

Ain't Nothing Changed

Ain't nothing changed but you
brother—

searchlights, night helicopters
hunting runaways.

Veils of innocence—masking
on Wall Street as the evening news

Heads crowned with fresh hoarfrost
yet rambling still on minds, yesterdays.

Ain't nothing changed but you
brother—

you no longer call me
with urgency hot on your tongue

about the Revolution is on!
Italian patent leather shoes grinding

like jackboots—you dressed in dark
suits & red tie—broad denture grins

for paparazzi cameras.
Ain't nothing different. But

the mirrors upon which
the light of error dances

A black boy, a basketball, hope:
but you, brother, you're playing

golf at the club with MJ & Tiger.
Ain't nothing changed . . .

not gunship clouding skies
raining fire on our head holding dreams

not the blackness of scavenging birds
crowded into laboring urban landscapes

while prophets of success celebrate in
suburban havens like wooded Guilford & Ten Hills.

Ain't nothing changed but you
brother—you still a retiring ceo,

daylight comes, daylight goes,
leveraging pyramids with greed and sway

staging inaugural trips
to the graves of Martin and Malcolm

Nothing but blue vertigo, barbs of steel
wire enclosures and tanks—colloquiums

councils justifying war on wretched humanity
flying machines crushing Gaza and Baghdad.

Media men press their points as talking heads.
Nothing's changed, brother—we won't give

up and we won't let go—there's possibility
and still surprise. Sunrise angling gardenias.

Ancients and ancestors haunting like ghosts.
The Armies of Heaven stand poised, silent . . .

For Stan Tookie Williams

We stroll prison corridors in
orange jump suit filled blackness
chained in silver bracelets—waiting
with dark suit, brown box, and mother’s
tears. In our cells, we live in maelstrom
seas of our mind, a lover’s odor seizes
the brain after decades of absence.

In his rubber room of darkness
Huey wrestled his fears to the mat.
Like Etheridge’s revolutionaries he
was doomed, stripped down to “love
& history.” Like many pilgrims, who
ran off plantations centuries ago into
frontiers forests, streams of terror
& hope—that Legba village boy
still inside versatile & volatile—
knowing no guarantees of freedom.

Mama’s cooking, the ragged apron,
the spiritual wrestler in Daddy’s house.
The moon will not shine tonight: no
floods of destruction will overtake us.
Through thick walls, a cold rain
falls from the ceiling in a six by ten.
Time runs out for Tookie the Redeemed.

December 2005

Sisyphus Walks Downhill

—for Albert Camus

It's always like the sun—the coming
& going at Pennsylvania & North

Cops & ambulances rush screaming
to their emergencies. Workers, men

& women, board & step down from
buses and trains as they go to and leave

daily their assigned drivers—these are
the blessed ones. On the sidelines their

shadows without chains chant, “Loose
ones!” These are the creepers, 35-plus.

Toothless on my right might have been
an A-RAB if he had a pony & a wagon.

With a few caps in his pocket he paces,
reflects, “You can't make no money in

the joint.” He bums a smoke. It's me
in their absurd mirror walking uphill.

24 February 2006

Postcard from Hell

For Etheridge Knight

A spoonful of death bubbling, spiked:
knotted syringe, blood walls push back
as it flows: nodding like fall flowers.

On a Retreat corner is man smeared
with oil and grease—open air garage
between debris of warehouse fire

and boarded house. Hooded boys hang
near, evading cops. At Francis, is
Ay Jay Deli & Store. Ma & Pa on jet

for family in Korea. Her sister behind
hard plastic, now. Folks say why don't
they hire since she can't speak English.

People search for work, travel all over
the compass of our global world. One
kid lives in a single family home.

That one in third floor apartment, two
rooms, five sleep on roaches—chicken
box babies & TV. Last week the church

tore down two buildings for a parking lot.
Deacons don't live on these hard streets.
Near the next corner a garage of Garveyites

from Kingston. Next, laundry workers lean
in blue uniforms: grandmothers see through
stones of July heat: wring hands, hush a cry.

Rudolph Lewis (born 1948 in Baltimore, Maryland) was raised by his grandparents William and Ella Lewis of Jarratt, Virginia in the Village of Jerusalem. He attended Creath, No. 5 (a one-room, one-teacher school) and later graduated from the all-black Central High (Sussex). In 1965 he left home to attend Morgan State College. After hearing in 1967 Stokely Carmichael, Walter Lively, and Bob Moore speak in 1967 on Black responsibility and leadership, he left Morgan “to join the revolution.”

He spent several years (beginning 1969) as an organizer for Local 1199 (Health Care Workers Union), married in 1972 to Evelyn Duncan, and divorced her in 1976. Resigning from 1199 in 1974, he worked a number of temporary jobs, including taxi driver, coal analyst, porter and pot-washer at Maryland General Hospital.

He graduated with a B.A (1978) and M.A. (1981) degrees in English from the University of Maryland, College Park. After graduation, he taught writing and literature as an adjunct professor at University of the District of Columbia and the University of Maryland. In 1982, he spent ten weeks with the Peace Corps in Zaire.

From 1991-1997, Lewis taught writing and other subjects in several adult education programs. During this period he spent a year in Morgan State’s doctoral program in education (1991-1992), and completed from 1994-1997 a master’s program in library science. From 1997-1999, he worked as a librarian for Enoch Pratt Free Library. After the publication of his edited volume of *I Am New Orleans & Other Poems by Marcus B. Christian*, Lewis again returned to the Village of Jerusalem where he collected the letters and stories of his grandmother Ella Lewis.

In November 2001, along with Kinya Kiongozi, he founded the website *ChickenBones: A Journal* (www.nathanielturner.com), which he continues to edit and which has become one of the most popular African-American websites on the internet, receiving over a half-million visitors in 2003 and expect over two million in 2010.

His poems have been published in *Black Magnolias: A Literary Journal* (2009), the anthology *Let Loose on the World: Celebrating Amiri Baraka at 75* (2009). His 1985 interview was published in *Conversations with Yusef Komunyakaa* (2010), edited by Shirley A. James Hanshaw. In October 2009 he married Yvonne Willis and now lives in Finksburg, Maryland. He can be contacted at rudolphlewis@hotmail.com.