

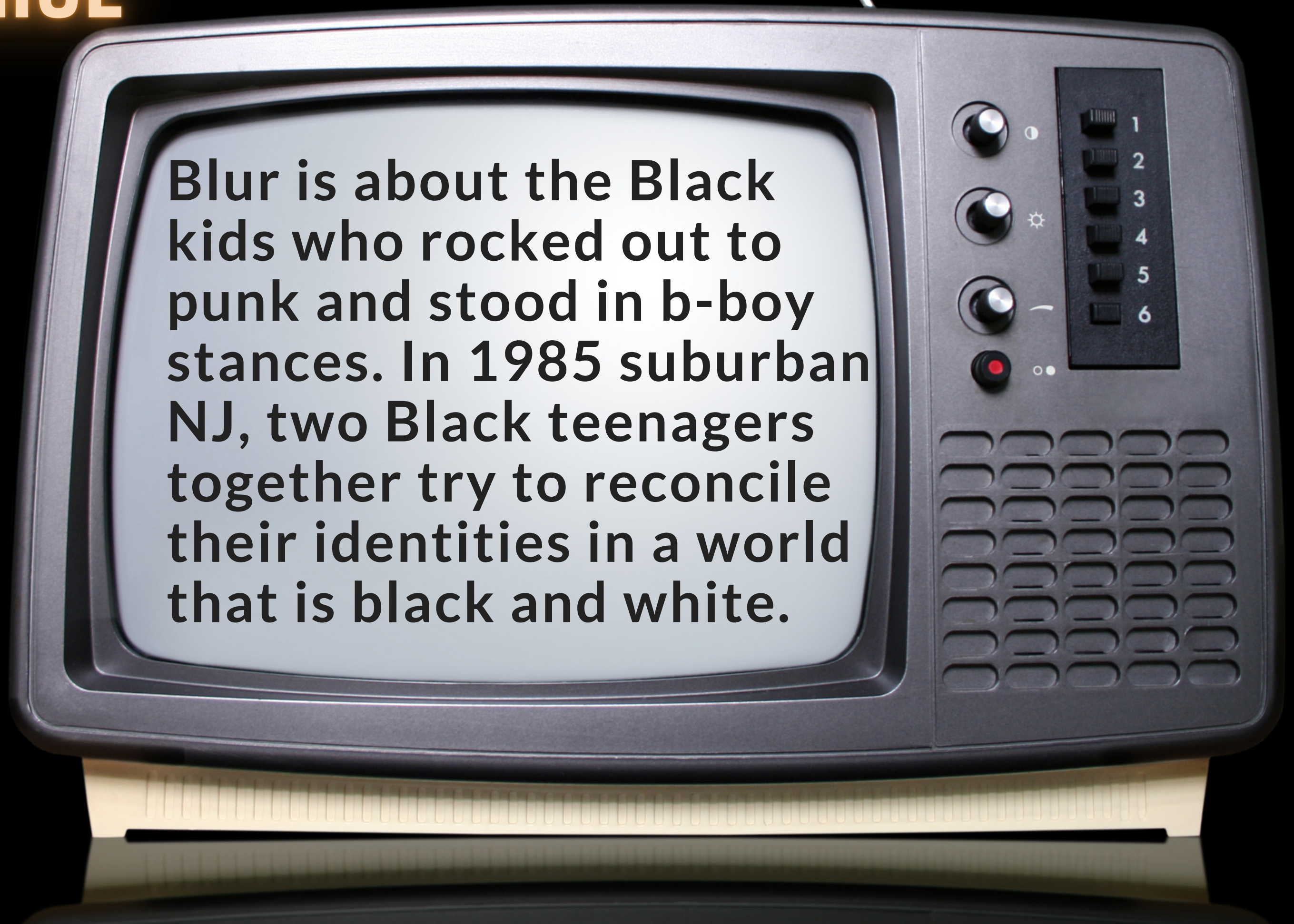
blur

***By Oneika Mays
&
Steven McLaine***

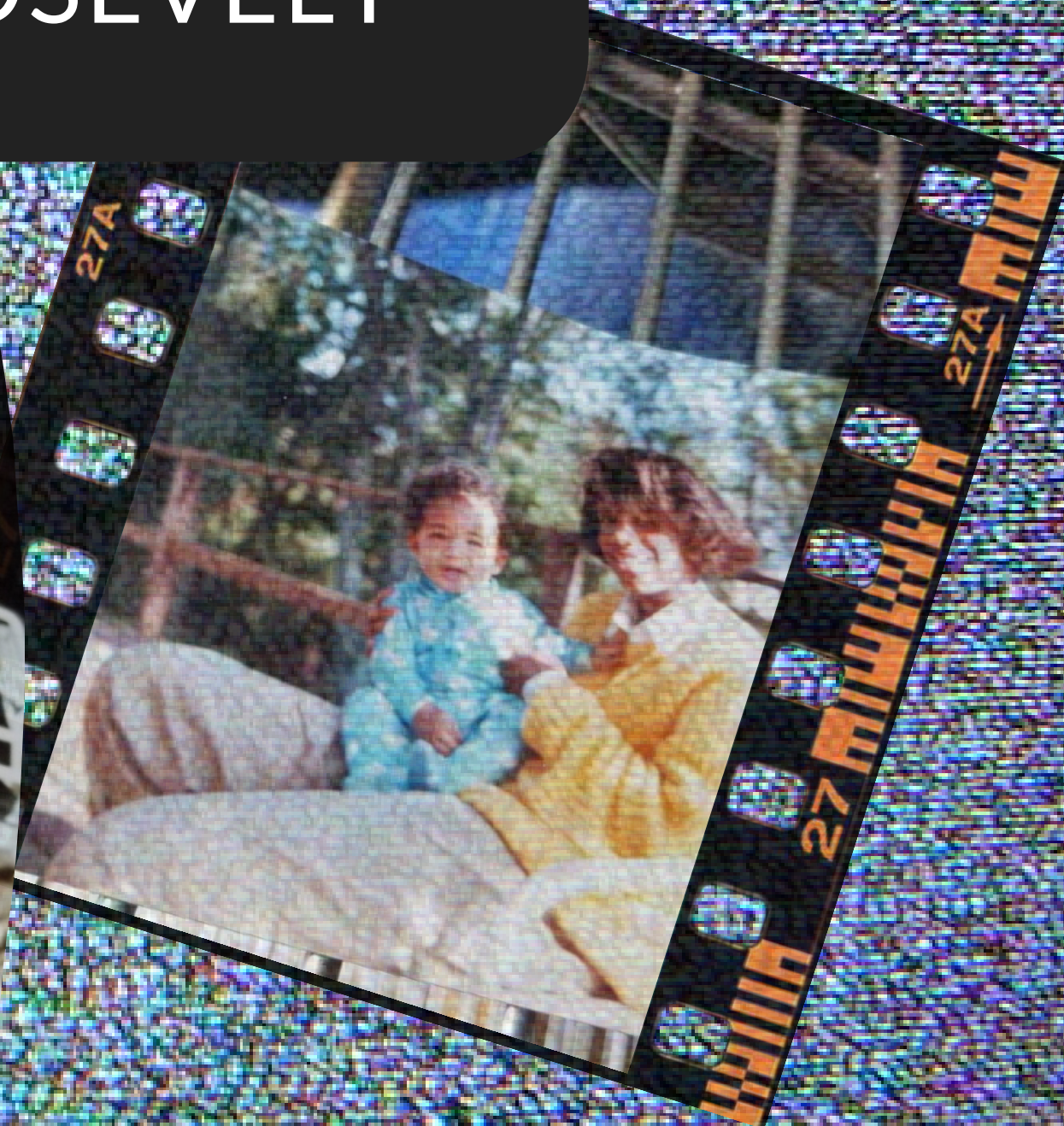
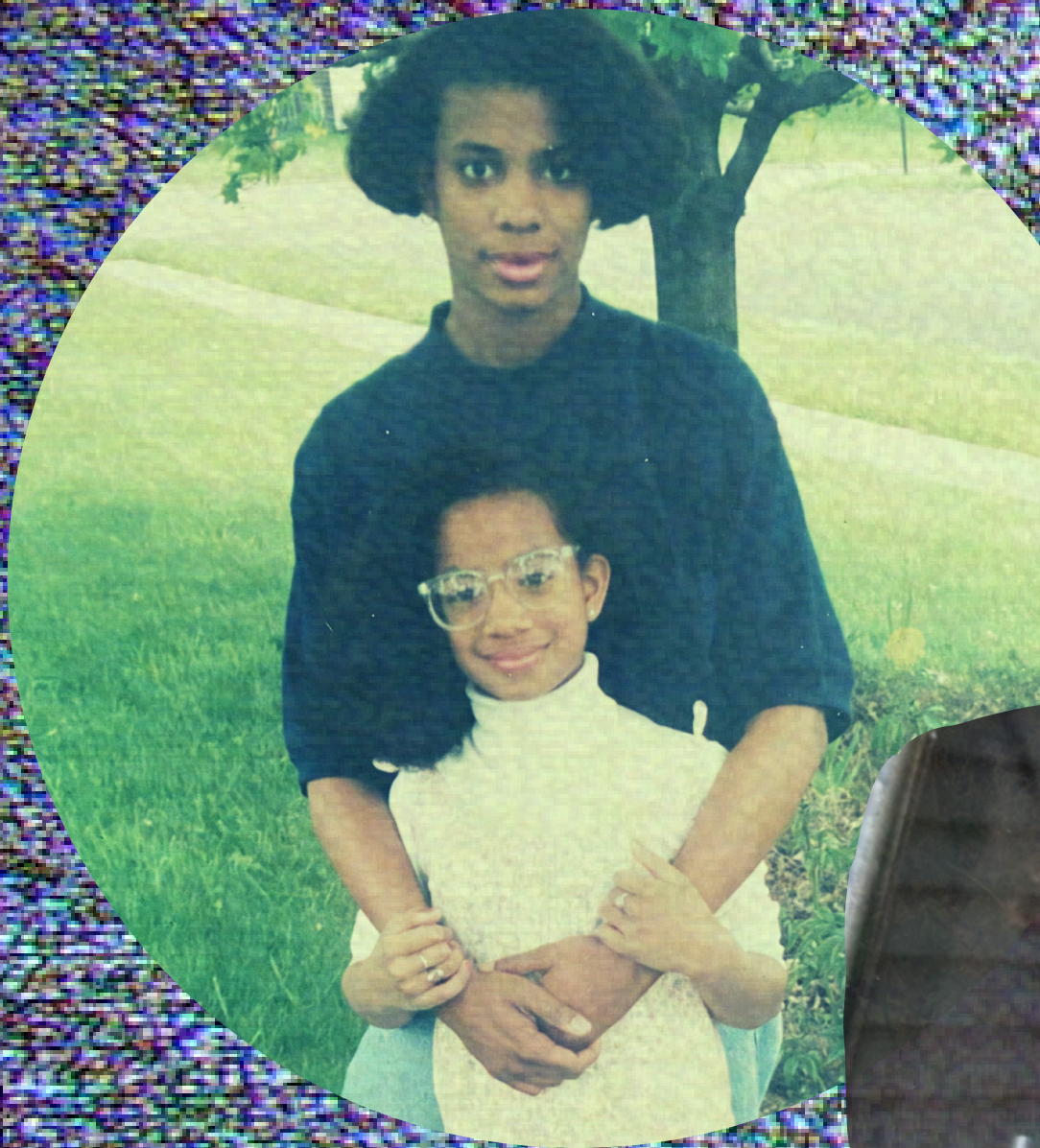
CREATED BY ONEIKA MAYS

THE PREMISE

Blur is about the Black kids who rocked out to punk and stood in b-boy stances. In 1985 suburban NJ, two Black teenagers together try to reconcile their identities in a world that is black and white.



There was only one
way to be Black in
1985...*and I wasn't it.*
- MAKEBA ROOSEVELT



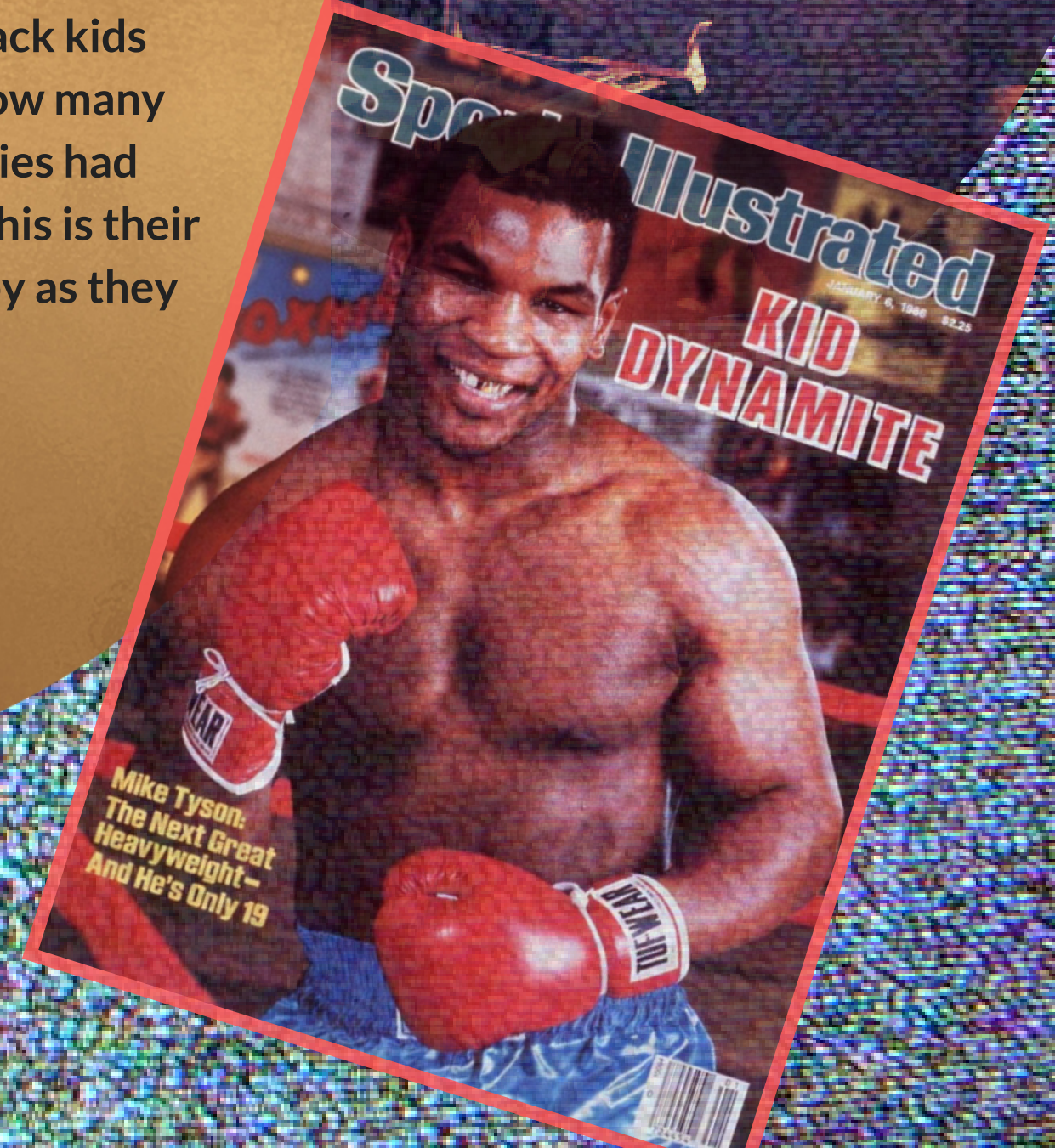
blur

BLUR is a show about a changing world. 1985. The first .com was registered and the planet got smaller with enormously scaled shows like Live Aid, Farm Aid, and Comic Relief. It was probably the generosity felt because we had our MTV and all that those videos promised. As the U.S. emerged from the Civil Rights and Women's Movements of the 70's and hit the gogo 80's, we could feel something big was on the way. And although everyone wasn't always included, that was about to change. At least that was the hope.



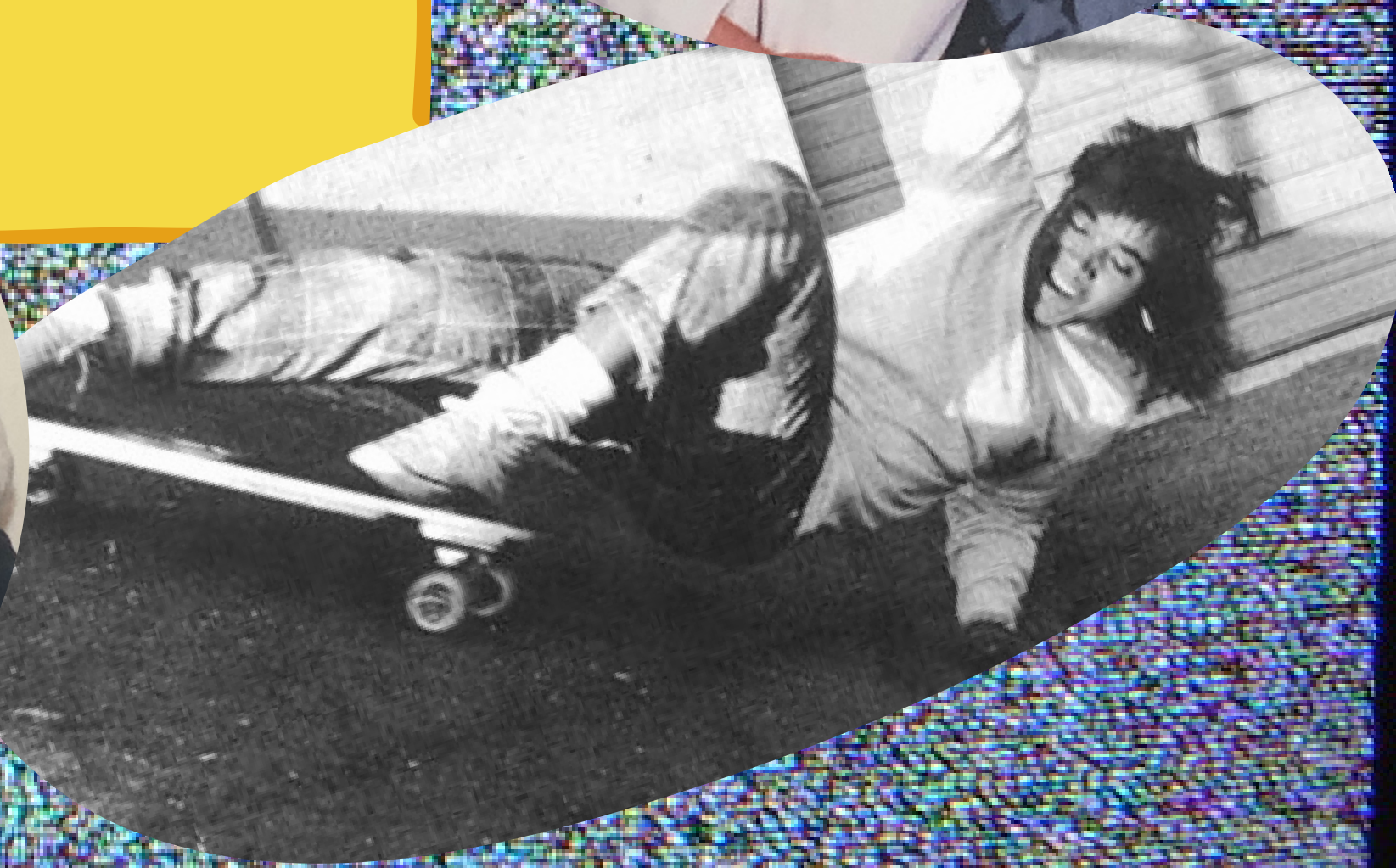
WHAT IS *blur*?

BLUR is a show about the unwritten rules of Blackness. Before identity politics became part of the zeitgeist, starker boundaries meant trying to be Black in a way that wasn't "typically Black" equaled white, which equaled betrayal. It's about Alfonso Ribeiro in Silver Spoons, or Dionne and Murray in Clueless, or wherever the Black kids were in Freaks and Geeks. You know how many of your favorite high school series/movies had one or two Black student characters? This is their perspective... and they weren't as happy as they looked, trust us.





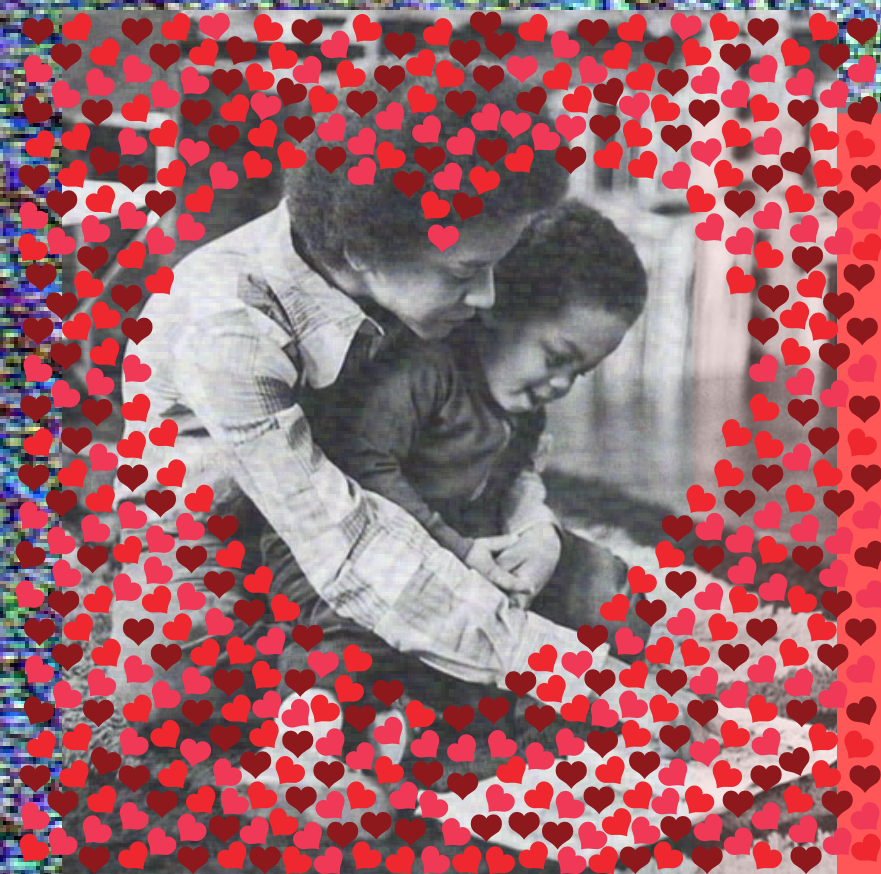
BLUR is a show about identity. It's about carrying a flag in a foreign land when you don't always feel welcome back home. It's about being asked to speak for an entire culture when that culture wonders how you were chosen to become its representative. It's about testing the edges of Blackness until you expand the definition.



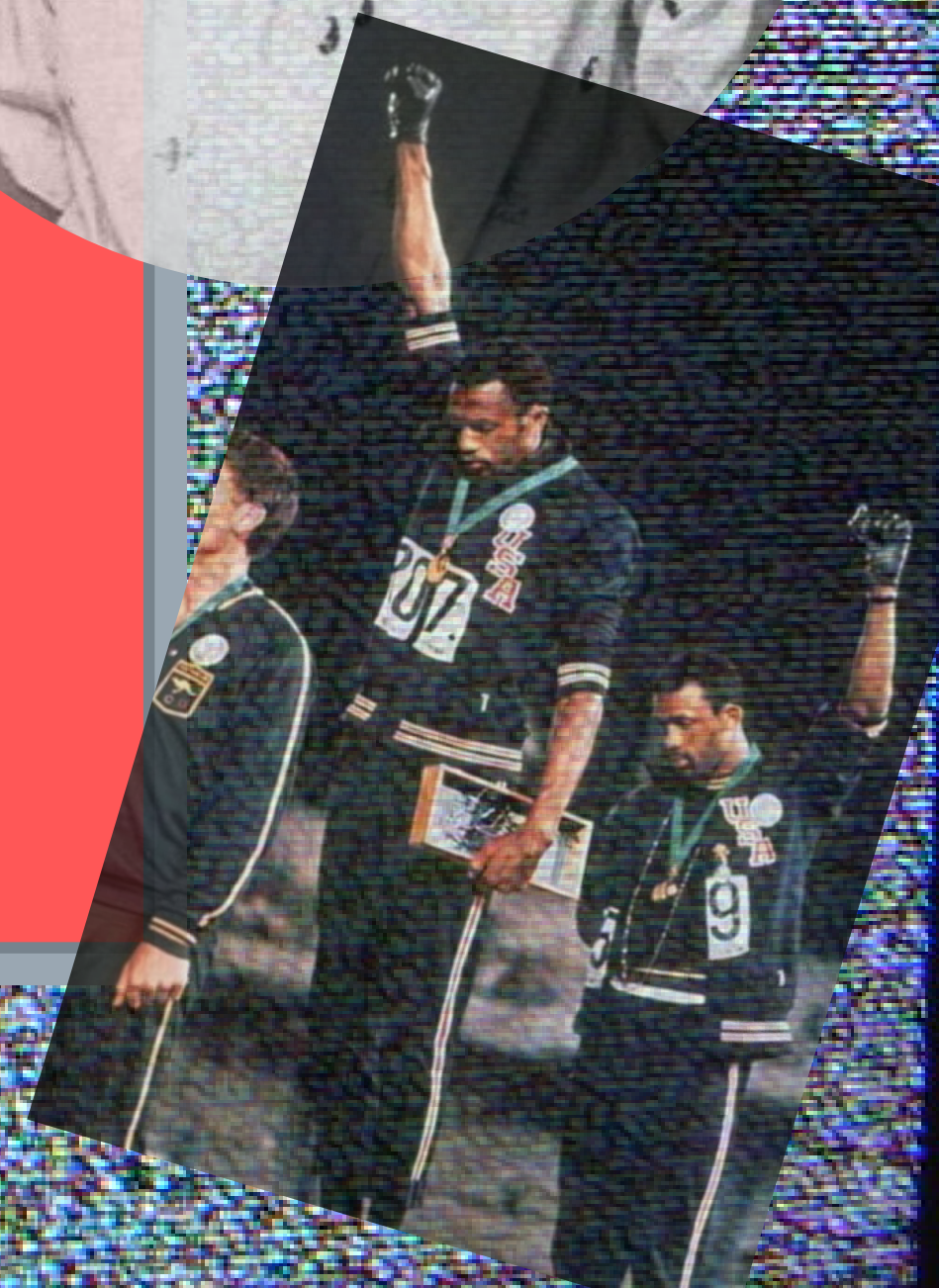


BLUR is a shout to the Black kids who rocked out to punk and still stood in b-boy stances, who navigated whiteness from such a young age that they became fluent in another language, who never forgot where they came from even in a world full of mirages, who learned to present a palatable Blackness yet seasoned all the same.



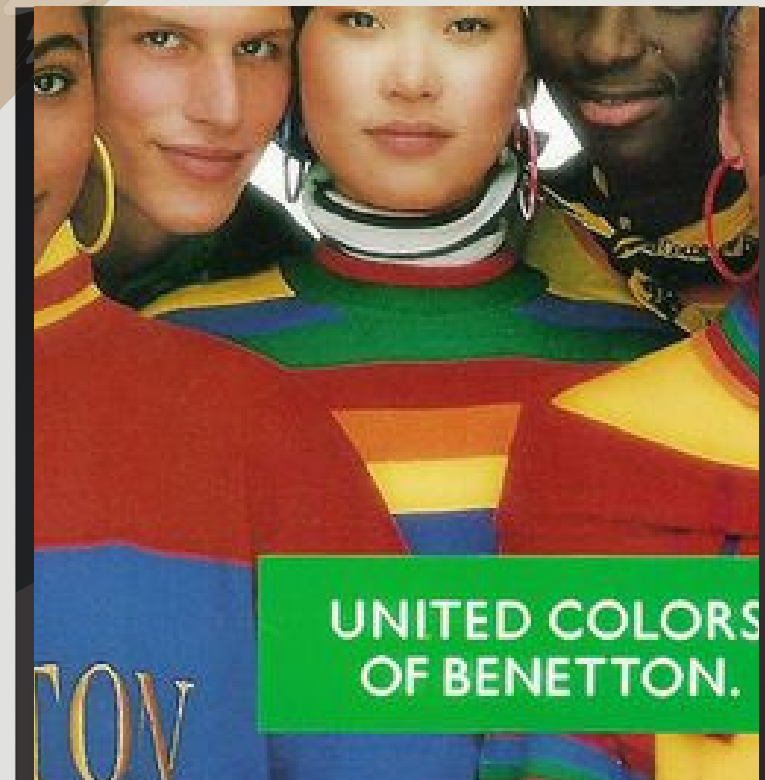


BLUR, above all, is a loveletter to the younger self. It is a look back with compassion, and a little embarrassment. It's not a wink wink, nudge nudge to the 80's, it is the 80's. It's a look at the boxes people are forced into and how those lines are blurred through intention, through invention, through mishaps, and through evolution. We didn't create this show to answer questions about how to be Black because that question either has no answer, or it has every answer. We created this show to depict the challenges of crafting your own identity independent of the world around you, and how those challenges become easier when someone has your back.

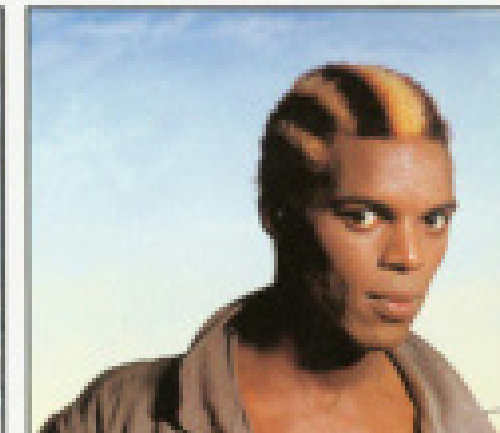
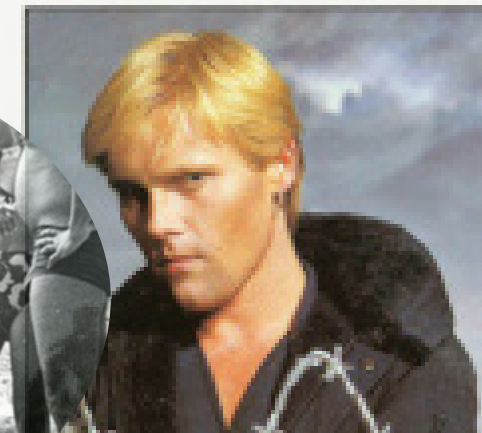


THE CHARACTERS OF BLUR

Makeba Roosevelt



...a l l t h e r a g e



Black, 14. Most Black kids make fun of Makeba because she “talks white” and dresses preppy.

Makeba thinks shell toe Adidas are weird and does not get the appeal of Kangols. Makeba’s parents were young, educated, ambitious, and wanted nothing but the best for their daughter when she was born in 1971. White kids become her social group, which means she has to endure racist knock knock jokes and then assurances that they’re not talking about her because she’s not really Black. Makeba knows she’s Black, doesn’t resent it or wish she wasn’t (well, maybe not anymore). She does wish that it was cool for her to love Tears for Fears and be Black. Sometimes the supposed Black experience (listening only to Rap and R&B) is so limiting. She doesn’t talk like that, she doesn’t act like that, and so what that she thinks that George Michael is sexier than Michael Jackson? And while a LOT of the Black kids think she’s weird, she may not always be the outcast she thinks she is... Denise Huxtable is her idol.



Smith Davidson

Black, 14. Smith was teased for being “white” by the neighborhood kids, all of whom were darker skinned than him. He’s not white (although his great grandfather was), isn’t even “mixed” (their second favorite designation for him), but his light complexion, hazel eyes, and curly brown hair sometimes made it hard for him to argue otherwise. Smith is shorter than most kids his age. These two major insecurities fuel Smith’s constant need to prove his manhood and his Blackness – to others and to himself. His identity is built around fitting in. He has a good sense of humor and he’s deferential... likely to a fault, but it’s part of his built-in survival mechanism. He disarms potential attacks before they happen, he makes people comfortable, he adjusts to them. This process fortunately works with both his groups of Black and white friends. He wants to be Michael Bivins. He doesn’t need it all, doesn’t have to be the lead singer, he’s kinda soft spoken, but he’s part of the group and he’s the one that everybody seems to think is cool. Nobody would question how Black Mike is, you know?



THE PILOT

We're introduced to the worlds of Makeba and Smith. Makeba still feels the sting of being rejected by a white boy she had a crush on as she tries to fit into a new school. Culture shock smacks Makeba in the face when she sees that the school has more Black kids than she's ever known. It's that many more opportunities to be called 'White Girl'.

Smith has designs on finally getting his due when he gets a phone call saying he's been selected as one of the flyest kids in the 9th grade. Smith makes a grand gesture to win over a crush with disastrous results. Makeba and Smith meet in their honors English class and while there's some obvious chemistry it's interrupted when she meets Smith's buddy Jack.

UNITRA T610

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Jack Eaton: White, Age 14 The cute popular white boy in school who has a crush on Makeba. He's #2 on the Top 9 in 9th (white version). No. 1 is Tom Cruise. Smith and Jack play soccer together, and Jack is Smith's "best white mate." Smith likes his cool confidence, and apparently so does Makeba, which complicates Smith and Jack's friendship.

Knowledge/Kenneth: Black, Age 14 The leader of the Mitchell JHS five percent nation sect who is not at all impressed with Smith's suburban, light-skinned life. He's on the basketball team with Smith's crew, so their social circles interact frequently; he's also interested in Smith's longtime crush, unfortunately. Smith is no fan of his, either, but envies his unquestionable Blackness. Their constant clashes are ironic, considering they have a shared past that neither of them reference anymore.

Claire: White, Age 14 She's a deadhead and shockingly self possessed for a teenager. Maybe it's her big brain, maybe it's the weed. She and Makeba meet on the bus ride home and become best friends.



Naima: Black, Age 14 Clearly and utterly beyond the entire concept of high school, she's the smartest one in her above average class. When Smith asks her why she isn't in the "smart" classes, she replies, "Why? So I can struggle? I can get straight A's in these classes and still hang out all weekend. I can get into the University of Chicago without AP English." She's so damn cool that even the teachers give her a nod in the hallways. She takes pity on Smith when he wants to get on the list. Although she'd never admit it, she's always thought that he was cool; they go way back to elementary school days and she adores his mother.

Diana: Black, Age 14 (Flygirl) The black princess of Mitchell JHS and every guy's desire. Homegirls with Naima. She may actually think Smith is cute?

Alton: Black, Age 14 Smith's super-ego. Alton is an old soul in a ninth grade body... he speaks, moves, and thinks slowly and with purpose. He's often hesitant, worried about the most remote worst case scenarios possible. But just when you think he's completely out of touch, Alton drops wisdom that changes your whole perspective.



Kayla: White, Age 14 She's the white girl who wishes she was Black as long as she can keep her privilege. She has a crush on Jack, who doesn't really know she exists beyond the fact that she lives in the apartments near his neighborhood. She resents Makeba's ability to be Black and different.

Derek: Black, Age 14 Smith's id. If Alton is saying look both ways before crossing, Derek is already in the middle of the road daring cars to hit him. "D" is loud, obnoxious, arrogant, and everything Smith wishes he was brave enough to be. He's tall, hilarious, and foul-mouthed... he's also a preacher's son, which intrigues Smith to no end. Smith sometimes doesn't even understand why Derek likes him, but he's so glad Derek is for him rather than against.

Trina: Black, Age 14 Takes no shit from anyone. Her tough exterior hides a desire for a more stable life. She has a mother who loves her and works two jobs to make sure she has everything she needs. Trina doesn't have it figured out but is smart enough to know her friend group can help her make her wildest dreams come true. She's a lyricist whose words cut almost as deep as the switchblade that's always in her pocket. She'd never use it, but no one needs to know that.



Mr. Bartlett: Black, Age 30s Algebra teacher. One of the few Black (and the only Black male) teachers at Mitchell JHS. He takes an interest in helping Black students succeed.

Ms. Patruski: White, Age 60s A white teacher in her 60s who understands the legacy of slavery and the current system of racism. She was a Freedom Rider. She's rare. Especially in 1985. Especially in the middle of New Jersey.

Mr. Patterson: White, Age 50s He's the soccer coach and teaches a social studies class. He's insightfully sober but even more so when he's drunk, which is most of the time.

Steve and Vicki Davidson (Smith's parents): Black, 30s Steve and Vicki Davidson have been married for 18 years, and Smith has watched Steve kiss Vicki on the lips upon coming home from work every day for as long as he can remember. Steve is a middle school principal... he is cool, wickedly funny, humble, and not much of a talker, which he shares in common with Smith. They also share a love of sports, so they can sit together and watch a game in silence and be perfectly happy. Vicki, however, does enough talking for all of them. She is a beloved elementary school teacher, and has quite frankly paved the way for Smith's acceptance in junior high because so many of his fellow students love his mother and often tell him she was their favorite teacher.



Linda and Eugene Roosevelt (Makeba's parents): Black, Age 30s They met at a HBCU in the late 60s, both politically active and eager to make their marks on the world. Linda is a stay at home mom with impeccable taste, who is fit, well-read and steeped in her history. Though she was marching in the streets to 'Free Angela Davis,' she appreciates being upwardly mobile. Her existence sends mixed messages to Makeba and her sister... there seems to be an idea of what being the "right" kind of Black person looks like. Makeba's mom talks about racism and white people a lot but doesn't want the stereotypes of Blackness impacting her or her family. Eugene is brilliant, quiet and powerful. He's intimidating to Makeba's friends and he likes it that way, but on the inside he's always smiling. He is Makeba's standard for how she sees boys. He is her hero.

STORY WORLD

We don't name the town specifically, but it is Ewing Township, New Jersey. It's smack in the middle of NJ right between Trenton, the predominantly Black and poor state capital, and Princeton, one of NJ's richest towns and home to Princeton University. Proximity to these borders matters in the show and sets a tone. Closer to the Princeton side, the houses are bigger; it's flanked to the west by the Delaware River and there is a golf club. But it's not Princeton and the folks on that side have their own identity crisis and call it Mountain View, named after the golf course. Closer to the state's Capitol or the Trenton side, the area is middle class, working class, and lower working class. The town's center is the most diverse area. The town has all the requisite NJ establishments -- 5 pizza joints, a few Chinese restaurants, three strip malls complete with video rental stores, a couple bowling alleys, a Carvel ice cream shop, a VFW, and of course a diner (that has the best fries).



SEASON ONE

Pilot - We're introduced to Smith, Makeba and the cast. Makeba moves to a new town and deals with adjusting while Smith contends with not being on the Top 9 of 9th List. Smith and Makeba meet. Makeba meets and has a crush on Jack, the coolest white kid in the 9th grade. Smith loses a long time love but gains a potential new one.

Episode 2 - Makeba has a crush that likes her and is confronted with racism when the police pull her father over on the way home. A school bully makes her life miserable. Smith joins a prestigious academy for students of color and is confronted by a girl gang.

Episode 3 - Smith and Makeba attend a mock senate committee hearing in DC and realize that there are romantic sparks between them. They become allies amidst a sea of whiteness.

Episode 4 - Makeba and Smith fall deeper into their respective relationships, but keep getting closer as they work together on an article for the school paper. They have another moment when a party they attend gets broken up by the cops and they have to figure out a way home.

Episode 5 - Makeba goes to the salon to get her hair done and spends the night at Claire's. Makeba gets in trouble at school and has to spend time with her nemesis. Smith tries to reconcile newfound attention and conflicting advice from his Academy mentor and his parents while navigating his temporary entrance into the Black upper crust.

Episode 6 - Smith and Makeba pair up as they work with Knowledge, Trina, Naima and Andrew to present at a Black History Month assembly. Makeba and Jack deal with their differences. Makeba looks to Smith for support, and Smith questions how much support he should give.

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SEASON ONE

Add Episode 7 - Jesse Jackson's son comes to the school to talk about Civic Engagement. When a classmate of Smith and Makeba asks a racist question a brawl breaks out. Makeba and Smith are forced to choose sides. Makeba's family adopts a dog that bites Jack. Makeba talks to her visiting grandfather. Smith, Makeba, Jack are assigned a group project at the absolute worst time. Smith appears on the list, but begins to view it differently.

Episode 8 - Makeba realizes that she's fallen for Smith. Claire gets back at a racist classmate (Mara) and Makeba is angry that her white friend thinks that someone needs to fight her battles for her. Makeba is frustrated with everyone and everything and takes off on her bike to the next town where she is enthralled... temporarily. Emotions are still high from the school brawl, and Smith argues with the deli owner at the bus stop. He vows to make things right with his friends, and begins to plot on tearing the whole list system apart. At the Galveston Business Academy, Smith has an interesting interaction with a guest speaker, who unbeknownst to him is Makeba's father.

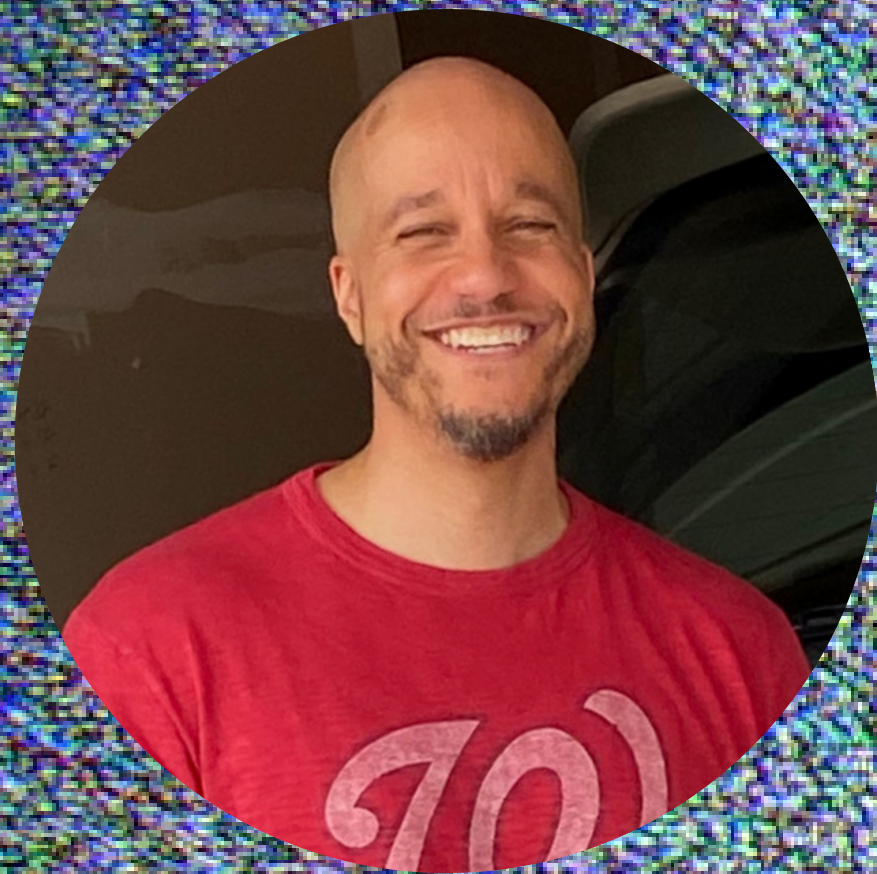
Episode 9 - Makeba goes to her first "woods party"; the neighborhood kids have a spot where they burn a fire and drink grain alcohol punch. At the party, Makeba meets a biracial kid who goes to private school. They immediately click and want to chat but resist it because they know all the white kids will say it's so cool that the two black kids like each other. Jack shows up and they have a fight that leads to a lot more. Smith deals with the ramifications of the deli incident with the owner's son in class. After getting caught in a compromising position with Flygirl, Smith's mom leaves a pamphlet about "petting" on his bed with a note asking if he wants to talk about it. He instead chooses to discuss sex and spirituality with Derek, the preacher's son. He also asks Makeba's advice, which leads to a long overdue talk.

Episode 10 - Prom. Everything begins and ends.



About Oneika

Oneika Mays (LMT, E-RYT) is a joy revolutionist and a born and raised Jersey Girl. She transitioned to yoga and meditation from a 20 year career in corporate retail leadership over 10 years ago. Oneika used that experience to support social justice non-profits and teach meditation and yoga inside jails. Today, she is the first Mindfulness Coach at Rikers Island Correctional Facility. She believes that our justice system needs to focus on transformation and restoration rather than punishment. This idea of liberation and compassion is woven into her work whether it's in a jail, speaking to audiences or working with folks in a corporate environment. She believes that meditation, movement and mindfulness practices can forge a path to freedom. blur is her first pilot. Oneika can be seen on TBS Lost Resort.



About Steven

Steven McLaine was born in Trenton, NJ and raised in its suburbs, which began a long life of justification. He was voted most likely to succeed in high school and has spent the rest of his life trying to live up to it while making choices that would suggest otherwise. Those choices usually revolved around denying his love of writing for literally any other career, but he could never fully abandon that creative jones. After graduating from the University of Virginia with an English degree, he moved to the hip-hop hotbed of Northern Virginia to become a rapper and was honestly surprised when it didn't work out. He went to grad school at Georgetown University for a Master's in Public Policy, yet somehow one of his papers analyzing blackplanet.com and other ethnic online communities became a chapter in a book called Cyberactivism. He became a federal consultant, but still made time to write for the New York Amsterdam News and some now-defunct websites (for which he takes no responsibility). And now he's put his second love (of television, which is ironically his favorite method of procrastination) to good use after deciding to no longer run from his first. blur is his first pilot.



