woman doesn't completely exist, but the work towards it for a woman like me is the healing.

Feeling like I'm leaving it better than I got it.

Everyday I walk through City streets,  
Not knowing whether to fear the  
White people who fear my Blackness  
or the Black men who appraise &  
then dismiss my womanhood. So  
I walk past them daily, battling  
the fear while staying centered  
as an empowered Black woman.



I am my ancestors'  
wildest dream. Every  
step forward is a step  
that brings us closer  
to freedom - together.



Lurie, 39

I come in as a  
blank slate.

You come in with your  
misconceptions about me.



Worthy



Abundance



Gratitude

Grounded in the beauty,  
wisdom, and resilience  
embedded in my DNA.

Let's Be HUMAN  
Together

Akilah 37



Our inherent intersectionality in identity places us in a consistent state of (re)evaluating - who we want to be, who and what we defend and advocate for, and who's going to love and care for us in the way we do for so many others.

The love and strength that sisterhood gives us through leaning on women friends and family in the difficult times and celebrating together in the joyous.



Mahlet, 28



SAMAR, 28

What it takes to survive  
after the assault  
the war  
the colonizing;  
This body is riddled with mines.  
I cannot even touch this self  
for fear and memory  
that it is everyone's but mine  
to claim.

Still and dark  
or  
carrying, running -  
I am the water.  
I can choose today.



SAMAR, 28

To Love

Myself

threatens

the American lifestyle



I am forced

to live in rough waters,

So I find refuge

in the calm deep below



I find that people (generally white people) often ask "What are you doing here?" when I'm in a place a young, brilliant, fly black woman isn't "expected" to be. My response is usually, "Living my best life, you?!" with a massive - if unbothered - smile.

Grace & gratitude are the keys to unlocking every aspect of the life I want.



Bliss, B1



Temniet, 24

I spend so much of myself  
wishing the world  
saw my people to be  
the wonder  
live always known vs to be.  
we are lifetimes of extraordinary.  
sometimes I forget to see it.  
in myself.

every day  
I both  
admire  
and  
forgive  
myself  
for being  
exactly me.



switching  
layers gets  
heavy  
sometimes  
black  
afro  
latina  
woman  
educated  
and single...  
but it's fine.  
nowadays  
I stop swapping  
and instead  
wear  
every layer  
all  
the time



Kadine, 38



freedom to unapologetically be  
me has changed my life  
it is the freedom  
to love my hair  
body skin face  
thoughts soul  
actions prayers  
and words  
without the approval  
of anyone else.  
that continues to  
allow for my  
spirit's expansion.



# Stripped OF Humanity

YOU QUESTION ME:

"How dare you dream A0

# BIG, Black Woman?

But when backed into a corner,

I RAISE MY FIST AND CRY:

"How dare you challenge the

# DREAMS

# of this Black Woman?



Amélie, 28

tee-hee-hee!

As a black creative,  
nothing is more apparent  
to me than the general  
FEAR of what our minds,  
bodies, and thoughts  
manifest into the world  
through our spiritual lineage.



Letting go of SHAME,  
and SECRETS,  
shouting them to  
the WORLD, and using  
them as our  
STRENGTHS towards  
HEALING.



Suhalo, 30

we are always being asked to sacrifice more, to strip ourselves, to hold our breath. the challenge is learning to fill ourselves up, to understand that we are worthy of absorbing and accepting the gifts of the universe.



one of the most important lessons i have learned from my beautiful and powerful journey into spiritual herbalism is to only allow what nourishes me to enter into my life.



MY blessings are not  
the burdens of others.  
They are just my blessings.  
My gifts do not impoverish  
anyone else.  
They belong to me.  
If this bothers you,  
so what.

The greatest ~~Reward~~  
of my life  
has been learning not to care  
what others think.



Denise, 43



When I believe I'm not  
 enough, or too much because  
 my epic ideas aren't  
 basic [af] enough.

I have the audacity to  
 believe that we're the chosen  
 one. Owning my GREATNESS  
 helps me operate from

ABUNDANCE

I fly high and touch the sky.  
 cuz there's a SEAT up  
 here for me & it's  
 Lit.





Stale, limiting, offensive  
media images of Black women.  
They're harmful and boring.  
We deserve to be seen, fully.

There is an unspoken agreement  
between many Black women;  
it's in the exchange of a shy  
smile, a nod, a communal  
"mmhmm," a random compliment.  
It's the subtle acknowledgement:  
I SEE you, because I am you.





Donja, 52

Can I exist without question?  
Must I fit in any box? Can  
I not be labeled? I just want  
to be silly me and be okay!

When I realize that my  
Crown was made for me so I  
don't have to fear anyone taking  
what is mine. I can root  
for all my sisters because  
our crowns are all our  
own.





TRUSTING that MY SUCCESS  
is not by accident ♡



GOD is in ME! ♡♡♡



Every day I rise, I have a choice to make. To silence the noise and reject the American narrative; the negative images and messages surrounding my identity and value as a Black woman.

I think of all the Black queens that came before me and are present in my life. My ancestors. My loved ones. My circle. And I bask in our collective power and beauty. Every. Day. ♡



Maiya, 33

your myopic understanding  
of the expansive person that

I AM

need NOT hold weight  
in my perception

of **SELF**

SELF

SELF...



vei darling, 22



NOTE TO

SELF  
**SELF:**

SELF: you are infinite and real,  
you are more than this

B O D Y

but a multitude of

LIFETIMES SPUN  
again : again ...

here ... now...

TRUST · IN · YOU ♡



I am as GOOD  
and  
VALUED  
as anyone else.

Dismissiveness.

and do you belong?

ido. ido.

the glory is

in you.

• PRODUCER + CREATIVE DIRECTOR •  
Seher

• SPECIAL ADVISORS •  
akilah scharff  
kimerie queen  
maiya norton

• ASSISTANTS •

chanelle aponte pearson  
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• HAND-LETTERING •

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judith iray

