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Shooting Star Review

Black Male-Female Relationships

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Robert Wesley Branch
Alexandria, Virginia

In My Father's Absence



Manhood has allowed me to see the boy in my father. The span of his attention toward me was equally off the mark: now he reaches out to the man I've become, looking for the boy he slighted during much of my childhood. His expectations are

thwarted by the reality of my years; many of them spent at a cool distance from his affections. Today, like lost targets in the night, we're both searching for the mark; for meaningful ways to appreciate the

father and the son in us both. We're each learning to respect the shared and singular experience of our journey from boys to men. In each role, we've often failed each other, and ultimately ourselves.

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The Dual Responsibility Of Women Against Sexual Harassment

O. B. Young
Chicago, Illinois

During the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings I thought there was something wrong about Anita Hill's claims, and the perception of solidarity she garnered from almost every woman

questioned by the press. She assumed moral superiority over him because she (allegedly) had been sexually harassed and, through gender identification, most women rallied to her

defense. But, was her goal to make the work place free from this kind of conduct? If not, what might have been her motivations in raising this issue?

Continued on page 6

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in times of peace an immigrant returns to st. james parish, jamaica, west indies

in 1948
dad was still on the books
at the office of records
as "female, born 1920"

under pressure
from my father's threat
to drop him damn drawers
for proof of error
a clerk drew
an uncertain line
through "female"

and she might have
let things go at that
for the mark could be dismissed
as a crease
or a stain
on the yellowed page
of village history
she'd been assigned to guard

and he might have
let things go at that
for he saw
with him own two eyes
the line drawn
was a witness
that he was not "female"

but before he could charge
back out the door
to his adopted homeland
secure in his ability
to change history
with a mere shake
of him pants
she wrote an addendum
that was no small feat
in a world just recently
pitched on the brink of destruction
by those who jingle pocket change
before they drop them drawers

she altered the records
like one
who is alone
authorized
to alter records
she made history happen

"postscript, 1948: changed to male.
approved by miss d. d. campbell"

Mary McLaughlin Slechta
Syracuse, NY

No More War Black Women & Black Men

Relationships 90's Style

Icy Harris
New York, NY

*Home alone these
nights? Anxiously
waiting by the
phone to no
avail? Lonely
without a
prospect in sight?
Or doubting your
sex appeal
because your
mate has turned
on you? You're
not alone. It's
happening to the
best of us.*

We all say we want the same thing. We want to be loved, respected and cherished by that special someone we can share our lives with. We devise our litmus tests of love and set out to hunt or be hunted. It should only be so simple to find love on the Black side of the rainbow. Black men and Black women, however, seem to be fickle friends and strangers when it comes to matters of the heart these days. The proof is in the pudding when titles like "The Diary of a Black Man (How Do You Love a Black Woman?)" and "The Black Woman's Guide to Understanding the Black Man" appear on stages and in bookstores. Are we taking the time to examine for ourselves why Black men and Black women often feel betrayed by one another? Moreover, are we listening to what is being said underneath the verbal wrangling? The sincere words (I love you, but I have been subliminally usurped by the media. Let's work this out) just may be heard.

Suffice it to say that the media's emphasis on our mate-choosing is a strong one. The men with executive positions, impressive cars and homes always get their girls. The women with long hair, size 7 bodies and skirts up their derrieres always get their men. Even with HIV positive courting many Blacks' bodies, a good catch seems to mean that a man is financially stable enough to get a woman into the bedroom and that a woman looks good enough for the man to take her there. Even if our partners measure up to the media's standards it is only an external attraction and more of us are realizing that, yes, it is the outside that initially draws us to a would-be partner. It's what's inside, however, that will inevitably determine the longevity of the relationship. The brothers and sisters below have come to this realization and offer their individual methods to successful relationships, 90's style.

Nona Smith
Jobs For Youth Recruiter,
Chicago, IL

My relationships work better when I don't sweat them. The men I date are usually so fine that I find it hard to trust them. I want to



know where they are going, who they are going with and when they are coming back. Now I am finding that when I am cool (the girl) my relationships tend to work better. When my man says he is going somewhere, I say, "Ok baby, see ya." They want to stay around more when they feel free to go.

Joseph Turkson
Student Teacher,
Wesley College, Ghana

Man is a big baby boy in terms of his relationship with woman--who is endowed with the big baby boy's needs and wants. A woman who is caring, sharing and totally committed to her male counterpart holds the essential ingredients in a successful man's life. Talks of equality, however, naturally has her lose feminine qualities that make her the spine of man. In a competing relationship the couples' behaviors and roles alternate between male and female. Ouyakopzu (God) knew what He was doing when He created one, man and the other, woman.

Mr. & Mrs. Morris
Retired Government Employees,
Chicago, IL

Couples often marry for the wrong reasons. Big bucks, looks and first-class family backgrounds are not sufficient enough to keep a couple together. The longevity stems from finding a compatible companion one can love and share responsibilities with for a lifetime. One should not make the other shoulder all the weight. That person can be selfish alone. Marriageable relationships involve sharing, trust and respect. Unfaithfulness arises when one or both of the partners fail to really know and accept the other as is. If a couple is considering marriage, we suggest a long engagement. That way they can really get to know each other, idiosyncrasies, and all.

Jenise Super & (Brother)
James Super, Jr.
Songwriter & Wall Street
Consultant, Englewood, NJ

Honesty and communication are the tickets, whether the relationship is business or personal. No one is a mind reader. Couples must

honestly communicate their needs. Males and females don't think alike. Therefore, couples have to learn to bend and be intelligent enough to take the good times with the bad times and learn from them. Dependency, insecurity and lack of trust can make relationships monotonous. A relationship is a partnership, and each day presents a new challenge. A couple can't take things for granted. Each person has to work to keep the spark strong. "I don't like pretentious women. I like a woman who has a sense of humor and who knows what's going on in the real world," says James. "I don't have a lot of girlfriends in my business," says Jenise.

Anita Luckett
Freelance Casting & Production,
Los Angeles, CA

We all define love differently. There are things I may deal with that my friends won't and the reverse. It's about what works for me and the man I'm with. People can't glamorize relationships by imitating what they see on t.v. and film. That's not real life, and most of what is seen is stereotypical hype. If a man doesn't know who he is then he is not for me. Potential couples should aim to be natural with each other. We can't gift wrap relationships, so I don't mask my bad side when I meet a man. I show the good with the bad because that's who I am. It will come out anyway. I want my man to be like a male friend. Without friendship there is no relationship.

Sidney J. Jackson
Project Engineer, New Orleans, LA

Playing games is a waste of time. The victim eventually becomes frustrated and moves on. Women say they want a strong man. When they get one, they decide they want a sensitive man. When they get a sensitive man, they decide they want both. That balance is hard for the Black man to achieve because we have to be tough in order to make it out there. Black men have had to overcome so many obstacles, including those set forth by Black women. Yes, we often sacrifice sensitivity, but we are willing to compromise

with a woman who knows what she wants.

Claude Brown
Author/Lecturer, New York, NY

In my youth, I, as many young men, allowed myself to be victimized by my libido which resulted in a series of relationships which had nothing to offer but great sex. Of course such relationships were doomed from the onset and had no lasting value. The valuable lesson these liaisons provided was that of teaching a young man with raging hormones that great sex is not an adequate foundation on which to build a nurturing and lasting relationship. Common interests and compatible sets of values help enormously. I look for affectionate and supportive women.

Jacci McGhee
MCA Recording Artist,
New York, NY

Because a man makes you feel good doesn't mean you're in love. Love takes time. You can't learn it from talk-shows or books. It comes when you love yourself, and after putting up with the mess that certain men can dish out, having learned what does and does not make you happy. I don't have an ideal-looking man, but he has to be a good Christian with a big heart and high morals. And yes, he has to be sexy. I'm very old-fashioned. Some may think that is boring, but there are ways to keep relationships exciting. A man doesn't want to see the same woman all the time, so I always have a new look. That way I'm the woman and the other woman too. To me, relationships are just like being in school. You just don't get a report card when they're over.

Darryl Oliver
Law Student, Lansing, MI

Everybody has an ideal person in mind when they think of a mate. Often our

mates fall short of that ideal, and we have to realize that we can't change people. One thing I won't deal with is a liar. If a woman has twenty men that's okay, but I despise the type of woman who feigns monogamy though she's far from monogamous. Every time I try to be someone that I'm not, it never works. In recent years I have had to learn to show women that they're special and that relationships are not just sex. I do, however, like sexy women. I like to pick out things for my woman to wear. There is a certain intimacy in seeing her in things I have chosen. I'm not the jealous type. I have no problems giving a woman space. A Black woman is the strongest individual on earth, and I guess I have to share her and all her strengths.

Martine Azor
Medical Insurance,
East Elmhurst, NY

If it's not coming from the heart, I'd prefer that a man not tell me that he loves me. I can tell if a man is saying he loves me because he thinks that's what I want him to say. I'd rather he say he likes me a lot if it's the truth. Since men are taught that they are not supposed to cry, I think they have a tough time with communication. If my man makes a mistake I would rather he tell me, than hide behind his machismo. At least I'd know he thought enough of me to tell me before I heard it elsewhere. I like my relationships to be fun and relaxed. I can't stand the stage of being too cool to eat in front of each other. I usually can't wait to "throw down" on chicken wings with my fingers and run around the park like kids. Arising problems are inevitable, but the challenge is keeping the sparkle of the courtship days.



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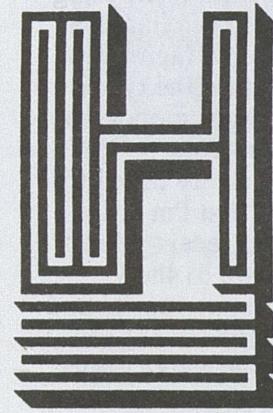
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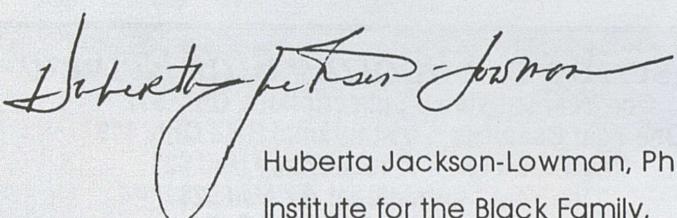


ow we love, care for, and communicate with each other is so fundamental to the quality of our existence and to our struggle for liberation that the debate, dialogue, and dialectical analysis of our relationships must be a cultural standard to which we regularly adhere. The implementation of this standard must be carried out in every cultural institution in our community -- the family, our churches and temples, our businesses, our civic and social organizations, and our literature. Each of these entities has a responsibility to encourage those values and activities which will protect, sustain, and enrich this connection on behalf of the survival of African people.

Social scientists tell us that the relationships between Black men and women are in serious trouble. Marital relationships between Black men and women are occurring with increasingly less frequency and survivability. Equally as disturbing is the talk of sisters and brothers who despair and express disgust about the possibilities of having affirming relationships with each other. We must constantly ask ourselves the question, "How are we doing now?" Is the loving, the caring, the talking, healing or hurtful? Does it enhance or hinder the well-being of our family and community? Does it contribute to or undermine our quest for liberation as a people?

Both the subtleties and the horrors of our oppressive condition have ways of insidiously intruding upon the most intimate of our relationships and wreaking havoc, often resulting in the taking up of arms against each other as men and women. All too often we are easily recruited to do the bidding of our oppressors by dishonoring our relationships with each other as brothers and sisters, lovers, husbands and wives. The poetry, fiction, and essays appearing in this issue must be evaluated within this context. In this issue we seek a fuller and higher understanding of our relationships with each other as men and women of African descent. Sometimes to achieve this understanding we must expose the ways in which we perpetrate pain and suffering. It is also necessary that we identify models of the kinds of relationships that will uplift us based upon our recognition of what is good, righteous, and just.

I thank each of the contributors for exposing the cracks, spaces, and gaps in our intimate relationships, and for urging us to appreciate the simplicity and complexity of love between men and women. I encourage you as readers to use the poetry, fiction, and essays in this issue as a mirror for your own critical assessment of the quality of your relationships with the opposite sex. Recognize that the extent to which that relationship is oppressive and destructive versus liberating and beneficial is a microcosm of where we as African people are in our collective struggle against our oppression. Hopefully, the writing here will foster awareness that can lead to greater insights into the personal ways that we can each take responsibility for transforming the relationships between African men and women.



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Special Guest Editor
*Black Male-Female
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Isaac & Ella

Michael Quixote Fellmeth
Montgomery, AL

Isaac wondered what it was about his wife that reminded him of an old elephant.

He sat in the wicker chair in the kitchen and watched as Ella swung the wet mop over the linoleum floor. She was old, there was no doubt about that. And she was big too and consequently had a way of lumbering when she moved. But there was something else that reminded him of an elephant, something he could not quite put his finger on.

She came nearer.

"Pick up your feet," she said and paused to dunk the mop in the bucket.

He hoisted his legs into the air and, when she finished, set them back down.

"Ella," he said, "you remind me of an elephant, though I can't say exactly how."

Ella stopped her scrubbing abruptly and dunked the mop in the bucket while she slowly brushed the sweat from her eyes.

"Now what kind of a thing is that to say to a woman?" She glared at him.

Isaac sat back and averted his eyes. Had he sounded cruel? He had not meant to sound cruel, only to tease. What did he care if after all this time she was large.

She had been shapely once though. Lord, she had.

When he first met her it was August of 1929. The Jazz Age was in full swing and he along with it, and Ella had seemed to him a physical extension of the melodies that poured from his trumpet on those brilliant nights. She had small breasts then and smooth black skin. She was kind and gentle as well, and in the choir of their church, St. John the Baptist, sang hymns with enough devotion to make even a non-believer tremble all over with the love of God. In those days, all the young Negroes desired her. Even some of the young white fellows, though they knew it could never be.

"I only meant to tease," Isaac said.

"That's still no kinda thing to say to a woman."

"I apologize, Ella."

"Well, it's too late."

She turned her big hips away from him and went back to work. What could he do now but sit there and wait. He had not meant to hurt her feelings, but he had, and he could do nothing to patch it up till she got it in her mind to forgive him.

He thought about the old days again, about the young handsome men whose offers she had refused before accepting his. There were three of them altogether, and all had been his friends. He pictured their faces. First there was Jordan, then Calvin, and then Ernest, whose father had been the first from their community to graduate from the black college in Durham. And then had come his turn. He got down on one knee as she sat upright on the divan in

her father's living room, and said, "Ella, I don't have much to offer a woman such as you, 'cept promises,

and the will to make 'em come true. But I'll give you a good and happy life, if you'll only accept me for your own." That was as much eloquence as he could muster, and he had practiced the words for two weeks and even written them down to get their order just right. And to his surprise she leaped off the couch and threw her slender arms around his neck because she had been waiting for him all along. Oh, he was the most beautiful trumpet man in the whole world, and he would be famous and their life would be wonderful and, yes, she would marry him, yes, yes!

For a long time they had gone without children, though not from lack of effort, when suddenly one day she caught hold of his shoulders and whispered it in his ear so excited she could barely speak and also a little afraid.

"I'm pregnant," she said.

After that they came steadily, nearly one a year for ten years. All needing to be fed and clothed and educated and taught how to behave in this world that they might reach the glorious next.

Suddenly, playing nights in the clubs was not enough. He went into the tobacco factory and did well as a manager so that eventually his dreams of making the big time faded and disappeared from his mind, replaced by dreams for his children. He recalled the way she would caress them, softly drawing her fingers along their bare shoulders and necks as she would read a story to them. He loved to listen to her read. When she brought the children in, and they all climbed into bed, he would set his chair just outside the door and lean his head up against the wall and listen to her voice, losing himself in the tale. His music was jazz, but even his best could not compare to her music, her sweet languid voice which slowly flooded the halls and rooms with enchantment.

But the children had all grown up and gone away. He glanced at his own thin varicose hands. He did not feel old, nor tired, and yet he looked like an old man. Did she feel old? Was she tired? She no longer did as much as she used to. Baking, for instance. He remembered hot blackberry pie and coffee in the mornings before his stomach turned sour on him. Now he got only warm milk for breakfast.

She had finished with the floor and was wringing out the mop in the sink. The sight of her backside to him made him tingle. He was not so old after all.

A clap of thunder outside shifted his attention to the scattered raindrops thudding against the ground. The rain will do the tobacco some good, he thought. But what did it matter to him? He was past all that now. He had lived the years of his life as best he could, and though they had seemed to go so quickly, yet he did not feel old and he was not dissatisfied. And he still had his wife.

"What are you looking at?" she asked him. She had finished with the mop and was putting the bucket away under the sink.

"A true giving woman," he answered without thinking.

For a moment she gave no reaction, then from out of the crinkles in her face a smile appeared.

Then Isaac realized what about his wife reminded him of an elephant. It was nothing in her appearance at all. It was a quality about her. In her moved something quiet and noble and peaceful, like an old elephant.

"I wonder," he said, "is there an old woman round here looking at me?"

Ella smiled again. "I'm looking," she said. "I'm looking."



Dream Song 8

From the corner of my eye
as I lie in bed
I see you
fleeting past my window
A shadow of my dreams of you
before I knew who you really were

I saw you many times
high upon a mountain
a twin of the sun
keeping me warm in winters without heat
sending me a breeze in summers
that chopped through my breath

On that first day
I saw you
when you had flown down from the mountain
sitting in a room filled with floating seagulls
I knew you by your eyes
silent twin reflections of the sun

Marilyn Elain Carmen
Philadelphia, PA

Red

My man, the red of Carolina earth,
Could make the staunchest atheist believe
That God shaped man from soil in lieu of birth
And took a rib to sculpt his woman, Eve.
My man's the red of newly minted coins;
Aroused, his skin reflects a copper shine.
He deftly pulls my body to his loins
And syncopates his passion into mine.
When praised about his looks my man grows shy-
This handsome man, the color of a roan.
He thinks I call him fine since he's my guy,
And not because I love his red/brown tone.
But while I find his skin a source of pride,
I celebrate the man who lives inside.

Rosemarie Moore Morell
Brooklyn, NY

The Dual Responsibility of Women Against Sexual Harassment

by O. B. Young

Continued from Cover

The answer to the latter question, to quote William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, she quite simply is, "A very honest woman, but something given to lie."¹ The answer to the former question is no, and the following are the reasons why.

Oppression is the precursor to discrimination and harassment. Oppress is from the Latin word, "pressare" and, according to the *Arcade Dictionary of Word Origins*, means to exert force, push. In modern day usage, oppress is defined as subjugating or persecuting weighing heavily upon, "so as to depress the mind or spirits." An oppressor then also psychologically oppresses those he has power

over. Joyce Mitchell Cook, in her paper presented at the 1970 Philosophy and Black Liberation Struggle Conference in Chicago described this as the "internalization of intimations of inferiority." This psychological oppression is exhibited in the workplace by women who are submissive to males, and is necessary to allow a mindset where the oppressor and those subjected to oppression can play out their individual roles.

Women are discriminated against in the workplace, and I believe this discrimination is wrong. Let us delve into the meaning of the word to get a better understanding of how it works in practice.

"Discrimination" comes from the Latin word "discernere" meaning to separate by sifting or to distinguish. Once isolated, a group can be treated differently than other groups. This is the primary reason for discrimination, to be able to control a subgroup in ways the dominant group finds acceptable. The way of dominant groups is to lessen the power of those whose power becomes a threat, and to maintain the status quo when the subgroup presents no threat and is useful.

"Harass" in present day usage means to disturb or irritate persistently, to wear out or exhaust. It is a word of Germanic origin and ironically was originally defined, according to the *American Heritage Dictionary* as, "to set a dog on," which many women must feel is the better definition. To be harassed sexually, you must first be viewed as a sexual object. This involves certain thought processes that can be reduced to one word, "objectification." An excellent definition of this objectification is, "A person is sexually objectified when her sexual parts or sexual functions are separated out from the rest of her personality ... " from Sandra L. Bartky's

"Psychological Oppression" in *Philosophy and Women*.

To free the work place of sexual discrimination and sexual harassment, women must be uncompromising to not only the practitioners (those who sexually harass/discriminate), but the participants (those sexually harassed/discriminated against) who act in ways that perpetuate their discrimination and harassment. Anita Hill was clearly one of those participants. She did nothing after the (alleged) harassment while working as an attorney in an office that dealt with sexual harassment (EEOC) and with women co-workers who had fought sexual harassment in the courts. All she could do was stay silent for ten years and advance her career, with Clarence Thomas' recommendations preceding her every move, until the day came that she had to tell all. How can the women's movement sincerely believe a person who has lied by omission for ten years and then raise her statements to the level of moral righteousness and expect men and non-movement women to take them seriously? What has she done to make them believe she is not lying now?

One way psychological oppression becomes systematic



The Who of Our Hue Among the Corporate Crew (or Shades of Blackness: 9 To 5)

Ebony attorney/adorned in corporate wear
Irked by sister Mailroom with dreadlocks in her hair

Brother VP Harvard/attended all the best
With blonde wife and his sailboat framed upon his desk

Sho 'nuff sistah secretary/Does Not Miss A Beat
Got office skills, aggressive edge, plus savvy from the street

Ms. Kente Cloth from head to foot/strong Afro-centric mind
Kept every drape and wrap intact as she made her corporate climb

My main man, Brother President/a "race man" from the hood
Let nothing stop him from achieving all that he believed he could

Sweet sister Exec, now thirty-four/knew motherhood in early teens
Thank God for mothers who give daughters strength to hold fast to their dreams

An ever evolving people of multi-fold identity
So many sounds, a dissonant key sometimes distorts the symphony

This is our plight and right to see ourselves unique in what we do
To share our sense of what it means to wear this great distinctive hue

Nadine Mozon
New York, NY

is that some of the oppressed group are lifted to a position above their group members. These individuals give legitimacy to those in power, and they serve the interests of the dominant group rather than their own group. An example of how this works is, imagine a glass jar with a dozen ants inside it. They are all trying to scale the sides of the jar and reach freedom. On the rim of the jar is one ant looking down on the others, smiling. This ant represents the participants and did not scale the jar, it was placed where it is by the practitioner. These participants are the most important group to influence. The practitioner judges a subgroup's sincerity by how they confront the discrimination and their group member's interactions with him. If they exhibit a hands-off policy concerning members of their group, he knows they are not sincere and only want to vie for a more advantageous position, not change existing conditions. The position usually offered is a co-opted position. If the subgroup is uncompromising, he knows his system is threatened.

In the work place women get many overtures from men. Those from a man in a position of power are significant, as he can influence her advancement in a company. If a woman is

approached by a superior and she is not interested, but feels a need to be on good terms with him, or if she is interested in him I call this, "good attention". If this same supervisor is for some reason repulsive to a woman, all his overtures are dismissed because they are classified as, "bad attention".

The opposite outcome of sexual harassment (associated with "bad attention") is sexual advancement (associated with good attention), and more women benefit from this than the number that file sexual harassment charges. Anita Hill is only a known case. Sexual advancement is happening in my city's (Chicago) postal service, police department, city bus system, the phone company, the gas company, and in state and federal civil service offices. At least these are the ones that I have first or verifiable second-hand knowledge of. It is the norm rather than the exception when it comes to minority women. This is detrimental to all women and ironically becomes reverse sexual discrimination to men who attempt to advance on a job by merit. To claim sexual harassment leads to what Shelby Steele, in his book *The Content of our Character*, calls, "the perception of innocence". This in turn amasses support,

for who can, with a clear conscience, dispute fair and equal treatment for all Americans? In reality, the overall actions of women and men in the work place are the cause of sexual harassment/discrimination. Those who see women use sexual advancement techniques and do nothing, can expect to see and hear of more harassment and discrimination. What can they do you might ask. They can discuss at a forum of their choosing, the hiring, firing, suspensions, job assignments, and promotional practices of management. If someone is sexually harassed or discriminated against, it must be decided if this can be proven. All it takes at this point is employees backing one another in the filing of a suit against that management individual. This could lead to women testifying against women and for men in reverse sexual discrimination suits. If a few are won, this more than sets the standard sexual harassment suits (which pit all women against all men) and will rid the workplace of blatant sexual politics.

Management will not be secure in surrounding themselves with women who promote bosses interests against their own.

With women's rights come women's responsibilities. Any

movement that neglects this precept soon becomes ineffective as people begin to see through it, and those opposed to it will use this lack of consistency against the movement (e.g. the civil rights leadership). The responsibility of women against sexual harassment should be to stop the injustice to all those affected, men and women, because this affects families. Only a sincere attempt to better the lives of all people will win. Anything else is simply an attempt to replace the group in power. Surely it is suspected by women's leadership that this will not happen, so they must be hoping to carve a niche for themselves in the existing power spectrum. They will lose their right to "innocence" because their interests are self-interests. Not better working conditions for women; not justice for men with families who deserve promotions but cannot get them; not to stop the degradation of young women just entering the work force; but only to raise their status to the level of a more influential special interest group which can vie for power.



Reader comment is always invited.



Strategies for Building Healthy Relationships

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The survival of the Black family rests upon the promotion and development of healthy Black male-female relationships. Karenga (1982) noted that not all Black male-female relationships are in trouble, but a significant number are problematic and, thus, require attention.

Meaningful relationships can be begun and sustained when they are anchored in common proactive values, common interests and aspirations, quality commitment, support structures, continuous renewal, and common struggle for liberation and a higher level of human life. Without open discussion, egalitarian exchange, collective decision-making and shared responsibility in love and struggle, a relationship will fail to be meaningful and mutually beneficial. (Karenga, 1980: 47-48)

Building and maintaining positive relationships requires guidance and strategies. Numerous social scientists have offered approaches to strengthening Black male-female relationships (Aldridge, 1984; Braithwaite, 1981; Cheek, 1977; Hare and Hare, 1989; Karenga, 1982; Myers, 1980; Rodgers-Rose and Rodgers, 1985; Young, 1989). Some of the strategies have been designed to deal more specifically at the interpersonal level, while others approach the institutional level. But, irrespective of the major focus, all social scientists concerned with Black male-female relationships have alluded to both interpersonal

and institutional factors impacting these relationships.

Rodgers-Rose and Rodgers (1985) provide strategies for open communication, emphasizing the need to relate to each other through love, doing meaningful things together, knowing how to say "I'm sorry" as well as when to say no or set limits and keeping thoughts and behavior in the here and now. Tucker (1979) suggests that women can help strengthen relationships by communicating to men that they measure manhood not in terms of "coolness" but in terms of responsiveness, support, care, and honesty. Additionally, Black women can further help by encouraging Black men to struggle to cope with their emotions rather than conceal them. Black women need to share with Black men an assurance that a man is found more attractive when he shares his feeling with his partner. While Black men may complain about women who force them to deal with issues, Tucker concludes, ultimately they respect such a woman far more than they do a meek, compliant one who makes no demands.

It is important to add to Tucker's observations and suggestions the risk of rejection that Black men face when they share their feelings or express their emotions. Self-disclosure cuts both ways, involving risktaking from both parties. Self-disclosure can be particularly risky in relationships where unnecessary gameplaying exists. Burges and Goosby (1985) advocate the exposure

of games to achieve more meaningful relationships.

Cheek (1977) addresses the need for assertiveness in the relationships of Black males and females. In his book, *Assertive Black-Puzzled White*, he provides an "assertive" training approach that translates the psychological theories of personality and counseling into an Afrocentric frame of reference.

For African-Americans, then, one of the best definitions of

assertiveness is an honest, open and direct verbal or non-verbal expression which does not have the intent of putting someone down...The intention of the assertive African-American person should be the basis of judgment, not the response of the target person (Cheek, 8).

The importance of positive interaction patterns is fundamental for "Blacks, who, like everyone else, benefit from guidance in choosing more productive and satisfying ways of relating to each other -- and/or relating to those who are not Black" (Cheek, 8).

An additional strategy for building healthy relationships is found in Young's essay, "Psychodynamics of Coping and Surviving for the African American Female in a Changing World." Young (1989) contends that on an individual basis, the African American woman has an equal responsibility to select a partner who affirms her strengths, capabilities, and potential. The complementary nature of the support provided by each member of the relationship sustains a resilience and positive assertion of love, respect, and trust that is enabling rather than diminishing. This selectivity of a mate points to a very significant strategy: shared expectations upon entering relationships are pivotal to sustaining ongoing positive interaction between a man and woman. Rodgers-Rose (1980) has studied the qualities desired in males and females that should influence selectivity of a mate. Her study indicates that if we are

to begin to understand the relationship between Black men and women, or women and men in general, we must move beyond the outer status (occupation, income, education, sexual compatibility) to inner qualities. The men and women in her sample were concerned about qualities such as understanding, honesty, warmth, dress, respectability, open communication, sharing, independence, knowing how to listen, dominance, selfishness, lying, fidelity, maturity, physical violence, affection, and cleanliness. If these areas of concern are contemplated when selecting and maintaining a mate, then an effective strategy would be to constantly evaluate these with potential and current mates.

A number of writers have focused upon strategies for healthy development of Black male and female children. They understand the process of socialization and maintain that it is during childhood that the shaping of present and future relationships between the two sexes is crucial. Such writers as Hale (1982), Hare and Hare (1985), Kunjufu (1984), Lewis (1988) and Wilson (1978) have been very forceful in positions taken on countering socialization practices which are negative to the survival and healthy development of Black children.

Kunjufu advocates in *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys* a program to provide skill development and recreation similar to the Boys Scouts with two major differences. He writes:

The first is ideological. The political/historical persuasion of the Boy Scouts is the maintenance of the status quo, which in America is European-American male supremacy. The Simba's major thrust is to equip African-American boys ideologically with the tools to understand why Africans are oppressed and specifically African-American boys. If this objective is not met, the conspiracy will continue. In order to resist, you must first know what you're resisting. The second major difference is the distinction between self-directed learning and training. Boy Scouts, like

most schools, train African-American children. There are fundamental differences between training and education....The Boy Scouts train boys to maintain America, the Simba program educates boys to remove the injustices of racism, capitalism, sexism, and to fuel liberation and the maximization of human potential. (1984, 33)

The Simba Program, resting on the above philosophy, includes strategies for parents and educators for the development of healthy Black males (Kunjufu, 1984: 34-35). Similarly, Kunjufu recommends additional approaches for Black child development that lead to healthy Black adults in *Developing Positive Self-Images and Discipline in Black Children*.

Hare and Hare (1985), like Kunjufu, have developed a strategy for the development of the Black male. In their book, *Bringing the Black Boy to Manhood: The Passage*, they outline a process through which Black boys should pass. This passage should result in the boy having an understanding of self and the immediate and extended families. And, as important as those two facets of existence are, the process of moving the Black boy to manhood entails much more and culminates in a formal ceremony -- the Celebration.

While Hare and Hare and Kunjufu focus on Black male children, both of their works carry grave implications for Black female development. Yet, Mary Lewis (*Herstory: Black Female Rites of Passage*) and Nsenga Warfield-Coppock, Mafori Moore, Gwen Akua Gilyard, and Karen King (*Transformations: A Rites of Passage Manual for African American Girls*) provide greater vision toward enhancing the lives of African American females. As a whole, the strategies described by all of these authors focus upon males and females in childhood and adulthood. The emphasis in adulthood is corrective, and in childhood it is preventive. If Black children are socialized in a healthy, proactive fashion understanding, respecting, loving and appreciating themselves and their gender

opposites, the foundation will exist for development and sustenance of healthy relationships in adulthood. In childhood and adulthood, these strategies embrace the interpersonal and institutional forces shaping individuals and their relationships -- as do other strategies that many social scientists, intellectuals, practitioners, and concerned individuals recommend.

Finally, other strategies for promoting and developing healthy Black male-female relationships suggest: (1) social scientists pose and explore researchable questions examining the context in which African American male/female relationships are embedded, (2) demographers focus attention on the scarcity of African-American males as a national phenomenon having potentially grave consequences for the race and having deleterious effects on African-American women, (3) African-American men and women address unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships by participating in personal growth and human relations group sessions, (4) K-12 focus on equity issues of males and females in textbooks, curriculum, and extracurricular activities, (5) universities develop/include a course on male and female relationships as a part of their general education curriculum, (6) African-American national organizations place on their program agenda the issue of strategies for strengthening relationships between Black women and men, and finally, (7) religious, political, educational and social groups establish and promote consciousness-raising among males comparable to that obtained for women. If both Black men and women buy into these prescriptions, then, our survival and growth as a people most likely will be assured.

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June the 10th

that's when Ms. Lillie's son
brought
the white woman home.

And,
Ms. Lillie
cracked her
best lemonade
pitcher
into two
over
the sink,
overcome
by the weeping
and
the accidents
in her life.

Now see,
she
didn't hate
the girl. Oh, no.
A daughter-in-law
was a daughter-in-law.

But, Ms. Lillie
had cleaned fish
and scrubbed floors
to raise Geoffrey
and put him
through school.

And, each night
when she awakened
reaching for men
that were no longer
there,
she'd hoped,
wished
her love and care
would make
Geoffrey
love and care for
a Black woman
beyond life,
hold her up
above the weariness.
But, there
he sat with
this smiling white child,
Ms. Lillie wailing inside --
wondering through
a pensive dinner
were this woman's
blonde hair and blue eyes
mere happenstance
or a rejection
of her own
Black face
and homespun spirituals
even
over
the
crib.

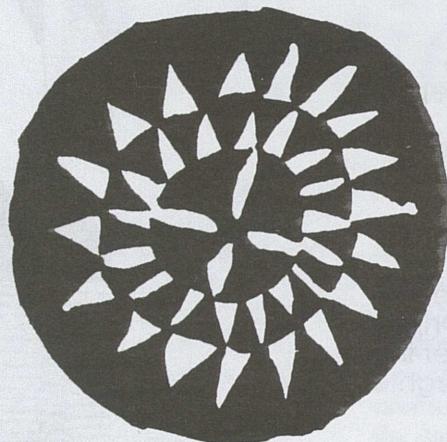
Romella D. Kitchen
Pittsburgh, PA

Sma-em-abu

The Union Of Opposites

Perspectives on Manhood, Afrikan Culture & Conflict Resolution in Black Male-Female Relationships

Dr. Dana Dennard
Florida A&M University



Philosophy and Behavior

From earliest times, the most fundamental aspect of authentic Afrikan philosophy and culture has concerned moral and social principles. And it is in Afrikan culture that Brothers can find keys to ending Black Male-Female conflicts.

Culture, which is rooted in a group's unique world history, prescribes "correct" behavior in response to the question: "How shall we survive?" Culture reflects a group's unique essence. Therefore, one culture can see behavior patterns as "normal" while another culture may attribute pathology to the same actions.

Scholars in the Afrikan diaspora like Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop have expressed concern about not evaluating the philosophy and cultural prescriptions we follow because, as Stevie Wonder said, "If you believe in things you don't understand, you suffer."

We have been indoctrinated with "white" philosophy as the standard for analysis and a falsified memory of history by Europeans who stole this continent, murdered the native people and abducted Afrikans from their homeland to build a

"free-enterprise" nation. Therefore, evaluating "white" philosophy can help explain behaviors now observed between Afrikan males and females.

Clearly, European philosophy (culture) is not consistent with its

democracy/free world propaganda. History demonstrates that social relations are valued least by European people, while accumulating material wealth is the valued most.

When the actual historical relations of Europeans to others (not the idealistic falsehoods found in the U.S. Constitution's preamble) are compared to the history of Afrikans to others, marked cultural and philosophical differences emerge. And these differences explain the negative behavior patterns rampantly practiced among confused Afrikans throughout the world, especially the conflicts between Black men and women.

Afrikan Philosophy

Reality Orientation

1. Life is fundamentally spiritual, where spirit and matter merge as one. "God" is in all things; is personal;
2. Life is eternal, time is cyclic; what goes around comes around;
3. Divine order (nature) determines right behavior;
4. Death begins new phase of life.

Value System

1. Value is automatic in being, persons and things;

The wise person feeds the Ka (spirit) with what endures, so that it is happy with that person on earth. The wise is known by his wisdom. The great is known by his good actions. The heart of the wise matches his tongue and his lips are straight when he speaks. The wise have eyes that are made to see and ears that are made to hear what will profit the offspring. The wise person who acts with Maat (truth, justice, righteousness, propriety, balance, harmony, order) is free of falsehood and disorder.

The statement given above comes from the oldest known, complete text in the world. It was written twenty-four centuries before Jesus Christ by Ptah-Hotep, the Afrikan priest who was instructed by his nephew, the Pharaoh Asa-Djed-Ka-Ra to leave words for the generations to come.

2. All life is valued;
3. Group survival is the ethic for living, the weak one is supported.

2. Some life is of no value;
3. Survival of the individual is the ethic; the weak one is conquered and exploited.

Mode of Social Relations For Productivity

1. Self definition is "WE";
2. Differences are a natural expression of Creation/Divine Order;
3. Men and women are equal by divine law and complementary; relation to other is mutual, equal and synergistic;
4. Collectivism is mode of production; sharing is encouraged.

Mode of Social Relations For Production

1. Self definition is "ME";
2. Differences are forced into inferior/superior opposites where white is on top, right, proper, best, etc; men are superior to women; they are more fit and powerful;
3. Relation to other is Self to an object; alienated;
4. Survival of the fittest individual is the mode of production; competition is encouraged.

Mode of Overt Behaviors -

1. Extended family patterns;
2. Material resources used for moral imperatives and spiritual development;
3. Sameness is emphasized and rewarded socially;
4. Children are raised by all adults; perceived as a blessing of life for increased relations and productivity;
5. Emphasis on relations between and within generations; wisdom guides behavior.

Mode of Overt Behaviors -

1. Nuclear family patterns;
2. Material resources used for personal gratifications; greed;
3. Being unique individual (a star) is emphasized, pursued and rewarded;
4. Unwanted children are murdered (aborted); perceived as burden on resources;
5. Emphasis on youth and remaining young in appearance; physical strength (fitness) and hedonic materialism guides behavior.

European Philosophy

Reality Orientation

1. Life is only matter, no spirit can be "scientifically" proven, thus "God" is never known; is distant and separate from;
2. Life is finite, time is discrete, unconnected and encapsulated;
3. Behavior which leads to exploitative power is right;
4. Death is finite; life stops.

Value System

1. Value is determined based on what it or one does;

Culture & Survival Are One

The conflict between Black men and women has its causal roots in the physical invasion of Afrika and, by extension, the invasion of Afrikans' natural, relational patterns. Colonialism that started with that invasion continues to spread into the bedroom. The most overt expression of this pattern is the increasing flight of



alienated Black men (and women) to white partners (ultimately an escapist act which results in different but predictable conflicts). To go outside of one's group to procreate is to discontinue the survival of one's essence, thus a suicidal behavior. Brothers (and sisters) who fall victim to this escape method are like the prodigal son in search of a fortune that can only be found at home, furthering the success of the old divide and conquer strategy.

Since culture defines what it means to survive (a standard for living) and directs a group's survival thrust (how to be successful), to abandon one's authentic culture is to commit suicide on all levels. No people can be strong and endure while the men and women are in conflict because their relations establish the most fundamental institution, the family. Family stability is the ground for developing the group's fruit (children), and therefore its survival. With a clear understanding of these differing, and often opposing philosophies as mentioned above, we can begin to explain the continued conflict between Black men and women. By embracing white culture (Americanism), we Afrikans find ourselves expressing that culture's relational pathology (i.e., alienation, aggression, domination/oppression, competition, abortion, abandonment of elders, loss of faith, striving to be unique and disintegrated, extended family patterns).

Individualism and Alienation

The European emphasis on individuality leads to alienation, competition and selfishness. One of the most overt expressions of this alienation pathology is the epidemic of telephone sex (and other escapist, "artificial intimacy) where people avoid real touching and openness. The European survival orientation of individual fitness contradicts living by an identity of oneness (We), and makes harmonious, egalitarian (male and female having equal status) relationships difficult.

Further, the value system(s) adopted determines why and how differences can lead to arguments, often over seemingly ridiculous issues (e.g., how to spend money,

whether and/or when to have children, time spent with relatives). Thus, a potentially good relationship can be abandoned because of not understanding the cultural dynamics influencing the "me" decisions. For example:

Two people meet, become attracted to each other and gradually develop a more intimate relationship. They perceive themselves as compatible until they must make career choices requiring relocation to distant cities. When an impasse is reached, they become individuals, seeing their dilemma as a forced choice between the other and themselves. The assimilation pattern usually struggles for dominance (the foundation of sexism in European male/female relations).

A "we" orientation lets them see the situation as a moment when they must choose what is best for their relationship (placing what they could experience and build on together as greater than what they could create as individuals).

Maleness & Manhood

Afrikan culture concretely defines what manhood is and prescribes proper behavior through roles. Fundamentally, he is responsible for protecting his family (female companion, offspring, elders), and ensuring that the environment supports the development of his offspring (procreation), such that his cultural intention will be respected (held sacred), transmitted to the next generation (education) and endure the test of time (survival).

In Afrikan reality, manhood is achieved through the establishment of a stable household. Marriage is a stage of manhood development, and a brother does not become a complete man outside of having a stable relationship (or in the case of polygamous arrangements, more than one stable relationship). Oriented in his authentic reality (philosophy), a brother recognizes his extended nature (essence) in his partner as she reflects his development. As such, he recognizes her divinity and holds her in high esteem (sacred). He perceives her as an extension of his own mother and respects her essence as his own. He is

conscious of the spiritual interconnectedness of life and the law of reciprocity which must exist between him and his partner. His identity is in part derived from his relationship to his woman, not as a possession but as a divine complement. Indeed, a man also procreates directly through her, and thus is made aware of his union with her as a direct connection to "heaven" and his own spiritual creative, causal power. Thus he does not confuse material presentations, such as his level of personal income with defining his level of manhood, should his partner by good fortune be in a more lucrative financial position than he. Neither does he attempt to validate his manhood solely on his material acquisitions.

On the other hand, a brother infused with European culture sees his partner as an appendage for manipulation; an object to be subjugated based on his selfish design. If she will not go along with his desires, he may use physical force (assuming superiority where physical strength due to maleness is confused with manhood). Taking on the slave master's style explains the rise in Black male brutality and abandonment of women. This can take on milder forms as well, such as insisting on having the final word on all matters, or simply free loading on the sister. Unfortunately, many females are equally confused and reinforce these pathological behavior patterns.

The Resolution

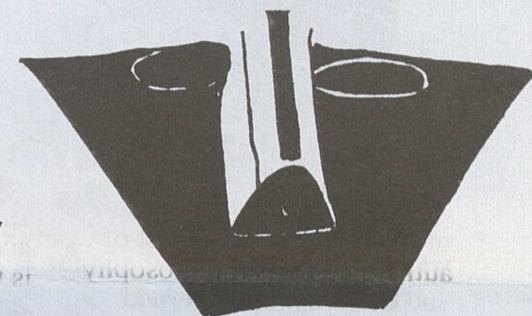
For Black men, the first step to resolving conflicts with Black women requires taking individual responsibility for learning about our authentic, Afrikan way.

We must also create formal institutions and educate the next generation of males. Brothers must form bonds based on group survival (interest and image of black people worldwide) rather than bonding around a plan to secure material accumulation and power for exploitation (such as what took place within gang formation). Brothers must demand that all males, especially Black males, respect Black women and denounce any assaults on the sanctity of the sisters through the media, in writing and in private or public company.

Brothers must rise above the shackles of European psychological domination and serve Black life at every level. And brothers must actively seek Black women who will work through these issues.

The resolution rests in being absolutely aware of the nature of the problem, the cultural underpinnings and a willingness to respond to the sacred mission in this life of rescuing, reclaiming, and reinstituting our Afrikan cultural intention survival of the group at the highest level.

Dr. Dana Dennard is a psychologist and is on the faculty of Florida A & M University's Psychology Department. He and his wife, Dr. Sharon Ames Dennard, also a psychologist, conduct retreats on Black male-female relationships.



Found Cure Eight

An infusion made with juniper berries promotes monthly terms of women. Besides profuse sweat it excites, it relaxes vessels of the uterus as it does skin. Take one teaspoon of the tincture before full moon. When the attack commences, take warm hip-baths. Bark of root of cotton plants was used by slaves. Mix dandelion root, pokeweed, May apple root, rhubarb root powders. Take in till cured.

Terri L. Jewell
Lansing, MI





Last night I went down to The Yellow Dog Cafe, and there she was -- this pretty, middle-aged lady, sitting all by herself at a table in the corner like she was waiting for someone. I wasn't sure she'd remember me after all these years, but I went over to her anyway and said, "Hi, Miss Danner."

It was about twenty years ago that she left town. I was nine that year. Mama had a bunch of her friends over to our house almost every Saturday night that summer. She'd let me and my older brother go to the movies then, so we wouldn't be in the way. I liked going to the movies, but sometimes I made excuses to stay around the house until Mama's friends came because usually Miss Danner came, too. Miss Danner was my teacher. I liked her because she smiled a lot and always smelled nice, and her hair was thick and curly. I thought she was the prettiest teacher in my school.

Around the middle of summer that year, Miss Danner stopped coming to our house with the others. I wondered

why she didn't come anymore, and I wanted to ask Mama what happened to her, but I didn't dare. I knew she would laugh and say I had a crush. You know how that is.

Sometimes when we'd get out of the movies we'd go down by the railroad tracks and watch the ladies over on Main Street. They'd be wearing fancy dresses and high-heeled shoes, and heavy make-up and such. We'd see them standing out on the sidewalk in front of The Yellow Dog, or sometimes just walking up and down that block of Main Street. I thought they were waiting for rides, because men kept coming by and picking them up in their cars. I knew, though, that those ladies were somehow different from Miss Danner.

Saturday Night at The Yellow Dog Cafe

Lela Branch
Warner Springs, CA

A tall, dark man walked in and went right over to her. I could tell he knew her. He sat down at her table for a little while, and then the two of them left. I watched them going down Main Street, with her holding onto his arm and laughing.

My brother and the other boys came then and said we'd better go. I wouldn't talk to them all the way home. They kept asking me what was the matter, but I wouldn't answer them. I was afraid that if I tried to say anything to them I'd behave like a kid and burst out crying. Besides, I was mad at them because if they hadn't stopped to mess around down there on Main Street, I would never have seen Miss Danner in The Yellow Dog in the first place.

It was about a week, I guess, before I began to feel better. I would see Miss Danner and that man almost every day. He really seemed like a nice man, and I don't know why I hated him. I heard Mama tell a neighbor one day that Miss Danner was going to marry "that tall, good-looking gentleman" soon. She did, too, and changed her name to his. But I continued to call her Miss Danner.

They moved into an apartment in the building next door to our house. He was a musician, and most of his jobs were on weekends, and mostly out of town. She stayed at home alone a lot. I thought he should have taken her with him sometimes, but he never

did. She got so she didn't smile as much as she used to, and I wished he would go away and never come back.

One Saturday, after he'd gone, Miss Danner called and asked Mama if I could come over and help her with something. When I got over there she was taking all her clothes out of the closet and stuffing them into a trunk. Pretty soon the trunk got so full I had to sit on the lid so she could close it. I helped her carry it out onto the porch, and I waited there while she went back inside and called a taxi. She hardly said anything to me, and I didn't know what to say to her. I remember, though, that when she was getting into the taxi, I said, "Bye, Miss Danner." She looked back at me, and I could see her eyes were wet and her face looked all crumpled. Then she just gave me a little wave and got into the taxi; and in a moment, the taxi was around the corner and out of sight.

He must have had a change of heart that day or, perhaps, a premonition of some sort, because he came back before dark. I had to go on an errand for Mama, and I saw him when I passed the building next door. I spoke to him, and he spoke back, but it was in an absent-minded way, like his mind was really on something else, or maybe like he was trying to figure something out.

When we got out of the movies that night I decided I'd

better hang around with boys my own age. We went down to the Frostee-Freez place, which was also on Main Street, but we didn't go down as far as The Yellow Dog. My brother and his friends did, though, and they said they saw Miss Danner's husband there, sitting all alone at a table in the corner.

It was pretty late that night when he called our house. Mama was busy, so I answered the telephone. He asked me if I knew where Miss Danner might have gone, and I told him all I knew was that she had put all her things in a trunk and left, but she didn't say where she was going. He didn't say anything for a long time. Then he just said, "Thanks," and hung up.

He sounded kind of sad, like he was already missing her. Suddenly, I didn't hate him anymore: I felt sorry for him. And after he'd hung up I wished I had remembered to tell him that she was crying when she left, so he would know she hadn't wanted to leave him.



Then one Saturday night after the movies, my brother and his friends got to fooling around down there on Main Street, and I was left pretty much on my own, so I just walked over to The Yellow Dog and looked in the window. And there, before my very eyes, sitting at a table in the corner, was Miss Danner. I couldn't believe it at first; but when I looked closer I saw it was Miss Danner, all right.

Still, she didn't look like my Miss Danner: She had a kind of look that I didn't think she ought to have had. I felt that if I moved too suddenly I'd be sick and throw up right there on the sidewalk, so I just stood there, very still, and stared at her through the window.



The Question of Strength

Sheryl Singleton Lynch
Hollis, NY



have been surrounded by strong women throughout my life. For many years, I did not understand the true qualities of their strength. I mistakenly perceived strength as being loud, forceful, and getting your own way in a confrontation. I thought you had to be a gadfly, almost ridiculous, a notion fostered by media images of the various movements for change during my adolescence. By the time I reached my eighteenth birthday, I had made these qualities my own. I thought brashness was the way to control any situation.

My mother was a shop steward, and later, a member of the executive board of her union. She would come home with stories of how she had put some manager in his place. She would laugh long and hard while telling the tale. I could see the pride she felt in her body language. I was proud of my mother's forcefulness. It didn't occur to me that she might have had a different persona as a union steward. That the strength of her argument was her knowledge of the contract, the people and the work environment. And that the true force behind her winning was her understanding of what was fair and just in a given situation, and acting in accordance with that.

When I entered the workplace, I held a non-traditional job. I thought the best way to handle myself was to become one of the guys. The job paid well, but I was full of rage at the men with whom I was working. There was also the rage I felt at myself for living a life I found uncomfortable. Although I advanced in my craft, I was miserable the entire time I was there. I had betrayed myself. It took me several more years, and a number of unsatisfactory work and personal situations,

to determine the extent of that betrayal.

There is the stereotype of Black Woman as Amazon, able to leap over ordinary mortals in a single bound. If I equate strength with pure force, the image is often offensive, and leaves little room for the nuances of a situation or individual. If I choose instead to view strength as a resiliency of the Spirit, and an ability to admit my failings -- my humanness -- I think I have a working model for my life. I'm finding that my strength is a matter of balance. It's knowing when to endure, and knowing when I've had enough. When to rest and when to act. When to listen and when to speak. It's my ability to listen to my inner voice, and then be true to it. To be exactly who I am, and revel in the beauty, complexity, and ordinariness of it. To let my Spirit strut its stuff, learning the lesson, and moving on. To be able to let you have your strutting room, if I am to have mine. To make my own way in the world, alone, and sometimes with the help of others. I believe those capabilities are within all of us, that they are human ones. True to ourselves, we do become warrior women, in touch with the heart of our strength. If I

bring this strong self to the world, on occasion, I am the recipient of small miracles, the first of which is being heard and understood.



Gossip

"Ms. Sara's man is gone."

"Don't say?" asks Mrs. Price.

"Yes, I do say. Sara caught him gambling, and threw all his clothes, shoes, papers, books, keys -- everything out in the street."

"But, why you say he's gone for good?" asked Mrs. Price.

"Cause the Widow Spencer was down below the window catchin' every piece."

Romella D. Kitchens
Pittsburgh, PA

There is a violent and raunchy side to voodoo, and Hurston obviously felt ambivalent about portraying it. Her aversion to sensationalism, coupled with the code of secrecy that protects voodoo from the outside world, accounts for much of the stifled air of *Tell My Horse*. Nonetheless, there is much that is revolutionary in the book. At the most basic level, Hurston announced, "Voodoo is a religion of creation and life," a far cry from any previous research.

Much of what is unique in *Tell My Horse* is Hurston's critique of women's roles in the Caribbean. She writes, "It is a curious thing to be a woman in the Caribbean after you have been a woman in these United States." She adds, "But now Miss America, World's champion woman, you take your promenading self down to the cobalt blue waters of the Caribbean and see what happens. You meet a lot of darkish men who make vociferous love to you, but otherwise pay you no mind."

In Voodoo she found a different story. Here was a religion where women not only worshipped and practiced alongside men, but often officiated. She began her

section on voodoo in *Tell My Horse* with the following shocking passage:

The Mambo, that is the priestess, richly dressed is asked the question ritualistically. She replies by throwing back her veil and revealing her sex organs. The ceremony means that this is the infinite, the ultimate truth ... It is considered the highest honor for all the males participating to kiss her sex organ of creation, for Damballa, the god of gods, has permitted them to come face to face with the truth.

Hurston also explored what she called, "the female aspect of deity." The goddess Erzulie is an example. Though she is mistakenly identified with the Virgin Mary, Hurston claims, "Erzulie is not the passive queen of heaven or mother of anybody. She is the ideal of the love bed." Maya Deren, another woman who researched voodoo in the Caribbean, wrote, "Voudoun has given woman, in the figure of Erzulie, exclusive title to that which distinguishes humans from all other forms: the capacity to conceive beyond reality, to desire beyond adequacy, to create beyond need."

This kind of female power was nowhere seen in Hurston's previous frame of reference. When writers like Hurston looked to the past, creative role models were nowhere to be found. In Hurston's day many of the creative foremothers were not writers at all. They were quiltmakers, fine cooks, gardeners, seamstresses. The conjure woman could also serve as a role model and obviously did for Hurston.

Hurston paints several portraits of voodoo priestesses, including the legendary Marie Leveau of New Orleans and Haiti's Celestina Simon whom Hurston calls "the black Joan of Arc." As an initiate, Hurston seemed to be identifying herself with this rich heritage. Conjuring is also akin to the creative power of writing. Thus at the same time that she documented a tradition of black women in conjure, Hurston also established a tradition of black women in literature.

This tradition carries over to the work of Jamaica Kincaid. One is the "daughter" of the other, passing from a time when African American women writers were so underappreciated that their work fell out of print for decades, to a time when

African American women dominate the literary scene. Kincaid, for example, received an incredible sum, half a million dollars, for the publication of *Lucy*. That's a long way from Zora Hurston.

The truth is their matrilineage runs much deeper than race and gender. Their common hunger can be seen most clearly in their most obscure books, *A Small Place* and *Tell My Horse*. Both Kincaid and Hurston yearn for a connection with the women who came before them.

Hurston's theme of voodoo is touched on in Kincaid's book *Annie John* when an "obeah" woman is called in to cure Annie. Kincaid's major theme of mothers seems absent from Hurston's work at first glance. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, for example, the mother is dead and Janie Crawford is raised by her grandmother. But even the grandmother taps into the matrilineage of African American women when she tells her granddaughter, "Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high, but there wasn't no pulpit for me...Ah said Ah'd save de text for you."



Not Ready for Again

In the hospital chair
she held her head

A head
heavy with
merciless pain
heavy with
O God, why me

Our hands took hold
the way bodies
embrace for support
communicating messages
the mind cannot express

Mommie shook her head
slow
deliberate
back and forth

O God
I saw that
back and forth
just before
she left my father.

Jaleelah Karriem
East Orange, NJ

Letting Go

The anger I cradled
like a baby heavy
with sleep is yours,
come claim it.

I want to unfold
my arms,
to pick bunches
of lilies that dance

about the river,
grazing my ankles
like fingers. Here,
take the anger

I thrashed
in weeks ago,
a hooked salmon
reeled in.

Look closely,
you will not
find it in me.

Peggy Ann Tartt
Amherst, MA

Cold

not there
in that sterile
city

northern lakes
blue
on tomorrow's
map

no
i imagined us
together in
some southern
country

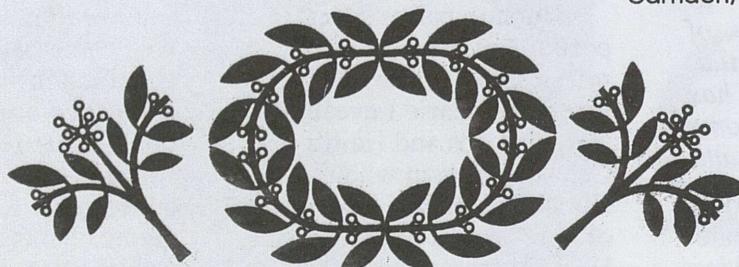
you said

years ago i
quit sitting
in bars

Jeanne Shannon
Albuquerque, NM

Convolvulus

Faith Basketweaver
Camden, NJ



M. S. M. Glory Mills picked up her desk phone for the third time, started to dial her house, then, for the third time, hung up. Roy would be leaving for work about now, she decided. It would be better to talk to him tonight.

No, that was just an excuse. They were never able to talk any more. Every time M. Glory tried to initiate dialogue to resolve their differences, Roy would, depending upon the level in his glass, respond with stony, withdrawn silence or with some off-the-wall silliness that discounted not only her feelings but her very

existence. Putting his thumbs in his ears and wiggling his fingers, or the equivalent.

That one-way fight last night had been about money on the surface. She had been talking to Roy, at first patiently and softly, then loudly, and finally screaming until he stalked out.

M. Glory tried to pull her shoulders up to her ears, let them sag, breathed deeply, shrugged again. That stubborn neck and shoulder spasm that brought on migraines was beginning earlier every day. If she and Roy had managed their money better, she would long ago have been able to quit this job with its constant pressure, its heavy responsibility, its insecurity.

The District was swarming with younger women who were eager to work and cheap to hire. Their eyes and minds were always alert, their bodies always equal to the pressure, and their claws and fangs stayed sharp to clutch and tear at other women's jobs. Other women's husbands.

Her new secretary, Roxanne, was wearing a shiny, clinging orange dress that hurt M. Glory's eyes like the premigraine auras.

"Miz Glory, here the dictation you left last night. If you can look it over and sign it now, it'll go out this mornin."

Looking at the letters that had occupied her until seven last night, M. Glory admitted to herself that she had been getting home even later than Roy. It was easier to clear her

desk with the building empty than in the midst of bustling employees. Easier to stay at her desk in an empty office than to go home on time to that big, beautiful, empty house. She frowned her way through the letters.

"Suporting (sic) documents 340-B

and 1242-S (Rev. 1991) are in order,

but Form 600-25-N (Rev. 1992) is missing. You also neglected to sign Parts B and C of your application. This is unacceptable (sic)..."

So, she noted with a precise pencil, was the spelling of 'unacceptable'. She was trying hard to train Roxanne after arranging the promotion for Louise, but the younger woman was coming along very slowly.

"It has been decided that pilot health-care projects will no longer be suported (sic) by this agency unless sponsored (sic) by guidline (sic)-meeting organizations and staffed with perseonel (sic) posessing (sic) apropriate (sic) cretentials (sic)..."

M. Glory buzzed Roxanne, whose mother she could, but would rather not, be.

"There's an error in almost every line of these letters, Roxanne. Don't erase them, please. Redo them. I'll sign them after lunch. Now bring me my calendar, please."

She ignored the younger woman's sulky side-cutting of her eyes and looked at her calendar. 10:15: Staff meeting. 11:15: Planning session for Mid-Atlantic Health Conference. 12:30: Lunch with Dr. Lawrence of District Mental Health. 2:00: Meeting with Dr. Stavros, Executive Director, National Council on Aging. 3:00: Meeting with Talk to Your Teens, Inc. 3:30: Meeting with delegation from La Leche League (why women needed government encouragement to nurse their babies, M. Glory could not understand); 4:00: Meeting with aggrieved Pakistani doctors (aggrieved because they had to repeat part of their

training to acquire U.S. certification). M. Glory, who'd had to return to/graduate school at forty, had no sympathy for them, either. 5:00: Quitting time. 5:30: Dental appointment.

M. Glory poked the sore spot in her lower left jaw with her tongue, trying to gauge whether that loose filling would last another day. Hot coffee after cold juice this morning had driven a spike of pain through her skull. She took out her mirror for a closer inspection, saw a cavity that looked like a cavern, quickly closed her mouth, redid her lipstick, and headed for the staff meeting, waving Roxanne away with a brusque "Hold my calls."

"But it's your husbin," her secretary whispered with her hand over the receiver. "He says -- he wants -- "

"Tell him I'm in a meeting. I can't possibly talk to him before afternoon," M. Glory said, and stepped briskly to the conference room. It was important to move with alacrity and never let them think age was slowing you down. She was three minutes early, which gave her time to help herself to coffee and pick the most advantageous seat -- opposite Gerhard, her boss, where she could watch him while he was watching everyone else.

She took a sip of coffee and felt the exposed nerve send shock waves through her skull. She permitted herself a moment to collapse into the heap of boneless jelly she often felt like before she pulled herself up, erect, bright-eyed and alert, as the others came in.

Louise, M. Glory's former secretary, now Gerhard's assistant, preceded him into the conference room. Recommending Louise for the promotion might not have been M. Glory's smartest move, but it had seemed so at the time, to keep Louise from going after M. Glory's job. Louise was bright, capable, hungry and young. Disgustingly young. She could work all day, drink and dance all night, and come in early the next morning ready to start all over again.

To her horror, M. Glory yawned. She stifled it, but it

was noticed -- by Louise, who would mention it to Gerhard whether he had seen it or not.

Gerhard Prinz, the head of Glory's department, was a small, insecure man who had worked his way up through the ranks by seniority, with only a high school education. M. Glory had to be careful not to tread on his ego. She had to brief him and tell him what to do without letting anyone -- least of all Gerhard -- know she was doing it.

The sign on her door said, "Ms. M. Glory Mills, Projects Director". She was sure it was Louise who had circulated her full name around the office. M. Glory's mother, otherwise an intelligent woman, must have been made giddy by the anesthesia at her only daughter's birth. How else explain naming her Morning Glory Meriwether?

Morning Glory Mills was only a slight improvement. There had once seemed to be better reasons for marrying Roy than changing her name.

Coughs around the table and stares in her direction indicated that she had missed something.

"Ms. Mills," Gerhard said with ominous patience, "we are waiting for a briefing from you on the Mid-Atlantic Health Conference."

She frowned, looked down at her copy of the agenda and framed a glib reply. "It's on target, chief, but I'll have to table my presentation. Plans will be finalized at our meeting later this morning. I can tell you it looks optimal, participation-wise, but I anticipate a budget shortfall. I'd like to touch base with you again this afternoon, if I may."

Gerhard nodded, but he knew she had missed his question, and she knew she had flubbed her answer.

He began a detailed explanation of some new job descriptions. No one seemed able to distinguish among a physician's assistant, a medical assistant, a medical technician and a medical corpsman, and Gerhard was not making it any easier.

M. Glory leaned forward to intrude on common space, waited until her projecting bosom drew everyone's attention, then said firmly,

"What Mr. Prinz is trying to say is--"

Gerhard reddened. Louise smirked and moved close enough to him to suggest intimacy.

"...it's not necessary for us to know what all these people do, it only matters that they be certified in their respective categories," she finished articulately but weakly.

The meeting ended on a note of discord. The conference planning session that followed did not leave Glory with a sense that anything was ready to happen. Everyone on the team was dragging their feet, failing to pull together details. Glory gave them a rough lecture that ended, "When I delegate, I expect follow-through." But she had no assurance that her expectations would be met, and no report to put on Gerhard's desk.

The handsome District Mental Health doctor had called to cancel their lunch date. She had planned to suggest a dark, discreet little place.

M. Glory still could not talk to her husband. She decided to write to him instead. She worked steadily through her lunch hour, dictating, then dropped the tape on Roxanne's desk.

Roxanne came back from lunch a half hour late, trying to look inconspicuous in her luminous dress, and began typing dutifully.

After the last meeting of the day -- after the delegations of neglected teenagers, needy elderly, unhappy Pakistanis and unappreciated nursing mothers -- Glory allowed herself to slump in her chair. She kicked off her shoes, even though her feet were so swollen she might not be able to get them back on. A lump of pudding, except for the girdle that held her together, she swiveled to see Roxanne sidle in, as pert and fresh as at 9 AM.

"Miz Mills, here the dictation."

Glory reached for the letter, but the girl would not leave.

"Miz Mills, I know it none uh my bidnis, but -- bout that letter to your husbin--"

"You're right, it's none of your business."

"Dear Roy," Glory read.

"When our solemn nuptials were finalized, I thought an optimal future lay before us, with a low risk prognosis and high-level opportunities for each of us to maximize our individual potentials while sharing peak experiences.

"I am aware that every person has his/her needs for territorial and emotional space. But the distance you seem to require is uncomfortably remote for me. Your incapacity for sharing, your low emotional output and your refusal to let me impact on your consciousness have accelerated my frustrations to a below-bottom-line position. I have tried every available program, but cannot access your feelings. Our communication level is now so minimal that I can find no other mode of expression than to brief you in this form..."

"What's wrong with my letter?" Glory demanded.

"Miz Mills, it just don't be soundin like a wife be talkin to her husbin."

"Well, maybe we don't be talkin like you be talkin."

"Maybe not, but -- Miz Mills, your husbin and me, we be talkin just fine."

Glory lost her own perfect diction. "What you *mean*, girl?"

"Nothin." Roxanne's voice faded away. She edged backward toward the door, her eyes sliding sideways under her long lashes.

"You already admitted that you and Roy were talking. You might as well tell me when and where, and what was said."

"All right!" Roxanne's eyes flashed. "I'll tell you, cause ain't no one here but you and me. You been mean to me, but I still want to help you. One time."

Glory felt a swimming headache coming on. This pathetic child wanted to help her.

"I tolle you, Mistuh Mills, he called you today. He wanted to take you out to lunch. When you said you was too busy, he asked me instead. He took me to The Hideaway for two hours and talked bout him and you. Bout how he loves you, but he can't understand nothin you say. I

thought he never would stop talkin bout you, Miz Mills. He really do love you. But afta while, he started talkin to me."

The Hideaway. Cool, discreet, elegant. More expensive, even, than the place Glory had planned to suggest to Dr. Lawrence.

"Is that all?"

"Thass all, Miz Mills. Except -- if it was me, I wouldn't give him that letter. I'd go home and talk to him. I'd say -- you know, the things what a man likes to hear."

"What things does a man like to hear?" Glory asked, half scornful, half curious.

"You know. Pretty talk. Love talk. A little bitta dirty talk if you can do it. 'Baby, it feel so good when you love me. Remember how you loved me the last time? Please, please love me that way again, sugar baby, cause it makes me feel so *gooooood*."

Speaking in that husky voice, Roxanne was too convincing, as if she really did remember.

"Get out!" Glory shouted.

"All right, Miz Mills," Roxanne said. "But if your husbin asks me out again, I'm goin. And I ain't tellin you."

Glory threw a paperweight at her and merely nicked the closing door. She bit her lip, looked at her letter, then looked away. After a time her lips moved silently, trying to frame simpler words.

Darling, my frustrations have reached criticality, and...

No.

Dearest, your optimal input enhances my total well being.

No.

Baby, please put your heart and soul into it. Please, just like you did before.

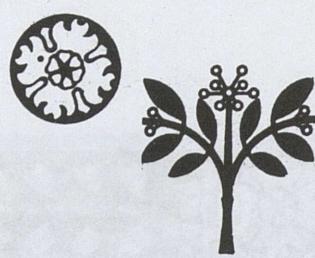
Better.

Baby, you're the only man who can give me what I need. And, baby, baby, I need it bad.

Perfect.

Glory felt a charge of energy. Now, if only she could get home and undressed and bathed and gargled and perfumed before Roy, tomorrow she might be able to thank Roxanne.





Welcome to the Island of Mothers: Zora Hurston & Jamaica Kincaid

In the early part of the twentieth century, Zora Neale Hurston cut a flamboyant figure in the literary scene of America. One of her contemporary literary darlings is Jamaica Kincaid. Hurston and Kincaid share a deep appreciation of the Caribbean. Both visited the islands at a critical point in their lives, a time of profound flux when each woman seemed to ask herself, "Who am I?" They returned to the States able to identify themselves with a rich matrilineage of powerful, even magical, women.

Hurston traveled to the Caribbean to write a book on voodoo. What she actually achieved was her masterful love story, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), written during a break in her research. Her voodoo book came out two years later as a somewhat garbled

sociological endeavor. *Tell My Horse* (1939) baffled readers and reviewers alike. It has long been overlooked as a groundbreaking text.

Maya Deren, another woman who researched voodoo in the Caribbean, wrote, "Voudoun has given woman, in the figure of Erzulie, exclusive title to that which distinguishes humans from all other forms: the capacity to conceive beyond reality, to desire beyond adequacy, to create beyond need."

Kincaid is the author of the eclectic short story collection *At the Bottom of the River* (1983) as well as the acclaimed novels *Annie John* (1985) and *Lucy* (1990). Between her novels, Kincaid also wrote a tiny book on cultural criticism called *A Small Place* (1988). It critiques her birthplace, the island of Antigua. Like *Tell My Horse*, *A Small Place* confused readers because it was so unlike the author's other work. It was dismissed as a travelogue.

Though nonfiction, neither have any claim on objectivity. The writing is passionate, experimental, and inspired. Though their reception was hesitant, both books were pet projects of the authors. They offer insight into their deepest

preoccupation: where do we come from?

During her recent book tour to promote *Lucy*, Kincaid told the story of her life from bookstores to radio interviews to universities. It goes something like this: Born Elaine Potter Richardson, Kincaid grew up in Antigua, a tiny island in the West

Indies. Her mother married an older man who had many disgruntled girlfriends on the island. For a time Kincaid and her mother had a fierce bond between them and lived

toward them as if she had suddenly found herself in the same room with relatives we had long since risen above. I cherished their presence and gave them names. I missed my mother's close company and cried constantly for her, but at the end of each day when I saw her return to her house, incredible and great deeds in her wake, each of them singing loudly her praises, I glowed and glowed again, red with anger.

Its sister text, *Annie John*, is a straightforward coming-of-age novel. It reads,

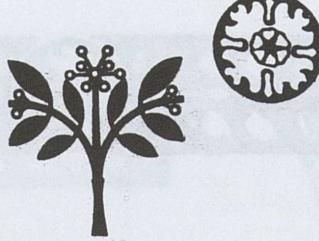
Why, I wonder, didn't I see the hypocrite in my mother when, over the years, she said that she loved me and could hardly live without me, while at the same time proposing and arranging separation after separation.

As a teenager Kincaid left Antigua to become a nanny in America. This is the subject of *Lucy*. The dour Lucy comes to the States and goes to work for a wealthy family with four blonde children. Just as Lucy never opens the letters from her mother, Kincaid cut off all contact from her own mother for twenty years. She did not return to Antigua in two decades.

And yet motherhood remained the obsession of her work. It is an argument never resolved, the see-sawish state between wanting to break away and wanting to be nurtured. The mother figure of all her work is monolithic. Kincaid herself has described her own mother as "like a great civilization in decline."

In America, Kincaid held a series of unsatisfactory jobs until she eventually was hired as an assistant at *The New Yorker*. Here, finally, her wry observations and blunt sarcasm were fully appreciated. She began to write stories. Eventually she married the son of famed editor William Shawn. By 1978 she was publishing almost exclusively in *The New Yorker*, where the texts

My mother and I built houses on opposite banks of the dead pond. The dead pond lay between us; in it, only small invertebrates with poisonous lances lived. My mother behaved



of her books originally appeared.

Kincaid wrote *At the Bottom of the River* before she had children and *Annie John* afterwards. She has since said that the kind of writing, indeed the kind of thinking, necessary for *At the Bottom of the River* was not possible after children. On one level she was talking about the creative intensity that birthed the book. She is also, of course, talking about process. To write *At the Bottom of the River* she lived in rural Connecticut for six months. Her husband visited her sometimes. It was hard for him, she said, but this was how she had to live to get the book done and also to preserve its bewitching quality.

What drove Kincaid at last to return to Antigua was the birth of her daughter. The thought of her own daughter rebuffing her drove her to reconciliation with her own mother. Of this momentous trip, *A Small Place* was born. *A Small Place* is an 81-page indictment of the British colonization of Antigua. Kincaid writes, "Everywhere they went they turned it into England; and everybody they met they turned into English," or, at least, tried.

With *A Small Place* Kincaid's major topic of motherhood was replaced with a new one, Antigua. Of course, Antigua had always been there, providing a rich bed on which her fiction rested. And whenever Kincaid had written about her mother, she was also writing about Antigua. In fact, Kincaid says she wrote *A Small Place* imagining it was told in her mother's voice. The voice, relentlessly blunt and cutting, points out corruption, deterioration, and political ambitions gone disastrously awry.

The entire book is told in the difficult second person, addressing the reader. For example, Kincaid writes, "The Antigua that I knew, the Antigua in which I grew up, is not the Antigua you, a tourist, would see now." She adds, "That Antigua no longer exists partly for the usual reason, the passing of time, and partly because the

bad-minded people who used to rule over it, the English, no longer do so." Freed from the grip of colonization, Kincaid now finds Antigua a floundering, directionless child of a country.

Kincaid claims it's her "sentence for life" to think about Antigua every day. She describes, "the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: no motherland, no fatherland, no gods...and worst and most painful of all, no tongue." Kincaid continues, "For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime [colonization] is the language of the criminal who committed the crime?" Precisely the same logic comes across in *Lucy*.

Mariah, the mother of the children to whom Lucy is governess, brags to Lucy that she has Indian blood. Lucy wonders, "How do you get to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also?"

The loss of language in *A Small Place* is ironic considering that the discovery of voice is actually the epiphany of her other books. *At the Bottom of the River* ends with the line, "I claim these things then - mine - and now feel myself grow solid and complete, my name filling my mouth." It is empowerment born of flight. One has to leave the motherland to know thyself. One has to return just to be sure.

The mystery of Kincaid's earlier work, just what was it that caused the deep rift between her mother and herself, suddenly becomes apparent in light of *A Small Place*. To leave Antigua meant more than leaving her mother. It meant leaving an unjust system that had robbed her of her heritage and her people's autonomy. Her most obscure book then provides the key to Kincaid's subtle, yet deep-seated, rage. The argument with her mother is actually the argument with her motherland, the real "great civilization in decline."

Zora Hurston had similarly idyllic early years. She grew up in the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida

where her father was mayor.

It was her mother who encouraged her children, Zora in particular, to "jump at de sun." Her mother died when she was nine. For the rest of her life, Hurston would call herself "Mama's child."

She had such horrible conflicts with her stepmother that she left home when she was fourteen. She had several disastrous maid and nanny jobs, being much more interested in her employer's books than in working. Still, she found her way, largely unschooled, to Howard University. There she began to gain recognition for her stories and plays, as well as her outrageous personality.

to the clandestine society of voodoo. She was fascinated.

Though never articulated in her fiction, voodoo became the passion of Hurston's life. She studied intensely for nine years, was initiated as a voodoo priestess numerous times, enduring grueling rituals. She wrote the first scholarly article on the topic by an African American called "Hoodoo in America," published in the prestigious *Journal of American Folklore* in 1931. Even in the final two years before her death in 1960, she ran a column on black magic in the *Fort Pierce Chronicle*.

In fact, it was through voodoo that Alice Walker "discovered" Hurston when

After Kincaid turned nine, her mother had three sons in close succession. Partly out of fury and partly out of maturation, Kincaid began the tangled process of separating from her mother.

She moved to New York, burgeoning at the time with the Harlem Renaissance. She enrolled in Barnard. One of her professors, Gladys Reichard, passed on an anthropology paper of hers to Franz Boas, the famed and revolutionary anthropologist known for his brilliant teaching at Columbia. He was also known for encouraging women in anthropology, such as Margaret Mead, who attended Barnard just a few years ahead of Hurston.

Hurston's first venture into anthropology was to travel through the South collecting stories. She did not get enough "to make a flea a waltzing jacket" because she found herself speaking in "Barnardese." On her next trip she disguised herself as a bootlegger's woman on the run and got enough stories to write her folklore collection, *Mules and Men* (1935).

Her travels took her to New Orleans where, through conflicts with Langston Hughes, she was introduced

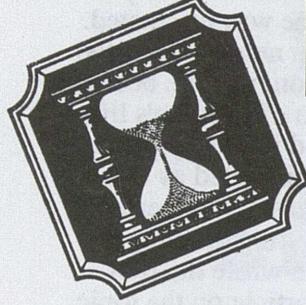
she was doing research for her story, "The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff." Walker's essay "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston," published in *Ms.* in 1975, launched a Hurston revival that continues to this day.

Hurston realized that New Orleans offered a transplanted version of voodoo. Its origination was the Caribbean where African slaves mixed their tribal religions with the force-fed Catholicism. With funding from the Guggenheim Foundation, Hurston planned her trip to the islands.

Her first stop was Nassau where she witnessed a hurricane which would appear as the climax in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She traveled next to Jamaica and then Haiti. Her research was intense, including ceremonies where the teeth of a dog were pulled and a black cat was boiled and the dead were raised and made into zombies.

Continued on page





The World's Best Ten-Cent Haircut

Haywood Hygh, Jr.
Artesia, CA

My Uncle Son was the village crier, for on most occasions he was the first person to find out what was going on in our community and in the world. This was because he lived close to the highway, had a radio and owned a car.

In addition to being a darn good farmer, syrup maker and part-time recruiter for the mourner's bench - a bench beside the minister where sat the community's unregenerated souls - Uncle Son was also the village barber.

His barber's chair was either a splint-bottom chair under the huge chinaberry tree in his back yard or a pine or oak stump in the forest.

Looking at the sheep-like wool on my head, my mama would say to me, "Go tell my brother Son to cut yo'r hair, boy!"

"Yes'm." I waited quietly for the dime to pay for the haircut.

"Jes' tell Son I'll send him the dime later, boy."

The architects of modern-day society constantly remind that no longer are we our brother's keeper. So, I cherish my memories of a different time when brotherly love was a constant.

I'd heard that statement many times before. "Later" seldom came, for during those years people were still licking the wounds left by the Great Depression, and silver dimes were as scarce as sinners on the mourner's bench.

Uncle Son's farm was about a mile and a half away. On reaching the creek, I made sure there were no pop belly moccasins sunning on the cypress log before crossing over to the other side.

When I arrived, he stopped whatever he was doing and asked about my mama and the rest of the family, then he'd say, "Go on over yonder and get in the chair under the chinaberry tree." The chair had been bottomed with oak splints by my papa, a sincere effort to repay Uncle Son for the haircuts our family had gotten throughout the years.

Soon, Uncle Son would come over and throw an old

piece of white sheet around my shoulders. Often, his much-used hand clippers pulled, and I'd cry as he deftly plucked the wool from my head. I tried to hide my tears because whenever he caught me crying, he called me a little ole sissy, which I hated hearing. I don't know which was worse -- the pain or not having the dime to pay for the haircut.

After he was done with me, I got up, brushed the wool off my blue duckies -- overalls with a bib in front -- and told him the usual story: "Mama said she'll send the dime later." He patted me gently on the back and told me to hurry home before it got too dark.

"Much obliged," I said and hurried down the dusty road, hopping, skipping and jumping as the echo of his singing faded away:

If when you give the best of your service,

Tell in the world that the Saviour has come,

Be not dismayed if men don't believe you.

He'll understand and say, "Well done."

Uncle Son had two pairs of clippers -- one for the colored folks and one for the white folks. Actually, he used them interchangeably. As long as the white folks felt they were being treated with distinction, they would continue paying a nickel or dime more for their haircuts, and peace between the races was maintained.

One day, someone let the cat out of the bag. Papa heard about it. Being a stern Baptist preacher in the true Southern tradition, Papa's Solomonic wisdom led him to believe that a man must be just in his dealings with his fellow men. Hence, he often found his ideas of justice to be at variance with those of Uncle Son.

Uncle Son was a clever old fox. He was seldom caught without the right answer at the right time. While he was cutting Papa's hair one evening, Papa brought up the issue. After Papa had his say, Uncle Son spoke.

"According to Paul, one of the first great patriarchs of Christianity, a man should live in peace with his fellow men. I believe that God wanted peace among His fellow creatures. Therefore, the little white lie about the clippers, one pair for colored folks and one pair for the white folks, keeps down conflict between them. Is it wrong to lie if it means keeping the peace?"

Papa had no refuting argument. He agreed that Uncle Son's position was well founded.

When it came to telling tales and fables, Uncle Son was the Aesop of his day. His speciality was ghost stories reserved for children, and we accepted them without question.

One evening, several of us boys were getting haircuts and being entertained with an episode about a famous bootlegger who had died about two years before.

The old bootlegger, Uncle Erlie Buchanan, was around ninety years old when he died. He was no relative of ours, but if one lived to a venerable, old age, he or she automatically became Uncle or Aunt, especially to the children of the community. But there was something spectacular about Uncle Erlie's departure from this world -- he died a sinner! Papa, Uncle Son and other members of the community had tried time and again to get Uncle Erlie to accept Christ as his saviour before he died. But like Thoreau, he decided to meet his Maker on his own terms. One of his favorite songs after he'd had a few swigs of white lightnin' was, "The Lawd Loves a Sinner."

Anyway, Uncle Son told us about the time when he was



returning from Uncle Erlie's wake. Until about 1950, when someone died, it was customary to bring the body home on the evening before the funeral. Members of the community would come with food and spend the night with the body of the departed soul. It was a vital, social function, to ensure that the departed soul would reach its destination. Uncle Son had gotten a short distance down the road on his way home when he heard the thundering sound of horses' hooves rushing in his direction. As the sound came closer, a cloud of dust almost blinded him. Then, suddenly, two headless men riding white horses galloped past him and disappeared into the forest. I still remember breaking out in a cold sweat while he was telling us about such a horrendous encounter. We were frightened almost out of our pants.

When it came to telling tales and fables, Uncle Son was the Aesop of his day. His speciality was ghost stories reserved for children, and we accepted them without question.

To get home after this frightful experience, we had to go past Uncle Erlie's old, haunted house, then through the same forest as the headless horsemen had ridden through. We ran all the way, occasionally looking back to see if we were being followed by headless riders on white horses.

My most outstanding recollection of my uncle was his infinite forbearance with human frailty. He counselled us against petty gossip about other people, reiterating time and time again that, regardless of a man's station in life, everyone was entitled to equal consideration, to equal justice under the law.

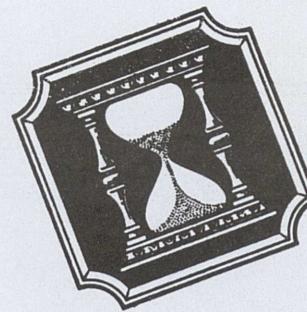
As in every community, we had our share of trials and tribulations. Our worst years were from 1935 through 1937. In September of 1937, my second oldest brother died of malaria fever. As he lay dying, Reverend A. C. Horton, the pastor of our church, came to pray for him. How

magnificent the reverend appeared to me in his white suit, fanning himself with a white, hard straw hat. Approaching us, he raised a song and embraced Papa who was then weeping openly.

Those were moments of truth, an early initiation into the adult world. Hard times had conditioned men like Uncle Son and Papa never to cry. Yet, when the moment of truth came, the forces of life ran counter to their acquired sensibilities, and cry they did.

Such a community as Papa and Uncle Son and their generation created has now been replaced by what sociologists call the "Gesellschaft," mechanistic type of impersonal social relationship. The architects of modern-day society constantly remind that no longer are we our brother's keeper.

So, I cherish my memories of a different time when brotherly love was a constant.



Praise Poem for J. C.

for Molefi K. Asante who has the gift

At his mother's breast,
John Calvin
learned the art of reflecting love,
how to make his face a mirror in which
women saw themselves, transformed:
His eyes, stars, for focusing our attention.

At thirty,
John Calvin still practiced
his craft before his shaving mirror.
Crooning "My Funny Valentine,"
razor strap his bass, flexing muscles
for our womanist delight. Glimpsing
our future vulnerabilities, he anointed us,
kin, neighborhood playisters,
standing like supplicants

Attentive as a priest,
John Calvin leaned against
fences while wives chirped complaints
into his eyes like wounded birds.
Having seen their worth mirrored
in non-roving eyes, they retreated to
kitchens, frying okra,
humming Ruth Brown tunes.

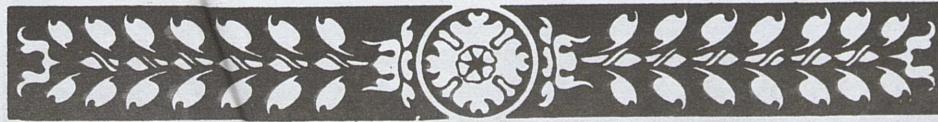
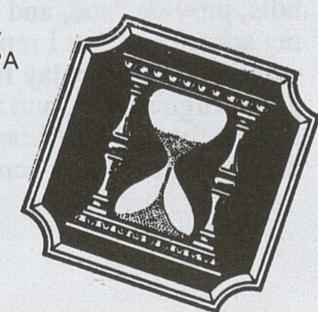
Loving us,
John Calvin made us
love ourselves halted our headlong
plunge into
disinterested sex, disrespect, despair.
Helped us discover ourselves.
Women walking like lions,
carrying wisdom endless as the Nile.

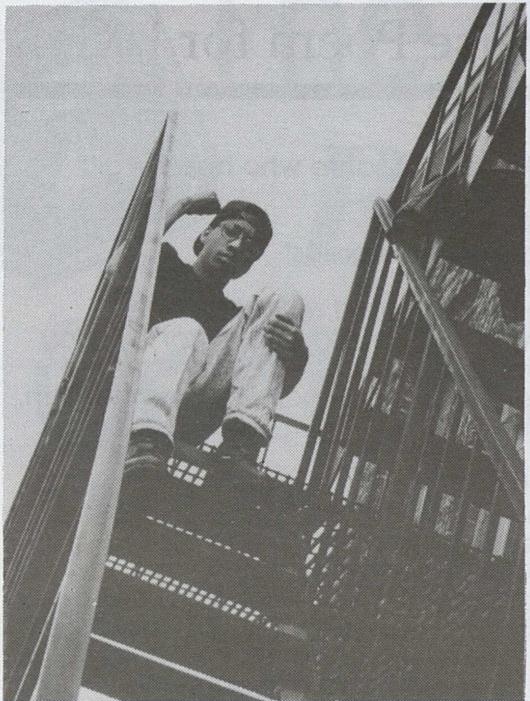
Decked down
in claps and khakis,
John Calvin was his mother's,
sister's, cousin's, neighbor's delight.
His death at thirty-five has no
mythical implications for us.
We lament our sun's passing.
Our star, exploding on some indifferent
highway, leaves us cracked shards:
our images fragmented.
No mirror reflects us.

Our diminishment his,
we do not stand,
shout down the preacher
chanting John Calvin's sins,
like some provincial local news reporter.
No mention of how he fathered us:
altered our universe
in ways despairing voids
continue making it difficult to articulate.

77; 80; April '90

F. E. DeLancey
Philadelphia, PA





In My Father's Absence

By Robert Wesley Branch

Continued from cover

When I was younger, I felt unloved and unappreciated by my father much of the time; that I wasn't his son, but only my mother's child; that my head upon her breast was the only safe place. I equated his absence from the small moments in my childhood -- from scraped knees to after-school events -- with a dearth of his love for me. An independent businessman who could sell you anything -- and often did -- he wasn't the type of dad to beat back traffic at breakneck speeds to make it home to the dinner table each night. When home, he shared sparse time nurturing me to manhood. In fact, I recall very few times when he and I did something together -- just the two of us.

I had, however, little doubt that dad helped to pay the bills, provide food, and buy my school clothes. I remember coming home one day from junior high school, and finding four or five pairs of brand new designer jeans lying across my

bed. I became one of the most admired teens in school, but it didn't make me love my father any more. In fact, I came to believe that he used material possessions to justify his focus on things other than his children.

After all, most kids, justified or not in their thinking, expect their parents to buy them "things." They don't know enough about the world yet to understand the difficulty in trying to keep up with the Joneses. Especially for a black man from a Pittsburgh ghetto, who after a few years living in Southeast Washington, moved his wife and two kids to the suburbs of Prince George's County, Maryland. But I never felt my father's hardships, instead I internalized his emotional distance from my everyday life. I took it personally.

cared for primarily by his maternal grandmother. His mother eventually married, and my father lived in his stepfather's home for some time. There, he witnessed his stepfather verbally and physically abuse his mother, and experienced much of that same abuse himself. On our bi-yearly trips to Braddock for Mother's Day and Thanksgiving during my youth, I never observed any warmth between my step grandfather and my dad. I was too young then to think that the father-son bond made a difference. After all, I wasn't experiencing it with my own father.

My natural grandfather -- the one seldom seen and even more scarcely spoken of -- was a deadbeat dad. I learned of his existence only after reaching my teens. In rare moments during family gatherings, my father tells the story of being a teenager and seeing his birth father come out of a beer garden, dressed to kill and with a lady on his arm. He asked his dad for a dollar or two, and my

determination to do that, I've come to understand his style of parenting. Now, all the childhood "things" I received without asking, make sense. It's clear now why many in my extended family call my sister and me spoiled. My father was playing catch-up. In many ways, he is still the determined little boy vowing not to repeat the abuse he observed in his childhood. He wanted to give me all the things his father didn't give him. And he succeeded. He gave everything he knew how. But what I'm missing today is what he was missing as a child: the emotional bonding of father and son.

It's hard to pass on what you've never been handed. Therefore, my father raised me the best way he knew how. His ideas about fatherhood were based on surviving an emotionally abusive childhood. But I have a greater responsibility in raising my son (when I have one) than my father had in raising me. I have more information now than he had then. I have his example to build upon, which is a step further toward the ideal than his father's legacy. There is no judgment in my dad's style of fatherhood; very little pain, and no regrets. Only lessons.

My mother helped me learn them. She was raised in that same steel-town suburb of Pittsburgh, only on the upper or northern side of the railroad tracks. Her mother and father married, and remained together until death separated them. She and her three sisters and one brother grew up in what's commonly referred to as a nuclear family. Her dad worked, while her mom assumed the role of primary caretaker of the children and home. My mother brings that legacy to her marriage. Unlike her mother, though, she held a full-time job up until a few years ago when she took an early retirement. She raised my sister and me at the same time.

It has been the steadfastness of my mother's love for my father that has given me the courage to want to know him better. In her words, "I knew there was a diamond in that rock somewhere. I just had to keep

"It has been the steadfastness of my mother's love for my father that has given me the courage to want to know him better. In her words, "I knew there was a diamond in that rock somewhere. I just had to keep shining it up." An observer of our continual wars, my mother always urged me to try to understand my father. "Then," she would say, "you'll get along better with him."

Growing up, I was unaware of where my father came from. I didn't know anything about Braddock, PA, the steel mill town on the outskirts of Pittsburgh. I never considered him as a boy, or thought twice about what his childhood was like having to basically raise himself. His birth parents never married and, born the second son to a young mother, my father was

grandfather completely ignored him. My father didn't exist to him. He was the invisible son. I know how my dad must have felt, because I've felt the same way being his son.

Hailing from poverty, and an abusive family environment, my dad promised himself he wouldn't repeat the same in the future for his own family. Given his



shining it up." An observer of our continual wars, my mother always urged me to try to understand my father. "Then," she would say, "you'll get along better with him."

If she could love him for 31 years as her husband, I knew there was something she saw in him that I didn't. Where her constant presence brought me security and stability, my father's absence fostered resentment and a cool distance that's hard to close. His actions forced me to not expect his affections. If I got them, if was gravy. But chicken gravy on beef leaves a strange aftertaste. There's little synergism, and relatively no cohesion. His consistent inattention to my growing pains quickly became the norm for me, and thus I leaned even more heavily on my mother's unchanging hands for validation and unconditional emotional acceptance. She was my rock. I thought, she really loves me.

But I've come to realize that my father really loves me, too; in the best way he knows how. And it's good enough, because in my father's absence I became a man. The mature man that he is today has accomplished what the boy of his youth purposed in his mind. He has built his family upon a rock, and we shall not be moved. My sister and I have never been junkies or in jail. We are post-graduates, and not parents. We are both empowered and employed.

I still rise, however, above resentment, bitterness, the disappointment of wanting Cosby and settling sometimes for Roseanne and the rest of the Connors. I still balance the constant tug between judgment of my parents and acceptance of the responsibility for my own actions today. But one thing is clear, without the unconditional love of two parents who, doing the best they could with what they had, worked through a wounded history to a healing legacy, I wouldn't have made it this far. I'm pretty damn blessed, in spite of my father's absence.



Island Music Lesson

child, this be the way it 'tis
they be the man with he little green banana
and he almond secrets
and they be the woman with she ripe sweet mangoes
and she red hibiscus hiding

they feel the sun on they skin
they dance they hips to those calypso drums
'til they no more hear those drums
they hear they blood beating
and it rhythm good

they lay beneath a mahogany tree
and wrap they legs round together
and find they lips manna kiss all wet
oh they woman she hibiscus open wide
like it be morning
and they man he banana grow 'til
you think it boughamin
they put they beautiful natures together
and make they music like ocean waves

this boughamin it filled with milk of coconut
and this man he give it to he woman
and way inside she red hibiscus
start to grow the little cashew
and when it pop out nice and ripe
it gonna be just like you

Connie Hershey
Concord, MA

For the Men of Huntingdon Prison, April 9th, 1992

After Seeing Prisoner-Produced Video: "Is the Black Male An Endangered Species."

These Men
Those Walls Around Them
of That Prison
Any Prison
of The Many Prisons
They Have Known.

They Know Unfreedom!

Growing Up
They Saw Pain
Suffered Pain
Inflicted Pain
And Know Unfreedom.
(Now They Know Unfreedom!)

They Loved
Many Times.
Fought
Many Times.
Did Wrong
Many Times.
They Hungered
Many Times.
Now They Know Unfreedom

And They Yearn!
Spirits Not Yet Crushed
Body Wounded
Brain Scanned
Heart Torn A Thousand
Times
They Know Unfreedom
And They Yearn!

Those who have known prison may enter into them suffering but cannot share it; We now are free --- they know unfreedom and they yearn!

Dennis Brutus
Pittsburgh, PA





Shooting Star Productions, Inc. exists to build awareness and appreciation for the Black experience via arts and cultural activities.

Shooting Star Productions, Inc. provides its services to all racial, ethnic, religious, age and economic populations, with its most specific and immediate work geared toward African-American youth and adults.

Shooting Star Productions, Inc.'s services include:

Promoting the arts and artists (literary, visual and performing) whose works explore the Black experience; and

Generating programs consistent with the Mission Statement that develop artistic capacity and cultural breadth. These programs can include production of a literary/cultural magazine, a system of Ceremonies, Commemorations and Conferences (such as Writers Conferences, Middle Passage Commemorations, Jubilee and Kwanzaa Celebrations and Literary Readings), and other arts activities and cultural events as opportunities arise.

Shooting Star Productions, Inc.'s Mission and services are provided so that opportunities exist for greater appreciation of the Black experience through knowledge and understanding of the challenges endured and the significant contributions created by people of African descent. **Shooting Star Productions** seeks to generate self-understanding and a sense of pride and accomplishment in Black people of all ages and circumstances while providing information and resources that could reduce racial and ethnic intolerance and allow the creative potential of all Americans to be better realized. Further, **Shooting Star Productions** will expand general interest in and access to the diverse expressions of Black culture.

Shooting Star Review ARTIST GUIDELINES

Upcoming Themes -- Regional Issues: Writers from the South (send by August'94); Writers from the Midwest (send by October'94).

Shooting Star Review is copyrighted and provides fine writing and art about the Black experience. This award-winning magazine publishes established writers and new talent. Work by non-Black writers on the Black experience is welcome. Sandra Gould Ford began *Shooting Star Review* in 1987 with the founding belief that art provides enduring truths and deeply meaningful, human understanding.

Rigorously juried, *Shooting Star Review*'s acceptance rate is about one in twenty. All visuals, graphics, photography, short fiction, poetry and narrative essays are provided by free lance talent from all over the world. Writers with the best chance of publishing in *Shooting Star Review* demonstrate these characteristics:

- ★ Well read, especially within their artform
- ★ Active voice with minimal passive verbs and prepositions
- ★ Honest and authentic voice(s)
- ★ Succinct with inviting & compelling openings

IMPORTANT

Include cover letter with name address and phone on every page. All text must be complete & clearly copied or printed (double space) on one side of plain, white paper.
Multiple submissions OK.
Return envelopes with proper postage required.

FICTION: Up to 3,500 words.
Fiction under 1,000 words encouraged. Up to three stories per quarter.

ESSAYS: Up to 2,500 words.
Conversational voice preferred.
Bibliographies accepted but no footnoting.

POETRY: Max. 70 lines per poem. Up to six poems per quarter. One poem per page.

PAYMENT upon publication for 1st N.Amer. serial rights and as funds permit. Fiction and Essays: \$10 to 1,000 words, \$20+ up to 3,500 words. Poetry: \$5+. Reprints are a third of standard rate. Artists also get 2 magazines (extras available at 40% discount). Visuals \$8+.

Sample copies of *Shooting Star Review* are \$3 with SASE. One-year subscription is \$10.

INTERNATIONAL:
Subscriptions are \$23/year airmail and \$15/year surface in U.S. Dollars.

RESPONSE TIME & RIGHTS:
Queries response in 3 weeks; 4 months on mss. Themes determine time to publication. All rights revert to author upon publication. Galley's are sent if time permits.

Send submissions to 7123 Race Street, Pgh, PA 15208-1424.

Shooting Star Review Advertising

Shooting Star Review distributes in 30 states, Canada, Japan and Switzerland.

Classified Text

Basic rate: \$1 per word [15-word (or \$15) minimum].

Frequency discounts for consecutive insertions:

2 runs = \$.95/word
3 runs = \$.85/word
4 runs = \$.75/word

NOTE: Classified ads must be typed. Your address = 3 words. Your phone = 1 word. Half-price ads are available for the following services for which artists and writers are not charged: Requests for artwork and/or manuscripts for publication; Opportunities for artists & writers (job listings, readings, shows, etc.); Announcements of Fairs and Festivals. Contests which charge fees are not eligible for half-price ads.

Classified B&W Display

Please call or write for COLOR rates.

All display ads must be camera-ready. Column-width is 2"

1" tall x 1 col. = \$30.00
2" tall x 1 col. = \$45.00
3" tall x 1 col. = \$60.00
4" tall x 1 col. = \$85.00
6" tall x 1 col. = \$100.00

1" tall x 2 col. = \$60.00
2" tall x 2 col. = \$90.00
3" tall x 2 col. = \$120.00
4" tall x 2 col. = \$170.00
6" tall x 2 col. = \$200.00

Half page = \$375.00
Full page = \$700.00

Frequency discount for consecutive insertions:

Deduct 10% for 2 runs
Deduct 15% for 3 runs
Deduct 20% for 4 runs

NOTE: Design and content of Classified Display ads may differ with each insertion, but you must retain the same dimensions. Advertisers must contract in advance for consecutive insertions to earn frequency discount.

All classified text and classified display ads must be PREPAID. Make checks or money orders (U.S. Dollars drawn on a U.S. Bank) out to: **Shooting Star Review, 7123 Race Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15208. Phone (412) 731-7464 for next deadlines.**

3rd *Shooting Star* Writers Conference

October 7 & 8, 1994

For details, send a self-addressed, stamped, business-size envelope to **3rd SSWC, Shooting Star Productions, 7123 Race St, Pittsburgh, PA 15208-1424.**

Presenters Wanted

Presenters sought for **3rd Shooting Star Writers Conference** for Mini-Lectures on aspects of writing, including fiction, poetry, journalism, essays, non-fiction, stage, screen, youth, literary history, criticism, agents & genres including science fiction, mystery, romance, etc.

For consideration and information, send resume, including previous teaching and/or presenting experience and brief (up to 100-word) description of a 30-minute presentation before June 30, 1994.

Published Writers Only. No phone inquiries accepted.

Write: Ms. Sheri Johnson, Artistic Coordinator
3rd SSWC, 7123 Race St. Pittsburgh, PA 15208-1424

Middle Passage Commemoration Ceremony

A healing, family event that therapeutically re-examines the trauma of the African Slave Trade and which offers positive methods for dealing with this inadequately acknowledged holocaust.

For FREE information, send a self-addressed, business-size envelope to: **Middle Passage Ceremony, Shooting Star Productions, Inc. 7123 Race Street Pittsburgh, PA 15208-1424**