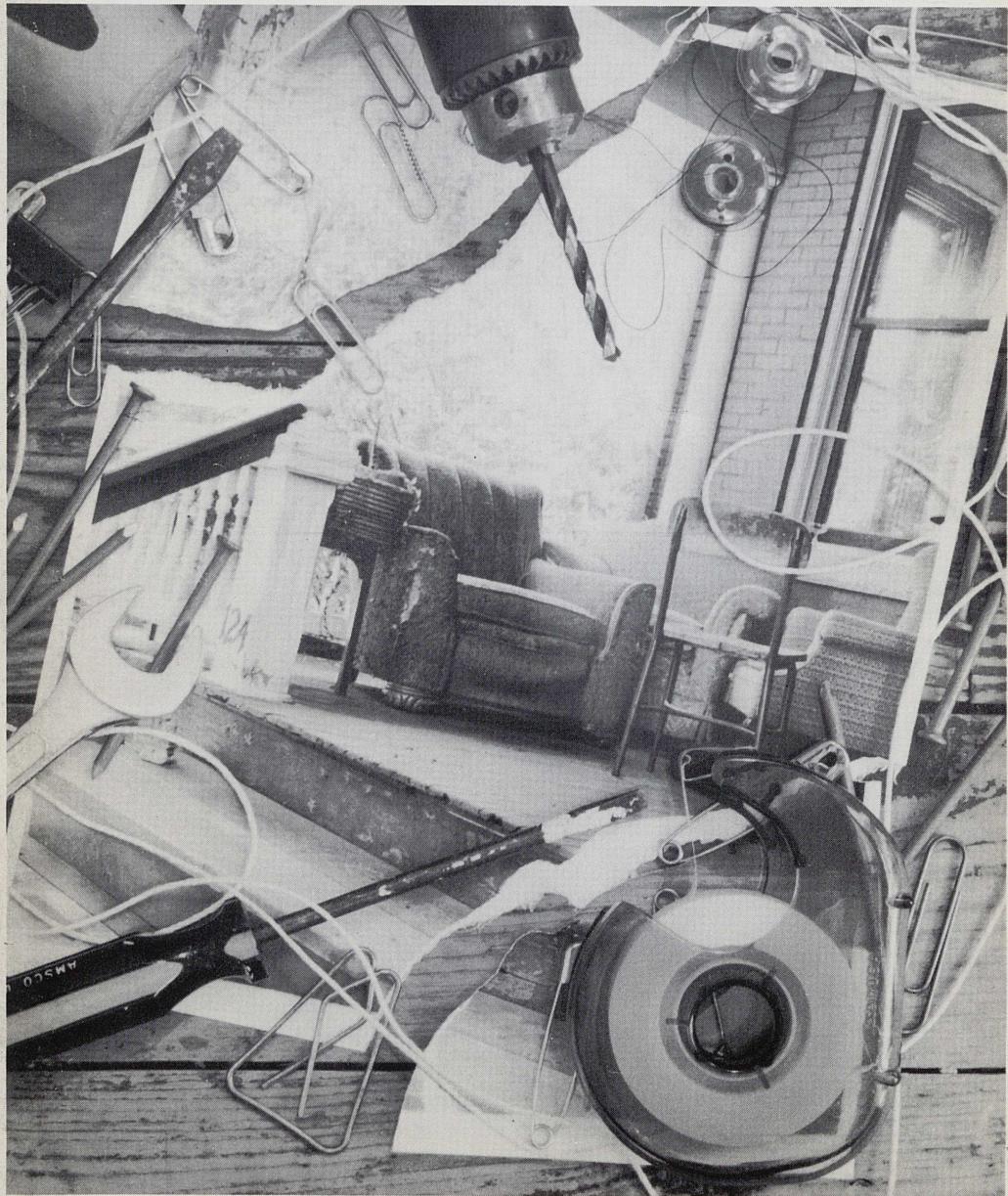


# Shooting Star Review

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Autumn, 1991

## Home & Community





# *Shooting St★r Review*

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A non-profit corporation that exists ...

*to  
use  
the arts  
to build  
awareness  
and appreciation  
for  
Black  
culture.*

## *Home & Community Issue*

Autumn, 1991 ★ Volume 5, Number 3

*Finding a sense of self.*

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"Mending"

Patching up a place to feel safe and find comfort.  
Photograph copyright 1991 by Sandra Gould Ford

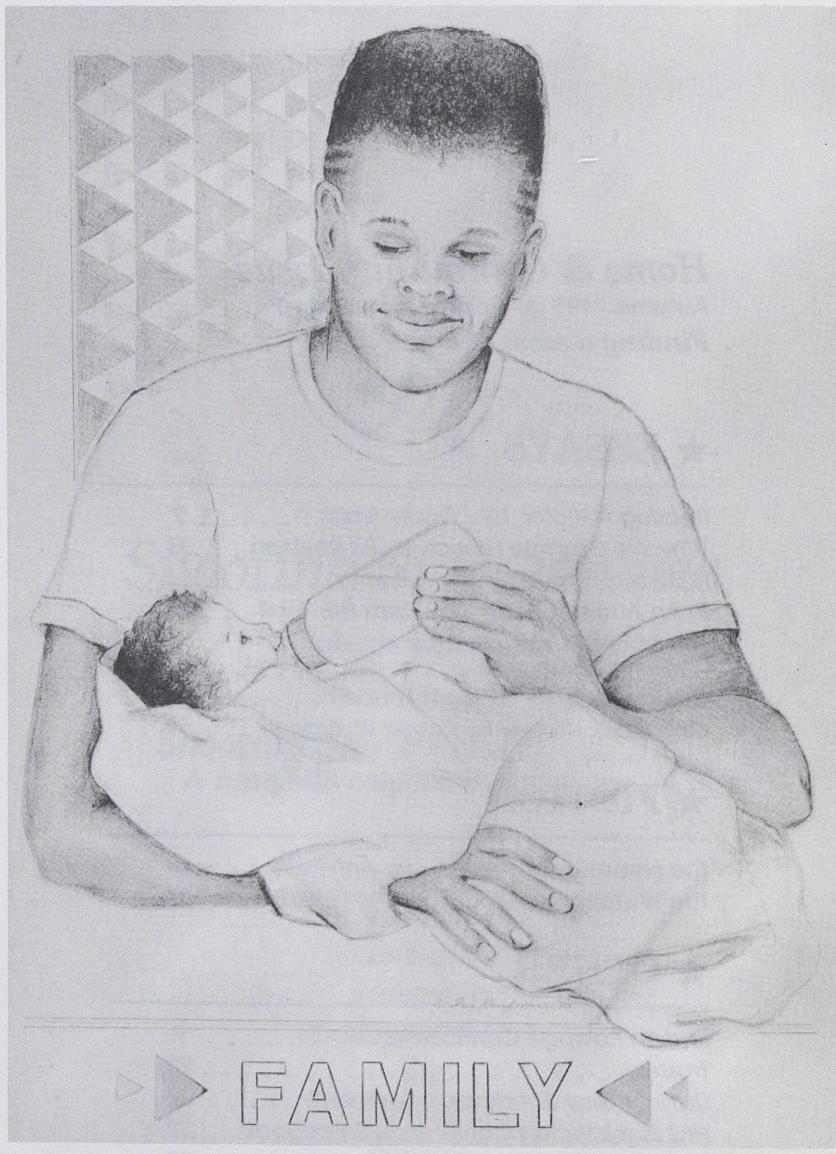


Illustration copyright by Iris Kaufman, IFK Graphics

# REARING A VICTOR, NOT A VICTIM: A Case For Home Education

by J. Frazier Smith  
Athens, OH

My ears heard the words -- "you have a boy" -- but I didn't know how to react to the message in the birthing room. Now I do: I am his teacher, the first my son Aaron will ever have.

Home schooling is a must as I prepare him for his tour of duty in the United States. His marching orders must include the history of a people who have been bloodied but have remained unbowed. His orders must also include details of a people who are the key builders of the Southern agricultural and Northern industrial complexes as well as creators of beats and rhythms, languages and dress codes.

♦♦

*Many blacks have joined these moaners in spouting the misguided rhetoric that private schools for black children are counter-productive. These are the same black folks who believe the fantasy that they are fully melted members of the pot.*

---

One piece of information must be excluded from his daily lesson, however. Aaron must not play the role of victim.

When he was born, Aaron's locks were a straight mop. His hair remains soft and black but has gone curly. His pale and wrinkled yellow skin has aged into a rich, robust caramel. A noticeably solid 30 pounds and 34 inches tall, this kid wears clothes made for children twice his age.

Every time I look at him I see myself, always tall and husky for my age, often singled out because I was the biggest and darkest boy.

Aaron's growth spurts trigger memories of my senior year in high school, when two white suburban police officers handcuffed me after they broke up a traditional senior "skip day" celebration of the coming graduation. There were more than 100 of my classmates at the mid-morning party held this particular year in an exclusive, neoconservative, upper-middle-class predominantly white neighborhood. No one else had to wear bracelets and sit in the back seat of the police cruiser that day, displayed like a prized catch.

Aaron is a black boy child, an endangered species in the United States of 1990. But there is no basket in which to hide him and no stream on which to float him to safety from those who has taken council to destroy his life.

The Darwinian mission of our society is to destroy. It happens every day in the morning newspaper and every evening on the TV news. As a youth I learned of troop movements through the media and saw fuzzy jungle footage. I gazed upon glistening black body bags and cheered whenever I spotted the seemingly omnipresent score-board of casualties from a war somewhere in Southeast Asia.

In this era of minicams, satellite uplinks, sound bites and roving on-location sets, the fuzzy footage comes from Southeast

Washington, DC, Howard Beach in New York City, South Oak Cliff in Dallas, Texas or straight out of Compton, CA. The scoreboard now sends messages that concern the latest body count from the streets -- usually black boys left lifeless after winding up at the business end of an Uzi or a Saturday Night Special.

The voice in the box usually utters some hopped-up nonsense about black-on-black crime that police or authorities suspect was drug-related. Isn't it always drug-related?

The fleeting seconds of air time and the banner newspaper headlines point to the destruction of black America, a possibility that makes me constantly hug Aaron so tight until he can hardly breathe.

Often, the air time and headlines accompanied by panic-button statistics horrific enough to inspire a parent to never let a child out of the house: Nearly one in four black American men in their 20s is in jail, on probation or on parole. One in five in that age group is in college. News anchors then relay the grimdest of all statistics: Among black males 18 to 34 years old, homicide is the leading cause of death.

Jim Crow was named for apartheid in my grandparents' and parents' day. Segregation was en vogue. Many of us have heard the tales our parents and

grandparents tell, how they walked miles every morning barefoot on gravel roads. We have never heard them mention run-ins with fascist drug dealers or gun-toting gangs sporting colors. Getting to the schoolhouse was enough.

Escorting Aaron to the schoolhouse door, through the hail of bullets and cocaine and the downpour of sour attitudes and hopelessness that floods the educational system in this country, seems Herculean.

Perhaps this is why the Institute for Independent Education in Washington, D.C., has found that more than 53,000 African-American children were enrolled in more than 284 independent neighborhood schools nationwide during the 1989-90 school year. In the Midwest, in the South, in the West, in the Northeast, black parents are rousing themselves or being roused from deep slumber and are sending the future to these special schools, where black children are treated as a precious investment and not commodities to be traded and sold.

It is meant to be included in Solomon's prophetic observation about the things that can be found under the sun. Black private schools thrived until Brown vs. Board of Education, the 1954 Supreme Court →

ruling that desegregated the nation's schools.

Not surprisingly, returning to the strategy of insulating black children from the mainstream temporarily has been met with the protests of whites who publicly profess to be liberals. They "tolerate" blacks and are repulsed instantly when blamed for perpetuating racial tension as members of the dominant class.

Many blacks have joined these moaners in spouting the misguided rhetoric that private schools for black children are counterproductive. These are the same black folks who believe the fantasy that they are fully melted members of the pot.

Professor Shelby Steele, a conservative thinker on the issue of race relations, advocates a strict diet of self-determination. He is correct when he sizes up criticisms of special schools as a form of voiced fear. The fear stems from the loss of power that victimization can bring, a power that makes the haves cater to the have-nots through the creation of federally funded education and social programs.

Victimization makes us lose sight of the goal, which is to lift children -- black boys in particular -- out of the mindset of accepting inferiority, impotence, invisibility and failure.

The key for me is to begin molding Aaron's understanding now to give him the knowledge

that his primary role -- whether or not he wants to accept it -- is that of an enemy to those in power.

This is the starting point for all of us in issuing marching orders to our children. They must not entertain the secondary role of victim that is so sinfully easy to accept once one misreads the primary role as being negative.

Victimization aims to attain power and horde power through projecting personal problems and traumas on the backs of whites, the group that dominates society through ownership of the mechanisms that make the economy run. The role is an easy one to play. The temptation to teach it to our children is painfully alluring. We have played the role since the time of Spanish King Charles I. who began to import slaves to the West Indies and then to South America from Africa in 1517.

This game of power among humans, the oldest contest since the debacle at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, is one more savage than any race war or War Between the States. This game requires the cunning of a chameleon, the forethought of a fox, the viciousness of a viper. This is not a war for capitalism or competition. This engagement is for psychological survival and empowerment.

Victors know the rules of the game. They understand the meaning of the saying "Those

who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

There is a time and a place for mainstreaming. This nation won't survive another War Between Neighbors. The time has come to change our thinking about how we will guide our children. The time has come to arm our children with the tools to challenge hegemony intelligently to beat back the Satan or self-doubt by any rational means necessary to achieve victory.

The blueprint must start with a strict home-based education that is the battle plan that will combat a system of teaching children that has failed black boys. This let-down in learning begs an action to counteract past actions. Apartheid in the United States has never left us. Under the guise of a free-market economy, the class structure that calls for a dominant class to be served by a working class continues to be operated by white males for themselves and their offspring.

This construct lives today because dominant class members have allowed a select number of the working class to pierce the inner circles of power. Hence, a Colin Powell here and an Oprah Winfrey there.

Hegemony will remain until the working class, who believes the hype and accepts the chaos that leave the streets littered with the future of black America, breaks

from its love affair with victimization.

*This game of power among humans, the oldest contest since the debacle at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, is one more savage than any race war or War Between the States. This game requires the cunning of a chameleon, the forethought of a fox, the viciousness of a viper. This is not a war for capitalism or competition. This engagement is for psychological survival and empowerment.*

---

As Aaron's first teacher, I have accepted the mission to teach him to ignore the fatal siren's song of victimization



that undoubtedly will try to enslave him. He will have to rely on my teaching to shed the desire to blame all his problems on "the white man." The best antidote for victimization is for Aaron to know and understand who he is and how he fits in a

society that doesn't want him to have a meaningful role.

My first order of business in administering the antidote is to share the scars of war with my first lieutenant and show him the way through the battlefield.

---

## Shooting Star Review

*"Ignorances, unfounded myths and unchallenged assumptions about the African-American are hidden in the language of the American people.*

*"Left to us is the enormous task of changing and enriching the American language; of filtering out the myths grounded in shoddy, and yes, perhaps even perverse intellectualism; and the exhilaration of creating myths of our own."*

Gilbert Moses  
Director & Producer

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Pittsburgh, PA 15208  
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# MIDDLE PASSAGE COMMEMORATION

During Thanksgiving Holidays

The Middle Passage represents the four centuries of the African slave trade and the resulting destruction of human life and cultural awareness. In the Autumn'90 issue of *Shooting Star Review*, the Middle Passage Commemoration concept was introduced in hopes that our readers would join in developing and promoting a system of ceremonies, traditions and events that help build appreciation for the Black experience.

### ***Host Items needed:***

- ★ Bowl or pan with (sea) salt water [represents Atlantic Ocean]
- ★ Small (to fit in bowl) boat or floating vessel
- ★ Silver [representing the sale of our forebears into slavery]
- ★ Chains baked from rolled cookie dough [chains that bound us into slavery]
- ★ Rocks, grass and dirt [spiritual repositories]
- ★ Matches [for fire to convey awareness and vitality]

These items should be displayed in a specially prepared space

### ***Participants should bring:***

Items that can be used to build an artwork [paper, fabric, etc.], White candle [for bones of the millions who perished], Covered dish representing food enjoyed by a forebear [a sampling of each item to be placed on special platter in honor of the ancestors].

### ***Ceremony:***

- 1) Gather around the salted water and offer libation (toast) to the ancestors.
- 2) Light all candles, then offer prayers for the ancestors and to our forebears seeking their guidance.
- 3) "Sail" a "vessel" across the water to remember the free exploration of this hemisphere by Africans who made Columbus' trip possible.
- 4) "Sail" again to memorialize the centuries of African slave trade. Blow out all but one candle (for cultural and spiritual losses), then the lit candle begins the relighting of candles.
- 5) Say prayers to guide and protect the young and unborn who follow us.
- 6) The "chains" are broken and consumed and there is the making a joyful noise [songs as suits the occasion].
- 7) Rejoining activity [beginning or completing a quilt or collage or other artwork built by contributions from each participant].

A Middle Passage Commemoration is being planned by Shooting Star Productions in conjunction with the African American Heritage Quilters Guild and will be held at the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild's 1st & Market Street Gallery, downtown Pittsburgh, PA on Saturday, November 30, 1991.

# The Necessary Knocking on the Door

by Ann Petry



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Photo copyright, 1989  
Manchester Craftsmen's Guild

Alice Knight woke up just a few hours after she had fallen asleep. She sat up in bed, leaning her weight on one elbow, listening, and wondering what had awokened her.

There was no sound anywhere either, in this room or, as far as she could determine, in any other part of the building. She examined the room with care, thinking that a jar of cold cream or, perhaps, a book might have fallen from the small table near the bed. Thus she became aware of the moonlight -- pale, cold light that filtered through the small-

paned windows, making grotesque patterns on the floor, the walls, the ceiling.

Perhaps a window shade had flapped. But there was no wind -- the sheer curtains, the dark green shades were motionless in the cold, still mountain air. Or, she thought, the floor may have creaked as old floors do at night -- the wood protesting against age, making a sound sharp enough to penetrate and disturb your sleep. Why would it creak once and not again? Or someone might have come up the stairs and stumbled. But there were no footsteps in the hall outside.

It was, she decided, much more logical to believe that she had been dreaming and that some phase of her dream had alarmed her. She lay down, pulled the blankets over her shoulders, closed her eyes.

Almost immediately afterward she sat up. Because there was a sound -- a low, agonized moan. It was followed by heavy strangled breathing that gasped and halted and seemed to come almost to a stop before it started again. Then the moan -- low, long, drawn out.

She reached for her dressing gown, shoved her feet into her slippers. Opening the door of her room, she went out into the hall. The long corridor was washed with moonlight. The pale, cold light shimmered on the paneled walls. And looking at it, she thought the moon must have fingered its way throughout the building, superimposing an uncanny stillness as it traveled, so that now there was layer after layer of stillness in which no one coughed, or sighed, or turned over in bed.

She bent her head to one side, listening. The low subdued moaning had started again. It was coming from

a room which was directly across the hall. She walked toward it, lifted her hand to knock on the door. Then she saw the name on the neat sign that was placed in a corner of the door panel: "Mrs. Taylor." The firm handwriting of the House Secretary stood out sharply black on the small white card.

She had forgotten that this was Mrs. Taylor's room. Her hand came away from the door. The sound of the uneven breathing, the low faltering moans, made her lift her hand again. But she did not knock. She stood, with her hand raised, staring at the card; and as she looked at it, she shivered.

She wished there were a brilliant light in the hall -- the hard yellow light from an unshaded electric bulb. In the pale moonlight the reality of this moment was lessening, fading, dying away. The outlines of the hall were blurred by the shimmering light; it even seemed to soften the sound of Mrs. Taylor's uneven breathing. She kept her eyes on the small white card, trying to focus her thoughts on it; but in its place she saw the images of all the things that prevented her from knocking at the door - - saw them and hated them.

For months she had looked forward to attending this conference -- the Annual August Conference on Christianity in the Modern World -- held at Rest House, high up in the Berkshires. She had found herself thinking of the week she would spend here as being an oasis in the desert of the years she had lived in Washington -- years of suffocating heat that started in June and did not end until October; years of trying to teach grammar to indifferent high school students; years of taking repeated insults that were an integral part of life in the Capital.

When she had arrived at Rest House, the brisk mountain air and the fresh green of the countryside had made Washington's hot crowded streets take on the remoteness of a half-remembered dream.

And now -- well, this was the second time she had found herself wishing she had stayed at home, in spite of the heat and the lethargy that she knew hung over Washington, in spite of the brilliant Conference speakers.



If she had stayed at home, she would not now be standing shivering, in front of a closed door, afraid to make a perfectly normal, human gesture toward another woman who appeared to be in distress. She would not have been forced to transform her face into a mask of stillness as she had done at breakfast yesterday morning. Why didn't I go home then? she wondered.

*And at night the  
sound of labored  
breathing is sinister,  
any sound is sinister  
at that hour.*

---

As she stood there in the hall, her eyes on the small white card, she relived that moment when she had first seen Mrs. Taylor. It was in the dining room and there were bowls of white phlox on the window sills and a long T-shaped table extended down the center of the room. The room was filled with women, all of them white. There was only one vacant seat -- on her left. She heard the murmur of conversation, heard her own voice joining the other voices discussing minority groups in Europe. As she talked she unconsciously relaxed, basking in the warm-hearted acceptance of the other delegates.

While her head was turned, a woman had slipped into the seat next to her. She had followed a sudden impulse, an impulse born of her deep satisfaction with Rest House, with the Conference itself, with the friendly atmosphere of the dining room, and had tried to draw the newcomer into the conversation.

And so she had said, not hesitantly, not delicately feeling her way, but boldly, with eagerness in her voice, with expectancy in her manner, "My! But this is good coffee!"

The woman looked at her once and then stood up. Alice got a blurred impression of white hair, of

contemptuous eyes. Then the woman made a violent thrusting motion with her hands, and the silver rattled, the plates clinked against the water glasses, all up and down the table.

The woman said, "I've never eaten with a nigger and I'm too old to begin now."

She left the dining room, walking swiftly. And Alice saw that she was still holding one of the small green breakfast napkins in her hand. There was a long, uneasy silence. Remembering it, Alice tried also to remember exactly how she had felt. Hot? Cold? Both at once? One right after the other? Breath constricted? Yes. But why? From embarrassment? From hate? From anger? Perhaps all three.

She had forced every muscle in her into immobility. And as she sat there so quietly, so calmly, the awful silence increased, widening, spreading. Then from all sides of the room came a babble of conversation -- bright, quick talk hastily assembled to fill up the hollow place made by the silence.

Her vision became strangely distorted. For at that moment she saw everything multiplied. The big dining room seemed to be filled with frenzied movement. All about her hundreds of women's heads were nodding and shaking; thousands of hands jerked in an erratic and purposeless pointing and beckoning.

As she watched the moving heads, the gesturing hands, she made her face expressionless, holding it as still as the silence, thinking: They are hurrying to build a bridge across the gaping silence. Each one of them is approaching with a straw to help build the bridge. They are carrying their straws between their teeth; hurrying, hurrying, hurrying, as they come to build the bridge. Why do I mind?

Why should a word, a two-syllable word, make me hate them? Not just that one white-haired white woman, but all of these others, too. What earthly difference does one word make?

Yes, she should have gone home right after breakfast yesterday. The determination to stay on until the Conference ended was a kind of defiance, a challenge hurled at the white-haired woman. If she had left right →

after breakfast the other delegates would have known why. They would have said she was abnormally sensitive. They would have pitied her. She could not bear their pity -- that was why she had stayed.

*The woman looked at her once and then stood up. Alice got a blurred impression of white hair, of contemptuous eyes. Then the woman made a violent thrusting motion with her hands, and the silver rattled, the plates clinked against the water glasses, all up and down the table.*

*The woman said, "I've never eaten with a nigger and I'm too old to begin now."*

---

She looked down at her hands. She was clenching and unclenching them. Their convulsive movement was as jerky as the sound of Mrs. Taylor's breathing. The comparison made her realize where she was and what she had to do.

When she extended her hand toward the door again, she was panting as though she had been running. This time her knuckles brushed against it before she stepped back.

You are a coward, she told herself. You are afraid that if you knock on her door, go in her room, she will spit the word "nigger" at you. And though you would be prepared to hear it, you cannot bear it. The sound of that word as it emerges from her lips turns you into an animal, an outcast, and obscene crawling thing. But you

can bear it. It is only a word. For a moment you would know that dreadful feeling of nausea, and for another moment, you would know that frightening feeling of being suffocated by hate. That would be all.

Instead of knocking on the door she moved farther away from it. Suddenly she stopped moving and eyed the hall, not seeing it, but held motionless by a recollection more vivid than the reality of the present moment.

The evening before, they had gone into the big dining room for dinner. She had chosen a seat in a far corner, behind a great jar of delphiniums. The spiked blossoms had formed an effective screen.

When she saw the white-haired woman enter the room and sit down near the door, she asked a question of her tablemate.

The girl answered quickly, saying, "Why that's Mrs. Gib Taylor. She comes all the way from Mississippi. She's been a member of this Convention for years. I think her room is on the same floor with yours."

At the close of the evening session, Alice studied the names on the doors of the bedrooms opposite her own, wondering if -- Yes, Mrs. Taylor's room was directly across the hall. The sight of the name on that small white card had made her feel as though she were behind a screen, twisting and turning her neck in an effort to see what everyone else saw.

She thrust the memory away from her, closed her eyes and then opened them quickly. The hall was still there, and the moonlight, and the door. It was all too real. I must offer to help her, she thought. But if I go into her room she will accuse me of breaking in while she slept, of planning to rifle her belongings, of intending to steal her jewelry.

She had once overheard Mrs. Taylor say, "You can never tell what they are liable to do."

But I can walk down the hall and find someone else. They will knock on her door. She paused in front of another door. What would she say if the occupant of this room should ask her why she had not gone into Mrs. Taylor's room?



She searched for words, whispering them softly under her breath: "Mrs. Taylor, Mrs. Gib Taylor, is sick. I don't want to rap on her door because I am afraid she will call me a name. She would not call you a name, the name that she uses for me, so will you rap? Will you begin the knocking, the necessary knocking at Mrs. Taylor's door?"

Why am I standing here mumbling to myself like this? she thought. Her lips formed the words again: "Mrs. Taylor, Mrs. Gib Taylor is sick."

Whomever she talked to would, very logically, ask, "What's the matter with her?"

"I don't know. I haven't been in her room."

"Why?"

And there you had it. There wasn't any way to explain that or anything else. She walked toward her own room. Once inside she closed the door swiftly, and leaned against it.

When she got back into bed, she lay huddled under the covers, staring at the strange pattern the moonlight was making on the walls and on the ceiling, hearing, and straining to hear, the faint thickened sound of Mrs. Taylor's breathing.

Finally she fell asleep. It was a troubled, uneasy sleep in which she dreamed that the moonlight had taken on the form and shape of an octopus; and the tentacled moonlight, the small white card on Mrs. Taylor's door, and the fountain in the patio outside her window pursued her down an endless hill. And as she ran from them, stumbling, panting, he heard the octopus moonlight calling to her: "Yours is the greater crime. A crime. A very great crime. It was a crime. And we were the witnesses."

When she woke up she was infinitely weary. Then she saw that the sun was streaming through the casement windows, filling the room with a dancing, sparkling light that set the panes of glass, the draperies, even the furniture to glowing. The sight of the strong clear light made her feel as though a great weight had been lifted out of her arms.

There ought to be a special kind of greeting for a morning like this, she thought. Some gesture of welcome, like an old-fashioned curtsey to the sun, to the day itself.

She almost smiled. Then she remembered her vain effort to force herself to knock on Mrs. Taylor's door and the impulse to smile disappeared.

I must have been half-asleep last night, drowsing and dreaming, while I stood outside that woman's door. There couldn't have been anything really seriously wrong. Perhaps a cold in her head. And at night the sound of labored breathing is sinister, any sound is sinister at that hour. You magnified it out of all proportion -- just as you do anything else.

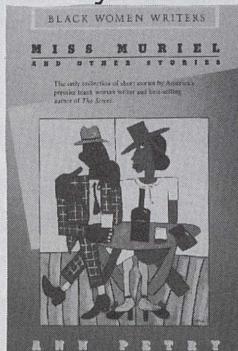
And then she thought: There is always a perfectly normal, easily understood explanation for everything. Unfortunately one does not always have a sun-flooded morning to help one arrive at such an explanation.

Then she frowned because she heard a kind of hustle and bustle outside her door -- quick footsteps, loud, alarmed voices. Rest House was always quiet at this hour in the morning. The only sound should have been the high sweet tones of the chapel bells. Curiosity made her get out of bed, open her door, and look out into the hall.

A maid, who was coming up the hall, greeted her with the quick eagerness of one who bears news. "Good morning, miss. Did you hear about last night?"

Alice shook her head. Remembering the moans, the hoarse breathing that had come from the room across the hall, she asked sharply, "What happened?"

"Oh!" the maid said. "That nice Mis' Taylor died in the night. Doctor say if anybody'd known about her havin' a heart attack they coulda saved her."



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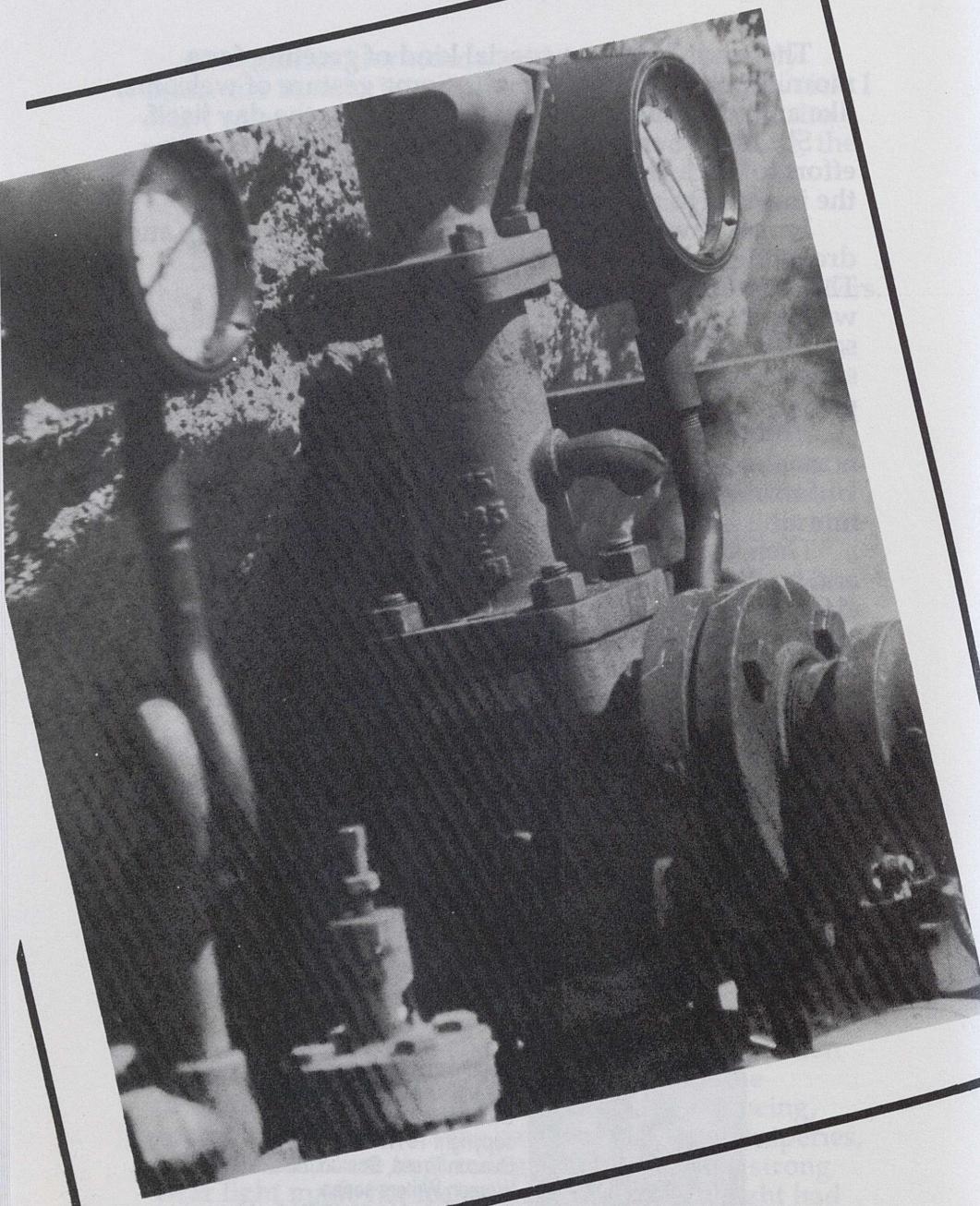
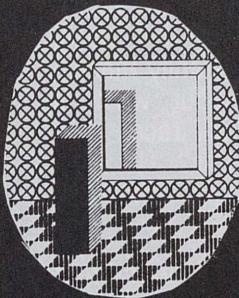


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*Shooting Star Review*

# Why We Can't Be Friends

Bill Rayburn  
Palisades Park, NY

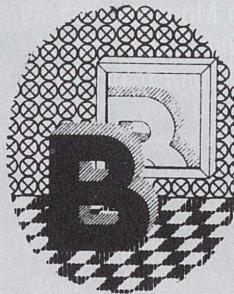


want a black man for a friend. Not just a casual friend, but a

friend to the degree that we discuss, analyze, and most importantly, laugh at the bullshit that is keeping our races from interacting. He's gotta be racially hip, an intellectual, a nostalgic and shrewd enough to be a cynic. Probably not too

# I'll Be Bill's Friend

Jason Barr  
Pittsburgh, PA



ill Rayburn wants a black man for a friend. I'll be your friend, the type of friend that can "discuss, analyze, and most importantly, laugh at the (mess) that is keeping our races from interacting." You assert certain conditions upon which your friendship with a black man must be based. Allow

••

**difficult for a black man to be a cynic. Yet, his cynicism cannot be singular. The race issue cannot be an all-encompassing one, for then his narrow focus will wear thin.**

He's got to have balance in his life. I want him capable of enjoying white musicians, athletes, politicians, etc. He should understand and appreciate the subtlety of Van Morrison, just as I admire Marvin Gaye. Be stimulated by Redford or Newman, as I am by Morgan Freeman and Spike Lee. Lust after Madonna, like I lust after Whitney Houston.

I want him to be open to the special skills of Joe Montana, appreciate him despite the racial barrier black quarterbacks have had to overcome.

Most blacks operate from a premise of insecurity, always promoting the accomplishments of black athletes as an argument AGAINST what white athletes have not accomplished. This is uncool. It promotes the narrow-mindedness that got us into this shit in the first place.

I want a black friend who understands that Michael Jor-

dan, Magic Johnson and Kareem Abdul Jabbar are simply athletes. They are not spokesmen for an entire race. I love Jordan. I also love Bird. I don't want either of these guys speaking for me, or anyone else for that matter. They're athletes. That hardly qualifies them to represent people.

I want a black friend who speaks for himself. I want him to realize that an entire race cannot have a half dozen people who represent them.

Jesse Jackson is a preacher. He may become a politician. Do you think his views are representative of yours? He does, because he's constantly making generalizations about what is good for the black race. How can you allow this? He gets tremendous support, and that scares me.

The lack of individuality, the fear of acting without representation, is the biggest anchor black people continue to carry with them.

The political spectrum is not where the black race begins to develop its strength. It starts with individuality. Only from there can a strong, unified effort and feeling develop. Black leaders have not had a consistent constituency, thereby cutting the legs out from under them.

The "Black Power" era, originally

**me to delineate the conditions I feel would promote a mutual exchange of ideas. After all, if we are to be engaged in this friendship, certainly you would not prohibit me from exercising the same rights and prerogatives as you.**

The first condition of our friendship is that you must rid yourself of copious, false and insidious presuppositions and perceptions. Black people are not monolithic. We have many interests, talents and proficiencies. You focus the first part of your article on blacks as entertainers and athletes. This reveals your ignorance on the contributions of my brothers and sisters across the spectrum of human achievement.

Please understand that black people were taught to appreciate Shakespeare long before we ever heard of Langston Hughes. We watched John Wayne exhibit his acting skills on the screen while blacks of equal talent were relegated to roles that provided comic relief for a racist society. Yes, we have an affinity for Spike Lee and Whitney Houston. Why must this be explained? They speak to us, about us and sometimes for us, through their various mediums in ways that were once, and sometimes are

still, either ignored or subverted by the dominant society.

For hundreds of years black people have had no choice but to like white politicians! Sometimes we love white politicians when they do not have our best interest at heart. Recent research by the Joint Center for Political Studies reveals that black people are more likely to vote according to party lines than by racial identification. A black person will vote for a white Democrat before he or she will vote for a black Republican. A white person is more likely to vote for a white Democrat or Republican before he or she will vote for a black of any party.

I agree with you on one point, athletes cannot be spokesmen for an entire race. There is even a modicum of truth in your assertion that "the strength of any group of people is only the sum of its strong individuals." It has been the white media, not black people which has exalted black athletes. It has been the racist perception and assumption of the dominant society that has perpetuated the myth that the strength of black people is to be found in our athletic prowess and physical stamina. This is not new, but has been something black people have had to deal with for hundreds of years. Winthrop Jordan, a white scholar of impeccable classical educational credentials, reports in his book *White Over Black* that when Europeans first came to Africa,

intended as a confrontational, group-like mentality, has failed miserably. The strength in numbers mindset is a short-sighted approach to a long term problem.

The strength of any group of people is only the sum of its strong individuals.

I want to talk about this, I'm willing to listen. I know my insight is from a white perspective but, goddamn it, I'm hungry for a black insight that makes sense.

Blacks don't trust ANYONE. They are an incredibly divided race. The obvious visibility of the "brothers and sisters" schtick has become a cheap, damaging and ultimately failing attempt to forge camaraderie and cohesiveness.

Most positive, chivalrous chemistry I've observed between blacks has been superficial, relying heavily on the visual effect.

The black handshake, which changes with regularity, has become a symbol of their futility. It began as an attempt to separate from whites, to establish an identity. But it never progressed beyond that. If a handshake gives insight into the black culture, then they've accomplished nothing. A handshake cannot survive being anything other than symbolic. With the glaring lack of trust and love among black people, their hand-

shake only serves as a reminder of what they don't have.

I have a lot of frustration and anger about black people, but it doesn't stem from areas you might suspect. I'm not angry because the majority of crimes committed, the majority of drugs purchased, are by the black race. I'm pissed off that they're allowing themselves to disintegrate right before their own eyes.

White people are not to blame for broken homes. White people are not to blame for black youths killing whites and each other.

Individuality. It must be a frightening word, with all its inherent responsibilities, because the black man has run from it. Assuming responsibility is the only place to start. That's what black mothers and fathers must do. Otherwise, the black race will remain as it is today, probably as it has always been, out

The black race has the white race intimidated physically. With crime and the overwhelming dominance of the black man in athletics, it has us on edge, back on our heels. But Black people are millions of miles away from challenging the white man intellectually. THAT should be the goal of the black man.

It's time to point the finger at the real people to blame for your predicament: yourselves. ●

their most prominent perception of Africans was related to their visceral, physical and sexual qualities. Your article is evidence that you have not advanced much further than your ancestors.

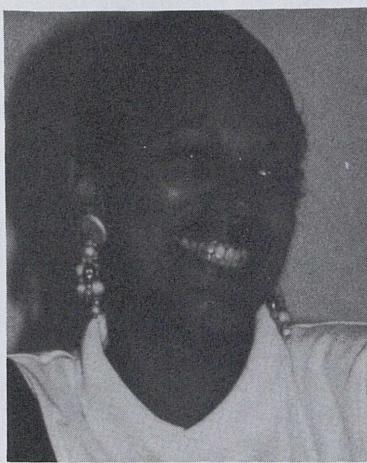
I am delighted you know about the contributions of Jordan, Johnson and Jabbar in athletics. That tells me you either read the newspaper, watch television or both. Are you equally aware of contribution by blacks in other areas of human endeavor? You are aware of Keats, Twain and Goethe. Are you equally aware of Baraka, Cullen, Dunbar and Angelou? You know who John Glenn and Neil Armstrong are, but have you ever heard of Mae Jemison or Ronald McNair? Every American is familiar with contributions of Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud and Frank Lloyd Wright. Have you taken the time to learn about Charles Drew, Samuel Massie or Benjamin Banneker? The list is virtually endless. For every contribution made to this world by an American or European, there is an equal contribution by an African American or African.

This brings me to my second condition for friendship. Friendships -- solid friendships -- are intimate. Each concerned with the background, interests and achievements of the other. Therefore, if you want to be my friend, educate yourself about me. Learn about my people. A few good places to start this process is by reading the

following books: *The Destruction of Black Civilization* by Chancellor Williams; *The Souls of Black Folks* by W.E.B. DuBois; *From Slavery to Freedom* by John Hope Franklin; *The African Origin of Civilization* by Diop Cheikh Anta.

The final condition for our friendship is that you learn to distinguish fact from fiction. In your article, you state "the majority of drugs (are) purchased by the black race." While this is the standard perception of many, it simply is not true. The Drug Enforcement Administration of the Federal Government has issued several reports establishing that 80 percent of all drugs consumed and purchased in America are done so by white people. However, when black people use drugs the consequences overall are more devastating. It only stands to reason. Most blacks who use drugs are socio-economically impoverished and educationally deprived. This is the element of the drug culture that the media focus so heavily on and consequently you, as well as others, have the notion that this is how life is for all black people.

So Bill, rid yourself of false presuppositions and familiarize yourself with the background, interests and achievements of my people. I have already done these things as they relate to you and your people. That would be the basis for a great friendship.



**Sandra Gould Ford**  
Founder of  
**Shooting Star**  
Productions, Inc.  
Publisher of  
*Shooting Star Review*

Photo by Eugene B. Redmond

The name *Shooting Star* was chosen because the true phenomena are such exhilarating experiences.

They leap out of blackness. They are bright and straight. When they are gone ... they are never really forgotten.

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## *Shooting Star Review*

Autumn, 1991

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FREE Submission Guidelines,  
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Written work must be neatly  
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Send poetry and fiction in  
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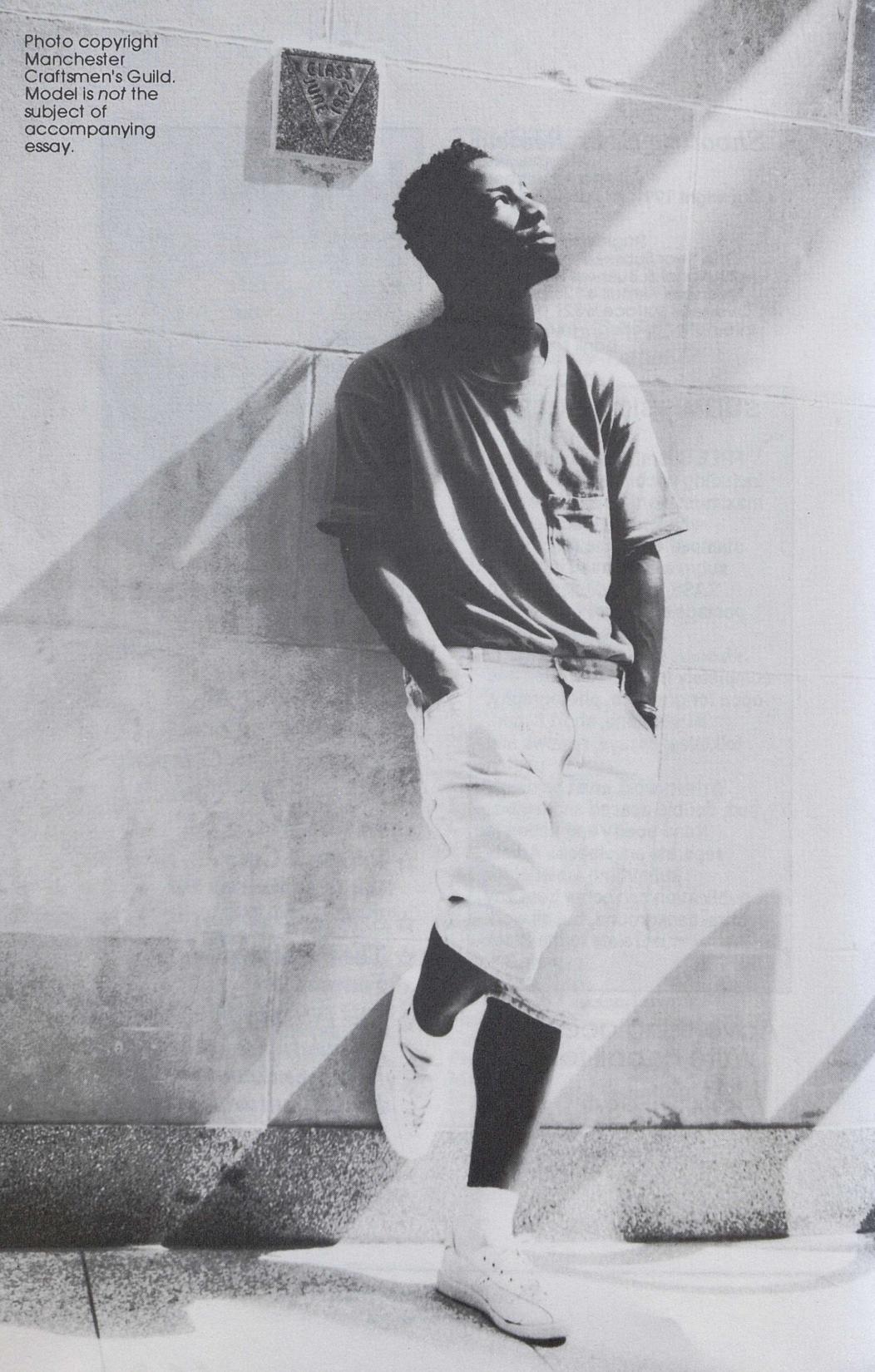
## MISSION

**STATEMENT**  
*Shooting Star*  
*Productions, Inc.* is  
a non-profit  
corporation that  
exists to use the  
arts to build  
awareness and  
appreciation for  
Black culture.

This Mission Statement is  
greatly assisted in its  
fulfillment by generous  
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# IN AN AFTERNOON LIGHT

by Essex Hemphill

Philadelphia, PA

On a recent afternoon in Philadelphia, I walked to the corner of 63rd and Malvern streets to catch a Number 10 trolley, my imaginary street car named Desire. Waiting, when I arrived at the stop was another black man, sipping a bottle of beer and smoking a cigarette. He wore sunshades and was built three sizes larger than my compact frame. I guessed him to be in his thirties though his potbelly suggested an older age or the consumption of too much beer and soul food. A blue hand-towel was tossed over his right shoulder. A baseball jacket was draped across his left thigh. He was sitting on the wall I sit on when I wait here. Since there was no trolley in sight, I guardedly walked over and sat at the far end of the wall. He continued to drink his beer as I observed him from the corner of my eye. I pretended to occupy myself with looking for an approaching trolley. He abruptly

**ended our silence. For no apparent reason he blurted out "Man, the woman's movement is ruling the world. It's turning our sons into faggots and our men into punks."**

"What do you mean?" I asked, raising my voice as loudly as he had raised his. Indignation and defensiveness tinged my vocal chords. I thought his remarks were directed specifically at me.

"You see all the cars going by? he asked, gesturing at the minor traffic.

"Yeah, so what about it?"

"Well, can't you see that all the drivers in the cars are women --"

"Which only means more women are driving," I interjected.

-- because women have caused major changes in society, brother."

"So."

"So women are ruling more things now. That's why I don't want my son to spend all his time with his mother, his grandmother and those aunts of his. His mother and I don't live together, but I go visit him and take him downtown or to the movies or to the Boys' Club. I think that's important, so he'll know the difference."

"The difference in what?"

"The difference between a woman and a man. You know..."

"Which is supposed to be determined by what? How they use their sex organs? What I do know, brother, is that 13-and 14-year-old black children are breeding babies they can't care for -- crack babies, AIDS babies, accidental babies, babies that will grow up and inherit their parents' poverty and powerlessness. The truth is young people are fucking because they want to fuck. They're encouraged to fuck. Yet we don't talk to them frankly and honestly about sex, sexuality or their responsibility."

"Okay brother, hold that thought. You're moving too fast. See, this is what I mean. Suppose you grow up in a home with your father being a minister and your mother is there all the time taking care of the house and kids. You grow up, go off to college and get a good education, then --"

"Yeah --"

-- then you decide you gonna be gay. You like men. I say you learned that. Education did that. Your folks didn't teach you that."

"That's bullshit, and you know it. It's stupid to suggest that women or education cannot make a man gay. What you fail to understand is that women or education cannot make a man gay. What you fail to understand is that this is the natural diversity of human sexuality no matter what we call it. Also, my father is a

minister, my mother was at home raising us before they divorced, and I went to college. And you know what?

"What?"

"I'm a faggot."

"No you ain't!"

"Yes I am. In fact, I'm becoming a well-known faggot."

"I don't believe you."

"Why not?"

"Because you ain't switching and stuff."

"Yeah, all you think being gay is about is men switching -- but you're wrong. I'm a faggot because I love me enough to be who I am. If your son becomes a faggot it won't be because of the way you or his mother raised him. It won't be because of television, movies, books and education. It will be because he learns to trust the natural expression of his sexuality without fear or shame. If he learns anything about courage from you or his mother, then he'll grow up to be himself. You can't blame being straight or gay on a woman or education. The education that's needed should be for the purpose of bringing us all out of sexual ignorance. Our diverse sexuality is determined by the will of nature, and nature is the will of God."

He sat there for a moment staring at me, sipping his beer. He lit another cigarette. I realized then that he could beat me to a pulp with his bigger size, his vociferous masculinity, but I

wasn't afraid for what I had said and revealed. On too many occasions I have sat silently as men like him mouthed-off about gays and women and I said nothing because I was afraid. But not today. Not this afternoon. The longer I sit silently in my own community, my own home, and say nothing, I condone the ignorance and its by-products of violence and discrimination. I prolong our mutual suffering by saying nothing.

In this tense interlude a bus and trolley approached. I was angry for having to encounter him on such a glorious day, but this is the kind of work social change requires. I consoled myself believing this.

When he rose I immediately rose too -- a defensive strategy, a precaution.

"It's been good talking to you, brother. I'll think about what you've said." He extended his hand to me just as the bus and the trolley neared. I looked at his hand, known and unknown to me, offered tentatively, waiting to clasp my hand.

"Yeah, it was cool talking to you, too," I returned, as I hesitantly shook his hand. He swaggered to the bus and boarded with his beer hidden under the jacket he carried. In an afternoon light devoid of shame I walked into the street to meet the trolley .

# 1st Annual Black Writers'



1. Temujin the storyteller talks to Conference attendees outside of the William Pitt Student Union.
2. Audience members line up to ask questions of panelists at the August Wilson Symposium, which was broadcast live over WYJZ that Saturday morning.
3. Associate Provost Jack Daniel with our favorite magazine in his pocket.

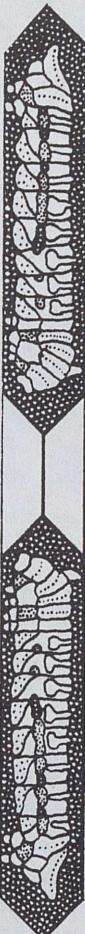
4. Volunteers celebrate the arrival of the 1BWC conference tee shirts.
5. Volunteers manning the registration table.
6. Two poets converse at the outdoor reading at Three Rivers Arts Festival. This reading was the final activity of the 1st Black Writers Conference in Pittsburgh and was held under a scenic arbor in Gateway View Plaza.

# Conference Scrapbook



7. Conference attendees listen to publishers and authors talk about writing for the children's market.
8. Representative from the AIDS Task Force encourages artists to incorporate public awareness in their arts activities.

*Shooting Star Productions* gratefully acknowledges the support of Kuntu Writers



## *Shooting Star's Upcoming Events*

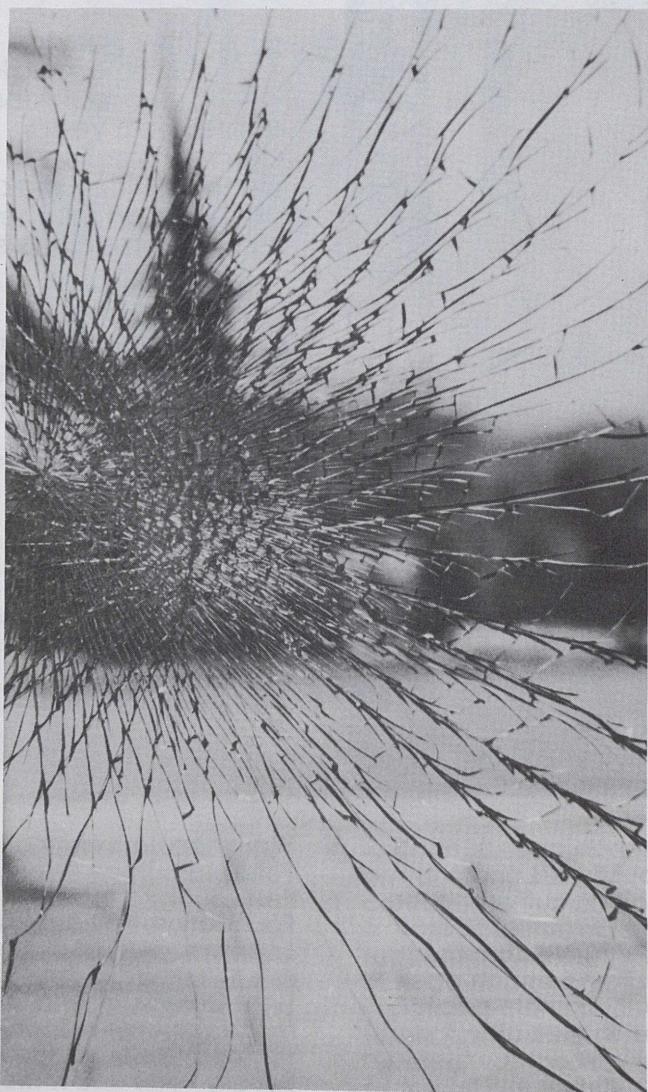
**M**iddle Passage Commemoration. See page 9 for details. Next year's Commemoration is planned with a major exhibition on this theme by the Women of Visions.

**2B  
WC** Pittsburgh's 2nd Black Writers' Conference is planned for mid-April, 1992. Watch *Shooting Star Review* for details.

**J**uneteenth!! A Celebration of Liberation. Poetry, picnic, barbecue, music, the arts & more!

---

Workshop, University of Pittsburgh, Three Rivers Arts Festival, The Pittsburgh Foundation/Howard Heinz Endowment Multi-Cultural Arts Initiative, Duquense Light Company, and the many volunteers. Special thanks to Valerie Lawrence, Beverly Portis and Marci Spidell whose efforts contributed substantially to this Conference's success.



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*Shooting Star Review*

# The Watermelon Story

by John E. Wideman

The first time he saw somebody get their arm chopped off was in front of the A&P on Homewood Avenue. They used to pile watermelons outside at the alley corner of the store. A big plate glass window where they stuck Sale signs and Specials This Week signs and propped church posters and advertisements for this and that on the bottom inside ledge was at that end of the store too. A window starting almost on the sidewalk and running up twice as tall as a man so they needed long ladders to wash it when they used to try and keep things clean in Homewood. Watermelons would be there piled three and four high. The green ones shiny, the striped ones cool as if the sunshine couldn't ever melt those pale ..

veins of ice shooting through their rinds. Mostly the winos would stay over in the trees, below the tracks in the Bums' Forest during the heat of the day but sometimes you'd get one straying off, too high or too dry to care, and then he'd wander up where people were doing their shopping, wander through there stumbling or singing or trying to get his hands on somebody's change till he got tired of people looking through him and at him and church ladies snorting and kids laughing like the circus was in town or staring like he was some kind of creature from Planet X and then he'd just settle himself in a piece of shade where the settling looked good and nobody'd mind him no more than they would a cat or dog sleeping under the porch. But the one he saw with his arm hanging by bloody threads, dangling so loose the man in the white apron had to hold the weight of it so it wouldn't just roll on down between the watermelons, that wino had decided for some reason to sit on the stack of melons in front of the A&P.

Must have nudged one of the front ones, the bottom ones holding the stack together and when they all started to rolling like big fat marbles under him he must have leaned back to catch himself and they pitched him through that plate glass window. Like trying to walk on marbles. Must have been like that. His legs going out

from under him all the sudden and him full of Dago Red and dozing in that July sun so he was probably dreaming something and the dream got snoring good to him and Homewood Avenue a thousand miles away. Like having the rug jerked out from under your feet and you know you're falling, know you're going to hit the ground so you throw your arm back to catch yourself and ain't the ground you catch but a whole A&P windowful of glass slicing down on your shoulder.

Must have been easy at first. I mean your fist punches through real quick and busts a clean hole and your arm just passes right on through too. Ain't bleeding, ain't even scratched, it's through that tunnel real easy and quick and nothing hurts, you don't even know you're just waiting for the goddamn watermelons to stop acting a fool so your feet and your behind can find the pavement but then that glass comes down like a freight train, snaps shut like a gator's jaws and you know, you know without looking, without feeling the pain yet either, you know it got you and that screaming behind your ear is not falling, crashing glass anymore, it's you waking up and saying hello and saying good-bye to your arm.

Must have been like that even though he didn't see it happen and he wasn't the man. He dreamed it like that many years later and the dream was his, the throne of watermelons belonged to him, green and striped and holding the heat of the sun. And when it topples and topples him with it into the bath of cool glass, the shattering glass is there ringing like a cymbal in his ear even after he opens his eyes. He dreamed it that way and often without warning when he was walking down the street his shoulder muscle would twitch, would tremble and jerk away from the axe in its dream. Like his arm was living on borrowed time and knew it. The shock? of seeing a severed arm in the white aproned lap of the man who had run from inside the store meant that arms didn't have to stay where they were born. Nothing had to stay the way it was. He had wondered if all that blood soaking the apron was wino blood or if the bald white man kneeling beside the hurt wino had brought pig blood and cow blood and blood from lambs and wall-eyed fish from inside the store. Was the man



surrounded by the green sea of melons a butcher, a  
butcher who was used to bloody parts and blood  
spattered clothes, a butcher cradling the wino's arm so  
the last few threads won't break. Is he whispering to the  
wino, trying to help him stay still and calm or is the wino  
dreaming again, moaning a song to the lost arm in his  
dream.

*It was Faith that  
bring them that child.  
Faith and God's will.  
Now He couldn't do  
nothing nice like that  
these days. Youall  
niggers ain't ready.*

---

The A&P is gone now. They scrubbed the blood from the pavement and stopped stacking watermelons on the sidewalk. One of the grown-ups told him later the wino's life had been saved by a tourniquet. Somebody in the crowd had enough sense to say forget about that thing. Forget about trying to stick that arm back on and had ripped the apron into strips and made a tourniquet and tied it around the stump to stop the bleeding. That saved him. And he had wanted to ask, Did anybody save the arm, but that sounded like a silly question, even a smart-alecky question, even when he said it to himself so instead he imagined how the only black man who worked in the A&P, Mr. Norris who always sat two rows down toward the front of Homewood A.M.E. Zion Church, pushed his iron bucket that was on wheels through the wide double doors of the A&P. The melons had skittered and rolled everywhere. People trying to get closer to the blood had kicked holes in some, some had plopped over the curb and lay split in the gutter of Homewood Avenue. A few of the biggest melons had walked away when folks crowded around. But it wasn't Mr. Norris's job to count them and it wasn't, he told the

produce manager, his job to scrabble around Homewood Avenue picking watermelons, wasn't no part of his job, Mr. Norris told him again as he hummed *Farther Along* and slopped soapy water on the dark splotches of blood. Mr. Norris had made a neat, rectangular fence of watermelons in front of the broken window to keep fools away. Nobody but a fool would get close to those long teeth of glass, jag-edged teeth hanging by a thread, teeth subject to come chomping down if you breathe on them too hard. Mr. Norris had kept his distance and gingerly swept most of the glass into a corner of his watermelon yard. Then the bucket and mop. When the pavement dried he'd sprinkle some sawdust like they have behind the fish counter. There were smears of blood and smears of watermelon and he'd dust them all. He sloshed the heavy mop up and back, up and back, digging at the worst places with soapy water.

Rather than ask a question nobody would answer and nobody would like, he imagined Mr. Norris taking his own good time cleaning the mess off the sidewalk. Through ninety-nine percent of the shoppers were black, Mr. Norris was the only black man working for the A&P, and that made him special, made him somebody people watched. Mr. Norris had rules. Everybody knew what they were and understood his slowness, his peculiar ways were part of his rules. Watching his hands or his face or the poses he struck, you'd think he was leading an orchestra. The way he carried himself had nothing to do with wiping shelves or scrubbing floors or carting out garbage unless you understood the rules and if you understood the rules, and understood they came from him, then everything he did made sense and watching him you'd learn more than you would from asking dumb question and getting no answers.

They wouldn't have left the arm for Mr. Norris to broom up. They'd know better so of course they'd take it with them, wherever they took the wino, wherever they took the tourniquet, the stump, the bloody strips of apron.

Don't try to stick it back on. Leave that damn thing be and stop the bleeding.      ♦♦

He hadn't been there when the one man with good sense had shouted out those words. He didn't see how you wrapped a stump, how you put on a handle so you could turn off the blood like you turn off a faucet. Turn and quit. He thought that's what she said at first. Those words made sense at first till she explained a little bit more and told him not "turn and quit," it's tourniquet, like you learn in first aid or learn in the army or learn wherever they teach one another such things. Then she said, Ugh. I couldn't do it. I couldn't get down there with my hands in all that mess. They'd have to carry me away if I got too close to it. Me. I wouldn't be no more good. But thank God somebody with good sense was there, somebody with a strong stomach to do what have to be did.

*It was Africa you see.  
Or Georgy or  
someplace back there  
it don't make no  
difference no way.  
Niggers be niggers  
anyplace they be.*

---

As he listened he heard May saying the words and remembered it was her then. May who told the story of the accident and ten told him later, No, he didn't die. He lost that arm but he's still living, he's still back up in the Bums' forest drinking just as much wine with one arm as he did with two.

And May's story of the lost arm reminded her of another story about watermelons. About once there was a very old man Isaac married to an old woman Rebecca. Was in slavery days. Way, way back. Don't nobody care nothing about those times. Don't nobody remember them but old fools like me cause I was there and he told me how it was way back then. There was this Isaac and Rebecca and they was old when it started. Old before

those olden days way back, way, way back. It was Africa you see. Or Georgy or someplace back there it don't make no difference no way. Niggers be niggers anyplace they be. If you get my meaning. But this old man and old woman they be living together ninety-nine years and they's tried and they ain't got child the first to hold they old heads, they's childless you see. Old lady dry as a dry well and always was and looks like she's fixin to stay the very same till Judgment Day. So they was some old, sad people. Had some good times together, everybody got good times once in a while, and they was good to each other, better to each other than most people be these days. He'd still pat them nappy knots up under her head rag. She'd rub that shoulder of his been sore for fifty years when he come in from the fields at night. They was good to each other. Better then most. They did what they could. But you ain't never too young nor too old to be hurt.

And a hurt lived with them all the days of their lives, lived every day from can to caint in that itty bitty cabin in the woods. They loved God and wasn't scared of dying. Naw, they wasn't feared of that like some sinners I know. And they wasn't ungrateful niggers neither. And I could name you some them, but I ain't preaching this morning. I'm telling youall a story bout two old people didn't never have no babies and that's what hurt them, that's what put that sadness on they hearts.

Youall heard bout Faith? Said I wasn't preaching this morning but youall heard that word, ain't you? Ain't asking if you understand the word. I'ma give you the understanding to go with it. Just tell me if you heard the word. That's Faith? Faith what I'm talking bout. And if you don't know what I'm talking bout just you listen. Just you think on them old, old people in that itty bitty shack in the woods, them people getting too old to grunt. Them people down in Egypt with the Pharaohs and bitter bread and burdens all the days of they lives. Well, they had Faith. Youall heard bout the mustard seed? That's another story, that's another day. But think on it. Old as they was they ain't never stopped praying and hoping one day a child be born unto them. Yes they did, now. This old Isaac and old Rebecca kept the faith. Asked ••

the Lord for a child to crown they days together and kept the Faith in they hearts one day He would.

Well old Isaac had a master grow watermelons on his farm. And old Isaac he have the best knuckle for miles around for thumping them melons and telling you when they just perfect for the table. He thump and Melon, Mr. Melon, he talk back. Tell his whole life story to that crusty knuckle, Uncle Isaac knock at the door. Yoo-hoo, How you do? Melon say, You a day early, man. Ain't ready yet, Isaac. Got twenty-four hours to go. You traipse on down the patch and find somebody else today. Come back tomorrow I be just right, brother Isaac.

*He had wondered if  
all that blood soaking  
the apron was wino  
blood or if the bald  
white man kneeling  
beside the hurt wino  
had brought pig  
blood and cow blood  
and blood from lambs  
and wall-eyed fish  
from inside the store.*

---

That was in Africa. Way, way back like I said. Where people talk to animals just like I'm sitting here talking to youall. Don't you go smiling neither. Don't you go signifying and sucking your teeth and raisin your eyebrows and talking bout something you don't know. This old lady got sense just good as any you. Like they say. You got to Go there to Know there. And ain't I been sitting on Granpa's knee hearing him tell bout slavery days and niggers talking to trees and stones and niggers flying like birds. And he was there. He knows. So in a manner of speaking I was there too. He took me back.

Heard old Isaac. Rap, rap, rapping. Out there all by hisself in that melon patch and Ole Massa say, Fetch me a good, big one. Got company coming, Isaac. My sister and her no good husband, Isaac, so fetch one the biggest, juiciest. Wouldn't give him the satisfaction of saying he ever got less than the best at my table. So old bent Isaac he down there thumpin and listenin and runnin his fingers long the rind. It's low mo hot too. Even for them old time Georgy niggers it's hot. Isaac so old and dry and tough he don't sweat much anymore but that day down in the patch, water runnin off his hide like it's rainin. He hear Rebecca up in the kitchen. Isaac, Isaac, don't you stay away too long. And he singing back. Got sweaty leg, Got sweaty eye, But this here nigger too old to die. And he picks one with his eye. A long, lean one. Kinda like these people going round over and squat down in the vines and thump it once good with that talking knuckle of his.

Now don't you know that melon crack clean open. Split right dead down the middle just like somebody cleave it with a little chubby legged, dimple-kneed, brown-eyed boy stuck up in there perfect as two peas in a pod. Yes it was now. A living breathing baby boy hid up in there smiling back at Isaac. Grabbing that crusty knuckle and holding on like it was a titty.

Well, old Isaac he sing him a new song now. He's cradling that baby boy and running through the field and singing so fine all the critters got out his way. Rattlesnakes and bears and gators. Nothing was going to mess with Old Isaac on that day. They heard his song and seen the spirit in his eyes, and everything moved on out the way.

And here come old Rebecca, skirts flying, apron flapping in the breeze. Took off fifty years in them twenty-five steps tween the back of that itty bitty cabin and her man's arms. Then they both holding the baby. Both holding and neither one got a hand on him. He just floating in the air between them two old, happy people. Thank the lord. Thank Jesus. Praise His name. They got so happy you coulda built a church right over top of them. One of them big, fancy white folks' churches like youall go to nowadays and they so happy they'd of



rocked it all by themselves. Rocked that church and filled it with the spirit for days, just them two old happy people and that baby they loved so much didn't even have to hold it. He just floated on a pillow of air while they praised God.

That's just the way it happened. Isaac found that baby boy in a watermelon and him and Rebecca had that child they been praying for every day. It was Faith that bring them that child. Faith and God's will. Now He couldn't do nothing nice like that these days. Youall niggers ain't ready. Youall don't believe in nothing. Old man bring home a baby first thing you do is call the police or start wagging your tongues and looking for some young girl under the bed. Youall don't believe nothing. But the spirit? Works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform. Yes He does now. In them old slavery Africa times there was more miracles in a day than youall gon see in a lifetime. Youall jumping up and down and oeing and ahing cause white men is on the moon and you got shirts you don't have to iron. Shucks. Some them things Grandpa saw daily scare the spit out you. And that's just everyday things. Talking to flowers and rocks and having them answer back. Youall don't believe in none that. Youall too smarty panted and grown for that. But old Isaac and Rebecca waited. They kept the faith and that fine son come to light they last days in this Valley of the Shadows.

Now I could say that's all, I could end it right here. Say Bread is bread and wine is wine, if anybody asks, this story's mine. End it happy like that, with a rhyme like the old folks ended their stories. But there's more. There's the rest goes with it so I'ma tell it all.

He heard the rest, and it was how the spirit took back the boy. The rest was the weeping and wailing of old Isaac and Rebecca. The rest was the broken-hearted despair, the yawning emptiness of their lives, a hole in their lives even bigger than the wound they had suffered before the child came. He listened. He'd never heard such a cruel story before. He was scared. He was a boy. For all he knew they had found him in a watermelon. For all he knew he might be snatched back tomorrow. Would

the grown-ups cry for him, would they take to their beds like old Isaac and Rebecca and wait for death.

May looked round the room catching nobody's eye but everybody's ear as she finished the rest of her story.

Where was all that praying? Where was all that hallelujah and praise the Lord in that little bitty cabin deep in the woods? I'll tell you where. It was used up.

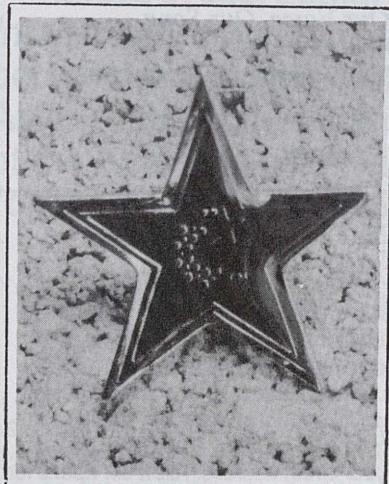
That's where it was. Used up so when trouble came, when night fell wasn't even a match in the house. Nary a pot nor a window. Just two crinkly old people on a shuck mattress shivering under they quilt.

He wanted to forget the rest so he asked if the wino could grow another arm.

May smiled and said God already give him more'n he could use. Arms in his ears, on his toes, arms all over. He just got to figure out how to use what's left.



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# The Scientific Narrative

## The Need of Our Time

by Horus I. Msemaje

African Americans have failed to discover their collective Self-identity and correspondingly, American ethnic harmony has yet to be realized. The correlation between these two seemingly insoluble problems is the subject of this paper.

Harold Cruse, author of *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, constructs an African American perspective on the structure and dynamics of America. He shows conclusively that the concept of the American as a "rugged individual" in an "open society" is pure illusion, by stating,

America is a nation dominated by the social power of groups ... both ethnic and religious. The individual in America has few rights that are not backed up by the political, economic and social power of one group or another.

As a consequence of the discovery that American society functions as a group dynamic, Cruse undertook an investigation into the basis of African American "impotence" in political, economic and cultural affairs. His conclusion is clear: "American Negro history is basically a history ➤

## GLOSSARY

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**Bright** Synonym for African Americans derived from ancient Kemet.

**Elders** Those who are both knowledgeable and wise regardless of age, gender, profession or academic attainments.

**Home** The group in which an individual is fully accepted or to which an individual is assigned by others.

**Integrationist** Those who focus primarily on gaining acceptance into American society.

**Leader** One who is able to satisfy the desires of his (or her) followers.

**Maharishi Mahesh Yogi** Maharishi means great seer. (Mahesh is a family name). Yogi means that his conscious mind is established in the field of pure intelligence, the Self.

**Nationalist** Those who accept and live as reality the American group dynamic.

**Enlightenment** The state of full human development, i.e., enlightenment, the state of wisdom.

**Talented Tenth** Those members of African American society who are enlightened. "Men (or women) we shall have only as we make manhood (or womanhood) the object of the work of the schools. On this foundation we may build bread winning, skill of hand and quickness of brain, with never a fear lest the child and man (or woman) mistake the means of living for the object of life." W.E.B.DuBois

**TM-Sidhi Program** Sidhi means perfection. The TM-Sidhi techniques are advanced procedures for accelerating the growth of full enlightenment.

**Transcendental Meditation TM** An effortless mental technique that allows the attention to turn inward and experience pure intelligence, the essence of human nature. Pure intelligence is, according to Maharishi's Vedic Psychology, the Self.

**Vedic Knowledge** An ancient system of knowledge cognized and orally maintained for thousands of years by an unbroken line of researchers in pure consciousness. (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is a significant contributor to that ongoing tradition.) By utilizing both subjective and objective methodologies, these scientists systematically developed their human faculties to such an extent that they were able to subjectively fathom and objectively verify the Self.

**Wisdom** The direct experience and understanding of the Self, the state of enlightenment.

---

of the conflict between 'integrationist' and 'nationalist' forces in politics, economics, and culture, no matter what leaders are involved and what slogans

used." Cruse emphasizes the imperative need for African American "elders" to articulate collectively a cultural Self-identity.

W.E.B.DuBois asks, "What is a Negro anyhow?" A collective Self-identity would fulfill his challenge. Certainly a coherent collective identity would serve as a power base for steering the development of the artistic, scientific, economic and political community. With such a power base, African Americans could finally participate in co-directing with other ethnic groups the evolution of America from a fragmented society to an enlightened civilization.

Cruse discovered that individual freedom in America is directly proportional to the degree of coherence expressed in the individual's "home" group. Lacking a homogeneous, sympathetic collective Self-identity, the African American community has fallen prey to internal disharmony, rendering its individual members powerless in American cultural, economic and political affairs. Perhaps as DuBois queried of the individual, so we should query of the collective: What constitutes culture -- specifically African American culture? Is culture created or found? Is it arbitrary or absolute?

Some scholars and scientists -- e.g., Wade Nobles, Asa Hilliard and Richard King -- advocate reviewing Kemetic, ancient Egyptian, intellectual and cultural artifacts.

Without question, investigating historical intellectual sources is fundamental to determining the nature of African American culture. We have to know: What was that collective experience and understanding that made for a Kemetic tradition that lasted for thousands of years?

*Collective consciousness-- family, community, city, national and world--governs and directs the action of a group, especially the leadership, in the same manner as the mind governs the action of an individual.*

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However, once the quintessence of Kemetic knowledge is found -- assuming that it has been clearly recorded -- it remains to be authenticated, understood and validated as true and useful. All this notwithstanding, the critical question about the ancient African records is: Can contemporary African American scientists, who are educated ↔

in the criteria of European science and culture, accurately and productively choose what is useful and what is not, what is valid and what is not? Moreover can it be adapted to modern needs and circumstances?

*... individual freedom ... is directly proportional to the degree of coherence expressed in the individual's "home" group. Lacking a homogeneous, sympathetic collective Self-identity, the African American community has fallen prey to internal disharmony, rendering its individual members powerless in American cultural, economic and political affairs.*

It can not be over emphasized that to underestimate the influence of a shallow materialistic middle-class (WASP) cultural viewpoint would be to invalidate even Cruse's most reasonable hypotheses and conclusions. There is no reasonable hope of ever actualizing an authentic African American collective Self-identity unless some method to neutralize the mesmerizing influence of Western culture is found.

To find our true collective, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (Maharishi) over the last 30 years has reconstituted the ancient tradition of Vedic knowledge-- both experientially and intellectually. Maharishi's steps were: 1) Developing his full potential; 2) Reviewing, re-interpreting and testing the knowledge contained in the ancient Vedic text; and 3) Teaching the ancient Vedic technologies (viz. TM, TM-Sidhi program).

Over the last three decades Maharishi has shown the essence of Vedic knowledge to be twofold: 1) techniques for Self-actualization -- e.g., Transcendental Meditation and the TM-Sidhi program, and 2) complete intellectual understanding of the path to, and nature of, Self-actualization. This is Maharishi's Vedic psychology.

In addition, Maharishi has uncovered the intimate relationship between the functioning of the individual and the functioning of society. Collective consciousness--family, community, city, national and world--governs and directs the action of a group, especially the leadership, in the same manner as the mind governs the action of an individual. Individual consciousness is the basic constituent of collective consciousness. A reciprocal relationship exists between them: "As individual consciousness grows, collective consciousness rises; and as collective consciousness rises, individual consciousness grows." (Maharishi). Even the square root of one per cent of any population practicing the TM-Sidhi program suffices to induce a base transition to increased orderliness in that society. This square root phenomenon is known to scientists as the Maharishi Effect.

World-wide research has verified that these technologies do, in fact, create a phase transition to a more coherent style of functioning in the individual and in the society: balanced development of left and right brain hemispheres, reduced crime, accidents, drug abuse, sickness, enhanced responsible behavior, improved functioning of leadership, enhanced prosperity

and progress; increased cultural integrity, invincibility and world harmony.

In summary, if we who wish to be DuBois' Talented Tenth become enlightened, then collectively we could: 1) review and (re-)interpret, and validate African American and ancient Kemetic records and 2) make the practical essence of that wisdom available for developing and perpetuating bright power. In fact, research shows that the presence of 7,000 individuals, which is the square root of one per cent of the world's population, collectively practicing the TM-Sidhi program spontaneously and immediately enriches not only the entire home group but also creates national and global coherence. Harmony and mutual support between all ethnic groups blossoms.

Questions are welcomed c/o MCAE P.O. Box 370, Livingston Manor, NY 12758

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*Shooting Star Review*

# The Ice MAN

by Clifton L. Taubert

Surely if my Uncle Cleve were alive today, he'd find a reason to be a black Republican. He was short, neatly dressed and conservative. Uncle Cleve came from Coldwater, Mississippi. I know very little about his early life with my Great-aunt Willie, but I do recall his strong personality and the impact he had on my life growing up in Glen Allan.

I never heard him raise his voice. When he talked, he always talked politics and demonstrated a real business sense. Independence and nonconversance were his most notable characteristics. I called him Uncle Cleve, Ma Ponk called him Bro. Cleve and every other colored person called him Mr. Cleve. The white community with which he had contact called him Mormon, his last name, their badge of respect.

Uncle Cleve, Mr. Cleve, Bro. Cleve or Mormon -- he was my first employer. From him, I learned a sense of responsibility that undergirds my approach today. He ran the only icehouse in town. Refrigerators were a rarity in ••

the colored community and among the poor whites, and nearly all the small businesses used ice to keep their goods from spoiling. Only Mr. Cleve provided the ice needed in Glen Allan. Twice daily, we'd see him driving the red flatbed truck up and down the streets, announcing "The iceman is here." For years, I would run alongside the truck as Uncle Cleve stopped at each house and chipped his sales of fifteen or thirty pounds of ice. Occasionally someone would buy fifty pounds, but that was rare. He was always quick, responsive and very polite -- not given to extra conversation when waiting on his customer. His business made our lives better, and he was always received as a welcome sight.

*... but I remember when those  
gigantic curtains opened and I  
saw all those beautiful ladies in  
sequined stockings. I could  
hardly sit still. I know I was too  
small to fully appreciate that  
beauty, but the glitter I  
understood.*

---

Being an assistant to Mr. Cleve was viewed as a good job, and I couldn't wait until I was old enough to work with my cousin Joe, Uncle Cleve's son. Uncle Cleve had been training me by taking me with him to Hollandale, Mississippi, to buy ice from the ice factory. We would ride to Hollandale together, just the two of us. I recall the trip taking hours, but really it was very short. We'd drive down the road eating salami and crackers and every once in while he would talk to me about life.

"Yes, git you a good pattern and follow it. Always be early for work, and save fifty cents out of every dollar you make."

I didn't try to answer. I just sat in the cab of the truck and listened as he continued talking. All I wanted was the

chance to show him that I could handle the big three-hundred-pound blocks of ice. If I could prove my ability to handle the big blocks, he would let me work at his icehouse.

Finally one Saturday, he gave me the chance. I must have been about twelve years old. Child-labor laws weren't in vogue in Glen Allan, and when you were strong enough to handle the job, nobody worried about how old you were. I could hardly sleep the Friday night before, although Ma Ponk had no problem getting me into bed on my little cot by the front windows.

"Boy, git to bed early, 'cause Bro. Cleve will leave you if you ain't ready to go when he comes by," Ma Ponk told me as she securely tucked me in bed.

Saturday morning didn't come soon enough. I found myself waking up nearly every hour, straining my eyes to see the hands on the clock. Finally I heard Ma Ponk's voice through the quilts. "Cliff, git up and git some food in you, 'cause you know Bro. Cleve ain't gonna stop."

No sooner had she spoken than I jumped from bed and ran to get the wash pan so I could wash up before eating my breakfast. The smell of hot oil sausages and grits floated through the house, and I could hardly wait. How lucky could I be -- a trip to Hollandale with Uncle Cleve, and my favorite breakfast. The food went fast and I found myself ready and waiting when Uncle Cleve came by. True to form, he was a little early.

"Bye, Ma Ponk!" I yelled as I jumped from the porch to the ground.

Our trip was not unusual, but this time I would have the chance to show my uncle that I was big enough to help him with the business.

"Cleve, pull your truck in next," a colored man yelled as we pulled up to the Hollandale Icehouse.

Uncle Cleve let me out of the cab and told me to take the steps to the dock; he'd meet me there. He never made suggestions. You simply did what he told you, and quickly. After parking the truck so the bed would be against the dock, Uncle Cleve came around to the side where I was standing.

"Okay, Cliff, we'll see if you can handle the big one." ↔

As we walked into the icehouse, all I could see was a cold vapor rising from hundreds of blocks of ice. Each block weighed three hundred pounds. Standing inside the door, I felt the chill as Uncle Cleve took the giant ice hook off the wall.

"Cliff, pay attention." Uncle Cleve proceeded to show me how to put the ice hook securely into the block, while using my knee as an anchor.

I watched and I watched and I watched. Finally, it was my turn. I walked over to a huge block of ice and carefully repeated what I had been shown many times. I securely hooked my ice, carefully placed my knee and began to gently pull the block to the floor. Before I could get fearful, I had finished. The three-hundred-pound block of ice was on the floor, and I was pulling it out to the trucks.

"New helper you got, Mormon?" one of the white men asked.

"Yes, sir," Uncle Cleve nodded as he watched me load the truck for the very first time.

My ride home could not have been sweeter. Uncle Cleve stopped by a local store and bought me a large grape soda and a moon pie -- my reward. We didn't say much on the way back, but we both knew it had been a good day.

Many months later, nearing the end of the summer, Uncle Cleve promised to take me with him to Jackson as a gift for having done a good job for him. The day of our trip finally arrived. It started out as one of the happiest days of my life. My uncle was taking me to Jackson to the biggest tent show that had ever come our way. Ma Ponk got me all dressed up in my Sunday church clothes, combed my hair until my scalp was sore and had me ready at least two hours early. Uncle Cleve was a slow driver so we were going to leave in plenty of time to get to the seven o'clock grand opening.

I was ready at three o'clock and sitting out on the front steps waiting for the familiar sound of Uncle's 1947 green International truck that purred like a kitten. Ma Ponk and I were waiting, and there was absolutely no way of missing Uncle Cleve. When the truck pulled up, I almost jumped out of my pants, but Uncle Cleve only smiled slightly as I ran around to the passenger's side and tucked myself firmly in, secure with the knowledge that tonight was

going to be a really big night for me. Uncle Cleve was very confident, only telling me that he never messed with the small-town minstrel shows that came to Glen Allan to rob you blind. If he was going to waste his time and spend his money, it would be at something like the big show that we were going to in Jackson.

*As we walked into the icehouse,  
all I could see was a cold vapor  
rising from hundreds of blocks of  
ice. Each block weighed three  
hundred pounds. Standing  
inside the door, I felt the chill as  
Uncle Cleve took the giant ice  
hook off the wall.*

---

I know I counted every tree and rock between Glen Allan and Jackson, because Uncle drove so slowly. He never hurried about anything. Moving meticulously, like a well-greased snail, he'd get the work of two men done in half the time. His driving was the same, perfect execution of the rules, never speeding, just fast enough to beat running.

It was almost 150 miles to Jackson. Ma Ponk didn't even pack me a lunch, because Uncle Cleve had promised to buy my lunch. Packed lunches in greasy brown paper bags were for old church ladies, not the two of us.

Finally we reached Jackson. There were more bright lights than I had ever seen. This was a large city, not like Glen Allan. Uncle Cleve took the city in stride. After all, he had been to Memphis, and Jackson was just another city to him. To me, however, Jackson was the biggest and the brightest. It even had uniformed policemen directing traffic, and I saw my first traffic jam.

I was so excited about being in a city I didn't realize we had gotten near the show grounds. There seemed to be hundreds of cars and people. But my uncle knew where ••

we were going. He parked the truck and held my hand tightly as we followed the crowd. Finally we got to the main gate, where a big curly-headed white man reached down and took our tickets. We were ushered in with the crowds of other people to a tent that seemed big enough to cover the whole world.

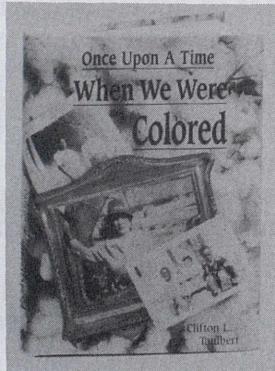
White people were everywhere, laughing and talking and eating popcorn and pulling their children behind them, as we all headed toward the big tent.

It was so crowded in the tent and we were so far back that I could hardly see, but I remember when those gigantic curtains opened and I saw all those beautiful ladies in sequined stockings. I could hardly sit still. I know I was too small to fully appreciate that beauty, but the glitter I understood. The music was loud all around us and sweaty men were yelling and whistling but my uncle just smiled slightly, ate one piece of popcorn at a time, and watched.

We couldn't have been there any more than twenty minutes when the usher came over to us and said, "I am sorry, but this ain't the night for niggers."

My uncle's smile dropped from his face and his warm eyes became cold as steel as he jerked me up and we walked out. We hadn't even seen half the show.

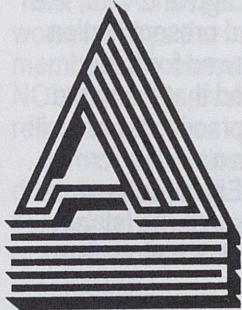
The long trip back was completely silent. I sat in the car, miserable, trying not to cry. I was too young to understand why this had happened to us, and my uncle would not explain.



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Time When We  
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# ONE BLACK NATION

by Robert W. Branch  
Washington, DC



bow tie, knotted around the crisp white collar of a tailored shirt. A wave, rippling across the tapered edge of a close-cropped haircut. The image shadows a figure familiar to many in our inner-city communities. The erect pose, the precision-- if not calculated-- movement trademarks the Fruit of the movement known as the Nation of Islam (NOI). A familiar legend speaks of a famed bird that lived for 500 years before it burned itself to ashes and disintegration, only to rise again and live on. Like that phoenix, the black religious, political and social movement of the NOI flourished for 45 years before it was disbanded in 1975 and, three

## years later, re-embraced and reconstructed under the direction of Minister Louis Farrakhan.

Many blacks vacillate between apprehension, admiration and respect for members of the Nation, often perceiving its members as "pushy, selling you newspapers, bean pies and attempting to recruit," says Kokayi Patterson, a citizen of the Republic of New Afrika, who, some 12 years ago, served as part of a security detail for Minister Farrakhan. But at the same time, he says, "people feel that if you're not involved with the NOI, you're not doing the right thing."

The Black Muslim movement, isolated from traditional followers of Islam because of the movement's race consciousness and strong social protest, was founded in 1930 by Wali Farad in Detroit, Michigan. Farad's followers believed he was Allah (the supreme being) and that he came to the United States from Mecca to re-establish the Black Nation of Islam. Farad organized his followers into local units called temples or mosques. He taught them cleanliness, thrift, and self-respect. Farad disappeared in 1934, and Elijah

Muhammad (born Elijah Poole) became leader of the movement.

During the 1960s, Black Muslims were viewed as violent, militant and radical, when the group was perhaps the most thrifty and industrious sect of the Black community. Members were encouraged to open their own businesses and the group as a whole enjoyed success in many corporate arenas.

However, "it was hard to reach Black folks back in the 1960s because of their mental state," says a former NOI member who was active with the group 15 years ago and who, like several past and present Nation insiders interviewed for this article, requested that his name be withheld. A practitioner of traditional Islam now, the former member says "Elijah Muhammad had to lure folks into the Islamic religion with a lot of nationalism, not spiritualism."

Another former Nation insider who worked closely with the Minister for several years agrees. "They needed to make people feel like someone was on their side." She adds, "Once you get into the teachings, though, more is explained to you as to the why that initial approach is taken."

Some say that the saving grace of the Nation, though, is its ability to increase an individual's self worth.

"The Nation is good for building a person's self-

confidence and self-esteem. By the time you get finished with learning your history you have a richness about you," says the former aide to the Minister.

Indoctrination into the Nation of Islam requires new converts to enroll in classes that promote self-defense and self-respect. Women experience Muslim Girls Training (MGT), which the former aide says "teaches things that Black women need to know."

For men, the Fruit of Islam (FOI) is the functional and disciplinary arm of the movement. FOI classes teach "men how to respect their women," says the former member who converted from the NOI to traditional Islamic religious practices.

The culmination of the disciplined classes and the total acquisition of knowledge that many seek and find in the Nation, prepares the convert for life inside the movement, as well as for a future life outside of the Nation's philosophical and ritualistic confines.

Patterson still beams when talking about the Nation ("My association with the Nation made me feel good!") Settling into his thoughts, more introspective--joyful-- he continues: "It was an opportunity from God. What it still does is reinforce my belief in the universal laws that govern people; that you're brought here to become the best that you can

be and to service humankind. My relationship with the NOI has enhanced that belief; it has solidified that."

*People  
inside  
the  
Nation  
shout,  
"We can  
save you  
Black  
Brother,  
Black  
Sister,  
through  
pride  
and  
through  
realizing  
your  
higher  
purpose  
..."*

---

The former aide to the Minister, adding that even though she knew who she was before she went into the Nation, insists that "you get more respect [when you're in the NOI]. People



don't bother you as much. When I used to walk the street in my full Muslim attire, people automatically respect you" She speaks as though she is recalling a dream. "It has taught me that I'm not better than everyone else, but that I am just as good."

*Farad's  
followers  
believed he  
was Allah  
(the supreme  
being) and  
that he came  
to the United  
States from  
Mecca to re-  
establish the  
Black Nation  
of Islam.*

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One of the key perceptions and complaints that many females register about the Nation is the perceived role of women in the movement. "I don't like what I see as the subservient role of women in the organization and in that particular religion, even though I admire them for what they're trying to do," cites Angela Henderson, a Washington, DC-based public relations officer.

"People use Western criteria in their judgment of what a woman's behavior should be," rebuts the Islamic traditionalist. "I didn't see any oppression. We were taught that the Black woman was the mother of civilization; she was held up high. We were told that it was the male's obligation to support their women," he says, referring back to more than a decade ago when he was an active NOI member.

"In some of the local mosques/temples, people have been put in positions of authority, with control over people that they wouldn't have outside of the Nation," one former member recalls. She says that people often get caught up in that power while carrying out the Minister's wishes. To not conduct oneself in that manner, may invite "people on the inside to look at you as a traitor, or as weak."

Another former member concurs, "Everybody in the Nation is not good. ... People come in from various backgrounds: Some of them good, some of them bad. [Some] people come into the Nation and accept the [teachings] of the Nation, but really [don't] clean themselves up." Thinking more intently, as if to balance out his previous statements, he adds: "[The Nation] is a brotherhood. Your whole life is the Nation; you don't have anything outside of it."

Black mothers look to the Nation with a rescuing eye for their sons, many of whom are dying in the streets through the illegal drug trade. Black men look to the Nation for ammunition to fight what they perceive as an exploitive "system" that negates their forward economic and social movement. People inside the Nation shout, "We can save you Black Brother, Black Sister, through pride and through realizing your higher purpose," while people outside the Nation quietly observe the things they don't understand and openly respect what they know about the Nation to be true.

"I admire the group, because to me they seem to be the only broad-based community group that seems to attract working-class and poor people in large numbers and help them," Henderson offers. "For example, people who are in prison, people who have drug problems... Now, I don't know if they retain them, but large numbers of Black men [join], which you don't see in a lot of [grass roots] organizations.

Patterson says the Nation could attract more people if, "there were a kind of membership designed that would allow people to participate and join with the NOI without being involved totally [in the religious aspect]." However, he cautions: "It's important for the Nation to be involved with the mainstream, but

not to compromise its principles and its contributions to the Black community."

The answers vary as to why the sources article are "former" members and not currently under the Nation's ever-watchful wing. One Sister left the Nation for health reasons, and another to practice traditional Islam. One Brother developed other philosophical ideologies as he grew and matured that proved to be, at least in part, inconsistent with the Nation's rigid structure.

All undoubtedly, however, hold high praise for the Nation of Islam and their experiences within the group. A mother of three boys, the former aide sums up the group's feelings best by saying: "Being a part of the Nation shows you your unlimited potential. I have learned that once we acquire the knowledge, we will see our greatness."

To delve through the Nation's steel rhetoric, to challenge the uncaged knowledge and unmatched intelligence is, perhaps, to raise questions that we, as Black people, don't really want answered. One of those questions being: "Are we ready for one Black Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all?"

# SHOOTING STAR

# SPEAK

In the Summer '91 issue, *Shooting Star* asked whether the term "*Minority*" was an appropriate designation for black people. We received only one response and found it quite interesting. We hope to hear from more readers next time!

The term minority is used to define a race with a different cultural background from the majority population. I do not believe it is necessary to use minority to identify the African American community. Americans live in a multicultural society. As African Americans, our skin color identifies us as having an ethnic background different from the majority population.

From the plantations in the South to the cities of urban America, we have been labeled with a series of titles or names expressing who and what we are and where we fit into American society. We are people, trying to live, love, work, plan and pray in a race-conscious nation. We are proud of our heritage, which has led us from our beginnings of nobility in Africa to the asphalt streets of modern America.

Despite our cultural differences, which have been ridiculed, despite ignorant remarks about our skin color, we have been able to contribute to humanity in ways that have exceeded our own expectations.

It is not necessary to label us as minorities, no more than it is necessary to label the blood of African Americans who died

side by side with the so-called majority population in every armed conflict in which America has participated. In death, we are all one, why not in life?

Vernell Lyles  
Philadelphia, PA

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## *The next Star Speak:*

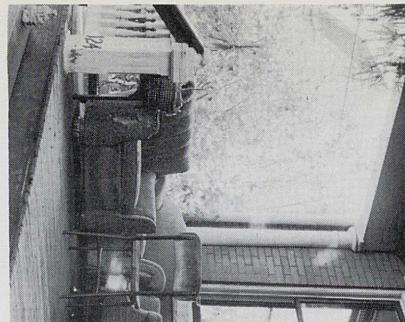
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In the essay "Being Black and Feeling Blue" from his book, *The Content of Our Character*, Shelby Steele says:

... "black" has been our most powerful name yet because it so frankly called out our shame and doubt and helped us (and others) to accept ourselves. In the name "African-American" there is too much false neutralization of doubt, too much looking away from the caldron of our own experience. It is a euphemistic name that hides us even from ourselves.

What do you think? Do you prefer *Black* or *African-American*? Why? Please limit comments to 200 words maximum. Views must be neatly typewritten and must be received by Nov. 30. Comments may be edited for length and clarity. Address your responses to:

**Star Speak,**  
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