

Tracing the C.R.O.W.N.

Reclaiming the Dissertation as a Living Cultural Document

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Abstract

This zine is part manifesto, part love letter, and part survival guide. It explores the intersections of identity, representation, and resilience in my journey as a Black woman earning a PhD in mechanical engineering. The opening pages of my dissertation (abstract, title, dedication, acknowledgments, and preface) become the backdrop, turning the most “official” part of my academic life into a space for storytelling and resistance. These pages are remixed with reflections, margin notes, and collage-like interventions that reveal what the dissertation cannot: the late nights, the self-doubt, the cultural negotiations, and the small victories that made the work possible.

Rather than existing quietly in an institutional archive, this zine reclaims the dissertation as a living, breathing cultural document. It honors the mentors, ancestors, and communities who lifted me up while questioning who scholarship is truly for and who gets to be represented. Positioned at the crossroads of design justice, perzine traditions, and public humanities, it invites readers to see dissertations not as endpoints but as sites of creativity, healing, and collective memory. This project blends Black-centered design, memoir, and critical making to challenge the boundaries of academic publishing and offer a more human, inclusive vision for scholarly communication.

Print Instructions

1. Print using one Standard sheet of 8 x 11sheet of paper.
2. Fold the paper down the middle on the long edge of the paper to crease to make it easier to cut (where there are two dotted lines)
3. Cut along the dotted line in the middle of the sheet
4. Fold the zine in half along the long edge
5. Push the ends of the long edge towards each other to make a “plus Sign”.
6. Fold and crease all sides of the Zine to make a booklet.

Final Page Order

1. “The Cost of Completion” Title Page
2. “I got my knowledge from a Historically Black College”
3. “Transform Higher Ed”
4. “Black Experiences”
5. “Shooting for success, Fueled by Family”
6. “Acknowledgements”

7. “Transcripts”
8. “I am a Maryland Mechanical Engineer”

References

This zine draws from personal academic archives, dissertation materials, community-based creative practices, and collected ephemera. The remixing of institutional documents and informal materials is an intentional design choice aligned with zine-making traditions and critical making methodologies.

Primary Source

Linkins, J. J. (2025). “Engineering While Black: Centering Lived Realities To Disrupt Design and Build Black Futures.” Doctoral Dissertation, University of Maryland at College Park.

Creative and Community-Based Sources

Linkins, J. J. (2019–present). Don’t Adjust Your C.R.O.W.N. Nonprofit organization and creative archive.

Visual materials and ephemera collected during doctoral study, including institutional stickers, campus artifacts, and personal archival materials.

Zines, Design Justice, and Scholarly Context

Vong, S. (2016). Reporting or reconstructing? The zine as a medium for reflecting on research experiences. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 10(1), 62–80.

Weida, C. L. (2020). Zine objects and orientations in arts research. *Studies in Art Education*, 61(3), 267–281.

Costanza-Chock, S. (2020). *Design justice: Community-led practices to build the worlds we need*. MIT Press.

Thomas, S. (2018). Zines for teaching. *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 18(4), 737–758.