

FOCUS



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Spring 1994

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank our Creator and the Ancestors for their presence throughout this experience.

We acknowledge the following persons for all they have contributed to the production of *Focus*.

Dr. Anne B. Warner
for years of guidance and leadership

Dr. Johnetta B. Cole
for her continual dedication and example to black women everywhere

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for devoting valuable time, energy, and expertise to the English Club

Mrs. Thedda Edwards
for her generosity and graciousness of spirit

Mr. Tony Grooms
for his fresh and insightful guidance

The Artists, both visual and literary
for daring to create

AWARDS

The winners of the "Spotlight On Focus" contest are:

First place

Shakira Hightower: "from way ago"

Second place

Karima Hasanati Pichon: "not/poem"

Third place

Tahir Fikara Hemphill: "and if you didn't know"

DEDICATION

The 1993-94 edition of *Focus* is dedicated to sister-writer Wanda Coleman. The editors of *Focus* would like to recognize her realness as she commits her art to the world. Her poetry explores the raw nerve of life in its vibrancy and truth. Coleman's voice is the voice of one who lives, breathes and suffers with people. Unfortunately, her poetry is unknown to many of us at Spelman. *Focus* would like to formally introduce a great writer to the body of Spelman women. Through this small sampling, we offer you the genius of Wanda Coleman.

A BLACK WOMEN'S HOLE

for Audrey Christian

she crawls in it for the only
refuge allowed her. and her children
grow fierce off the acid and piss and cum and crawl out
and shit on the world and die young because the world kills
those who defy it, decry it, seek to change and rearrange it
-all but the lucky the cunning the dumb

there are those who go down into the hole with her
finds she's transformed it into paradise

if the world knew it would put her hole up for sale and
turn her out

UNTITLED

he asked if i was a seventh day adventist
they were the only kind of black adults
he knew of
who read and wrote
in public

THINGS HE TAUGHT ME

how butterflies kiss

how to walk like a pink panther

music as a religion

shortcuts across loneliness

always light a joint at the small end
inhale deeply
let the smoke fill your heart

ARS POETICA

he came down the mountain
with a full growth of beard, smiling
the new MS taut in his mitts
precious gold of months of solitude/thought/work
he'd done it--conquered the bitch muse
made a nympho out of her
begging at his boots to be taken
he felt proud. proud as any man who can
wear pain well
he showed it to his old lady, the black chick
who'd had a hard life. a woman of little mercy
in her heart and less in her vocab
he unwrapped his dream carefully, cautioned her
to wash her hands before touching a single page
after a guttural sound from her throat
she obliged, angry at having her
chores in the kitchen interrupted
he sat her down and read each event. when he
finished, cast eyes to reel her expression
"how do you like it?"
she watched his hope dance. "that what you went away fo?
it real nice for some poetry"
"is that all you can say about it?"
"no. i could say more"
"well say it--for god's sake, say it!"
she took off the sanitary napkin she was wearing
and plopped it on the page
"needs more blood in it"
and went back to the kitchen

FOCUS

absent ingredient

1 shakira hightower

3 WINTER
atuanya cheatham

4 How Passive People Make
the Best Slaves
mary lou johnson

5 A Marketable Occurance
lana d. parker

6 Fawn's Bravado
tahra edwards

7 Hawaii
atuanya cheatham

8 Andy's Song
chiquita lockley

9 No Bus
kiini ibura salaam

11 and when the storm came
kiini ibura salaam

sipping soul

13 expecting
candice jenkins

14 not/poem
karima hasanafi pichon

15 Doing It in the Light
lana d. parker

17 a man who covers me in
showers
amira

20 Welcome to my
disappearance,
erinn r. gordon

22 Hot Doughnuts Now
chantrell l. lowe

25 Pornographic Fruit
erinn r. gordon

26 Some Soul To Keep
dineo andaiye brinson

27 Emi Lilo
michelle mccullers

29 nichole neilly

30 Retentions
michelle mccullers

33 you can be free
candice jenkins

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Literary Magazine of Spelman College

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36 Imperialism
mary lou johnson

37 It's Possible
alyson jones

38 what tawana b. thought
kiini ibura salaam

39 A Carriage Missed
lana d. parker

40 Fury
mary lou johnson

41 3.44
michelle mccullers

43 IN THIS ZOO
kiini ibura salaam

44 Love, Peace, and 1992
nicole e. coleman

46 Whistling
monishae mosley

48 For the Messenger
michelle mccullers

50 Tarnished Jewel
sabrina medaniel

52 and if you didn't know
tahir fikara hemphill

54 Bookstore in a Black
Neighborhood
thelonius

closing the distance

60 joe-lynn
candice jenkins

62 A sister. . .
sabrina medaniel

64 En el subway
dineo brinson

66 I was so busy
ladessa e. pearson

67 The Corner of My Mind
sabrina medaniel

69 to all the women. . .
stefanie dunning

72 the little womam
omah m. williams

74 9-29-93
stefanie dunning

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"absent ingredient"



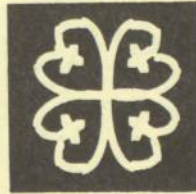


shakira hightower

from
way ago
in the back-then years
i can remember
earthwind&fire serenades
in your puke-green cadillac,
gifts of popsicles and earrings,
straddling your shoulders for
sky journeys

But

mostly
i remember
you were the
good-for-nothing Black ass
whose tardy checks meant
more bologna sandwiches and
canned beans indefinitely
and enduring busted Buster Browns
for as long as they could endure me





or
at least that's what i remember
mommy saying
way-ago
in the back-then years
which are now good-bye years
and
though broken
are a family, promises, and hearts
i can remember
loving you
once.





WINTER

atuanya cheatham

Chilling winds whisper
to the bear within his cave.
Snow dances without.





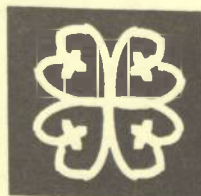
How Passive People Make the Best Slaves

mary lou johnson

They wait.
Every day they wait patiently.
Until.
Until the night turns into day
So they can rise and wait
for breakfast to be ready
for their turn to use the bathroom
for the bus
for someone else to respond to the question. Even if they know the answer.

They wait until
the clock strikes five
for the traffic to disperse
for dinner
for their favorite t.v. show
Until it is time to go to bed.

They wait.
Never questioning, never thinking, never revolting
just waiting for someone to tell them what to do and how to do it
and all along wishing, praying, pleading, begging that one day they
will never have to wait.



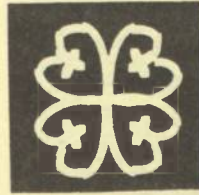


A Marketable Occurrence

lana d. parker

You sent me
to pick up a suitcase
at the grocery store.
It was heavy
because
it had a rose in it.
But you left me
standing
by the frozen foods.
So I gave the rose
to the fishman
and he cut it up
into pieces
and gave it back.
There you go,
is that better?

(Of course he chopped off the head first.)

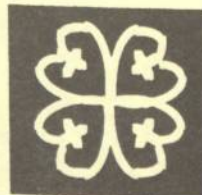


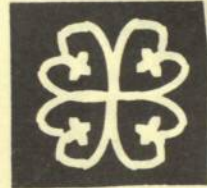


Fawn's Bravado

tahra edwards

Sitting on cliff's edge of approbation
braiding into his waist length ebon hair
a long weed plucked from the margin's soil only
to see it slip through his brown fingers
scorched by the heavens' heat
Yearnings fill a bursting chest to follow
the thunder of the buffalo
to feel the arrows of manhood soar on the back of
traditional chant
yet the bonds of springtime hold fast
these brown hands and feet
with warrior force.





- HAWAII

atuanya cheatham

Nani!

The lush green leaves
shade

The warm sands
welcome

The crashing waves
taunt

The rough rocks
unveil

The burning sun
smiles upon

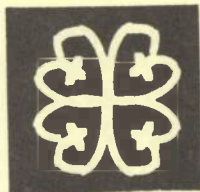
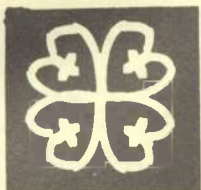
The yellow hibiscus
stretch towards

The lush green leaves
of the palm trees.

Ah! Hawaii!

E Komo Mai!





ANDY'S SONG

chiquita lockley

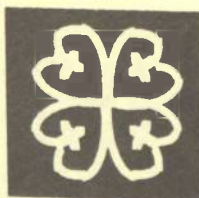
As I stand beside this lake, Cherokee Lake,
I reminisce over the good things in my life.
How the sun, radiant and glowing,
spreads his medicine over the earth to heal her wounds
-- her broken heart.

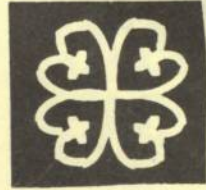
How the grass, the ever so lush green carpet,
defies gravity and grows upward
never stopping until it reaches its peak
--We should try it sometime.

How the butterflies flutter here and there
mystically capturing one's attention
to show off their beauty.

Oh, how sweet the sound of bells-
alarm bells, church bells, school bells,
Those sweet sounds I will hear no more.
Her face, the beauty etched in her pale, so pale, face.
She loves me. I know.

That beautiful face I will see no more.
The times we shared, all of us, so good they were.
Always remember them and me
for I am now only a memory
a little match flickering through the dim, deep darkness of the past.
I will always remember you.





No Bus

kiini ibura salaam

12:35

Heat

Air still

Bags heavy

Car pass

Time tick

12:55

No bus

Restlessness

1:00

I buy candy

Women wait in work clothes

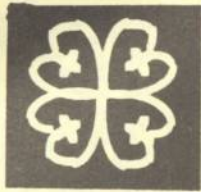
Men circle the brown paper bag

Children follow the bouncing ball
into the busy street

Horn blow

Head turn





1:25

Empty school bus whiz by

Empty taxi whiz

Empty cars

No bus

1:35

Hot wind

Eye burn

Blink

Tear flow

Damn

1:50

Time tick Time tick Time tick

2:00

And still no bus





and when the storm came...

kiini ibura salaam

and when the storm came it had no mercy,
it hit with heavy blows

 exposing doubt where there was once
 security
 creating needs where there was once
 satisfaction

and the raindrops were indeed stinging
each sphere fell without prejudice
each globule carried ounces of pain

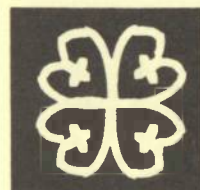
eventually the storm came to pass, but
 the water remained

 flooding the house
 buckling the linoleum
 lapping at their ankles
 seeping through their shoes

and though the water was quite painless,

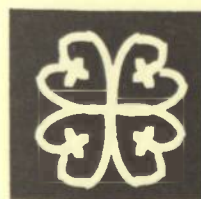
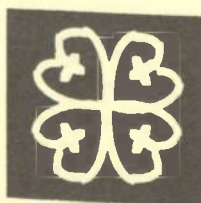
 the ripples that
 accompanied each movement whispered the truth in
 low nagging splashes





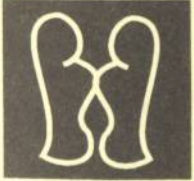
soon all of their time was spent attempting to silence the
ripples,
they brushed water out of
threw bucketfuls out of
pushed streams out of
cranny
then they stumbled upon a drain
a drain clogged with
words
together,
they rolled up their sleeves, got on their hands &
knees and cleared the drain
and the water started to slip down the drain
drop by drop
with heavy thoughts,
they sat down to mend their house
and so the healing began.

doorways
windows
every nook and
half-truths
cover-ups
unspoken
compromises





*"sipping soul
freshly squeezed"*



*"sipping soul
freshly squeezed"*



expecting

candice jenkins

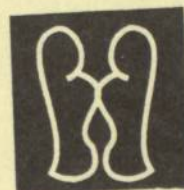
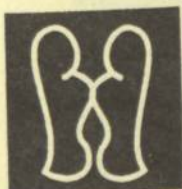
an embryo sits patiently within my chest, curled into itself like twisting ribbon, growing. it forms tiny limbs, that nudge and pull against me in the night; it breathes life from the warmth of my blood, coughing gently in its shining globe of pre-nativity, smiling in its sleep.

the mysteries of feeling, stained dark with passion and glittering with a simple music, unfold within my breast like scented petals. my pulsing heart, my heavy soul are womb and sac, there spreading, stretching into ever-larger circles of enclosed desire.

i wait, with closed eyes and subtle breathing, for the birth, to come in showers of bright understanding and delicate shades of touching; encounters at daybreak and new kisses, which illuminate the shadows in my eyes like stray sunlight.

love

a long-awaited gift, is a newborn jewel within my mind. it crawls through my days on chubby legs and grasps clumsily at my face, blessing me with infant laughter, fragrant talcum mornings, and the brown velvet skin of happiness.

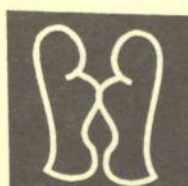




not/poem

karima hasanati pichon

if this were a poem i could compare making love to you to carnival in
rio i could say your love is as sacred as the hajj to mecca i could say
your body is as strong as victoria falls or that your skin is as black as
the backside of the moon or that your hair resembles thousands of
african pythons i could tell you your name flows from my mouth like
palm wine from the tree i could describe your touch to my body like
rain falling on the parched mojave desert i could b/c i'm a poet this
is for real so let me start again your love is a real tangible thing i
can reach out & touch it i can pull it out & put it on the table i
can carry it in my pocket you are as beautiful to me as sterling silver
you are as precious to me as my grandmothers quilt you take over
me like bob marley burning spear & black uhuru you are the reason
the most high created the color purple you are as classic to me as a
66 mustang your body plays love supreme when you walk you are
as hard as jimmi hendrix you are as soft as sarah vaughn you are as
real as daisies in bloom autumn leaves & summer heat you are as
real as the curls in my head the arch in my feet & the length of my
legs you are as real as texas hillcountry florida shores & georgia
earth your skin is a black country night your hair is branches of
pecan trees your hands are chamomile tea your breath is mango
madness you are as real as killians red you are as real as french
lavender incense you are as real as hashish my god you are real
do you dig cuz if you dont i can go on i could because this is not a
poem this is for real . . .



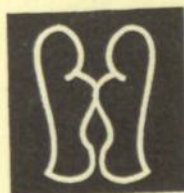


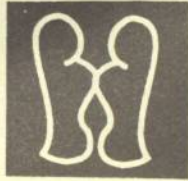
Doing It in the Light

lana parker

In the night,
The mountain emerges
and breaks through
the clouds.
It becomes a volcano
and the sky
separates in preparation
for its spew.
But something catches the lava--
yet not fully

The clouds envelop
this mountainous volcano
paying special attention
to its peaks
as well as its valleys.
The precipitation moistens
every
pebble and boulder
leaving nothing dry

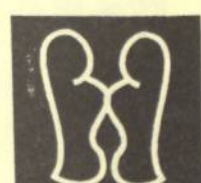
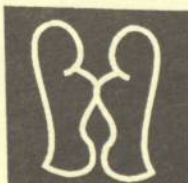


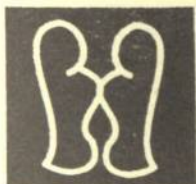


An avalanche--
and it's coming
now.

In the light.
An earthquake and
the mountainous volcano tries
to restrain its inevitable moans--
still the clouds don't
let up.

A pebble no--
a boulder is moved
unplugging the hole.





a man who covers me in showers

amira

he is a dream

that i dreamt in my

other life

other sleep

full of wavering images and

sunlight which curls around corners

like smoke

and he is

creeping through my waking hours

stealthily

dragging his feet

in the dust of my soul

stopping to blow dandelion

seeds of hope

helter-skelter

like so many diamonds scattered in the night

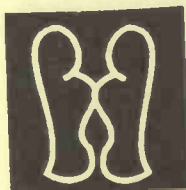
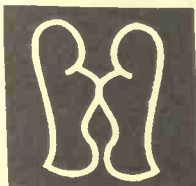
he is

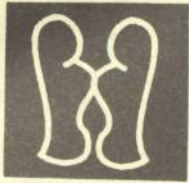
a gift-wrapped sliver of an ancient joy

hiding

in the shadow of my eyes

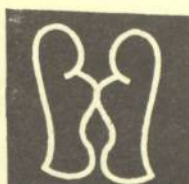
breathing tiny breaths upon my skin

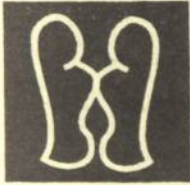




i twirl a praise dance
in the crackling wind
to remember
to exalt
his midnight presence
in the outer reaches of my
existence

for he is
the resonant remnants of a griot's song
running in
ripe circles
of melody
and he is
soothing
with the sparkling balm
of his voice that is like mountains





he is

touching
his hands upon the earth
like splashing water
slipping through the hours
in glistening simplicity

i twirl a praise dance
for he is
loving me like
somewhat of a madman
or a king

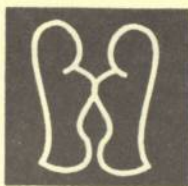
and i am

drowning in his rain

standing

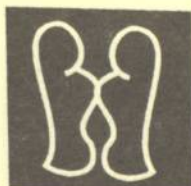
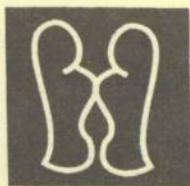
at last.

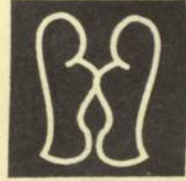
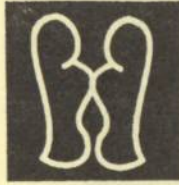




Welcome to my disappearance,
erinn r. gordon

crimson heat
pulsing blindly through my own arousal,
murmuring silence
windless chills
sweat-soaked smiles
as we come
-- a part.
tears of laughter
raining
from your loving
eyes as
you tease me
for my innocence.
cinnamon skin
tasting of
the salty passion
that you
and
I
have
shared.





I stay near
you
searching
for my soul
as you once again
resume your role
as choreographer
in
our
miracle
production.
You direct my dreams
(cueing me to think of *heroes*)
and lead me
into your thoughts-
trampling
on my own
in
this
sweet
trespass.





HOT DOUGHNUTS NOW

chantrell l. lowe

Every day
I anticipate the salvation
of that bright beautiful red neon sign saying
"HOT DOUGHNUTS NOW."
It means everything in the world to me
to see
"HOT DOUGHNUTS NOW"
illuminate the end of a long dark road.

I run across the street
Oblivious to stereo-booming cars
deliberately trying to hit me
Oblivious to old men hanging-out
saying sweet nothings like,
"brown sugar, get me a doughnut too!"
Oblivious to the disgruntled remarks of others
as I race ahead
so I can be next in line





Oblivious to everything
EXCEPT

That sweet sounding Billie Holliday-like voice
of the cashier asking,

"What do you want?"

Then I breathe

(because I had to get there as soon as possible)

relieved "HOT DOUGHNUTS NOW" wasn't turned off.

"Two, no, make that three hot glazed doughnuts please."

A huge smile emerges

as I eagerly await the return of the cashier from the backroom.

"One o six."

I gratefully hand her a dollar ten.

I devour the treats greedily

Without taking time to savor the flavor in my mouth

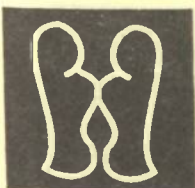
Without taking time to put my four cents in my coat pocket

Without taking time to notice unapproving stares as I ate in
public

Without taking time to tell those men

on the corner

to stop flirting with women who could be their daughters.





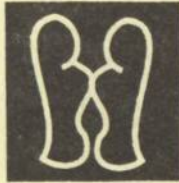
Without taking time to realize...why I crave...
sugar (hot)
distractions (doughnuts)
addictions (now)

Satisfaction.

Even for a brief moment
I crave artificial sugar
as a substitution
for someone's brown sugar.
I look back.
The sign is off.
And I think
at least I can get some
when I want
as many as I want

(or at least until the sign comes on again).

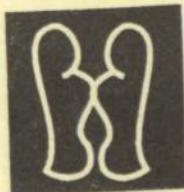


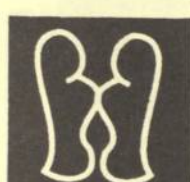


Pornographic Fruit

erinn r. gordon

You sneak away,
embarking on
a lazy orchard rendezvous-
memories of your last
apple-scented assignation
glowing in your eyes.
You think of how the
sun shone
-copper on her skin
and remember
the sweet nectar that
dribbled down the
side of your face
as you bit into
the cool, crisp fruit.





Some Soul To Keep

dineo andaiye brinson

The triviality of taking a shower everyday
is NOT so trivial.

As I wash off the day's dirt,

I wash off the day's hurt.

And when I do not make time to . . .

I lie down with the dirt as my blanket
and it weighs heavy on my soul.





Emi Lilo*

michelle mccullers

Have you ever been somewhere
When the drumbeat caught you
And wouldn't let you go?
Africa calls it Emi Lilo!

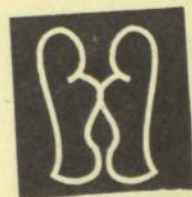
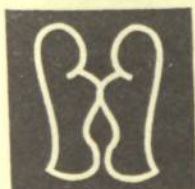
It starts in your face,
pushing--

ThumpThump
ThumpThump

Rising from your heart,
Spreading like honey,
All over your cheeks,
Squeezing your eyes
into two juicy grapes--

Juicy
Juicy

Drip Drop





Trickling down your arms,
Pulling your rag-doll body
With strings of jumping beans
And exotic glass beads--

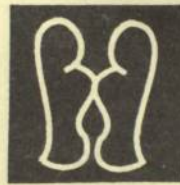
Jingle down your hips,
Rock a rock and wave like palm trees,
Dropping fruit to your knees.

Your knees chew and chew the rhythm,
Leaving peels
And shells
And skins
For your feet to kick high
To the sky
And you fly--

Have you ever been somewhere
When the drumbeat caught you
And wouldn't let go?
Africa calls it Emi Lilo!

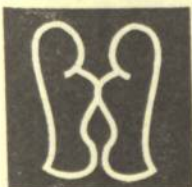
*Kiswahili for spirit possession





nichole neilly

Chopsticks and collard greens
A piñata full of fried chicken
Soursop juice, my love? Where?
In America. If I say to ...
you how come we speak so
differently? They say to us ...
why aren't you homogeneous? She's
light with yellow undertones ...
he's dark almost blue-black.
But you're all the same...to us
that is. Us today is not us
yesterday.





Retentions

michelle mccullers

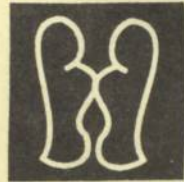
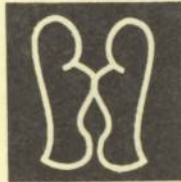
Beaufort Mardi Gras
Parading Town
Toss a Now or Later and
lemon drop
throw me a bubble pop
baby from your borrowed
Corvette crowned and crooned
in this ain't no Macy's day
ain't no Santa Claus
Parade

Just the low country ladies
Shirley Templing hair and
Dressed up Pumpkin in all her
Starched laces.

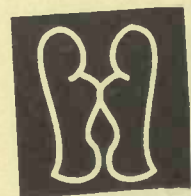
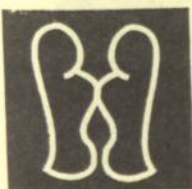
So she can be dirty as the
day is long after the bands
March by and turn that lil'
lady womanish.

And the babies catch candy
Pullin' the air's skirt-tails
for sugar-daddies and
trombone saxophone bass



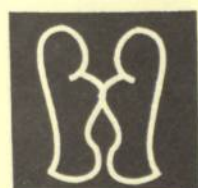


drum fun. And inside
those old men gates
where all parades end
A sign says
African food.
But it ain't nothing but low country
collard greens brown rice and
split peas.
Little fast girls sip juice
and blink slow over dixie cups
Blushing at
Yoruba boys playin' drums
Scarred faces and dread-locks smile
back at hot-combed curls and
Mama's Maybelline
them African boys grin over
cowried chokers just like young
buck at the bus-stop.
But their necks are longer
Held straight





Lil' Hot Mama's
Stand tall too
African Gals
pokin' sugar-cane scepters
into sweet air thick with blue Nile incense and Aunt Effie's ribs.
Grampa sits pecan-faced
stretched and saggin'
Wooly-spice hair-full-o-
salt smellin' sugar cane.
Watchin' new generation
stompin' canes into coffee-and creme
dust
rizin' into Bar-B-Que Smoke
rizin' into Moss
rizin' into Oak
rizin' into God
and she grins
all over that
Sugar-sweet
fat-backed-womanish-fast
drum beaten, good-eatin' deep country
Southern, African-African-African
Parade.





you can be free
candice jenkins

near you
i sing with special joy
 the melody of laughter
and my heart sends telling glances
 filled with moonlight
 into your morning
i awake to see your footprints
 scattered in the pages of my season
 (i wonder if
i dragged you between broken stars or if
 you wandered through simple galaxies
 alone
 to find me)

and i watch your
dreams
 cower in dark spaces behind your eyes
 afraid
 to step into the light of
reality
which nips and claws like winter wind





how much of you
is hiding like a

frightened puppy
just beyond the narrow warmth of your smile?

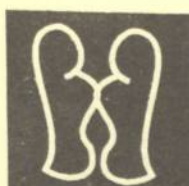
i feel that if i peeled away
the delicate brass

of your skin
the flashing despair shrouded in your manhood
might burn my eyes
with dripping tears

so i seek to cover you
in my own humanity

i want to free your demons
to run in the sunlight
and sing like ancient copper children
who
never seen snow

34





i wish you would know
that you can come out
and play in my meadows
that you are free
 within the shadowy liltings of
 my voice which circles into corners
to dance rhythmless pirouettes
 around my fingers
that you can brush against my mind
with impunity
and be your
gentle, freaky self
 sweetly shocking me like
 hot sauce

at every moment
 that if you do
 then i will still
 use every language i might breathe
to call you *friend*
 and I will
 stand near you and
 never fade into the dust of weakness
at inopportune moments





"alkebulan screams"



Imperialism

mary lou johnson

Thighs parted against her will
Alkebulan screams at her son's initial penetration
Each pulsating thrust begets more of her Afric children
Who have never seen the actual Madonna. . .
Nor do they know her name.
They only know Africa. . . and call her home.





It's Possible

alyson jones

Maybe he loves you so much
That he beat you until you had enough
Until you are willing to love yourself
To rise up like the Phoenix
And fight with your own strength
love with your own heart
think with your own MIND.
But you never thanked HIM!!!

HOPE WOULD RATHER DIE THAN LIVE JUST TO CRY

I'd rather die
Than eat pies and cookies full of superficial Bliss
to satisfy real hunger to get by
I'd rather die
Than listen to the same damn lie
When you get to that deepest shade of Blue
Damn right I'd rather die

There is nothing left to do but cry





what tawana b. thought

kiini ibura salaam

the knife cut
deep

the gaping K's
will

close up
and keloid
over

and heal

but the deep
gashes
in my
soul
will
throb
for
ever.





A Carriage Missed

lana d. parker

I hear laughter in my sleep
and the pitter-patter of little feet
leaping off of tall buildings
and falling slowly
downward
into the street.
Their silence is heard forever.





Fury

mary lou johnson

A silent scream echoes
 in my womb.
It rests gently
Between the azure tears and
 sleepless nights
Until I am ready to
E-X-P-L-O-D-E.





3.44

Michelle McCullers

I jammed my yellow marker
into the wall.
Ceiling wax with it,
Trophy women spit it up
on fake certificates.
How can I scourge the mess away,
before Mom sees,
she's let me be,
since I was 13.

Since 8th grade.
1 AM Science Fair
Glue and markers permanent
from posters,
and yellow never shows up on white.
Essays, 10 minute final draft.
Smile at Teacher.
Bite your nails.

GPA, 100th of a point
of 12 years
of white-out
too low.
I could fail.
Shouldn't try.





Should rip Ivy applications,
tear Trig tests,
Burn scholarship essays
trash SAT scores,
fry AP scores,
and freeze-dry
brick-cold transcripts.
Should move
into a yellow mobile home,
double-wide
by Piggy Park
eat oreos

But I hate oreos
and I heard yellow means death.





IN THIS ZOO

kiini ibura salaam

The secret is whispered from cage to cage
Alcohol takes too long, hoots the orangutan to the ostrich
Drugs too expensive, hisses the ostrich to the giraffe
Pills too risky, bleats the giraffe to the hyena
Guns too messy, whines the hyena to me

NOOSE GOT TOO MUCH HISTORY

Meanwhile, the gorilla is bashing itself against the walls of its

cage

the leopard is pacing the lengths of its

confinement

and, the caged bird is singing its throat

raw





Love, Peace, and 1992

nicole e. coleman

ever since my thirteenth birthday.
ever since i became a man
or a woman
the years have gone by quickly.
and what used to be a sweet white lady
who smiled and gave me cookies
or a man
is now the woman who rapes me and feeds me.

who do i turn to when martin and malcolm are dead and
nikki giovanni and eldridge cleaver have given up
when mom has confined me to grocery store worker or
at best a teacher when pop has confined himself to a
bottle and brother to a street corner handing out bags
"A nickel a pop will take you higher than the President
himself"





who do i love when i am just a nigger bitch at best and
nigger whore at worst when sweet sue anne is brighter
and whiter when all i hear drink sleep eat fuck
breathe and shit is how great sue anne is

i have grown to love this woman
who seems to hate me
or a man
who loves to rape me
even more than i love myself
because it is 1992, and i am 18, and
in her consistency do i find peace.





WHISTLING

monishae mosley

He whistles
Whistles to block out
 all he doesn't want to hear
 even if it's me
Me-I only make him
 whistle
Whistle, because he gives me reasons.
Reasons,
 oft times
 unjust, impure.
Impure reasons
 that make no sense
 to anyone,
 still reason enough.





Enough
to change everything.
Everything except
my heart,
which he still possesses
Possesses alone.
Alone I feel
without him in my life,
in my arms,
in my thoughts.
Thoughts of him whistling,
Whistling all day.





For the Messenger

Michelle McCullers

It is 2000 and more
years since you've seen
your mother
and you're still rocking
back and forth and
screaming and moaning
at the pain in your belly
and the fetters flocked
at your woolly head.

I can still hear the
women singin'
"Wade in water"
while you splatter
your ego all over a microphone.

I've seen those packed
black and oily bodies
forget. . .
there's a tom-tom in your feet
and a mango in your mouth.
When you bear down on all that grief
with no words,
the blood of Africa flows

48





and flows and flows out.

I bet you didn't know
that you could move a house
with that anguish
you call music.

I know your little sister
had a baby
and your brother
got shot in the street.

But they all whispered
in my ear
when i put in your tape
and you screamed
for no reason.

You may have it harder,
for Mercury sliced
your wings and
left the earth for you to prowl,
My messenger,
black panther.
Growl!
Growl!





Tarnished Jewel

sabrina mcdaniel

Trampled on by tourist trade
Kicked about in capitalist tirade
Stripped to weakened and vulnerable centers
Poverty, self-hate, ignorance enters.

Activism seems these people ignored
But Africans as Maroons not slaves endured
And Dreadlocks still sign praises to JahJah
Pan-Africanists, don't count out my Jamaica.

'Cause communal life still yet abounds
Open doors, helping hands still can be found
Patois serves to keep nosy foreigners out
From Christianity from Obeah, "nuff religions de bout."

Women still carry their spoils on their heads
Book illiterate maybe but still with self taught knowledge
They barter with those driving BMW's
Foreign goods are no match for the home grown produce.

Neighbors still gather on each others floors
Laughing and shouting at the cricket scores
Children have plenty adults watching over them
'Cause to beat somebody's pickney is "no problem".





Minibuses wheel and dally through the streets
Vibrating with speed, chatter and funky beats
There is no formality on this transportation
Just holler, "One stop driver," at your destination.

Celebrating through music is still critical
Young and old partakes in each carnival
And all stay out together until morning light
-On Christmas Eve, we call it Grandmarket Night.

Reggae and calypso are still number one
Despite other forms of foreign creation
The spirit that causes our bodies to sway
Has survived colonialism and slavery day.

Yes, as I sit and write and reminisce
There's much about my country that I sadly miss
My simple upbringing taught me an often lost lesson
Of the value of life in African tradition.

And though at many times I hated its ways
Felt underdeveloped, as Western thought says,
I now proudly realize my journey home has begun
As I learn about, re-claim, revision my island in the sun.





and if you didn't know atlantas sponsored by a soft drink
tahir fikara hemphill

the ninety six olympics
the ninety four super bowl,
the soccer world cup...now it's atlantas turn at/as the big wheel
taking cues,
learning from the mistakes of the other empires(those that fell off and are now
struggling) newyork,detroit,neworleans,baltimore

it plans to do things differently

it would like to have a uno-directional flow of money, to satisfy
its gluttony (as if gluttony could be satisfied)
it, like the flaming bird of prey that it is, lures us to spots
like lenox and the under ground, knowin we aint got no money, but
always findin ourselves feeding it at least \$3.00 daily, buyin
someshit we really don't need
they call us consumers but who's consumin who?

it plans to do things differently

it only provides transport into the city during its business hours
5am(when we slaves prep the salads at let us suppress you)till
1:30am(when our peoples at mackdonalds is finally done cleaning the kitchen)

it plans to do things differently

52





"the city that never sleeps" shiit not atlanta
it wants to keep things(people's movements)under control-tight and tidy
it doesn't even allow for that one strip of grass(a generous gift, some say a
mistake, which was the demise of the fallen cities)along the side of the walk, if you
can find one(a side walk that is)
it wants us to have no reminder, a reminder of how things again can
be, a reminder that may trigger our emotions, our emotions of
anger, emotions which will lead us to resist
it goes through the pains taking work to make sure no weeds push up
through their sterile shit, but sinkholes show us that it rots from
underneath

it plans to do things differently

but try as they do they can't plan every thought of everybody
and they can't build a sturdy empire on a false foundation
and i sent a whole bunch of weeds the otheaday somewhere downtown
readin fanon carryin pilots and cry-lon
inventin new words
bridgin old gaps
forgin new bonds
sippin soul
freshly
squeezed





Bookstore in a Black Neighborhood

theloni

Black valleys and valleys and valleys and valleys
and hills and hills and hills and hills
and fields and fields and fields and fields
of knowledge.

shelves upon shelves of books
placed ever so neatly
in an illuminating gold case...
it appeared to me to be one

BIG

book

fused with thousands of years
of struggles,

pride,
and hope.

boundless by its beauty and wonder
this book was

written by strength
illustrated by faith
copyrighted by intellect
published by creativity

finally,
edited by Love
product-

54





a bookstore in a Black neighborhood.

"Nigguh, what possessed you to open a damn bookstore in a Black neighborhood?"

"Love."

"Love? What's the catch? Who put you up to this?"

"You did."

"No way man, not the kid, i didn't tell your Black ass to waste your fuckin' money on no bookstore - in a Black neighborhood too! Shiiiiiiiiit? Put it in writing that's what the white man always says."

"Do you always believe what the white man tells you? Because once you step out that door

He brands you, like cattle, with a perennial scar symbolizing that you're 3/5 of a man.

Inhuman.





But in here, in here you are whole, you're respected, you're admired and revered, you're one with yourself as you absorb and envelop the captivating words of Gwendolyn Brooks. Let Achebe, Baldwin, Hooks and Truth enrapture your spirits and then you may be able to proceed on a Hajj with Malik El Shabazz."

"Mannnnnn, whether i'm here or out there i'm 3/5 of shit all the same.

Ain't a damn difference.

crack cocaine and liquor store

all is

WELLfare babies O.D. on government cheese

livin' in roach owned motels,

walkin' through a multicultural everglade of

pimps,

prostitutes,

needles and arms.

just give 'em a hit

and they'll shoot up like spring!

pregnant teens giving birth to all white juries

inheriting a sea of mental molestation by their

invisible Jack Daniels dads

and their everpresent

11 to 7, 3 to 11 moms.





conehead abominable snowman
riding KKKonfederate horses through
Simi Valley,
praying to a white Jesus who's selling pictures of
Madonna and pseudo Black Child,
a pus filled punk
Big Daddy give me a Kane
'cause i can't walk upon the shore of Black manhood.

1500 on my SAT
but i ain't got a fuckin' dime to spare
to go to no poison ivy school-
seems like i'm

endlessly, endlessly
endlessly, endlessly
endlessly, endlessly

spinning this white
wheel of misfortune
bankrupt
go to jail
pay \$200 and

Go the fuck back to Afrika!

i could feel myself moving now,
to where,
i couldn't even tell you.





i was exhausted,
head down, gasping for love of self,
drained of all desire to make a change,
an impact.
i just wanted to know why we must live this way,
dependent
 assimilated
 lost
 scared.....

as i looked up i could still see the man at the bookstore
mouthing words of meaning,
 of substance,
 of truth.

"My brother are you coming back?"
he said with a powerful tone of a regal southern minister.
i, then stood upon an old, decrepit blue crate that the neighborhood kids
play ball
with and raised my clenched fist
and said to him...

"i don't know."

Black valleys and valleys and valleys and valleys
and hills and hills and hills and hills
and fields and fields and fields and fields
of knowledge.





shelves upon shelves of books
placed ever so neatly
in an illuminating gold case...
it appeared to me to be one
BIG
book
fused with thousands of years
of struggles,

pride,
and hope.

boundless by its beauty and wonder
these book were

written by strength
illustrated by faith
copyrighted by intellect
published by creativity

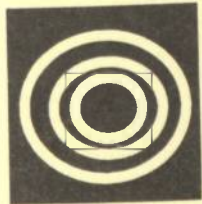
finally,
edited by Love
product-

a bookstore in a Black neighborhood.





"closing the distance"





joe-lynn
candice jenkins

knowing you is like
watching the daybreak--
painting my face in its golden glow
and
smiling at the shimmering residue
of morning

it is like moonlight
to see your smile
and
trip over your swirling
laughter

the ancestral music
weaving through your voice
climbs from the silenced tongues
of a thousand
stolen
queens





(and your creeping wisdom
overtakes me like
warm waves of saltwater)

knowing you
is like swallowing
a bead
of
 sunlight,
feeling
its airy radiance
shining
in the weighted moment





**A sister is someone who isn't afraid
to let her breasts touch you when you hug**

sabrina mcdaniel

Squeezing you
Her spirit reaches out
Through nipples, tissue and skin
Closing the distance
Of time apart
Denied emotions
And negated female experience
Through osmosis
She speaks the painful truths
That live

-silence by patriarchal language

In solitary confinements
Rejoicing who she is
Validating her way of being
In a five second embrace
She rubs your back
With the comforting promises
That tomorrow
We will remember





Our natural rites

and together
protruding defiantly
through institutionally defined restrictions
loosening ourselves from the grips and attempts
to mold us
claim us
and suck our life sustaining strength
we stand
proud and erect
blessed with the heated kisses of the sun

Your eyes connect
The contact is broken
But this pact
Conceived in a five second soul-mating
Forever remains
A smiling memory away





En el subway

dineo brinson

Hermana mia,
dónde estamos...cuando tu no tienes paciencia para tus
hijos que has creado?

cuando tu cuerpo no vive?
cuando tu mente no funciona claramente?
cuando tu alma no canta con Dios?

Yo no sé

Pero no olvidame, mi hermana

Yo soy la una que lleva esperanza en mi corazon
para ti
como la madre quien mece a su bebé





On the subway

(Translation)

My sister,
where are we...when you do not have patience for your
children that you have created?

when your body does not live?
when your mind does not function clearly?
when your soul does not sing with God?

I don't know

But don't forget me, my sister

I am the one who carries hope in my heart
for you
like the mother who rocks her baby.





I was so busy
ladessa e. pearson

I was so busy
reaching back
pulling up my
Black Brother,
Big and Strong
with Desire
bogged down with
mental absorption
and bleeding--
raw with the new day's
lashing of
Hopelessness.

We so long had
been shackled together
that I didn't notice
his weight
was making me sink
slowly,
ever so slowly,
into the depths
of my soul
and drown in my
Aspirations for Us.





The Corners of My Mind

sabrina mcdaniel

I run to the corners of my mind
When foreign goods assault
Alien notions, stereotypes, roles
Drape themselves around my shoulders
Gently massaging me to sleep.
While others scream at me
From Time, Vogue and Ebony.
And the shuffling feet of capitalism
Hustles me into chambers
Where I'm fed
Diet, beauty, health, wealth.

I run to the corners of my mind
When I've wandered into the marketplace
Selling pieces of nonentity
Buy one eye
 Get the other free
Big breasts over here
 Thirty six C





Firm buttocks
Tight stomachs
High cheekbones
Fabulous skin tone
We'll make you what/should be
On sale today
-For the price of your soul.

I run to my mind
When they've put a price on me
And I fear
Soon I will be who they see.
Down the streets of Identity
I run viciously pursued
Until Truth and Self intersect.
Only then do I allow myself to breathe
In this corner of my mind
open and embracing me.





to all the women who dare to love me
stefanie dunning

one day i was walking with a girlfriend
and she was staring
at my breasts
i asked her why
she said because
they moved

they moved?

so i looked at her
breasts solid
against her chest
and asked her
how
she got them that way
and furthermore
did she like it?





she laughed

and told me

that it was a bra crazy
a crazy bra?
a crazy me for rejecting bras?

so i watched one day

watched with my mind
felt
my breasts rise and fall
with each step of my foot
all of my body in perfect unison
collated to my mind





and i thought about
breasts i had seen on tv
in magazines and illustrations
none of them gave mind to
motion
the movement of
body that undulates, that is
the essence of mind

the costumersphotographersartists and bra inventors
assume that
the breast should
sit like stone
pale and gleaming in light
and unmoving
because,
so the mind of a woman

so the mind





the little woman

"for bell hooks"

omah m. williams

panoramic view from a balcony seat
anticipating thoughts of expectation as the red coat approaches
attention getting, subtle flamboyance
polyester, cashmere, lambs wool, nylon red
Introduction of stammering reserve
realization of greatness
ain't I a woman
Black Looks
sisters of the yam
race gender representation
personage of literary descent
critique of media masculinity sexuality
Feminism
no restrictions, male-female
issue of statements toward black pom
chastised/goaded by television, movie theaters and prime time
hatred of beautiful Blackness experienced by thine own
dick, pussy
balcony in unison - Dammmmn





medium words for the little high pitched woman
analytical forefront of dynamics
eloquence of the street
presenting educational ideas of personage
likes not corresponding with Menacing critique
Are You Ready!
A Long Walk Home
the challenge of inner centralization
of art, radio, fiction, reality
upliftment of the Black
rather Afro-American
rather African-American
rather
what is it are we
different in number
people
humans
equals
upliftment of same-
cradle of beautiful peaceful darkness lying in the midst before rising
-community





9-29-93

(for my mother)

stefanie dunning

you say the detachment
came when i was

8

i'm searching my brain

to re/ call that

year

dredging up a dark past

from must/ y

places

and des/ spite my stomp

ing

roaches still live

here

there, i mean

and like that

this to/

is broke/ en

bright/est thing about

8th year

is room

a yellow shag rug (napp/ y blondes)

glaring in fu /tile

compensation

for the empty/ ness

74





that your
 can/never/not fill
 large glass window pain/s
 wary from real/ity
 it was in that/this room
 that my dolls and little figure/ ines
 in meticulous ord/er
 ms. piggy never cried/s
 and from this/that room

love

the roof
 could be sat on
 and from the roof one could
 fall
 or jump

a/cross from this room
 was the bath/ room
 under construction
 my face
 under construction
 your fist
 the wrecking ball
 my face
 the condemned building





water hot and steamy
my juice swirling down
the drain
a red pool of love?
black out and me and miss
piggy just smile with swollen pig lips

8 i detached myself
you said/say
perhaps the de/tach/ment came
at im/pact
perhaps in that violent

union
so strongly connect/ed
by lost love?
de/tach/ment
was/is
the kind/est possi/ble
re/act/ion

