

Trees

By Christian Paige

They called us,
Low-income,
They called us at risk,
Always speaking from a deficit,
didn't realize that my learned experience was pre-requisite,
to be a leader in this community, how can you really know unity if you've never seen the broken
They tried to slam the door but my man Tim held it open

See they forgot to call us scholars, knowledge-dipped sociologists, unapologists, polished with dreams
being our brother's keepers long before it was common in politics

See we were seeds that nobody expected to be trees,
but we tend to supersede expectations,
Defy statistics
Never be complicit
Leaders aren't just our titles
it's synonymous with our existence

We are the roses that grew from the concrete
The garden that grew in the ghetto
The forest that grew from the forgotten

Proceeded without caution
Never waited to blossom
This is the part in the story where
Somebody finally saw them

It started in a garage
Humble beginnings in its early stage
Where teachers who cared worked extended days
Without extended pay
To see students standing on an prestigious stage
not holding average diplomas
But holding degrees for change

They gave us the tools
Watered our seeds
Never looked surprised at what their investment would bring.
A network of leaders from the Hill to the CD
Educated and ready to meet their city's needs

We changed campuses
Brought prospective to private schools
Navigated the unspoken rules of colleges that weren't built for us
With stories too unique for the common application

With collective determination and cadre in formation
We made an impact that can only be measured in scientific notation

We became teachers, preachers, scientists, activists, counselors, lawyers, employers, non-profit founders, and Ph.Ds but ultimately when watered we became trees

A wise person plants seeds so that their descendants will have shade
The investment that was made receives returns everyday
What started as little ripples has now become waves
and generational trajectories have been completely changed

Community development
Doesn't start with tall buildings,
Renovations or detaining our youth
It starts with homegrown leaders unafraid to speak their truth
Able to bear fruit because they're connected with deep roots
To a city that raised them and supported what they do

When a community is together then mountains become movable
Lights in a collective too bright to be dimmed
We didn't love our communities because they were beautiful
Our communities are beautiful because we loved them

So don't call us anything that starts with a deficit
Call us scholars
Call of us leaders
Call us Change
Call us trees

And discover what happens when you decide to water a seed.