

Focus  
1990

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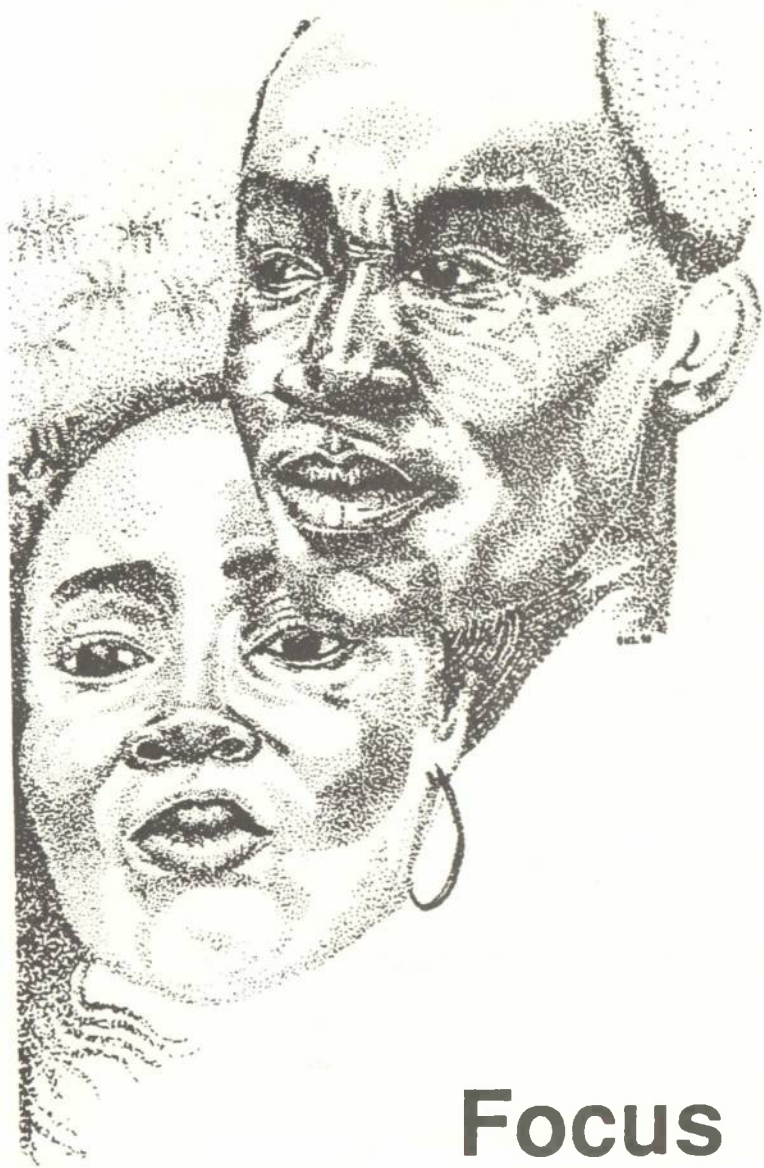
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# Focus 1990

The Spelman College Literary Magazine

## Table of Contents

### Robyn D. Brady

<i>Alma Blues</i> .....	1
<i>Hot Chocolate Night</i> .....	2
<i>Tune In</i> .....	3

### Carla M. Cherry

<i>Food for Thought</i> .....	4
<i>Tribute</i> .....	6

### Sheri L. Dennis

<i>Writer</i> .....	8
---------------------	---

### Tomika DePriest

<i>Resistance</i> .....	9
<i>Tell-A-Vision</i> .....	10
<i>Soul</i> .....	11

### Lisa Y. Forniss

<i>Jazzy Love</i> .....	12
<i>Night Dreamin</i> .....	13
<i>Sleeptight Eternal</i> .....	14

### C. Wiatta Freeman

<i>Beyond Africa</i> .....	16
----------------------------	----

### Jennifer Freeman

<i>I woke up on da wrong side of da bed</i> .....	19
<i>manaction</i>	
<i>The soul swims in the tears that</i> .....	21

### Monique Gaffney

<i>Black Men</i> .....	22
------------------------	----

### Shennette Garrett

<i>On sunflowers, wild blackberries, and</i> .....	23
<i>lemonade</i>	
<i>Recipe</i> .....	24
<i>Untitled</i> .....	25

### Aretha Hankinson

<i>For Len Bias 1963-1986</i> .....	26
<i>Sisterhood</i> .....	27

### Kamela Heyward

<i>Man's Job</i> .....	30
<i>namow</i> .....	31

<b>Tracey D. Hughes</b>	
<i>In Search of</i> .....	33
<b>Karen Ann Jenkins</b>	
<i>Howzit Gowin!?</i> .....	34
<b>Carliss Johnson</b>	
<i>Personal Letter</i> .....	35
<i>Reasons (4 Earth, Wind &amp; Fire)</i> .....	36
<i>This isn't really a love poem</i> .....	38
<b>Simona M. Jones</b>	
<i>Squeezing her eyes shut, she</i> .....	39
<b>Tasha Keeble</b>	
<i>A Rapee's Plea for a Spit Cup</i> .....	40
<i>Retreat</i> .....	41
<b>Nalida E. Lacet</b>	
<i>The Game</i> .....	42
<b>Kim C. Lee</b>	
<i>Anticipation</i> .....	43
<i>Haiku #3</i> .....	44
<i>Where Have All the Children Gone?</i> .....	45
<b>Helen Lewis</b>	
<i>The Sky</i> .....	46
<b>Jacqueline D. Mason</b>	
<i>I Saw Thousands of Flowers Today</i> .....	47
<i>Like a Stone</i> .....	48
<i>Realizin'</i> .....	49
<b>Kimara Mason</b>	
<i>For Men Who Don't Understand</i> .....	51
<i>Luxury(?)</i> .....	52
<b>Valerie McLeod</b>	
<i>Still-Born</i> .....	53
<b>Cynthia Miles</b>	
<i>Revision of Sight</i> .....	54
<i>Untitled</i> .....	56
<b>Riche Deianne Richardson</b>	
<i>My Child Will Be a Man</i> .....	57
<i>Together We Will Win</i> .....	59

**Carrie Smith-Dahl**

*Cello*.....61  
*Poetry Gets Hard at Times*.....62  
*Spelman's Monument*.....63

**Kalia Spears**

*The Big Question*.....64  
*No More Love From Me*.....65

**Elvira Wleyeno Tarpeh**

*Don't Sleep*.....66

**Kanini Ward**

*No Wake Up Calls*.....67

**Andrea M. Wren**

*Haiku*.....68  
*A Roach*.....69  
*The Scream Keeper*.....70

## Alma Blues

Woke up this moanin'  
Hunger pains inside  
Headed for the caf' and I nearly cried  
    Oh Alma Blues, why you leave me so abused?

Outside the caf'  
People backin' away  
Sistah next to me kneeled down to pray  
    Oh Alma Blues, why you leave her so abused?

It don't help sistah  
We been doin' it long  
Just face it, this ole' cookin' done done us wrong  
    Oh Alma Blues, why you leave us so abused?

This Broccoli is purple  
These Beans are cold  
And this chicken they got is nearly ten weeks old  
    We got the Blues, can't fight the abused  
                                Reused  
                                Alma's Blues

*Robyn D. Brady*

## HOT CHOCOLATE NIGHTS

Here's to Hot Chocolate Nights  
cool breezes flowing through opened windows  
steam curling from cups caressed gingerly  
marshmallows melt slowly mixing creamy-ness  
with chocolate-ness  
mix  
milk chocolate kisses  
melt  
swiss mocha touches  
warm  
rich chocolate depths  
steeme

See me  
breezing cool  
through  
steamy  
warmth.

*Robyn D. Brady*



## TUNE IN

Wrapped in your cocoon of  
self-admiration, self-preservation  
you play roles never conceived by  
the writer.

You  
cannot name the characters;  
they surprise you as much as they  
stifle  
your love.

Ain't gonna get no pay for these roles funny  
Y ain't even inta actin'-  
professionally.

If you gonna do it, do it right  
get paid in full  
of shit--  
You ain't even got a director.

Blind love the show  
Fund its production.

Riding on "canned laughter"  
the  
sickcom-drama continues.....  
Watch it,  
don't run out of material  
You  
might  
get  
cancelled.

*Robyn D. Brady*

## Food for Thought

Nigger...  
some long dead  
white man's  
convenient pronunciation  
of Negro.

Hey nigger, he'd drawl,  
expecting a subservient look  
from a spirit broken slave.

Nigger...  
was a synonym for a low life  
that would swing lifelessly from trees.  
Nigger...  
was a docile fool  
with buck eyes  
and an asinine grin.  
Nigger...  
was a rapacious beast  
that would desire the ultimate-  
to indulge himself in a white woman's flesh.

Nigger...  
YOU ARE UGLY  
YOU ARE STUPID  
YOU ARE LAZY  
YOU'LL NEVER AMOUNT TO MUCH  
YOU ARE DOOMED  
was ingrained in us

Marcus Garvey  
Dr. King  
Malcolm X  
emerged out of our misery  
And suddenly  
Being  
an African, Negro, or Colored  
was a gift from God.

Yet  
if you walk through  
a decaying ghetto  
a thriving Black bourgeoisie community  
or even a Black college  
Nigger...  
is now  
a word we use  
in the context  
of "brotherly love"  
But Nigger...  
is off limits  
if your eyes are blue  
and your skin is white  
Then  
Nigger...  
is a fighting word.  
Fists tense,  
Eyes harden,  
Punches fly.

I say  
Nigger...  
is deadweight,  
yesterday's putrid rubbish,  
a bad taste in the mouth.

Question...  
do we use Nigger...  
because we don't know any better,  
or are we nostalgic about  
the Good Ol' Days?

*Carla M. Cherry*

## Tribute

He's a streetwise hustler,  
A smooth talking casanova,  
With a stylish strut.

He's a hard working man,  
Whose dark hands are covered with blisters  
And wrinkles,  
Scars from hard labor.  
His wife aches from his absence  
And his children anxiously await  
His return from work.

He's an upwardly mobile  
Ivy League intellectual  
Who dreams of becoming the boss  
After all, as Billie crooned,  
God Bless The Child  
That's Got His Own.

He's a broken convict  
Rotting away in an iron cage  
Remorseful, wishing for another chance.

He's bitter  
Abused  
Powerless  
And thanks his woman  
For her support  
With a resounding slap.

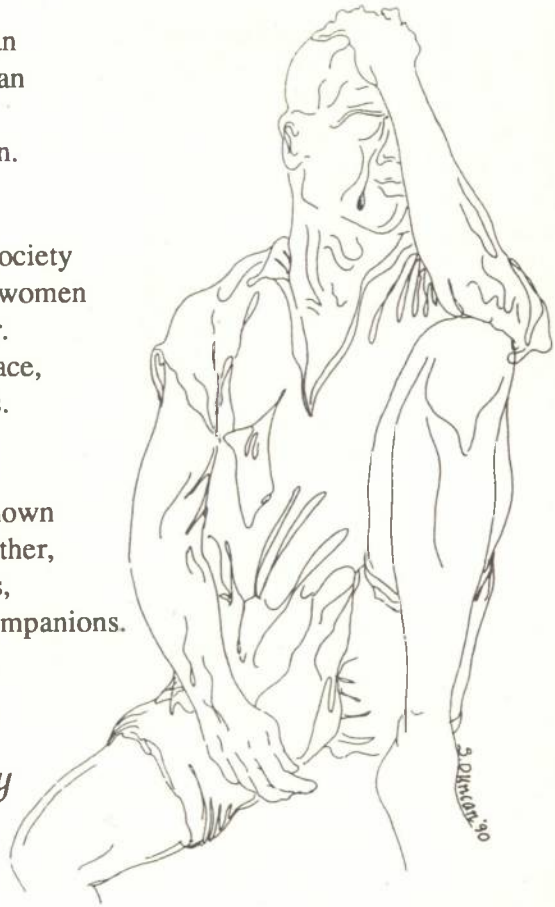
He's a revolutionary  
Black power  
Black Consciousness  
Black Knowledge  
Right On!  
Surrounded by an indifferent society  
And waiting for Nation Time!

He's a warm loving man  
Who respects his woman  
Loves his parents  
And adores his children.

Our Black Men  
Conspired against by society  
In conflict with Black women  
At war with each other.  
The backbone of our race,  
An endangered species.

This is a tribute to all  
The Black Men I've known  
My father, my grandfather,  
My uncles, my cousins,  
My friends, and my companions.  
I hope they survive  
So we all will.

*Carla M. Cherry*



## WRITER

THE TURNING POINT COMES UPON US  
SHARPLY, SHINING AS BRILLIANTLY  
AS ANY BEAM THAT THE SUN OFFERS  
I HAVE COME TO THE END OF THE ROAD  
AND I MUST TREK ACROSS ENDLESS

BOUNDARIES

PASSING FROM, ONE LIAR TO THE NEXT  
TASTING EVE'S FORBIDDEN FRUIT,  
AND DRINKING THE WINE OF DIONYSUS  
I PASS THROUGH AGES OF LONG AGO

I STUDY THEM,

LEARN THEM,

LIVE THEM,

AND RECREATE THEM

I TAKE UP ANTIGONE'S PLIGHT

AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS OF

SOCRATES

I STAND FOR WHAT WILL ALWAYS BE

I AM THE PEN

"THE JUNGLE" DOES NOT LIVE IN MY

MIND

I SEE IT EVERY WHERE

ALAS! TO BE ROBINSON CRUSOE

YET I SPAN ACROSS YEARS

MY MARK LEFT UPON PAGES

MY WORDS SPREAD ACROSS THE

UNIVERSE

MY NOM DE PLUME PROTECTS ME

AND SPEAKS FOR ME IN THE SAME

BREATH

I AM.....

I AM THE WRITER

*Sheri L. Dennis*

## Resistance

I am fed up  
with Reagans, Red-lining, Racists  
People who vibe off of oppression  
and genocide  
without even knowing  
Who lynch and run  
Who are scared of me  
and me of them.

I stand to the challenge  
of revolution  
with a raised BLACK fist  
making a gun with my mouth  
spitting bullets in the oppressor's  
Eye/I.

I am here  
Fullll of rebellion  
Fullll of the spirit of:  
Nzinga  
Turner  
Vesey  
and  
TRUTH!

I am here  
full  
and  
fedddd-up.  
I shall struggle to death.

*Tomika DePriest*

## Tell-A-Vision

The idiotbox tricked me into an hour long journey.  
I travelled to places I had only dreamed about  
and  
Places I never thought of.  
I saw myself in different images  
Totally different from MYself.  
When I landed upon the stars,  
I became one of them.  
Zombie-like. All dressed up  
and  
Being applauded for what they called being a "Bitch"!  
All this time I thought a bitch was a female pregnant  
dog?!

Yes, the idiotbox ceased ME  
and  
Took me to horrific heights.  
My brown eyes turned into a mystical blue  
and  
My hair took on a blondish tint.  
For a while I thought I looked like a Winner.  
Yet, my brown turned imaginable white skin made me  
into a Sinner.

Indeed, the idiotbox was hard to escape.  
It was clearly a case of Rape.  
As if my world had not been rocked enough.  
Yes, I found the idiotbox to be a bluff.  
All fiction and fantasy.  
Beware!

*Tomika DePriest*



# Soul

if a woman's hair represents her Soul,  
What happens when she Perms it  
and the chemical interacts with her soul?  
Is it burned or just cooked like meat on the stove?

if a woman's hair represents her Soul,  
What happens when she Slicks it down  
with heavy grease and unnecessary oils?  
Does her soul become weighed  
OR  
does it somehow ooze thru feeling betrayed?

if a woman's hair represents her Soul,  
What happens when she allows it to be free  
and untamed as defined by society?  
Does its purity manifest itself?  
and yes does the soul fly FREE??  
O' spirit of KA connects perhaps  
With the cosmos  
and yet, is this release?

if a woman's Hair does not represent her Soul,  
then what does?

\*KA means innermost spirit

*Tomika DePriest*

## Jazzy love

as Sanborn  
touched the keys of  
his horn, I too, wanted to  
play the keys of your horn. like  
the notes that rippled forth from  
the saxophone, your skin sang  
in tune with the touch  
of my light  
caresses.  
an explosion  
of melody rang clear  
while your cadence burst into  
the cavity of my score. i floated  
above you on notes being enveloped  
by the darkness watching  
you reach your  
Jazzy Finale.

*Lisa Y. Forniss*

## Night Dreamin

I Took a ride on a caressing moon wave  
and it led me to you  
there was an explosion of love sparks as I  
reached out for your mental essence  
I slowly made love to your dreams  
arousing them with teardrop kisses while  
rolling around in my crescent smile  
attempting to bring us together  
in an eclipse of the aftermath of spiritual love

*Lisa Y. Forniss*



## Sleeptight Eternal

they tell me not to love  
too much.  
that loving  
You  
gives life a new dimension.  
that by loving/life, I make  
You  
real.

i imagine  
You  
silently, innocently sleeping  
having no idea in the world  
of the harm coming to  
You  
....i'm sorry.

i lay my hand on my stomach hoping  
You  
feel my touch.  
i soak myself in warm, warm water hoping  
You  
feel the warmth.  
i talk through my head hoping  
You  
hear my words.  
never knew i would "know"  
gwen brooks words:  
"abortions will not let you forget/you remember the  
children  
you got that you did not get."  
You  
are a part of  
me  
growing inside, causing changes in  
my  
body that only

You  
can cause. my milk  
You  
will never taste.

i imagine  
You  
one way, then another. the product of  
Your  
father's semen  
Your  
mother's egg.  
You-my child  
me-your mother  
he-your father.  
the two of us  
lost  
in my cavity to make  
One.

the three of us  
emerging from the submersion of  
love.  
tonight i write this in memory of  
You,  
my sleeping, eating child.  
i write this in memory of  
You,  
my a part-of-apart-from-me  
Child.  
i write this in memory of  
You  
my loved/unloved  
Child.  
Goodnight  
Sleeptight &  
May God Bless  
You.

*Lisa Y. Forniss*

## BEYOND AFRICA

The sun takes its glorious throne  
hailed in by the beat of the drum  
there is nothing else  
but the rhythm  
the sun  
the drummer  
the motherland  
and me

perfect harmony  
i need none else

Dark Ebony Hands  
Black as Night  
Black Hands of Samson  
now unchained  
beats a song of freedom  
they speak to me

I stare in awe at the hands  
I ache  
the rhythm  
the sun  
the drummer  
the motherland  
and me

The sun rises  
rays dancing  
on the tall green grass of rice fields  
Black sparkling bodies bend in community

on the city  
on untamed jungles  
on pyramids  
on the Nile  
on the deserts

on the starving Black baby  
Ethiopia  
U.S.A.  
on the ghettos  
on Little Boy Junkie won't you blow your pipe  
on me wit' ya oozie  
on large gold chains  
that adorn the body  
while the mind starves  
GUCCI CHAIN THE BRAIN  
on the bleedin'  
deformed  
South African child

1990  
1890  
1790  
1690  
2090???

Sugar-coated  
tell me  
which is more dangerous the hidden knife of today  
or the obvious knife that hung Black men from trees

Yesterday  
Today  
Harlem, Jamaica, Newark  
Atlanta, Ethiopia, Panama

none escape the light  
or the bleeding  
of the Motherland

only its milk

United in color  
in struggle  
in experience  
in mental slavery

The drum speaks the story of your life  
Night comes  
Night passes  
the sun rises  
the sun sets

the sun...the moon...theday...the night

There is nothing else

but the rhythm  
the sun  
thedrummer  
the motherland  
and we

*C. Wiatta Freeman*



i woke up on da wrong side of da bed  
dis mawning  
so when i  
propped my body at its edge  
and swang my feets over  
to stand  
i fell into a chasm bout as deep as  
twenty-fo hours could hold.....

(den i thought-all i'se had to do  
was roll over.)

*Jennifer Freeman*

## manaction

"I WANNA DO IT THE WAY I WANNA DO IT ALLTHE  
TIME I WANNA SAY IT THE WAY I WANNA SAY IT ALL THE  
TIME SO I WANNA BE IT THE WAY I WANNA BE IT ALL NO  
TIME SO THERE'S NO WAY LEFT FOR you NO  
TIME LEFT FOR you NOTHING LEFT FOR you  
JUST ME DOING IT  
ALL THE TIME----  
WITHOUT YOU."

*Jennifer Freeman*

The soul swims in the tears that  
are never shed--struggles--sometimes  
drowns.

Those that I dare to let  
taste stale  
from being kept  
too long.

They dry on my face  
and sting.

*Jennifer Freeman*

BLACK MEN

of distinction  
of purpose  
of love  
of power  
of strength  
of pride

BLACK MEN

strong  
wise  
gentle  
erotic  
sexy

BLACK MEN

angry  
upset  
mad  
fearful  
afraid

BLACK MEN

incomprehensible  
manipulative  
indecisive

but then,

BLACK MEN

intelligent  
caring  
honest  
sensitive  
fun  
passionate

and that's why  
I love them.

*Monique Gaffney*

on sunflowers, wild blackberries, and lemonade

it took a long time for me  
not to feel so scared  
of you  
but more importantly so scared of myself  
and what i could feel  
if i took the chance

you helped me to feel  
like those sunflowers in my secret field  
that reached way past my shoulders,  
kissing bees and embracing the sun  
like a hungry lover unashamed of her need  
like the dangerously sweet clumps of wild blackberries  
tangled along my fence, full of spiders and thistles  
that could not keep me from  
the tart, purple stickiness against my tongue  
and like my aunt's fresh garden lemonade  
tasting like church on a hot Texas summer day,  
full of sunlight and lemon pulp and  
the starry tinkle of ice against the glass

you helped me to see  
how much i missed  
touching and being touched  
holding on and being held  
and not coming all by myself

so i stopped being scared  
i closed my eyes,unfolded myself,  
and started to feel again

i thank you  
for making me feel so good about it  
but most of all i thank you for giving me  
sunflowers,  
wild blackberries,  
and lemonade

*Shennette Garrett*

## recipe

got me a taste of  
a goodbye last night

“even if i don’t never get  
with you no mo, i’ll always remember you”

your little bit of goodbye was  
bitter  
crumbly and dry  
too brown  
not quite done in the middle  
with a little blood left near the bone

looks like i’ma have to  
cook myself up  
a little  
something  
special

*Shennette Garrett*

## untitled

“you always sound like a goodbye,  
like i’ll never see you again, “ you said

but i had gotten used to seeing them leave  
when they realized that i ain’t so strong  
that i ain’t fine as all that  
& that i need a man to trust above all else  
so everyday i expect to hear you tell me  
“you love too thick & need too much”  
on your way out

so i’m trying to let you know that  
i ‘preciate you trying/it was nice getting to know  
you/you’re a really nice  
guy/& take your pictures with you/  
goodbye  
goodbye

but you keep on saying “hi” again  
& the other word gets harder to say  
& i can’t make it mean so long/good riddance/get  
out/fuck you/  
‘cause i don’t want to give up another goodbye  
unless i can take it back to save  
for the next day  
& the next

hello?

*Shennette Garrett*

## For Len Bias 1963-1986

The gameplan was to  
have it all. He played well but  
missed the final shot.

*Aretha Hankinson*



## SISTERHOOD

Janet kept her room clean all of the time. She loved her single room all the more for that reason. When it came time for housing assignments Janet lived in fear. She was sure that she'd get a slob for a roommate and she'd have to deal with chaos.

"If there is one thing I can't stand it's being messy," she'd say when someone commented on the neatness of her room. It always looked like a dorm photo spread in one of those collegiate magazines that were left in our dorms. There was a Spelman pennant on one wall; some pictures of the crew, and a lot of her and Omar; Malcom and Martin posters; and plenty of African art. Her prize piece was a wooden mask brought to her from the continent by her parents. It hung alone on a narrow wall opposite her dresser, so everytime she looked in the mirror she was able to look at it.

We were all concerned about Janet when we came back to school. Death knocked on her family's door and left with both of her parents. I honestly didn't expect her to return -- she had so much to deal with, but when I went to check into my room, there she was grinning from ear to ear and checking her watch.

"What the hell took you so long? We've got business to take care of!" With that we were off and running all over campus, gathering together the posse, and making plans for the final voyage...our senior year. Through the rituals of discovering the events of everyone's summer, I never saw Janet flinch. She never mentioned the car accident or the funeral or any part of the tragedy; instead she talked about the joys of finally being twenty-one and Chicago's newest clubs. All of us knew about the accident.

Carmen was with her when she found out, and Tracy and I alternated a couple of weekends with her. Still, none of us knew how to ask her how she was really feeling -- we didn't know what to expect.

Late summer became fall, the year progressing in a normal way. All of us hit the books and the parties with equal passion. Janet's relationship with her "husband," Omar, stayed its normal steady course while the rest of us picked up our search for the "right one." We all contracted extreme cases of "senioritis," and spent the time we were supposed to be in classes and labs discussing our futures, hopes, and fears. It was at one of these sessions when Janet held up her left hand to reveal a small glimmer on the ring finger. At these times we celebrated our acceptance letters, reflected on our years together, and wondered what time would do to our special bond.

Through all of the pressures of senior year, Janet held up remarkably well. She was an excellent student and managed to stay in the honors program when the rest of us dropped out or were dropped. She knew that law school was the place for her. She knew that she loved Omar. Her life appeared to be back on track despite her tragic summer. Janet never said anything, but we all knew she was still hurting but trying to stay strong.

The year flew by. Before I realized it, I was making plans to ship my things home at the end of finals week. Janet floated through Senior Week the same way she moved through the school year -- seemingly in control. She didn't drink. She claimed it didn't do anything for her and she preferred a natural buzz. It came in handy on the night we went clubbing. Tracy celebrated too much, and the rest of us were too giddy

to care. Janet was able to take control of the situation and take care of us as usual.

We spent the last day before graduation together at the mall. Janet usually reserved her evenings for Omar and this one was no different. We had to race down the expressway to get her back in time. Of course when we got back Omar had left a message that he'd be late...as usual. I don't remember why Janet was in the room alone. I don't know how the mask on the wall shattered. All I remember about that night was Janet's screams. We ran into her room, and found her curled up in the fetal position screaming and sobbing. She finally let go, and no matter how much we wanted to, we couldn't help her. All we could do was hold her and surround her with our love.

*Aretha Hankinson*

## Man's Job

Dedicated to Man who works in our favorite eating place.

1.70 You were figurin' and changin'  
wakin' me from my tonka toy summation  
of life

If I could figure like you when I was...

How aged are your years?

Your years of life installments?

17.00 Lil' mouth blurted over the register, standing  
on an orange crate,

I stare mouth open then shut,

Seein' you dreamin' you could sweat  
playin' 'stead slavin'...

Little eyes screamin' through my body,

"I have to be here who are you?"

Shiftin' my glance, thrashin' my head  
down...

from shame.

receipt Hearin' more 'adult worries' in your man  
child matchbox car racin' voice of seven  
than my

whispering twenty one years...of discovery,  
chargin', drop, chargin' into life without  
yo' teddy bear,

Keep chargin' Man, speed, cause if you  
slow

to a stop, you might see other's doubt  
reflecting in your eyes.

*Kamela Heyward*

## namow

I ache to shake you  
your bones, your mind, your heart rattling  
until  
you can imagine your blood yielding to  
the flow,  
You are bleeding internally don't take no Doctor  
to see . . .

20/20 failing vision  
I want to slit your eyes, look at your hand and  
hands  
rocking you in a hellified furnace  
hoping for reflexes.  
You are bleeding internally don't take no Doctor  
to see . . .

Wake from your coma and scour your damned  
rigormortis  
off my soul,  
You are bleeding internally don't take no Doctor  
to see . . .  
I want to live.

Too much talk, too much m-o-v-e-m-e-n-t,  
too much of a chance to run into the open air,  
the country pine bama okra goober collard green  
tata' pie,  
air . . . to breathe  
But, you inhale mealie bugs and weeds.  
As you lay dead leaves sloped, daggered stems  
pierce your face while you sanction your own  
rape

And what do you do when the hands are gloved,  
the white sheet weights your eyes  
as the ground becomes your cooling board and  
your blood incidental?  
You're bleeding internally don't take no Doctor  
to see . . .  
You should live.

*Kamela Heyward*



## In Search of

The rays of the sun beat upon my head  
in search of...my knowledge

The drops of rain mix with my beads of perspiration  
in search of...my precious minerals

The gusts of wind push upon my body  
in search of...my unfaltering strength

The soft kisses of a man cover my body  
in search of...my everlasting love.

*Tracey D. Hughes*

## Howzit Gowin!?

Money's tight - - Love ain't right

Food ain't made - - Rent ain't paid

Can't think straight - - Gas bill's late

Mixed up head - - Telephone's dead

I am sick and tired of having to continue to smile  
when everything's

going wrong. I'm tired of being strong, a martyr--  
everyone

thinking my grass is always greener. I want to be  
able to be weak sometimes, to crack. To stand and  
face the world with tears in my eyes and a lump  
in my throat and answer loudly to the question

"Is everything okay?" with a "No, hell no  
everything is not okay-I am not fine!"

and to let them all know, just like  
everyone else I have bad days and  
bad weeks and bad months. I have  
problems too.----Now take this

into consideration the next

time you think of

asking someone

"howzit gowing!?"

*Karen Ann Jenkins*



# Personal Letter to the Black Prince (4 Tawana Brawley)

No one shares my perpetual  
pain

If I get raped tomorrow  
at noon  
on a busy downtown street...  
If I get violated like a trite traffic law...  
If my thighs  
are stretched  
like unyielding elastic...  
If my womb is  
painfully poisoned with his  
recessive seed  
like one poisons  
an unwanted rat,  
and the excess  
crawls down my leg  
staining my skin  
and encircles my feet,  
who will care but you?

Brother of my flesh,  
Father of my womb's creations,  
Guardian of my eternity,  
ascend the throne  
once again

If you do not survive I may never exist.

*Carliss Johnson*

## Reasons (4 Earth, Wind & Fire)

How can I write a poem when the woman down the street thinks the revolution is a musical group and the man who lives with her does not need her cuz cheap whiskey gets him through the day and their ten year old "baby" boy does not need either of them cuz he sells reefer and crack at school during class and "what does love have to do with it anyway. . ."

How can I write a poem when sell out Black brothas are selling soul sistuhs in animal furs for less than they sell their drugs, and keep the sistuhs high cuz they so low, "swing low sweet chariot. . ."

How can I write a poem when brotha I go to school with is having casual sex with a sistuh I know, nobody says I love you, he doesn't use condoms, she doesn't make him, and they both think AIDS is people who help. "Let's get it on"--the condom, I mean. . .

How can I write a poem when the only Blackman teaching at the all Black inner city school has a jherri curl, lives with a wicked white man calls him honey cuz he is so sweet, and cautiously cringes when you or I call him brother. "What's going' on?"

How can I write a poem when my melancholy minister drives past me on Sunday in his shiny new car, waves, does not pick me up even though we are going to the same place because the wild white woman kissing on him in the front seat is not his wife, she is out "workin hard for the money. . ."

How can I write a poem when the young girl on heroin ridin' the train believes her womanhood is ultimately innate in her ability to bear children and the only reason she had his baby anyway was cuz she needed somebody to hold on to "if only for one night..."

How can I write a poem when nobody reads anymore everybody is talking, nobody is listening and nobody is sayin' anything anyway "how come you don't call me anymore?"

How can I write a poem when most of us don't know where we've been, none of us know where we going, many of us don't know who we are and some of us who don't know who we are think we're Greek "just sitting on the dock of the bay watching the tide roll away..."

How can I write a poem when the sun will rise everyday no matter how oppressed and opressing people are, no matter who is high, no matter how many die, no matter who fired first, or if my brain bursts and what if one day the sun does not rise, are we gonna "turn out the lights?"

How can I write a poem then?

*Carliss Johnson*

## This isn't really a love poem

I wanted to write you a love poem,  
but love poems don't come easy to me.  
Is this a love poem?  
I mean is it sufficient to say that:  
just hearing your name thrills me,  
I think about you all day long  
Dream luridly about you all night,  
your kisses linger on my mouth and breasts for  
months,  
your eyes haunt my every waking hour,  
I want to devour you wholly,  
and  
if I knew how I would make simply sensuous love  
to you  
until the revolution comes  
  
and even then I want you by my side

*Carliss Johnson*

Squeezing her eyes shut, she opened them again and tried again.

Making a giant effort she clenched her hands into fists squeezing them and her eyes tightly shut.

Her body was tense with frustration, her room a mess.

On her desk were balls of paper.

-Next to her desk was her trash can, half way filled with these balls.

-Around the can were the other paper balls that had missed.

As if hit, she jumped, not physically but mentally. As if someone slapped a word in her head.

She opened her eyes and her hands. She thought, then grinned.

She then pulled the pen out where she had stabbed her desk, then proceeded to write her essay.

After writing one word the rest seemed to flow and as her pen raced across and down the paper, her body relaxed and her eyes followed the pen down the page.

*Simona M. Jones*

## A Rapee's Plea for a Spit-cup

He told me to be still  
and we churned  
my meat and potatoes runny.

He insisted I hold on  
and I choked up  
the sticky mess,  
caught it with my tongue,  
and held it there  
dangling.

When he cordially asked  
that I be silent,  
I discreetly plugged my nose  
and gulped the gooey  
mess of our lives back down.

*Tasha Keeble*

## Retreat

Told him I couldn't stay.  
Had to go.  
Wouldn't be back.  
Not too soon.

Called me a  
feminist.  
"Always on a brother."  
Trying to see something  
in nothing.

Asking questions.

I had to leave.  
Was tired of lying there beneath him  
in that room.  
In the dark.  
In that bed  
shrouded in  
Red, Black, and Green.

I had to go.  
It was too dark.  
Couldn't even see  
me  
Black as I am.  
Me:  
human,  
black,  
woman,  
feminist.  
Yea!

*Tasha Keeble*



## The Game

third graders marching  
like toy soldiers  
line the classroom.  
black teacher stands in the middle  
pointing to the prizes  
for those who know all the time tables.  
no one has yet been successful.  
a little Haitian girl raises her hand  
and is brought to the middle.  
she stands, a secret agent  
questioned over and over  
to be tricked and caught,  
but she wins.  
then, black teacher calls white children  
to the center.  
practice and practice and practice and...  
so many questions in our young minds  
why we never went to teacher's house  
but the blue-eyed girls did.  
why teacher accused a black girl of stealing  
but not the grey-eyed boys who were there also.  
Why...

*Nalida E. Lacet*



## Anticipation

Water dances excitedly down my back  
pirouetting in places where your lips  
once danced.

Reminding me of your gentleness  
the way you make me laugh.

And I smile,  
that kind of smile that cannot  
be seen on my lips.

Downy towel and robe tenderly drying,  
licking water from my breast and thighs.

Reminding me of how your  
lips feel.

And I smile.

Wishing I could wrap you  
around me so easily.

Perfumes and oils sing  
their poignant song.

Reminding me of the way  
you sigh and our aroma of love.

And I smile.

Tasting the flavor of love  
on the tip of my tongue.

Spandex and nylon hugging  
my body, lovingly stopping to  
caress every curve.

Reminding me of the way you  
make love, then hold me oh,  
so tight.

And I smile,

cause I know you'll be  
coming back tonight.

*Kim C. Lee*

## Haiku

I have a friend who calls me  
butterfly. I guess  
she is a collector--

*Kim C. Lee*



# Where Have All the Children Gone?

Where have all the children gone?

The playground is full of empty  
crack viles and dirty dope syringes.

no Mary on the monkey bars  
or Sammy on the swings.

Where have all the children gone?

The schoolyard has a high barbed  
wire fence holding the criminals-  
inside.

no Sandie learning science  
or Robert reading aloud.

Where have all the children gone?

the street game got different  
players - pint-size pushers and  
bubble gum whores.

no Dana jumping double dutch  
or Billy playing ball.

Where have all the children gone?

the hospital is filled with crack  
the addicts screaming and shaking for  
the calming white substance. (and it  
ain't mama's milk)

no Cathy quietly cooing  
or Malcolm in mother's arms.

**WHERE HAVE ALL THE CHILDREN GONE?**

has anyone checked the graveyard

*Kim C. Lee*

## Sky

Dancing  
Dangling sunbeams,  
Piercing clouds in the sky,  
Fresh, cool, and loving the moon gives birth  
To the stars

*Helen Lewis*

I SAW THOUSANDS OF FLOWERS TODAY  
THEY WERE ALL SMILING AT ME  
THEN THEY SUMMONED ME TO REST MY  
THOUGHTS ON THEIR BLOSSOMS  
THEIR BRIGHT COLORS SWALLOWED ME  
WHOLE  
AND MADE ME FORGET  
THE DARKNESS OF THE WORLD  
THEY TOOK ME ON A PSYCHEDELIC  
JOURNEY  
INTO PEACE AND STILL BEAUTY

*Jacqueline D. Mason*

## LIKE A STONE

LIKE A STONE I MUST BE  
I TOUCH NOTHING AND NOTHING TOUCHES ME.  
I RESIST ALL TENDERNESS, WARMTH, AND  
CONCERN

GIVING ONLY THAT WHICH I DESIRE  
RECEIVING LITTLE IN RETURN  
I HAVE BEEN TOUCHED BEFORE  
A LONG TIME AGO  
I REMEMBER THE LASHES  
THEY WERE STRONG AND HARD  
TOO YOUNG TO UNDERSTAND  
DEVASTATING WAS THIS PAIN  
YET I LEARNED TO ENDURE

THERE WAS NO ONE TO EXPLAIN  
AND MY MOUTH WOULDN'T TELL  
INWARD REMAINED THIS HELL

MY HEART HELPED ME TO HEAL  
AND IT TOLD MY MIND TO BUILD A SHIELD  
I BECAME A WARRIOR  
WINNING EVERY BATTLE

SO HERE I STAND LIKE A STONE  
STRONG AND HARD  
NEVER TO BE PENETRATED

OUTSIDE  
IT'S NOT SO BAD IT'S ALL I KNOW BEEN MY  
BEST FRIEND  
I'M FOREVER SAFE  
IN  
DOESN'T LOOK APPEALING AND I'M NOT CURIOUS  
ANYMORE

FOR YOU SEE THE DOOR WAS SHUT ON ME SO  
VERY LONG AGO

ALONE IS MY REALITY

*Jacqueline D. Mason*

## REALIZIN'

STOP!  
HOLD UP  
LET ME OFF!  
THIS MADNESS IS TAKING ME TOO MANY  
PLACES I'M NOT SURE I WANT TO GO.

ISN'T IT SOMETHING?  
MY ENTIRE EXISTENCE IS THREATENED  
AS A FREE BLACK WOMAN THAT IS  
IT'S A POPULAR ISSUE NOW  
A PERTINENT ISSUE  
EVERYBODY'S TALKIN' BOUT  
YOU'VE GOT TO DO THIS  
YOU'VE GOT TO DO THAT  
YOU AIN'T FREE YET  
YOU MAY NEVER BE

IT'S A MAJOR CAUSE WE ALL GOT TO  
BREAK OUR BACKS  
SWEAT, CRY, LAUGH, AND KEEP ON  
MOVIN' ON

STRUGGLIN'

THAT'S ALL I HEAR  
EVERYTHING IS IN SUCH FULL SPEED  
GUSHING FORWARD  
EVERBODY REALIZIN' WHAT IS, BECAUSE  
OF WHAT WAS

SOLIDARITY!  
FREE MANDELA SOUTH AFRICA  
MARTIN, TUTU  
MALCOLM, AND MALCOLM SPEAKS

REALIZIN'  
"BLACK GIRL YOU AINT' FREE"  
"FAR FROM IT"

"THEY STILL WANT YOU OUT"  
THEY FINDIN' NEW WAYS TO KEEP YOU  
OUT EVERY MOMENT

WE SIT WE REST WE LAUGH WE LOVE WE  
PRETEND WE WASTE TIME  
THEY USE IT AGAINST US AND WE GET  
LEFT BEHIND

ALWAYS WORKIN' THINKIN' PLANNIN'  
USING TIME AND NOT USING TIME  
CAREFULLY, CONSTANTLY

DEMISE!  
THE ULTIMATE, UNDERLYING GOAL  
A COMPLETE RACE GONE, WIPED OUT

MY GOD  
I REALIZED I'M SCARED

*Jacqueline D. Mason*



## For Men Who Don't Understand

Doesn't it seem strange to you that women endure  
heartache,  
rape,  
oppression,  
instability,  
poverty,  
desertion,  
verbal and physical abuse,  
but are still labeled "the weaker sex"?

*Kimara Mason*

## Luxury (?)

If I had a dime  
For every time  
You said "I love you,"  
I'd buy diamonds

If I had a dime  
For every time  
You said "I need you,"  
I'd buy furs

If I had a dime  
For every time  
You said "I treasure you,"  
I'd buy cars.

If I had a dime  
For every time  
You meant what you said  
I'd be destitute.

*Kimara Mason*

## Still-Born

It starts with a simple gesture of sharing from me  
to you.

My heart no longer beats for one, but for two.  
Quicker than imagined, this task becomes your  
own.

From this day forward you are no longer my  
clone.

You have been the inhabitant for merely months  
of my body.

Yet, it seems like a sweet, joyous eternity.

I can't imagine you ever leaving my warm  
comfortable shelter

To enter a cold cruel world of helter-skelter.

OOH...OOH..the time has arrived.

But wait! I can't deliver my baby alive.

My baby is unwillingly leaving the womb.

She is now the inhabitant of a ready-made tomb.

The tears stream down my face;

My heart decreases its pace.

Why? I repeatedly ask.

It was such a lengthy task.

I loved you with all of my heart.

Guess it wasn't meant to be, from the very start.

Oh how I want another chance

To feel my baby dance.

*Valerie McLeod*

## Revision of Sight

I no longer look at the project tenements in which  
we live and see  
Poverty and Despair; But I've adjusted my vision  
and now I see the  
Richness of a people celebrating their existence.

I no longer look at brothers hustlin' to a fast bone,  
as mere beggars;  
But I see survivors trying to live from day to day,  
because the system that beats them year to year,  
decade to decade, generation to generation, won't  
give them a Goddamn thing!!!

I no longer see sisters pregnant with Youth and  
Poverty as just statistics;  
But I see reproducers of our race which is slowly  
dying.

We must all stop and revision our focus,  
for if we adjust our sight and seek out the source,  
Together we can redefine our existence.

*Cynthia Miles*

## Untitled

In all my life I never meant to hurt--only to love. Sometimes I thought I loved you; this time proves I didn't. Maybe the times we laughed together, the one time we cried together, all the time we shared together from November until last week was a lie.

When I allowed you to choose me, and you allowed me to choose you, we made the wrong choice. Maybe when we laughed together, we laughed at things that weren't funny. Maybe the times we traveled we went nowhere, together. Maybe the times we talked we said nothing, together. Maybe the times we danced, we celebrated for nothing, together. Maybe when you held me and I held you, together, we grasped the intangible. Maybe the mornings and nights we "made Love," we only followed the simple steps to a universal game which can be defined in a three-letter word.

I say all of this to say that all I thought we had, we really didn't have, and that which we really didn't have must have been nothing that we had together. In order to understand the quickness of my words, the poetry of my prose, the theology behind my spirit, you need to understand Who I Am.

But if you're troubled by my words, I guess it's understandable. To you I'm a simple female with a bad attitude. But I thought it was okay to be myself cause I was tired of being who I was. I'm sorry that I didn't please you.

I thought it was okay to understand your pain, who you are, and the reasons you are who you are--and ask no more of you--I'm sorry I accepted you. For whatever reasons I didn't come close to being special to you--I'm sorry.

By the way please don't think I'm doggin' you out because I could never forget your concern--Remember when I was sick you simply cared? And I hadn't known you for very long the first time you showed that concern.

By the way please don't think I'm doggin' you out because I can never forget your compassion. Remember the night you pretended to cry because you were sorry for being sorry?

I guess if this poem had a title it would be Untitled: A Eulogy for A Love That Died. And the only survivors included you and me.

I watched a man die who died trying to kill me too--and I was abused for one year, one month, and nine days by a man who loved me more than life itself.

I almost lost my life and yet the life of one unborn because of love. Hundreds of people in a place far away blame me for these crimes and hold the guilty unaccused.

It's been real--I only wish it had. Oh please don't think I'm feeling sorry for myself, or giving you a sad story, because I like hanging out in my own self, Alone. I dig my beauty that others can't seem to stand. I love my smile that's like a candle in the dark. And I respect my mind, for it, in retrospect, has respected me.

At the close of this relationship and eulogy, I say that in the name of love the mistakes I made were only human errors and I'm sorry.

And now i lay to rest the spirit that  
once embodied this corpse of love.

*Cynthia Miles*

## My Child Will be a Man

I won't raise my boy to be  
A lawyer or a doctor.  
That is not my dream.  
I won't raise him to be professional--  
A player on a team.  
I won't teach him to be a bully  
To always have his way.  
I want tell him that he's somebody;  
I'll show him everyday.  
He'll know of his proud heritage--  
That in him I'll instill.  
I won't expect him to agree with me  
And always do my will.  
The sweetest gift that I will give him  
Will not be a car.  
It will be my motherhood,  
I'll drive him to the stars.  
This gift will teach him how to love--  
How to love and live.  
It will show him how to care,  
And how to always give.  
He will be a beautiful child.  
I'll love him without conditions.  
I won't raise him to want it all--  
To have the high positions.  
Yet, it is a paradox,  
For he'll want everything.  
But I'll give him the mind to get it  
And that is everything.  
Therefore, my one and only task--  
The one that faces me--  
Is raising my boy child to be

The most that he can be.  
There are many things I know  
That will help him to succeed.  
But giving those things is not enough,  
I simply won't concede.  
I would only promise to always love him;  
Still, that's not enough.  
For that can not sustain a boy  
When times start getting tough.  
Therefore, I will promise to love him,  
To always hold his hand.  
I'll also raise my little boy  
To truly be a man.

*Riche' Deianne Richardson*



## Together We Will Win

I am very tired today.  
My work has made me weary;  
But I really need the pay.  
Why must my days be dreary?

Get up, lady, we need your chair,  
There's no room in the front!  
Who cares if you're in despair,  
Just give us what we want!

I work so hard to make ends meet.  
Yet, many rights I lack.  
And he won't let me rest my feet--  
I'm hated because I'm black.  
My forefathers had to fight and die,  
And I'll be just as brave.  
This unjust system I will defy,  
I won't be made a slave.  
I am a parent-the mother of  
A future generation.  
Upon it I will shower love;  
I'll be its foundation.  
The children don't deserve this sorrow--  
This harsh reality.  
They deserve a better tomorrow,  
In short--equality.  
Now I wonder what I can do  
To change these harsh conditions.  
How can I make our dreams come true?  
I'll take a new position!

Tomorrow is not good enough,  
I must start right away.  
Times are getting much too tough,  
That's why I'll start today.  
I'm tired of this strife and grief,  
So I am sitting down.  
It's time for my people to have relief;  
Thus, I will hold my ground.  
Today my race will start anew,  
This system we will beat.  
I'm not getting up for you,  
I'm staying in my seat.

Lady, are you forgetting your place?  
You know that I'm the master!

I'll sit down and support my race.  
That's right! I'll court disaster!  
I'll get the respect that I deserve,  
My people I won't fail!

Lady, you've got a lot of nerve,  
So you will go to jail!

*Riche' Deianne Richardson*

## cello

hand at neck while body is played  
every last breath pulled out of her depths  
naked she rests against the heart  
caressed and coaxed into the vibration of  
the truest love  
swelling with pride  
she explains his melody  
painstakingly - precisely  
abruptly - then fully  
then barely once again  
once respected and understood  
all doors are opened  
her voices take on their full power  
soon their influence  
falls upon him who spun them once  
each fraction of sound  
visible in the arch of his wrist  
crouch of his forehead  
and hold of his eye  
his love for her resounds  
as his lips purse  
in the serious exhilaration  
that results in their  
perfection of expression

*Carrie Smith-Dahl*

## poetry gets hard at times

poetry gets hard at times  
the words don't spin out  
in strings of continuity  
    like water beading on a string  
but stumble  
i feel like i have the wrong pen  
and paper  
and table

but i know  
it's not them that's the problem  
but instead  
a manic muse  
gone wild in my head  
opening drawers  
shuffling papers  
hiding marbles  
stepping on cats in his rush  
to get everything just right  
--for him--  
of course  
well, no, i'm kidding  
poetry gets hard sometimes  
not because of a pen  
or mischievous muse--imp--  
or even because of me  
the one writing it  
but only because  
poetry gets hard sometimes  
the words stumbling instead of spinning

*Carrie Smith-Dahl*

## Spelman's Monument

I like the way that building is  
sharp  
against the sky  
abrupt brick and white  
coming closely, finely  
to the blue and cloud of sky.  
Clean and crisp it is  
a cutting and witty  
building.

It pushes so ever upwards  
from a firm earth  
not impertinently  
but comfortably,  
old and stout  
knowledgeable and down to earth  
the beauty of old Giles Hall.

*Carrie Smith-Dahl*

## The Big Question

A month passes  
Because you are confused.  
Only one decision  
Right or wrong... You'll probably lose.  
Twisting and turning  
In the midst of what must be.  
Only one decision  
Now's the time. I'm just glad it isn't me.

A Big question  
Bruising all that once you learned.  
Opening eyelids  
Ripping dreams that have been burned.  
Taking beauty  
Inventing pain within the soul.  
Opening eyelids  
Never memories will grow old.

A Mistake  
Bringing so much pain and grief  
On a single heart  
Releasing internal relief.  
Terrified  
Inducing reluctant cries of pity  
On a single heart  
Now a statistic of the city.

*Kalia Spears*

## No More Love From Me

No more lonely nights, smothering my sanity with  
memories of you.

No more pitter patters pricking my present--  
I refuse

No more.

No more selling my soul for your sensitivity  
No more sad, solemn, stained Saturdays sitting  
silently wondering when and if you will want to  
abuse or use me again.

No more pussy passing--heart harrassing--or  
bottled laughing.

No more love strokes, entering me as if you were  
born with the right

No more accepting your brutal mentality in  
exchange for your egotistical sexuality--

No more patient patterns, pretending passion,  
playing love songs to replace your presence

No more denting dreams for selfish schemes

No more fabrication to shade your plans of  
intimacy, the kind that smothers and covers  
my in dependence--my individualism  
--mySELF--

I refuse

No More!

*Kalia Spears*

## Don't Sleep!

1989 -- a fad?  
Another fashion?  
What's up?  
Old Glory [red, white & blue]  
Has been replaced by  
Old Freedom [red, black & green]  
Smooth gold chains  
Have been replaced by  
Rough roped medallions  
Soft silk scarves & ties  
Have been replaced by  
The textured lengths of kente  
Cute high-priced perms  
Have been replaced by  
Attractive low-budget naturals  
What's up?  
Or better yet: Who's up?  
Do U know what time it is?  
It's time to watch the signs  
It's time to stop listening  
to what Simon says  
And let the Motherland  
do the talking.  
Mama says:  
Don't Sleep!

*Elvira Wleyeno Tarpeh*



## No Wake Up Calls

If you don't set your own alarm, who will?  
Think about it.  
We offer no wake up calls in this hotel.  
You know what you've got to do--just do it.  
"No Waiting," please.  
Do you want to stay or not?  
While you're making your decision,  
we're putting up our sign--no vacancy.  
In this life, there is only room for a few.  
To get yours, you have to get up earlier than  
everybody else.  
But this time--more than one depend on  
your alarm  
Everybody's TALKING about it    nobody's  
DOING anything about it  
What you have to understand is--it's all about  
ACTION-move the masses!  
It's a majority thing, so where does the fear come  
in?  
It's the minority's dream-you're nightmaring  
and you still won't wake up?  
There's NO EXTERNAL help-it's all on you but  
remember-NO WAKE UP CALLS                      and,  
TIME does not WAIT!

*Kanini Ward*

## HAIKU

planted his fists in  
her face and she watered and  
grew a field of weeds

*Andrea M. Wren*

## A ROACH

(It Happened in Natural Science 104-Spring 89)

you screamed violently  
as if someone had attacked you.  
it was only a roach and you ran.  
it was smaller than your big toe.

what is a welfare mother to do  
who lives in a flea infested,  
roach motel of a shack?

what is a mother to do  
when roaches play tic-tac-toe  
on her wall and answer  
to the dinner call  
before her children?

what is a mother to do  
when you will not even step  
on a damn roach?

what is a mother to do  
for she can not run...

*Andrea M. Wren*

## THE SCREAM KEEPER

i am dark--  
darker by despair;  
i am my people's midnight.  
i stand quiet in my darkness,  
silent in my pain.  
my tears are suspended  
as stars in the sky.  
i am the keeper of secrets,  
the garbage can for dreams.  
i have listened to the screams of the victims  
of murderers, rapists, drug dealers, gangs;  
victims killed by the hand  
of their own arm.  
i heard the pleas for help  
but, i am helpless to respond  
for when they invented the night  
they gave her no voice.  
i am the keeper of screams,  
an abyss of lost dreams;  
i am my people's midnight.

*Andrea M. Wren*

I am writing to expose and explore the point where racism and sexism meet. I am writing to help myself understand the full effects of being black and female in a culture that is both racist and sexist. I am writing to try and communicate that information to my sisters and to any brothers of good will and honest intent who will take the time to listen.

I am writing because four women a day are murdered in this country by men who say they love them. I am writing because rape is. I am writing because I am a daughter and a mother and a lover and a sister and a woman and a feminist. I am writing to understand. I am writing so I won't be afraid. I am writing so I won't start crying again. I am writing because nobody said the word sexism to me until I was 30 years old and I want to know why. I am writing because marriage is slavery unless it occurs between equals.

I am writing because I have seen my friends bleed to death from illegal abortions. I am writing because I have seen my sisters tortured and tormented by the fathers of their children. I am writing because I almost married a man once who beat me regularly with no remorse. I am writing because my daughter is almost old enough to start dating, and I don't know how to tell her to protect herself from what I cannot even fully articulate to myself.

I am writing to allow myself to feel this anger. I am writing to keep from running toward it or away from it or into anybody's arms. I am writing to keep from shooting somebody whose face is only now coming into sharp focus.

I am writing/writing/writing for my life.

from "Why I Write"

*Pearl Cleage*