

Shaggy Flores, New York City



## **Lucumi**

*for Freddie Moreno*

Moreno  
Let your legend  
be told  
around camp fires  
Not through Chains  
and Bullwhips  
But through Areitos  
and Tambor Sessions.  
Last of the Bakongo  
First of the  
Bata Beating  
Ashe Healing  
Shaka Zulu  
Ashanti  
Dahomey  
Warrior Princes  
Moreno  
you speak in fire  
and move  
in Clave rhythms.

El hijo  
De Shango  
Son of Loiza  
Spirit of Boriquen  
Afro-Taino  
Citizen of the Commonwealth  
Of Cubop  
Tu memoria  
Shall live  
in the words  
and deeds  
of Conga Children.

Moreno  
Let your nom de guerre  
live beyond the darkness  
of your Shadow  
Let those who seek the light  
find sleep  
in between the comfort  
of Symphony notes  
and Berimbau assassinations.

Moreno  
We know  
and love you  
because you represent  
amor y paz  
in an age of darkness  
when things fall apart  
and the world craves  
the truth of our existence.

There is no tomorrow  
Without the today  
Because the Today  
Is all some of us really have  
So let us remember you,  
Moreno

Nuestro Hermano  
Nuestro Reflection  
Nuestro destino  
Nuestro amigo  
Lo mejor  
De Nuestro  
Pueblo Latino  
Pa'lante  
Siempre, Pa'lante!  
Moreno.

--\_Shaggy Flores

## Letter for Bobo

Sent a letter  
To the governor of Mississippi today  
Asked him  
If he remembers  
That the ghost of Chicago Bobo  
Still swims  
in the shallows  
Of the Tallahatchie River  
Not far  
From the town of Money  
Where the only Green  
That exists  
Is the Evil  
That Men Do  
On Delta Summer  
Back Roads

Sent a letter  
To the governor of Mississippi today  
Marked it urgent  
So that Dixiecrat Hands  
Could make  
Prompt response  
To the actions  
Of August 28, 1955  
When Wolf Whistles  
Sold more than Tickets  
And Bryant's Grocery Market  
Began to sell  
2-cent Gum  
Wrapped  
With Grim Reaper  
Death Cards

Sent a letter  
To the governor of Mississippi today  
Questioning  
The hospitality of Sumner County  
And its motto of prosperity  
"A Good Place to Raise A Child"  
Land  
Of Strom Thurmond

Land  
Of Sheriff Clarence Strider  
Land  
Of Jim Crow  
Land  
Of the Rope and Mob  
Land  
Of the Midnight Rides  
And Southern  
Pecan Tree Picnics

Sent a letter  
To the governor of Mississippi today  
Attached a copy  
Of LOOK Magazine  
And a picture  
Of a 14 Year Old Corpse  
In an open casket  
Three Days  
For the World to Witness  
How a Swamp  
Treats the mangled remains  
Of Black youth  
Wondered  
If the names of Demons  
Called Bryant and Milam  
Still Haunt the Governor  
And residents of Mississippi  
In their sleep

Sent a letter  
To the governor of Mississippi today  
Gave him a list  
Of his constituents  
Told him that the following:  
Will Moore  
Reverend George Lee  
Lamar Smith  
Medgar Evers  
And Raynard Johnson  
Could no longer vote  
Because they played  
Poker with the Devil  
And Drew Jokers  
Dressed  
As Separate but Equal  
Executioners

Sent a letter  
To the governor of Mississippi today  
Requesting justice  
For the family  
Of Mamie Till Mobley  
And Moses Wright  
Provided an account  
Of how a child  
Carried his father's ring  
To the grave  
While a panel  
Of Conservative Council Citizens  
Took less  
Then 67 seconds  
To honor  
Anglo-Saxon Pride  
made it Possible  
For two southern boys  
To receive \$4000 payments

Sent a letter  
To the governor of Mississippi today  
Inserted a piece of Barb-Wire  
And a Blade  
from a Progressive Ginning Company Fan  
Same as the one  
That held Little Emmet  
Down in the bowls  
Of the Mighty Tallahatchie  
Spoke of  
Plessy V. Ferguson  
And of Black Mondays  
Imagined  
That Poor Whites  
Posing as Hunters  
Rolled over in their graves  
When Brown v. the Board of Education  
Gave Negroes the right  
To exist,  
To breathe,  
To live  
In WHITE ONLY spaces

Sent a letter  
To the governor of Mississippi today  
Waited  
67 Nights  
For a response  
That never came  
Cried for 3 days  
Prayed for the living  
And honored the Dead  
Wrote a poem  
Ended with the words  
When ALL is Quiet  
When ALL is Still  
In Mississippi  
They still hear the screams  
Of little  
Emmet Till,  
Rest in Peace  
Emmet Till.

## **Negritude**

*For Pedro Pietri, Tato Laviera, Jesus Papoleto Melendez and Trinidad Sanchez Jr.*

We be those Negroes  
Born to Slave Hands  
Resurrecting forgotten African Gods  
When Transplanted to New Lands  
Mixing Ebonics  
With Splanglish Slang  
We be those Negroes  
Children of Yoruba y Ibo  
Bilingual and Indio  
Afro-Caribes  
Masters of plantation work  
Race mixing  
And Orisha Spirit raising

We be those Negroes  
Creating Jazz with cats  
Named Bird, Dizzy, Duke, and Armstrong  
Cubop Bugalu Sal-Soul Searching Journey men  
Mongo-Santamaria/Chano Pozo Drum Gods  
And Celia Cruz  
AZUCAS!  
Legends leaving our cultural footprints  
On the muddy minds  
of the mentally dead

We be those Negroes  
Creating Schomburg museums  
of Black Studies  
In Nuyorican Harlem streets  
Where we once dance  
during zoot suits riots  
to Conga  
Maraca  
Bata  
Break beats  
and Palladium Massacres

We be those Negroes  
Drawn as Sambos and Jigaboos  
By political cartoonist

Who couldn't erase  
The taste of  
Africa  
From Antillean Culinary  
Magicians  
Creating miracles  
with Curries call SoFritos

We be those Negroes  
Younglords  
Island Nationalist  
Black Panthers  
Vieques Activist  
Santeros  
And Guerreros  
Brothers of Garvey  
Children of Malcolm  
Black Spades  
Savage Skulls  
Chingalings  
And Latin Kings

We be those Negroes  
Like Harvard Educated Lawyer  
Don Pedro Albizu Campos  
Stationed  
In all Black regiments  
Learning the reality  
Of Jim Crow Society  
And their gringolandia  
Government Race public policies  
Calling Bilingual Niggers  
Spics

We be those Negroes  
Before Sosa  
Before Clemente  
Before Jackie  
Giving Negro league  
Baseball legends  
A place  
Under the sun  
to call home  
When no one else  
Would have them

We be those Negroes  
Dancing  
Moving  
Breaking  
Egyptian  
Electric Boogalooing  
Locking  
On concrete jungles  
To Cool Herc  
Jamaican  
Sound Boy Systems  
And aerosol  
symphony backgrounds

We be those Negroes  
Charlie Chasing  
Rock Steadying  
A dream call Hip-Hop  
In Bronx Backyard Boulevards  
Between  
Casitas and Tenements  
With Roaches for Landlords

We be those Negroes  
Writing Epics  
Like Willie Perdomo testaments  
Called "Nigger-Recan Blues"  
And Victor Hernandez Cruz  
Odes to "African Things"  
Hiding our dark skinned  
Literary Abuelitas  
With Bembas Colora  
In places where the Whiteness police  
could never find them

We be those Negroes  
Denied access to Black Nationalist run  
Karenga Kwanza Poetry readings  
Because we remind the ignorant  
Of the complexity that is their culture  
Neither Here nor There  
Not quite Brown  
Not quite White  
We navigate uncharted  
Waters  
Of Black Identity Boxes

We be those Negroes  
Mulatto  
We be those Negroes  
Criollo  
We be those Negroes  
Moreno  
We be those Negroes  
Trigueños  
We be those Negroes  
Octoroons and Quadroons  
We be those Negroes  
Cimarrones and Nanny of the Maroons  
We be those Negroes  
Cienfuegos y Fidel  
We be those Negroes  
Luis Pales Matos and Aime Cesaire  
We be those Negroes  
Puentes,  
Mirandas,  
Riveras,  
Colons,  
Felicianos,  
Lavoés and  
Palmieris  
We be those Negroes  
Judios  
Y a veces  
Jodios  
We be those Negroes  
Dominicanos y Cubanos  
We be those Negroes  
Jaimiquinos y Haitianos  
We be those Negroes  
Panameños y Borinqueños

We be those Negroes  
Seeking freedom from  
Irrationality  
In an age of Nuclear  
Goya Families  
And Television  
Carbon Copy Clone  
Univision/BET/MTV  
Slave Children

We be those Negroes  
Known by many names  
And many deeds  
Spoken of in Secret  
By African-American  
Scholars  
In envy during their nightly  
Salsa  
Dance classes  
As they try  
To pick up White Girls

We be those Negroes  
Caribbean  
Negritude  
Heroes  
Sometimes negating our destiny  
But always finding  
Peace  
In the Darkness  
Of Sleep

We be those Negroes  
Negroes  
We  
Be

--Shaggy Flores  
Nuyoricán Massarican Poeta

## **Blackness Arise**

I am Black

Black as beginning  
Black from creation  
Father of nations

I am Dark,  
from whence cometh light.

My Black soul  
spans black holes  
In universal cosmos

This Black soul  
was stole in trans-Atlantic time travel  
smuggled cargo in Western darkness  
birthing new Blackness

De-humanized, De-cultured and Distorted Blackness  
Black-list beings in American dream.  
Original kings entombed in cell-block cages  
Institutionalized, life-sucking Blackness

Moon-less sky over project windows  
As black boys cry at best friend funerals.  
Black boys lost in American project  
Black man soul in American darkness  
Black man stole from African continent

Black redemption is repatriation  
Black mind,  
traverse time  
Back to creation

North Star constellation  
Guide Black Star navigation

Black man land on African sand  
African stand on African land  
African dance on African shore  
African consciousness is Blackness restored.

-- Ras Griot,  
Washington DC

## **Election Day, 2008**

The People wait.....

They wait in line to change the time  
wait in time to change the mind  
long time coming,  
The People wait patient

Grandmothers smile as separate and unequal  
become Presidential People

A generation of youth witness self-truth  
African leadership in the 21st century  
Breaking chains of inferiority  
Awakening African Royalty

They Re-member who they are  
limb-by-limb  
They re-member

They remember Sundiata  
They remember Queen Nzinga and Makeda  
They remember Tutankhamun, Nefertiti, the Pharaohs  
King Sunni Ali Ber, Mansu Musa, Shaka Zulu  
They remember Mali, Angola, Sudan and the Songhai  
they re-member who they are  
As they wait to elect an African President.

They remember the African precedent  
that established civilization  
they remember the African foundation  
that built the Western Nations  
they Re-member as they wait

casting a ballot, hoping for change....

Change began when they awoke ancestor memories  
African Kings and African Queens reclaiming humanity

Ras Griot:

A Griot (*Gree-Oh*) by his or her very nature is a portal through time--A gatekeeper between the past and the present. The Griot's function is to transfer and preserve cultural knowledge, history and wisdom. In West African tradition the Griot serves as a member of a class of traveling poets, musicians, and storytellers who maintain oral history. In this modern age, Ras Griot uses the fusion of poetry, hip-hop, jazz, African drums and dub music to educate and entertain. His poetry and spoken word draws upon the subconscious connection with African forefathers and mothers, giving voice to their struggle, hope, and ultimate redemption. He has served as a featured poet at several youth and community venues in the Baltimore and Washington, DC area.

## The Human Race

by Phavia Kujichagulia



it's a beautiful day here at Equator gardens  
and events are just getting under way  
please note that this is the first race  
the first race of its kind ... and it's post time  
we've got some great thoroughbreds running down the line  
but to begin a fine young filly's first time on the track, first one to enter the race  
in lane #1 ... we've got Chocolate Pyramid; her jockey is wearing the black jersey  
in lane # 2 ... we've got Dravidian Dream; her jockey's wearing the brown jersey  
we've got Mayan Mystery in lane #3; her jockey is in the red jersey  
in lane # 4, Golden Son is in the yellow jersey  
and in lane # 5 ... it's Snowball Express in the white

they're lined up at the gate ladies and gentlemen  
that's the starting bell ... and they're off...they're off in a cloud of black dust  
as Chocolate Pyramid leaps ahead taking an early lead  
she's the only one in the race for the first 3 million lengths  
down the straight away and into the first turn  
she's approaching the first set of markers now  
AUSTRALOPITHECUS AFRENSIS, HOMO HABILIS  
HOMO ERECTUS, HOMO SAPIEN, HOMO SAPIEN SAPIEN  
to CRO-MAGNON into GRIMALDI

Chocolate Pyramid's maintaining an impressive stride  
on the inside turn as she heads around the track towards the next straight away  
I've never seen anything like it ... none of the others are in the race  
however Chocolate Pyramid's performing magnificently  
she's approaching the second set of markers now  
HOTTENTOT, TWA, KOI KOI, AFRICIOD, AUSTRALOID  
into KEMET/Ancient Egypt, SUMER, SHANG, DRAVIDIAN, OLMEC

Chocolate Pyramid's coming off the back turn  
she looks like an easy winner in this one folks ... just a minute  
jockey #2 Dravidian Dream has just leaped from the starting gate

she's in the race in second place

Mayan Mystery and Golden Son are now on the track tied for third place

Snowball Express is trying to get out of the starting blocks

but he's way behind in fifth place ... barely in the race

and Chocolate Pyramid's still way out front in first place

she's coming up on the next set of markers now

NUBIA, PUNT, AXUM...GHANA, MALI, SONGHAY

TIMBUKTU, ETHIPIA, MONAMOTAPA, GREAT ZIMBABWE

BENIN, DOGON, DAHOMEY

top of the lane it's Chocolate Pyramid

and she's approaching the final turn

Dravidian Dream is gaining on the outside

Mayan Mystery is coming off the turn into the back stretch in third place

Golden Son is looking for room on the rail

leaving Snowball Express way behind in last place

around the last turn ... it's Chocolate Pyramid

and she's approaching the final markers now

MOOR, ALGONQUIN, CARIB, ABORIGINE

ARAWAK, MAROON, SEMINOLE, GULLAH, GEECHEE

Chocolate Pyramid's way out front in first place  
the others are barreling around the track  
quickly approaching the last straight-away  
and Snowball Express is beginning to make his move  
he's putting on pressure from the rear  
scrambling to make up for lost time  
but it's going to be impossible for Snowball Express to catch up...  
... wait ... wait a minute ... something's happening  
it appears that one of the jockeys has thrown something onto the field  
there's a cloud of white smoke on the track  
it's looking bad for the others in the race  
they seem to be confused and dazed  
there's a smoke screen on the track ladies and gentlemen!  
it's difficult to see who's out in front as they head for the home stretch  
neck-n-neck it's Chocolate Pyramid and ... Snowball Express ???  
this is unbelievable ... what ... what an amazing recovery !!!  
Chocolate Pyramid and Snowball Express are racing for the finish line  
it's Chocolate Pyramid ... Snowball Express  
... Snowball Express ... Chocolate Pyramid

it's Chocolate Pyramid ... Snowball Express ... Chocolate ...  
it's ... it's too close to call  
... it's going to be a photo finish!  
...one moment please...just a minute ladies and gentlemen  
I've just received word that one of the jockeys has been disqualified  
... please ... hold all your tickets  
it appears that jockey #5, Mr. Ray Cism has been disqualified from the race  
yes, it's official jockey racism on Snowball Express  
has been disqualified for throwing a white substance onto the track  
... we're now awaiting further details here at Equator gardens  
okay we've just received word that the white substance  
has been identified as a cloud of white supremacy  
yes, a cloud of white supremacy has severely  
unleveled the playing field here in the human race  
I'm sorry ladies & gentlemen but all bets are off ... all bets are off

-- Phavia Kujichagulia,  
Oakland, California

## **Yo Yo Yo: Australopithecus Afrensis**

by Phavia Kujichagulia

yo...yo...yo...in case you didn't know

I'm a woman, a mother, dred daughta, soul lover

sweet solid chocolate rock of Jah womanhood

money in the bank, soul sistah

knock on wood it's all good

after the years of tears

the fears...the lies

the cries

somebody better recognize

*(somebody better recognize)*

duck and dodge, comin' up like God

sistahs surviving the odds

so drop the sexist hype

stop the stereotypes

cause I'm an ebony Goddess

Queen mother doing it right

you've got to fight to survive

the things you see on t.v.

you can believe in the media hype

or you can believe in me

'cause if you believe

I'm just a physical thing

then you'll never see

the spiritual power that I bring

believe I'm the Eve to the Garden of Eden

know that I'm the virgin that gave birth to Jesus

Australopithecus Afrensis

since 3.5 million B.C.E.

everybody on the planet had to come through me

from the Olduvia Gorge human life was born

from the thighs of momma Africa's

Great Rift Valley

so take a tally, take notes

whatever it takes to rock your boat

but just know

that I'm the Eve to the Garden of Eden

know

that I'm the virgin that gave birth to Jesus

I'm the first ... I'm the last

I'm the present to your past

Sumerian princess from Kemet's Nile

Babylonian, Dravidian, Olmec child

ire daughta gave birth to one human race

that's what you see upon I & I face

though the media tries to disguise my fame

I'm the mother of justice

Ma'at is my name

so no more blame

no more shame

no more pain

no more games

yo...yo...yo...in case you didn't know

I'm a woman, a mother, dred daughta, soul lover

sweet solid chocolate rock of Jah womanhood

money in the bank, soul sistah

knock on wood it's all good

after the years of tears

the fears...the lies  
the cries  
somebody better recognize  
*(somebody better recognize)*  
duck and dodge, comin' up like God  
sistahs surviving the odds  
so drop the sexist hype  
stop the stereotypes  
cause I'm an ebony Goddess  
Queen mother comin' up right  
you've got to fight to survive  
the things you see on t.v.  
you can believe in the media hype  
or you can believe in me  
'cause if you believe I'm just a physical thing  
then you'll never see the spiritual power that I bring  
I said... if you believe I'm just a physical thing  
then you'll never see the spiritual power that I bring  
yo...yo...yo...  
just thought you ought to know  
--Phavia

## **Piece of Meat or Piece of Mind**

by Phavia Kujichagulia

woman gives birth to life but racism and science  
want to abort her role  
trying to find another way for human kind to be born  
genetic rearing, no longer god fearing  
but ... no matter what  
they can't replace us  
got to have a uterus to reproduce life  
from eve to evil  
genesis of the world ... made  
maid a material girl  
programmed to buy  
programmed to die  
searching for some superficial pie in the sky  
the hype of insecurity and low self-esteem  
it's all psychosomatic ... we think we got to have it  
  
it's all psychosomatic ... we think we got to have it  
face lifts and collagen lips

nose jobs ... boob jobs ... cosmetic façade  
misinformation ... dermabrasion ... hot bikini wax  
colored contacts ... false lashes and nails ... self-hate for sale  
tummy tucks ... they all charge big bucks  
and detrimental to our spiritual potential  
the fashion industry barbie mentality  
promotes youth to deny the wisdom of age  
inside the beauty of truth  
so don't submit  
don't submit to the myth of bimbo charms  
cause it hurts and harms  
our mothers ... daughters ... sistahs ... and others  
don't feel inadequate  
we ain't having it  
love and respect yourself  
don't be a piece of meat  
seek peace of mind  
don't be betrayed and blinded by false desires  
love and respect yourself  
don't be a piece of meat  
seek peace of mind

Phavia Kujichagulia is an author, educator and Griot (musician/oral historian). From 1990 to 1999, she wrote for *Jazz Now Magazine* and was Resident Literary Artist at San Quentin Prison. Phavia Kujichagulia has been recognized as one of the Kings & Queens of Black Consciousness along with Dr. Cornel West, Sonia Sanchez and Amiri Baraka. In 2002 she was a member of the United States Delegation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Conference Against Racism in Barbados. A former professor of African Civilizations and Ethnomusicology, Ms. Kujichagulia currently writes for the *SF Examiner* Online.

## Chains

A link of sordid, violent events,  
Held together by hooks of pain  
forming a formidable, unbroken force,  
Like thick wire chains,  
Clanking, dangling, and then firmly affixed.  
Restraining, shackling, by its weight,  
The people.  
Encircling, holding back,  
Binding firmly, and condemning  
human souls to perpetual pain.

Chains.  
Victims are carried away,  
Like linked animals from neck to neck,  
Stacked together, all shackled.  
To shuffle along ingloriously, like  
Beasts of burden, muffled with bits,  
like the days of real sorrow,  
Stowed like ants in a furrow  
in the belly of cars to hidden joints.  
Then kept in dangerous dwellings in the forest,  
To sweat and worry countless hours, or  
Long days, or even weeks in the fortress,  
Like caged animals, tamed;  
To lift another to incredible wealth  
From ransom cash.

Chains.  
Connected links, indissoluble, stuck.  
Holding a people in bondage;  
Shackled by poverty, decadence and greed,  
Crime, senseless crime, explodes in rage,  
Creating---human----

Chains

Links, secured by wickedness in high places,  
leaving a trail on the rough terrain, with  
Linked souls dragging in the dust,  
Unleashing despair and pain.

A caravan, driven by pettiness,  
and greed for power and gain.  
Surrounded by buffoonery,  
Urged on by a symphony  
Of players of different tunes,  
Blending in mournful harmony  
like howling jackals hungry for meat---

Power, position, control and wealth.

Chains.

The hired criminals abound, petty criminals too,  
descending daily on their victims  
Like vicious bees, hungry for nectar,  
Oozing from tree hollows in links;  
Like chains, tumbling out of storage bins.  
They fall on their prey, now  
to the hard terrain pinned.  
Chains----

Politics, power, money, jobless youth mix,  
to hold and shackle Nigerians,  
Like chains.

-- Chinwe Enemchukwu  
Nigeria/Florida USA

## Diasporans

Sizzling like whistling kettles  
Running out of steam,  
Despite the heightened heat  
from the stoked fire beneath.  
Fire stoked daily by bad winds  
Hurling from the homeland.  
Deadly winds, brutal as the harmattan  
Fanning the fire and scorching the skin  
of diasporans already double stretched thin.

The whistle, now a mournful whine  
Emitting from once courageous souls  
Weary from encompassing hopelessness,  
Warding off hardship in the host land,  
Terrified by surrounding wickedness.  
Saddened by frequent untimely passing.  
Plain finding it ever harder to stand  
The whirlwind life of foreign lands.

Still they struggle to increase the pace,  
Trying much harder to transform the race,  
Straining daily to get it in stride,  
And by so doing, surely control the tide,  
And with that success, make it to shore,  
From all indications, having tried for sure.

They beat themselves to messy pulp  
Taking more than possible in a gulp.  
They whistle and sizzle wildly, blowing  
Twirling steam in an urgent puff,  
Scorching white puff, nothing more.  
Like whistling kettles working ever so hard  
To give more steam, scorching steam, words  
Useless for the problem on hand  
But ever so harmful nonetheless.

--Chinwe Enemchukwu

Chinwe Enemchukwu is a pharmacist by profession, and a mother of six adult children. She is a Nigerian immigrant and has lived in the United States via Florida for over thirty years. She counts herself as part of the Nigerian and Igbo Diaspora and participate in numerous activities involving these groups. Her poems reflect on the current socio-economic and political situation in Nigeria.

## Going to the Village

My brother

Nobody speaks of you

You sleep now in earth dust

A mound covering you

With no earthly name

You left the city

To hide your death in the forest

Even the witch-doctor

Will not harvest your bones

Village women wailing of your death

From across the road

Fearing what could escape from your death hole

Songs of sorrow hide in fear

Of your return from the city

My brother

Nobody speaks of you

Your death has turned love upside down

No animals will be sacrificed

For your journey home

Your father's door has been marked

With signs of witchcraft

There is talk of burning fire with fire

Even in death

Fear makes you unsafe

The villagers are gathering stones  
Not to mark your grave  
It is not safe here for you  
They say your death  
Is as a thief at night  
Coming among them in their beds

My brother  
Nobody bathed you in death  
They feared the wetness of you  
Those who gathered  
Came only to bury you  
Their silence like your death  
We have been shameful  
And even now  
We cannot speak your name

My brother  
Forgive us for our fear and ignorance  
In time  
Your name will be spoken

My brother  
On AIDS Day  
The world will hear your name

-- L. E. Scott  
Aotearoa/New Zealand

## **In Passing**

*(for Gwendolyn Brooks)*

Gwen

in passing

I saw you in South Africa's Soweto  
with the children of Nelson Mandela  
the refrain of the poem –  
apartheid, apartheid, apartheid is over  
the work has just begun  
Black leaders, Black leaders,  
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen

in passing

I saw you in Zimbabwe's Harare  
at Afrika Unity Square with the children of Robert Mugabe  
the refrain of the poem –  
land reform, land reform, long overdue  
political oppression, drunk on power, raped by corruption  
Mr. President, this is unclean water  
Black leaders, Black leaders,  
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen

in passing

I saw you in Kenya's Nairobi  
at the Maasai Tuesday market

with the children of Kenyatta  
the refrain of the poem –  
Daniel Toroitich arap Moi  
so many years, so many years, way too long  
do not bathe Kenya again in such unclean water  
Black leaders, Black leaders,  
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen  
in passing  
I saw you in the green killing fields of Rwanda  
with the children of the dead, Hutu and Tutsi alike  
the refrain of the poem –  
Mr. President, Mr. President  
do not feed tribalism with the blood of brother and sister  
Black leaders, Black leaders,  
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen  
in passing  
I saw you in the coup-infested land of Nigeria  
where tribalism, witchcraft, religion, corruption  
are dancing with mouths full of human blood  
the refrain of the poem –  
in the words of Marvin Gaye  
Brother, brother, brother  
There's far too many of you dying

Tell me what's going on  
Black leaders, Black leaders,  
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen  
in passing  
I saw you standing between the armies  
of Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe  
in Kabila's Democratic Republic of Congo  
the sins of the fathers –  
at the feet of the people  
were the photographs of Mobutu Sese Seko and Laurent Kabila  
diamonds cannot save the greedy for ever  
the refrain of the poem –  
where, beloved Afrika, are the children of Patrice Lumumba  
Black leaders, Black leaders,  
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen  
in passing  
I saw you crossing the waters from Zanzibar  
walking hand in hand in Dar es Salaam  
with Tanzania's sweetest Julius Nyerere  
the refrain of the poem –  
in Nyerere's words  
*If it is in your power*  
*Do not let any child suffer in this land*  
Black leaders, Black leaders,  
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen  
in passing  
I saw you at Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park  
and then at W.E.B. du Bois' grave  
tall men  
big shadows  
I saw you again in Ghana  
on the coast at the slave forts  
the refrain of the poem –  
beyond “the door of no return”  
the children of those who passed here  
have returned with their souls  
Black leaders, Black leaders,  
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen  
in passing  
I saw you walking from Timbuktu  
with the women of the desert  
dressed in indigo blueblack  
arriving at the markets of     Bamako  
   Djenné  
   Mopti  
the refrain of the poem –  
they say this land is poorest of all  
yet  
we dressed the gods in gold and silver  
Black leaders, Black leaders,  
stay on the course of righteousness

Gwen  
in passing  
I saw you on a full moon night in Blackest Afrika  
you were standing tall  
at the last village  
all the ancestors had gathered  
you were going home  
the refrain of the poem –  
Afrika, Afrika, Afrika  
you are more than fifty strong  
Black leaders, Black leaders,  
stay on the course of righteousness

-- L. E. Scott  
Aotearoa/New Zealand

## Things Are So Random After the Womb

*(in the time of George W. Bush)*

A nun

dressed in black

taking pictures of the Pope

on his death march

dressed in white

proof of what?

both are childless

moving on beyond God

and his prisoners

at the airport in L.A.

and the Métro in Paris

and in the streets of Madrid

young black men

dancing with brooms

clean, clean, clean everywhere

Ralph Ellison

invisible offspring

Miles

telling you what to kiss

'Birth of the Cool'

blueblack

get back

Picasso

colored his mind with indigo  
came back from Afrika  
called it  
a period of blue  
confusion  
people walking around in circles  
pulling life like human mules  
mules who have enslaved  
other mules  
such rotten teeth  
they smile  
when speaking of  
humanity  
in Marrakech  
that wondrous city of Morocco  
a few steps from the Medina  
of gods and snakes  
and naked mules  
dancing for the money  
all is for sale  
flesh, flesh  
in the Place Djemaa el-Fna  
mules with no forehead mark  
they have left Mohammed  
passing other mules  
with the mark of five daily prayers



dressed now  
in your red  
white  
and blue  
being led by a mule  
crowned  
by a supreme court  
in another land  
their hooves would have been cut off  
theft  
the war on terrorism  
should indeed  
start at home  
Giuliani  
remember the mayor  
before the September Fire?  
zero tolerance  
terrorists dressed  
in New York's finest blue  
guns and toilet plungers  
fighting crime  
they pledge allegiance  
to the flag  
one nation under  
hypocrisy

James Baldwin

said

no more water

the fire next time

raining in the world

L. E. Scott is an African American jazz poet, currently based in Aotearoa/New Zealand. He is on the staff of "Tu Mai", a magazine for the indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Scott has had a number of books published, the latest being a collection of poems entitled "Bones", published by Five Islands Press of Melbourne University, Australia. He has also had work published in two recent anthologies, "Fingernails Across The Chalkboard" and "Gwendolyn Brooks and Working Writers", both published by Third World Press.



## **When**

When the tide of life rocks your boat  
When the winds of change batters your doors  
When the rays of reality shatters your illusions  
When the quiet of abandonment fills your ears  
And yet you stand;

When it seems that fate has left you adrift  
When all your friends condemn you  
When your path is strewn with your past  
When failure is all that you can see  
And yet you stand;

When the solitude of forgetfulness is your only escape  
When the multitude of complaints are your only friends  
When the plethora of excuses is all you redeem  
When the avalanche of disaster is all you harvest  
And yet you stand;

When despair mingled with tears is your daily drink  
When drama coupled with fear is your only comfort  
When pain and defeat forces your head to bow  
When deceit and lies weigh heavily on your shoulders  
And yet you stand

Then, and only then -can you shout with both clarity and surety  
That you have overcome. Then, and only then -will you know  
who are your true friends. And then and only then will you  
Be able to drink from the cup of victory-if only you stand.

--Dr. Rodney D. Coates  
East St. Louis, IL

## Street Spirits

(For Marvin X)

under a red sky  
you have roamed  
the streets of San Francisco  
rapping about homeless blues  
in your poetry  
in your life  
in your spirit

under a red sky  
i saw you  
once selling the Poetry Flash  
to rich tourists and wondered  
whether you would become  
the next Bob Kaufman

under a red sky  
you have roamed the beaches  
of the Golden State  
praying here and there  
remembering your sweet Sherley  
confessing your sins and mistakes

under a red sky  
you have remembered  
that a poet is full  
of great feelings  
of love  
for God  
for self  
for others  
whether the poet  
is homeless  
or not

under a red sky  
you have helped me  
to embrace  
the street spirits  
and the rays  
of a red sun  
with your poetry  
with your life  
with your spirit.

--J. Vern Cromartie  
Richmond, California  
© 2005

Dr. J. Vern Cromartie is a poet and chair of the Sociology Department at Contra Costa College. He is a former student of Marvin X. Dr. Cromartie recently delivered a research paper at a sociology conference on Marvin X's tenure at UC Berkeley.

## Remembering

(for Gwendolyn Brooks at Chicago State University, 1999)

This poem is the child of the letter you sent me  
Ten years ago. How fulfilling it is  
When a forerunner celebrates a predecessor.  
Chicago was a strange place that welcomed the eagle  
To a nest full of trials. Workshops for young writers  
Instigated a field of questions. Between two faces,  
Yours and mine, bridges were built, since  
Art remained a language of universal solidarity.  
*Always believe in yourself*, you said,  
And I have never stopped, like the bird  
That returns to its favorite nest, ignoring  
Threats by unsympathetic winds.

## For Years

For years I kept a rod  
By my window, dreaming  
Of liberation day  
And the moment an eclipse of the sun  
Will rename the earth my song.  
It all started with Rodney King in LA  
And his plea of  
*Why can't we all just get along?*  
Looking back now, I knew I saw  
In his face a survivor's glow conjuring  
Biko  
Diallo  
Hector Pieterse & many brothers & sisters  
Gunned down or silenced in places unknown  
To leave holes in a century's imagination.  
But now that I've learned to wage wars  
With words, I figure my rod will only  
Do justice to my will, if I keep  
Exerting fury through letters in ink  
That crack bones and drive consciousness  
Into souls empty like a dry well.

## **The Day the Caged Bird Sang**

It happened that January  
Barack held Lincoln's Bible  
And billions across the world blinked  
In front of TVs and large screens.  
His face, a reflection of  
Ghandi's  
MLK'S  
Medgar Ever's  
Malcolm's  
Madiba's confidence,  
Under a joyous sun  
Too great to be limited to  
Columbus's pride.

## **What I Said to a Friend**

(after reading the following headline from the Chicago Sun-Times: "Emmett Till's Casket Found 'Rusted, Battered'") by robbers at Burr Oak Cemetery, Illinois.

Those who know nothing of the purity of the sun's light  
Will find pleasure in accusing time of treason, each day  
They steal from the dead to eat of the fruit of chance.

Dike Okoro, Ph.D., is a poet, short story writer, critic, essayist, and editor. His work has appeared in *Black Issues Book Review*, *Quarterly Black Review*, *Warpland Journal of Black Literature & Ideas*, *Botsotso*, *Drum Voices Revue*, and a host of journals in the US, Europe, Africa and elsewhere. He is the editor of *Speaking for the Generations: Contemporary Short Stories from Africa* (Trenton: AWP, 2010), *Echoes from the Mountain: New & Selected Poems by Mazisi Kunene* (Lagos/Oxford: Malthouse/ABC).



## **This We Wear**

by Neal E. Hall, M.D.

This, we wear as freedom.  
This odorous secondhand garment  
tattered and ragged,  
dipped in blood,  
drenched in brethren's woes  
and rigor mortis.  
This, we wear as freedom,  
as if real this independence,  
as if evidence of redemptive parity,  
as if born of battles of hearts and minds won.  
Crumbling crumbs of contaminated equality,  
picked over scraps,  
fetid morsels of liberty  
lobbed casually from passing callousness  
to fall foul on drenched feet standing yet  
held bondage still in their brethren's  
woes and rigor mortis.  
This, we see as freedom.  
This, we wear as freedom,  
as if real,  
this facsimile of blackened independence.

## **For Black Americans, 9-11 Is 24-7**

a labyrinth of terror buried beneath shallow  
words on revised pages of America's iniquities  
dating back four hundred years,  
when blacks were snatched and kidnapped,  
ship jacked and hijacked to America's labor and  
concentration camps to be bought and sold  
into unspeakable servitude on land we would  
come to lose ground to some  
lesser place and foreign cause.  
For black Americans,  
9-11 is 24-7,  
... an endless cycle of America's weapons of black  
destruction crashing and imploding, 24-7, into  
towering black hopes and aspirations...  
... a viciousness finding continuous  
momentum in prescribed brutality,  
administered 24-7, to infuse in us  
enough terror to keep us in a lesser  
place for economic gain.  
For black Americans,  
9-11 is 24-7,  
Four hundred years and more of  
democratic sleight of hands,  
jiving and conniving, slipping and sliding across  
smoke and mirrors...  
... Jeffersonian poker face democracy  
bluffing its hand of freedom,  
always with the ace of tyranny  
concealed up its white sleeve  
to place race-based road blocks  
strategically on unpaved roads to  
nowhere to ensure that blacks get there...  
... discriminating mercenary legislative, judicial  
homicide beheading black men from the souls  
of black homes and families; cutting short the  
lives of one out of twenty black men

imprisoned ten times the rate of white men's  
crimes as a means of genteel 1 genocide to keep  
us from finding from among us a deliverer to  
lead us from this lesser place...  
... a good old boy network of  
murder, rape and intimidation,  
torture, beatings and mutilation,  
social isolation and economic decimation to  
keep us enslaved children of slave children  
ripped from the breasts of slave mothers sold  
into tortuous misery by those first families  
hooded in democracy.  
For black Americans,  
9-11 is four hundred years and more  
of America crashing and imploding,  
24-7, into our towering black  
hopes and aspirations.  
Four hundred years and more of  
no reprieves, no parity, no sign of mercy,  
no justice, no relief in sight for us...  
... no world coalitions proffering UN resolutions  
for economic restitution...  
... no international peace keepers  
amassing at these plantation shores to destroy  
America's weapons of mass black destruction...  
... no search and rescue teams to search and  
rescue us from the ruins of America's racial  
injustice and exploitation...  
... no gathering dignitaries to raise our tattered  
black flag half-mast, found buried deep  
beneath the shallow hypocrisy on revising  
white pages of America's history.  
... no 9-11 commission to investigate the  
disposition of 36 million 2 holocaust victims  
swept quietly and anonymously under white  
stars and stripes forever.  
... no day and time set aside to memorialize  
four hundred 9-11s, each with nine thousand  
black men, women and children stacked black  
side up, black high to make easy America's  
economic climb...

... no marked graves black with names  
to fare - thee - well to distant sounds of tolling  
bells...

... no heaven or hell to turn back or put back  
black hopes and aspirations snatched and  
kidnaped, ship jacked and hijacked.  
For black Americans,  
9-11 is 24-7.

---

Human Rights Watch - United States, Punishment and 1Prejudice: Racial disparities in the War  
on Drugs; [www.hrw.org/campaigns/drugs/war/key-facts.htm](http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/drugs/war/key-facts.htm). African American History, Melba  
J. Duncan, Ch. 3, p. 31 2. Copyright © 2009 by Neal Hall, M.D.

## Dr. Nigger

Dr. Nigger

Can you cure me without  
touching me with nigga hands  
Can you save my life  
without changing my life  
Can you dance soft-shoe while  
humming those negro tunes  
when my white life codes blue  
Can you reach inside yourself  
beyond the shit we put in you...  
past painful moments we put in you...  
past despair and hopelessness  
we've put in you and  
find that old black magic in you  
to save my life without changing  
all the shit we put in you

Dr. Nigger

Can you breathe in me  
air free of nigga  
from a nigger not free  
to breathe in free air  
Can you stay on the colored side  
of the color line and reach across  
without touching me with nigga hands  
to restart my blue heart without  
changing my cold heart  
Can you reach past the life  
we've taken from you to  
save my life and not  
let white life pass me by

Dr. Nigger

save my life  
without taking my life  
Cure me without  
touching me with nigga hands

Dance soft-shoe while  
humming negro tunes  
while you save my life  
without changing my life  
when my white life codes blue

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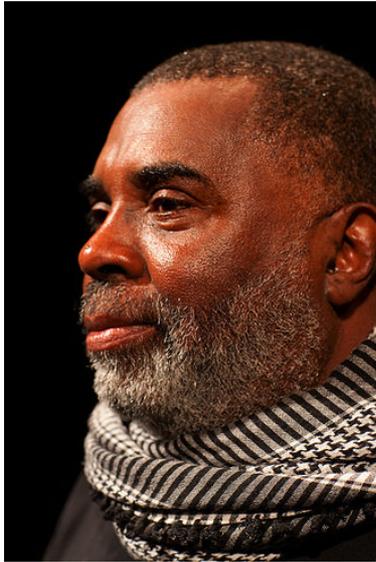
## Democracy

Do ragged  
sagging pants,  
hooded out hanging out  
on the corner of hypocrisy and deceit,  
tucked between the narrow streets of  
Justice and Liberty.  
Nodding white knight  
wearing cowboy black  
beneath white hats,  
pimping the pimps  
macking the macks  
bitch smacking lady liberty  
as he staggers back leaning back  
snorting hits  
holding dick  
talking shit  
dealing hits  
selling high hope dope  
to keep black folk  
strung out, high  
on false hope.

--Neal E. Hall, M.D.

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Dr. Hall is author of *Nigger for Life*. He lives in Philadelphia PA.



## Again the Kora



heart strings before me  
vessel  
arteries  
no blockage  
music is detox  
unplugging centuries  
slavery  
aftermath  
failed reconstruction  
terror of KKK  
landless  
betrayal of all parties to conflict  
jim crow

post black negro  
neo jim crow  
down to Obama drama

oh, kora  
you are the one who takes me out of here  
another land, a time, space, a trillion years ago  
a thousand million nights on the Senegal, the Congo, the Nile  
I am the king, I am the farmer, I am the builder, iron worker, goldsmith  
I am that I am

soul of my soul  
plucker of heart  
dance holy dance of a thousand years  
leap into the forest  
hold the lion above heads  
dancers of the perfect mask  
terror of manhood training  
blood of womanhood  
see and smell womanhood  
men know smell blood of the lion.

I am your slave, oh Kora  
in spite of myself  
I submit willingly  
to the voice of Allah

no getting out of this  
no crawling, no slither  
snake like

Kora light and love.  
so it is.

--Marvin X  
7/30/10

## Memorial Day

I am a veteran  
Not of foreign battlefields  
Like my father in world war one  
My uncles in world war two  
And Korea  
my friends from Vietnam  
And Congo “police action”  
But veteran none the less  
Exiled and jailed because I refused  
To visit Vietnam as a running dog for imperialism  
I visited Canada, Chicago, Harlem, Mexico and Belize  
Federal prison for a minute  
But veteran I am  
of the war in the hood  
war of domestic colonialism  
neo-colonialism  
White supremacy in black face war  
Fighting for black power that turned white  
Or was always white  
as in the other white people  
war it was and is  
Every day without end  
no RR no respite just war  
For colors like kindergarten children war  
For turf warriors don’t own and run when popo comes  
War for drugs and guns and women  
War for hatred jealousy envy  
Dante got a scholarship  
but couldn’t get on the plane fast enough  
The boyz in the hood met him on the block and jacked him  
Relieved him of his gear  
shot him in the head because he could read  
Play basketball  
had all the pretty girls  
a square  
The boyz wanted him dead like themselves  
Wanted him to have a shrine with liquor bottles and teddy bears  
candles

Wanted his mama and daddy to weep and mourn at the funeral  
Like all the other moms and dads, uncle aunts cousins  
Why should he make it out the war zone  
The blood and broken bones of war in the hood  
No veterans day no benefits no mental health sessions  
No conversation  
who cares who wants to know about the dead  
In the hood  
warriors gone down in the ghetto night  
We heard the Uzi at 3am and saw the body on the steps til 3 pm  
When the coroner finally arrived as children passed from school

I am the veteran of ghetto wars of liberation aborted  
morphed into wars of self destruction  
drugs supplied from police vans  
Guns diverted from the army base  
sold 24/7 behind the Arab store.

Junior is 14 but the main arms merchant in the hood  
sells guns from his backpack  
His daddy wants to know how he get all them guns  
Junior don't tell cause he warrior  
He's lost more friends than daddy  
What can daddy tell him about war  
death and blood and bones

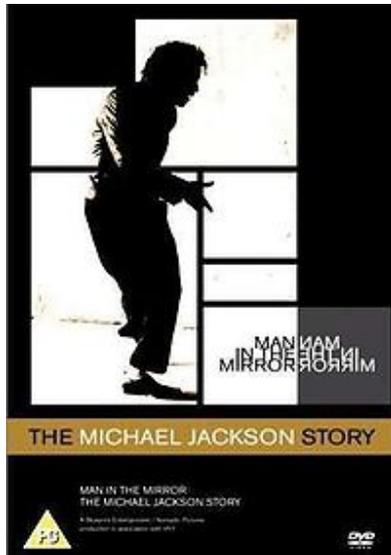
He says he will get rich or die trying  
But life is for love not money  
And if he lives he will learn.  
If he makes it out the war zone to another world  
Where they murder in suits and suites  
golf courses and yachts  
if he makes it even beyond this world  
He will learn that love is better than money  
For he was once on the auction block  
sold as a thing property  
For money, yes,  
for the love of money but not for love

his memory short and absent of truth  
blunted  
The war in the hood has tricked him into the slave past  
Like a programmed monkey  
he acts out the slave auction  
The sale of himself on the corner with his homeys  
Trying to pose cool in the war zone

I will tell him the truth  
maybe one day it will hit him like a bullet  
In the head  
It will hit him multiple times in the brain until he awakens to the real battle  
In the turf of his mind.  
And he will stand tall and deliver himself to the altar of truth to be a witness  
Along with his homeys  
They will take charge of their posts  
They will claim their turf and it will be theirs forever  
Not for a moment in the night  
But in the day and in the tomorrows  
And the war will be over  
No more sorrow no more blood and bones  
No more shrines on corner with liquor bottles teddy bears candles.

--Marvin X  
25 May 2007, Brooklyn NY  
revised 5/31/10

## No Black Fight





no johnson

no Ali

no Lewis

no Sugar Ray

No Black fight

no fists no backbone

no elbow grease

no stamina

no long distance runner

no champion in the ring

no nationalist

no fearless men

no fearless women

no ancestor consciousness  
no cry for justice  
no liberty or death  
no justice no peace  
no death do us part  
no nothing  
no housing  
no job  
no medical  
no music  
only smooth  
only fusion  
delusion  
no community  
only multicultural  
diluted polluted  
convoluted  
gentrified  
homogenized  
pasteurized  
are you surprised  
no Fillmore  
no Harlem  
no DC  
no Philly  
no ATL  
where shall you dwell  
in hell  
the empire falls  
no news to you  
the Republic falls  
where shall you be  
what part shall you grab  
shall you stand  
with dick in hand  
heart racing  
Whites take theirs  
Latinos too  
Asians too  
Gays/lesbians too

what will you do  
stuck on stupid  
walking like ducks  
pigeons  
reverse evolution  
moon walking like Michael  
remember the time  
look at the man in the mirror  
no look  
no memory  
smoke yo blunt  
life up in smoke  
we did the same  
24/7  
Daddy it's too much smoke in yo house!  
No love for woman  
children  
siblings  
neighbors  
friends  
no nothing  
no God  
no devil  
lone stranger  
rides into sunset  
no Tonto  
no tomorrow  
no yesterday  
no now.  
Women cry,  
I hate weak niggahs!  
Men cry, I hate punk bitches!  
no unity  
no dialogue  
no consensus  
no plan  
no game  
no respect  
no win.

--Marvin X  
10/30/10

## **If I Were A Muslim in Good Standing**

If I Were A Muslim In Good Standing  
I would be like Prophet Muhammad  
I would fight oppression everywhere  
I would liberate the slaves  
educate the poor  
free the women  
expel the infidels from Muslim lands  
I would fight quisling Muslim governments  
not sleep until Jerusalem was liberated  
Palestine a free nation  
send the Zionists back to Europe  
or into the Mediterranean  
if it took one hundred or two hundred years  
like Saladin  
I would slay them without remorse  
Recite the Fatihah on a pyramid of their heads  
I would expel the heathen Christian armies from Iraq  
Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia  
I would defend Iran's right to have Nukes  
Why should the Zionists have Nukes but not Iran  
If the Zionists are sane, so is Iran  
I would fight white supremacy in all its forms  
even in black face, Arab face, Chinese face  
If I were a Muslim in good standing  
I would liberate Mecca of slaves and selling pork  
free the kingdom of Arabia of wickedness and primitive theology  
Infecting the Taliban Al Queda and Sunni insurgents in Iraq  
who have no intention to allow Shia to rule except with obstruction  
I would salute Hamas and Hezbollah for confronting Shaitan in all his masks  
I would stop honor killings and put women in the front of the masjid to pray  
put the veil on men and show equality at all times  
I would make earth a paradise for those who truly believe  
who fight oppression everywhere and will not sleep til the world is free.

--Marvin X

Note: Brother Marvin, I'm reading your poem today at the Malcolm X & Islam Today event this afternoon at the Schomburg. I think it hits the spot on what we want to discuss at the forum. We can rest assure that Brother Malcolm is proud of you today... carrying on his legacy of revolutionary spirituality for resistance and struggle.

--Sam Anderson

## Poem for Clara Muhammad



She went to the door  
when Master Fard knocked  
selling red silk  
asked was brother there  
she said yeah  
he in the back  
drunk as a coot  
Master Fard  
sobered him  
raised him from dead  
so-called negro  
Master departed

Elijah in charge  
brothers said no  
even his own brother  
Kallot  
Elijah ran seven years  
black devils after him  
"I will eat one grain of rice  
til we kill Elijah."  
Clara ran Nation  
raised children  
Elijah came home  
snatched again by devil  
this time white  
charged with sedition  
draft evasion  
five years prison  
Clara ran Nation  
raised children  
a little silent woman  
disrespected by sisters  
who shared her man  
in her face  
caught on roof  
getting to her man  
why they dis me  
in my face?  
she told Nisa Islam  
Clara  
first lady of the Nation  
silent warrior  
where is her bio  
her mention on Women's Month  
No black studies of Clara  
comforter of Elijah  
chief wife  
mother of Herbert, Wallace,  
Akbar, Ethel, et al  
who will tell her story  
raise her name to glory  
this silent warrior  
who nurtured Nation

those early days  
when Elijah fled for his life  
from black devils  
white devils too.  
who will call her name  
great ancestor Clara.  
I was in her house  
she spoke to me  
As-Salaam-Alaikum.

--Marvin X

## **A Street Named Rashidah Muhammad**

There is a street in Oakland  
nobody knows  
hardly sees  
they pass it going downtown on 20th Street/Tom Berkley Way (A Black Man)  
Rashidah intersecting Tom Berkley  
how nice  
a black man's street intersecting a black woman's street  
how nice  
but who knows this Rashidah Muhammad  
how many women or men or children  
black or white, Muslim, Christian  
but there it is  
Rashidah Muhammad Street  
named for a little warrior woman  
midwife community organizer mother wife lover  
who fought and killed her white rapist  
down south and survived  
police beatings and prison  
The Uhuru Movement pushed her case nationwide  
Free Dessie X  
Free Dessie X  
Uhuru! Uhuru!  
Salaam Rashidah Muhammad Salaam.  
We love you.

--Marvin X  
3/19/10



## **Wish I Could Fly Like a Hawk**

Wish I could fly like a hawk  
just soar above earth  
silent  
gliding smooth  
no noise  
silent  
observing all  
madness below  
rats scurrying  
snakes in the grass  
wish I could fly like a hawk  
sometimes in motion still  
wings frozen in flight  
yet moving  
wish I could be hawk  
above the madness of it all  
the meaningless chatter  
cell phone psychosis  
talking loud saying nothing  
why are you breathing  
jogging  
without meaning purpose  
no mission beyond nothingness

absorbing air from the meaningful  
who subscribe to justice  
let me fly above the living dead  
let me soar  
let me dream  
imagine  
another time and place  
another space  
this cannot be the end game  
the hail marry  
let me soar above it all  
wings spread wide  
let me glide  
ah, the air is fresh up here  
did I make it to heaven  
did I escape hell  
come with me  
do not be afraid  
the night is young  
let us fly into the moon  
see the crescent  
so beautiful  
let us fly into the friendly sky  
wings spread wide  
strong and mighty  
hawk.  
--Marvin X  
10/10/10

Marvin X ([jmarvinox@yahoo.com](mailto:jmarvinox@yahoo.com)) is well known for his work as a poet, playwright and essayist of the Black Arts Movement. With playwright Ed Bullins, he founded Black Arts West Theatre, 1966, and the Black House with Eldridge Cleaver and Hurriyah Asar (Ethna X). Black House served briefly as the headquarters for the Black Panther Party and as a center for performance, theatre, poetry and music. Marvin received his B.A. and M.A. in English from San Francisco State University and has received writing fellowships from Columbia University and the National Endowment for the Arts, and planning grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. His twenty-five books include volumes of poetry, *Fly to Allah*, *Black Man Listen*, *Woman-Man's Best Friend*, *Selected Poems*, *Confession of an ex-Wife Beater*, *Liberation Poems for North American Africans*, *Love and War*, *Land of My Daughters*. A new collection is coming soon, *Sweet Tea/Dirty Rice*.

## Little Mosque Poems

by Mohja Kahf

In my little mosque  
there is no room for me  
to pray. I am  
turned away faithfully  
five  
times a day

My little mosque:  
so meager  
in resources, yet  
so eager  
to turn away  
a woman  
or a stranger

My little mosque  
is penniless, behind on rent  
Yet it is rich in anger  
every Friday, coins of hate  
are generously spent

My little mosque is poor yet  
every week we are asked to give  
to buy another curtain  
to partition off the women,  
or to pave another parking space

I go to the Mosque of the Righteous  
I have been going there all my life  
I have been the Cheerleader of the Righteous Team  
I have mocked the visiting teams cruelly  
I am the worst of those I complain about:  
I am a former Miss Mosque Banality

I would like to build  
a little mosque  
without a dome  
or minaret  
I'd hang a sign  
over the door:  
Bad Muslims  
welcome here  
Come in, listen  
to some music,  
sharpen  
the soul's longing,  
have a cigarette

I went to the mosque  
when no one was there  
and startled two angels  
coming out of a broom closet  
"Are they gone now?" one said  
They looked relieved

My great big mosque  
has a chandelier  
big as a Christmas tree  
and a jealously guarded  
lock and key  
I wonder why  
everyone in it  
looks just like me

My little mosque  
has a bouncer at the door  
You have to look pious  
to get in

My little mosque  
has a big sense of humor  
Not

I went to the mosque  
when no one was there  
The prayer space was soft and serene  
I heard a sound like lonely singing  
or quiet sobbing. I heard a leafy rustling  
I looked around  
A little Quran  
on a low shelf  
was reciting itself

My little mosque has a Persian carpet  
depicting trees of paradise  
in the men's section, which you enter  
through a lovely classical arch  
The women's section features  
well, nothing

Piety dictates that men enter  
my little mosque through magnificent columns  
Piety dictates  
that women enter  
my little mosque  
through the back alley,  
just past the crack junkie here  
and over these fallen garbage cans

My little mosque used to be democratic  
with a rotating imam  
we chose from among us every month  
Now my little mosque has an appointed imam  
trained abroad  
No one can dispute his superior knowledge

We used to use our minds  
to understand Quran  
My little mosque discourages  
that sort of thing these days  
We have official salaried translators  
for God

I used to carry around a little mosque  
in the chambers of my heart  
but it is closed indefinitely pending  
extensive structural repairs

I miss having a mosque,  
driving by and seeing cars lining the streets,  
people double-parking, desperate  
to catch the prayer in time  
I miss noticing, as they dodge across traffic  
toward the mosque entrance between  
buses and trucks,  
their long chemises fluttering,  
that trail of gorgeous fabrics Muslims leave,  
gossamer, the colors of hot lava, fantastic shades  
from the glorious places of the earth  
I miss the stiff, uncomfortable men  
looking anywhere but at me when they meet me,  
and the double-faced women  
full of judgment, and their beautiful  
children shining  
with my children. I do

I don't dream of a perfect mosque  
I just want roomfuls of people to kiss every week  
with the kisses of Prayer and Serenity,  
and a fat, multi-trunked tree  
collecting us loosely for a minute under  
its alive and quivering canopy

Once, God applied  
for a janitor position at our mosque,  
but the board turned him down  
because he wasn't a practicing  
Muslim

Once a woman entered  
my little mosque  
with a broken arm,  
a broken heart,  
and a very short skirt  
Everyone rushed over to her  
to make sure

she was going to cover her legs

Marshmallows are banned  
from my little mosque  
because they might  
contain gelatin derived from pork enzymes  
but banality is not banned,  
and yet verily,  
banality is worse than marshmallows

Music is banned  
at my little mosque  
because it is played on  
the devil's stringed instruments,  
although a little music  
softens the soul  
and lo, a hardened soul  
is the devil's taut drumskin

Once an ignorant Bedouin  
got up and started to pee against a wall  
in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina  
The pious protective Companions leapt  
to beat him  
The Prophet bade them stop  
A man is entitled to finish a piss  
even if he is an uncouth idiot,  
and there are things  
more important in a mosque than ritual purity

My little mosque thinks  
the story I just narrated  
cannot possibly be true  
and a poet like me cannot possibly  
have studied Sahih al-Bukhari

My little mosque  
thinks a poem like this must be  
written by the Devil  
in cahoots with the Zionists,  
NATO, and the current U.S. administration,  
as part of the Worldwide Orientalist Plot  
to Discredit Islam

Don't they know  
at my little mosque  
that this is a poem  
written in the mirror  
by a lover?

My little mosque  
is fearful to protect itself  
from the bricks of bigots  
through its window  
Doesn't my little mosque know  
the way to protect its windows  
is to open its doors?

I know the bricks of bigots  
are real  
I wish I could protect my little mosque  
with my body as a shield

I love my dysfunctional little mosque  
even though I can't stand it

My little mosque loves Arab men  
with pure accents and beards  
Everyone else is welcome  
as long as  
they understand that Real Islam  
has to come from an Arab man

My little mosque loves Indian  
and Pakistani men with Maududi in their pockets  
Everyone else is welcome because as we all know  
there is no discrimination in Islam

My little mosque loves women  
who know that Islam liberated them  
fourteen hundred years ago and so  
they should live like seventh-century Arabian women  
or at least dress  
like pre-industrial pre-colonial women  
although  
men can adjust with the times

My little mosque loves converts  
especially white men and women  
who give "Why I embraced Islam" lectures  
to be trotted out as trophies  
by the Muslim pom-pom squad  
of Religious One-up-man-ship

My little mosque faints at the sight  
of pale Bosnian women suffering  
across the sea  
Black women suffering  
across the street  
do not move  
my little mosque much

I would like to find a little mosque  
where my Christian grandmother  
and my Jewish great-uncle the rebbe  
and my Buddhist cousin  
and my Hindu neighbor  
would be as welcome  
as my staunchly Muslim mom and dad

My little mosque has young men and women  
who have nice cars, nice homes, expensive educations,  
and think they are the righteous rageful  
Victims of the World Persecution

My little mosque offers courses on  
the Basics of Islamic Cognitive Dissonance  
"There is no racism in Islam" means  
we won't talk about it  
"Islam is unity" means  
shuttup  
There's so much to learn  
Class is free and meets every week

I don't dream of a perfect mosque, only  
a few square inches of ground  
that will welcome my forehead,  
no questions asked

My little mosque is as decrepit  
as my little heart. Its narrowness  
is the narrowness in me. Its windows  
are boarded up like the part of me that prays

I went to the mosque  
when no one was there  
No One was sweeping up  
She said: This place is just a place  
Light is everywhere. Go, live in it  
The Mosque is under your feet,  
wherever you walk each day

Parts of this poem has been published in Azizah Magazine.

--Mohja Kahf  
Fayetteville, AK

## Reasons



I got reasons  
reasons for war  
reasons for inner peace  
reasons  
for my reasoning  
it ain't random  
you can put it on the margin  
call it fringe  
it's a matter of the matter  
ya condition is in  
or the paradigm ya  
lens is in  
if its crazy to be sane  
then  
you know  
how a double  
consciousness go  
walking and wounded  
wounded still walking  
behind the veil  
seeing

I got my reasons  
reasons  
why I flaunt my nappy hair  
still think in Ebonics  
fluent in my overstanding of  
the lens in ya literacy  
and i still be me  
got my reasons  
why I don't care bout  
ya reasons  
season after season  
it looks the same  
it ain't geography that's  
easy to see  
its beyond the lie of race  
it's not nuanced in class  
(I pray ya the last of a dying  
breed) cuz I  
can't explain the greed  
what kind of fear  
prompts that kind of need  
but I see it  
and I reason  
I don't matter  
so I stay brave  
enough to smell rain coming  
get my news from the dead  
eat well  
sleep on clean sheets  
and wear oils of lavender and frankincense  
while I can  
I reason time belongs to God  
and you are  
not  
God  
you got ya reasons  
I guess to be confused  
manipulating thangs  
the way you do  
what's a lie told  
over and over

it's the truth  
broadcast it and  
make it divine  
but season  
after season  
I resist the  
change necessary  
to see through your  
eyes  
I got my reasons  
with this target  
on my back  
I lack the motivation  
to see how you reason  
your rationales  
decide ya bottom lines  
devise ya acceptable collateral  
damage tolerance  
I got little tolerance  
for ignorance  
and reasons  
not to trust you  
done studied you thru Tuskegee  
and the subways  
don't trust you on the airways  
seen you thru the haze  
covering the high ways  
as you follow the oil pipe ways  
seen you  
my eyes were open  
(heard you plotting death  
and everyone's destruction)  
my ears were open  
(God don't forgive em  
they don't care what  
dem do)  
feel you wining  
when I'm quiet  
so I got reasons  
to scream  
I got reasons  
to sleep eyes open

I got reasons  
not to forget you  
jailer keys jangling from the  
belt below your fat belly  
I remember them dumb  
(its true you eat your young)  
big ass eco foot prints  
yes and ships  
planes  
bombs  
weapons of mass destruction  
and doctrine  
manifesting ya reasons  
to suit ya actions  
I got reasons to  
fear your secret thoughts  
and your out loud lies  
got reasons  
to hit ya with the stank eye  
while keeping my good eye on you  
got reasons  
to say ju ju when you pass  
spit in the road and burn herbs  
where are the souls that  
should show though the eyes  
I fear the reality  
behind your disguise  
I got reasons  
to pray to old Gods  
got reasons to  
read more than the gospel  
(yeah though I live in  
in Babylon where idiots do  
get they babble on)  
got reasons to  
teach my young to  
beware merry go rounds  
and lies about shiny things  
that you pay for with ya soul  
teaching em' to remember  
no matter how it hurts

to know the truth  
instructing them to  
ward off evil  
by working  
hex the devil  
by dreaming  
saying to them  
write poems  
don't kill one another  
even lyrically  
love the old  
protect the young  
sharpen intellects  
to sword points  
to make my point  
got reasons  
to keep reasoning  
with the tone deaf choir  
(more fire aya)  
until its  
too late  
for reason  
reasoning or  
reasons

11/2009  
Ayodele "WordSlanger" Nzinga  
Oakland, California

## **Remember Me**

I want to be remembered.

I want my name said.

Remember I was the daughter of Ernestine,  
who was the daughter of Nettie,  
who was the daughter of Connie,  
whose mother I do not know,  
but still remember to remember.

I want to be remembered for remembering.

I want to be remembered as a bridge.

Remember I tried to help us get there.

I want to be remembered for being a shelter.

Remember me for building and sharing.

I want to be remembered for being a loyal friend.

Remember I loved you

even when you were an imperfect vessel.

I want to be remembered for my loving black heart.

Remember how I loved unconditionally

until it was impossible.

I want to be remembered for saying the words whispered in my ear.

Remember me swinging nouns and verbs like swords.

I want to be remembered for my courage.

Remember me standing in the valley of the shadow

with truth in one hand

a desert eagle in the other.

I want to be remembered as being a part of the paradigm shift.

Remember me as a mother of lions.

I want to be remembered as a warrior.

Remember me as a guerilla in your midst.

I want to be remembered as a fierce enemy.

Remember I am Nzinga, born again,

Nat Turner & Harriet, used to be me.

I want to be remembered for acting up.

Remember me setting fires on stages.

I want to be remembered for the words.

Remember me crying over the news.

I want to be remembered like Garvey.

Remember to forgive my sins

look for me in the whirlwind.

I want to be remembered for my love of nation.

Remember us from doors of no return

spread like ocean seed from shore to shore.

I want to be remembered for my determination.

Remember that if I can

I'll come again

a warrior still

rising again and again

my love won't sleep.

Remember me.

--Ayo, aka WordSlanger  
October 2010

## **Madness & Poets (For Marvin X)**

All poets are mad Baba.  
It's in the saying of unsayables  
the seeing the unseen  
mad from murals of mundaneness  
masquerading as meaning  
we tag truth in acid  
with lethal pens we  
carve epiphany on the  
heaving breast of humanity  
hear me: I am  
Godz voice,  
you see?  
Mad.

Crazed with grief  
lack of sleep  
poems keep knocking  
screaming  
howling accusations  
insisting on justice  
or blood  
and the terrible knowledge  
they may be the same.  
Knowing its ill to be well  
in insanity  
we are religiously mad  
listening to the jokes Godz tell  
about the planz men make  
we invoke open eyes  
amongst the blind  
literate itinerants  
healing wounds  
stapled with the gutz of prophetz  
whose spines have been  
broken open so poems  
can be stitched to their  
cleaved carcasses.

Poets grow in  
the recesses of society's  
bowels deep in the  
world's shit we  
spin beauty in the beast  
to soothe the savage  
someone should dance now  
like poets spin  
daring poems to be dervishes.

The trajectory of a poem  
spit with accuracy  
resembles lyrical alchemy  
turning impossible into  
the color blue.

I am a poet  
long past caring about  
disposed scholars who  
lie in standard English  
we break tense like fences  
that separate us from them:  
flow oceanic  
if you ain't up on it  
long tongue ju ju poets  
say sooths  
somber inelegant truths  
salvaged from graveyards  
laureates go hard,  
sharp spitters are split  
at the larynx hurling  
neologisms like clever hexes-  
some like sharks  
eat the open mic  
& spit back  
silk stitched caresses.

In words we are invested  
& you said  
the devil is in the language  
so sometimes it be ebonics  
we stay hooked on phonics  
& known to slam in spanglish  
poets float but don't drift  
past tipping points  
blaze in smokin joints  
bent on makin points  
angels dance on pointed tongues  
bleeding metaphors  
& poetry ain't the whore  
its poets who crush lyric  
on temple floors  
its poets who commit  
commissioned sins  
in the name of the mortgage.

Loosely intercouring textually  
he said:  
the poems have left  
the building  
stop texting me,  
but I can't  
because words are  
like sex to me  
I'm mesmerized  
by poetry's ejaculation  
I trick without hesitation  
love it passionately  
ain't no reservations  
even when it dogs me  
I'm stuck in the relationship  
It's good  
I don't trip  
without poetry's caress  
my wig would slip

I'd blow up not a little  
but a lot of shit  
poetry is my drug of choice  
& my weapon  
I keep a full clip  
I'm poetry's bitch  
& I'm good with this.

Baba all poets are mad.  
On this we can agree  
Grand Baba Amiri & you  
& like fruit & trees  
I guess I be mad too.

--Ayodele Nzingha

Ayodele Nzingha is a poet, playwright, actress, producer, and director. She directed Marvin X's *In the Name of Love*, Laney College, 1981, and *One Day in the Life*, 1997-2002. She now operates her own theatre in West Oakland, the Lower Bottom Playaz. She recently produced and directed August Wilson's *Gem of Ocean*, Opal Adisa's *Bathroom Graffiti Queen* and Marvin X's *Flowers for the Trashman*, *Graffiti Queen*, and *Ayo's Mama* at Twilight were featured at the San Francisco Theatre Festival, 2010.



## **African Diva: An Elegy Among The Ruins (For Kamaria And Our Sisters)**

I hadn't wanted to venture down certain avenues, exploring startling aspects of inhumanity and ruin. I hadn't desired to confront infamy face to face. I longed for gentler things: your delicate face illumined by love's tranquility, or spiritual ecstasy; your sepia arms enfolding a child. Yet, Moseffa, this century, of primal savagery, this era of death's bizarre mockery sickens the soul. I am awed by your perpetual strength and certitude. You seem to blossom like a lotus in mire. Your mellow calmness inspires miraculous hope—my empress of a thousand battles, mistress of celestial vistas, imagination's jasmine diva. In a grander age, when mystics reigned,

sages would astound the World with tales  
of women like you: Sheba, Nefertari, Tiye,  
and thousands more. Alas, today, as barbarism  
stalks ruined capitals, and life violates  
the breath with endless rot, your supreme  
virtues are mocked by surly thugs, high on  
misogyny's vicious cocaine. And yet,  
to aspire towards the ultimate, sublime  
Unity of Being, to exalt beauty  
and excellence remains a beacon of any  
time and place. And, because that striving  
heart belongs to a woman of the African race,  
the clouded day is suffused with glorious  
rays, as we move together, striving always  
to resurrect the visionary heart.

--Askia

## **CANDACE 2/ A PROFILE**

She was Sheba; dred-locked,  
prognathous, pristine, lovely,  
this unique, spring morning,  
filling these moments with  
sunlight. Primal rhythms sang  
from swaying hips, counter-pointing  
her sacredness: dusky sibyl  
implying Amharic grandeur, unsung  
for millennia upon our human  
tongues. But time was upon us that  
instance, and she its awakening  
agent: prima donna nilotic, blessed  
with brilliant smiles against erotic bronze.

--Askia

Askia M. Toure' is an activist, Africana Studies pioneer, an award-winning poet, and the author of eight books, including "*DawnSong!*", winner of the 2003 Stephen Henderson Award in Poetry. He is also an American Book Award Winner, 1989. He lives in Boston, and is a member of the African-American Master Artists-in-Residency Program (AAMARP) in African-American Studies at Northeastern University, Boston. He can be contacted at: [askia38@yahoo.com](mailto:askia38@yahoo.com).

## **Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Us 'Round"**

(for Sekou Sundiata)

when the shadows chased us  
all the way home  
and the force of their  
intentions broke the windows  
of our mother's house  
we looked for stones  
to arm our slingshots  
and the songs came flying to  
us like birds with jet engines  
wings spread wide  
history spilling its colors across an ocean  
and the only thing we knew for sure  
were the poems we painted and left  
like footprints in the mountains

ahhhhh yessss

the poems

with melody and harmony

rhythm and history  
the poems  
more than the text so textured  
it could be woven into a fine garment  
hung across weary shoulders  
like a choir robe rising with outstretched hands

yes  
the poems  
sitting under a fedora  
growing like trees  
on a tongue moving  
nature  
rising and falling  
like dancers caressing  
the notes that infect  
their bodies when the lights disappear

the poems  
the weight of their truth splashing  
around in blood

slipping on placenta

the dirty poems

full of shit and surprise

we want the truth

and when the shadows chase us

all the way home

and the force of their

intentions tries to break the windows

of our mother's house

we still find stones

arm our slingshots

sing new songs so the birds will

fly to us like rockets

wings spread wide

spilling our colors across the planet

we know for sure

we will always paint our poems and leave them

like footprints in the mountains

no more slavery

no more slavery

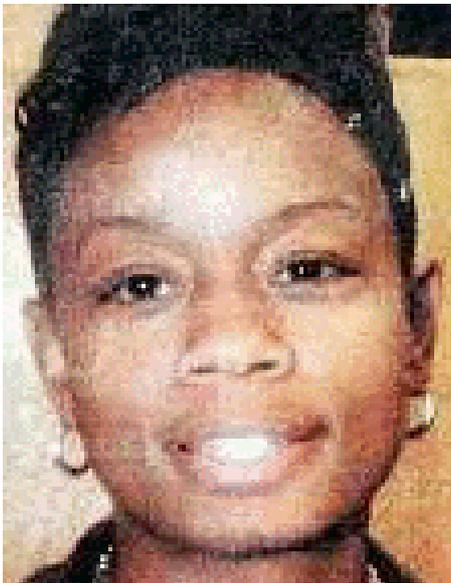
no more slavery

over me

© Michael Simanga  
Atlanta, Georgia



photo Kamau Amen Ra



## Listening Again to Shani Laughing

What loss  
In yr life, like losing life  
For yr life is touched with all lives  
What is closer than the life  
You give, what loss greater  
Than the life you gave, the life  
Inside  
What loss is deeper, what pain more horrible  
None, none, there is  
None...

2

Shani had a perfect idea  
Of her self  
She knew exactly what her self  
Her perfect little self  
Shd be  
And she beed it

3

I tell you Evil  
Is the reverse  
Of what is live  
Not just death, but  
Something that can never  
Live.

4

Not the thought  
Of dying  
But of never having  
Been alive  
That is the craziness  
That haunts  
Things that want  
Yr life

Amiri Baraka  
3/24/07

Amiri Baraka is Godfather of the Black Arts Movement, and our greatest living writer/activist.



## If You're Still the Same Afterwards



photo by Alex Lear  
(to nia, thanx for making me better)

to say

"i am touched

by you"

is to be

changed

into

a person neither of us

was before

entering the other

more open, a sun of sensitivity

emotionally nude, erupting joy  
& willing to kiss life open mouthed  
emoting the vibrancy of glow  
endemic to souls in the flow  
in fact, it's even unscientific  
not to evol  
ve/not to love, not to  
grow & give back  
the only humans who actually evolve  
are lovers  
all others  
just simply fuck and reproduce  
the transformation  
of touch  
that's all  
love is

—Kalamu ya Salaam  
New Orleans, LA

## Tomcat in a Zoot Suit

press pass doesn't take her past diamond-cut  
god-complex vibrating hooked up hoopties  
rims, tints rush devil's playgrounds—idle  
minds moved by mixes certified platinum  
dignity bartered for a dime piece of american dream:  
*cash rules everything around me –c.r.e.a.m.*  
*get the money!*  
*(dollar, dollar bill y'all).*  
hypnotic chants draw heads to the auction block  
uzi eyes puncture mamas'  
inflated hopes lighters in the air mouths wide  
like capital o's beg  
for the show.  
shucking and jiving drive reckless as 81 in a 55  
no line between a living and how  
you make it: *just the way players play.*  
flash bulb fantasy cheap love  
over expensive wines *foggin'*  
*the windows, gettin' sentimental,*  
*sippin' cosmos with the cherry*  
*in the middle,* cherish cut-rate lovewords  
squeal in the hot rush of womanhood  
when they'll try to hate him for the  
ambition, crashing against fleeting values  
worth less than the gnp of countries he  
tours offering  
40 ounces of false hope;  
dreams hand-wrapped in brown paper.

—Kalamu ya Salaam  
New Orleans, LA

## At the Edge of Obsession

his toes curled  
knuckle-white  
on the edge,  
neither of you afraid.  
four big sisters on big budgets, family  
vacations and pre-fabs wouldn't  
understand you believed him when he  
surprised you with a cheesesteak the day  
you dreamt, out  
loud, of filet mignon.  
circumstances  
sharper and finer than strands of trip wire  
that were his arms:  
colored envelopes dressing up the dresser,  
hustle on the burner rapid boil watched  
to defiant red dime between a dollar  
and dinner thin as the line between love  
and hate  
spoiled you rotten-sweet.  
why didn't you just say you loved him?  
he rubs my new-age woman-ness  
raw: chaffeuring me, parading before  
his friends, playing mr-fix-it with an  
accent that seduces my pink  
to red, extra toothbrush, heady with the  
maybe of adequate. i took a hit  
because you said  
my eyes were smiling.  
what i really needed to know  
was it was okay to gamble  
him, long distance  
number tucked in the back  
of my phone book, crawl  
out of the red.

—Kalamu ya Salaam

## **HIWAY BLUES (for Dessie Woods)**

Ain't it enough  
he think he own  
these hot blacktop hiways,  
them east eighty acres,  
that red Chevy pick up  
with the dumb bumper stickers  
and big wide heavy rubber tires,  
two sho nuff ugly brown bloodhounds  
and a big tan&white german shepherd  
who evil and got yellow teeth?

Ain't it enough  
he got a couple a kids to beat on,  
a wife who was a high school cheerleader,  
a brother who's a doctor,  
a cousin with a hardware store,  
a divorced sister with dyed hair,  
a collection of Hustler magazines

dating back to the beginning,  
partial sight in his left eye,  
gray hairs growing out his ear,  
a sun scorched leathery neck that's cracking,  
a rolling limp in his bow legged walk,  
and a couple of cases of beer in the closet?

Ain't it enough  
he got all that  
without having to mess  
with me?

Yeah, I shot the  
motherfucker!

—Kalamu ya Salaam

## **A Gun In The Hand Is Worth...**

it was a cliché  
in a sad sort of way, the way  
these weird, oppressive social  
games are played

it happened in a community center (so called)  
a food stamp office  
she was old, tired,  
had an injured hip, a  
pillow and a cane,  
and was number two  
hundred and one  
when the cut-off was  
two even, brother man  
on guard dumbly overdoing  
his duty invited her  
to stay out, she asked  
to rest inside, he denied

then like a saturday poker game  
with a newcomer taking all  
the chips, it turned unnecessary  
nigger ugly, "bitch, if-in  
you wasn't so old  
i'd go upside yo haid,  
this here office is closed  
i said,"

"son, what did you say?"

the repeat hissed snake like  
cross his teeth, calmly  
her old hand went  
inside her old bag  
and came up with her  
old gun and with her  
old voice she slowly  
repeated an old phrase:

"well play like I'm  
sweet sixteen and  
hit me...!"  
--Kalamu ya Salaam

Kalamu ya Salaam is one of the founders of the Southern Black Arts Movement.



## **Esther Rolle**

(a poem in memory of the pioneering  
black actress)

When you die...come back to life  
So we can laugh and cry and curse the living!  
O! I want to curse anything.

Drab concrete sky leaving me with too many songs.

Sadness leaves, because I forget the words.  
The words are so many, I just wrinkle  
up and laugh and squeeze my hurting hands.

I remember being young and frisky.  
I remember being a creamy hot thing.  
I remember the lemony days and hasty dreamy nights  
that snuck away with the words.  
Stole away.

The one song I remember, the one I loved  
went:  
"when you die...come back to life."

--Kola Boof



## **I care about whichever word**

I care about whichever word  
is used like grass  
or turned to twist  
& make a victim look like killer  
or heard to sing like daybreak  
smelling...

An octorose of warmth  
blending  
into  
nightshed  
deep  
a dance of waves  
the sun weaves in  
an intricate of light  
of gentle ripples  
warmly dancing  
weaving waves  
of shadelit haze  
like the sea ebbing into shore.

Even in the repetition  
a word  
means just as much to me  
as morning's mist to dawn  
the ease with which  
night  
moves  
out

for daylight rays  
like the quick shot from a gun  
or loosely lipping attitude  
that can just as easily  
grit  
or  
grin  
or smile right back  
in hard soft sounds  
like a kitten's tender touch  
a curious tiny paw wanting  
but to be believed.

I like the word, determination,  
a Black child learning how to read  
the wonder of a family intact,  
a puertorrican  
grasping & digging  
into our own past... becoming Borinqueño  
studying Betances  
Belvis  
Pachin Marin  
listening to Malcolm  
hard  
intent  
& full of care  
concern  
in a loving nudge of words  
penetrating  
deep inside the heart of thought  
with Yes! Of course!  
We got no choice  
but grow!  
& Be!  
& Stand Up, Child...  
Come & Change this world  
with strength & perseverance  
Come & Grace this Earth

with your own sense longing  
like the octorose of warmth

u  
n  
f  
o  
l  
d  
i  
n  
g  
winglike petals unto dawn  
to soar, Yes, flying!

I like to hear Rashidah speak  
I like to watch Zizwe's walk  
the happenstance of Sekou's song  
the lilting lyric in Safiya's sway

(& in case you do not know,  
have never heard or watched them work:  
Rashidah is an Ismaili,  
a misspelled word  
from the ink of census takers  
conquering her land;  
Zizwe, a child returned  
from whence once stole,  
Ngafua now an African at war;  
Sekou but a blue lake  
reclaiming lineage to Sundiata  
undercoat guerilla born;  
Safiya, black pearl caught  
in the devil's hand  
way back when Hendersons,  
cut loose from prison cells,  
sailed across atlantic gates  
to rape the earth into a world  
where poets have no chance.)

Despite it all, they sing & work,  
they write & read,  
they care,  
get drunk  
or pray,

while few will publish them their due,  
fewer still will plant their books  
into your hands,  
your own calluses of soil  
    digging  
    deep  
    into  
    self  
gripping all their pages,  
holding them as dearly as you would  
an octorose of warmth.

& yes  
I like the word of action true  
the sound of gunfire busting through  
    the doors  
that hold back freedom blue  
given  
how  
our own young Blackfolk  
get cornered into hating what to do  
like Larry Davis  
cracking through  
the wall of crack  
that would diffuse  
whatever life a child could cling to/  
cornered  
in a vacuum of tenements jammed in despair  
surrounded by a dozen cops  
a dozen watchful dogs  
hunting those who break  
the must  
& misty stink of deprivation  
surrounded by a dozen cops  
alone  
except for rifle  
shotgun  
millimeter  
automatic in his hand  
bursting through the door  
this five foot four

Davis, Larry  
hurls across a rooftop  
shooting  
wounding  
striking out against  
this hateful passion  
cold city bred  
escaping into freedom's scent  
like the octorose of warmth  
s  
p  
r  
e  
a  
d  
i  
n  
g  
w i d e  
its span of wings  
& soaring, Yes,  
soaring high & bleeding from the heart  
of nothing  
wanting  
something  
in the anywake  
of every word  
struggling for the worth of hope that comes at dawn.

--Louis Reyes Rivera  
Brooklyn, NY

Known as the Janitor of History, poet/essayist Louis Reyes Rivera has been studying his craft since 1960 and teaching it since 1969. The recipient of over 20 awards, he has assisted in the publication of well over 200 books, including John Oliver Killens' *Great Black Russian*, Adal Maldonado's *Portraits of the Puerto Rican Experience*, *Bum Rush The Page: A Def Poetry Jam*, *The Bandana Republic*, and his own award-winning *Scattered Scripture*. Considered a necessary bridge between the African and Latino American communities, Rivera has taught Pan-African, African-American, Caribbean and Puerto Rican literature and history in colleges and in community centers. Currently, he conducts a Writers Workshop at Sistas' Place, in Brooklyn, and continues to work with Jazz bands, including Ahmed Abdullah's Diaspora. He can be heard every Thursday on WBAI (99.5 FM; streamed at [www.wbai.org](http://www.wbai.org)), hosting the weekly talk show, *Perspective*.

## **A Letter to the Elders**

by Aries Jordan

Where were you when I needed you most  
Why didn't you let me know that you have been through the same thing too  
Now you saved and don't talk about your past  
Why did you let them hide our history from us?  
Did you not think we would be around?  
Old people always talk bout the good ole days  
I have seen more people die than two lifetimes combined  
Where were you when I thought about suicide?  
I did it when you was on the phone, like every night  
Work always came home with you, when I was home for you  
Now you wanna cry ain't ever ask me how was school  
I would told you about the bullies, the teasing and threats  
Now you wanna cry?  
Look at them girls dating dem no good boys!  
You aint never show us what a lasting relationship looks like  
You told me you aint know who my daddy was  
Got 10 aunts with no man  
Am I destined for the same fate?  
I came in the kitchen because I smelled the pots cooking  
I wanted to help but you told me to get out of the kitchen  
Aint never been back since  
Where were you?  
Why didn't you get involved before I fell asleep in class?  
You told me I wouldn't amount to nothin and I believed you  
Where were you?  
Dem kids ain't got no home training or respect!  
You ain't never give me respect how you expect to get it in return  
You just a stupid kid  
You did your drugs around me, gossiped about your friends,  
You whispered about family secrets you thought my mind was to young to comprehend  
You argued in front of me and put your hands on me  
You told me to respect you, if anything I want to be nothing like you  
Then who do I be like?  
You shushed me in church, pinched my side when I got outta line  
You told me beauty was pain so I suffered  
You told me its always gonna be this way cause it has always been this way

You put me in an institution because your partner didn't want any retarded kids around  
You gave me antidepressants but never asked why I had lost hope  
Where were you?  
I promised I would never tell our little secret and tried to look somewhere else when you was  
touching me there  
I don't know what to do with them kids!  
Let me know you got my back, let me know that I am redemable  
Let me know my existence gives you life  
Where were you?  
And the questions add up  
I finally got enough courage to ask that question and you disappeared.  
One day I will be an elder and the list will be longer  
I face the wounds left unhealed and the future beings ask where were you?  
I wonder if you asked the same questions  
Why didn't you let me know that one day I would be you?

--Aires Jordan

## **A Mile in My Stiletto Shoes**

by Aries Jordan

You think I don't care about the environment  
Which means you think you can walk a mile in my stiletto shoes  
Just because I don't take two minute showers to save the planet  
Don't mean I don't care as much as you  
Just because I don't pull out the plugs every time I unwind  
I might leave my cell phone charger plugged in even when it is not in use  
Don't mean you care more than I do  
So you think you can walk a mile in my 11 wide stiletto shoes better than i do  
Just because I refuse to have the heat extra low don't mean I care less than you  
Try going a whole winter without heat because the bills are overdue  
Try sleeping in a full set of clothes and two socks so you wont freeze to death  
Boil some water to take a warm bird bath  
Try taking a walk in my 11 wide stiletto shoes  
Just because I don't freak out if my chicken from the taco shack is not free range, certified  
organic, non genetically modified bird  
Cant front it taste hella good  
might say I am ignorant, I guess that explains why my breast so big  
How bout you take a walk in my 11 wide stiletto shoes  
Go food shopping in my hood where organic food is like an endangered species  
Come take a walk with me through a concrete jungle  
Where flowers,lemon trees, wild berries, tomato and medicinal plants grow  
Help me clean out my pockets and purses full of wrappers and trash I been carrying around  
Been walking 15 blocks ain't see a trash can yet  
So snug in my 11 wide stiletto shoes and you look good in your earthly sandalls  
How bout we walk together cause I care about the environment just like you  
Don't judge me, cause you don't know me, I have come a long way  
Sometimes I switch up my stilettos for hiking boots  
But we can never walk together if you think your stride and step puts you at the top of mother  
earths dean list

## **Behind the Shadow of Reconciliation**

by Aries Jordan

I know I am being called and god told me you don't have a choice  
Seeing through eyes stand with tears  
How do I heal the pain, the inevitable cause of the system  
Suffering from sale and private ownership I feel something dieing in me and I am afraid  
I hear the calling and know that it is not enough to forgive those so distant  
Different from those I watched lynching my ancestors from trees  
Rapping my great, great, great grandmother, the cop that pepper sprayed that man off the train  
I cry, I cry, I Pray  
I rage and am sent back to the pain  
That capitalist, objectifying ,mother fucker comes out and I am ready to flip  
Swing fist, go crazy almost in a trance  
I hear Dr. King saying that "Hate is a burden"  
Though I have forgiven my White liberal down for my people, fist in the air, New Age,  
Loving, shouting terms from my Black studies courses, in line , straight line, progressive, hard  
core, genuine to the core  
3. Non violence seeks to defeat injustice not people  
2. seeks friendship and understanding  
You got me and I go into the dark shadow behind reconciliation  
I cry and I pray  
I realized confronted with that person that represented the pain of my oppression,  
Attached to a particular view that caused so much pain, that hold the views of superiority  
I cry and I pray and realize the power of loving and forgiving  
and I am free, the attachment to victimization, that identity that gave me passion I let go and  
relearn myself  
With a new vision , filled with the courage to love, to feel, to learn, to be whole, to be a sell out  
Because I stoped using the tools of the oppressor which quantifies, compares , dehumanizes and  
objectify pain  
The ancestors chant, they wanted this for us a long time ago  
I cry, I pray , I live in the story of our time

# **Black Studies Went To College and Never Came Home**

by

Ptah Allah El

Black Studies went to college and I miss her  
And when she comes home, I will hug and kiss her.  
Black went to college and started a strike  
Then the Third World Liberation fronted the mic.  
Black Studies went to college, became a controversy started  
Killed Bunchy Carter.  
Black Studies lost her destiny and fate  
She changed after 1968.  
Black Studies went to college got her BA, MA, and PHD.  
Now she petty bourgeoisie.  
Black Studies went to college and forgot where she came from  
She so damn smart, the community going dumb, dumb, dumb...  
Black Studies went to college now she ain't no good  
Forgot all about the hood.  
Black Studies went to college and pledged Greek  
Now she don't even speak.

Black Studies went to college and became Afrocentric

So complex, she simplistic.

Black Studies is acting like charades

Too many African costume balls and masquerades.

Black Studies went to college and I miss her

When she comes home, I will hug and kiss her.

## **Holy Coup**

by

Ptah Allah El

Rising like a phoenix, out of the ashes of slavery  
Haiti freed herself, fought for liberation  
Didn't wait for Emancipation Proclamation,  
Couldn't wait for Civil Rights,  
Her revolutionary birthright said fight.  
That magic island in the West,  
A metaphor for African post-colonial progress  
God and ancestors smile at you, with joy from heaven  
While sinners on Earth turn you, my lady Hati in to Hades.  
Using Democratic Demons, Devilish Dictators,  
Race Traitors, Haters, Political Beasts, and Foreign Priest  
That perpetuate political purgatory, in every speech and sermon  
Africans globally must be politically self-determine  
By any means calling the spirit of  
St. Boukmon, Tossaint, and Dessalines  
Stop Western oppressive repressive regimes.

Haiti my dear lady, gave her money away  
Paid reparations to master for freedom, but no reparations for slaves today?  
Haiti I wipe tears from my eyes and cry for no more lies  
No more self hate, no more greed  
We need true democracy, so let the Loa lead!  
“Holy cow, no Holy Coup”  
No democracy for me and you except JuJu.  
Damballah is my president elect  
I nominate Papa Legba Speaker of the House  
Opening the way for all congressional ceremony  
I appoint Pap Loco to the office of Secretary of State  
For his wisdom can heal and make Haiti great  
The love of liberty makes Erizule Freda our first lady  
Papa Ogun is our Secretary of State, just in case things get shady.  
Haiti has become a political valley of dry bones  
Papa Shango send thunder and lightning  
Rebuild Haiti with Loa stones.  
“Holy cow, no Hoy Coup”  
No democracy for me and you, accept Juju.

## Unbreakable

*This is not merely a poem about oppression and lynching a poem about endurance, struggle and sometimes overcoming....*

we are not unbreakable

shards of tears

bleeding red glass

you expect us not to crack?

unbreakable

against the storm

*be unbreakable*

this confusing place

about race...is haunting me

“Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze....”

hanging strangled, strange...being

unbreakable in the presence of

weeping willow me

I am:

lamenting

bending, being not unbreakable,

yielding flesh dangling

I am optimistic about  
overcoming “Bloody Sunday,” at Selma  
in my blackness  
the only way to be is  
being, to become, *becoming*  
unbreakable  
not you/me  
can we cry and be unbreakable?  
We show you strong-  
BLACK POWER!  
*you can't have it both ways*  
durability is what's expected  
*[...yet you have discerned this body is pliant, when you hung mommy's cousin from the old oak  
tree in the gallant south]*  
thus, the only way to *be* is  
unbreakable  
Did you know  
that there are  
many ways to lynch a body?  
Stop this high tech lynching of *our* President!  
i am tired, so tired....of the struggle

carry my breaking/broken

black body

to the cathedral in pieces

weeping willow me

bending and unbreakable

not you/me

Hettie V. Williams is the author of *We Shall Overcome to We Shall Overrun: the Collapse of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Revolt (1962-1968)* published in 2008 and co-editor of *Color Struck: Essays on Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective* (2010) with Julius Adegunle. Currently, she is a full-time lecturer of African American history at Monmouth University where she has taught both survey and upper division courses in African American history, American history, gender studies, and interdisciplinary studies.