



**PLAYING THE
BLACK CARD**
CANDACE OWENS

You've heard about the black card, right?

No—not the one from Visa or American Express. This one is much more valuable. There are entire organizations that have been built upon it. And individuals that have used it to acquire both wealth and influence.

If this sounds like something you might wish to own, you should know that there is only one way you can get your hands on it: you have to be born with black skin.

That's the only requirement. Really.

You can be poor, middle class, or rich—it doesn't matter. The black card will still confer upon you an entire history of oppression, even if you've never been oppressed.

Flash the black card, and most white people will cower.

Play the black card expertly, and you can win awards, make millions—all the while claiming that the people who got you there somehow hate you.

With a black card, you can sell books full of indecipherable prose. Because with a card that powerful, who cares if your words make any sense?

You can call yourself a "civil rights leader" and shake down multinational corporations, or you can torch your own neighborhood because you didn't like the outcome of a grand jury verdict.

Ironically, the people you might think have the most legitimate claim to the black card refuse to use it.

Take my grandfather, for instance:

He raised me from the time I was 9 years old. Born in 1941 in rural North Carolina, he started working at age five, laying out tobacco to dry on a sharecropping farm. Jim Crow, separate drinking fountains, and the KKK were ever-present realities.

He was 17 when he married my grandmother. He made a living cleaning homes and office buildings until he saved up enough money to open his own cleaning business.

The thing is, he never played any card. Nor did my grandmother. If they had problems, they didn't blame anybody. They just fixed them.

And they raised me to do the same.

Chores were a requirement in their household. So was reading the Bible every morning before school.

I didn't like the Bible readings, and I hated the chores. But I realize now that these small acts of discipline, although sometimes stifling, had a strong, positive impact on my character.

I was a first-generation college student. This was supposed to be the ticket to prosperity. But it wasn't. I left college with a mountain of debt and no practical skills. I had just \$80 dollars in my bank account and very few prospects. I could have given up. I could have dug deep into my history and declared myself a natural product of ancestral oppression. I could have played the black card and absolved myself of all responsibility for my own stupid decisions.

Except, I didn't. Because it would have destroyed my grandfather's legacy.

I am proud that he had the fortitude to turn nothing into something; and I have no intention of reversing that something back into a nothing.

My attitude comes with a price, however. Because if you are born black and you don't accept your natural status as a victim, then the validity of your blackness is immediately called into question.

Well, so be it.

If believing in myself, if accepting the responsibility for my failures somehow disqualifies me from owning an imaginary card, then let me be the first to declare that I don't want one.

I also don't want Cornel West, Al Sharpton or insert-anyone-else who uses their skin color to game the system as a role model.

I already have my grandfather.

If there is one thing that my family history has taught me, it's that I do not need a black card—or an imaginary anything—to make something of myself.

For the record, my grandfather, now retired, lives in a home that he and my grandmother built on a plot of land they purchased in North Carolina—the very same sharecropping farm that he worked on as a small child.

His story is unique. His story is beautiful.

Because it's American.

And that's the only card I've ever been interested in playing.

I'm Candace Owens for Prager University.