##### Rackeb Tesfaye

Hello, everyone. Rackeb here. Welcome to a special edition of Broad Science. I recently had the pleasure of chatting with a few organizers of #BlackinNeuroWeek, which took place online from July 27th to August 2nd this year, following the success of Black Birders Week, which we covered on episode seven of our Audio Distancing minisode. You should check that out if you haven't had the chance.

Many in the neuroscience community wanted to mobilize a similar experience of belonging and support. Black in Neuro created a space to increase visibility of Black neuroscientists and those in neuro-related fields, and to celebrate those individuals and their often overlooked contributions. It was another international success, amassing a following of over 15,000 people around the world. Black in Neuro organizers created a centralized repository of almost 400 Black in Neuro profiles from around the world, [and] resources and opportunities for various career levels. The week itself was a jam packed conference: from panels and a journal club about the historical and present systemic racism within neuroscience and health research, to multiple roundtables about mentorship and outreach. It also included hundreds of people celebrating and sharing the artistic expression of those in the community with Black neuro art. And even the kiddos had some fun Skype with Black neuroscientists and learning about their research. Some kids even won home EEG kits from Backyard Brains that will allow them to measure electrical activity of their brains at home. I'm not going to lie, I'm low key jealous about this, even though I work in an EEG lab.

And disclosure, I'm one of the Black in Neuro organizers. But regardless, I think my feelings are totally valid. #BlackinNeuroWeek ended with a wonderful and joyful dance party. No better way to celebrate success and newfound community that many of us never had. By the way, every single speaker and contributor was paid because of the sponsorship that the team worked hard to get, sending a clear message that Black people's time and expertise in this space should be valued and not volunteered. Here's the kicker. All of this was organized in three weeks. So how? In the next hour, you'll hear organizing members chat about how this all came together, their experiences in academia, their incredible research, and the future of Black in Neuro.

OK. Hello, everyone. So we're here with Black in Neuro organizers. We have how many here: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. Eight. That is a lot. But it takes a community to put [together] what is being put together, and do it well. So before we get into the week, we're here with a bunch of really cool researchers first and foremost, who are doing incredible science. And so can you all tell the listeners who you are, what you do, and why you love doing what you do in research? Paige, let's start off with you.

##### Paige Greenwood

Hi friends. So I'm Paige Greenwood. I'm a fifth year neuroscience doctoral candidate at the University of Cincinnati, College of Medicine, where I study the role of socioeconomic status on reading ability and brain function for school-age children with reading difficulties. I love the work that I do because we are really making a difference in the lives of children who may be inhibited in their academic environment because of their reading ability, whether it be in their attention or their working memory or phonological processing, whatever it may be. We provide interventions to be able to improve the academic environment for these children. That's why I love what I do. Anything with education and helping little babies reach their their goals.

##### Lietsel Richardson

Hi, I'm Lietsel, and I am a mechanical engineering PhD student at the University of Central Florida. Although I do mechanical engineering, my research focus is actually neuromechanics, which is the intersection between neuroscience and biomechanics, which is actually my background. I have a Masters in biomedical engineering with a track in biomechanics. So the reason why I love what we do in our UCF brain lab is we are looking to expand on the science behind human movement by studying and approaching rehabilitation therapies. For instance, from the perspective of neuroscience. And with building on this knowledge, we can contribute to the knowledge base for things like BCIs, prosthetics, exoskeletons. And that's why I love what I do, because in efforts of all of this, the end product means that someone gets the help that they need to be able to move again. That's such a powerful thing and that's why I love what I do.

##### Angeline Dukes

So hi, I'm Angeline Dukes. I am a fourth year PhD student at the University of California, Irvine, and my research focuses on assessing the long-term effects of adolescent exposure to nicotine and cannabinoids. So really what this means is we know that teens are smoking cigarettes and smoking weed, and my research is to understand the long-term effects of that. So how is their brain going to change? How will that affect their later drug-seeking behaviour? This is just really important, especially with all of the e-cigarettes and the vape pens that I'm sure many teachers are used to confiscating in classrooms. And so we really want to know as they're using these things, how this will affect them later on in life.

##### Rackeb Tesfaye

And why do you like doing what you do?

##### Angeline Dukes

I love it because I feel like I'm actually contributing and making a difference. And this is research that's really important. But also, I like that it's easy to explain. So when I go to K through 12 classrooms and talk to kids about it, they understand like they know someone who smokes and they want to know how this is going to affect them and what they can do maybe to help them either quit smoking or maybe so they don't pick it up in the first place.

##### De-Shaine Murray

Hey, guys. I'm De-Shaine Murray. I'm a second year PhD student at Imperial College London and I am in the field of neurotechnology. Now if I'm talking about why I like what I do. It's partly to do with just if you've ever been in a clinical environment, especially a neurocritical one, and you see potentially lifeless patients who are essentially clinging onto life. That in itself is just a big driver for a lot of the work that I do, just knowing that the neuromonitoring and the devices that I'm actually making potentially really inform on the treatment and potentially the outcomes that they have. So yeah it can be a very emotional thing, a lot of the research I do is actually based in the clinic. But yeah, that's really what drives me. So neuromonitoring, fabrication, all of that. Bringing it together and really trying to improve those outcomes for patients.

##### Kaela Singleton

##### Hey all, I'm Dr. Kaela Singleton. I am a postdoctoral fellow at Emory University. I'm also a DSPAN scholar and a FIRST teaching fellow there, and an adjunct professor at Agnes Scott College in the biology department. My research focuses on understanding how the brain develops in pathological and in normal states. And one of the reasons that I love neural development research so much is because I think that the formation of an individual neuron or the nervous system is really similar to the formation of a successful, happy, productive researcher and scientist in person. The brain is controlled by intrinsic factors like genetics and DNA that guide cells, but also extrinsic factors like contact mediated changes. And when I talk about the development of my students or the development of my classes or my scientific processes, they're controlled by similar aspects where those intrinsic factors are someone's personal identity. So my identity as a Black queer woman shapes how I view science, how I live my life, and the choices that I've made. My choice to attend an interdisciplinary program for graduate school, in an all-women's college for undergrad, they come together to create me as an individual. And so that's why I love what I do, because I can draw the parallels between my science and the students that I'm hoping to help.

##### Thiago Arzua

Hi, everyone. I am Thiago Arzua. I'm originally from Brazil, but I am now here in cold, cold Wisconsin, in Milwaukee doing my PhD at the Medical College of Wisconsin. I also studied neurodevelopment and it never dawned on me how many of us study early neural development. My research focuses on fetal alcohol syndrome. So what happens to a fetus or a baby when the mom drinks during pregnancy. My research is, for a good portion of it is, highly unfocused, in a good way. That's what I love most about it. So I do stem cell research. I do—I jokingly say that get baby mice drunk. I also do some computational work, study like very deep mechanical or deep mechanistic studies. We do a little bit of everything. So I love how I'll be dabbling on almost every subfield in neuroscience, so from stem cell to computational hardcore stuff. That is very, very challenging because we are a small school and a small lab. So we actually do all of these things. But it's also very rewarding because we learn so much and we're able to connect with all different people. It's very challenging but very rewarding. And we are hoping to get some new, exciting data on fetal alcohol syndrome to hopefully have a better protection against fetal alcohol syndrome in general. So obviously, we already know the cure for this is, it's just "don't drink during pregnancy." But we know that that's not enough and we should have better care and better prospects for the people who either drink and didn't know they were pregnant or any other cases that might emerge.

**Stephanie Renee**

Hi, I'm Stephanie. I'm an undergraduate neuroscience major at the University of Texas, El Paso, and right now I'm doing cancer research, breast cancer. And it's important to me because Black women are some of the people that have the highest rate of breast cancer and also throughout our lifetime, probably everyone here either knows someone that has had breast cancer, that has survived breast cancer, or has lost someone via breast cancer. I hope to start working a little bit more on neuro projects, but we'll see what the next year has to come for me.

**Ti'Air Riggins**

Hello, everyone. My name is Ti'Air and I am a — I don't even know what year this is — PhD candidate in biomedical engineering at Michigan State University. And our lab looks at brain-computer interfaces, but in particular looks at formed by response to brain computer interfaces. So my project in particular looks at reactive astrocytes because astrocytes get upset and they become reactive and they activate calcium channel expression and they encapsulate these probes. And the special thing about probes is that they communicate with neurons in tetraplegic patients to allow them to regain like function such as arm, leg, hand movements that they've lost previously. This technology is very, very important because it has a lot of potential. It can not only help people regain the function that they once had, but there's implications of using implantable probes or microelectro arrays to help with pain management, to help with mental diseases, to help with Alzheimer's, dementia, and seizure patients. So the potential for this device is very, very, very, very important. However, the device only lasts for a few years. So my role is trying to look at if I can try to minimize the formed by response to the brain to these probes and particularly stop astrocytes before becoming reactive and encapsulating the probe and allowing these probes to hopefully last more than a few years, since they have to undergo invasive brain surgery to to use them.

**Rackeb Tesfaye**

Ok, so I don't think this is just me, but having everyone talk about what they're doing and how applicable it is, and basically [how it's] going to save humanity, I didn't really realize that everyone was doing this. I think we were just so caught up in organizing that it's taken me off guard. You guys are all incredible. So thank you so much for sharing your research. And before we get to this week, I want to know a little bit about how you have perceived and experienced your time within the academic space. So I know this is a heavy question, and apologies for that, but what has this space up to this point been like for all of you?

**Kaela Singleton**

I have always really loved science and I've always been interested in the brain. And my experience as an undergrad versus a graduate student were very different and I don't think it's really possible to prepare Black students or students of colour for that experience all of the time, for them to really understand and internalize what it's like to be the only Black person in a space, the only Black woman, the only Black queer person in a space. And so my journey has been filled with a lot of struggle, a lot of gaslighting, a lot of racism, a lot of micro- and macro-aggressions. And I think, for me most importantly, a lot of lost confidence in myself that I had to build back up over time. And I did that through having successful mentors, or good mentors rather, and through really trying, really unlearning how to stop shrinking myself to fit into a mould that wasn't made for me. I'm a deeply self-aware, reflecting kind of person. So I take the challenges I experienced with a grain of salt in a way, where I'm appreciative of them because they've taught me a lot, but they also did a number on me emotionally. And if I hadn't have earned the fellowships and the awards that I did earn, there's a really good chance I would have left graduate school and become like a wedding planner or something a little easier. And so it's just... I really want to emphasize how hard it is to exist in spaces that aren't made for you, and spaces that don't see you, but also how rewarding it is to kind of be on the other side of that in some way and now be actively trying to make those spaces better. For them to be more inclusive and more supportive and acknowledging of the intersectionality of everyone's identities.

**Lietsel Richardson**

So I can speak a little bit on this. So my experience is somewhat similar, but it differs in a way because I spent the last few years of my life trying to conform to spaces and changing aspects of myself so that I would be more likeable, more professional. Just fit into the space. And I have the privilege of doing so, being a Black, biracial woman, and that means I have light skin privilege. So I would straighten my hair and try to be more white passing in the spaces that existed in, because those spaces were designed for white folks essentially. And then you know, it messed me up emotionally and mentally as well, because that meant I was erasing half of my identity. So I was living my life in academia just... And it's a little hard to talk about, but just not being my entire self. And I feel like this is just my experience. And there are a lot of Black students and Black faculty in academia who experience it way worse than I do. And I guess my mission here is to take my little kernel of an experience in academia and try to make it better for everyone else as well, just like Dr. Singleton mentioned. So it yeah... It's been difficult. And then not to mention I'm coming from an engineering background and in a lot of ways it's not just racialized micro-aggressions that I experience, but also gender-based micro-aggressions. I mean, down to sexual harassment not being taken seriously. It's been tough and I can definitely relate to [the idea that] if it weren't for the one or two advocates out there rooting for me and actively providing me with the tools I needed to succeed, I think I would have also quit and gone for a different career path. So, yeah, it's been difficult. And I can't stress enough how important it is to have an advocate, just because the space isn't designed for our success.

**Paige Greenwood**

And just to co-sign what Lietsel said, this space was definitely not designed for us at all. I started my science journey at a historically Black college where I had finally started to — Hampton University, shout out to Hampton — I had really started to come into my Blackness and accept my Blackness and love my Blackness there, and then going through PWI for grad school. It was like I was in a space where people were trying to make me unlearn or not be appreciative of my Blackness and all of the things that I had really, really worked hard to kind of establish for myself. My program was created in 1988 and the first Black woman will be graduating from the program this upcoming winter semester. She's actually defending on August 25th. Shout out to Kayla Miles, I love you so much. And I'll be the second African-American woman to graduate from the program. So you just see these large disparities in these neuroscience programs or whatever biomedical research program there may be. Or you might have mentors who don't necessarily have cultural competency and they don't know how to talk to you. I've had an experience where a PI would not let me rotate in his lab unless I submitted a diversity supplement. And so my value was attached to that money, that NIH money. And so it's been frustrating. It's been difficult having to code switch and just kind of kind of just kind of fade into the back and not be able to be my one hundred per cent authentic self. But now I don't care. Like, you're going to get these braids, you're gonna get these curls everywhere, don't reach your hand and touch my hair because they've tried that before. But it's definitely unlearning colonialism and loving everything that you have to offer and bring to the table. So that's what my experience has been.

**Angeline Dukes**

I kind of want to piggyback off of that, because I also went to a historically Black college, shout out to Fisk University, and we have a lot of love for HBCUs and that also gets discussed a lot as far as the relevance. I personally believe they're incredibly relevant because just like Paige, that's where I learned to love myself, to love my Blackness, to love my natural hair. I used to straighten my hair all of the time because that was more acceptable. It was seen as, quote unquote, more professional. And I've learned that this is who I am and you can take it or leave it. And applying that to science is challenging but so important, especially, in my opinion, for little Black girls to see themselves, to really see themselves for who they are and that they don't have to conform to fit into these spaces. I struggled with that heavily just as far as feeling like I needed to change myself in order to be accepted. When I first decided to go to graduate school, of course with interviews I was told how to dress, how to wear my hair, how to speak. My voice was too high pitched or too... Just too much. Or I shouldn't be as enthusiastic or whatever it is. I shouldn't let all of my loud personality show. I should be more reserved. And that's just not who I am. It's not who I want to be. And if these spaces can't accept me for who I am, they're the ones that need to change.

**Ti'Air Riggins**

Hey, guys, I'm going to go ahead and agree with pretty much everyone's experiences. I've seen and experienced the same things, even within undergrad. I think growing up I was fortunate to have computer scientists in my home, as my parents were computer scientists and my mom's a computer scientist. So I always grew up knowing that I could be a scientist or an engineer. And I also went to a private school that was predominantly Black, which spoke a lot about Black culture and Blackness and Black excellence. So it really wasn't until I got to college [where] there was this push back. So when I went to undergrad, I ended up graduating Ohio State as the first Black biomedical engineer. But it was no easy feat because there are people who... There are 17 of us who graduated as undergrads, and people met outside of me, having meetings and basically getting together and studying together. I was left out of that. I was left out of the equation. But an even going to grad school, every degree or every program that I went into I was told, "You don't deserve to be here. You don't have what it takes to be here." And even still, in my PhD experience, it was so much racism and sexism, and dealing with my first two PhD advisors going through what I went through with that. It was it was a lot. And I was going to drop out so, so many times. And then all of a sudden, as of last year I transferred schools, and I got the validation that I needed because I got the mentorship I needed to succeed. So I left the school and I left the department. Don't ever go to Purdue. Don't ever go there. Don't ever in your life. But then I found the mentor and the mentorship I wanted, that I very much so desperately, desperately needed. So for folks who are going through this process, please please please reach out, have multiple mentors, reach out to people who are in your shoes. Because you're not going through it alone, and I think that's a big thing, because I thought that everything that was happening to me was things that were happening to me in a silo. And it wasn't. So if you listen to everybody on this podcast and everybody's who's talking now, they have been through so many things that are very similar to what you're going through. So I think the problem here, of course, is academia and the fact that we need change it and whatnot. But definitely reach out to people because you are not alone. A lot of people are experiencing the same things that you're experiencing. So that's what I had to learn on my own.

**De-Shaine Murray**

Most definitely 100 per cent agree with that. I guess I'll give you more of the European perspective or more of a critical perspective, but those problems and everything that everyone else has said is very much the same in the UK. One issue is that we don't have HBCUs and we also don't have the critical mass in terms of a flat population where you can feel that comfort, especially when it comes to academia. So my secondary school experience was an interesting one. It was very much a culture shock because I had been around multicultural societies for a while and then I went to a grammar school. So that's when we have to do a test. I got into the grammar school and from there I went to being one of four Black kids out of a hundred and fifty in the year. And in the school, out of about a thousand, there were probably about thirty Black kids. And that was a very interesting experience, and I dealt with racism there for the first time. There was classism there too. But that really helped and actually prepared me for what was coming next, because I can tell you for a fact, I would not have been able to deal with academia as it is now had I not had those experiences back then. So when I went to university and started studying chemistry, I was one of, again, four Black people in the year and I watched my Black peers drop out. So one after the other. So year one, there were four of us, by year two that were three. By year three, it was just me and I was the only one that graduate with the Masters. So again, you've seen across the board that academia, it doesn't seem to be a place that really retains and looks after Black students. So by the time I got to my PhD, I was very much prepared for what was to come next. And I think the importance of even just hearing or listening to everyone else's experiences with this podcast, is that we show people or we kind of demystify what it is to be a Black person in academia. Because it does take resilience, but you have the power in order to get through it. But we need to show people that it's going to be hard. It is definitely not easy, but you can use that. You can grow and you can excel from that too.

**Rackeb Tesfaye**

Tiago, do you have anything that you want to share?

**Thiago Arzua**

Yeah, so for people who are just listening to this, have never seen a picture of the organizers, I am not Black. I do have a wild experience because I am from Brazil. I came here seven... I don't know what day it is today, but it's going to be eight years now in a little bit. And I have this weird cathartic moment when I like became a minority almost, when I was 19. I was raised by a single mom, I was adopted by a single mom. And it was a very wild but privileged background. And then I moved to the US and suddenly I'm not white anymore. I became a Latino, which is wild. It's wild to have suddenly a new tag attached to you, and now you have to fill everything - I don't know if you've seen this before, but when you fill demographics, you usually fill out race, and then there's a separate question just for whether you're Hispanic or Latino. Those are very popular in Florida where I went to undergrad. And you have a lot of institutional barriers that are somehow inexplicable, inexplicably there. So there's a lot of grants I can't apply to. There's a lot of scholarships, a lot of schools I can't apply to. And that's still the case. I have grants to the NIH that I can't apply to. There's underrepresented minority-focused things that I cannot apply to because it is federal money. So every now and then someone sends me, "This is perfect for you." And then you have to see, "Oh yeah, it's US citizen only." Which is great because it means that people are actually in a way incorporating me into this American culture of just, "You're one of us, come through." But then every three months or so, I'm reminded of that, no, I'm still an outsider. Been here eight years, a lot of friends, a lot of community building here, basically all my academic career here, and still an outsider to the institutions and to the people who hold the power. So I know it's not the same as other struggles or some racially based differences, but it is so wild to still have that issue in 2020.

**Rackeb Tesfaye**

Thank you so much to all of you for sharing your experiences and your journeys, and I know that many people listening to this podcast will thank you because they're also feeling quite isolated and alone in their journeys. Which brings me to the reason for why we were all connected. So Madame Angeline, future doctor here, about a month ago you had posted something into the Twittersphere, something to the effect of wanting to have a #BlackinNeuroWeek. Can you take us back to that day? What motivated you to tweet that out? And what were you thinking about?

**Angeline Dukes**

So for me, it's actually funny, I had thought about sending that tweet out and it was just a very simple tweet: "So when are we doing a #BlackinNeuroWeek?" It was inspired by all of the previous weeks. So there was #BlackinAstro week and the #BlackBirdersWeek. And there's also a #BlackBotanistsWeek. And it was just amazing to see the Black community being so celebrated in all of these different disciplines. And of course, being a neuroscientist, I was really curious to see how many other Black neuroscientists there are in the field that I could look up to and connect with. And I felt like #BlackinNeuroWeek would be a fantastic opportunity to do so. I actually made the tweet and deleted it a couple times, I had it in my drafts. And I was like, "No, I'm not going to send this out, no, nobody's going to listen to me. Like, who cares?" But when I did, I was just like, "You know what? I'm just going to do it. It's fine. If nobody responds, whatever, at least I tried." It was met with so much love and support. And honestly I am just so grateful. So many people liked and retweeted, and I think it was Thiago who tagged a bunch of people. He tagged Kaela and he tagged Ubadah [Sabbagh] a few other people like "Hey, we're doing this." And I was like, "Great." So that was really lovely. And the way it came about was pretty quick, that same day people volunteered to help organize it. We made a Slack channel and then two days later we had our first general meeting. And then by that next day, four days after I sent the tweet out, we had the Twitter handle secured, we had the Instagram handle secured. We had a website going. It was just incredible how quick it happened, but also showed how necessary this was and how important it is to so many people.

**Rackeb Tesfaye**

I mean, I think "whirlwind" would be a way to describe what's happened, really. And so for everyone here, you see the tweet or you get tagged in the tweet, what was your motivation for first thing, "I want to invest my time." And what happened? Maybe walk us through what that was like for you to engage with that tweet. Because Angeline, I didn't know you before all of this. And I'm assuming that many folks didn't on the organizing team.

**Thiago Arzua**

I think, to put it mildly, there is a lot of pent up energy from 2020. And when I saw that tweet, my first instinct, I think I tagged Ubadah and Christine [Liu], who were also nonblack allies. And then I tagged Kaela because... I didn't know Kayla very much. We were just joking on Twitter for like a week. I literally just tagged the first people that I knew would be down to help with big scary projects. And there was straight up energy. It wasn't I thought it wasn't something coherent and "I'm going to find these people." No. It's just, "These people work." And 30 seconds later, they all said yes, they were like, "Yes, let's go right now." And I think that came from the whole year and our whole experiences here of just, "I got to do something and do something that matters." Especially after the protests, after seeing so much, being involved so much, especially when you're in quarantine or inside the whole time. I think it was just a lot of built up momentum of, "I got to do something, even if it's just creating a Twitter handle, writing tweets and writing Instagram posts, something more concrete than staying at home."

**Paige Greenwood**

I will say that when I commented under that tweet, I think Angeline had just followed me back on Twitter. I didn't have that many followers and I literally was like, "Yeah, I want to do this." But I never expected to have a DM in on Twitter the very next day from Angeline saying, "Hey, let's do this thing. Here's the Slack." And I was like, "Wow." I just immediately found a community of people or a team of people that really knew how to get stuff done. They didn't just talk about things, they were efficient. They knew how to get stuff done. They knew they had to do something. And that was so empowering. And it gave me energy because I'm definitely a very shy, introverted person. I don't think I would have thrust myself into a whole social media movement any other time. But, yeah, I was just so grateful to have been included in this. Like I said, this team is very energizing and I was just so surprised, but also so grateful that it happened so quickly and that we got so much done.

**Stephanie Renee**

I was really excited that Angeline spoke out. We were just coming off the tail of Black Birders week, which I'd taken a little bit a part of setting together with everyone. And with that starting, I was like, "I wish we could do something in neuro." Because at this point everything had been with outdoorsy people. And I like to camp and hike and stuff, but I don't know any neuro people here where I live. And I also haven't seen another living person since March that doesn't work at the store. So I don't know when the next time is that I'll be able to actually interact with other people that are in the same field or have that same interest as I do. So when I saw that Angeline said that, I was like, "Man, I've been thinking about this forever. I definitely want to help." Because I'm the type of person that has a million ideas. But am I going to do them? Probably not. So with everyone in this group being so efficient and reminding me about the Google Docs that I lose every day. Sorry everyone for asking the link all the time. But it's been great to form this community and to virtually meet all of you.

**Paige Greenwood**

I was so excited. I was so glad that I was on Twitter at the right moment just because I feel like I always get lost in the sauce on Twitter. I never catch all of the good content that comes on there. And so seeing Angeline's tweet, I immediately contacted her and she welcomed me with open arms and allowed me to join in on the organizing team, which I'm so grateful for. I've been really worried, I think, since the one mentor that I have in Cincinnati will be leaving soon because she's graduating. She's been my connect as a Black neuroscientist in making me feel welcome and make me feel comfortable. But now I can say I have this incredible group of people, Black neuroscientists from all across the country, all across the world, that are supportive and are loving and are caring and uplifting at all moments. And now I'm not afraid anymore. So I'm very grateful for you guys.

**Kaela Singleton**

I think for me, Thiago definitely right. We had only been joking on the on Twitter for a little while and I was really happy that he tagged me in that tweet and I saw it. And it came after I had essentially called out Georgetown University for not doing anything or speaking up or helping in terms of the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. So I just spent three days in a bunch of Zoom meetings with a bunch of old white professors explaining to them that the police are bad and that racism still exists. And it dawned on me in that meeting, because they were like, "What's something that we could do?" And I was like, "You could just hire a Black person in the department. That would be like a real good start for me, because I'm twenty-eight and I just defended, I just earned my PhD 19 days ago, and I'm having to sit here in this room and educate all of you about this thing that is such common sense and common decency to me." And I understand that it's not that way for everybody, that it takes learning and growth. But so when I saw Thiago's tag of me in that tweet, I was like, "Absolutely, this is something that I've always wanted. I've never had a Black woman professor, a Black woman teacher. I'm mixed race. My mom's not even a Black woman. The only Black women I have in my life are my Nana and two aunts. I've got a family full of thirty-five men and three women. It's real rough out there, but also hilarious sometimes. And so for me, it was a chance to use my voice and my platform and the new three letters after my name to, even if it was only uplift and support and retweet and post on Instagram about everything, it was a chance for me to do something instead of trying to wait for other people to bring the change that I wanted.

**Rackeb Tesfaye**

Most of the organizers here are based in the US. So De-Shaine, you have a perspective on the UK side of things and sometimes can often as a Canadian as well I often feel kind of removed from things that are happening in academia in the US—so why did you think it was important for you to share your voice and be a part of this?

**De-Shaine Murray**

Sure. What a lot of people don't realize is just how global anti-Blackness is, and it doesn't matter which country, as long as it's in the West—well actually it doesn't even have to get in the West—but if you look from Australia to Canada, to the UK, to France, they all have histories of colonialism that still pervades our current society today. So you still have disparities. You still have, well even we've seen it with COVID in the locked down, how certain populations or certain ethnicities and people have been more affected. And you wonder why. Well, we know as scientists that this is not genetic, and this is something that is actually socioeconomic. And to deal with the people and how they live and how they have been discriminated against, as a result of just over the years. But essentially for me, it was about getting involved in that and bringing that UK perspective, but also just showing that essentially your brothers and your sisters in another country, and another part of the world, are fighting exactly the same fight, fighting exactly the same battle. So as soon as I saw Angeline's tweet I was like, "Yup, I'm on board." I literally tweeted the UK is on board. Because there aren't very many of us, especially Black neuroscientists in the UK. And even just from the organizing that we've done, I've seen just the reluctance of the UK or UK institutions to actually get involved in this conversation. But it's definitely there, there's a history of colonialism, there's a history of slavery. Funnily enough it's Jamaican Independence today and yeah, 58 years. But I see that in my own country's history and yeah, there's a lot of things that need to be talked about. So Black in Neuro is a global campaign. Bringing light to anti-Blackness in general is, is very, very important.

**Rackeb Tesfaye**

Hey, Happy Independence Day! Everyone's snapping and doing like emoji hands up there. So something that I think most people will catch if they read our Twitter is that we quite enjoy working together. And even right now, I'll just expose us, we're having side conversations here in the chat, making everyone hungry. So here's the thing. In three weeks, what we've accomplished as a team goes far beyond what many institutions or organizations could do or have done. So there has been a website that's been created. There has been a repository of resources and opportunities. There has been mentorship facilitation. There has been a network that has been mobilized, of over 300 Black in Neuro folks. I mean, the list goes on, in addition to the sponsorships that we have received. We can talk about it for days. So how did a group of strangers pull this off? Can someone talk about the mechanics behind this week and why they think it was so successful?

**Stephanie Renee**

All the power goes to all of them. I wake up and there's 20 threads on Slack of, "Hey, this email happened and this happened and this person wants to donate this much, and this is going on." And I was like, "Good morning. Does anybody want some coffee?" Like what's going on? So they definitely just kept pushing. I've never seen people work so hard while they've also got jobs and schools and thesises... Thesi? Theseses? You know, papers to write and stuff.

**Paige Greenwood**

I feel like the reason why this week was so successful is because we did all of the things that we wish our universities would have done for us. And for previous generations of Black scientists who didn't have a space, and often had to create those spaces for them[selves]. So I feel like we all brought our experiences to the table and we worked hard to ensure that there was a platform and a community for other people who didn't feel as supported. So that's just my 2 cents.

**Ti'Air Riggins**

I'd like to add to that. I feel like to some degree, every single one of us, we have worked in environments where we were not supported, where things didn't get done, like Paige mentioned. And I think that we took that and threw it all into #BlackinNeuroWeek's planning, because we were like, "Okay we're going to do this the right way, because no one else has been able to get things done before." So as far as mechanics are concerned, we had people who had the energy as soon as they wake up and they're like messaging everyone [in] the Slack, they're like, "Okay this, this, and this needs to get done." We have high functioning people on our team who, they're taking notes and minutes detailed action items for everyone, for every single Zoom meeting that we had. And I think that's why we were able to get stuff done. Not only were we drawing from our previous experiences, working on teams and wanting to do it better with Black in Neuro, but I think it's also the fact that we're all awesome and all highly functional beings. And we know how to get stuff done. I mean, there's a reason why we're here and a reason why we're scientists, right? I don't think it is surprising at all that we were able to pull this off.

**Angeline Dukes**

I personally also want to say that Sunday, that was our closing call, it was very cathartic because everyone shared these lived and shared experiences that we thought we experienced in a silo, but we actually determined and we saw that, "Oh, we have some of the same experiences dealing with a lot of the isms in academia." So we saw the things that we wanted from our universities, as mentioned earlier, as Paige has said, and we made to fruition because we've been through these things and we don't want other people to deal with these things too. Because we know that these things that we dealt with, because of our background and because of mentorship or things that have happened along the way, we've stayed. But not everyone else has that privilege. So I think we saw ourselves in other people. So when we share these experiences, we came together and it was like, "Okay, we have to make this work. This has to be organic because if we drop the ball, it may not happen again like this."

**Rackeb Tesfaye**

This group is mainly composed of Black folks in academia, but a large reason for our success is the allies that we had in our group. Can someone talk about what that allyship has looked like for this organization, and what they appreciated so much about the approach that our allies took. Especially for allies listening, or for potential allies listening who want to take notes on what they can do to support similar organizations or movements.

**Angeline Dukes**

I think what was really nice about it was at the very beginning, and part of the reason why this works so well is we were all very clear on what our goal and our mission was. And it really was to amplify and highlight Black voices. And everyone was on board with that, including all of the allies. And so because we all knew that this is what we're doing, it wasn't taking away from us for them to be there. If anything, their experiences help amplify the things that we were trying to do, because they had unique jobs or unique assets since skills that could help us. And so we have allies that are excellent science communicators, allies who are good with securing funding, those who are fantastic at making graphics on Canva and for Instagram. And the best way is to pull together threads. And so by working together, I think that helped. But I think sometimes the trouble with certain allies is that they centered their experiences and how they feel about racism. Or centering white guilt and "Oh my God, I can't believe it." Instead of centering the Black voices and the Black people who are experiencing it and amplifying their voices. And so our our allies did a really great job of making sure that our voices were amplified and the things that we wanted to accomplish... Because we know what we want, right? We know the things that we want to get done. We know what we wanted to do. Um, we just, you know, needed the extra help to get there. And so they did a great job of doing that.

**Rackeb Tesfaye**

And Thiago, being one of the ally representatives here on this call, what, was working in this space—I mean, you're still working in this space—like for you?

**Thiago Arzua**

I think—and this might have taken me longer than it should have as a human being—but I realized some time I think in college that you go through these grants and you know that the people that are paid less are usually Black women. It was very clear to me that if a Black woman succeeds, I will succeed, and I will thrive by definition. The least paid person, if the person who's being most oppressed by society is thriving, by definition when we all raise. So I don't even use the word. I don't call myself an ally too much. I like when people do it, because it means I'm doing right, but I think also these things are very common sense, or they should be at least. It is very clear to me, it wasn't ever a debate, that Black Lives Matter. It was never a debate that these things should be discussed. When I joined my diversity committee in my school, I realized that a lot of these things are still complex ideas in people's heads. These things are still up to debate, like, "Oh but should we say like this? Or should we approach like this?" And I think all of the allies in the group literally just went like, "Yeah, we all know. Yeah. We get it." I won't say much for them, but it seems that all the allies also had their own struggles with either with immigration or with other forms of oppression. And it's not all the same, but I think having been oppressed and having not been in the position of privilege of old white men, you have other things that talk to you. I think all of it was very, very natural for all the allies. We never had a side chat where we were policing each other and like, "Oh, should we talk about this, should we talk about this?" We were all very clear on what we should do and we should not do, and very clear on our mission, like Angeline said. We're here to empower people.

**Rackeb Tesfaye**

Before we get to talking about the success of this week. A lot of the period of the three weeks of organizing was trial and error for us. And we learned a lot. Part of that was being held accountable by our peers for certain things. And part of that was just being exposed to different perspectives that we might not have had an emphasis on because of our lived experience. Can we maybe talk about what has been the most salient learning experience of putting this together, and what are our kind of takeaways from this experience as organizers?

**Kaela Singleton**

I think for me one of my biggest takeaways was really being able to open up and free myself to being vulnerable within our group, and bringing up problems without the fear of retribution or consequences. In my lived, learned experience there've been very few times where I could bring up a problem and not be chastised for it in some way or not have the blame placed on me. So when we did encounter problems, or not even problems, when things would come up, we would just talk about them in what was an open, safe, and loving form. And that's something that has been missing for me in academia for a really long time, not necessarily my personal life, but in the facet of what my job is. It was also the way that we embrace intersectionality and the diversity of perspectives and opinions really paved the way for everything to go as well as it did. And it was a learning and growing experience for all of us. I don't think I've ever made a Canva post so quickly in my whole life, or updated a Google doc with swiftness ,that quickly before. And I had to buy more Google Drive storage. So that also was great.

**De-Shaine Murray**

I guess from what I've seen from this week, is just how much can be done when you're not worried about how people are perceiving you when you're trying to do your work. Just because in academia you're having to tiptoe around people, you're worrying about Impostor Syndrome and just everything apart from your work. But as soon as we came into this group it was, "Okay, we're down to business." And we got straight to it. The amount that we accomplished, especially in three weeks before it started, we were regimented, everyone had their roles, everything was in place. That was probably down to great leadership by Angeline. But everybody just knew what they were doing and what they were bringing to the table. And it really showed. And I think the one takeaway I get from this is just how much can be done when you're in a comfortable environment. And I guess, secondly, that, sorry institutions but you have no excuse now. Because we've shown you in three to four weeks, just what can be done. And there's more to come. You have no excuse with regards to diversity, inclusion, and putting certain things in place, because we just did it.

**Rackeb Tesfaye**

Yeah. And so we've just wrapped up the week and there's obviously more to come. But what are some of the most maybe memorable takeaways, some things that really stick out to you in terms of that week. And I know there's so much to be proud of, but what are some things that are most salient in terms of things that you're proud of?

**Angeline Dukes**

So the best thing for me, it's a little bit of a weird thing, but it's all the tears that were shed. Because they were all happy tears. There were so many just happy "I'm so proud to be a part of this, I'm so grateful for this community" tears during our women's social. We were all just boohoo crying. During our wrap up meeting, all of the organizers, we were crying. And it's because we know that it's so beautiful and so important, the community that we're building. And it's also just incredibly necessary, not just for ourselves now, but also for future generations to be able to connect and to know that they're loved and supported and that we're here for them. A lot of people do feel alone being the only one or two Black people in their departments or their schools, and that feeling of isolation, it just disappeared, right? We found each other. And honestly, I just think that was the most beautiful thing.

**Paige Greenwood**

One of the things that I really loved, I mean I loved the entire week, but one of the ones that really hit home for me, and really brought out the little girl in me who just loved curiosity and discovery but was discouraged from pursuing that, was the Skype a Black Neuroscientist. Hearing the comments from those babies, and the questions and how inquisitive they were, like one kid asks, "Why is my brain called a noodle?" And I literally cracked up laughing. But just the space to be able to ask questions like that and not be ashamed or told, "Why are you asking a stupid question like that?" Just being accepted. I feel like fostering science at a very young age for Black and brown children is so important because we see such large disparities in these fields. Because you basically blew out the fuse for that kid when they were maybe five or six, when they showed interest and they showed passion in it. So the Skype of Black Neuroscientist was transformative and we had some really great speakers. Dr. [Theanne] Griffith was so bomb. I just loved her and the books. And then also seeing parents following up and being like, "I bought my kids these books and they loved what you said about neuroscience and they're interested in it." So seeing that on Twitter and the engagement there was just, it was everything to me.

**Kaela Singleton**

I think for me #BlackJourneytoNeuro day was my favourite. And it goes back really to Angeline's point of the way that everybody connected and resonated and shared their stories was something that I didn't expect or really think about. I shared my story, just because I loved hearing myself talk and I'm pretty funny so I thought it was a good idea. And the support and the other people being like, "I felt the same way or experienced the same thing," was in one sense heartbreaking, because I don't want anybody to have to experience the things that I did, but also reassuring in a way that was, "I've helped somebody realize that they can do this if they need to, or if they want to really." That you can stay in academia and there's a place for you there. And so it really, for me, just built this whole new sense of community. I have more mentees and I love that. I love talking to people, and it's given me a new perspective on what academia can be, which is essentially what I've always wanted it to be, which is a supportive, inclusive, safe space.

**Stephanie Renee**

I think my favourite part, which I guess sounds narcissistic, but I liked doing the panel a lot. It took me out of my comfort zone. I'm not a big talker and I'm definitely not a big talker in public. So being able to do so and share my experiences was great. And to get the response back from people on Twitter that have watched it and to be told that I helped them was wild. So that was just a really good feeling. But outside of myself, I think I love the #BlackJourneytoNeuro. I see all these beautiful melanated people on the timeline. And I'm like, "Where are you hiding? What happened? How come I didn't know that you existed before?" So those were my favourite parts.

**Thiago Arzua**

I worked on a lot of the #NeuroRacism material, and it was so heavy. And so emotionally draining to go through centuries of oppression, and see how over and over again, scientists have done this. Scientists have claimed to be neutral and claim to be objective, ever since science is science we've been doing this. And seeing how these things never end, cause I think we have this historical sense that, "Oh yeah, Gen X was really bad and then it was over." And no, none of this is over. None of these problems in science are done. They're still very much here. And then seeing people engage with that, and talk about it, and talk about their own ways their research is biased. I think that it just opened up my eyes even more, even though I've been thinking about this for a while, of how science is not apolitical and it will never be apolitical. Science is not objective. Science is not any of this. Because it's done by humans. It's done by a lot of humans with their own problems, their own colonialism thinkings and their own biases against Black people. It was very eye opening and very like I literally needed a shower after I finished writing a lot of those threads. And at least we're talking about this in the open and you have no excuses now to not talk about this again.

**De-Shaine Murray**

Yeah. I guess I'll jump on that point. It was definitely the interaction, the engagement, the fact that we were shining light on quite a few things, and some really deep topics. But at the same time, just on Twitter in general, the way the organizing committee were interacting with each other, I think that was quite a nice thing that came out of the week. And it was the fact that we were able to be ourselves and not just when we were on the panels and presenting [and] you saw us be professional as ever, but then on Twitter you saw the funny side. You saw us interacting with GIFs and just being playful and showing that as a scientist, or as scientists, we are human, we can be ourselves and we don't have to dim that part of us. And I think that added to just how successful the week was because we were able to not only execute on one side with all the events that we did, but we were just being ourselves, our authentic selves. I think that's what academia needs in general.

**Ti'Air Riggins**

I agree because a lot of people that were like, "I'm going to participate in Black in Neuro." They were people who were representing throughout the diaspora. So it's not just this one view of like Black American culture that we can all kind of look at and be like, "Oh, that's Blackness." But Black neuroscientists kind of came together from like all over the world, from different ages, from different backgrounds, different cultures. And to me that was just beautiful because not only did it display how non-monolithic Blackness is as a culture, but it displayed how diverse we are as scientists. That we don't fit into this mould of like this old nerdy white guy that may or may not look like Bill Nye. That's not us. We are a whole multi-faceted people. We have goals and dreams and desires and we are more than just scientists. All the things that comprise our identity gives to our science and gives to us as scientists. And I really appreciate that. I can't appreciate that enough. I can't really appreciate enough how many Black people I got together and saw and witnessed, interacted with. And learning about their backgrounds and who they are and how talented they are. That was another thing too, seeing people with the art display and talking about like them singing and performing and dancing and showing their artwork. That was real to me because it showed the world that not only do Black scientists exist, but Black scientists are multifaceted. So that was really the most beautiful thing about the whole week.

**Rackeb Tesfaye**

I mean, the impact of this week is incredibly immediate. I think for all of us, but even just seeing the dialogue on the internet about how folks got Twitter for the first time, just to participate in this community,. Which is incredible. People switching majors, or seriously thinking about pursuing a career in neuroscience. People talking about how they had never actually met a Black neuroscientist before and how this has completely changed the way that they feel about the field and the support that they can receive. So the immediate impact is clearly there. Now looking towards the future. Of course, we all really need to take a little breather, take a break, take a nap. But what are your visions for the next steps for Black in Neuro?

**Angeline Dukes**

So for a vision for Black in Neuro in the future, I hope to see us become sustainable enough so that we can host conferences, post-COVID era, because I think it would be so wonderful to have all of these folks that we connected with our online community and just meet in person and be ourselves in person. Because I think that would just make a world of a difference for all of us. I mean, one of my favourite things about #BlackinNeuroWeek was that I could just be myself with the people I was working with. So I think it would be amazing if all of these scientists got together for an annual conference that we were all looking forward to and just got to be our authentic Black selves. And then allies are welcome too. But that's what I hope to see. I think it would be so beautiful. I'd also like to see our community grow in the future. We're pretty large, but all of these folks that were inspired by Black in Neuro, I want to see them in the field next year or subsequent years. So that's what I hope for.

**Lietsel Richardson**

I 100% second all of that, but also we really want to start even younger. Talking to Black highschoolers and Black undergraduates and letting them know about neuro. I know at a lot of HBCUs neuroscience isn't an option, so a lot of people don't know that this is a field that they can get into. And I think by showing us and being representation for them, letting them know about the careers that could follow, if they choose to pursue this. Also funding opportunities and grants they can apply for, and just helping guide them, could really have a huge impact on the field of neuroscience and getting more Black students into it. So I think really connecting with HBCUs, we've talked about possibly using some of the extra funds that we have to make scholarships or travel awards so they can attend some conferences. So everyone please stay on the lookout for those. And hopefully we'll be able to announce them sometime soon. And once COVID is over, of course, we can actually have in-person conferences. But I think this is really just the beginning. There's so much more that we're going to do and sustaining this community is a huge part of that.

**Kaela Singleton**

Yeah. I agree with everything Angeline and Lietsel said. I hope that it just continues to grow. I hope that Black in Neuro, continues to inspire all Black people to pursue neuroscience, to consider it a space for them, a field where they're welcomed, and not just welcomed but cherished and supported and uplifted. I hope that it keeps making my Nana proud, specifically for me, and that it brings people as much like teary-eyed happiness and joy as it's brought me in this week, every day for the rest of their time in science. I also hope it continues to grow and be a great place. I don't know. All the good things. That's what I want. And t-shirts. I would like a tshirt Angeline.

**Angeline Dukes**

We still have March on the come up. So stay tuned for that too, it's going to come.

**De-Shaine Murray**

I guess I'd probably just add the final thing is, it's been touched on before, but it's that legacy. One thing I'm seeing with Black in Neuro that is already happening, but I think it's going to continue to happen, is that we're really bridging that gap. It's almost like we've become advocates for our community, such that we can actually lift people up or bring people, or more people, into our science. And that's why I just want to see it continuing, because even the amount of calls I've had, people saying, "Yeah, now I'm going to do neuroscience, I'm going to study it. I want to know more about it." The questions that are coming from that. That's what we need and we need that engagement. And I feel we can do that, from a professional level with mentorship and with job opportunities, et cetera, but just in general inspiring people. And to do that long term is something beautiful. I think we're capable of doing so.

**Rackeb Tesfaye**

They are most certainly capable and I'm proud of every single one of them. Thank you to all of the amazing organizers who participated. And of course we couldn't get all of them on the podcast. It would be sheer chaos because there's so many of us, but we do have bonus material from the episode where we play a fun game to get to know every person who contributed. You don't want to miss it. It will be added to our website and our show notes. So check it out to learn more about Black in Neuro. To contribute, catch up on the events that week and the ones to come, go to blackinneuro.com or @BlackinNeuro on Twitter. As always, you can find us on Twitter @science\_broads, on our website, broadscience.org, or on Facebook. We are also anywhere you get your podcasts: iTunes, SoundCloud, Spotify, Stitcher. You can like and subscribe if you can. And we appreciate every single review. This episode was mixed by Ryan MacFarlane, in partnership with CKUT 90.3 FM. Alyssa and I will be back with more episodes in September. So 'til then, take care friends. Be kind, and please wear your masks.