

FOCUS

1995

Literary Magazine for Spelman College

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Acknowledgments

Focus 1995 embraces the Atlanta University Center community. This year, writers focused on our spirits, our senses, our sameness, our differences, our silence, our violence, and, as always--our love. We present them to you as a reflection of who we are.

The **Focus Staff** would like to thank:

Our ancestors everywhere

for making a way out of no way because you believed in yourselves enough to leave us a legacy,

Dr. Anne Warner

for you continued guidance and support,

Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole

for believing in us and being someone we can believe in, and

Sisters and brothers who produce

for claiming your space to create.

Dedication

Focus 1995 is dedicated to our sister, *Alice Walker*, who has walked these walls and written these halls. We lift up the spirit in which she has unearthed lost fruits of our mothers' gardens and returned to us with hands that know the earth.

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Table of Contents

You Can Taste It

Sinnamon	Stephanie Milton	2
in my remembrance	Darlene Scott	3
Him	Fiona Roberts	4
The Cheeto Betrayed	P. Andrea Richardson	5
Misgiving	Malik Singleton	6
Honeysuckle	Michelle McCullers	8

Daydreams

...and to hear him	lumbe' davis	12
long distance, soft	mendi d. s. lewis	13
there is a corner	shakira hightower	14
running late	chanda bailey	15
at any given moment	katherine leccima	16
fairy tales	eric rose	17
untitled	stacey abrams	18

Unseen, Unspoken

Aquarian Risings	Dawn Glover	21
Somebody	Malik Singleton	22
Focus	Tamika R. Harris	24
underneath the jackets...	Mary Anne Imes	25
Street Interviews	Stacey Abrams	26

So Many Teeth

abuse	michelle mccullers	28
down low	kenji jasper	31
harrassment	nakietha macneil	35

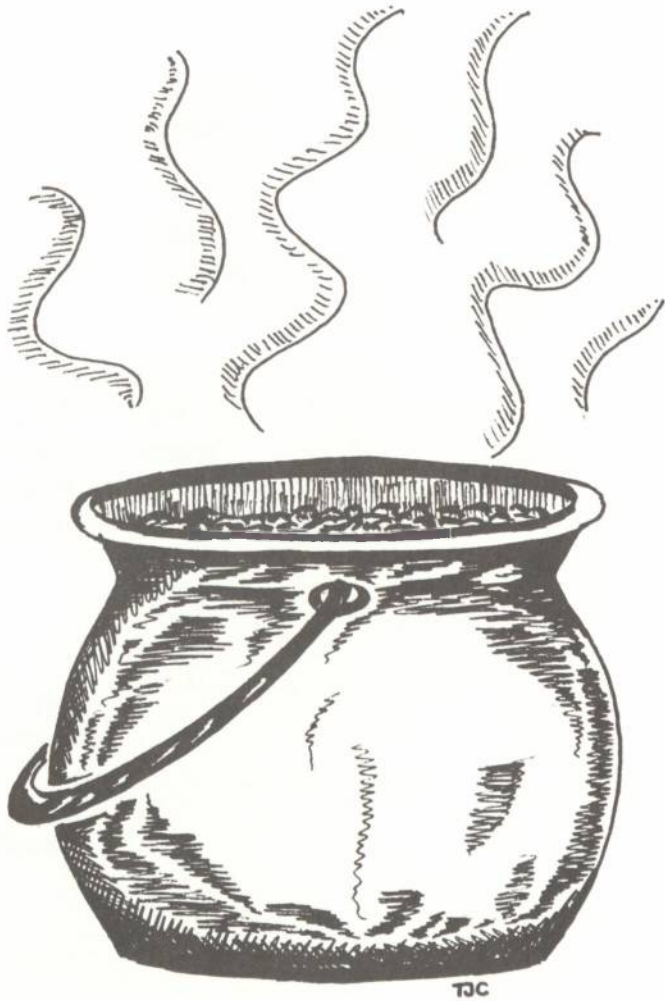
From Where I Stand

Shock to the System	Antonia Randolph	37
I walk around...	Nonye Akuba	40
The Dynamics of Having...	Fastblack	42
Prostituted Culture	Ada Brown	45
A Stream of Consciousness	Assitou Cross	46

Divine Beat

a world divine	fastblack	48
Our Father	janene jones	49
ancestor worship	mendi d. s. lewis	50
a visit with	stacey abrams	51
anatomy of a party	darlene scott	52
a new day	gay ojugbana	53

YOU CAN TASTE IT



Sinnamon

i am
enjoying
a sugarsweet
sinfully tempting
luscious cinnamon roll
eyes are closed
in fond remembrance
the lingering sensations of
fire
warms me
the aroma of spicy
ambrosia keeps me languorous
so familiar
i smile that knowing
sistas smile that tells nothing
yet reveals all to the experienced
a sigh escapes
its happening again
the cupreous treat evokes
vibrant images of cinnamon
and mocha rolling intersecting
melting flowing in inherent rhythms
with beginnings so esoteric and ageless
i lick
satisfied
lips in joy
this is all too
decadent to be right
sweet hot immemorial
sinnamon

Stephanie Milton

in my remembrance

your milky caramel smile melted in my heart and stuck gooey sweet to my emotions,
it was those water clear root beer eyes that seeped into my
skin and permeated my soul, intoxicating me until i vomited your
grin and then buried my weary person into those plush penetrating
dimples,

in my remembrance

all that separated my sober reality
from my euphoric hallucination
was curiosity

curiosity killed the cat,
from my remembrance
i remember you.

Darlene Scott

Him

Beauty-
Walks into my nocturnal dreams.
Smooth, satiny black skin
Deep, seductive chasms bless each cheek--a smile.
By day, this towering oak shades me from the
blistering sun...
By night, he soothes and caresses me by the
light of a lustrous moon.
When he speaks, his words, oozing of warm,
melting chocolate
Linger in my ears.
When he walks, his body exudes finesse, confidence,
and sophistication.
His eyes glisten and gleam at the very sight of me
His mind is overwhelmed with thoughts of me...
I awaken.
My dream evaporates.
Beauty
He walks in my nocturnal dreams.

Fiona Roberts

The Cheeto Betrayed

I focus my eyes intently on the rectangular shaped bag with ridges on the top and bottom.

My exact currency rests in the palm of my hand. I cannot wait for the transaction to begin, so I hurriedly cram the currency in the small crevice.

A brief moment of silence is heard, and then a flash of an even number appears on the face of my servant. The bag with the ridges on the top and bottom begins to awaken.

It quickly moves down the transparent pathway, steadily accelerating at 9.8 ms^2 , fighting the air resistance, until it finally collides with its short resting place.

I quickly, but gently, retrieve the rectangular shaped bag with ridges on the top and bottom. It has escaped its captive and is now with its lover.

I gaze at the bag with ridges on the top and bottom with loving eyes, but my gaze is quickly transformed into an acute stare.

My love has become an obsession. This obsession combined with the teasing nature of the bag with ridges causes me to uncontrollably rip the ridges on the top and proceed to steal one of the possessions inside.

I stuff the possession into my mouth and chomp on it monstrously.

There is peace for that brief moment of fulfilled ravenous passion.

Suddenly, I feel eyes on my bag with the torn ridges on top, so I swiftly dash away to my hidden cove of cheeto ecstasy.

Andrea Richardson

Misgiving (one vegetarian's Harvest Holiday)

"O God, Blessed are we for our family,
for our food, our shelter, health, and longevity.
Let our good fortune be our life's omen."
"Word!" my insides exclaim, "Amen."

My family's first words:
"We gon hurt dat bird!"
In so many euphemisms they express,
"Pass us flesh of the carcass
of a fowl who lived foul under pain, strife, and stress."

I am not the least bit impressed.
So with no debate I decide to perpetuate
my digestion of the vegetation to be put on my plate.
No I don't want no greasy gravy on my grains;
I like my rice plain.
The initial aroma of the buffet is ok,
so should I be trusting of this stuffing?
Or will the extent of my grub be nubbed
like it was in the few years past
ever since I began my lifelong flesh fast?
Apparently so, just like the last.
I'm in the minority when it comes to how I like mine.
O I know its dinnertime, but the concept of the recipe
is what is leaving me hungry
because it insists she stuff the bird with swine.
That's fine, just pass me the greens.
From how long I'm takin' I know it must seem
like either I don't want no grub or that I'm not grateful
for what Aunt Kaki spent two or three long, hard days makin'.
But ooh! Strike two. It can't be true. My first view
of the stew is of the little cellulite slivers of bacon.

Because I take heed to what I've learned
regarding my health, this predicament is what I've earned.
And now my belly begins to churn.
I turn toward my cousins, and they're steady grubbin.
I turn toward my brother and grandmother
and their plates are straight smothered,
while I'm here trying to be nice
with just a plate of rice.

Well, I don't want any incriminating attention
but I did forget to mention to Aunt Kaki the nature of my diet.
but I always manage to manage, so again, I will still stay quiet.
I turn toward the cabbage and pray
that it too won't turn me away.
Then as I dissect and examine it
I am relieved to see that it is ok

And since it would be so unsanitary
to porkify the cranberries
I add heaps to my starving feast.
So to get even somewhat full
I have to straight roll on the rolls;
O yes, pass me another my brother.

Oddly I am ostracized for my ways
when I'm just tryna stay alive by eating to live.
If I even tried to tackle that turkey
it would be me who got hurt
so I just sit back and await dessert.

I am the one who is unfed yet not entirely unhappy,
mistaken, yet misunderstanding why they question my way of living
They ever express more disappointment that I do as they chew
so what else can we say on this holiday except "Happy Misgiving!"

Malik Singleton

Honeysuckle

I asked if you had ever
had honeysuckle.
You said no,
of course not.
You didn't know
what it felt
to walk barefoot
over dew-dripped grass
either,
between ant-hills and thistles.
I want to take you
from your cement,
asphalt, broken glass,
car horned streets,
and carry you
to the south.
Some say the nation's womb,
you can be born
again and again in this
womb
so wet and warm and...
oh.
But this is about honeysuckle,
and how to eat it.

First pluck white golden blossoms
from wrapping vines,
so erect stamen
still caps the base
like old-fashioned
fizzy coke bottle.
With flower close
to your face
pop the tender
green cork.
Softly pull stamen
through opening
between petals,
and just as it
comes,
through,
stretching quivering flower,
let a drop
fall to tongue,
just enough
to keep you

in competition with
wasps and hornets
all day.

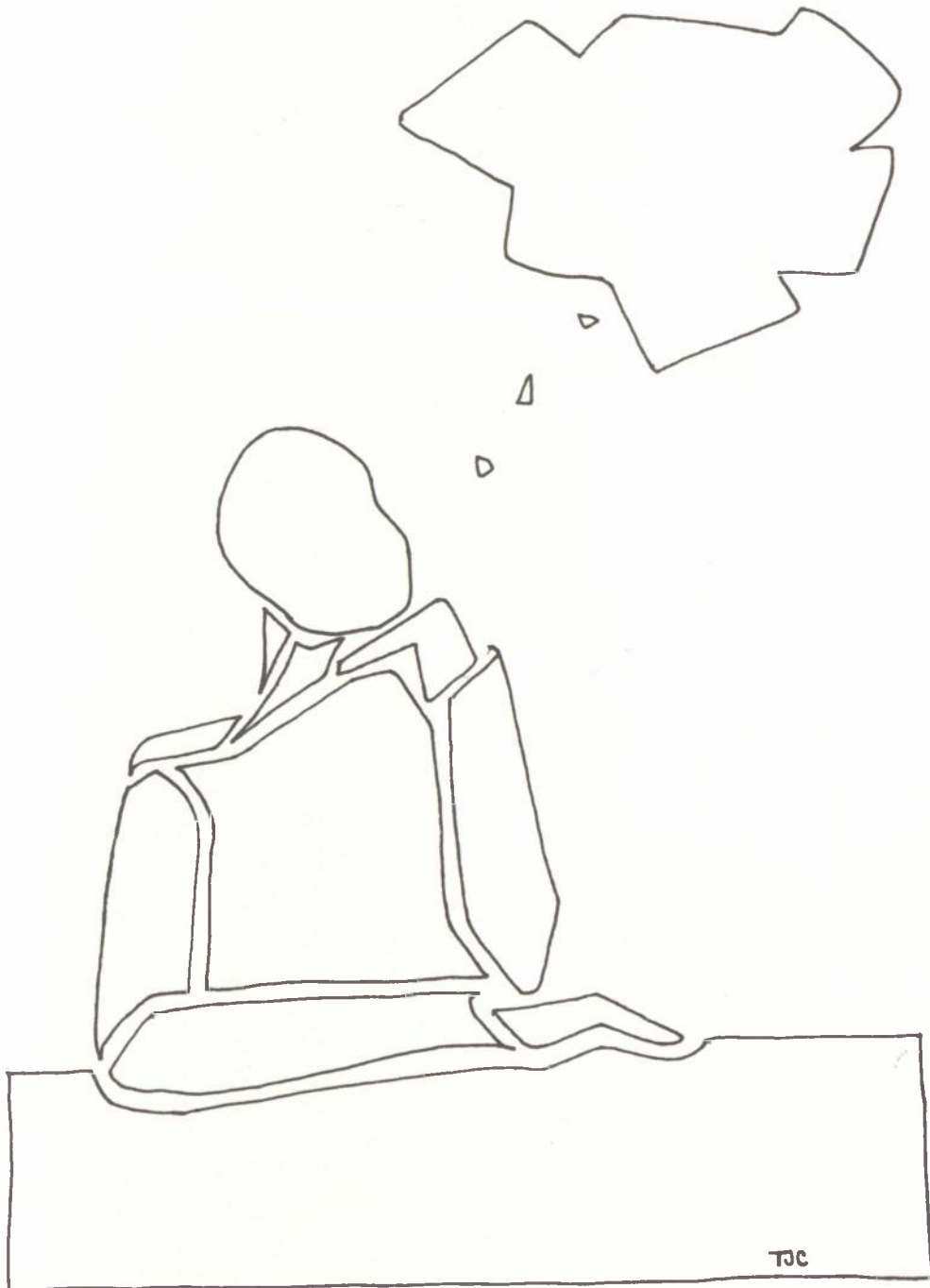
"Honeysuckle."
Funny word.
Strange thing, too,
licking flowers
like bumble-bees
and humming-birds.
Kinda explains
the high pregnancy rate
in the south.
But maybe
that's only from
the batting lashes
and taut cornrows,
or hips
made prematurely round
by grits
and smoked ham.
But there is also
something so sensual
about honey
and apple-butter
sloshed
and drippin'
on homemade
crumbly biscuits,
and ooohh lips
made sticky
and purple
with blackberry juice.

Have you ever done it,
in a blackberry thicket,
between thorns
and hard, red berries
supple blue ones
and sly snakes,
slippin' tween
onion grass?
Oh but it's all
as fleetin'
and as slow
and as fast
and intoxicating
as the drop

of South Carolina sunset
I'll lick
from your lips
after an afternoon
of sippin'
honeysuckle.

Michelle McCullers

DAYDREAMS



...and to hear him say my name
and when he says my name

like a whisper

like a new promise

like a soft old song

like a forgotten plea

Lumbe' Davis

Long Distance, Soft

I long for the part of you that is soft.
Not just your plum lips,
Your hot-ocean arms,
Your sun-black eyes.
Not just the "heart-catching tangles"
Of your mesmerizing love-locks,
But also the space in your drum-voice
That belongs to me:
Big enough
For me to crawl into,
Hide from the world,
Expand at my own pace,
And small enough
For you to remain a whole person
With room enough to grow.
Long distance,
Soft is
Not so easily recognized,
But I hear it in your coffee-words:
miss . . . love . . . forever . . . soon
And everytime you call my name.

Mendi D.S. Lewis

there is a corner

there is a corner
in washington d.c.
where streets Q and New Jersey meet
to awake a morning
and evening
for me
each day that i walk it is
to and from...
it is a corner
greened and yellowed by gardens and sun
and it serves as ground
for the brownstone with a him
inside...
a him
who might be a John or David,
Jason or Craig
but who is imagined
as an Eyiende or Mustafa
Hanif and Akinyele too
What is known
and is real
is his brownness and tallness,
eyes and swagger...
embarking their magnitude,
is tasting the juice
of tight-skinned fruit

Shakira Hightower

Running Late

On the bus this morning
something said with your mouth
remembered me
and I smiled.
Wanted to *LAUGH*,
but a light-skinned, hazel-eyed, t-shirt tucked in blue jeans
with too much space between each tooth
was eyeing the thoughts
my mind was making.
So, I settled
for an upward turn of lips
and squint of eyelids.

Your words clung to me
like static to flannel sheets
leaving footprints
in puddles inside my brain
And that's what
seeped into the grayness of my memory
flooded my eyes
with the glow of six o'clock morning sunshine.

And although running late
as *USUAL*
stopped to consider life.
how empty it would be
like this
mid-morning bus--*LATE*
how full of gaps
like that nosy man's teeth
Then,
had to consider
gladness
that 10:43 am on the bus number 2
found me smiling,
thinking of you.

Chanda Bailey

At Any Given Moment

At any given moment
I am reminded of you

In my solitude...
While the flow of words tickle my mind,
I think of your voice
As its sound vibrates and tickles my ears
Causing my being to giggle;
I am reminded of your tantalizing tenderness

In nature's blissful corner...
As the wind subtly caresses me,
I reminisce of the times
When your smooth fingers caressed my skin;
I am reminded of your soothing sensitivity

In my personal space...
As the sun's rays seep through the blinds,
I see and feel
Your inconspicuously loving eyes
Sneak to embrace and keep my being warm;
I am reminded of your germinating gentleness

In that special place of cleansing...
As the water prances excitedly
In places where your lips once danced
Inventing maneuvers unknown, feelings unheard of;
I am reminded of your prophetic passion

At any given moment my love
I am reminded of you.

Katherine Leccima

Fairy Tales

When the mountain
Touches the valley
And the stars
Fall from the sky
And the children
Ask their questions
As the world
Just wonders "Why"
Then will I
Return to take you
To our castle
By the sea
That I'll build
For you and me

As the waves
Embrace the seashore
And seagulls
Soar high above
And the surf
Foams on the pink sand
Bubbling over
Like our love
Then will I
Return to take you
To our castle
By the sea
That I'll build
For you and me

I'll give you
So much pleasure
Satisfy
Your every need
I would battle
Every danger
Even do
Heroic deeds
I would die
Just to take you
To our castle
By the sea
That I'll build
For you and me

Eric Rose

i wait for you
in silence
in hope
in Atlanta
or D.C.
or on 5th Avenue
in bookstores in the romance section
by the mangoes in the corner market
with pen poised on crowded buses
on darkly lit porches on sultry summer nights
as if i were Maggie the Cat
in a white linen--no, silk shift
that falls shadow soft
and teases with glimpses
of brown satin flesh
waiting for the touch of
yours to mine
slightly work-roughened
for your time waiting
but i do not wait
not so passively
my mind seeks
searches for you
my laugh challenges
reaching for your echo
i do not wait
i yearn
because i am yet alone
and Maggie's shift
doesn't fit me
and i am afraid
i am alone
because you have seen me
and the satin flesh
has marks and puckers
and there is more there
than you had imagined
and the laugh was too loud
not soft and lilting
or husky and sexy
just a raucous symphony
of sound
and the mind was
too different
and Atlanta
and D.C.
and 5th Avenue
did not hide the flaws

and your soul decided
to forgo this round
and so i will not wait
i can not afford it
no biological clock ticking
i have years before the sound
but i have to prepare
for the loneliness
so i stockpile the romance novels
and i juice the mangoes
because you can get thirsty alone

Stacey Abrams

UNSEEN, UNSPOKEN

Aquarian Risings

Familiar voices don't sound as sweet
Lips don't embrace familiarity
I was expecting you to meet
some new aspect of me
that had no similarity

To what we were there
What we could have been here

And my dreams are unspoken
while yours run in the air
with buddha smoke
and flow inside of small plastic
containers

The remainder is for me

Dawn Glover

Somebody

Some of my very first friends in this world
were little girls whose games I would play,
and then in mine they would partake.

And at their birthdays I recall we all
would make little arts & crafts and masks
or ornaments like butterfly flower little jammies,
or happy face chocolate cake cookies and candies.

And Tamy was my best friend back then,

In her house every room was a fun park.

Or we would have fun in the park playing house.

And in those days everyday the sun shined out.

In the shade we'd doze and our days were made.

And the one thing that could always make our cheeks smile

was knowing that we each saw the other as a child.

Not as a little girl or boy, cuzz they don't play.

You have your different kinds of toys and you stay
away from one another everyday. OK!

cuzz little girls are really little hooties with cooties,
even the cuties. As women they're just coochies with booties.

and don't you ever get the gall to play with dolls.

Real boys only play with bats and baseball.

If you do we will find you to be the kind who is inclined to

bust butts, lick nuts, dick suck, and get fucked!

And betcha we'll connect ya to the conjecture

that if it ain't rough play its gotta be gay!

All they would say were reasons why

together we could laugh, but I could never cry.

Ever! Never! Imagine all of this at age five.

But by their evil ways Tamy and I did not abide.

We played together, laid together, laughed and cried.

Lovely carefree characterized our reality.

Only the innocent see eye to eye;

'cuz she & I were Most High on that level
until "somebody" said she was the devil.

Malik Singleton

Focus

When you look at me, do you notice my eyes?
Can you see that they are not my eyes alone?
These are the eyes of the masterful griot,
 reciting my life story.
His wisdom is reflected in my thoughtful gaze.
Mine are the eyes of the oppressed slave,
 praying his way through my past.
His pain is revealed in my tears of frustration.
My eyes are the eyes of the confused young man,
 fighting his way through life.
His anger is visible in my cruel glare.
My eyes are those of the sad little girl,
 struggling with her own existence.
her fear may be seen in my timid glance.
These eyes are the eyes of the unwavering mother,
 holding my family together.
Her strength is what shows in my determined stare.

To really look at me is to look into my past and see
 all that I have ever been, as well as what I am.
My eyes reflect this past, and I will never be
 ashamed of it.
For I have taken off the mask and disposed of it,
 dashing it against the rocks of my ancestor's souls.
The griot,
The slave,
The young man,
The little girl,
The mother...
Their joys and sorrows will be with me always,
For they are within me, guiding me to my place on the
 mountaintop.
I shall not rest until I am there,
Looking back at you through the eyes of a dynamic
 young woman.
My firmness will be reflected in her resolute stare.

Tamika R. Harris

underneath the jackets, next to the shoe rack

it's lonely in here.
when i go out i creep.
but mostly i just sit here,
in the dark,
waiting for someone to knock
or--
having heard i was sitting in here,
or
thinking they heard noises from inside,
or
just looking for something else--
fling the door wide open
and let me out.

i am jealous
of people who get to be
detested.
at least they receive the most appropriate emotions
for who they are.
and when they are not detested,
they are loved,
they are brave,
they are identified with.

with your voice muffled by the jackets,
no one feels anything for you,
at least not for what you are,
at least not toward you.
in the closet,
it's easy to intellectualize
silence
as death,
but i'm still here.

Mary Anne Imes

Street Interviews

Panhandling--children smiling
begging
holding cups styrofoam and polystyrene
capture the environment
in a penny or
a dollar bill
dropped without
looking into sad brown eyes
to examine the unexamined life
is to know what is
and is to be
without the benefit
of media coated coverage
of pain and endless useless
hope
mother and child
Michaelangelo's Madonna and child no more
alleyways
unpaid maternity leave mandatory childcare
too many
not enough
and he smiles with the
terrible two's evident
sister holds his hand
too young for surrogacy
clutching her edifice of childhood
McDonald's cup and fifty-nine cents

Stacey Abrams

SO MANY TEETH



Abuse – for Rosa Parks and A.L.

if you decide to fight back
you'll be hurt
well what if you scream
and police are called
and your hard-working man
of two years
may be convicted
for bouncing your head like
a bas

ket

ball

off hard wood
If you scream
will you be hurt?
must you hit,
bite 'till teeth meet
on meat
no, through meat
take a momento
of attack with you
so when a big dude
slam/molds him
like silly putty
from inside those
inside places out
when asked
"where's your
little finger,
bottom lip,
left eye?"
he'd say
"she got it.
i hit her,
and she took this."
will she stand empowered
in a frilly room
displaying to the
waitresses
housewives
gynecologists
the piece of flesh
he paid with
as currency
for crushing her
into plaster,
mattress,
tile.

no,
she won't.
not until she is angry enough
to hit,
bite,
'till teeth meet
on meat
no through meat.
not until she
sees a shove,
a stare,
a push,
a dare,
a punch,
a slap here,
a "you ho" there
a "can
you
feel
this
bitch?"
in the bed,
on the radio.
she will not be angry
if she didn't hear,
"you'll probably be raped
at school,
if not,
at least hit."
have you ever seen the face
of a hit/raped
woman?
weak
whore
scared
dumb
white
is Rosa Parks a whore?
is Rosa Parks scared?
is Rosa Parks white?
--NEWS FLASH--
TODAY AN ELDERLY, BLACK
WOMAN WAS ATTACKED
BY A YOUNG, BLACK MAN
LOOKING FOR MONEY
grandma?
no.
Rosa Parks?
yeah.

does it matter?
HELL NO!
or maybe it does
when others only yell help
when celebrities stand
Victimized
i wanted a man i could hit
for so long
cuz fathers hit
uncles rape
boyfriends beat
and whisper
short, nasty words
over phone lines
and call you Crazy
for taking offense
hitting won't help.
but damn,
why do black women
Rationalize Pain?
If it Hurts,
and it ain't
Childbirth,
Shots,
Cramps,
or Old Age
stepping on your toes
be prepared
to hit,
bite,
'till teeth meet
on meat,
no,
through meat

Michelle McCullers

Down Low

For me, to remember is to dive into icy waters with your clothes on, the extra wet weight pulling you down while you try to keep afloat in the sewer water called life. I'm 19 years old and I work in a sewer. It's just a summer job though, but not any less degrading. The work warps your reality sometimes because you never see the sun and the only things that you have to amuse your senses are the echoes of splashing water, your Walkman, the voice of your boss down a distant corridor humming some Luther Vandross song. Not a second goes by when I don't mentally mask the stench of raw sewage with the smell of fresh money. In retrospect though, I know that there's not enough money in the world to cover the stench of the ghosts from your past, especially ghost that you never thought you'd run into in the first place.

It all happened yesterday, when it was 98 degrees topside and the stench down low was worse due to the heat. I was off in the twilight zone somewhere when I returned to hear my boss giving me instructions.

"We have to make sure there's no pressure buildup," Ron said as he adjusted on one of the little pipes along the side of the wall where we were working, "go around the corner and make sure nothing's busted open."

"Alright." I replied as I welcomed myself back to reality and trudged my way through the dregs of Washington, D.C.'s water works.

I had no idea what I was getting paid for. I just did whatever Ron told me to do and I got my money. Ron was an old head from around the way who just happened to have been working in the sewers for the past five years. We were playin' ball at the rec center one day and he told me that the job was open. I took it and after a lot of red tape, paperwork and timesheets, I was beneath the manhole every day from 10 to 1 and 2 to 6.

Ron's "around the corner" trudge was further than I imagined. It was a good ten minute trudge through the ankle deep water that seemed to make my skin crawl, despite the fact that I was wearing galoshes over work boots. The walk was slightly interesting though because it gave me a chance to rifle through the debris which surrounded my feet as I walked. There were bottles cans, floating bits of newspaper and.....sploosh! I slipped on a bottle and fell face first into the murky liquid. My uniform was covered in the brown substance as I returned to my feet. I check to make sure I had everything only to realize that my monkey wrench was missing from my tool belt. I kneeled down and searched through the waterlike substance, but couldn't seem to locate it. I found something else instead, a wallet.

Leather feels funny when it's wet. Water gives it a slick, kind of reptile quality, as if it is somehow alive. It was alive. As I flipped it open, the name and photo on the driver's license

trapped behind damp transparent plastic screamed four years of nightmares across my eardrums. My knees buckled and I groped for the wall in order to maintain equilibrium. It was Jared's, my best friend's.

It seemed that the wallet had been at the bottom of the streams of the forgotten for almost four years. The memories sliced through me like razor-sharp claws upon contact with the picture. My foot tapped against the monkey wrench at the bottom of the water but I couldn't move. I wished that I could've just stepped over that bottle and moved on with my life...

Jared was my ace for my first two years of high school. We wanted to be the "real niggas" at the Ellington School for the Arts. We smoked Newports in the bathrooms 'cause we heard the brand in a few hip-hop songs, we fought and collected several unnecessary scars at some house parties, drank malt liquor until it tasted like water and robbed the yuppies in Georgetown on the weekends just to prove how hard we were.

Jared always thought that the robbery thing was taking it too far, but I had Dr. Dre' in the tape deck and I brainwashed myself into believing that we were doing it to survive, even though our college educations were both paid for two years in advance. I was the leader of the duo and Jared trusted me not to let him get caught out there. I did and I paid for it in his and my own blood.

Armed with two pellet guns that looked like .45s, we walked the Georgetown streets figuring that every white person was just as naive as the ones we'd robbed the weekend before. We caught each victim on one of the many dark and copless backstreets every Saturday around 11 and got home just in time for our 1 am curfews. I thought I was so smart, then I proved to be a total idiot.

On the way black from heist number five, we decided to take the shortcut to the subway through the alley behind M street. We did it about every other time just to relieve ourselves from the monotony of travelling the same path. We never had any trouble for five weeks and then it finally found us in that alley, when we were ill-prepared for the events that were to follow. It all happened faster than I could even document it in my memory.

Four neo-Nazi skinheads entered the alley from the back of a restaurant kitchen. They were the real thing too, tattooed with the swastikas and the whole nine. They saw us. Of course, they said something about us being niggers and that they were about to beat our little asses. I was hard. I told them they could kiss our asses and that it would be their own funeral. Jared backed me up. They advanced anyway. Jared pulled his pellet gun and shot one of them in the groin. He fell to the ground. Two of them pulled teal guns and pulled the real triggers. I got shot and Jared ran. I blacked out.

I woke up in GW hospital with two bullets in my shoulder and one in my stomach. Jared turned up on the front page of the Post floating in the Potomac with two bullets in his head. There were no suspects and the investigation led to a dead end that was deadlier than most. They decided to let me heal and go back to school to endure more interrogation from the administration and probably the PTA.

I could only guess what happened after Jared ran, but I knew what the result was. It was my fault because he followed my lead. He'd never even shot anyone with a BB before because his parents said they were only for the targets the gun came with. I had been hard and reckless and he was dead because of it. Tears welled up in my soul for months for them to explode one night when I was in my room looking at pictures from the freshman class trip. His wallet must've found its way into a gutter or manhole or something, only for it to turn up to in my bloody hands just when I was beginning to be able to forget, only to make me remember again.

As I stared at ID photo of a nappy-headed kid not even old enough to grow a moustache, I realized that I might as well have pulled the trigger myself. He died trying to live an illusion. I couldn't tell anyone. The whole thing was on the down low, just like I was, down low beneath the city in the sewers. The part of my soul I lost when Jared stopped breathing had been floating in the bowels of the city for four years, waiting for the chance to start the same reel of memories on the projector called my mind that I had tried to smash to pieces.

Rick's voice was echoing in the corner of my mind but I couldn't answer. I couldn't articulate the surge of guilt that ran infinitely deeper than the water I stood in. I prayed that Jared's voice would magically enter my ears and tell me it was alright but even my Walkman at high volume couldn't drown out the silence. I just wanted to go back to work so I could get my check on Friday. I pulled my wrench out of the water and inspected the pipes Rick instructed me to. They were fine. My work was finished for the moment. I let Jared slide into the down low again as I dropped the wallet into the water and headed back towards Rick. He was right where I left him singing the same Luther Vandross song. Nothing had changed in everyone else's world so I wouldn't let anything change in mine.

"Damn, what took you so long nigga?" he asked.

"I dropped my wrench, " I replied still desperately trying to make my conscience knit itself back together before Rick got suspicious, "ain't it almost time for lunch?" I asked.

"Yeah, in about ten minutes. We're done working on this end. I'm taking the truck back to the building."

"You want me to go with you?" I asked.

"Naw, we done for the day. You'll get your hours. Go home."

"Alright." I replied as I headed for the beam of light that marked the location of the ladder that led to the street.

I trudged toward it, thinking with each step that I was still walking away from the past and that it was bound to turn up again. It was a bully I had to face in the schoolyard at 3 o'clock some day, just not today. The screams in my nightmares were still too shrill. My memories were still too vivid and the pain was still too intense. But I knew that the next time I was on the down low, none of it would be any less painful.

Kenji Jasper

Harassment

"Goddamn, here we go again," she thought, as the catcalls and howling began. She hadn't even gotten a third of the way through the parking lot to her car already...

Damn this location. It had really been a long day today. No one at work was productive and she really had to come down on some people. They probably will be having hard feelings for the rest of the week. Well, that's just too bad. They don't work here to sit on their asses, they're here to get the job done. She didn't have time for lollygagging, and neither does anyone else. But don't these guys have anything better to do than sit out in parking lot watching the pretty women go by?

"Hell, I'm almost there. I'll just go home, kick it for awhile; watch a little TV before I go to aerobics. I deserve the break," she thought to herself.

About two cars distance away from hers, a car that looked quite unfamiliar sat, engine running, perpendicular to the parked cars, as if it was waiting to take a vacating car's parking spot. Some dude was sitting on the driver's side, legs out of the open car door. He appeared to be minding his own business. At least he wasn't saying anything. In fact, she wasn't even sure he really noticed her at all. Looked like he was looking at something else.

"Cool, I just don't need the aggravation today."

As she walked by his car, he suddenly noticed her. Indeed he did. He quickly stood out of the car, grabbed her arm to be sure he had her attention and began yapping about "you look..." and "baby, you are..." and "how ya doin...".

Mistake, mistake, mistake.

Smoothly, she snapped her arm from his hand and grabbed him at the forearm. She shoved him against his own car, being sure his lower forearm was in the area of the open car door. The man was stunned. With her other hand, she pulled at the car door; then with both hands and all her might, she slammed the door on the man's arm.

Strong woman. Compared to the sound of the door slamming the man's arm, the sound of the thunderous crack representing the breaking of the man's ulna was quite small.

There were no catcalls anymore, just dead silence and faces aghast.

"Aagh; Aaaaah!/" the man fell to his knees.

But before he had reached the ground, she had already resumed the trek to her car. She unlocked the door in a nonchalant manner, as always. She sat down in the car, got herself situated...

"Aaaa...! Yuh. Y... You... Gha!"

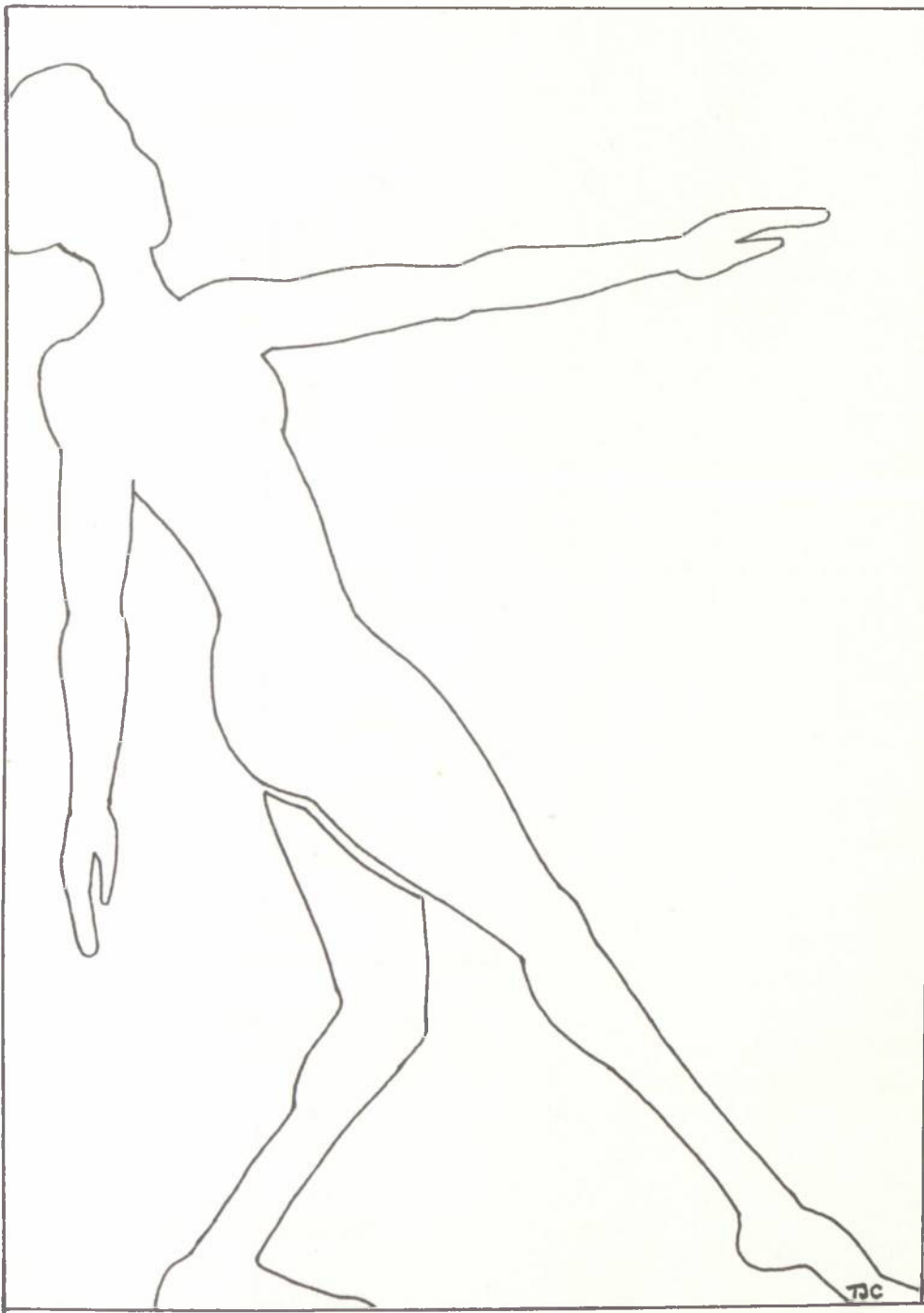
...Placed the key in the ignition, started the car and backed quickly out of her space, just as always. Off she drove. Right past the staggering man with the broken forearm.

As she exited the parking lot, a heckler awoke from his stupor and ran to get the man to a hospital.

About a half-mile later, while the woman was driving, she took a long look in her rear-view mirror and noticed herself. She didn't realize she had so many teeth.

Nakietha MacNeil

FROM WHERE I STAND



Shock to the System

Freestylin' on the mic, buckwhylin' like Term X
Like the exterminator
So, yo money don't flex.
You know I got you open
Like surgery, bro.
Say ya never heard of me,
Probl'y cause I'm on the dolo.
Even if you had heard,
You couldn't see me though.
I'm blind to you like Stevie,
Not Nicks but on the t.v. I heard Rumors
That they'll be back this season.
Givin' you the reason and cause
With Luther Vandross' paid rent,
One senses your confusion
Want to view where the same went?
Out of sight!
Got it hidden with this illusion
It's soothing to those made sick
Off the foul rhymes you kick.
Since you're bent on poisoning my system
With all those tainted rhymes,
Allow me a couple of verses
To get ill with mine.
Hit me one time! for James Brown's sake
Take the shackles off your mind
Stop using the same break,
Same beat,
Same hoarse style all the while knowing
Mr. Ed can't do any tricks but talk
Something you could stand to learn.
Forever blabbing about the money you want to earn,
Or steal in the hour of chaos
And where were you when they tried play us?
Frontin' off the hoes you done slapped
Stop the nonsense
That don't make a man, Black
Or should say Black man
But most never did put the slap down
Cause yo momma taught you how to act
back around the way clown
By the way, the woman was Black right
Notice I say woman, since ya'll never do
And how the hell
are all the women you talk to under eighteen anyway
That's statutory rape in any court

On any day
But all you hear about are girls
In the rhymes, never a woman
Sometimes we get to be a lady
But only when you want to lay
these legs open
Don't front cause you know
Black Sheep and Gangstarr
Both talk about the hoes
Guru's afraid of the schemin' ones
Guess only these abbreviated garden tools
Aren't cool to his mack vibe
They deflect the rays
No to mention that I've
Heard Grand Pooh say he's easy on the lays
These days
And what the many "girls" he splays?
Aren't hoes just women who have as much sex
As he claim he does, but I don't hear
You takin' his head off cause
What? the D word
Not the dilznick, but the one
that ends in standard
Double like dutch young women used to play
Gets easier to say if you try hard
But wait a minute,
I don't want to pull all your cards
Last one about the bitches
Hand you the Ivana Trump
Or what Robin Givens takes
Whichever you prefer
And isn't that what a bitch is
Any hers that rake in the dough, from any hims
Any how they do it
'Cause when you get right down to it
All a bitch really is
Is a woman who goes against what a man says
Now play that three times loud
Late at night in your boomin' system
'Cause I can't help but dis them
And you know who you are
Since every third rapper is on
Some old superstar women ain't shit tip
Step to this woman and get told quick
To read some bell hooks
And look to Shange for guidance
Providing you've gotten over your Black macho
Wallace will show the myth of the superwoman
to be just that

And you might stop trying to mack
A so-called "hood rat"
That's the end of this session
Lessons for understanding there is really no defense
The "Black man's uplift"
Doesn't truly come
At the Black woman's expense.

Antonia Randolph

I walk around

I walk around with the chinese balls
The forces of good and evil
Ying and Yang yal
They pull me in every hour and everyday...
I don't have money, but I can't sell drugs
Because for my people I have one love
Then I am so stressed, but I can't smoke sess
Because I'm supposed to be drug free...
But the weed by calling me
I try to stay strong because I know the feeling will pass
Keeping in my mind that I'm a Queen, because I know my past
But the forces of a lighter shade
Keep stressing me and pressing me
Giving me static with my moms and my man
Because they have the same stress I have
Plus my own people stress me and test me
Damn when are you going to understand your history
And understand how this society is set up
The pressure from the white and ourselves keeps us stuck
Why when I walk down the street, you roll your eyes?
Is it because I am a darker shade or because I choose to show my thighs?
Why when I walk down the street you roll your eyes?
Because you have dreads, do you think, your mind is more conscious than my third eye?
Why Brother, why Sister we have been Europeanized
Whether you like it or not we come from two sides
I find beauty in my sisters' and brothers' with locks dark or fair,
I find beauty in myself who chooses Straight Hair.
If you see me as lost, try me...
Bring on your man and his man,
Yes you can, Yes you can...
On your knowledge and your experience take me on a trip with you
And I'll bet you (I'll be there with you)
Now can you be there with me
And pick up a book and learn your history
Take half of the time you're on the corner and go to the library...
Get knowledge and add it to everything you've experienced outside your front door
Then it's more knowledge you will thirst for
Make your goal knowledge and then teach one
To get out of what they call the "World of the Heathens"
Get established, earn money...
Do you understand what I'm about?
Then come back and get the next one out
Be alert, stand your post and be ready

Oh and peace to the Rock Steady
As you contemplate and wait for the Revolution
Understand what I'm saying
Because that's my solution

Nonye Akube

The Dynamics of Having a Black Ass

Black Power!
Black Enlightenment!
Black Unity!
Black Strength!
Black This!?!
Black That!?!
Black my Black ass...!!!

Always have I been deeply enchanted and totally enraptured by the facts and facets of what is termed the black experience. I have probed into the complex minds and the enigmatic souls of black folk, folk who are not mine, but folk to whom I belong. I have reflected upon and I have analyzed the liquid conditions and the solid plights, the floating ethnicities and the ever-evolving psyche of the world's black race.

I have dedicated lovely thought and thoughtful love to the antique existence of children born of black suns and brown moons. Hard tears have escaped from my coal black eyes because of the oppression, the dehumanization, and the lynching of coal black birds.

Assiduously, have I confuted those stigmas that present distorted portraits of Black life,

And boldly have I opposed those false realities that lie about what it means to be black.

All too frequently has my mind been preoccupied of better put, imprisoned by thoughts of, about, and for black America. This fragment of a whole and this whole of a fragment drowning in the sad, saltwaters of complacency and tickled by the pain of an unknown insanity.

In hopes to transform the horrendous conditions of America's black people and Black peoples' America

I have dreamed dreams of a Black America

I have realized realities about Black America and

I have prayed prayers for Black America;

and all to no avail, for Black America remains an Americanized race of dehumanized peoples,

And it is this America that is painful, yet so easy for me to love

Indeed, the love that I have for those sharing my skin, for those with whom I share a legacy of blue struggle and a history of flowing, sacred blood, is a love rooted in an ineffable something.

It is the unconditional love that a distressed, tired mother has for a rebellious child. I say this because the people humble themselves; yet, because our fates are intertwined, It is an unusual love yielding rage and frustration that I

have for this race of people who I recognize,
but who does not recognize me.

It is a love that will not suffice in righteously
revolutionizing the states of existence and mind of the
dark masses.

Reality makes me understand that there will always be those
brothers and sisters who collude in the degradation of a
sable universe, and who--with the oppressor's wine--toast to
the abortion of an onyx nation.

My love, no matter how lovely it is,
my love, no matter how immense and intense it may be,
will never truly touch in a revolutionary way these deaf
brothers and sisters who are so substantial that they cease
to exist.

Why should I believe that I can educate and uplift the
masses by decorating my voice with philosophy?

What makes me think that I can defy a fate that condemns my
tribe to a future that mimics the past? What makes me think
that I can vanquish the steadfast systems of oppression that
afflict black America when it is black America that
perpetuates these systems? I face the unfortunate, staunch
truth that a poem that I create will not put an end to the
many domestic wars raging within black communities, and it
will not put an end to the government's pimping of mahogany people.

My analysis of the conditions of the Black man's world will
not keep black fingers from embracing liquor bottles and it
will not keep black lips from kissing crack pipes.

My concept of black love and how it ought to be will not
convince black men and women that they have to respect one
another in order to love one another in order to uplift one
another in order to uplift the race. The agony that visits
my heart when I visit a penitentiary overflowing with brothers
will not annihilate the corruption that spawns the
self-destruction of Ebony America.

The articulated thought that I use to move my people to a
higher plane of intellect will only move my people to
question, vilify, and assault me.

If I was to attempt to serve my people righteous knowledge,
they would curse me and spit in my face.

If I were to provide the true solution to the plight of the
black nation I would be deemed as insane and inane.

If I were to reveal the conspiracies of white ghosts I would
be ostracized from the black community.

Is it all worth it?

Is my sanity and dignity worth the salvation of black America?

Should I sacrifice all that I am and all that I am to be in
order to salvage what hope is left for the emancipation of
black minds?

I think not,

for I am **FASTBLACK**,
too black and too real to fight for a race of people who
refuse to fight for themselves.
Because I understand black people so well that they do not
understand me my ideologies, perspectives,
theories, philosophies,
concepts, thoughts,
paradigms, emotions,
prayers, dreams,
hopes, wishes,
convictions, and realizations
will never become enduring, concrete
fixtures in the world of black
America;
and so...
my ass is black; but still, black my black ass.

FASTBLACK

Prostituted Culture

I'm sorry sir, I can't say African because this afternoon you
just purchased the word?
Excuse me my good man, I'm sure my ears fail me, you bought
"African", are you absurd?
Oh, it belongs to YOU now and its not up for sale... oh I see now
and that's my mistake.
Should have checked out where my money was going all this time,
but that a risk that I'll no longer take.
Always told I should buy black
want my M-O-N-E-Y back
from you whiteowned pseudo-African fakes.
Takin ends off the black man using it for the white man, the
whole concept just gives me the shakes!

How long did you think that your facade would stand strong
What if Ebony wanted you on the cover?
I'm glad we found out, before we got clowned out when on the
front page wasn't no sista or brother.

It's all over now,
hope you've lots black friends,
because your products will stay on shelves' place
I'd hate to see all of that "African Pride" that you "own" there
just going to waste.
When you find yourself boycotted in your newfound spare time your
mind will snap back and you'll think
And realize that despite your long list of ingredients
REAL African pride you can't make.

Ada Brown

A Stream of Consciousness From a Sister Who Thinks

Now, let's just make it plain. We all see that we cannot fail one another any longer. The strength of us is in our numbers. I contemplate what the revolution will be like; what will become of us when it is all over? I fear that once we finally overcome the oppressor--the oppressor we see as the white man, poor economics, poor education, poor health care, etc.--we will awaken one terrible morning and see the oppressor in the mirror. Unless we consciously try to overcome the doctrine of the oppressor, we internalize it and mentally become the oppressor. Our goal as a people should not be for the persecution of anyone. How can we exclaim that gays and lesbians be a part of our community? How is it possible to exterminate the vast population of mixed-race people? I become physically terrified and disgusted when I ponder how we (People of Color) would be even if there were no physical being present to oppress us. Sadly, our people have been oppressed for so long that we have digested the anti-life/anti-difference ideologies of Amerikkka. This condition is even present among our "freedom fighters" who hide behind locks and dashikis and the "liberation movement", yet foolishly attempt to keep sisters, gays lesbians, mulattoes, intellectuals, etc. in bondage. This is unbelievable. How can one be down for freedom as one protests and marches for the demise of the status quo and then at the end of the day come home to beat his wife?

I am terribly concerned about the sexist and homophobic doctrines that have been allowed to reside within the fabric of our family structures. Even here in the AUC--the only place one will ever find so many of the folks--we blindly accept a backward means of existence. (How do we invite one of the most self-hating, denigrating activities to our "home"? And then, we call it FREAKnik??) I, a sister who thinks, recognize the need for holistic healing. I see that we must restore compassion. I also see that we need to critically analyze our future existence in this country. (Do we elect to stay here, or is it possible to build a new nation?) However, let's not think too much! We need to set aside the rhetoric and replace it with ACTION!! So, these few words come from the heart and soul of a sister who thinks. Now, I gotta move.

Assitou Cross

DIVINE BEAT



A World Divine

I want to live in a world that's
entirely,
solely,
authentically,
undoubtedly,
utterly
cool--midnight cool.

A world liquid and laid back,
A world gentle red and mellow blue,
A world ocean-wet and desert-dry,
A world Chicago windy and New Orleans hot.

I want to live in a world of masculine, mahogany jazz
and of salty, sweet sensuality.

A world of slick, smiling, sugar talking, dudes decked out
in sharp zoot suits

And of sassy, classy, collected chicks sexing and vexing,
inhaling and exhaling

I want to live in a celestial world
of ancient cadillacs creeping on cruise control
and of rolling dice and painted kings and queens

A world of dimmed streetlights casting the frames of fluorescent ghosts,
and of jumping, jukebox joints suffused with the music of black life and black soul.

I want to live in a world of philosophical poets and poetic philosophers,
of religion that's realistic and of reality that's religious,
of cultural beauty and of beautiful culture,

A world of strength that's unified and of unity that 's strong.

I want to live in a renaissance world of black diamonds and brown gems,
of blue funk and rainbow emotion,

I want to live in a world of sultry laughter that echoes for miles,
and of innocent cries that extend into the distance

A revolutionary world of loud, proud, black voices spreading
the righteous word to the multitudes and belting out the bluesy tunes of
black, true black, real black spirituality.

I want to live in a world of soft drama that goes on, and on, and on...

A digable world of wooden beads and colorful dashikis,
of kinked, puffy afros and loose dreadlocks,

A world of fragranced, bronzed bodies,

A world of coldblack, fastblack eyes.

I want to live in a world of Creole summers and African springs
a saccharine world of dry grey, syrup skies.

I want to live in a world of luminiscent stare, limestone moons, and lilac suns.

a mellow world of freelove, love that's real, and of freethinking, thinking that's heavy

I want to live in a fine, ruby world

A world sanguine and genuine

A world existing in your dreams and in mine

I want to live in a world divine.

FASTBLACK

Our Father

They taught me about my birth, but
HE made me . . .

They taught me how to breathe, but
HE breathed air into me . . .

They taught me how to live, but
He lived in me . . .

They taught me how to speak, but
HE spoke to me . . .

They taught me how to walk, but
HE walked with me . . .

They taught me how to eat, but
HE fed me . . .

They taught me how to fight, but
HE fought for me . . .

They taught me how to love, but
HE loved me . . .

They taught me how to die, but
He died for me . . .

Janene Jones

Ancestor Worship

Gone.
and yet you left your words here
to speak to me.
But do you hear my voice?
Is death an ocean,
washing away the understanding
we might have had?
Does time coat my experience
with words
you don't know?
Or are these conditions the
Conch shell to my heart?
I need your approval.
Your blessings, too . . .

lend
me
your
fire

Mendi D. S. Lewis

A Visit with Keith, Thornton and Tres

Slow moving
Rhythm holds the hand
sound pulses
peaks
 ebbs
 flows
rivers running rivulets
of harmonic motion
quicken pace
gyrating to what
 is
bopping to a beat
that refuses
 a name
there is no
 moniker
 alias
 pseudonym
for
 the
 beat
that passeth
 all
understanding

Stacey Abrams

Anatomy of a Party

The music moves. . .
bass thumpin'
speakers jumpin'
people boppin'
ain't no stoppin'
sweat pourin'
voices roarin'
sugar highs
excited cries
big smiles
funky styles
booties swingin'
tuneless singin'
disco lights
isolated fights
shootin'
lootin'
party over
Good night. . .

Darlene Scott

A New Day

The dawn of a new day
Appears like a rainbow in the sky.
The glorious hope not wanting to go in vain,
Ignites a flame.
A flame,
Hoping to one day turn into an inferno.

Gay Ojughana