

Africalogist

Melodye Micëre Van Putten



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Melodye Micëre Van Putten (melodyevanputten@aol.com) has been an education consultant, writer and lecturer for nearly thirty years. Educated at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania wherein she was a Presidential Fellow. She received a B.A. and M.A., and has completed course work for a doctorate in African and African American Studies, and she is certified in Multicultural Training and Education from the School of Social Work at Temple University.

Van Putten has lectured in universities, consulted to school districts, conducted professional development for teachers and parent workshops, and designed and implemented Rites of Passage programs and community education programs for churches and civic organizations.

Van Putten has researched and written two comprehensive teacher manuals and over two-dozen workbooks for children and adults. She has worked as a talk radio commentator and a nationally syndicated columnist, and has been featured on numerous radio and television broadcasts. Additionally, she is a published, award-winning poet. As President and CEO of Black History Works, Inc., Van Putten is the creator and founder of a number of programs that promote knowledge of Black history and culture. Black History Workshops for Children (BHWC), known in Bermuda as Ashay: Rites of Passage, is a character education program designed to expose children, ages 5-16, to the history and culture of global African peoples with the goal of developing self-esteem, motivation and pride. The program was recently redesigned to be independently implemented as Ashay Clubs. Four separate Ashay Clubs were initiated by parents and summer camps in Bermuda in 2014. The Ashay Teen Summer Institute for teenagers encourages self-examination with a focus on values, goals and plans towards achievement. Ashay Babies commenced in the fall of 2015 for grandparents and their grandchildren ages 4 to 8, while Ashay University has provided university-level adult education classes for busy professionals since 2013 and is held in two locations - the Bermuda National Library and the North Village Community Center.

Van Putten served as curriculum specialist with Khepera Charter School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania from 2010 to 2012. In consultation with teachers, she created an African-centered social studies curriculum for grades K-6, meeting the Pennsylvania Curriculum Standards while establishing African-Centered Curriculum Standards. She also provided a series of teacher professional development sessions via her Ashay Training Manual for Teachers of African Centered Education. Written to fill the gaps in teacher training, the manual facilitates effective teacher implementation of a culturally-relevant curriculum. Black History Workshops for Children and Van Putten have been nationally recognized with various academic and civic awards and citations. In 1989 TIME Magazine named her a "Rising Star." Other honors include Outstanding Young Woman of America (1990), the National Council of Black Studies (1991), and the NAACP Meritorious Service Award (1991). Citations include the Pennsylvania House of Representatives (1989, 2001, 2006), the Pennsylvania Senate (1989), and the City Council of Philadelphia (1996, 2001, 2006). In 1996 and 2001, the Mayor of Philadelphia honored her work by decreeing, "Black History Workshops for Children Day in the City of Philadelphia."

In 2014 Van Putten was honored with having her image placed on the Bermuda National Library's READ poster series. In 1997 Van Putten was a featured speaker at the Million Woman March in Philadelphia.

In 2001 she accepted an invitation from Dr. Nontombi Naomi Tutu, daughter of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, to participate in a Women's Retreat in South Africa. In 2002, 2004 and 2010, her work promoting Bermudian history and culture was recognized by Bermuda's House of Parliament. In 2009 Van Putten was invited to present at a Student Summit at the University of Dar es Salaam in The Republic of Tanzania, sponsored by the African Diaspora Heritage Trail Conference, where her African Foundation Timeline presentation garnered a standing ovation. In 2001 Mrs. Van Putten took leave from her work in the United States to provide a one-year consultancy to the Ministry of Education in Bermuda, serving as Education Officer, Social Studies. In that capacity she was responsible for managing the implementation of the social studies program for grades K-12 for the public school system of Bermuda. She was also responsible for re-writing the social studies curriculum and providing teacher training to emphasize Bermudian Black history.

Her work with filmmaker Errol Williams resulted in a re-edit of his definitive film, *When Voices Rise... Dismantling Segregation in a Polite Society*, creating a school version and teacher study guide. Additionally, she has been an adjunct professor at Johnson C. Smith University (NC), Winthrop University (SC), Temple University and Pierce College (PA). She has also been a keynote speaker and instructor at Bermuda College, and a speaker and workshop facilitator at the Women of Color Conference at the University of North Texas for eight of its ten years. Her "Educator-in-Residence" programs include professional development sessions for teachers, parent workshops, and assembly programs for students. The program has been conducted in schools in Charlotte, NC, West Palm Beach, FL, and Milwaukee, WI, among others. In 2008, after a week-long residency, the Ravenswood School District of Palo Alto, California, called Van Putten, "...a true champion of children and the learning process."

Through her poetry, Van Putten continues her work of raising consciousness. Her most recent book, *Rightings Arousing Conscious Empowerment – R A C E: Poetry in the BLACK*, is a compilation of race consciousness poetry; Dr. David Hall, President of the University of the Virgin Islands, St. Thomas, wrote the Foreword. He writes, "...RACE is a living testament that creative ideas and poetic resistance born centuries ago and nurtured in the veins of generations of cultural keepers, are still alive in the 21st century. ...Melodye Micëre Van Putten has eloquently demanded that we remember the struggle that ushered in our present reality, and embrace the challenges that speak to loudly to us today."

More Sacred Thoughts: Standing in The Light (2014), is a continuation of *Sacred Thoughts: God Is The Light... and The Light Is All There Is* (2011), an award-winning finalist in the National Best Books Award for Prayers and Devotions (2013, USA).

It was reviewed Dr. Nontombi Naomi Tutu, who noted, “The poems serve to inspire, to comfort, to encourage.” Both books were published by Kephra Publications.

Another book, *Soul Poems: Life as Fertile Ground*, published by The Elevator Group (2009), was reviewed by the celebrated poet and founder of Third World Press, Dr. Haki R. Madhubuti. He wrote, “Melodye Micère speaks with a voice of authority and caring . . . This book is refreshing, thoughtful and welcoming.” Van Putten’s book, *Obamatyme: Election Poetry*, also published by the Elevator Group, chronicled the election of President Barack Obama, and won the National Best Books Award for Urban Poetry (2009, USA). It was reviewed by Dr. Cornel West who penned, “Melodye Micère Van Putten is a talented poet whose love for truth and justice is quite evident in *Obamatyme*.”

Van Putten’s insightfully provocative book, *Healing History: Reflections on Race and Forgiveness in Prose and Poetry*, another Kephra Publications title, was chosen as the inaugural book club selection at the Bermuda National Library (2013). A documentary film by Kristin Alexander and MiddleWay Media on Van Putten’s work in education and performance poetry takes its title from this book. The film, *Healing History: The Documentary* is currently on the film festival circuit and has been well received by audiences attending the Bermuda International Film Festival, the Africa World Documentary Film Festival (St. Louis, Cameroon), the Charlotte Black Film Festival and the International Pan African Film Festival (Cannes, France).

Van Putten’s “poetic performance lectures” have been well received. Organizers of the 2009 “Thank You Rosa Parks” Celebration in New Haven, CT, wrote, “. . .you marvelously weaved poetry, history and contemporary issues together producing a presentation full of history in context . . . thought-provoking and entertaining.” She also composes and delivers stirring poetic libations at various national and international cultural events, including the African Diaspora Heritage Trail Conference (Bermuda, The Bahamas), the Association for Black Cultural Centers, the National Council of Black Studies, and Sister Sojourners’ Retreat (South Africa).

Van Putten is married to Bermudian W. Carvel Van Putten, and divides her time between Philadelphia and Bermuda. Believing that she is living her divinely ordered purpose, she says of herself – “I am a passionate, African-centered educator and poet, working on behalf of African people worldwide, to learn and understand what I call the lessons of empowerment.” These lessons emanate from our global African history and culture, struggles and achievements, and the shared destiny we have in the twenty-first century to raise from the ashes of a painful recent history and reclaim the glory of our ancient past. Her work is a journey that has taken her all over the United States and to countries in Africa and the Caribbean. Writing is her muse; teaching, her reason for being on the planet. Hence, her desire is to be of service, and to create programs and poetry that educate, empower and heal.

Ashay! It is good!