

# Focus 1989



# Focus 1989

The Spelman College Literary Magazine

A Spectrum of Sisterhood,  
Self-Love and Black Genius



## Acknowledgements

In the making of **Focus 1989**, we have learned the value of dedication. Despite all obstacles, we have found that it is possible to transcend all boundaries. We send this edition of **Focus** to the Spelman family and the world, with the knowledge and pride that it is a worthy and beautiful representation of not only Spelman women, but all women.

To:

**Dr. Anne Bradford-Warner,**

Whew! What would we have done without your tireless dedication, your encouraging smiles and creative energy? Thank you is not enough, but know that we love you a great deal.

**Dean Freddy Hill,**

who gave us a light at the end of our tunnel. We are grateful for your belief in **Focus** and your excellent advice.

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**All of the 'Sistas' who submitted a piece of themselves,**

thank you for sharing your creativity with the Spelman family. Continue to be strong writers and revolutionary thinkers. This world desperately needs your power and passion.

**This issue is dedicated to the community of readers and writers.**

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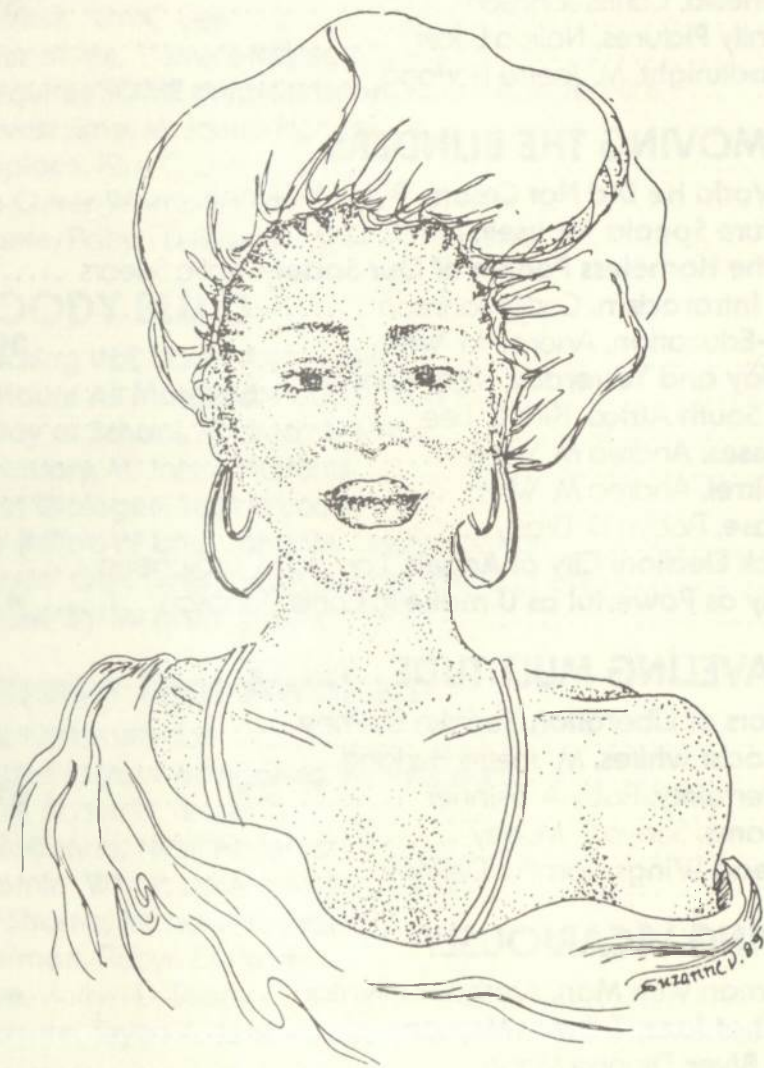
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# Friendship

We have been planted in mother earth, reborn as the roots of trees and together we grow, stand tall and unconquerable in our strength-diversity as black women. and as our leaves live and die (beautifully) as they must, we are constantly being reborn in our friendship, constantly gathering the strength to survive as many winds try to uproot us.

you are my **strength**. when i find myself giving up, i see you behind me. you are my shadow, constantly a protective shelter—bending in the same direction. as the sun descends, we inevitably merge into one-soul support.

you freed me from emotional bondage. you alone held the key to the shackles incarcerating my soul and mind. you graciously accepted me back—well, then things didn't go very well. in our solitude we grew emotionally and understood that freedom is not individuality.

you are my sister. you are my friend. you are my everything. together we are the musical vibrations of the soul. you wrapped those strong, black arms around me and showed me that black women can harmonize on a spiritual and emotional beat.

i found a home in our friendship, cozy and familiar. whenever i was homeless, loveless, shelterless and vulnerable, i found a home full of warmth in which i could find solace and strength.

in you i found the goodness of human nature. i am always wary of taking too much from you and not giving enough. you are sweet-pure cane sugar-cotton candy-sweet. happiness is your smile. precious is your friendship to me.

you are so-very important to me. i never want to lose sight of the specialness of our friendship. sometimes, obstacles are hard to overcome. then i realize that friendship is commitment. it's responsibility, it's me--it's you--together making sense of our existence. it's painful to acknowledge that i need-depend on you for my happiness. it scares me sometimes that i love you because i realize the branches are forever entwined.

—Andrea M. Wren

\*for a. d. k. m. m. s. t. w. who are my constant "shadows."



## Zenith

Once I sought strength.  
I wanted to be a STRONG BLACK WOMAN.  
I walked the Nile with Cleoparra.  
I followed the North Star with Harrier Tubman.  
I spoke the words of Shirley Chisholm  
and  
I sweated and slaved in the fields  
Next to the men like my mothers  
Before me.  
My soft, tender skin grew hard and right.  
My soul grew black as the moonless night  
and  
I was proud.  
Then I sought love.  
I wanted a STRONG BLACK FAMILY.  
I sat in the lecture hall of W. E. .B. DuBois.  
I organized with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
I campaigned with the Reverend Jesse Jackson  
and  
I met my STRONG BLACK MAN  
To whom I gave my heart, my soul, and my hand.  
But then,  
He turned my hard, right skin tender and soft.  
For then,  
As I lay with him I was, simply,  
a woman  
again  
and  
I am Proud.

—Sonya E. Murray

## Victims?

If I was raped tonight  
Who would care to help me fight?  
The wheels of justice would crush my toes  
Pointing to my habits, my provocative clothes.  
Say I asked for it and had it  
Many times before.  
Making me the criminal,  
Calling me a whore.  
Because I am a woman  
Who does not follow "status quo"  
I drink and smoke and cuss  
And go where the hell I wanna go!  
And though they seem to look at me  
They do not understand  
Because, the only definitions of "I"  
Are those given to me by man.  
And I am just a willing pawn  
An object made to turn him on.  
And when I succeed in what he assigned  
I am the guilty party.  
After all, he is only a man  
He's not responsible for his body.

—Kim C. Lee

## Color of Me

Beautiful woman of color, where does your beauty lie?  
Beyond a million twinkling stars in the deep ebony sky.  
Beautiful woman of color, from where have you come?  
From deepest darkest Africa in the wake of the morning sun.  
Beautiful woman of color, who are you to me?  
To you I bring the truth of the past, your African history.  
Beautiful woman of color, how much of you is in me?  
Every breath you take and the blood in your veins. This  
I know is true. For I am the struggle of the past as you  
are the hope of the future. In you is the spirit of a people  
who have overcome and will succeed. You are the fruit of  
Freedom's seed.

—T. Jivens-Mapson

## it requires **SOME** consideration

she kept it for three months. the whole time she rAlked about  
how miserable she was. "it's **B**een five weeks,"  
she'd say. "now it's been eight and a half." that  
ninth week is when she finally did it. it was  
somewhat **O**bvious that she  
had contemplated it fo**R** a long time.  
it may not have been the best thing for her to do,  
bu**T** it was her  
cho**l**ce—just  
One question—  
didn't she wo**N**der how the  
baby would feel?

—Karen Ann Jenkins

## harvest time

the cultivation of our  
long harvested friendship  
is without the balance of  
rain and sun.

already the words of the fruit we  
beared have been silenced and warped  
like an old woman whose fallen teeth  
have made her face wrinkled and sunken.  
our external nature, like worms and leeches,  
have made our substance rot.

and if we are not to face the grave truth  
in reaping what we sow,  
springtime will have to come  
again to save all the nourishment  
that is left of our once  
abundant and fertile crop.

—M. Joette Harland

## Fireplace

I lie down afront  
the fire. And, the heat warms  
My fancy. Sleep—my  
mouth opened. He comes inside  
my mind. And there plants his seed.

—Kim C. Lee

## The Other Woman

She reached out her hand,  
I had no choice.  
I had to grab it.  
Our lives depended on it.  
Not him.

—Kim C. Lee

## Asante

Think proud  
Black woman  
Do not let the web of ignorance tangle your  
dreams.

Be proud  
Daughter of Nzinga  
Do not sway in the winds of pettiness.

Stand proud  
Child of a heritage too deep, too powerful  
For non-believers to comprehend  
Be not blinded by the clouds of envy.

Have pride  
My Spelman sister  
For you are traveling along a path  
Marred by webs  
Haunted by winds  
Shrouded by clouds—  
Beneath which lies the beauty of  
Truth  
Many have sought  
But few  
have  
Found.

—Robyn D. Brady





## Cracking Up

First a smirk, then a grin—this of course, leads to a smile,  
which is followed by a snicker, which brings on a giggle—after  
which there is an awfully loud laugh and before you know it  
you're  
sitting in an insane asylum playing checkers with an old man—all  
because you wanted to have a little fun—————alone.

—Karen Ann Jenkins

.....**To Haunt All Mankind**.....

Luscious scents of man walk by.  
Tear-filled dreams adorn the sky.  
Intimate moments of love reborn,  
taunt the soul with complacent scorn.

Utopian thoughts engulf the mind.  
For truth and its harmony appease all mankind,  
and the tresses of realism create its walls,  
that reflect the light for which the being calls.

Immortal fears embellished with bliss,  
cause the creatures to seize love's wisdom amiss.  
For the love once sought, lies bellowed in doubt,  
and the pleasures of fate their souls are without.

The seasons move on with changes of days,  
but in mortal limbo the soul is caged.  
The sun shines fervently to ease the pain,  
yet the search for nonexistent love will always remain.

.....To Haunt All Mankind.....

—Ruby A. Skinner

# A Day At School

Go t' School  
Come Late  
Smoke Pot  
Drink Booze  
Ger High  
Fight Teach  
Bell Rings  
Open Door  
Gun Shot  
Brother's Dead  
School's Out

—Andrea M. Wren

## Sanctuary (especially for my friends who flee to drugs)

At one time i idolized all of u/now i  
can't get thru 'cause u left and took  
a trip 2 where your feet don't even have 2  
leave the ground/where i can't get inside  
2 where u envision liquid weed/where  
smiling faces bounce across the hood of  
the car/where i want 2 reach u but refuse  
2 submit 2 the confines of where u  
got away and locked yourselves  
in2 confinement.

—M. Joette Harland

## Short Dialogue

Do you think hell really has fire?

I think it's an abyss filled with flames

So hell is really hot?

No. The flames are as icy as glaciers; as  
cold as the souls and hearts of the devils

What color is it?

Sometimes, it is red, white and blue

—Nalida Lacer

## The Ballad of Little Johnnie

Little Johnnie in his coffin lay,  
Felled by a bullet that went astray,  
Felled by a bullet that went astray.

Mama warned him to be wary, but  
Little Johnnie was contrary,  
Little Johnnie was contrary.

One day playing in the field,  
Little Johnnie's fate was sealed,  
Little Johnnie's fate was sealed.

Caught in a drug deal gone sour,  
Johnnie saw his final hour,  
Johnnie saw his final hour.

Now blind to tears and wise to fears,  
Little Johnnie lay silenced for years,  
Little Johnnie lay silenced for years.

—Leisha Stewart

## Dancin' OUR Lives Away

I saw a paper cup dancin' across the streer today  
yeah, i was n dah gherro an' if it wuzn't  
a soul sistuh tellin' this story it wudda been suburbia  
but that's nor my rap fa now.  
Sad but true, you cain't even dance with the wind  
cain't trust nobody deze dayz  
b cuz sumthin' will make him turn 'gainst you lil'  
paper cup  
n u kin believe me cuz ah seent it wif mah own two  
eyes  
Ah warched as yo instinctive rhythms complimented yo  
expression  
ah guess we wuz boaf caught n the moment  
it all seems so simple at lease dar's dah way dey make it  
seem  
it wuz jus' dar cho partnah lef' u hangin'  
swept yo graceful passionate steps  
into dah gutter  
n wifour a second or backward glance  
it happens to the best of Us, believe me lil' cup  
an' u no fo an instant mah stomach felt that pitifall tharchu  
musta felt  
discomfort  
tension  
an' nervousness  
fo a moment ah wuz dere wircha  
but only fo a moment  
and then you were gone

—Lorena M. Craighead



## People try so hard

Laxatives—to get it all out

Vitamins—to get it all in

Calvin Klein—to be in

Liquid Paper—to cover it up

Xerox Copies—to do it again

Tammy Baker—try again

Exercise—to fill it all in

Rhinoplasty—to fix it all

Salary—to pay for it all

The Pill—to prevent it all

Makeovers—to help it all out

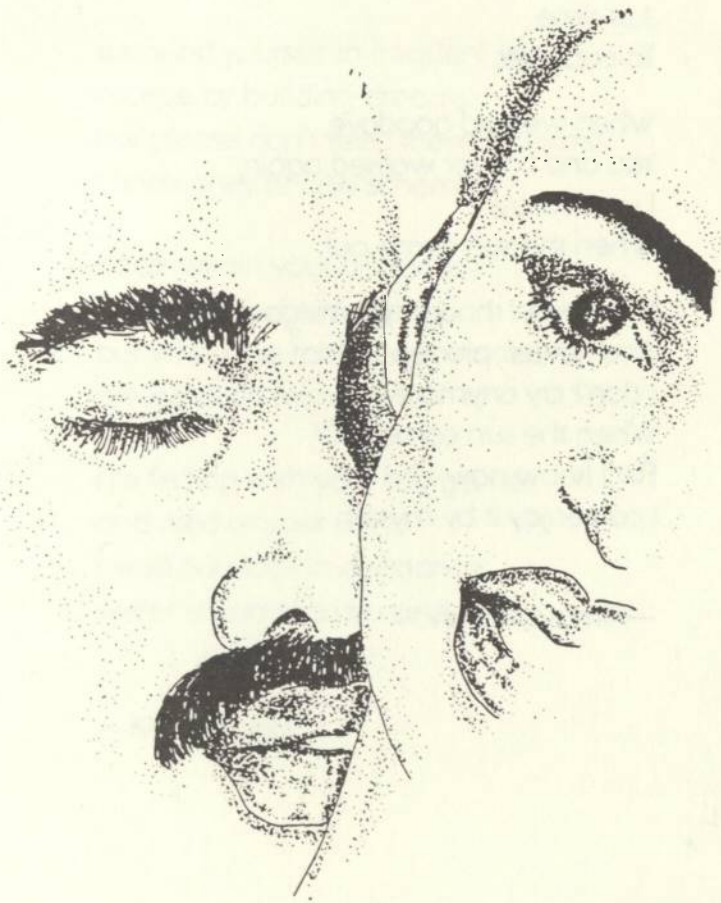
bad credit—to go to jail for it all

good credit—to be able to have it all

Greed—to want it All!

—People try so hard

—Nicol Hanyard



## Sun

I remember times when the sun came out,  
You and I used to walk,  
Having no destination,  
No place to go,  
Just time  
To ourselves.

When we said goodbye,  
You and I never walked again,  
I used to cry,  
When the sun came out.

Now, even though you're gone,  
And I'm left alone,  
I don't cry anymore  
When the sun comes out;  
For I know now  
I can enjoy it by myself.

—Kimara Mason

## hidden in your arrogance

pretend in all your victories  
rejoice in all your fame  
but when the mirror faces you  
to me you're just the same

surround yourself in frequent lies  
escape by building dreams  
but please don't feed them all to me  
I know they're only schemes

boast within your arrogance  
take pride in being free  
but when the tables turn, my friend  
please don't rely on me

I'm fed up with your silly games  
and tired of your lies  
i wish you luck in arrogance  
sweet dreams to you and pride.

—Kalia Spears

# Sorry

Hit me —  
I don't feel it I grin.

Kick me —  
I can't feel it I smile.

Slap me —  
I won't feel it I laugh.

Love me —  
It hurts OUCH!

—Robyn D. Brady

## Belladonna

The beauty of Belladonna  
The coquettish air  
Alluring to the male eye  
She allows every one of them to try

Her trait may be beauty  
But her passion is death  
Vixen strings from her beautiful lips  
Men die by the bliss of her magnificent trip

—Nicol Hanyard

## Zoomin' Who?

using U/using mE/shoUld It B  
caN'r wE sTop rHe passIon/oR iZ it puRely  
lusT  
alWayZ b diScreEt/paRt of uS iz trUst  
decelt iZ rHe reAl motiVation/sneaKing makEs iT fUn  
dO i fEel guilTy/oR shouID i feel freE  
bUt leT mE aSk u 1 thing  
aM i usinG u/Or R u  
uSing  
ME  
/?/

—Lorena M. Craighead

## No Shame

Kiss me passionately  
Or don't kiss me at all  
Lift me to the heights  
But don't let me fall

Love me in a way  
That I'll always remember  
Make my body sweat  
Through the month of December

Whisper words to me  
Make me at your command  
Pour all of your love  
Into the palms of my hands

Fulfill my longings  
Surrender to my fires  
Caress my body  
And yield to my desires

Try not to get burnt  
But come closer to my flames  
For this love we share  
Knows no shame

—Michelle Jacobs





## Spelman

Hands offered with love.  
No questions asked, no questions—  
we're sisters, no need.

—Robyn D. Brady

## Love

Webs creep around  
strangling the blind insect  
who seeks nourishment.

—Robyn D. Brady

## Because

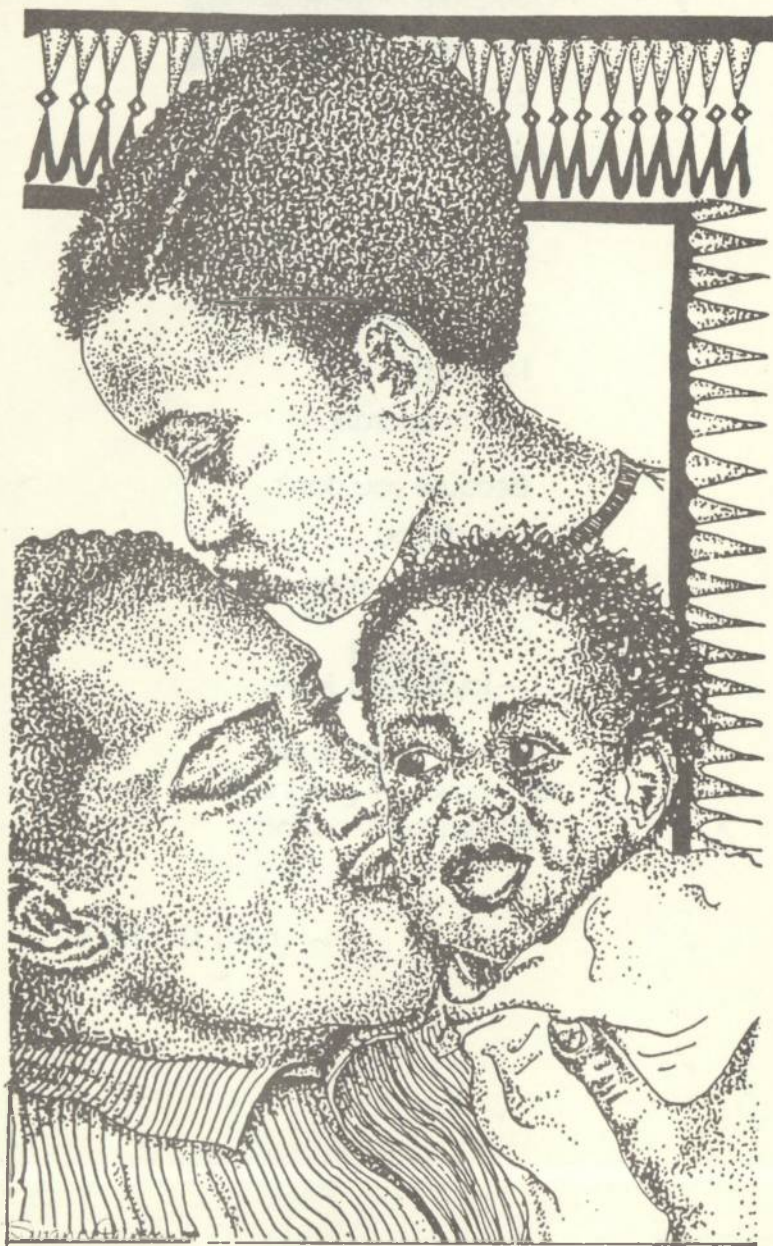
Because I love you,  
my emotions  
are yours to steal.

Because I love me,  
I lie  
and hide the way I feel.

If you loved me,  
I would shower  
you in adoration.

Because you don't  
I touch you  
only in my imagination.

—Tayari Acia Jones



# Who I Am

"When you don't know who you are, don't know who you were,  
then you don't have any idea of what you can become."

Min. Louis Farrakhan

and God said Be; so I am—  
an African woman,  
a fruit from the Original tree.  
my purpose set by God,  
yet still unknown to me,

who I am.  
a flower planted in America  
from the seeds of Haiti  
from the roots of Africa.  
longing to live in a Free garden  
together with my people.

who I am.  
a thought from the beginning  
the reality today,  
wanting to live with and for my people  
but willing to die  
to help free our chained minds.

when I die, I wish to be remembered  
for my uniqueness, my love, my strength  
not a BS, MS, PhD, or my M-O-N-E-Y.  
a degree does not tell of the degree of character.

who I am.  
wanting to know the unknown  
accomplish the undone  
see the unseen wisdom that life offers,  
become one with one who would strengthen me.

who I am.  
the daughter of Queen Makeda  
the sister of Toussaint L'Ouverture  
the daughter of King Shaka.  
I am what God said—Be—an African woman,  
a fruit from the Mother of nations.

—Nalida Lacer

## Black Male

Tall, slender, sensuous complexion, muscular build, sandy eyes, silky hair.

Slim waist, desirable lips, firm gluteus maximus, warm embrace, compassionate eyes.

Deep dark and delicious skin, massive arms, rich voice, wide nose, aggressive touch.

Short, thick shoulders, thunderous thighs, sexy chest, strong cheekbones.

Powering hands, sweet smell, warm light brown skin, round hips, intriguing laugh.

Large belly, thick mustache, curly hair, intelligent thoughts, sturdy provider.

So diverse, so distinct, so sexy, so suave, so complex, so complete.

### THE BLACK MALE

—Heather Hawes

## Life's Cycle

When I breathe,

I take in the mist of life.

When I sleep,

The moon's spiral energy touches me at the forehead  
surging power.

When I sing,

The harmony of the world's could-be is felt.

When I dance,

I worship the great mother.

When I die,

My body's minerals shall nourish my mother

AND

My spirit be forever manifest in the generations  
to come.

—Tomika DePriest

## Your Presence

I can feel your presence when you are near.  
I can feel your presence when you are far.  
Your fears, joys, sadness, happiness, pain, stress,  
I can feel your presence.

I feel your presence when I get dressed.  
Your eyes give me an awkward look and my senses tell me that I  
look unpresentable.  
I go change.

I feel your presence when a black man tries to disrespect me.  
Your voice fills with anger and I feel ashamed that someone has  
treated me this way.  
I show him the strength of a black woman.

I feel your presence when I am at a party.  
Your body is moving to the fast pace, bass beating, sweat running  
music. I feel the music and begin to dance, expressively.  
I feel my ancestors through my body.

I feel your presence when I am depressed.  
Your sincerity and warmth touch my soul and lift me up.  
I gain confidence and move on.

I feel your presence when you are in pain.  
Your sadness showers me with unhappiness. I give you flowers out  
of your own storm and make you smile.

I feel your presence when you are near.  
I feel your presence when you are far.

I feel your presence.....ALWAYS.

A dedication to **THE FAMILY**  
—Hearther Hawes



## Amnesia(4thosewhodoubt)

my soul remembers a time  
we ruled this world  
constructed the pyramids,  
built the Sphinx,  
controlled the Nile,  
(sometimes the current gets so strong you  
can't go with the flow).

my soul remembers a time  
we ruled this world  
created empire after empire  
we were called

Zulus  
Mandinka  
Erihpians  
Kushites  
Ashanti  
Masai  
Nubian  
Fulani

Bushmen and yes  
pygmy  
a time of Nzinga  
of Candace  
of Tiye  
of Nirocris  
of Nefertere  
of Makeda  
of Cleopatra  
of Nefertiri  
of Kahina  
of Kentake  
a time  
when Memphis stood  
before Kemer fell  
a time  
when the Sahara was an ocean of sand

my soul remembers a time  
we ruled this world  
when curly hair graced our scalps  
when full lips kissed only  
full lips  
(is love really such a fragile thing?)

my soul remembers a time  
we danced to the beat of our own drums

a time  
the land of BLACK  
was vast  
before the people scattered  
after the white devils  
from the west came

—Carliss Johnson

## Family Pictures (for all who treasure the memories)

They sit around the table  
With the pictures scattered.  
Smiles and laughter because  
of "the old days"  
Looking at the family  
dinner and barbecues  
The unexpected look of Grandma  
The sleeping face of baby  
Those beautiful tall Afros  
The old bell bottoms.  
More laughter  
Then silence as one picture  
is studied.  
Then they start, like an old song  
being played again  
He was...he used to be...  
He used to do...he could have been..."  
But he never will.  
Then there are tears,  
Then weeping,  
As the picture fades

—Nalida Lacer

# Goodnight

Dear Brother:

As you lie sleeping with the television on,  
the sounds of violence, death, sex, and drugs  
your lullaby,

I am reminded of all you represent  
Our King—lost  
we need your royalty again

young mind not too old to be pure again  
lead us man, with your sisters by your side

and in your drowsy understanding  
know that in our day, what is most  
readily accepted is also what is  
most crippling

I beg that you put down your brass knuckles,  
your wooden club

I want to turn off the tv and let you hear  
that we've already been beaten down enough  
don't help us to destroy ourselves

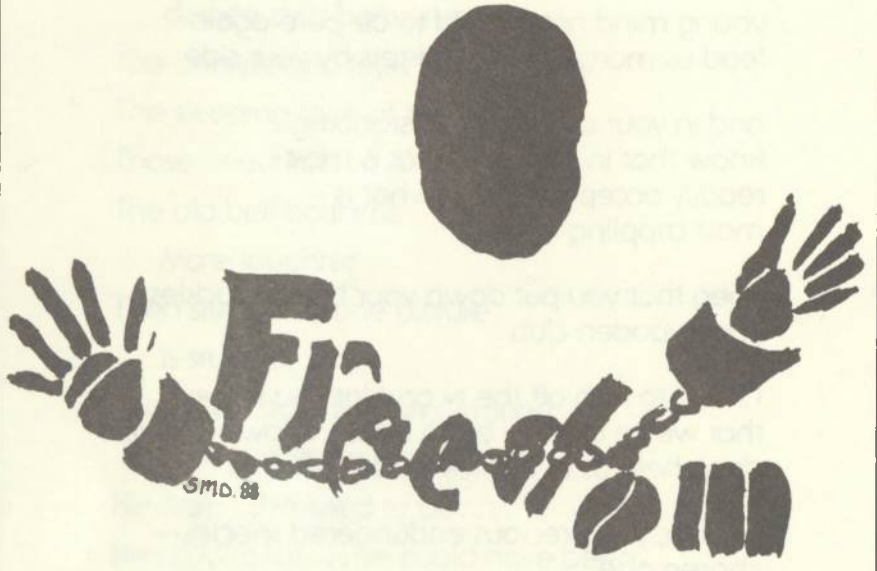
Brother, you precious endangered species—  
chosen one

wake up and turn the tube off  
wake up and turn the people on  
wake up and hold tight what is  
slipping through your hands

wake up so that we can live again  
and lie down to pleasant dreams.  
your sister wants you to have a  
good night

—M. Joette Harland

(Joy all who treasure the memories)



SMD. 88

## A World He Did Not Create

A slicing roar cuts the silence of his stare.  
Eyes bound to a longing for times past spent.  
Once the ruler of a land, with worldly possessions at hand,  
is now but a lost dream which reality prevents.

A lust created by an insatiable desire  
chases his images of inevitable doom.  
Blood was once again shed, tormenting a soul that bled,  
with a thirst in which tragedy loomed.

With arms stretched upward to a God,  
a supreme essence in which his faith lay unseen.  
For with the grace of flight, he slays all in sight,  
the ashes of death blow into a pool of faceless thoughts serene.

A look to the north, a quick glance to the south.  
A barren field on which an empire should stand.  
Through the pursuit of prize, a reality is despised,  
images of priceless grandeur lay lifeless as the land.

The humility of a mortal existence,  
Its presence burning with an arrogant tease.  
For such possessions obtained prove uselessly vain  
to a pompous being driven by irrational extremities.

In time a new kingdom will arise.  
In it a Divineness to encompass all mortal hate.  
For the foolishness of a soul defied a majestic control  
In a world he did not create.

—Ruby A. Skinner

## Nature Speaks for Itself

so you say a natural is not your style.

"Girl, all that brushing and picking  
would just drive me wild!

How can you stand your hair being  
So short.

It's all right and nappy.

And it looks rather coarse.

You look like something from

An early 70's flick

Or worse, something from Africa.

Homegirl, this time you've tripped!"

And then you wait for my reply,

But I just pass you silently by,

Because fiercer than your words

Is the envy in your eyes.

—Kim C. Lee

## To the Homeless People of Our Society

if each of you could fit there . . . I'd offer you my bed . . .  
I'd even give my last dime to let you rest your heads.  
I'd give you my pillows and my flowered blanket too.  
I'd comfort you with warmth and a big, big bowl of stew.  
You must get very hungry as your home is in the streets.  
Tell me my homeless soul mate . . . how often do you eat?  
Do you wake up every morning with hope . . . or none at all?  
Or are you happy with your status because now you cannot fall?  
Do your children have good morals? Do you teach them how to pray?  
Or do you simply feel so helpless that you send them all away?  
Do you strive to make improvements or do you sulk in all you've lost?  
Tell me my human soul mate—what does your failure cost?

America, the beautiful—how could they write those words?  
With people living in the streets . . . Dear God that is absurd.  
Do they not see the obvious—do they know there's poverty?  
Or are they hiding in their diamond worlds, dismissing reality?  
What happens to our hungry? And the children that they bear?  
Or is it that society just doesn't care anymore?

The sun still shines in the rich world . . . who cares about the rest?  
Besides they're not worth helping if they can't put forth their best.  
I hear that from humanity . . . What hope is there for you?  
I wish that I could help you, but there's nothing I can do.  
My words are simply helpless . . . and I can't afford your rent.  
Just like you have no say in life . . . I'm banned from government.

I'm sorry that you're stuck here . . . with nowhere left to turn . . .  
I hope you survive this sick, sick world—at least until we learn!

—Kalia Spears



## On Intra-racism—if there is such a thing

When you look at me  
you see

a light-skinned,  
a yellow,  
a redbone.

But when I look in the mirror,  
Everywhere i look  
I see the  
gentle  
explosion  
of  
Blackness

—Carliss Johnson

## Mis-Education

everybody says you're nice  
lily-white woman  
teacher of my children

everybody says you're generous  
in your spoon-feeding-method  
of teaching

let me break it d  
o  
w  
n

you are a  
patronizing birch  
your mentality is i-can-lead  
these-little-black-children  
out of the ignorance into  
the light

you do not respect the power  
of our minds  
you are so certain of our ignorance  
that you engage in a conversation  
with yourself  
rapidly promulgating memorized  
lesson plans  
never taking in oxygen

it's an egotistic trip  
that you engage in

you ramble on  
never seeing the students  
never engaging in  
a learning experience

i say you're patronizing  
most students think you're ms. nice

this niceness  
they don't realize  
is smiling  
on imagined ignorance

—Andrea M. Wren

## Today and Yesterday

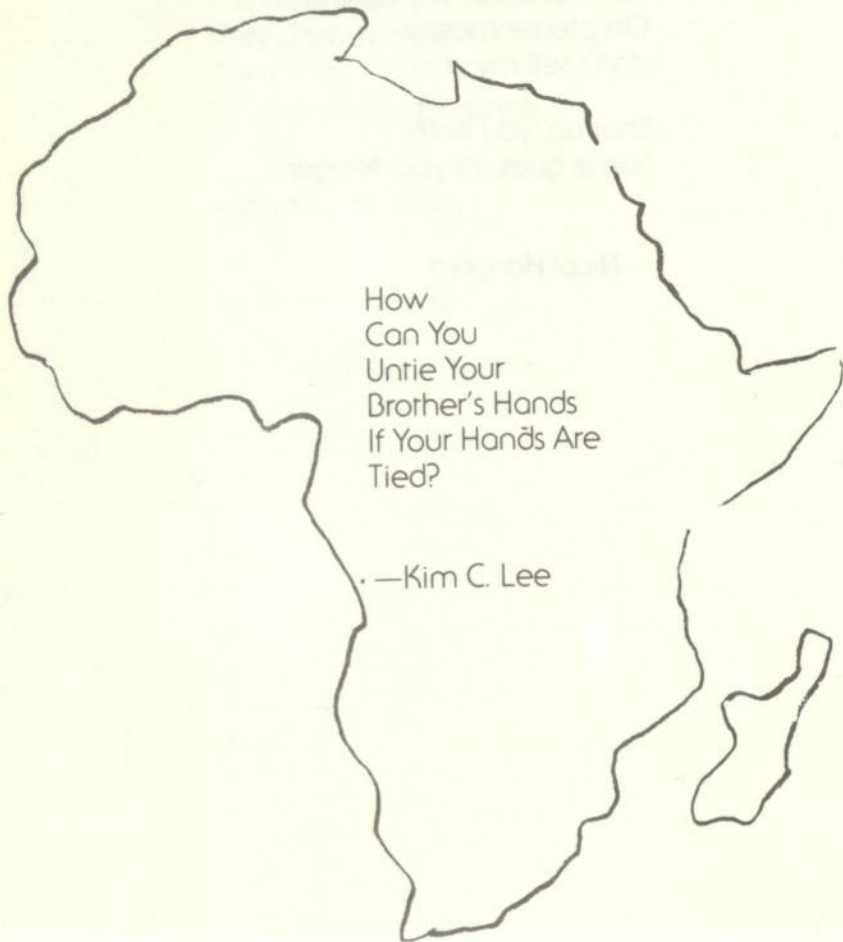
Oh please Nkosi  
don't kill my baby  
Oh please master  
Don't take my baby

Oh please Nkosi  
don't endorse my child  
Oh please master  
don't sell my child

Shut up, you Kaffir  
Same goes for you, Nigger!!!

—Nicol Hanyard

## On South Africa



+ C+R+O+S+S+E+S +

there's power  
in wearing a cross a

o  
r u  
n  
d

one's neck.

a cross represents the crucifixion  
of some white guy  
but it reminds me  
that i have been crucified.  
my race is dying an unnecessary death and  
of the religion that the white man  
gave us as he justified (slavery).  
it represents a religion that has encouraged  
dissension and division  
baptist, methodist, everything  
but togetherness.  
there's power  
in wearing a cross.  
i look at it and realize that  
i've been crucified, but  
i can survive.  
i may die, but  
i shall return  
on perhaps the 400th day with  
my people.  
there is power  
in a cross as knowledge is power.

—Andrea M. Wren

## Squirrel

like a monkey swinging in a tree,  
you were hung.

like a piece of barbecue on a grill,  
you were smoked.

like a block of wood,  
they chopped off with a collective hand  
what made you  
in a technical sense a man.

like a yellow bird,  
they put you behind bars in a narrow cage.

as if hunting a squirrel in the woods,  
they viciously killed,  
skinned and ate you for dinner.

i can't believe that you still desire  
the white hole,  
black man.

—Andrea M. Wren

## Please

Grant me one wish  
Only one  
Let me be a snake.

I'd slither along the warm ground,  
Despised  
by humans—  
Happy.  
I wouldn't have to tolerate their bitterness  
I wouldn't have to tolerate their lies  
I wouldn't have to endure their pain  
My pain.

Grant me one wish  
Only one  
Let me be a snake—  
Let me shed this layer of skin  
Punctured  
with bitterness  
Punctured with lies  
Ripped with pain  
Useless.  
Let me shed this skin  
Emerge from this battered cocoon  
Reborn  
Refreshed  
Alive.

—Robyn D. Brady



## Mock Election: City of Angels

The air is frightening  
in its thickness  
suspended by the dollars  
and beauty  
and the award-winning-roles.  
I told myself that it was  
good practice  
see what i'm up against  
spirit tired of burning  
inside  
stepped forward only to be misunderstood  
stared at blankly and  
'quoted the latest'  
Busy trying to be busy  
pinned down by mountains of beauty  
oblivious to the beauty  
of being you.

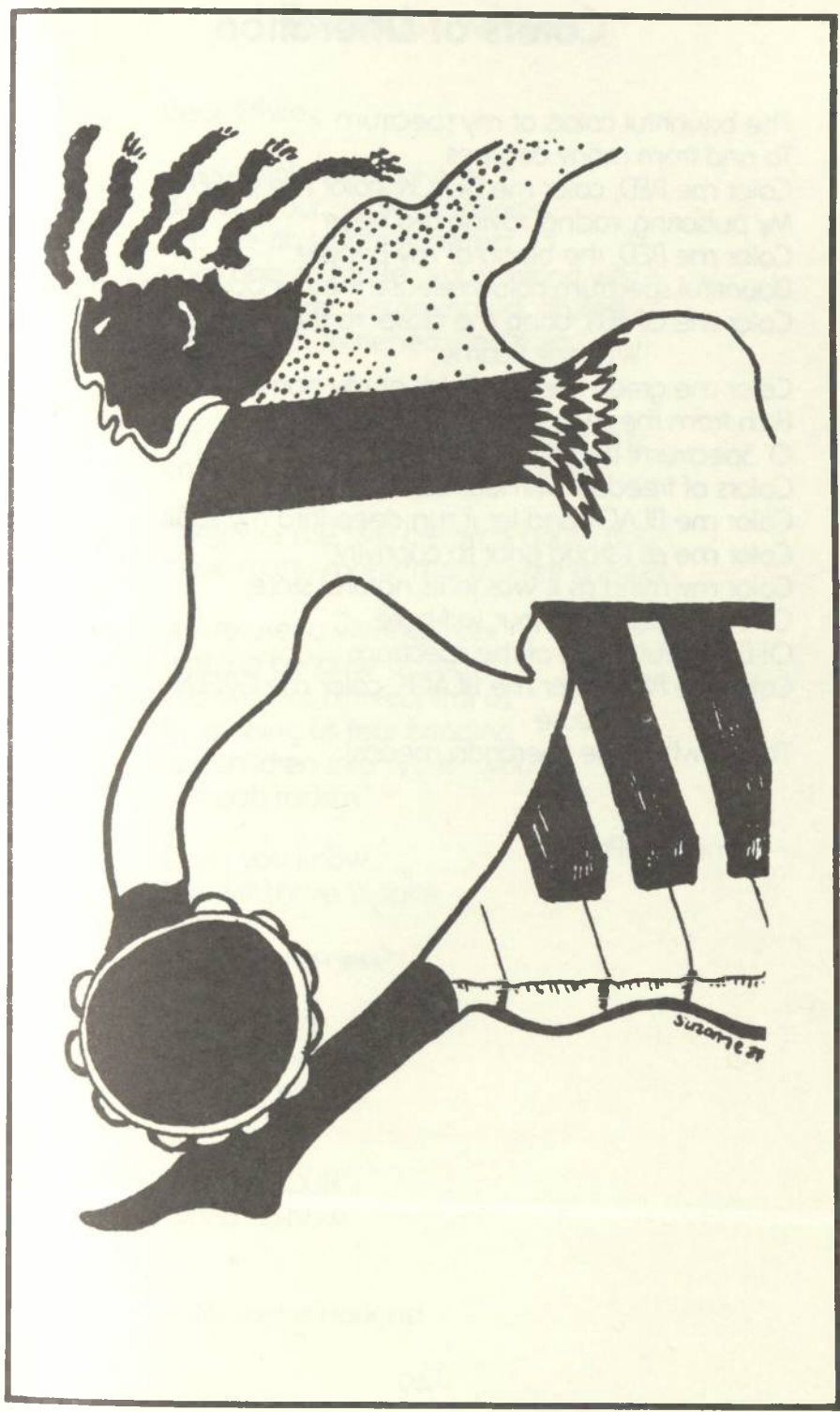
—Lorena M. Craighead

## Only as Powerful as U make it (4AST-23)

Will all non-believers in the house stand up?  
Have you ever felt the presence  
of Almighty Isis, ISis, ISIs, ISIS,  
the Black goddess?  
Have you ever heard Swahili or Zulu,  
and had generic memories  
rug not gently at your tongue?  
Have you smelled  
the soft, red clay  
that keeps the overflowing Nile company?  
Have you bowed before  
the Egyptian pyramids,  
the only remaining natural wonders?  
Have you listened to  
the red eyes of a  
displaced Afrikan?  
Didja ever greet the dawn,  
meet the moon?  
Have you ever thanked  
Ra the sun god,  
only to have him say,  
karibu,  
which means welcome,  
with the next perfect sunrise?

Have you ever touched  
the full lips  
of another Afrikan  
and been overcome  
with such PASSION that  
it had to leave this place and time?  
Didja look at **all**  
the unmarked graves  
of our many ancestors,  
and become inspired?  
Have your hips swayed  
to the not so ancient  
beat, beat, beat, beat  
of the bass drum?  
Didja ever want  
sweet freedom  
so bad  
you could taste it?  
Can you feel like  
Osirus felt when he was cut  
into fourteen pieces  
by his twin brother and then  
resurrected by Almighty  
Isis, Isis, ISIs, ISIS?  
Will all non-believers in the house **please stand up**  
**and**  
**GET OUT!**

—Carliss Johnson



## Colors of Liberation

The bountiful colors of my spectrum  
To and from many degrees  
Color me RED, color me BLACK, color me GREEN.  
My pulsating, racing, loving red heart  
Color me RED, the blood of my people.  
Bountiful spectrum colors release the rainbow within my soul,  
Color me GREEN, bring me closer to that nature of  
    Whence I came.

Color me green like the fields of my homeland  
Rich from the magical rain.  
O' Spectrum! Beauty of liberation  
Colors of freedom without constraint  
Color me BLACK and let it run deep into my soul.  
Color me as I stood prior to captivity,  
Color my mind as it was in its natural state,  
Color me Black without self-hate  
O! Bountiful colors of the spectrum  
Color me RED, color me BLACK, color me GREEN  
    Because  
That is what true liberation means!

—Tomika DePriest

## To racist whites

Dear Whitey,

If you think my blackness  
dilutes "your" white dominion,  
you are ab-so-lute-ly correct.  
I am here to make "your" bland white  
world blacker, disseminated, diluted,  
attenuated, loosened, and color  
rich.

I am here to birth many, many, many,  
children who will grow up and fill  
"your" world.  
They, like me, will become adults and  
have many, many, many more children.

We refuse to withhold our  
birthing because of you.  
You will not birth-control us  
by making us fear bringing  
our children into "your" world  
of harsh racism.

Don't you know  
We will thrive in spite  
of your  
un-want-ing-ness?

We are here  
We will make  
And we will be.

After all,  
it ain't "YOUR"  
world no-how.

—M. Joette Harland.

## Uncertainty

What creations, evolutions, images arousing whirling sensations.  
I ponder through a window of uncertainty, seeking a world of  
vast beauty. Yet my sight is shaded by a blanket of disillusionment  
draped upon a oneness, by the forces of human reasoning.

The paint, yes the paint covering the buildings,  
remains lifeless, yet the richness of its color fades in time to a  
dull hue. Its true distinction, however, goes untouched,  
for its appearance is but a blank state of uniform color  
rationalized by the discriminating eye.

The wind, how silently it moves with the slyness of the fox,  
Creeping along, never seen, yet creating the sounds of surprising fear.  
Moving those weightless objects which dance about on the trees  
in a dazzling array of splendor.

Hundreds of faceless shapes, each unique to its perfected form.  
They surely must be immortal. For when they fall lifelessly to  
the earth, they somehow return in full vigor, again to dazzle the eye.

The rooftops, walls of unperiled strength.  
Shaped like slanted arrows, able to shoot in either direction.  
A support to the beings who know nothing of their existence.  
For in the world given, brick and mortar are soulless objects.  
But how can that be? When they wage war everyday protecting our  
pitiful souls from the forces of nature.

The grass. So green!  
Yet its true rare beauty goes unnoticed, blending in to form a river  
of forgotten vastness.  
For it lay still looking up harmlessly, softening its touch  
providing comfort for the tortuous human body.  
Our feet must surely know it well.

What do I seek?

A reason! An explanation! A solution.

For such abundance, such diversity, proves futile unless its  
dignity and beauty, forming unique entities, are recognized and made  
a part of the individual world, housed within the soul.

For my world is only of genuine value,  
when it excludes such fatal presumptuous regulations,  
created by centuries of human ignorance.

—Ruby A. Skinner



## Spread Wings

The ancestors told me my destiny

Where I was going

The path I would take

Spiraling like a hurricane

Raging like a bull

Savaging the rest of my people

in

Blood

Love

Time

Strength

and

Revolution

Surrendering to the wind

to

Liberate

Spread Wings

and

FLY!

—Tomika DePriest

# Dreams

Dreams . . .

Dreams of lily-filled fields,  
of star-filled nights,  
of a love-filled life.

Dreams . . .

Dreams of life with no pain,  
of fun with no games,  
of spring with no rain.

Dreams . . .

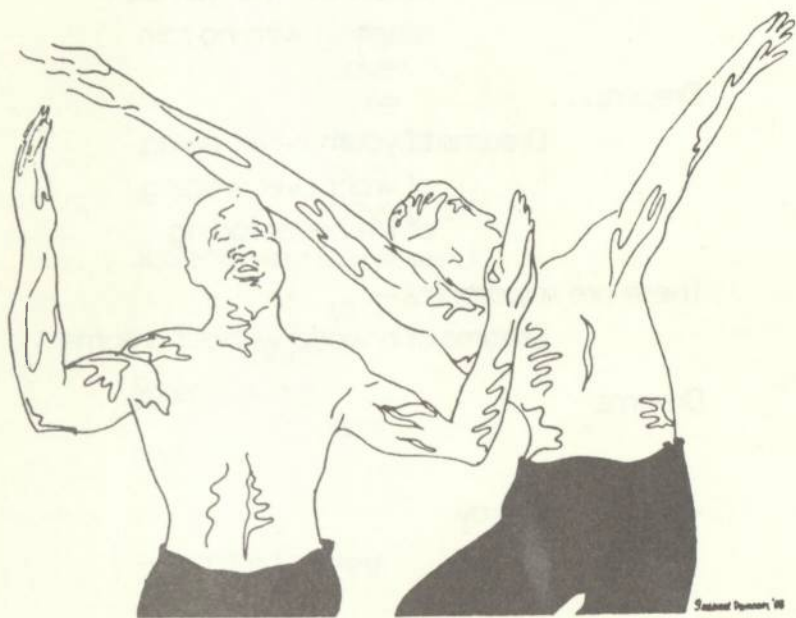
Dreams of youth never aging,  
of war never waging,  
of life never fading.

These are my dreams—

Dreams of a world without dreams!

Dreams.

—Sonya E. Murray



Stanford Dunning '88

## Woman with Man

She worked nervously, trying not to look at him. Her co-worker giggled.

"That'll be \$8.40," she said, still trying not to look. She knew if she looked at him she'd faint, or stare, or embarrass herself in some way.

"Is this catalog free?" he asked.

It wasn't, but what did it matter? Homeboy was fine, and if she couldn't find a way to give him her phone number, she could at least slip him a catalog.

"Um ah, yea, you can have one."

He was smiling at her. He had a beautiful smile. She was trying to take as long as she could to return his change so she could look at him for a little longer.

"Enjoy it." She gave up. Someone who looked like he did had to have three or four women. She didn't have a chance.

"Thanks, ah, what time do you get off tonight? Maybe, you know, we could ah see a movie or something."

She was obviously mistaken. This man who was perfection personified was not asking her out! Well, what was she waiting for? She'd better answer that man before he walked off.

"I'd love to," she cooed.

"You'd love what?" snapped her mother. "You'd better love getting up; this alarm clock has been on for fifteen minutes. You'd better not oversleep again. If you lose this job. . ."

She should've known that she would only be so lucky in her dreams.

??

—Aretha Hankinson

## All That Jazz (Notes from a Conscious Wind)

Whatever happened to Jazz music? It still exists somewhere below country/western music but just slightly above classical, I think. It's odd that the very race that created jazz has chosen to place it on the shelf alongside other discarded aspects of our culture. It's sad to me. Don't get me wrong, I'm a fan of Rap music, as are most of my peers, but many of them are close-minded when it comes to jazz. They're missing out on the most brilliant, passionate and exciting music performed. Whereas Rap comes from the street, jazz comes from the soul and attracts the mind, causing you to think. You think about how far our people have come and how much further we have yet to go.

Jazz music is an intricate part of musical history. Why then are we giving it away? Are people of other races better able to realize the genius of our music than we are ourselves. Why are white students in colleges and universities across the country more receptive to respected jazz artists than our black college students? Surely we have the most to gain by supporting our jazz musicians. It's called perpetuation. We have to keep this beautiful form of expression alive for future generations, so they'll know and appreciate the black race's contribution to music history.

Some say we've "progressed" beyond jazz. How can you progress beyond a sound that's ahead of its time?

—T. Jivens-Mapson

## The River

Sometimes it comes on me so heavy—to simply float on air through pockets of breath, leaving behind only bad memories and inadequate dreams. The tension in my body longs to be smoothed over and set loose. . . .

Traveling down a lazy river, I see myself in its reflection. The tears in my eyes crawl down my face and drop into the river and blend in with a thousand tears that came before mine. The tears swirl and spread as my heart reaches out to the river for having to flow so long without a rest. I tell the river that I will take over for a while so it can have a rest. I tell it that I will gladly flow over the rocks and boulders. I will fall down the inclines and splash in the wind. I will spread in between the toes and fingers of intruders and mix with the dirt to make mud.

The river replies and tells me that no one ever offered to take over for while and that it would be glad to grant me my wish. So I crawl in. . . .

—Dianne Marsh

## A Conversation With You . . . And You Know Who Your Are

Dear You,

I guess I should thank you, for through the thick clouds of smoke and the clanging monotonous beat of the music . . . there you sat. You were enjoying yourself, hanging out with the boys and taking in the female sights. Then, I came long. I innocently strolled by to talk to my friend. As I looked over my shoulder, I noticed you—tall, dark and handsome. We began to talk and the prospect began to seem even more intriguing, a college boy, nice major, very good looking and from a nice city. The ceremony of exchanging phone numbers merely added to the festive mood. For the first time, I left that singles joint with a glimmer of hope in my eye.

As it always happens in real life, the glimmer was transformed into a shadow of doom that followed me around a little longer than I had hoped for it to. The next morning, being awakened by your call, momentarily brightened my day, but suddenly the eloquent rhythm of your words changed into harsh, dissonant sounds. The infamous sentence concerning your "other involvement," burst my illusions of grandeur into tiny pieces of dust.

For a minute, I guess you could say I tripped the light fantastic, for I had fallen into a world where people don't have emotions and the pains of an illicit affair cease to exist. You had me, I have to admit. I was convinced that I was capable of entering into a relationship (if that's what one would call it) that would consist of dark sunglasses and big hats. I had forgotten about the joy of the sunlight shining bright upon the hearts of two young lovers playing in the park. I had forgotten about the bond.

The bond, I must declare, is what has inspired me to write to you. The bond, my friend, is what exists between "us" women. We, you see, cannot continue to exploit one another. The love one woman has for a man cannot be poisoned by the venom of another female. We cannot take from our sisters the joy of giving and receiving love. We cannot, for our own selfish reasons, delve in between the emotions that exist between two individuals. We must support our sisters in their quests for "their" perfect loves—not break down their foundations.

So, "you," I just want to thank you, for on that special evening, you not only touched me by complimenting on my beauty, but you made me realize that love is a powerful force. Love, not just between men and women, but love for my sister. A love that forces me not to take away, but to give. To give my support and my fondest wishes. I wish you and your love a special and strong future.

—Ellen Hill



## Not Guilty

My best friend's name is Ambre. Her family lives a couple of houses away from mine. I don't know why I'm even thinking about her. Every once in a while I do... Every once in a while.

Ambre and I both met my husband Shak at the same time. I'll never forget the first time I saw him, it was raining out and... the way single raindrops rolled slowly down his black silky skin made me want him more than anything I'd wanted in a long time. The thought of not being able to have him never, well, it just never occurred to me.

Shak and I became good friends. The three of us, Shak, Ambre, and I went everywhere together. Shak became a trusted friend to both Ambre and myself. Sometimes when Shak looked at me I was sure he sensed the intense feelings I was sending through him. I was wrong. Four months after Shak and I met, he and Ambre began going together.

We remained friends. I could not blame either of them. Some messages sent are not received. I never told Ambre how I felt about Shak, she was my other half, I thought she knew. She should have. We had been through so much together. My parent's divorce, my little sister's death, she loved me when no one else would. She had always been there when I needed her, I suppose she always would have been there if...

Well one day, Ambre and I went swimming in the lake. Ambre, not one for taking advice ate a whole meal right before going in. Needless to say she got a real big cramp...in the

middle of the lake.

I was on the dock. I heard Ambre calling my name. Over, and over, and . . . my thoughts were on Shak as usual.

His long black eyelashes. The way his lips curve into a sweet, serene smile. The softness of his skin, when his arm just happened to brush against mine, which isn't often enough. Doesn't matter though. One day he'll realize that I'm the only one. That was my last thought as Ambre went under.

Strangely enough, even though we share **everything**, Shak never asked me what happened, never questioned my swimming ability. In fact, no one ever questioned why I, a state champion swimmer sat on the dock, on a sunny Sunday afternoon and watched my best friend die.

—Carliss Johnson

## Roommates

Dear Lavernetta,

I would appreciate it if you would keep your cookies out of the refrigerator and your nose out of my business!

P.S. Your father called, how was the exam? Remember your paper and that I love you.

Dear Shirlnetta,

I wish you would quit offending my gentleman callers. Just because you do not have any does not call for rudeness!

P.S. Remember that size does not make the person. It's the size of your heart and soul.

Dear Lavernetta,

In response to your last note—whatever! Oh, and no I won't pick you up from work—I do have a date.

P.S. Congratulations on your job offer!

Dear Shirlnetta,

Which one of the neighbors will you go out with next, Leroy or Slim? Please tell them there is a significance to their paying rent for their own apartment.

P.S. Thanks for picking me up from work on Friday. (I knew you would!)

Dear Lavernetta,

I hope you enjoyed your impromptu gathering on Saturday night. Next time please remember that one never serves brandy with ice and white is never worn past Labor Day! On your next trip to the mall—you could replace my six crystal wine glasses and four champagne glasses. Football and chablis just do not mix!

P.S. Your date was fine!  
Do it, Girl!

Dear Shirlnera,

O.K. You need to realize that your mother does not live here! The garbage man does not make house calls and we do not have a live-in maid. Get it together or pick it up! My perfume may be inexpensive but it is better than smelling like an ole battle ax who has not changed her clothes, hairstyle, eyeglasses or identity in 20 years.

P.S. I'm proud that you have been studying and doing well in school. Keep up the good work.

Dear Laverneta,

I paid the phone bill yesterday. I also discovered that the love of my life is the love of several other sisters' lives too. How about pizza and the Cosby show?

P.S. I miss you!

Dear Shirlnera,

The cable man came through to pick up the converter. I am doing horrible in a class that might prevent me from graduating. I met a fine man in the grocery store!

P.S. Your beauty will still shine without his existence.

Dear Laverneta,

Your parents called, they will be in Tuesday for your graduation. I have three exams and four papers to write. I have decided that I am addicted to Vivarin and chocolate. I think I may have found my new apartment.

P.S. What are you going to do without me in Chapel Hill? If you meet any fine law students, don't forget to mention my name.

Dear Shirlnera,

I called the movers today and they will be by on Monday afternoon to pick up my stuff. Did you ever find the earring from the party last night?

P.S. When you get to NYU, remember to go to class, wash your clothes, and write me. I don't know what I am going to do without you.

Dear Lavernetta,

What time did you tell people to come over for the Graduation Bash? Dare not attempt to steal my maroon coat, or my purple sweat pants—I plan to check your luggage. I passed all of my finals with flying colors—and I'm ready to **GIG!!**

P.S. I cried for 15 minutes straight as I packed my clothes. I don't want to leave you!

Dear Shirlnetta,

Wasn't graduation live! My parents are driving me crazy with happiness and joy! Does the crew know we are having a sleep over after the bash?

P.S. I'm scared to be without you, we **must** write each other every week, call once a month, and vacation in the Caribbean at least once a year!

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear Lavernetta,

I guess you should get this letter in a couple of weeks—you know I never buy stamps. I usually depend on you. Speaking of depending on you, I cannot do that anymore.

I hate my new apartment, it's so lonely. I got to watch Knors Landing on Thursdays. I missed fighting with you over L.A. Law.

I start my new job on Monday and I's terrified. I know I'm going to oversleep—I need my human alarm clock. Summer school started last week, no cute guys and a wild woman for a professor.

I really hope you like law school. I'm not going to lie, I'm jealous and I hate you for leaving me. Even though I never told you, you really helped me to get through.

We must remember that distance can never separate us. Spelman was wonderful, but now we must go on. I know that each of us will have new experiences but we must cherish the old. You are forever my sister!

Lavernetta, I love you!

Always your roomie,

Shirlnetta

—Heather Hawes & Ellen V. Hill

A writer friend of mine once told me that all writers are trying to do one of two things: find a way in or find a way out. At the time, I tried to argue it. I wanted to make case for saving the world, reforming the politics, reaching the children and proclaiming the love at the top of my lungs. But as I get older, I think he was right after all. All of the things I try to do with my own work eventually boil down to trying to find a way into my own brain and my own heart and my own spirit, or trying to find a way out of all the mazes and dead ends and dark ended streets that I've been directed toward by a country that is still less than fascinated with the presence of black women. And I find that when I am serious about the journey, and disciplined about the quest, the things I find on those forays in or dashes out also illuminate the lives of those with ears to hear or eyes to see. I don't find that it gets any easier, the longer you do it, but I can guarantee that the rewards for sticking with it have never been as sweet. Our truth is in our stories. Don't stop . . .

Pearl Cleage  
Spelman College  
FOCUS, 1989