

To the Beat

Brown suburban dancer, the downtown beat of the bongos play no more.
The rhythm of manicured lawns vibrating in her soul and white picket fences has
replaced the hip hop harmonies of long ago.

Brown suburban dancer electrified by the magnetic pulse of the city.
Her band plays here no more.
Big city lights, the pace of life, the hum.
The hum that used to course through your veins, now a meandering pace.

Brown suburban dancer with your wanna be ghetto fabulous rides with gold-rimmed
wheels, your thumping pumping base makes you legit?
Drag queen of the planned community.
White youth consume you.
Frenzied hyena feeding on a culture that no longer exists.
White adults want to control you.
Go back to the plantation of the Black reservation.
We'll call you when we need you.

Black suburban dancer clap your hands and tap to the beat.
Feel the vibration in your soul.
Color mixing, blurred realities, parallel lines intersecting,
Police watching, neighborhood watch conspiring.
Produce your passport on demand.
There can only be one of you.

Brown suburban dancer hips shaking, urban romance thrusting in her soul
Working the margins of life; gerrymandered existence.
White flight migration.
We like you on T.V., but we don't want to live near you.
Think of our property.

Brown suburban dancer gyrations forced to beat softly in her soul.
Her feet are tired from doing the shuffle.
Haunted to a hushed hyper-visibility
The poacher needs no license.
Live below the radar.
Your color is too stunning.
Suburban color requested on demand.

Dr. Tracey Owens Patton is Director of African American & Diaspora Studies as well as an Associate Professor of Communication in the Department of Communication and Journalism at The University of Wyoming. Her area of expertise is critical cultural communication and rhetorical studies. Her work is strongly influenced by critical theory, cultural studies, womanist theory, and rhetorical theory. Her research focuses on the interdependence between race, gender, and power and how these issues interrelate culturally and rhetorically in education, media, and speeches. Dr. Patton presents her research at numerous academic conferences and her articles include publications in *Communication Teacher*, *Howard Journal of Communications*, *International/Intercultural Communication Annual*, *Journal of Black Studies*, *The National Women's Studies Association Journal*, *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*, *Visual Communication Quarterly*, *Women's Studies in Communication*, and book chapters in *The Spike Lee Reader* and *Opposite forces: Issues and conflicts in American journalism*.



city scat

we come to this city
of concrete, brick
steel and toil

country people
knowing the earth

sea faring people
reading the tides

gambling people
holding jokers and spades

we come to this city

hard laughin'
weep sob wailin'
prayin' celebratin' people
bending and sweating

we come to
this hiss crack
slap snap
siren whirl
holler
electric zip
and burn
city

rounding
bustling corners
banging our heads
against destiny
and crumbling
brick walls of confusion

we come to this city
that can cage us
enrage us
deny us
revile us
turn us
from friends and family
into prey and predator

we come to this city
this hip howl
she bop
da he bop
da we bop
bang clang
swinging city
and we name it ours

devorah major

child soldiers

1.

the boy stares into the camera
softly speaks of his shame
at being forced as a young child to
with the other children kill
a farmer and his wife
as they kneeled beneath the rebels' guns
using the farmer's hoe to slice
legs and head, arms and torso
all the while only wanting himself to live

almost man now at just fourteen
he sits on smoothed earth
near the edge of the camp
playing a carved wood xylophone
notes so clear and open
as to make you cry or sing

when he plays he says
it is his mother's laugh before
before she watched her husband
chopped into pieces

when he plays he says
it is before, before
the trembling night
when her two sons were stolen
with only one to return

when he plays he can see
an almost tomorrow
when he can become as the wind
playing leaf and forest
the notes of his songs a river
on which he sails the world

2.

smug in our civility
we know that we
at least do not have
our children kill our children

but late at night
as i lie in my bed
i can hear bullets fly

some as pellets spit on the wind
others as thunder spurs
some times there are yells
or the screech of tires
occasionally sirens

i cannot see the ones who fire
but i know that they are young
and did not choose this war

3.

barely eighteen face
still pimply and bare
he lifts his machine gun
and fires into the car

his distant mother's lessons
are silenced by the bullet cascades
as he watches the car careen and stop
with a family of eight now dead

later that night in his bunk he remembers
how it was about this same time of the year
last year when he was spending his days
playing football and making love to
his girlfriend on the couch in his father's den

he cries himself to sleep

devorah major

for boyd

the morning after
i drove down laguna street
eerie in its emptiness
with only oya's daughter
covered in leopard
skin hat, coat, tight long pants
concealing the fact that
she could have been
great grandmother
to the man who was felled
the night before

she walked slowly
passed the torn yellow
police tape across the corner
blood not yet bleached
from the slate pavement
as boyd's legless ghost
floated near her shoulder

his arms still held high
surrendering to his executioners
as he cried out his love for his
unborn child and pled
to be remembered for more
than his madness and his pain.

devorah major

in memory of daryl

before you were eight
you were already a poet
and it was less than ten
more years before you
found yourself
on the corner
talking smack
slinging rhymes
doing time
until one day
caught alone
you were
smokin'
smoked
and gone

I remember you
with dark shiny eyes
and a rock that carried magic
the little boy who wrote-
*I like my stone because
it is smooth and soft
and when I am sad
I rub it and feel happy*

true that when grown
rhythms you spilt
made some women smile
at the sweet that
wouldn't be rubbed out

by the blocks you walked
sporting sagging pants
& trademarked shoes
wearing chains in gold
slinging and singing
trading and talking dirt
until you became
another black august
blood sacrifice

almost forgotten
the child you had been
the one who
found life singing
inside a stone

devorah major

mother to mother

for Brendalisa

pick up the phone

your daughter
wants you to
wrap love around her name
when you hear her voice

she cries prayers into the receiver
pleads for you to hear
how he touched her
how he tore her
how he bruised her

and she knows
he is your husband

your daughter chants heartache
into the disconnected line
begging that you understand
how he betrayed her
how he blamed her
how he broke her

and she knows
he is her father

your daughter wants you to know she
does not blame you
she knows
how one can love a damaged soul

she loves him
she loves you
she is trying to learn
to love herself

Devorah Major (devorah major) served as the first North American African 'San Francisco Poet Laureate' 2002 through 2006. In addition to being a poet she is a performer, lecturer, fiction and creative non-fiction writer, and editor. A trained actress and former dancer, she approaches poetry as both a written and performing art, she also instructs at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco, California.

Obama

Articulate, dreamy, foreign child
The classic mulatto, infectious smile
Malcolm and Martin rolled into one
Mandingo's scrapping bastard son!
Obama!

Styled his Gullah wife in a corporate blouse
Did a buck dance for bankers to the White House
Bailed out greedy bankers with a juicy treat
Did a Negro's tap dance for Wall Street.
Obama!

Denounced his father, forsook with his preacher,
Praises robber barons and his Harvard teacher*
A tragic mulatto with blemished past
Wasn't the first and won't be the last!
Obama!

"Change" he preached - for "Change" people wait
More bailouts, tax and police state!
More of the same but in black face,
Just another national disgrace!
Obama!

Rescued the gangsters in private planes
While the jobless and homeless felt the pains
Silly voters he never meant to serve!
He's the house Negro for the Federal Reserve.
Obama!

Ward Connally would say "amen!"
Stepin Fetchet would call his act a sin!
A perfect puppet to deceive and pretend!
Obama!
Begs a bailout with tin cup in hand
Around his neck, a golden band
Dislikes elephants, but claims the donkey,
Begging like the organ grinder's monkey!
Obama!

Barack Obama's instructor in university was none other than Zbigniew Brzezinski, globalist, Trilateral Commission, Council of Foreign Relations, etc.

For Muhammad Ali

You beat the smoking gorilla
And you defeated the terrible bear
You punished an impudent rabbit
And you proved your worth in Zaire .
You showed you were the fastest
As your victims fell with groans
You beat Marines and the vampires
But you didn't beat Doug Jones.
You whipped the U.S. government
And survived the greed of wives,
Escaped assassins' bullets
And malicious media knives.
You downed many great white hopes
And invaded forbidden zones,
You felled the enemies of blackness
But you never beat Doug Jones.
You say you are the greatest
And you deserve your due;
Maybe not the greatest-
But at least, in the top two.
For Jack never called opponents names
Or stooped to put brothers down;
Like you, such a pretty man,
But he was not a clown.
So when that final bell rings
And you hear those melodious tones,
Tell the God that you beat them all,
But you didn't beat Doug Jones!

--Anthony Mays

Anthony Mays has been living in Korea (South Korea) for the past twelve years, his "soul on ice," as Cleaver wrote.

I'm in a world



I'm in a world
of concrete and steel
of mace and riots
of endless talk
of endless plots
of prison politics
of taking orders
of giving orders
of recycled dreams
of letters gone unanswered
of funerals unattended
of lock-downs
of beat-downs
of testosterone
of claustrophobia
of anger
of no love
of no hope
of no peace!

I'm in a world

where you look through and not at
where you cry on the inside
where you die on the inside
where you take no prisoners
where you are taken prisoner
where time stands still
where time passes by
where you are forgotten
where you are not forgiven
where you lose your mind
where you lose your soul
yet I'm still a man
yet I'm still human
yet I'm a child of God
yet I'm free!

--Bruce George

Bruce George is the co-founder of Def Poetry Jam. He has written poetry/prose & articles for over 37 years. His work has been published in major magazines, anthologies, and literary publications. He has won several awards such as "Peabody Award" for "Russell Simmons Presents, Def Poetry (HBO)", "Miky Award" for "Russell Simmons Presents, Def Poetry Jam (HBO)", "Upscale Showcase Award", "Trail Blazer Award" etc... for his vision, production, writing and performances.



Slave Song

Leh us carry on da sa
da sa da sa
da sa of who do
not so few who do

da wind snake comes
send him away

all dey songs de buried
heah, heah, heah
in sacred ground who do
who do

death awaken
death awaken
Paul and Silas
Paul and Silas
Paul and Silas
Paul and Silas
come through heah
who do who do
not so few

I wants none of dis nonsense
gon on befo'
don' been in de house far too long
no use to holler now
whuppin' time don' past
for me, who do
who do not so few
de massa rose
de massa rose
de massa rose
and come through heah
wind snake come back
dis time who do who do
who do come through heah

da sa da sa da sa
of sunshine
sunshine

sunshine ovah who do
not so few
who do stand ovah de pot
de cast of iron pot
stirrin' stirrin' stirrin'
de stain away

de blood de mud de sweat
away away away
stir de massa stain away
upon ma lips
upon ma brow
the scent of dead chullens
flowers now
who do not so few
come by heah

to run and cry
and rot away

beneath de cracklin' flame
de singin' of de mulberry tree

de branches was once free
da sa da sa da sa
of sunshine blowin' in ma hair

da sa da sa da sa
of darkest night
dere ain't no place to hide

Lawd Sweet Jesus
where is you at
come stem dis bruisin' tide

de massa rose
de massa rose
de massa rose
wind snake blowin'
round de cabin door

Lawd Sweet Jesus
where is you at

help me find de other shore
da sa da sa da sa.

Déjà Vu

(For Toni Cade Bambara, June Jordan, Sherley Anne Williams,
Abbie Hoffman and Huey P. Newton)

...”because of our actions,
...the world sees us as a bully and liar,”
the twelve year old on tip-toes reminds.
Today I want to be at the National Mall,
grey-haired among thousands
to wave my flag again,
to let Uncle Sam know
my knees ache,
my teeth fall out,
that he has not killed me yet.
I pray nightly for relief.
I want to hear Jane Fonda not on aerobics,
remember Martin’s “ain’t gon’ study war no more,”
my high school teachers in 1955
who understood the meaning of innocence
and irony as I waxed on
in “The Voice of Democracy Oratorical Contest.”
Still packed away somewhere.
My medal. Proof.
A brown child belonged
in the new south.
*Oh beautiful for spacious skies,
for amber waves of grain.*
Your hunger haunts
like the promise of death
and I am She who will
never be satisfied.

Compassion

I try to feel
for those who must give
up fresh apricots, arugula, lobster.
Curtail vacations to Venice, Rome, Paris.
Watch their portfolios shrink daily.
Eat Richfood Grape Jelly
instead of British marmalade.
There is enough blame to spread
from Maine to California.
Three blocks from my house
some elders cannot afford dentures.
Still, they smile and thank Jesus
for rice, red beans, collard greens.
They dream of Egypt and be waiting
to inherit the earth.

Old Lady Prayer

I jes say Lord,
I know You
got a plan, special
with these low interest rates
and folks can't hardly afford
apples, oranges or milk
for they babies. Me,
I'm a old soul, know how to make do,
to squeeze a dollar 'til bald eagle scream,
but these young'uns now,
even some black ones
don't know diddly-squat 'bout Sacrifice,
think they got to eat Chinese food,
drink 7-11 coffee according to whim,
wear brand name jeans, jersies and shoes;
need to blackberry text sweet nothin's,
cell phones glued to their ears,
young'uns racin' so hard, Lord,
where they goin'?
Hollerin' screamin' streamin' cable.
Can't hear your birds, don't know nary
a name of the first star. Twenty-four
hours a day foot stompin', head-shakin'
hip huggin' can't cook let's eat at Wendy's
selves ripping running first here, then there
where next to go, to show? Operate
on he say - she say yesterday, tomorrow,
a few minutes ago, not right this second,
You giving breath, brain, water, a chance
to be still just this second
be still
this second.

If The Walls Come Tumblin' Down

Stagolee shake hands with Billy
if the walls
come
tumblin'
down.
Joshua fit de battle.

Oatmeal taste like steak
if the walls
come
tumblin'
down.
Joshua fit de battle.

You can slide, but you can't hide
if the walls
come
tumblin'
down.
Joshua fit de battle.

You gon' have to pull
your Lexus out the mud
if the walls
come
tumblin'
down.
Joshua fit de battle.

Citicard won't matter
if the walls
come
tumblin'
down.
Joshua fit de battle.

Bank American on that other shore
if the walls
come
tumblin'
down.
Joshua fit de battle.

The Poet

(for Askia M. Toure)

Sire. He be
soul searing.
Smokey grey
ringlets. Us. We go
outside blue-black chaos.
See sound. Divided fury.
Yes. No. Blow. Whether they
old young bold desire
to hear or not
His Brand Name Truth,
they fear to face.

Elijah's Cousin

(For Marvin X)

If I wanted to sit a spell,

I might write a greenhouse poem

about this mad man,

in this wilderness,

in the Crazy House Called America,

who speaks in the name of Ants, Bees, Cows.

This poem composition

would not be easy as One, Two, Three,

not a do re me

or an X Y Z.

See, this man's tended fields, lived through fire,

feasted on wine and honey,

got kinky hair, black, grey

maybe like his grandpoppa.

Who knows? Who listens?

"What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

Of one wind whirling?

Hush. Hush. Hush.

--Jeannette Drake 3-9-10

Jeannette Drake, writer of poems, short stories, and essays is an artist and Licensed Clinical Social Worker (retired) who holds an MFA in creative writing from Virginia Commonwealth University. Occasionally, she conducts dream work and expressive art workshops. The author of *Journey Within: A Healing Playbook*, her writings appear in *Callaloo*, *Obsidian*, *The Southern Review*, *Xavier Review*, *Honey Hush!* *African American Women's Humor*, *Go, Tell Michelle: African American Women Write to the New First Lady*, *www.disabilityworld.org*, *Tough Times Companion III*, *Richmond Free Press*, *The Book of Hope* and *The World Healing Book*, *The Sun Magazine*, *Coloring Book: An Eclectic Anthology of Fiction and Poetry by Multicultural Writers and ChickenBones: A Journal*, at www.nathanielturner.com among others. She has received awards and fellowships from the Virginia Commission for the Arts, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, the Hurston/Wright Foundation and a scholarship award from the Leonard E.B. Andrews Foundation for visual art. She is currently working on a novel.

Ego: The Most Wanted

How embarrassing,
Jayson Blair,
Burning down master's house
The New York Times, style.

How embarrassing,
they can't find a rebel voice
in a desert storm.

How embarrassing,
they came to free Iraq,
but stayed to occupy the freedom.

How embarrassing,
digital warriors mapping a failed assault
to drown intelligent life,
searching for an elusive foreign enemy
in Sunday school fatigues.

How embarrassing,
an appointed White House
that debates and ignores the UN.

How embarrassing,
Baghdad is crushed,
Palestine is occupied,
and pain engulfs the planet.

How embarrassing,
they think the world is a playground,
and all games should end in selfish victory.

How embarrassing,
they can't see the wind change,
the earth evolve
or
the isolation
of an ego.

Be Like Barbara

I would like to be
a Barbara Lee,
but they have
tied my hands,
shut my mouth,
and questioned me.

I would like to be
a Barbara Lee,
asking questions,
when they ask me,
not to question.

Yes,
I would like to be
a Barbara Lee,
so I can
question war,
free my hands,
and stand up,
for reason.

Yes,
a patriotic me,
would be,
a Barbara Lee.

Itibari M. Zulu is the senior editor of *The Journal of Pan African Studies*. His poetry has appeared in *Essence* magazine, *The Griot* (the journal of the Southern Conference on African American Studies), and the previous issue of this publication (volume 4, number one). The above were written in 2003.

Danced



I've danced through life, glided through strife
and yet am still here to tell my story with glory
.The pain didn't kill me-it made me hurt and aware
I didn't die from my hurts in a way it made me whole,
today I feel no pain as i smile in glory.

Art and poem by Renaldo Manuel Ricketts
(San Francisco, California)

BCN Kids

Uniformed T-shirts, jeans and scabs,
we were the revolution's kids.
We played spiders and flies in the parking lot,

raced down ramps on ten speeds and tricycles.
Small feet at attention, balled fists
erect in the air, completing a drill team stance.

Tightly pulled cornrows made
crosses in our heads and hung
rattling multicolored beads.

Our Black Jesus and bishops and building fund,
the blue gray van with black box letters
BLACK CHRISTIAN NATIONALIST CHURCH

At school we walked out during the pledge of allegiance
and wouldn't dare stand during the national anthem.
I stared at the flag ever day.

Laying my hand across my chest,
I closed my eyes—
thirteen lines, each one I gave our names...

Ndambi...Okera...Naima...Ayinde...
Each star, a promise traced in my eyelids.

Our Hair

1. What We Learn from Madame CJ Walker

The curved cast iron laid on our palms like a sin.
We knew what the metal clasped jaws could do to natural hair.
Kehina, who had inherited her father's Patowami grade,
was the last in priority and so, was assigned to keep watch.
Nailah tried warming the pressing comb with faucet water.

Ndambi turned the curlers over the heater
Shashu tried both on a platted section of hair,
but I could not tell the difference. It just looked wet.
The hinge of the curling iron was cold.
I rubbed my knuckles over the metal-toothed comb.

We had to figure out a way to make them burn through our braids,
scorch our temples. For hours we speculated which
of the older girls really had good hair.
Could it have been that at night all of the sixteen-year-olds
waited at the opening of a large mouth stove,

with freshly washed broccoli puffs cotton-balling over their ears?
The smoke sizzling out their greased curls
until they could smooth and flatten the manes into ponytails.

2. Combs with Broken Teeth

At home we were natural. Our mothers' hair thick,
symmetric, clean. Our fathers' fros tight and tapered.

At school we were nappy headed. Buckshots
crawled down our necks. They named us African

Booty Scratcher, Kunta Kinte. It was kinky.
Other girls burned their scalps, or scarred their earlobes

for press-and-curls. We sat still for hours, our heads cocked
between braiders' thighs. I winced under the heavy construction

until I had needle thin corn rows too tight to touch.
The pull would make a girl consider scissors.

I tied scarves and stockings to keep my greased styles
from frizzing. There is pain in taming naps.

In Mexico my hair was curly and soft. Children reached out
to press their hands into my cotton ball locks.

There is no word for naps in Spanish.
At home I filled a garbage bag with combs with broken teeth

--Nandi Comer



The Emmett Till Blues

What they use to just do and just done it to me,
they doing it directly to all yall now, doing it
and doing it and doing it to the world.
Shoot and cut and smash my head in,
take me to the river, sink me down –
you call that religion? Yeah, yeah!
It hadn't of been for my mother bring
my busted body back up to Chicago and let
Jet get pictures for the world to look at,
nobody would of known. I'm long time gone.
Nowadays wouldn't be no way I'd get to say
this on television, no way yall would even see
a picture of me. Do yall even know who this is
talking to you? This is Emmett Till. I died
and died and died. Soon as yall figured
America was saved, here come Guantánamo
and Abu Ghraib. Here come greed and
here come grief. The Thief of Baghdad
make they own commandments. Geronimo,
wouldn't of paid them no mind. What you think
they might pull next? Talk to me. I been done died.

-- Al Young

Al Young is the former Poet Laureate of California. From 1969-1976 he was the Edward B. Jones Lecturer in Creative Writing at Stanford University. His honors include Wallace Stegner, Guggenheim, Fulbright, National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, the PEN-Library of Congress Award for Short Fiction, the PEN-USA Award for Non-Fiction, two American Book Awards, two Pushcart Prizes, two New York Times Notable Book of the year citations, an Arts Council Silicon Valley Fellowship, the Stephen Henderson Achievement Award for Poetry, Radio Pacifica KPFA Peace Prize, the Glenna Luschei Distinguished Poetry Fellowship, and the Richard Wright Award for Excellence in Literature. Young's many works include novels, collections of poetry, essays, memoirs and anthologies, and he often performs with musicians. He has a degree in Spanish with honors from the University of California, Berkeley, and in May 2009 he received a Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Whittier College (www.ayoung.org).

Yard Bird's Bitter Sweet Suite

They Laughed
At The Wonder
In*G...The Wondering
Yellow Jacket
Yard Bird
Hovering
In Humming
Bird's Eagle Hued
Him*His*Fears...
Levitating The Divine
Nector Of The Shadow
Scented Black
Honey Suckle Rose
In The Key Of Sea
Sons Of Shafted Wheat
Sharecropped Chromo
Zones Redeveloped
To Gather The Diasporic
Distance Into Streams
And Lakes
Of Consciousness
Dancing...Waves
Brushing The Droning Node
Of The Lotus Cymbol
With Chipped
Trident Shafts Of Air
Dusty From The Spike Edged Lust
Of Loan Shop Interludes...
Little Did They Know
He Only Four*Shadowed
The Keys Of Their
Laughter...Orchestrated
Passions In The Key Of X*
Perience...Cherry Faced White
Lightnin' Licked Corn
Husked Crow Modes
Laced To The Lapel
Of An Abscent Father's Sun

Day Go To Meeting
Pretty Plummed Princes
Parade In The Debutant Dungeons
Of Pendergast's Platnum Palacades
Where The Prez
Delivered The Future
To The Gardenia Toned
Essence Of Each
Lady Day*Zed In A Clan*Descent
Cloak Wolven Ntu
The Brail Silence
Of Smoke Sediment*
Dead Between The Lazer
Gaze Of Luminious Lovers
Lendy Leaping
To Jimmy
Rushing To The Bar
Where The Pent/Angled Changes
To Prohibitions
Pink Flammed Blues
Walked And Bounced
With Bud
Ing Gracefullness
Down Salt Masked
Faces Glass To Glass
Propelled By The Pumiced Poverty
Of Corn Liquor Effervescence
And The Tale Winds
Of A Lost Dream
Bronco Bustin'
Night Mares
Found Deludging Into The Dusk
Hued Palms
Of A Working Mother's Night
Shifting Hands
Calloued From Bare Handing
Typhoon*Slung Tears
Mending Fears
Pretending The Too Few
Crashing Dollar Bills

Would Beak The Hawk Hurl'd Winters
That Scream Thru Blistered Glass
Windows Festered With Fog
*Ged Frontal Lobes
Limp From The Cresendo
Of Disenfranchisement's Descent...

Celebrate The Bird
He Laid The Ground
For Today's Music...
Check The Worlds
He Herd...
Tommy Guns At Duke's
Black And Tan "A" Trane
In A Harlem Air Shaft Fantasy...
Dig...His Children
Sonny Rollins
Miles And Jackie
Mack...Till You
Word Up On The Bird
You Ain't Heard Shit
In Fact...
So Celebrate The Bird
He Spoke The Sacred
Language Bopped
From The Future...
The Music All Preferred
From Hip New York
To Gay Paris...
Dizzy Atmospheres...
5 A.M. Blind
Moon Walks From Mintons...
Mingus Monk
And Bud Powell Too
Klook And Max
They All...
Celebrate The Bird...

-- Ghasem Batamuntu, Europe



On Not Being Able To Write A Post-Katrina Poem About New Orleans

It wasn't Katrina you see

It was the levees

One levee crumbled under Ponchartrain water surges

One levee broke by barge, the one not supposed to park near ninth-ward streets

One levee overflowed under Ponchartrain water pressure

We paid for a 17-foot levee but

We got 10-foot levees so

Who got all that money-- the hundred of thousands

Earmarked for the people's protection?

No metaphors capture this battle for New Orleans
Now defeated and scorned by the bitter mistress of big government
New Orleans is broken by the bullet of ignorance
Our streets are baptized by brutal neglect
Our homes, now empty of brown and white faces, segregated by
Our broken promises of help where only hurt remains
Our hearts like our voices hollow now in the aftermath

Our eyes are scattered among tv images of
Our poor who without cars cling to interstate ramps like buoys
Our young mothers starving stealing diapers and bottles of baby food
Our families spread as ashes to the wind after cremation
Our brothers our sisters our aunts our uncles our mothers our fathers lost
Stranded like slaves in the Middle Passages
Pressed like sardines, in the Super Dome, like in slave ships
Where there was no escape from feces or
Some died on sidewalks waiting for help
Some raped in the Dome waiting for water and food
Some kids kidnaped like candy bars on unwatched shelves
Some beaten by shock and anger
Some homeless made helpless and hopeless by it all

Where is Benjamin Franklin when we need him?

Did we not work hard, pay our taxes, vote our leaders into office?

What happened to life, liberty, and the pursuit of the good?

Oh say, can you see us America?

Is our bright burning disappointment visible six months later?

Is all we get the baked-on sludge of putrid water, your empty promises?

Where are you America?

--Mona Lisa Saloy

For the New Young Bloods on My Porch

Two years two months after post-Katrina flooding, I remember
the first time I saw y'all
Camped out, sitting on my front porch
Chilled out in the cool shade of my cement stoop
Spread eagle on the steps like you owned the place
Bronzed chocolate faces, all sizes, ages, and you
Acted like you owned the place,
I welcomed you,
told you, seeing y'all reminded me of my brother and his friends
standing guard for our block, our street, our neighborhood
though sometimes they stole a smoke from big butts on the street
or made fun of people passing by
or they played coon can in the street, stopping traffic
There y'all are, the new neighborhood residents
bringing life to this 7th Ward New Orleans block struggling to return to glory.
Come to think of it, I
should have taken names
should have found y'all Mommas & Dads
should have checked if you were in school, and where

should have checked to see whether you could read and write
should have thrown 20 questions to test for any common sense
should have jacked you up for being so cocky
when y'all ran my tap till the bill burned me
linning up cars to wash on my dime
leaving the water running for its source,
y'all not caring for the holes you make in my pockets.
Then, in the last two weeks,
I wouldn't be so shocked to find my 100 year-old cypress doors & windows destroyed,
my cement and bricks--formed by Creole craftsmen--broken like rotten teeth,
and y'all grinnin' like Stepin' Fetchit, slitherin' away.

--Mona Lisa Saloy

Mona Lisa Saloy is associate professor of English and Founding Director of Creative Writing at Dillard University, and Director of The Daniel C. Thompson/Samuel Du Bois Honors Program. Saloy's first collection of verse, *Red Beans and Ricely Yours: Poems*, won the T. S. Eliot Prize in poetry for 2005, published by Truman State University Press. She has also won fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities and from the United Negro College Fund/Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Her poems have appeared in anthologies, magazines, journals, and film. She received her PhD in English and MFA in creative writing from Louisiana State University and her MA in creative writing and English from San Francisco State University. Displaced by Hurricane Katrina, Saloy was a visiting associate professor of English and creative writing at the University of Washington for the 2005/2006 academic year.



Upbringing: The Pedagogy of East Boogie* (Three Kwansabas)

#1 Grandmother's Soulversity

whether churnin' lye into soap, earth into
produce, clabber into butter, sass into whippin,
snow into ice cream, sermon into succor,
hair into plait, body-ash into glisten,
theory into thimble, remnant into quilt, kitchen
into sparkle—or what-not into feast—
her edict was, “get some learnin', boy.”

#2 School of Weavin' & Bobbin'

every boy/girl a garden of dreams:
croonin' like Nat Cole, Eckstine, Johnny Ace;
chirpin'/beltin' like Billie, Ella, Big Mama;
bobbin'/jabbin' like Brown Bomber; slinkin' silkily
like Eartha & Katherine; coppin' cool like
Miles; swingin' low like dues howlin' 'neath
Wolf's blues, like granma's chariot—home-gone.

#3 Academy of Low Heights

swingin' low—fetchin' sky; saddlin' moanin' noon's
evening sun; ark-eye-texts of black
studies ridin' hair trigger of double-being
into an all-night palaver & hearin'
blood-shot sages scream, "we're schizophrenics with
split personalities!"; mountin' new *courses*--ala Olaudah,
Sojourner & Malcolm--back to East Boogie.

*Nickname for East St. Louis, Illinois
ebr @ 11 15 2008

Eugene B. Redmond, poet laureate of East St. Louis, IL (1976), meshes "Arkansippi" sounds/beliefs with formal training. Professorships (Oberlin College, Cal State U-Sacramento, SIUE), books (*The Eye in the Ceiling*), fellowships (NEA), journals (*Drumvoices Revue*), and a Pushcart Prize led to retirement in 2007. Email: eredmon@siue.edu; Website: www.siue/ENGLISH/dvr/



Mixed Love

Dedicated to Lovell Mixon



Lovell Mixon (left) smoked 4 pigs in Oakland shootout a short time after they killed Oscar Grant. Fritz Pointer (above) said the suffering people of Oakland enjoyed an obscene pride in his actions after decades of police abuse, in spite of the Black Panther Party's valiant resistance during the 60s.

You had an *avtomat Kalashnikova* of '47?
Assembled in minutes by children in the old USSR.
Kalashnikov and Heston are beaming with obscene pride:
 In the efficiency of the automatic
In the accuracy of your aim
In hitting the Pig's Eye
Four in a row!
You could have surrendered like Amadou Diallo
Raised your hands
Taken sixteen

And nothing in your “cold dead hands”
Except a wallet!
Or, heard the bells, like Sean Bell
“Made it to church on time”
Your wedding day now a funeral day
And nothing in your “cold dead hands”
Nothing!
Or, lay face down, a boot on your neck like Oscar Grant
And get it in the back
And be blamed
And nothing in your “cold dead hands”
Cuffed in steel.
You had an AK-47!
Easy to use
Easy to transport
Easy to kill
The AK has caused more deaths
Than Hiroshima
Than Nagasaki
Than HIV
Than the bubonic plague
Than malaria
Than all earthquakes
Than anything organic or synthetic, metal or chemical.
Kalashnikov’s automatic:
Won’t jam when dirty or wet
Has a feather trigger a child can pull
“Can turn a monkey into a combatant”
There’s pride in that...obscene pride
In the accuracy of a killer
The rehearsal on man-sized silhouettes
Dark shadows
The outline of a person
The will to kill.
The vulgar pride in:
The ABM
The drone
The nuke.
Hitting the pig’s eye.
All you needed was the will

The will to kill
The will to be free
Simply...Free
Not ideologically
Not intellectually
Not romantically
Not consciously
Not politically
Like Nat Turner
Like Malcolm X
Like Steve Biko
Like Fred Hampton
Not like that...simply
Not behind bars.
The repulsive, indecent respect some pay:
To the monsters created
To vindicate a people's historical abuse
Surprised that the monsters
Dutifully designed
Consciously created
Meticulously molded
For the cities of Iraq
For the cities of Afghanistan
For the cities of America
Frankensteinesque
Should act other than
Monsteresque.
Is Fanon correct?
Is such violence redemptive?
Is it cleansing?
Is it a rebirth?
For a microsecond
For this generation
The score was evened.
Four pig's eyes in a row!
Wow! How sick! This obscene pride.

--Fritz Pointer

17 April 2009

Fritz Pointer, Oakland, California, is a graduate of Creighton University (B.A.-English) UCLA (M.A. - African History) and U. of Wisconsin, Madison (M.A. - African Literature). He has taught African Studies and English at Merritt College (Oakland, CA.) Golden Gate University (San Francisco, CA) Humboldt State University (Arcata, CA.), Luther College (Decorah, Iowa), and is presently Chair of the Department of English at Contra Costa College (San Pablo, CA). He is the author of "A Passion to Liberate: Alex LaGuma's South Africa." His wife, Liziwe Kunene, born in Cape Town, South Africa, is Dean of Students at California College of Arts and Crafts (Oakland, CA). They have four children: Thiyane, Somori, Nandi and Shegun. Two granddaughters: Jadah (14) and Selina (2). His sisters are the internationally known Pointer Sisters. His brother, Aaron, is the last professional baseball player to hit .400 for a season and a retired NFL official.

Childhood Revisited

The collective voices of warnings, hear me right.
Too many grapes, purple stains on my pink shirt
My mother doesn't scold. She washes my hands in the kitchen sink
Asks me to put cans on the pantry shelf.

 This is my job now that I am four-years-old and ready to go to school.
First day of school
I am excited to be in kindergarten
And not have to watch out of the window as my two older sisters leave me behind.
When mother walks me into the room with the yellow and blue walls
I almost want to cry, but I don't.
I see so many toys and things to do.
It's just me at first, then other children wonder in.

 "Hey, that toy is just for boys."
I am told to get down and not play with the pretend horse in the corner.
I dismount and as a hay-colored hair boy pushes it across the room, I am thinking
It is a stupid horse anyway, didn't even move on its own
Not like our red hobbyhorse that I can ride whenever I want.

I look around for something else to do
 Girls are gathering in the make-believe kitchen
 I want to play, but they seem too busy to see me
 Even though I know how to play grown-up and house
 And have a "real china" tea set at home

 This the second time that I want to be invisible.
 I wonder to the reading corner and pull a not-too-new book off the shelf,
 start flipping pages, a blur of tears well up in my eyes.
A tall brown-haired lady says it's time to begin our day, put playthings away
sit at the funny shaped tables, fold our hands
She tells us her name, it's long. She asks us to repeat three times so we will remember.
She sings when she talks and I think I'm going to like kindergarten after all.

 For two days, I didn't mind that no one sits near me at music time
 Or chooses me as line partner when
 we walk down the corridor to the lavatory.
 But on the third day, we play "little sally walker" and the children on both sides
 of me have to be told to hold my hand
 It is then I realize that no one else looks like me
 And I want to be invisible once again.

Among the Missing

Girl who shares my name is missing.
The seventeen-year-old child of some mother
in anguish of not knowing
did not come home and now her picture hangs on this wall
with a dozen other pictures of missing.

I hear the voices speaking our name into the largeness
of what we don't understand. They call out
Daughter, where are you?
They are prepared to keep calling
until you answer.

I was wake with worry
and our only connection is this name
somehow thrown away on a snow drift in the deep of winter,
frozen solid in the seasonably below cold nights. If you were
my child, I'd check your room for drafts,

wrap an extra blanket over
your body just covering your head and the mass of hair on your pillow,
I'd watch you readjust in your bed; then turn to do the same
for your sister who already
anticipates our ritual.

If you were my child, how long ago would you have stopped
playing hide-and-seek and catch-me games? Would I
have been the watchful eyed mother on a bench at the edge
of the playground listening for the all-e-all-e-in-come-free chant
as the game ended? Or was I never there?

If you were my child, would I see signs of what pushed you
away or would my hold to a dream promised be illusions
blurring our vision of tomorrow will be different?
When would I have noticed you had already been taken
to another place of shelter in this storm?

Where do you look for missing and lost things?
This is not like the glasses that I retrace my steps through lived in
rooms and find carelessly placed next to today's mail.
This is not like the keys or cell phone that is swallowed
daily into the vast inside carry all bag.

You don't lose a whole person. Do you?
Daughter, can you hear us calling your name?
Name in the prayer box on the alter—for twenty-two weeks a fresh
piece of paper is placed in the box. We pray,
We wait to find you among the missing.

--Gwendolyn A. Mitchell

Gwendolyn A. Mitchell, poet and editor, is the author of *Veins and Rivers* and *House of Women* and the co-editor of two anthologies of literary work. She received her MFA in English from Pennsylvania State University. Ms. Mitchell resides in Chicago, where she serves as Senior Editor for Third World Press. Email: Gwenmtwp@aol.com Mailing Address: 12754 South Union Avenue, Chicago, IL 60628



Farewell... to Lagos

Mother,
Leaving assumes the hope
This night is too long
I do not know when the sun will rise
But the sea breeze, the sea breeze being so
Friendly came to tell me always to stay a few day

I have to rush to the top hill
Do not mind the heavy night
I have torchlight I can trace my dream
If moon too refuses to come

The drum is rolling already, the drum
That dance tomorrow around is rolling already
I have to rush there and pick my part

Do not say I should stay till dawn; dawn
Cannot come rain has covered the heaven
O' home, give me no pet; not this time
I will be happy without you

Father,
I'm glad I would never part a tear
No time for tear either
My feet is out there waiting for the journey
O' brother – sister, friend of my green day
None knew you but to love you

--Felix Orisewike Sylvanus

Felix Orisewike Sylvanus lives in Lagos, Nigeria, and is currently running a degree programme in English language. He was born in Akure, Ondo State of Nigeria in 1982 and has written two anthologies of poetry awaiting publication, and he also writes in other genres of literature.



ChickenBones Express

There was a time,
not long ago
in blue memory
of my journey
north—1960, I was 12.
That fall I'd be in 8th grade
at the new black high school,
Central. There was no seat
in the front of the bus
or the back making a trail
to Baltimore, to Freemont Avenue
to Cherry Hill, where my other
folks lived. It was still dark
that morning when Mama told
me to be a good boy
and handed me my bag,
food she cooked for me.
Daddy waited beside
the road with me. Then I
was alone standing in
the aisle all the way
to Petersburg and its colored
waiting room. I did not get
off the bus at Richmond or DC.

Five hours from Jerusalem, I
was downtown on Fayette
and Howard. The streetcar ran
on the wire above. The crowded
streets pushed me along to
a bluesman in dark glasses
playing his guitar with a troubled
mind like a prayer at midnight.

8 June 2010

A Poem for Valentine's Day

I have grown old: I have no lover
for yellow roses or white gardenias.
Dogs are barking loneliness
in my neighbor's yard. My cat
is napping on my bed. Who
says a man can't love a woman
without *Cialis*? Is love only
hydraulics and pounding thighs?

In cold night silence as Venus
beds down in the dark
woods I can stoke a heater
to burn logs hotly, hold a woman
warmly in my arms: fingers, lips
tongues wander into pits, cavities
caress and sound water falls in
satisfying regions of her universe.

When dogs fill woods with barks,
breaking night silence, where is
Venus, vibrant vixen of evening
couch dramas, whispered
fictions set aside for wild women?
I flip memory pages—streets,
numbers, scattered leaves, horizon
to horizon—she's lost in passing mist.

14 February 2009

Women with Men in Prison

He's not in Abu Ghraib a black bag
over his head—his genitals exposed
on film by a mocking female GI.
He's not at Guantanamo detained by
top-secret Pentagon memos—tortured
by water & bright lights around the clock.
No, he's down on Southampton's County Farm
on a work detail in Boykins to pay
thirty dollars a week for room & board.
His woman can visit him for two hours
on Sundays & receive his telephone
calls if he gets the blues thinking she's not
alone. He didn't get 25 to life.
In six months she's planning to be his wife.

31 August 2006

Shine on Silver Moon

through dark pines. The stars
are not so bright
in this milky white haze.
We are alone
with the blue ache
of naked limb shadows
on burnt grass in this March
forest—choruses of insects,
tree frogs, night birds sing
purple silence—all out of tune.

Winter in these woods
will reach down like winter
icicles in the wails of hounds
in chilled air. As flower
bushes bud, as turned soil
grows hot under shoeless feet
as brown leaves are wind-blown
across lawns and highways
the spindly limbs of gloom
will not leaf into a portal of joy.

Far Away from Bliss

The full moon is soft
around the edges:
this white indefiniteness stretches
out across the purple heavens:
there's no clarity of starlight:
no confidence which turn is right.
The peoples of these swamps
are sad with backwater misery.

A cat listens to the silence:
a train blows at the crossroads
rushing to port; an old man
with ax splinters boards
on a chopping block
for the morning chill to come:
a bird awakes with a shrill cry
swoops down: a cat pounces

ready for crisis and opportunity:
silence returns: an aging black woman
with family sleeps in a parked car,
pleads for a kitchen
and a bathroom: a young Hispanic
college student who works
at MacDonald's, his fourth year,
is touched by the magic hand of fate.

Thank God and the president:
all are not dead like 39 in cemeteries.
In this warm mist three young deer
in the garden munch moonlight and silence.
Our pains are softened by prayers,
hope, and grace mounted up: from the ruins
many will reach Obama heights, riding
on the uplifting coattails of vultures.

--Rudolph Lewis

Rudolph Lewis is an educator who has taught at several universities including the University of New Orleans (UNO) and Coppin State in Baltimore. He has also been a librarian at Enoch Pratt in Baltimore, St. Mary's Seminary and University, and at City College High School in Baltimore. He is also the founding editor of the popular *ChickenBones: A Journal for Literary & Artistic African-American Themes*, which has been online since 2001 with both a national and an international audience.



Life Expectancy

for Abdul

Daryl Grigsby's question: is 55 old age for a Black man?

Start with this

there are no fritters on the burner
there will never be smells
ripe and holy as Sunday morning
corn muffins, kidney stew, tomato slices
on a Mingus morning

there will never be you on the porch
a fly brush of early red sun against your locs
the rustle of crisp newspapers
quicksilver like an Eagle's span of wings
as you pause to peer through an October sky
just a grinnin

you should not have come back
you said it yourself
there was still the itch of soda lake
beneath the thin cloth of your shirt
in your sweat
you missed the coffee trees and waterfalls
the wetlands and the women

you were no romantic though
said you often heard the booming blue wail
days, nights, years of a people's torture
riding the Pangani coast
ghost children in the salt pans
blood curdling on cliffs
fringing palms and waterbirds
still you missed Tanzania
you had found a place there
some peace

there will never be a memory
like a snapped cord
that says I could have been with you then
me with my small babies
and younger than you
my own impossible struggles and plans

could have been the cigarettes you smoked
or some dream flamed to ashes
black man you were trying so hard
only wanting a little kindness in your life
a house of certain meal and brick
cashmere horns in the midnight hour

at 45 your legs wobbled
and yellow diamonds shattered to dust
underneath black and white keys
that ushered in your last call
again the heart not outdistancing the heart
the medicine beyond the grasp
the elder women gathering to bury another son

and I don't know if I could have turned your pain
into something we could have lived with
because there was one more call
and then no more
and when I heard
some part of life slipped dark and heavy from my soul

start with this
there is comfort in the way of things
hiccups of breath then quiet then breath again
Abdul, you are in the marketplace
you are wind and color
dancing with the women of Mulalaⁱ

Torrent Called Katrina

Sometimes this world seems a supine staircase of inevitable trials
as limitless and unfathomed as those torrents called Katrina were once
all consuming and devoid of affirming geysers; fluidly serene muse
and the long liquid play of copious reward

*The rains came without filling wishes or bowls
or the belly of this extravagantly dark earth*

They reached for dry/ for light/ and their hands wrinkled like chittlins
in the sour vinegar of flood/ in an unauthorized baptism
pronounced by a people's hastened mortality/commandeered by ravines of flesh
running to underworlds/The floating of dark bodies like rancid debris
like human rafts of desecration in profaned lagoons/So drifted my sister
over there my son/my lover/ my brother
my daughter/ my neighbour/my kind

Assemblies of inflatable lungs/choked out of recognizable life/a rebel's
reticence to ceasing/ as they cried out to canoes of mercy/rowed through canals
of men with guns/as they cried out to the helicopters/ hovering ominously
above their beloved communities/as they cried out save my grandmother
my uncle/my auntie/ my babies/The repressors of their very movement
they implored to find a human ringer/in the biliously murderous waters
and even further appeals/ to secret emissaries authoring this snivelling siege
of decriminalized killing/they resigned also to cry mercy

Displaced and secreted away *sub rosa*/ to encampments of unspeakable agendas
Spirits upon high burst into conflagrated chorales/ the global conscience spins
in mass ascensions of unfettered souls/ pin pricks of moans like slave violins
distilled through the marrow of illumined rebirth/ and fated continuums
refusing

Believe some when they say/the rains will fall and they shall come the rivers
Believe others still of earth-song/breath and human composition
that in the time of the living/we will have known
the remains of gutless tyrants/in the pyres of rejuvenated rainbows
and mellifluous vamp of critical resistance
in the aromatic flow of our unwavering revolution
we will only recall their polluted stench/ ... less we forget.

At the Place de Negres

-for Deedra

I heard you praise there
and between sand and Atlantic gulf
silt settled on my eyelashes
fell into my eyes
and I and I
urgently blinded with colour
and seeing
beneath envelopes of colour
the feminine release
the rituals incanted
passing the misery
for a moment
and I and I
saw beneath colour
breadth of colour
obsidian beneath ivory
and I felt you dance there
in Congo Square
with the feminine
who squealed and hollered
and untied themselves
hip, abdomen,
breast, womb,
waist
rattled with scent
breaking bamboulasⁱⁱ
running with rivers and pigment
and you gathered up all that colour
and naturalness
to put on your canvas later
North of the French Quarter
your salutations of joy
hearkening, quickening medicine
laying warm stones and mirrors
as I walk a windy High Street
in search of toothpaste and fish

Pokeno

-- for my grandmother Mae Kennedy and her Club Women

Nana played Pokeno with real women
There was grand mystique in the Queens
kings, spades, jacks, hearts, diamonds, and clubs
drawn on big square cards
and the plastic discs chips
in blues and reds, blacks and whites-
the shuffling and turning of cards-
the stacking and falling of colored discs-
and the call

“tray of diamonds...Pokeno!”

The women, the chicken, the china
the water and red punch in crystal cups
the strong hot coffee steamers chugging upwind
the little taste of something forbidden
“gon and take it, it won’t hurt ya none”

The dead sons the battered daughters
The dark people’s plight
the mastectomies, the lost wombs
the refusals
“cause they experiment on Negroes in that hospital”

The murdered sons, the lost weddings
the remains of asparagus spears
the dead daughters
the mousy winters
the hungry strangers

the peppermint candy for the knee highs
the fires
the water rising in the basement
the burnt offerings at the joker’s table-
the one who filled you with all the babies

The autographed picture of the Nat King Cole Trio

the knick knack table
the talcum powdered sheets
while all that you cleave is advancing sleep
beneath a sky of tin stars and brown nipples
a house standing upright
a house on its brain
the December women jeweled with sorority
doused with Emeraude played on through

Kamaria Muntu is an African-American Mother, Poet and Writer with extensive experience as a political organizer throughout the Southern United States. Her writing experience includes plays, essays, press releases, research reports and grants. Her activist experience focuses Black liberation and human rights. She recently founded her own production company; Rightimb films. Muntu currently resides in the United Kingdom.

Reference notes on the above: women of *Mulala*: Tanzanian market women; *Bamboula*: a kind of drum made from a section of giant bamboo with skin stretched over the ends. It is also a secular dance accompanied by the drums. Both were brought to the Americas (notably New Orleans and the Virgin Islands) by enslaved Africans.



Bad and Stuff

I'm taking everything
and that's not enough

I'm taking everything
and that's not enough

And he said...

I'm taking everything
because I'm bad and stuff
Yes
I'm taking everything
because I'm bad and stuff

And we called it
subprime
subprime
subprime
subprime

Because
I'm taking everything
and that's not enough

I'm taking everything
and that's not enough

I'm taking it all
because I'm bad and stuff
I'm taking it all
because I'm bad and stuff
That's subprime subprime subprime
Subprime...

-- Ed Bullins 10.09.2008

Ed Bullins is one of the founders of the Black Arts Movement. He and Marvin X founded Black Arts West theatre in the Fillmore district of San Francisco in 1966. Eldridge Cleaver, Marvin X, Ethna Wyatt and Ed Bullins established the Black House, a political/cultural center in San Francisco, 1967. He fled to Harlem after the fall of Black House and worked at the New Lafayette Theatre. He was playwright in residence and editor of *Black Theatre Magazine*. Ed is one of America's most prolific playwrights. He is currently the Distinguished Artist-in-Residence at Northeastern University in Boston. He earned his MFA in playwriting from San Francisco State University in California. His teaching interests include playwriting, scriptwriting, Afro-American literature, Black History, acting, and directing, and African-American Cultural expressions, i.e. music, film, thought. He is author of eight books, including *Five Plays By Ed Bullins*, *The Duplex*, *The Hungered One*, *Four Dynamite Plays*, *The Theme is Blackness*, and *The Reluctant Rapist*. His latest book is *ED BULLINS: 12 Plays and Selected Writings* (U of Michigan Press, 2006). Among his awards and grants is three Obie Awards, four Rockefeller Foundation Playwriting Grants, two Guffenheim Playwriting Fellowships, an NEA Playwriting Grant, the AUDELCO Award, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best American Play of 1974 -75, the National Black Theatre Festival Living Legend Award, and the OTTO Award in 2004.

Aborted Freedom in a Jar

Conceived in half love
an almost formed ideal
floats in chemicals
of supposed preservation.
No smell of death
stilled movement of life.
Bulge the closed lids
that see nothing.
Fist in liquid air,
armed in Amandla stance.
Just nullness,
as the voice mouths a mute scream.

--Mabel Mnensa

Begging for Knowledge

Dressed in tatters,
ravaging through the gutters,
surrounded by intellectual poverty
he searches for more.
Finding a world that cares only for texting
he turns to me,
eyes bloodshot,
drown me in their sorrow.

His PS2 stained hands, open
shaking from their starving reality
beg me :
“please ma’am, one verse”
I give him a verse, just one
which he devours greedily
then looks at me
for more.

-- Mabel Mnensa

Mamlambo's Helping Hand

Deep down
at the bottom of the motherland
it rolls out its hand
and says devil I be
rolls out the woman I should be,
canned and proud.
Rips out my heart that dare protest
the arms, legs that dare contest
what remains of me
is little grains so close to the sea
build into female perfect humility.

A big vast emptiness
where my heart once was
I try to find the answer to my sores
but the great Mamlambo roars over my calls
and sings
“hush little one now gone are your flaws
now we can find you a man
to feel up all your holes”.

--Mabel Mnensa

Mabel Mnensa (a resident of South Africa) is interested in the inherent power that poetry, especially performance poetry, has. Her masters dissertation, *Speaking Out: African Orality and Post-Colonial Preoccupations in Selected Examples of Contemporary Performance Poetry* examines the common preoccupations that emerge in South African and American poetry. Sarah Jones and Gil Scott-Heron are among the American poets whose work she explored in a paper she completed last year.

Modern Medicine

See blood posted up over there
In the shadow of that black block.
Up way past the hour of reason?
Mouth full of cracked, small stars?
That's the doctor.
See sis braced 'tween streetlight
And hydrant, fingers chapped round that burnt butt,
Hawking fifteen minutes of her burnt butt?
For anyone with a few dollars,
And nowhere to spend it-
She heals.
See, it comes down to that at this hour in this
Dark slice of city, this apothecary
Of street salve and mood medicine.
This is for the lifers,
The sho nuff sick.
Prescriptions 'round these parts don't come
Prescribed
But they efficient.
Guaranteed to make the pain go.

See, these two got fine brewed elixers
For every ache from your head to your ass.
Bring your sick and your wallet
And get to know the place.
Sit a spell.
See those little bags rocked up under his tongue?
Cook'em up:
The result of hours of alchemy.
Dreams, baking powder, and nightly news churned in a scum pot.
Kept in the mouth for quick release.

Just like what that girl got up
under that dress. When she opens up
What she been tryin' to keep closed,
The whole day melts
Into those Washingtons and Jacksons
There in your pocket.
So that you can't wait till it's away from you.
She takes your money,
Because you ask.

See, her job is taking what you don't want
In exchange for what most people ain't willing to give.
She's generous with her healing.
Gives it out as long as there are people
Who possess the talent
To turn their hurt green.

Cliff

A name meant for falling from things
He succeeds, at throwing
His life into ravines.
It bobs and sinks, waterlogged
but doesn't quite drown.

I'm watching you now,
Panther pacing the small living room
Screaming and crying into the receiver
Fighting back the tears and failing
Body cocked like a hammer
Your fist bullets out toward the lit blunt
Man, please let me hit that.

Then talking through smoke-
What the fuck man?!
For this weed man?!
How the fuck they shoot him over this weed man?!

Fighting back the tears
And falling

Another gone
Another reason to reconsider
Your own quick tumbling.

I'm telling you cat, straight up,
Your life should have come with guard rails
And a warning, and some kind of caution.
Something about standing too close
To your name's own edge.

--Kwan Booth
(Oakland, California)



Ancestral Speak

Chile, you do what you s'pose too
Pay dem no nebah mine, you hearah
Deys ribbon ain't yo's to have ebah
Yo' tongus goes back befoe' deys do
Just you study yo passion, you light
Shine baby, come time it'll be alright
You listen careful now, we ain't dead.

Fly baby, go on, you know how
Stop fretin' you mine wid dey trouble
We watchin' ova you whilst you sleep
Tell yo stories to ones that need
Leave dem no accounts to they failins
We see they got you to walk
Carry some soda for that acid stomach

Tureeda Mikell – Djeli Musa is a story medicine woman with 35 years combined experience in nursing, language science, songwriting and the paranormal synchronistic occurrence; she weaves blood memory to mend our story. Tureedas' stories reveal then seal to heal. An activist for holism, her works have been found in South Africa, Japan, and Sweden. Recent publications, 'Temba Tupu', Africa World Press, and 'Sparrows Eye', Bay Area Writing Project, Digital Paper, U.C. Berkeley.

