

BSC _ Season 1 _ Tiffany Hobbs_Draft 1

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SPEAKERS

Dr. Thomas, Tiffany Hobbs, Dr. Fowles

- D** Dr. Thomas 00:16
Today we want to welcome Tiffany Hobbs to the show. Tiffany has been featured in Ebony, Gawker, Cultural Weekly, the LA Times, and other publications. She has also been a guest on panels and at community events where she makes her unique perspective and voice heard. Tiffany has resided in the Leimert Park neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles, shout out to the home town, for the last 10 years where she works continuously to edify the community by celebrating the complexities and beauty of Blackness with her activism photography and her words. See Tiffany's work at [Tiffography.threadless.com](https://tiffography.threadless.com). Hey, Tiffany, welcome.
- T** Tiffany Hobbs 01:02
Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Jaqui. And Dr. Theo, I'm really happy to be here with you guys. And congratulations on launching your show.
- D** Dr. Fowles 01:09
Appreciate that.

T Tiffany Hobbs 01:11
You're welcome. You're welcome.

D Dr. Fowles 01:12
So I just have to let everybody know why I'm excited that Tiffany is here today. I was born in New York, but raised in the Chicago area. And coming to Los Angeles, for for school. There was nobody else on campus that was part of the hometown team, that that was excited for other people to experience Los Angeles more than Tiffany. And because our campus was a bubble, right, you could, you can stay on campus for all four years and never venture out. And that was never the case, with with Tiffany, never the case with her friends and the people that she brought around her. And so just to see the amount of activism, the amount of culture that she brings to her artwork, as well as her activism, it really speaks to that continuous thread of wanting people to understand the experience of Los Angeles. So I'm really excited to have her here on the show today, to give you just a little bit of taste of what the City of Angels is like. So welcome Tiffany.

T Tiffany Hobbs 02:27
Thank you very much. And I also I don't know if you remember Theo, but I also am originally from Queens. So we have that commonality of being transplanted here, here. I've been here since childhood, but definitely have that duality.

D Dr. Fowles 02:42
I remember that because I was I was always wondering why Tiffany'd be wearing Tims on campus. I know her feet is hot. But but but she loves LA why the Tims? And then I was like ah, there it is. Got it, got it.

T Tiffany Hobbs 02:59
Of course, a little bit of an accent, if I got frustrated, I hear people is very difficult to place me-- but our bubble on campus was definitely as to set very, very insulated and you know, going to a school like USC, which is a predominantly white institution, not predominant it is totally white, it is a white institution. And let's not minimize it. And and having a very small population of Black students, Black identifying students created, you know, this, this this void that we needed to fill. And I felt like we were there, we were at USC at a time where we were able to kind of we were supported by, by by organizations on campus, this community of Black students that was supportive, and that would edify each other and

look out for each other and provide the social capital for each other and that experience and we were enveloped in that. And so it made a challenging environment that much more comfortable. And so I'm really grateful that I was able to meet you at that time and expose people who were new to LA to what Black LA then-- 2001 to 2005-- was really about and it has changed greatly since then. But being able to kind of bring you guys or provide the the content by which LA could be judged then from a Black perspective, I think was really crucial. Because up until that point, a lot of people only knew LA through what they have seen in the media or in entertainment. And you know, that's not always accurate. But being able to do that was very, very meaningful to me.

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Dr. Fowles 04:47

I want to back up for our audience just a little bit. Help us get into our community capital segment. So let's back up just a little bit. Let's talk about just your educational pathway, how you even ended up at USC. What's your major was? What were your thoughts during undergrad and how that kind of propelled you moving forward?

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Tiffany Hobbs 05:10

My educational path, my goodness. So I'll try and keep it as brief as possible because it is quite layered. So in high school senior year of high school, when all junior year when students are kind of kind of kicking around ideas as to where they want to attend college, if they want to attend college, what kind they want to-- I was also simultaneously navigating my mother's breast cancer diagnosis, which came, I believe, in the summer, before I was my rising senior year of high school. So the summer before, and as anyone would possibly surmise, or may have dealt with dealing with a cancer diagnosis from a for a close family member or a friend is devastating, to everyone involved. And it really kind of framed my senior year of high school within a fog. And at that time is when you're supposed to be buckling down and focusing and, you know, really, really laser. You just having this laser focus, right, everything is just, you're moving quickly. And I was operating again, with such dread and pain, that it colored a lot of my decision making. Now academically, I was able to push through socially, I was able to push through, I really threw myself into school as kind of a catharsis and coping mechanism. Up until this point, up until that point, I want it to go to HBCU to Clark, Atlanta, and Xavier, those are my schools, I'm going, I'm going to Atlanta, I'm going to Louisiana. That's it, maybe, maybe NYU, I'll come kicking around, but I knew I was leaving, right for the first time in my life, I was going to leave. And once it came time to actually apply, my mother was going through chemotherapy, and I was at home. And again, just really feeling the weight of watching someone you love battle for their live life. And I decided not only did I not want to leave, but I honestly didn't really care where I went. So I decided I was going to, I'm

going to stay local, I'm not going to go anywhere. I'm going to stay local cuz my mom is sick, my mom-- in my mind my mom is dying. So I need to be here. And I ended up reducing my applications greatly to just two schools. I was really lackadaisical I'm care. I didn't care, I was not arrogant enough to think that two schools was enough. But I was depressed enough to not, again, really seek out my educational pathway, I was throwing everything to the wind. So I decided to only apply to USC and Long Beach State two schools, both local, I was fortunate enough to get into both. And once I got into both, I decided you know what, maybe I should go to USC. It's prestigious, I should go to USC. And so I did, I went in as a pre business major saw how much math was required in business. And after the first semester, changed that immediately, because that wasn't my language I spoke. I became an American Studies and Ethnicity major so that I could really explore the cultural classes that were offered with some of the most acclaimed professors and content. And so I really dug my heels into American Studies and ethnicity and thought about throughout my journey at USC, double this is this is interesting, double majoring or switching my major completely to African American Studies. At the time, because I was only I was really taking mainly courses dedicated to Black Studies. And I loved them. Everything was Black, Black, Black, Black, Black, Black, Black, as you can be at USC, that was me, I'm like I'm taking everything right. My advisor at the time, a non Black person told me when I said I want to switch my major from American Studies and Ethnicity to Black Studies or African American Studies. He said to me, and I remember this distinctly and I'm so regretful of my choice. But he said to me, you know, you probably should look into something that essentially this is what he said you should basically look into something that's more widely accepted. That's such a narrow niche. You don't really want to pigeon your pigeonhole yourself into just African American Studies. Make it broader. That way you can go more places you'll be able to get a job and as a sophomore junior at the time. I let that influence and direct my staying in the program that I graduated from or with my BA in American Studies and Ethnicity. I highly encourage students, Black students, if you want to major in Black studies, anything, anything along the diaspora, please, by all means, do it. Do not let anyone dissuade you do not be dissuaded by a job market that is fledgeling in every way except for STEM. If you want to do liberal arts, and Black Studies is your forte, pursue it we need-- Our leaders are rising, our leaders are transitioning and we need people to fill those spaces and write that content and oppose the status quo. But I finished at USC in 2005 and went on into the professional world and I'm sure we'll get into that. But after many years, I went back and got my master's from Cal State Dominguez in Sociology with an emphasis on juvenile delinquency in the juvenile justice system, colored by a lot of my professional experience working with youth of color, predominantly Black and Lati- Latinx. In the juvenile justice systems, I found a juvenile justice or excuse me, a juvenile detention facility in SoCal. And I ended up working there for three years as a kind of like a behavioral therapist doing groups for these adolescents in this locked psychological or psychiatric, excuse me facility

for about eight deep coed predominantly Black kids, and the staffing was predominantly Black. And that's by no, that's by no mistake, it's very systemic, right, very indicative of the system and who is asked to control those who are deemed uncontrollable. And I, I enjoyed it, it, it was very challenging. But I saw how necessary representation of Black people in those spaces in that specific space was and still continues to be for these little Black kids who were kicked out of other accommodations or other facilities. And now relegated it to this locked psychiatric facility because they were dangerous or too difficult. And there were some who fit that because of different diagnoses and whatnot. But overall, all of them were looking for love and support and to see themselves represented. So I stayed longer than I expected to stay because I felt a duty. Once I decided to transition away from that, I began working at a non public school in Culver City. And I worked there for about seven years and behavioral therapy again, and taught a special education classroom for about a year. Again, non public operates different than public, the setting is a lot smaller, the restrictions are different. And I left, I left, I ended up getting into general education. And I carried the same impetus to serve the special education population. And so I served in different roles from behavioral therapists to kids who are on the spectrum of different cognitive abilities, autism to ADHD, and everything in between, not that it's autism or ADHD, but everything in between. And after doing that, in the public setting, I became a public school general education teacher, which is what I've done for the last three, give or take years now a three and a half years, including this year now with COVID-19. So I've been in education largely for 15 years at different levels, whether psychologic, psycho education or general or special education. I love education. I appreciate it. Teaching is not my passion, I am good at it. And I think it's important to draw the distinction between what you are passionate about and what you are good at, because often we conflate the two and we pitch ourselves ourselves to that conflation doesn't necessarily mean it's what you're destined to do or should continue doing. I am a teacher. I'm an educator, I also am a photographer, and that is my passion and being able to use my my perspective to draw attention to what I consider as being beautiful and worthwhile of attention. And that is that sound in the most mundane parts of to me humanity, and I look really to bring people's attention to the beauty of Blackness. So skin, tones, joy, I love photographing Black people be happy. I love photographing. And these are, these are candid, this is street photography-- commissioned just fine, but I'm out there doing my street photography. And it's been, it's been doing pretty well for me for the last six, seven years. And I've created a store, a merchandise store where I take my photography, and I put it on different types of merchandise. And those, those sales have been doing well. So it's less about the financial gain for me. And it's more about the exposure to Blackness, and there's a story behind every photograph, and people are buying those. And it's just, it's so fulfilling to me to see something go from a person just living to a photograph to people being proud to display that on their person walking around in opposition to whiteness, and disruption to privilege and supremacy, and

systems and all these different ways in which we are subjugated. And I feel like my art really opposes that and speaks to it.

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Dr. Thomas 16:10

I want to kind of go a little bit deeper into what it is that you see, like, not just in like the people, right, because you're talking about the people, but you're also talking about the place. So why is the area like Leimert Park important in a city like LA? And what do you think that other communities can learn from South Central?

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Tiffany Hobbs 16:36

Oh man, South Central Los Angeles is a jewel, it is a jewel, and it has been, it has been that way since Black folks migrated here from the South, we came here, and we created something-- our ancestors, our families, we came here and we created what we weren't getting in the places of our origins. And so our origins in this country anywho. And so there was a freedom here there was a beauty to be and to express art and to build and to create community. And South Central has been that protected enclave. Of course it comes with its issues, anything that is segregated does. We know that so you know, we can just get the misnomer of the whole Black on Black crime idea out the way and ain't true. It's, that's we are-- We're not talking about that. But it is a beautiful place. And and it is a beautiful place. It is so beautiful that people want it and people have always tried to get it. Non Black folks want it white people want this land, they want the proximity. They want what we have created. And so there are things that are put in place to again disrupt and and completely obliterate in some cases, our spaces. So when you think of Leimert Park-- Leimert Park began its Black Renaissance, I think in the probably about the 70s. Up until that point, it had been predominantly German and Asian as well. Black people moved in here and they turned it into an artist's village. And homes were built and, you know, community was built. But the centralized part of Leimert Park where a lot of people patronize or go for parades or go for a Juneteenth celebration or protests or the drum circle and that centralized part on Degan Boulevard has been has been so central and so important to art and expression. You have a lot of early rap that started, a lot of backpack rap, a lot of underground hip hop that started in Leimert Park again, a lot of artists have come out visual, auditory, any type of art you can think of is produced here and really found a footing and a foundation here of support built in support. And it is so important to recognize that because again, as we talk, there is a very active movement to change that to take what makes Leimert Park beautiful to repurpose Leimert Park as being for not just for everyone but reflective of everyone. And it hasn't always been that. It's not supposed to be that. Leimert is supposed to be reflective of the community. The community has been Black, the community is changing through gentrification and a very violent, very

aggressive way. And Leimert is a stronghold. So there are things in place to try and circumvent that there are educational initiatives in place. There are Black business owners who are scooping up more and more of the property in that area. But as advancements are happening again, capitalism is encroaching upon the community. And when capitalism gets involved, Black folks historically get the short end of the stick. But seeing again, the people who are fighting against it, whether again, through visual representation or through local government initiatives, it's, it's inspiring. And I just, I implore people to visit Leimert. But as Black people, please visit, please put your money back into the community, circulate your dollars here, there are beautiful things, if you can move here, they're making it very difficult to move here. They're making it very easy to get folks out.

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Dr. Thomas 20:43

The poles have like all of the lights telephone poles have these like, you know, usually it's like concert, you know, concert coming up on on Saturday, everybody come! But now you're seeing a lot of cash for home. Right? Now. It's all of this like, Hey, are you are you are you in trouble financially? It's very predatory, right now. If you could just keep your property in, you know, in the hands of Black people, right? That is activism. Holding on to your property is activism at this point.

T

Tiffany Hobbs 21:19

Absolutely. Existing is kept, excuse me is activism. They're making it they're being the city, the government, those in charge of a capitalist structure and investments and whatnot are making it very difficult for people to remain here for Black people to remain in this very Black area. Los Angeles, our production is valued. Our, our our capital, that way is definitely admired

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Dr. Thomas 21:41

Our flavor

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Tiffany Hobbs 21:47

Our flavor, our essence, our culture. We absolutely do, but they don't want us here to do it. They want us to give it to them or for them to take it and you know

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Dr. Thomas 21:58

Commodify

T Tiffany Hobbs 21:59
Commodify it. Yeah.

D Dr. Fowles 22:03
Have you always seen your artistic side as a as an outlet for activism? Or did you did you see them separately, and then found ways to bring those two portions of yourself together?

T Tiffany Hobbs 22:18
Definitely, in its origins, photography, writing was, again, cathartic, it was for me, I was producing things and art, not even necessarily considering it to be art. I was enveloped in these mediums because of my love of them. My my appreciation for those who those artists, those writers, those photographers, Gordon Parks, Dream Hampton writing, I grew up with wanting to emulate Maya Angelo, as I realized how important art is in activism, looking at how art has been used throughout history to voice opposition to to rally people behind certain causes to expose people to content in ways that is easiest for them or easier for them to to grasp. Because not everyone is going to sit and listen to a podcast, right? Not everyone is going to read an essay or attend the march or take a college class, right or go to college period. People, people rely on what it is that's most comfortable for them. So I looked at the mediums as communicative, of course. And I said, You know what, I love what I do, how can I take what I do, and make it palatable to as many of us as possible, just immediately, you know, just make it succinct and doesn't require too much conversation. Just like to see it and feel something. And so that's what I did with the photography. Ultimately, I am definitely speaking to Black people

D Dr. Fowles 24:03
I had a follow up question as well, to something you said earlier, which was really about having a job, but the job not being your exact passion. Let's talk about why passion is so important for you and how you've been able to navigate-- navigate having your passion as the primary way that you identify yourself.

T Tiffany Hobbs 24:30
Man, I'm still I'm still learning how to how to do that and how to push my passions to the forefront and to not be not just distracted but beholden to financial requirements. We live in a very expensive city in a very expensive country. And the things that are asked of us as

far as what we need to produce monthly, weekly in the minutia are it's difficult, it's difficult so I get it. I totally understand and sympathize with people wanting and needing to make money and going, you know what, I'm gonna just do this so I can do so I can do that. That's fine. Do it. Also, you are more than your ability to produce capital for someone else. And I think it is extremely important to be with self and a lot of people are being everybody's being forced to do that right now. And it's, it's challenging for some, but when you are with yourself, you can really sit back and go, Okay, what do I like? What am I good at? What what I do for free? You know, what, what I want to do? For for if I could design a career, what would I want it to look like? What would I be doing? How can I? How can I bring those things together? Maybe more than one thing. And I think that the generation, our generations, and the generations below us the youth, because we are now we are now the Auntie's, right, we need little older now. The uncles. So our nieces, or nephews, and the other youth, they have so many things at their fingertips, they have so many opportunities to explore what they enjoy, from the comfort of their computer from the comfort of their phone even. And so having the the confidence to figure out what you like, that is brave, it is brave, because you're going against a system of porter. Got to go to school, got to go to college, got to get a four year degree, got to get a job. And especially in our Black communities, I think what is being pushed a lot is STEM, not against STEM. I'm not against STEM whatsoever. But I do not want our little Black and our little Black children to only grow up through this educational system, thinking that they are valuable, based off of how well they do math, or how much they grasp science. There are whole arts fields out there. We need the writers we need the intellectuals, we need the professors, we need the leaders, we need the the anarchists who can expose and breach and do it in a way that is articulate. We need it with urgency, develop your passion simultaneously to your profession. And if they are not the same, then carve out time to really, really build upon those things that you are interested in. We need the comic book illustrators, we need you know, we need all of these things that are we need inventors, we there. And Black people, we do everything. We do everything, everything, everything, if sports is your thing, and I'm not going to get into too many platitudes, but find out what it is that you love, and carve out a time carve out time to develop those things as much as you spend time making sure that you get to work and that you do someone else's, or carry out someone else's, you know, financial goals. We can't just be all for making someone else prosper. And, and not just financially, they're prosperous in many ways like psychologically, there's peace to, you know, to, obviously to financial freedom. And I want us to also experience that, in addition to the peace of being able to take your passion and enjoy it and find joy and fulfillment in outfield things outside of the rat race.

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Dr. Thomas 28:39

I think someone could listen to this and think, well, how am I going to do this all by myself?

Right? How am I going to figure this out all by myself? And usually the answer is, you can't. You can't you need you need the community. You need, you know, organizations, be it a community org just the social org right? Or maybe even a professional org, but like you need others.

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Tiffany Hobbs 29:10

I think I find my greatest support from the organization of my friendships. And absolutely. So while I have again, while I belong to professional organizations, or social organizations that the biggest, the biggest and strongest shoulders, I've been able to lean on, stand on come from the people who know me best and hold me accountable. Those people are my friends. And I think it is so important especially for women, for Black women, to have friendships that are strong, and that are true, so that you can be held accountable so that it is not just placation of Oh your great Oh my god, you look good girl. That's it. Those are both That's wonderful, but you need you need real gritty, not grit, but gritty like you need the real down and dirty. You know, people

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Dr. Thomas 30:03

To call you on your stuff

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Tiffany Hobbs 30:04

to call you on your stuff. I have people in my life who do that for me, my professional organizations are wonderful for my resume. But they don't necessarily, it's not reciprocal. I'd rather focus on the people who are there during the minutiae who are there without the letters attached to the end of my name. Find people who you can consider to be mentors. I looked at-- I've said Dream Hamptons name twice in this interview, I'm gonna say it again, Dream has been a mentor to me. Dream Hampton, a longtime writer and activist artists. Her Twitter bio used to say, Pilot, I agree with that as well. But she has become a mentor to me, personally and professionally, and, again, holds me accountable. And I look at her moves. Kiese Laymon, another mentor, writer, professor, I've found people who I can speak to directly and not have to necessarily go through channels to get to, to ask advice of people who have forged a path that I hope to be on. So I look to people who have already kind of set that in motion and ask them how they've done it. That has been very, very integral to me. And I suggest, I strongly suggest finding people in the fields that you want to get into and and befriending them, and really asking them the questions that you need answers to. You cannot do this alone, you need a village, I'm a person in full transparency. I'm a Capricorn, I rely on myself, like I got this, I can do it by myself. I can't, I can't do it all by myself, and I shouldn't even try. And I'm not the best at what I do. And it

will be very arrogant to think that I am so you look to people who who can push you into positions and and teach you. Be teachable at every turn. Be teachable at every turn.

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Dr. Thomas 32:01

That is some good advice. Right? Don't don't rest on your laurels. Once you think you got your big job, still be teachable, right? Once you got that that admission letter to that prestigious school, still be teachable?

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Tiffany Hobbs 32:18

Absolutely. And if you are in the position of authority to be able to write that letter to get someone in or you have that position where you are a hiring manager, reach back. Don't turn a blind eye to be a mentor. It's not just for the mentees, be a mentor reach out, find the youth or the people who could be even you know, in your own circle who would benefit from mentorship and guidance.

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Dr. Fowles 32:44

I have a quick question that I think could wrap us up a little bit. But as as an artist, as someone who has the eye, you know, whatever. The eye may be. You mentioned a couple of artists, you mentioned Gordon Parks, you mentioned Maya Angelou tell us a favorite quote or a favorite book or a favorite piece of art that has kept you motivated and rising along a path.

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Tiffany Hobbs 33:16

Dr. Maya Angelou has a quote, I longed to be at home, wherever I find myself. I have it as a tattoo. I will never forget it. And it is something that has anchored me. Wherever I go, I know that I am fully capable of being where I'm at. I'm there because I'm supposed to be and I need to, I'm going to make myself comfortable. No matter how much that makes others uncomfortable. So it is about staking claim making space for yourself. I mean, this is the idea of space and people say make space make space kind of turned into a colloquialism or a buzz term. But it is true, it is true. Don't minimize it. Space is so important. Carve out space, demand space, make space where your voice where your presence is necessary. And make yourself comfortable in that it can be a very scary thing. And so the quote, I find myself at home or excuse me, I longed to be at home wherever I find myself is very important to me because it reminds me again, that I am valuable, I am worthwhile. And wherever I go, and not in an arrogant way, but because I belong to be there because I'm I have something to say wherever I go, that can be home. You know

home is home is it's just it's just it's not just four walls. You want to be at home in yourself. And wherever you go that home should find an anchor. Just find the foundation.

D Dr. Fowles 34:53
Snaps. Go off poet

D Dr. Thomas 35:00
This was amazing. We are so grateful that you took the time to talk to us today. So with that, thank you again and we are going to go ahead and wrap this show up. Thank you all so much for listening. We hope you got something from this today. And that is a wrap.

D Dr. Fowles 35:18
We out. We hope you enjoy today's show. Remember, the way we build social capital is to build self and build others. Make sure you got some notes on a tablet, computer, or even using a pen and paper. Leave us review and continue the conversation on social media @BlackSocialCap and share the show with someone you know. Until the next episode, stay motivated and rise together.

D Dr. Thomas 35:46
Hey, are you rolling your eyes right now because yet another talented student is questioning their abilities

D Dr. Fowles 35:52
Well turn a negative into a positive the No Deficit Model or No Imposter Syndrome Tee. Check out all of our Black Social Capital swag stay motivated by going to staymotivatedandrisetogether.com/shop

D Dr. Thomas 36:11
Black Social Capital