

“Be You. Full.”: A Moon Manifesto

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It was a crisp fall evening, and I was bundled up in a chair on my porch, enjoying the vibrancy of the evening's full moon. I am often struck by the moon and the ways that we react to her when we notice that she is full. Her brightness is often blamed for offhanded behavior and extreme circumstances. Yet I have always been in awe of how beautiful she is lighting up the night sky. This night I paused longer than other nights to take in her brilliance with gratitude for this moment of stillness and perspective. I whispered aloud, "I wish you were this bright every night," thinking how great it would be if the moon was always full for me so that I might bask in her presence. It was then I heard a response.

*"I am always full," whispered the moon. "You see me in pieces.
That doesn't mean that I am in pieces."*

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Negotiating the parts of myself that show up in the classroom and in this academic life feels like a constant journey. I love to learn, and I love to teach. I love experiencing consciousness expand and perspectives shift. I love delving deeply into new concepts and stories and sharing them across mediums. I love facilitating the courageous work of learning and getting to grow even as I lead. I love exchanging information with colleagues that not only enhances our own projects, but our schools, disciplines, neighborhoods, and the world around us. I love the collaborative possibilities of education and what can happen when our ideas become practice towards a more just world. I love to learn, and I love to teach. However, my love for these things does not supersede my love for my whole, well, and full self.

I am a Black Queer Woman from Baltimore, Maryland, who loves short walks on hot beaches and long walks in the cool woods by a lake or the busy streets of a city. These are important things about me and yet are still only a sliver, a snapshot, amidst the myriad of other identities and experiences that are me in my fullness. I am often frustrated by the ways that institutions, colleagues, students, policies, disciplines, ideologies, societies, and other stakeholders in this journey consistently ask me to show up as only parts of me for their comfort or what they deem useful. It seems like too many places want the markers of diversity without the work of systemic disruption that moves us towards practicing equity and demanding justice. Lately, I have been curious about what it means for me to survive as who I am amidst all of the aggressions (macro and micro) that articulate that I am too much when I show up full. I know it's important to curate how I show up through healthy boundaries, but I won't be contorted by external forces into something that I am not.

I have decided to take my cue from the moon. The moon reminds me that I don't stop being full regardless of the phases that others perceive nor the phasing I must offer for my own protection and flourishing. From this sacred ground of myself I can grow and evolve. I can teach and learn and remain attentive to my fullness.

I wrote this to offer my musings on my mantra from the moon: *Be You. Full.* Whether you read each phase, or stop at a few, I hope you find your own invitation to remember your fullness through this series of fragments.

New Moon

The Invisible, Dreaming Phase

Like a seed being planted in the earth, such is the new moon.

As a child, Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech was always so interesting to me because of how frequently people would quote it and find meaning from it years later. As I have gotten older, I wonder how we talk about the dream so easily but ignore the uncomfortable reality that his dream and actions towards that dream got him executed. Dreaming is dangerous when your dream subverts normative ideas that aim to dismantle structures built upon the foundation of supremacy. Dreaming requires the risk of rest in a

world performing wokeness. It demands wonder that won't be constrained by limiting calendar slots and the openness to ideate such that your mind might discern and glimpse at the unexpected. It's hard to be a dreamer who sees the possibilities of a world where all can be well, while living in a world where most people's basic survival is under attack.

The great Black women rhetors and writers that I study remind me that to teach and to proclaim also means to dream and see new possibilities beyond the confines of today's world. Women like Fannie Lou Hamer, Sojourner Truth, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Octavia Butler, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Prathia Hall (to name just a few) push me to delve into my dream space. Their legacies remind me to have the courage to see something otherwise and risk naming what I see in some way. I believe they knew that word could be made flesh and they dreamt, spoke, and wrote to show us glimpses of what they saw such that we might know more and do better.

For me, dreaming requires a time to step away into myself and, sometimes, with other courageous dreamers, letting our visions move beyond what reason would deem possible. In

this phase, that looks like stillness and absence to the unaware eye, I dream. I dream about the world at large. I dream about the communities I am accountable to and the families I come from. I dream of classrooms that equip proclaimers across platforms to change the world through practice partnered with their proclamation. I dream of amplifying voices that have been silenced. I dream of rituals that root us so that we might feel grounded enough to heal and keep going forward. I dream of a world where pain is not the automatic, oppression is not the norm, and injustice is not the epidemic. I dream that the Holy, the sacred, the God-likeness is not intangible but is seen in the very real practices that we might call love. I dream of an earth not under attack by human negligence and a world not stuck in the violence of supremacy. I dream of spaces where the layers of my identity are seen as a rich lens and not a series of liabilities to be managed. I dream of a world where all Black people get to flourish in their fullness. I dream to tend to the rich soil so that seeds of hope have a place to grow.

I don't stress myself or try to dream it all in one sitting for I trust, as sure as the phases change, I will dream again. I will risk and dream and, as much as I can, I will share it. I dream. And because I dream, I teach.

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Waxing Crescent Moon

"...waxing means increasing."

Greetings and Salutations Class,⁶

*[I am the child of]*** Cassandra and David, two greats that created well together even if it couldn't be for forever.*

[I am] Daniel's sister, my prototype for innovation whose life raised the bar.

I am the auntie of many littles animating the prophetic simply by being who they are.

I am granddaughter, great grand, sister, friend, partner, Christian, innovator, daughter, disruptor, enneagram coach, mystic, leadership lover.

And many other things I have yet to discover.

[I come from] crab cakes, high stakes, Ravens games, half and half, poor representations of who we are, and never too much old Bay.

Some call it Baltimore, I just call it home.

[I am suspicious of] rhetoric that sounds robust but feels empty.

Suspicious of sweeping calls for freedom without the work to dismantle the systems that make freedom feel impossible.

[I am hopeful] that painters, poets, writers, musicians, sculptors, and other artists continue to inbreak new futures with their work.

[My hope for] Black flourishing [keeps me up at night].

[I fight hard for] all Black stories to be told robustly, repeatedly, and right.

[I refuse to] be a dream deferred.

[Today, God is] love that always looks like justice.

[I love being] a Black woman.

[I am always] becoming. [How] amazing. How terrifying.

[Preaching is] risky when done well.

[In this class I hope to learn] more about how to help you preach across platforms and contexts.

[A question I bring] is what evidence do we have that preaching aids in positive societal transformation?

[I am] The Rev. Dr. Chelsea Brooke Yarborough. She/her.

[In this space please call me] Dr. Yarborough or Dr. C. I am. I am. I am.

I begin each class the same way. I introduce myself with something like the aforementioned piece. It is my way of starting at authenticity and remembering this self who is teaching.⁷ Then, after committing to our community agreement, everyone introduces themselves in this format. I feared it would be redundant to do it at each class but the more I teach and have repeat students, I see that as we evolve, so does how we introduce ourselves. In a world set on "you are," I invite students to call in their "I am." Sometimes the prompts change and the length changes, but the intention to offer the class a glimpse of ourselves is there. This is their first proclamation in each class. Some see it as poem and others engage it as prose. Regardless, we learn about who they are. We can't know all of each person, but I believe we give each other a rich beginning that we hope increases. This seed gives us a starting place to approach each other as more than projections of our own fears and insecurities and get into actual engagement. It is also here that we remember that we don't proclaim from an objective lens, but from a deeply integrated lens of all our experiences. From this beginning, the possibility of remembering our own fullness increases even in the limitations of the classroom.⁸

***[] brackets signify the prompt students can choose from.

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Play



First Quarter Moon

How are you moving towards the dream?

How are you attending to the seeds you planted in the New moon?¹⁰

Retreats are the way I keep the rhythms of my life together. The everyday is so important but the everyday for me is best organized and grounded in concentrated times away. I quickly learned that attending to my fullness meant a winter retreat and a summer retreat with myself or one other person to set up the calendar thinking about my wellness, teaching, writing, community, and other responsibilities together. I am learning everything can't be done at the same time, so I find it best to work on four to six months at a time. This

practice allows for me stay grounded and present to the many practices that keep me well and attentive to my fullness.

Sample Retreat Structure:

Ideally Monday to Thursday (three-night, four-day retreat). This is work so it's in the work week. It can be time away in another city, a retreat down the street, or a time you set up in your home. Different times call for different things. Take lots of breaks and offer yourself some reward each night, regardless of how much you finish.

Day 1: Arrival

Set the space in a way that will enhance creativity and open up clarity. For me, that means comfortable seating, notepads, markers, candles, and large calendars. I first ask, "What is the dream right now for me, my relationships, my work, and the world around me?" Lately my dreams have been rooted in rest as a foundational commitment even in the work,¹¹ justice centered pedagogy and practice,¹² and rhythms that acknowledge I am life and love, not labor and liability.

Day 2: Inventory

AM: This is time to organize and prioritize what's on our plate. What are the categories? Then, what are the eggs (things that will break when dropped), the bouncy balls (things that won't break but may bounce away for me to catch), and the rocks (the things that will be fine and be what they are regardless)?¹³ *Tip Towards Fullness:* Wellness and the things that are critical to it are always eggs on this list because I find that if I don't prioritize them, I will act like they are a rock until they break.

PM: With each goal/task on your plate, break it down into smaller parts. Then try to give the smaller parts actual time slots. Things change week by week, but I find it helpful to place things into the calendar as much as possible.¹⁴

Day 3: Syllabus Day

AM: (1) What are the goals of the course and the values undergirding the course? How do they support your dream? (2) What assignments will support those goals and are shaped by those values? (3) What collaborators are needed? (4) What readings, videos, podcasts, art, and other resources will support student learning?

PM: Finish the morning's work and if there's more time, I start week-by-week sketches creating a shape for the class. *Tip for Fullness:* I look at my personal calendar while prepping my syllabus. It helps me honor my capacity and rhythms happening outside when assigning deadlines for the course.

Day 4: Celebration

Begin: Review – Create a list of what still needs to be done to feel most energized and prepared. Put time to do that in the calendar.

End: Offer gratitude for what you were able to get done and a delicious meal to celebrate taking actions towards that which you envision for yourself, your work, and the many ecosystems you exist in.

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Waxing Gibbous Moon

Increasing Each Moment to Full

Reflect. Remember.
People. Places. Practices.
That Love You To Full.

To my friends who have seen me through many evolutions and cycles and still call me beloved

To my family who love me for who I am and far beyond what I do

To my mentors who said, "be more of you, not a replica of me."

To my colleagues that consider collaboration more interesting than competition

To my partner who sees all my flaws and still doesn't consider me in fragments

To my church mothers that stuffed money in my hand and whispered affirmations in my ear

To my sisters in this work, birthed from zoom writing sessions into forever co-conspirators

To my ancestors, who move mountains with your wisdom or give me strategy for the climb

To my littles, I work so you have a better world to breathe and be beloved in

To my folks who I have yet to meet but will teach me more about love and myself

To my God, who always remains with me as intimate as my breath and still extends far beyond the expansiveness of the cosmos.

To all of you, I love you.

Thank you for consistently reminding me of my fullness in all phases.

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Full Moon

"Sometimes it's not the right answers that we need, but the right questions to catch hold and stir you." "What if I am the one I've been waiting for all these years?"¹⁷

Mirror Work: You are a Solution

What if I told you that you were the joy you were looking for?

You were the pleasure you seek and wonder if it's

possible?

What if I told you that your flesh says just ask and it shall be given

That your spirit has never missed a beat

And even on your worst days you're still dust and divinity

You are a solution

Not an obstruction

Not a manmade gaze, haze, or maze

You are no one's problem unless they choose to make you one

You are the daughter of fertile earth

And the raging sun

You are not a problem, but a solution

Only an optical illusion to those who have committed to the lies that try to catalyze your demise

All the while they surmise that

You are the problem? Nah

You are the best that was yet to come

You are the hope of the collective and also the breath of the one



You are creativity.

Your flesh a journal reminiscent of the imagination that
allows blank pages to become poems from the heart
Empty canvases to breathe as works of art
Silence to become sweet harmony
A dream deferred to become one that's free

You are summer's sun and her warm embrace,
You are adornment of fall trees and the truth they reveal as show their branches bare face.
You are the peace in their pause of their external show to focus on their winter rooting
And the opulence of their emergence in their spring fashion of fruiting

You are the best day you can imagine
The best meal you can fathom
The most stunning image your eyes can conceive
The lushest moment of life
And all the joys that it can bring.

You are both an ancestor and a descendent
Even as you are right here and present
You are power and you are peace
The gift of the beauty and the beast
Not perfect, but enough
Stunningly sensitive, and yet still tough
You are your best lesson
So please hear this question...

A simple invitation. One that I hope you will consider.
What if you simply believed what I said was true?
And that I described was still only a fragment of the fullness that is you.

What if I told you that you were the joy you were looking for?
You were the pleasures you seek and wonder if they are possible?
What if I told you that your flesh says just ask and it shall be given
That your spirit has never missed a beat
And even on your worst days you're the best of dust and divinity

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Waning Gibbous Moon

*"The Waning Gibbous phase is when the lit-up part of the Moon shrinks from 99.9% to 50.1%."*¹⁹

I remember the first time I felt myself shrink in class. It was not the first time I felt like I wanted to shrink in general, but this felt so intense. It was like all the insecurities I was trying to work through as a teacher were thrown in my face in a single sentence. I was a teaching assistant at the time and during class an older Black male pastor disagreed with something I said. He smirked, "I have been preaching longer than you've been alive." I was already nervous; it was one of the first classes I was teaching by myself. I wanted to disappear because some part of me heard truth in what he said. Instead of hearing the fact that yes, it may be true, I believed his disqualification of my presence for a moment. Later, angry at myself for mostly ignoring him, I spoke to a mentor, also a Black woman, about what happened. She honored the difficulty of responding professionally in the moment and helped me claw my way out of the shame of my silence. She also told me I would have other opportunities to choose a different response, telling me her own tales of these all-too-frequent backhanded comments. She was right. The very next semester I had a white male student who spent the majority of the class trying to prove to me he knew more than I could ever teach him. As he disagreed with me



about the need to do exegetical work for each sermon, he almost yelled, "I have been a pastor and preached far more than you." My response, "And yet, I am still the professor." He had no reply and I kept moving. I still don't know if that was the "perfect" response, but I do know that I felt peace on the other side.

Moments of shrinking can happen. When you are constantly under the attack of aggressions that manifest themselves as backhanded comments, dismissals of your role, tears marked with the DNA of fragility, and an overarching confusion by your presence, it can be hard to remain clear on the mirror work and the person you know to be full everywhere you are. Thanks to my mentor, I am reminded to take these moments as lessons about how I might respond and not as invitations to evaluate my quality or qualifications.

There have been more moments when I found myself shrinking or trying to contort myself into something otherwise to fit in. I hate it. And I am also proud of the times I recognize the phase and keep moving, knowing that I don't have to stay there. I study women who were asked to be small, but who chose to be big. They were asked to be disgusted by their existence, and they chose to be disgusted with the state of the world and worked to create more beauty in it. Their flesh was pointed towards as a liability, and instead they saw their flesh as life. In their legacy, even as I phase, I do my best to remember to return to fullness and learn from the experience.

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Last Quarter Moon

Inventory

*"It can be difficult to release something you hoped would grow. But this release makes room for something new and perhaps better."*²¹

My late mentor Dale P. Andrews ended every class the same way: "I have more questions than I have answers, more problems than solutions. It is from these gifts I freely share." I keep this close to my heart. It is in the questions, the wonderings, that I find the deepest gifts. Who am I today? What parts of who I am feel amplified? How is that "I am" impacting my pedagogy, my writing, and my work? Sometimes it's asking, "Why didn't that work?" about something I thought would be amazing in class, that helps me more than a completely smooth class. Often, it's being honest about the ways I am always recovering from this world rooted in white supremacy and apologizing when I act out of scarcity and enact harm, even if I don't mean to. It is in asking "How can I honor the fullness of others?" that I also stand in my fullness. As I move through these phases, honoring my questions, my wonderings, and my concerns, I also ask, "What does the dream look like now?"



Waning Crescent Moon

"Find inner peace and reconnect with yourself, surrendering all that has happened that is out of our control, before the lunar cycle begins again."²³

Every shut eye ain't sleep. This phrase often heard amongst elders made me laugh as I was growing up, and I get it now more than ever. Things are not always what they seem and that's often strategic. Every shut eye ain't sleep. Every silence isn't without opinion. Every aggression ignored isn't because there's no fight. Every moment disengaged isn't because there isn't something to put energy into. Sometimes, and perhaps often, these choices are strategies for survival. They are for regeneration. They help me create boundaries that protect my energy and allow me to use it where it is most fruitful. They help me find pockets of rest even in the work. For folks who only engage the sliver, my most powerful tool is not to attend to their small pieces, but to regenerate and find my fullness. I choose when I engage and also when I must regenerate so I have the energy to dream again.

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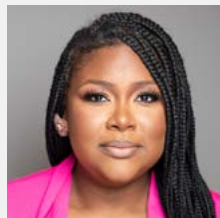
*"I am always full," said the moon.
"Thank you for the reminder," I replied as I gazed at
her brilliance.*



The moon is always full to herself and sometimes she offers us the wonder of her fullness too. However, even when we only see the tiniest sliver of her presence and even when she sits behind the sun for an evening in new moon, her existence still offers a gift to the night sky.

The moon gave me an invitation that night on my porch. She invited me to full. She reminded me that fullness is about how I see me, not how others determine who I am. I am committed to believing in my fullness even in the phases of this teaching life. The teaching life is a beautiful life and one I am grateful to be in. The teaching life can also be hard because there are a myriad of systemic realities that make it hard to remember how full, how enough, how brilliant, how evolving, how necessarily flawed, and how beautiful we truly are. My identity cannot be determined by my institutions, classrooms, or my work. Those are phases, a part of me, but I am full regardless.

For all of my Black folks, Women folks, LGBTQIA+ folks, POC folks, Disabled folks, Neurodivergent folks, Fat folks, nontraditional story folks, Immigrant folks, Poor folks, and all other folks asked to be fragments, I hope you will join with me. Remember your fullness and hold to it, relentlessly.



About the Author

Chelsea Brooke Yarborough was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. She received her PhD from Vanderbilt University in Homiletics and Liturgics and is the Assistant Professor African American Preaching, Sacred Rhetoric, and Black Practical Theology at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, OK. Her current research reimagines the nature and purpose of preaching and worship through the rhetorical and ritual practices of Black women throughout history. Most importantly she is a daughter, a friend, a sister, an auntie, and a partner. Her work aims to decenter normative systems of power and paradigms of proclamation by considering platforms beyond the pulpit for the voices of preachers. Dr. Yarborough is also an Enneagram coach, a poet, and group facilitator for team building. Most importantly she is a daughter, a friend, a sister, an auntie, and a partner. Her motto is "live to love and love to live each day" and she is excited to continue her journey of cultivating curiosity and helping people find and use their voice.

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- 3 Anne Buckle, Graham Jones, and Vigdis Hocken, "New Moon: The Invisible Phase," *Time and Date*, <https://www.timeanddate.com/astronomy/moon/new-moon.html>.
- 4 Paraphrase: Sara McCormick, *Lunar Intentions: A Magical Guide for New Moon Intention Setting*, (self-published, Sara McCormick, 2017), 16.
- 5 Anne Buckle, Graham Jones, and Vigdis Hocken, "Waxing Crescent Moon," *Time and Date*, <https://www.timeanddate.com/astronomy/moon/waxing-crescent.html>.
- 6 Kopernik Observatory and Science Center, "Phases of the Moon," <https://www.kopernik.org/visitor-info/science-park/phases-of-the-moon/>.
- 7 See Parker J. Palmer, *Lunar Intentions: The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).
- 8 In classes over fifteen students, I break them into groups ideally of five and we do different versions of this introduction throughout the semester. Each time they are with different people. In this case, everyone doesn't get to hear everyone each time, but having to introduce oneself in this way to anyone in the course is a helpful starting place that I find particularly rich.
- 9 Robert Lea, "See the First Quarter Moon Sunday," *Space.com*, September 3, 2022, <https://www.space.com/first-quarter-moon-sept-3-2022>.
- 10 Paraphrase: McCormick, *Lunar Intentions*, 24-25.
- 11 See: Tricia Hersey, *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto* (New York: Little Brown Spark, 2022).
- 12 See: bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
- 13 This framing using the egg, bouncy ball, and rock comes from a conversation with Brittany Jones, an incredible therapist at Grace Wellness Center.
- 14 I learned this practice of putting things into my calendar as an organization tool from Lisa Thompson, Associate Professor and the Cornelius Vanderbilt Chair of Black Homiletics and Liturgics.
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