

Anita Cameron



A photograph of a woman with short grey hair, wearing a purple jacket and blue jeans, sitting on a wooden stool in a studio. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a plain white wall. To the right, there is a professional lighting setup with a softbox and a camera on a tripod. The floor is a light-colored concrete or wood. The overall atmosphere is calm and professional.

In This Moment
Revolution
Reckoning
Reparation

Anita Cameron

essay by Brianna Milon
photographs by Sean Boose

Anita Cameron has never been afraid of a challenge. From early on, she was taught that challenges were meant to be faced and won. Growing up with a twin sister, she was expected to do everything Yvette could do. Anita being partially blind and disabled didn't matter.

Her love of activism grew early. Some of her oldest memories are from living just down the street from the Black Panther's Children's Breakfast program in Chicago. She even participated in her first protest at just five-years-old in kindergarten when the school refused to serve the children lunch.

When she was nine-years-old, Anita read about women like Fannie Lou Hamer, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman. Learning about how these incredible women changed the world made Anita's mission clear.



It was then, she made a pledge to do whatever she could to make the world a better place for everyone.



Standing at just five feet with locs that hit the back of her legs, she may not look like the force she is, but Anita would go on to be arrested 140 times for “nonviolent civil disobedience in the fight for equity and justice.”

Her only regret? That she wasn’t born early enough to have given the same dedication to the civil rights movement.

Growing up, Anita learned how to navigate the world as a Black, disabled woman. She found the world wasn’t designed with people like her in mind. When she started school, special needs children didn’t even have the right to an education. That wouldn’t come until 1975 with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Anita excelled in school, especially in reading. She was taking on college-level books at the age of 5. Attending public school as a child with undiagnosed autism came with its challenges.

She says she learned how to “mask” early on. Like many others who are neurodivergent, she learned how to hide the things that made her different in order to survive.

Anita hid more than social stems from the world. She didn't publicly come out until she was 21. She fears if she had been honest with her birth parents back then she wouldn't be alive today.

Even in 1986, there were still a lot of dangers in coming out as gay. Around that time, she and a friend were attacked while leaving a lesbian bar in Chicago. When they went to report the incident to the police, Anita says the officers did nothing to help them, a response she grew accustomed to from those who "protect and serve."

That year, 1986, was a transformative one for her. It was the year she began to stand in her truth as a lesbian. It was also the backdrop to the start of her journey with ADAPT, a national grassroots disability rights organization.

Over the next three-and-a-half decades, Anita would be arrested 140 times, more than any other disability rights activist in the U.S.



One of those arrests happened in 1991 at The Peabody Hotel in Orlando, Fl. The police used horses to intimidate protestors. Anita remembers how she was thrown to the ground on her stomach and how the officers would move the horses around, "trying to spook them so they would hurt us." During the action, officers confiscated a bicycle lock Anita was carrying, and threw it into the crowd of protestors, hitting another ADAPT member in the head. It was then that officers arrested Anita.

Activists are often the vehicle pushing society to progress forward.



Anita’s work has helped make the world a safer, more accessible place. She fought for lifts to be added to buses, and for greater accessibility for voters. She has also written for several agencies and publications on emergency and disaster protocols for people with disabilities.

When protesting, onlookers approached Anita and asked, “Why are you out here? Why are you doing this?”

Her only response: Martin Luther King, Jr. Some of those people who asked “why?” were Black and she wonders how they could forget that “we as Black folks have had to fight for everything we got.” She says the same thing goes for disability rights. Anita’s passion for activism is palpable. You can hear it in her stories.

When recalling all of these memories, she can’t help but quietly sing lyrics from her favorite song that was the soundtrack to many protests, “Ella’s Song” by Sweet Honey in the Rock:

“We who believe in freedom cannot rest
We who believe in freedom cannot rest
until it comes”

To be queer, Black, and disabled is to be
in a constant fight. Anita says,

**“As disabled people we are always
put in a position to prove our worth
and value.”**

“That our existence isn’t a burden to
someone else,” she continues. “There’s
always a fight to prove I’m just me. I’m not
your stereotypes. I’m just me.”

People with disabilities deserve to be seen
as individuals, not as a group, yet folks make
ridiculous, disrespectful, ableist assumptions
every day.

Anita says people either believe disabled
people are entitled and get everything they
want, or are incompetent.

“We want to work, but we’re told we’re a
liability.”

Anita has a master’s in biology and
an associate’s in Computer Information
Systems. But she can’t get a job in either of
those fields due to her disabilities.



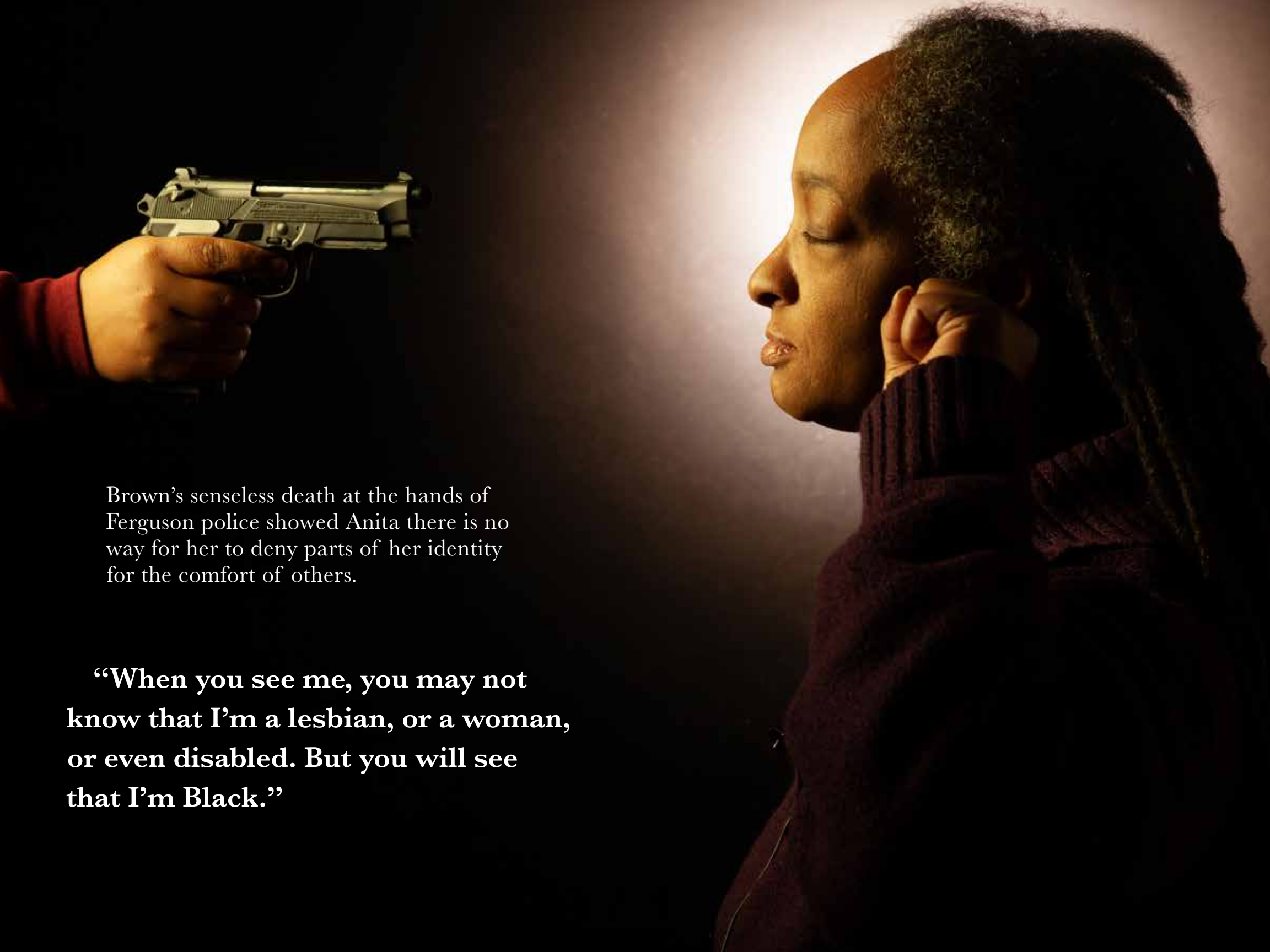
***We who
believe in
freedom
cannot rest***

Some believe people with disabilities have it made because the “government takes care of them,” but not every disabled person qualifies for certain benefits or assistance.

“People say the system is broken, but it’s not. It’s working exactly how it was designed to: against us. It’s set up to make you give up.”



Anita has always had to limit parts of herself in certain spaces. When she started working in disability rights, she didn’t talk about being Black. They didn’t understand her fight as a Black woman. In the Black community, they couldn’t see past the “burden” of her disabilities.



Brown's senseless death at the hands of Ferguson police showed Anita there is no way for her to deny parts of her identity for the comfort of others.

“When you see me, you may not know that I’m a lesbian, or a woman, or even disabled. But you will see that I’m Black.”

She looked for ways to speak up and organize within the Black Lives Matter organization, but she wasn't welcomed as the seasoned activist and leader that she is. She was instead told that they didn't want to "deal with a blind person."

That year, Anita's title changed to Black Disability Justice Activist. The new title represents all of her identity and reinforces her fight for every piece of herself in this world.

Anita says the disabled community and Black people are natural allies with the same goal: To improve or even dismantle systems that unfairly target and dehumanize us. Thirty to 50 percent of people killed or forcefully injured by police have a disability.

Our communities are built on the backs of Black women. Often at the helm of the charge, those Black women are either queer and/or disabled. People who are unafraid to fight because it's all they know.

“Nah. I can't rest,” says Anita. “Not that I won't rest. Fighting for freedom, fighting for equality, fighting for justice. It's just something I can't stop.”

Anita is queer, Black, and disabled—neither label more important than the other, but all integral to what makes Anita, Anita. Another label just as important to her core is “activist,” a title she knew belonged to her since she was a little girl, long before there were any protests or arrests.

I think we can all say Anita has made her younger self more than proud, and lived up to her childhood pledge to always strive to make the world better for everyone, regardless of the labels assigned to them.



BRIANNA (BRI) MILON *she/her/hers* is a young media professional based in Rochester, NY. Born and raised in Buffalo, she grew up in a small family that multiplied into 5 siblings, 12 nieces and nephews, and 4 great-nephews. Bri was always destined to be that cool, fun aunt. Now, she works as a communications specialist for Action for a Better Community, runs a local influencer page/blog “Fat, Black, and Femme”, and blogs for 540 West Main on social justice issues. In her work, Bri aims to advocate for Black people, the LGBTQIA+ community, and fat people, hence “Fat, Black, and Femme.” When Bri isn’t writing she loves playing with her cat, Fancy, watching corny TV shows, and trying new crockpot recipes. facebook.com/fatblackandfemme

SEANDELL BOOSE and SouthTown Images began as a series of family events where it became evident that photography was the true calling of the young photographer. In 2011, began an internship with GoodKnews Photography where he learned the business. By 2014 Sean developed his own clientele including working with Beach Boy Nino, NICO, Phresh Visions, SKYZOO, Chris Rivers (Big Pun Son), Suburban Plaza, Mercedes Benz Buffalo Fashion Week, Determined Life, Porshia Collection, TB Events, 585 MAG, MIGOS, Lil Yatchy, DJ Tyga, Jadah Blue, Samra Brouk, Rich The Kid, Dj Dynamic, Rochester Razor Sharks, Nick Canon Presents Wildn Out, Hit City Records, J Clancey, Sir Nicolas, and Brooklyn College among others.

IN THIS MOMENT pairs ten teams of Black writers and photographers with ten Black leaders from across the city of Rochester resulting in the publication of 10,000 chapbooks given away for free in the community through Rochester Public Library branches. The project offers vital learning opportunities and reflection for students and community members. All project teams and chapbook images are curated by local Black curator, Amanda Chestnut.

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For more info on In This Moment and to give to the project go to the QR below.



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