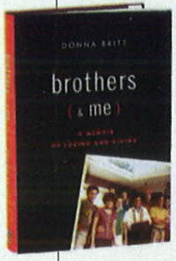
Why I Love Black Men

In a passage from her memoir, *Brothers (& Me)*, author **Donna Britt** explains why she cares so deeply about brothers



Three decades after the fact, I still felt responsible for my brother's death.

For 20 years, my brother Darrell had been my heart. When we grew apart, I told myself the gap would disappear when we settled into adulthood. But Darrell had died—an event so huge, so inexplicable that someone besides the policemen who'd pulled the triggers had to be to blame. Of course I chose me. I hadn't done anything wrong, so I turned to what I hadn't been doing: paying attention. I hadn't been watching Darrell, checking in with him, keeping him beyond the reach of pistol-wielding cops. I had let my brother die. If I'd been there with him, tending to him, supporting him, he wouldn't have died. No sane person knowingly embraces such a lacerating belief. Yet unconsciously, I was convinced of my guilt. So I resolved that no one else I loved—certainly no man—would die because I wasn't there for him.

My revelation wasn't just about me. I recalled the day that my friend Gwen, a public relations executive, had startled me by describing a program for at-risk youth as "perfect" for me to write about because I had "that thing for young Black men." Gwen had seen something that I'd hoped my feminist trappings had hidden: I'm a guy's girl, particularly a Black guy's girl. Like most Black women. Don't expect us to admit it. Sisters talk a good "I'm my own woman" game, warbling with everyone from Gloria Gaynor to Beyoncé about our self-sufficiency. For years, when a man bullshitted a Black woman on TV, her "Say what?" response was a cliché: Her head swiveled. One eyebrow arched. Her don't-even-think-about-it finger snap said, "Honey, I am not having it."

Please.

Before that moment on the sofa, I'd never connected the dots. My brother Darrell's undeserved killing had inspired me to heedlessly dedicate myself to supporting and protecting Black men as penance for my failure to protect him—and as insurance against tragedies to come. How many other Black women were doing the same thing? How many sisters were putting their dreams and well-being on hold on behalf of the men in their lives, men often unaware of their efforts? How many were taking a backseat to brothers, in private or in the public consciousness?

> ***"How many sisters were putting their dreams and well-being on hold on behalf of the men in their lives, men often unaware of their efforts?"***

Far more has been written about "endangered" Black men than about equally threatened sisters—with barely a peep of protest from the ignored.

The disproportionate attention focused on Black men results from brothers inspiring more fear than Black women. If I'd been in that ditch behaving as the cops described [instead of my brother], I might have been spared.

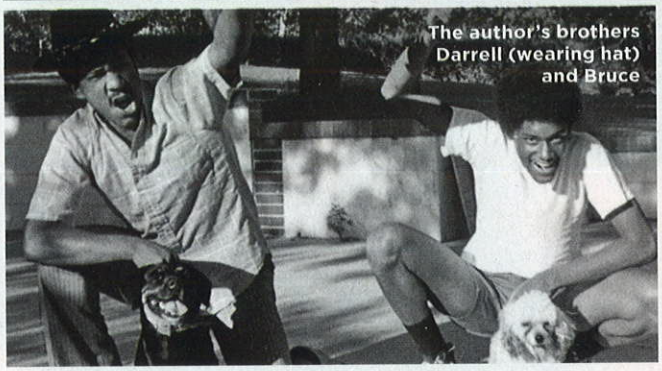
And the person who's most likely to die is the one who's "endangered," correct?

Survivors of such killings know better. Darrell was gone, but Mom and I, as well as my father and brothers, had to live and endure it.

The carnage that has decimated the nation's population of Black men barely acknowledges their shell-shocked kin, the thousands of wives, lovers, mothers, daughters and, yes, sisters left behind, many of them emotionally and financially devastated. No one can tell me they aren't endangered.

From *Brothers (& Me): A Memoir of Loving and Giving* by Donna Britt. Published by Little, Brown and Co., a member of the Hachette Book Group. Copyright © Donna Britt 2011.

Britt and sons Hamanai and Darrell (in arms), circa 1985



The author's brothers Darrell (wearing hat) and Bruce

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