

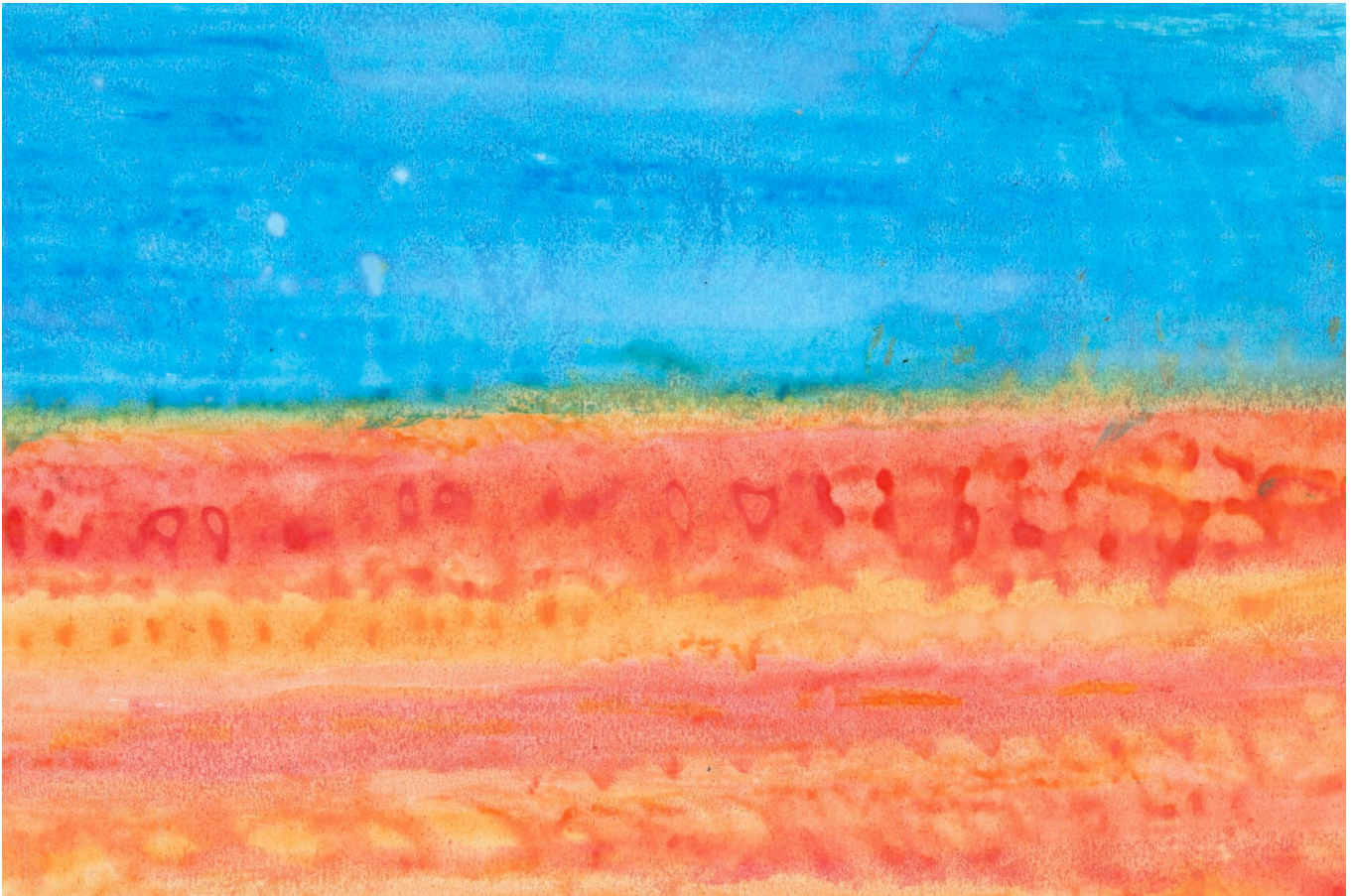
**LIBERATE!: A STUDENT JOURNAL OF AFRICOLOGY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES** ***LIBERATE!***

# THE ROOTS RUN DEEP

Katherine Woods

I really didn't know what to expect when I signed up for a class entitled "Afro-Environmentalism". All I knew at the time was that I had finally committed to an area of study and that this class would help further my goal of obtaining a degree. However, as I dive into the readings for the class I understand that there was a necessity for this class, not only for the degree. The necessity is for me.

Reading about how my ancestors embarked on the pilgrimage of fostering a relationship with the Earth, I can only imagine the soil feeling charged with anticipation, like a promise yet to be fulfilled. As I am reading, I visualize my ancestors with their stoic wisdom, working with a purpose; the shared humanity as they became sentinels, marking the boundaries of their/our land. This was evident when reading "These Roots Run Deep."



Artwork by Katherine Woods

Africa's people's awareness of plant domestication and ecological knowledge is a testament to resilience and growth. One section that particularly stuck with me was "African Composters." It is a true demonstration of the journey of women who, against all odds, carved a path to redemption and self-discovery.

I know that compost is a kind of soil conditioner made from decayed plant material. Most compost also provides nourishment to the soil and gardeners oftentimes mix it with the soil to loosen its structure. I believe the anthropogenic compost invented by women in Ghana and Liberia was vital to their survival. Plants, animals, and humans depend on soil and soil must have adequate nutrients and organic matter to remain productive.

Ghanaian and Nigerian women form collectives, resilient tapestries woven together by the threads of survival. They navigate the tension between acknowledging a need and recognizing the uniqueness of their talents. They find solace in the common thread that bonds them together: survival. I would consider these collective women survivor communities because they are the solution to a problem, not only in their community, but also their culture.

The healing inherent in the collectives extend beyond the personal. They heal the soil which contains “two to twenty-six times the amount of pyrogenic carbon of regular soil, a carbon compound whose long persistence in soil contributes to greater fertility and climatic stability (xxxi). This confirms the importance of these African women’s groundbreaking invention; an invention that was revelatory in its innovation.

The older I get the more I recognize some of the lessons that my grandmother taught me. Some of the stories that she told me are coming into alignment. It makes sense to treat plants and trees as living beings. It also makes sense to take care of the soil. Layers of identity unfold against the backdrop of the past—our past—and we should more often press rewind and reflect on how we got to this point. I think that it is important that we, as women, we as Black people, pay homage to our ancestors.

As we navigate centuries of trauma and scars, physical and emotional, we need to recognize the unsustainable path that we are on and the need for change. This will allow our strength to emerge, lead us to self-discovery, empowerment, and the gradual rebuilding of the self-esteem of our people. The Earth has always been our wealth. We should acknowledge its indomitable spirit.

## **CONTACT AND SUBMISSIONS**