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Black in Maine

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BLACK IN MAINE

A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE
STONECOAST MFA IN CREATIVE WRITING

BY

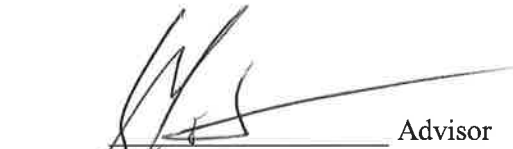
JOSEPH NATHADUS JACKSON

2016


THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE
STONECOAST MFA IN CREATIVE WRITING

2016

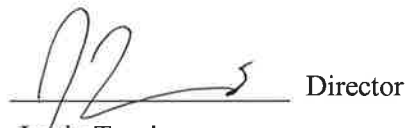
We hereby recommend that the thesis of Joseph Nathadus Jackson entitled Black In Maine be accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts.



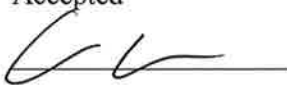
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Accepted


Adam-Max Tuchinsky Interim Dean, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Abstract:

Black In Maine is a collection of poetry composed around the narrative of poetry being used as a source of liberation and rehabilitation for incarcerated persons. The poems in *Black In Maine* find several protagonists self-reflecting or speaking to an assumed audience about their experiences as prisoners within the Maine Department of Corrections. Many of the poems within *Black In Maine* are persona poems. The incorporation of persona poems was used to offer the reader a view beyond that of the poet. Dramatic dialogue is the principle technique to evoke the sense of many speakers speaking to many -audiences. Many of the poems use rhyme in a variety of formats. The rhythm of the rhyme merging with meaning contributes to each poem's tone. Close attention was paid to diction, which was employed to ascribe racial identity. The speaker's voice and diction allows the readers to visualize the face of the protagonist. The poems allow prisoners who are usually faceless and voiceless to speak for themselves. The poems show that prisoners are not monsters they have been made out to be, but often-times individuals who found themselves making choices in the heat of the moment when all the options were bad. Poetry is rehabilitative because it helps prisoners begin the inner work of moving beyond the grief, anger, and regret many harbor. Poetry liberates because it has contributed to the conversation on prison reform. *Black In Maine* seeks to continue the conversation in hopes to make prison reform real here in Maine.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to acknowledge those who made it possible during my twenty years of incarceration to heal and reinvent myself. First and foremost, I want to thank the Supreme Being, with all the blessings bestowed upon me, how can I not believe? I want to acknowledge my family: Dad, Stepmother, Aunts, Uncles, cousins, and of course my siblings, McGail, Monica, Timothy, and Lura. Thank you for not giving up on me. For those no longer here, Momma Flakes, Momma Vercile, Momma, Daddy Foley, Faye, Peter, Paula, Sonya, Alice and others too countless to name, I'll mourn you till I join you. I want to thank Karin and Louis Dillman for loving me unconditionally. I have to thank the Sunshine Lady Doris Buffett for believing in me when I didn't fully believe in myself. To my countless teachers, thank you for opening my mind. I would like to thank the Rachel Talbot Ross, Reverend Dewey Fagerburg, Portland, Bangor, and National branch of NAACP, for your unwavering support over the years. I want to thank the judge who declared I was "unrehabilitatable," and all those guys in prison who taught me not to judge a book by its cover, it gives me the drive to continue to move forward. I want to thank Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, Maineworks, Maine Inside Out, and the MDOC for allowing me to lend my voice to the discussion on prison reform. Lastly, I want to thank Robin Talbot, for helping me cut through the red tape of college admission for felons. This is something I couldn't fathom in my wildest dreams. Thank you.

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Preface

Black In Maine is a collection of poetry influenced by twenty years of incarceration and my journey as a graduate student at Stonecoast. Many poems in *Black In Maine* were influenced by my research into poets who were once incarcerated themselves. Poets like Reginald Betts, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Raul Salinas, and Etheridge Knight convinced me that poetry can help liberate and rehabilitate incarcerated people. The poems in *Black In Maine* employ various poetic techniques in an effort to give faces to offenders and ex-offenders who often remain faceless. Many poems explore issues of race, specifically African Americans interaction with our national prison industrial complex. I hope the readers of *Black In Maine* will feel the urgency and need for prison reform here in Maine and across the country.

I don't recall being exposed to African American poets in grade school. I read African American poets as an undergraduate, but that encounter didn't offer the kind of insight to help me to understand the poet's technique or craft. The first book of African American poetry I received as a gift *The Vintage Book of African American Poetry*, edited by Michael S. Harper. I fell in love with the writings of Phillis Wheatley, Langston Hughes, and Amiri Baraka. I was intrigued by how their words sounded like music. I saw how many of the poems were written in the first person and even noted how some used capitalized I's and other's used lower-case i's. On some level I understood that this technique conveyed information about the protagonist, but I didn't understand that the voice in the poems was not necessarily

the poet's own. It wasn't until I my arrival at Stonecoast that I was able to fill in the gaps.

The first poet I fell in love with was Etheridge Knight. My Stonecoast mentor thought I would like him and boy was he right. I dove into the writing of Etheridge like I was a starving child. The first poem that caught my eye was a poem about a nameless black prisoner entitled, "*The Idea of Ancestry*."

Here's the first stanza:

Taped to the wall of my cell are 47 pictures: 47 black
faces: my father, mother, grandmothers (1 dead), grand
father's (both dead), brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts,
cousins (1st & 2nd) nieces, and nephews. They stare
across the space at me sprawling on my bunk. I know
their dark eyes, they know mine. I know their style,
they know mine. I am all of them, they are all of me;
they are farmers, I am a thief, I am me, they are thee.

This stanza blew me away on so many levels. In the first line we see the speaker is a prisoner. We see that the protagonist is African American, and that the speaker is confined to a cell. We see that the voice is speaking in the first person, and then most importantly, we see that the character is a thief. Knight uses the persona of the speaker to lend credibility to the information being conveyed. The use of characters or personas in poems creates distance between poet and speaker. This distance allows the poet to expand the scope of the dialog beyond him to examine complex issues and themes. In *Black in Maine* many of these issues revolve around black male identity.

Reading Knight's poem, I feel as though the speaker is speaking directly to me. Knight goes to the extraordinary length of showing us to whom the speaker is speaking when we get to "thee" the last word in the stanza. It is when we get to the word "thee" that we begin to understand that we must look beneath the literal meaning of the language to get at its true meaning and intent. The word "thee" has a religious context and meaning: God often referred to mankind as thee. I take the meaning of Knight's "thee" to mean you and me. The use of figurative language allows the poet to tap into issues that often go unsaid in regards to the incarcerated. For instance, the listing of relatives evokes the sense of separation and isolation from friends and loved ones as a near universal condition of all prisoners. Beneath the literal meaning of the relatives is the figurative meaning: the prisoner isn't the only one being punished. *Black in Maine* employs Knight's technique of using figurative language as a device to look beneath the literal meaning of words. One such place this can be seen is the stanza that ends with the synonym "et al," in the poem "Gestalt." In a literary text "et al" is usually a reference to other works cited, but that isn't the meaning of the word in the poem "Gestalt." My use of et al in "Gestalt" acknowledged my failure to see or care about other human beings.

Readers will notice the frequent use of rhyme in *Black in Maine*. During my research at Stonecoast I discovered that the African American link to rhyme originated prior to written language. Griots employed rhyme during ritualistic ceremonies. Griots, like all epic poets in the oral tradition, used rhyme as a way to transmit history and culture to the younger generation. The consensus in academia is that they employed rhyme because rhymes are easy to remember. I don't recall a time when my poetry didn't rhyme. Introduced to poetry as a lad, I memorized and recited

limerick poetry in Sunshine Baptist church on Mother's Day. I fell in love with the beauty of the crafted language; loved the blending of sound and meaning to evoke feelings, so much so, that the feelings those Mother's Day poems evoked became my reality as I recited. It was because of my love for those poems that I began to write my own poems. Much of the poetry I wrote as a teen was influenced by the music of the day the love songs of Marvin Gaye, Barry White, and Smokey Robinson.

Jimmy Santiago Baca showed me that rhyme could be used to address certain political topics, that it was more than a device to make people laugh or a way to express teenage love. I discovered that rhymes could be used to investigate social and economic disparities. Baca showed me the technique of utilizing in-line rhymes, as opposed to end-line rhymes. Baca's "*Steel Doors of Prison*" is a poem about another incarcerated individual. Unlike the protagonist in Knight's poem, the first stanza in the "*Steel Doors of Prison*" provides very little information about this speaker. Since no identity is ascribed to the speaker in the "*Steel Doors of Prison*," the speaker takes on every face of every prisoner the first time they enter prison.

The big compound gate closed the world off,
Lock with a thunderous thud and clunk,
While bits of dust scatter into your lungs,
Breathing in the first stark glance
Of prison cellblocks behind the great wall,
Breathing in the emptiness, the darkness
As you walk with an easy step on the cold sidewalk.

The "*Steel Doors of Prison*" incorporate imperfect rhymes to produce its rhythmic movement. Baca employs the poetic techniques of consonance, assonance,

and repetition to produce the poem's musical sound. Baca builds consonance by using the constant "c" in the words, "compound [and] closed" to initiate the rhythmic movement of the poem. The sound produced by this alliteration merges with the device of assonance through the use of the vowel "u" in many words in the second and third line to propel the rhythmic movement of the piece forward. The stanza concludes with the repetition of the words "breathing in" at the beginning of the fourth and sixth line, these near rhymes produced by repetition join with the perfect rhymes of "emptiness ... darkness / ... walk [and] sidewalk" to bring the rhythmic movement to a close.

There is a sense of hardness in the images in the "*Steel Doors of Prison*." Baca merges descriptive language with figurative language to evoke this. The compound gate, the great wall, the cold sidewalk reinforce the sense of hardness, and it is this hardness in which the new prisoner has to walk. Notice the unnamed individual's easy steps and imagine those steps as the only thing that's easy. My poem "*Locked in a Cage*" and many others in *Black in Maine* are inspired by the "*Steel Doors of Prison*." The universal persona is the perfect tool to depict the harsh unyielding environment of prison. *Black in Maine* incorporates Baca's technique of combining descriptive and figurative language to introduce black male perspectives.

My studies at Stonecoast forced me to come to grips with my aversion to form. I love the way the former-prisoner turned poet, Reginald Betts, utilizes form to explore the depths of prison experience. In Betts's book *Shahid Reads His Own Palm*, I became captivated by the poem, "*Ghazal*." Ghazals are usually written to express the pain of loss or the beauty of love, but the theme of Betts's poem veers from the ghazal's traditional usage of the pain of loss or the beauty of love. Betts's

uses the repeated refrain "the sky above" at the end of the first and second line, and then subsequently the last line of every stanza. This repeating pattern is standard and consistent with the ghazals form. Betts's "*Ghazal*" is a poem about a man in solitary confinement. Prisoners often refer to solitary confinement as being placed in the hole. The repeated refrain strengthens the image of a person stuck in the prone position. When one is in the prone position the sky is always above, and prone is where prisoners in solitary often find themselves. The poem's repeated refrain invokes the sense of untold hours lying on a cell bunk staring at the ceiling. The refrain also evokes the feeling of sameness, or a prisoner in solitary confinement everyday experience of lying on that bunk. "*Ghazal*" made me recall my stint in solitary and how thoughts float across the mind like clouds float across the sky.

In the hole, guards dream me below the sky above
disturbed, they watch me. I shadow the sky above
My cellmate calls prison the devils echo.
I show him god's first flambeau: the sky above

Like the traditional ghazal, Betts's "*Ghazal*" is also very melodic, mixing the near rhyme of the repetition with internal rhymes. I incorporated Betts techniques in *Black in Maine's* poem "House is Not a Home". A ghazal as well, "*House is Not a Home*" dispels the notion that a cell can ever be a home. Like Betts ghazal, "*House is Not a Home*" attempts to explore a common consensus of many prisoners. Like Betts's ghazal in his book, "*House is Not a Home*" is the only ghazal that appears in my manuscript. *Black in Maine's* poem "*A Mind On 23Hour Lockdown*" took "*Ghazal's*" theme of floating thoughts to give voice to the thoughts of prisoners our penal system has deemed unrehabilitable.

Etheridge Knight plays with one of my favorite forms in his poem "*Haiku*," a series of stanzas composed of haikus. I love Knight's short succinct lines. Knight numbered each of his stanzas to make each stanza stand on their own and be part of the whole. Knight's poem is a prison poem, and each stanza offers a snapshot of prison life. One such snapshot evokes an image of correctional officers perched high on the catwalk. Their automatic shotguns gleam in the sun as prisoner's pretend not to notice.

1

Eastern guard tower
glints in sunset, convicts rest
like lizards on rocks.

Knight's short lines showed me how to break up rhyme schemes while still maintaining the poem's melody and tone. There is also an aesthetic quality to the way the short lines appear on the page. They are reminders that poetry is not only for the ear, but once written on a page, for the eye as well.

Raul Salinas is another prison poet with whom I feel a kinship. Salinas's book *Un Trip Through the Mind Jail y Otras Excursiones* speaks about the psychological and physical impact of incarceration. *Un Trip Through the Mind Jail y Otras Excursiones* was composed (at least partially) while he was incarcerated in a Texas prison. (Did I mention I'm from Tyler, Texas?) Salinas utilizes near rhymes and perfect rhymes to produce his poetry's rhythmic effect. The tones of many of the poems are full of emotion. Salinas's poetry is sensory, invoking and appealing to a reader's moral and ethical compasses. Salinas's poem "*To My Woman*" is an excellent

example of a poem employing a formal rhyme pattern. The use of perfect rhymes in "*To My Woman*" demonstrates that poets can use rhyme without interfering with the information being conveyed. The poem "*To My Woman*" addresses the near universal separation of prisoners from their significant others. It demonstrates that when an individual is convicted and incarcerated they are not the only ones harmed.

The speaker in the poem is a male prisoner locked in his cell for the night, feeling alone and missing his woman, he imagines his partner feeling this same sense of loss. It is that sense of loss, perceived or not, that demonstrates this shared harm. The imagining evokes the sense of emotional loss prisoners experience from the forced separation and distance from their significant others. The rhyme scheme of "*To My Woman*" is simple and in no way disrupts the poem's somber tone or sentiment.

The poem "*Letter to My Wife*" in *Black in Maine* makes use of Salinas's near universal theme. The formal rhyme scheme in "*To My Woman*" is an aspect of the poem that appeals to the academic in me. I'm intrigued by the use of simple diction to produce the poem's perfect rhymes and the way those rhymes contribute to the overall tone and rhythmic effect of the piece. Salinas uses the words "view ... subject to ... / bear ... tear / [and] known alone" to contribute sonically and tonally. I incorporated aspects of these techniques in Salinas's poem "*To My Woman*" in my poem "*Letter to My Wife*." One of the opening poems of *Black in Maine*, "*Letter to My Wife*" similar theme sings that same sad song playing in the mind of the 2.2 million prisoners in this country.

What I came to understand during my studies of Knight, Baca, Betts, and Salinas is that they all taught me how poetry is a means to heal the internal scars inflicted by the system and the individuals who work within it. They all wrote to make sense of their ordeal. I came to realize that all were writing poetry to liberate themselves from the anger, grief, and regret so many prisoners experience.

During my studies I also began to realize that Knight, Baca, Betts, and Salinas use poetry as a form of social advocacy. I kept wondering why I should write about my experiences in America's prison industrial complex, and then it dawned on me that the reason to write is because what happened to me and many others is wrong. What is happening within America's penal system today is wrong. The treatment of prisoners within America's penal system is cruel and inhumane. Many prisoners in Maine reenter society with nothing more than the clothes on their backs and fifty dollars in their pocket. When they enter the penal system they are cast in a world turned upside down, and when they finally learn to walk in that world they are cast back into this one and told to walk upright.

When I entered Stonecoast I felt as though I didn't belong. I felt as though I wasn't really wanted there, but that feeling quickly changed. My studies at Stonecoast that first semester sustained me by focusing my attention to the task at hand through the difficult transition of reentry. My study of prison poets made me realize that poetry liberated me from the grief, anger, and regret, of incarceration. That liberation leads to rehabilitation.

In the presence of so many talented writers at Stonecoast I gained confidence in my writing. *Black in Maine* is the product of my personal journey and

experience within Maine Department of Corrections. *Black in Maine* is a testament to those black poets and authors who came before me. Etheridge Knight, Reginald Betts, Jimmy Santiago Baca, and Raul Salinas are only a handful of muses. I have been blessed with many muses and teachers in my life, and the professors I worked with at Stonecoast were god sent. I'm proud to have been presented with the opportunity to explore poetry as a source of liberation and rehabilitation. I pray you accept these humble offerings as food for thought. Who among us has never made a mistake? Who among us think it is justice to be defined and punished by that mistake for the rest of their lives? Who fails to see this is what is currently occurring to ex-offenders being released today? *Black in Maine* is presented as evidence that ex-offenders can move beyond their mistake and emerge from prison a changed individual.

Opening Statement

I see the world much different than my peers
See nothing wrong with profiting from tears
Both the pharmacist and drug peddler have careers
Because some must find happiness in a substance
or bury sorrow with beer.

What's wrong with a brother doing what he must to make ends meet?
Contrary to popular belief, the world was not inherited by the meek
War, famine, and pestilence is what is left for the weak
When it comes to prosperity all we can do is peek.

The media says my culture glorifies sexism, homophobia, and violence
Without Hip Hop would women and gays breathe solace?
And will there be no violence if Hip Hop was silent?
How can anyone look at the black man as the architect of misery?
How can some say that in one breath and ignore American history?

Or better yet America at the present
Black men hunted and shot down like pheasants
For the black man in America there are no lavish presents
Only ghettos, prisons, and divine presence.

Am I the only one to perceive that justice is contradictory?
What is legal and constitutional for some is denied to me
Statistics prove that I am denied equality
I know because the boys in blue are always pulling me over
or following me.

Institutions ostracized me as a child
Because none of their policy makers had a brown smile.
I almost believed the way I was portrayed in society
Declared un-rehabilitatable as the judge chided me.

Does anyone know what it means to be a human being
That we are all striving for the time when our hearts simply sings
Something beautiful like the dream of Dr. King
But his dream and mine was terminated by the traveling bullet's ring.

On that fateful night my opponent and I were pulled into that Gladiator thing
Two lives were gonna be lost that night - cause we were striving to make our hearts sing.

Letter to My Wife
(dedicated to Sonya
R.I.P)

Hopefully you realized
the four shots I fired in
the heat of the moment
was to prevent my opponent
from snatching me from
your side.

My only thought ... surviving
Didn't even consider the consequences
of not dying, all I could think of was if
I verbally confided my pride
My commitment to remain
by your side before your diseased
riddled body finally released
your divine spark.

Do you remember those silly
poems of me comparing
our love to white doves
or the naughty limericks
referring to burns from rugs?

Do you know how difficult
it is not to hold a grudge
for the time stolen from us
by the dead or that judge?
Whether it was Carlos or me
there could be no win or justice
for either of us.

Oh ... how my heart still trembles
as much as my hands trembled
on our wedding day
and on that fateful night
Vowing "I Do" and "I Will Not"
Symbolizing every tragedy and
comedy Shakespeare ever composed.
Cruellest joke imposed on the human
spirit. Rehabilitation through incarceration!

The rapid clicking of the cold
stainless steel handcuffs severing
blood and love from my hands
I still hear it ... I still hear it.

And you can no longer hear
my verses sing or anything.

Like A Man
(Dedicated to my Father)

Dad cried
Moments after waving to granddad goodbye
Traveling home that night in the cab of his Chevy truck
A proud father and his young buck.

We absorbed the familiar rumble of tires crossing the old wooden bridge
In different eras it was a test of manhood to stand on its edge
and dive into its murky waters as kids.

I glanced over in the darkness
and witnessed tears run down his cheeks
The look on his brown face told me this was deep.

Rivulets streaming down
No Words, No Sound
Thump in my chest deafening as my heart began to pound.

Started to open my mouth to ask if he was okay
But in fright looked away
Unable to find the right words to say.

Maybe it was the alcohol and he had something in his eye
or maybe it was something serious like somebody dies
Whatever it was during that ride
I discovered the way that men cried.

No Place

Prisoners have no place for remorse
Profound regret and sorrow is for the weak
No respect for men
 With tears on their cheeks.

Male-centered machinations
Patriarchal machismo domination
Conditioned behavior
 Bearing pain in silence is the preferred behavior.

No room for remorse
Not in a public place
No room for remorse
 Our culture hasn't provided the space.

Far from inert
True remorse is covert
On your knees in the middle of the night
 Prostrating in the dirt.

I heard the judge say - I did not display remorse
Implying me and my feelings were divorced
leaving her but one course of action
 Judgment devoid of compassion.

No room for remorse
Would its true form be recognized?
Even if it was
 Wouldn't forgiveness be denied?

Speak So Well

When the trial was over
Heard the AG tell my lawyer
That I speak so well
Then ignorant my pride swelled
Mistakenly taking for granted that for which I was being held.

But speak so well
Has a taint - has a smell
A type of prejudice that's veiled
As though it is unusual for my kind
Like Blacks don't have the mind
Speak so well implies blacks are a separate species
and inferior by design.

Historical perceptions come to mind
Views still resistant to dying
The argument over the first published African American
Author Phillis Wheatley didn't change many minds
Some felt her rhymes meant the divine didn't leave the African behind
Still, others like Thomas Jefferson's opinion of her vocabulary was less than kind
And speak so well has been applied to blacks since that time.

I'm told the only constant is change
Something as seemingly benign as speak so well
Makes me feels as though nothing's changed
So I'm viewed the same
Primitive-three-fifths-savage-blamed
Enslaved-lynched-incarcerated-named.

You speak so well suggest that I have been trained
That I have performed a trick-that deserves recognition-deserves fame
Maybe I should take the compliment with less than the grain
it could be a compliment as they claim
But where it once filled me with pride
I now question its aim.

Moment of Silence

Toboggans race towards the ice covered Androscoggin
Laughs and giggles spew white geysers into the cold air
Snow covered log launches haunches landing on noggins
Pink youths full of exuberance leap up without a care
Grinning from ear to ear frantically waving and nodding
Unabashed pleasure and joy quieting the heart throbbing.

You ever hear
The fat puffs of white snow crashing into the turf?
Do you hold dear
Every child on mother Earth?
Strange how fear
Makes things so clear.

Tragic events unfolding
Every minute, every hour, every day
Wish we were holding
The hands of all children keeping them safe
To continue witnessing toboggans race towards the Androscoggin
Hearing laughing and giggling while landing on noggins.

Color Blind
(Dedicated to Lamar K.)

They say, "There is no need to think about race".
"A person's color means nothing today".
"Racism is history".
"So there is no need to treat 'them' differently".

They say, "Derogatory terms are just words".
"Rarely used so they rarely hurt".
They say, "Occasional verbal barbs
Never inflict scars".

They say, "It's not discrimination".
"We aren't taking applications!"
"The apartment's taken!"
"Your loan request has been denied ...
Thank you for waiting!"

They say, "May I see some identification?"
"You look like the person we're chasing".
"Place your hands behind your head".
"Spread your legs".
"Keep your eyes on him while I frisk em Fred!"

They say, "What do we have here?"
"That's some wacky tabacky there!"
"You might not be the right creep".
"But you're all the same to me!"

They say, "Come with us".
"Don't make a fuss".
"Not to Worry".
"Our legal system will treat you fairly".

They say, "Last night a black man was arrested".
"Charged with Public Intoxication"
"Trafficking Schedule Z medication"
"Inappropriate dress"
"Resisting arrest"
They say, "After questioning he confessed".

They say, "He was denied bail
Because he is guilty as hell!"
They say, "There isn't any racism in this country of mine"
"It's color blind".

House is Not a Home

Gabble slams, judge's stern tone, rendered decision, thirty years before you're home.
during eye contact, from the defenses table, shorty mouths, how long before you're home.

MSP founded 1824, warden who unlocks cell door sneers, welcome to your new home.
step in, join strange peers, all alone, fully aware, this place will never compare to your home.

Steel frame, steel toilet, steel sink, steel shelf, steel mirror, steel bars, steals your heart.
deep in the night, cloaked by the dark, wish from deepest recession of your heart, you're home.

Although you are rarely alone, you constantly hear whispers from home.
my love, my dear, you're not here, where have you gone, how long before you're home.

In this place of steel and manmade stone, the sun is not itself, blue sky is a clone.
blank face conceals turbulent thunder storm which won't cease till you're home.

No longer debating masturbating, homosexuals contemplating, around the corner waiting.
D. T's saps your strength, Love Jones ... there is but one vent, waiting till you're home.

Best friends move on, kids full grown, love dissipates, elders fade away, gone, gone, gone,
gone.
even hearts of stone crumble, pyramids tumble, order becomes disorder till you're home.

Correction official declares prison isn't suppose to be nice like home.
her tone, reveals she's unaware, no punishment can compare being separated from your home.

Greece and Rome, cultures from which our concept of justice was born, intention for period
between trial, sentencing, and detention; was for voluntary permanent exile from your home.

Prison rules aren't set in stone. become more punitive as time moves along. Cee-Ohs feeling
prison is not enough are awarded big cushy homes, they ensure Jay's house never feels like home.

Maine State Prison: Founded 1832

They stand hunched over
in an ancient rock quarry ...
wearing white and black striped
sweat drenched prison blues...
bent backs broken
breaking homo habilis like spear chips
off the granite rock face
with each fall
of the iron pick ...

One hundred and seventy years
later ... I don a catcher's mitt ...
and turned to retrieve
softball ball I missed ...
only to face the thirty foot
blue grey granite wall
encircling the softball field
like a giant cathedral
of jagged frozen faces
embedded in bedrock ...

Smile falls from face
faster than each ping ...
of the sledge hammers countless
swings slung to produce this
cavernous enclosure ...
joy drowned by imagining
stone faces with
bent backs broken
breaking spear chips
so I could play softball ...

what did I have to smile about?

Between space of
swinging arm and slinging
softball ... time stopped ...
and I took stock of
this prison of impenetrable
immobile stone faces
created by bent backs broken
breaking spear chips
with a trillion swings
of an iron pick ...

How dare we mock
our predecessors pain ...
playing, joking,
laughing, teasing ...
we should be standing
on this hallowed ground
as I am ... head bent ...
face silently grieving ...
for them
and for me ...

In the middle
of the first inning ... I tossed
catcher's mitt
for the last time ...
to another smiling face
blind to the stone
deaf to the tone
set by predecessors
singing vibrating bones
and ringing ears ...

I departed ...
escorted to cell
with my thirty years ...
ghost and prisoners
who peer stand clear
of the impenetrable
thirty foot face of chipped stone ...

Dear John

"This is a collect call from Maine State prison ... this call may be monitored and recorded ... if you chose to decline this call, hang up if you chose to accept this call please press zero now".

Come on ... please press zero
I haven't spoken to you in so long. Please answer my wife love of my life ... please answer and say your love remains true or has my absence and distance starting to affect you? Why haven't I heard from you? Is there someone one else comforting you?

You can't imagine the things I've seen in this zoo. Men dedicated to their mates for decades discover by mail, phone, or silence their relationships are through. Can't bear the thought of losing you. What is a man to do when he loses his only connection to the outside world? Can't see his kids. Can't touch his girl.

The Maine Department of Corrections policies prevent you from visiting me. They decided you are no good for me Can't they see the love? Can they feel my grief? My Dear John letter is silence because they denied us contact, and brief displays of intimacy.

Despair

During those lonely nights
When the guards turn off the lights
and despair enters your thoughts
You realize it's your life not your cell that's dark.
During those recesses you can't help but obsess.

Despairing how to make up for time gone by
When for you on the outside it continues to fly.
Despair over how to recapture the lost seconds,
minutes, hours ... years, possibly build a new career.

Despair over how to rebuild the broken bond
once shared with family. Despairing over being
absent when there was a crisis or calamity.
Fearing family is slamming me, damning me
No visits, letters, or financial support because
poverty is more demanding than me. Despair
is damaging me.

As time continues to pass ending despair becomes
a bigger and bigger task. Wish I could get lost
in a shot glass. Instead I must continue to wear
this stoic mask. When prison officials ask the wrong
question - I pretend they didn't ask - and they are all
wrong if they pertain to the past.

I've made so many wrong turns, the right ones didn't count.
Can't even calculate the amount of mistakes made
It is not a bad thing times is sometimes akin to a grave.
You can bury things, but how do you get over the regret
and despair it brings? Pain so intense you can't recall
the moments when your heart once sang. How would
you react if you lost your Queen?

Despair provides very few answers and leaves an awful
amount of questions. I didn't know this life was just a
series of testing. Where in prison is the lesson learned?
My life is gone, everything has been thrown into the flames
and burned.

They say, you reap what you sow, you get what you earn.
It has also been said this life is a test.
I've done my best - but I think I have to ask for a retest.

Black in Maine State Prison

Twenty four years gone
ghost linger like wisp
of smoke in a still room,
facade concealing all those
feelings broken over and
over. Not a place to have
grief and anguish leak
through my stone face.

Not necessarily something
involving my race, more like
my gender. Men must show
no weakness is the lesson
I remember. Never ask anyone
for help, if you can do it
yourself, and for a black
man from Tyler Texas
there can't be anything
else.

So while I'm crying
inside, there is pepper
in my step. Black Man
has to be made of stone
to get through the hell
of 24 yr. confinement in
a Maine cell.

As I scratch another
name out of my address
book, another relative
took, another R.I.P. I'll
be forced to look upon
every time I open this
book. Compounded by
the fact that the last
time I saw you will be
the last time I ever see
you. I take the blame
myself for not being
there for you.

I can't even remember
our last words. I can only
image how absurd they
were and unbecfitting for
the moment. I know I
didn't cherish our last
moments. Feel as
though I broke
a most sacred
promise.

Momma, Uncle Jimmy
half-brother Willie,
Aunt Faye, and Devoria,
Uncle Wardell, Momma
Vercile, Daddy Foley,
Peter, Uncle Roosevelt,
Momma Flakes, I Love
you.

Twenty four years gone
your ghost linger like
wisp of smoke in a still
room even now that I'm
home, reconciling with my
siblings, hugging, kissing and
sitting with daddy, turning
corners with Uncle Tom,
but there is just too much
open space for me to here
in Texas, because all
yall gone.

A Mind On 23 Hour Lockdown

When you're incarcerated
You learn to insulate with hate
after reflecting on the erroneous sentiments
directed towards me on judgment day.

I hate the bars
I hate the prison yard
I hate the prison staff and the guards.

I hate the judge
I hold a grudge
and pray I'm blessed to discover her car
stuck in the mud.
I won't budge
and also not view a human
when I judge.

I hate the D.A.
He had all types of evil shit to say
Skewed the truth to get his way.

From the bottom of my heart
I hate the policeman that lied with a calm face
I discovered it's by any means necessary to close his case
And you know there is only one thing to do with the head of a snake.

I hate the volunteer
because I feel his intentions are fake
What else do you call the man
Who has no problem fraternizing with snakes?

I hate the public too,
because the public hates me
When they open these gates
Witness how hateful I'll be.

Locked in a Cage

Escorted to Center block
as the bottom of ballooning grey Army blanket
enveloping allowable prison property
slides across the well worn path
of the countless others
who have made this move.

Pausing long enough to reflect
On what brought me to this place
pausing long enough for my grandmother's prayer
to shower over me like the beads of sweat
joining the sparse specks of gray paint
on the concrete floor like a Jackson Pollack painting.
This particular rectangular masterpiece
is framed in a spider web of one inch steel bars
divided in two foot sections
spaced four inches apart.
Much like those 1970 enclosures
holding carnivorous predators in any zoo USA,
there is not enough space for pacing.

This cage houses Man.
hunted, captured, and stuffed
Like the moose-head on the wall of the
Elks club in Brunswick. The photos of
old white men exhibit the same empty gaze
as the moose. I'm as immobile as those unblinking
faces, trapped in the Chernobyl of my own making
and nailed to the wall for all to see, except those
loved ones who can't bear looking.
The indifference of both
is enough to cause a man
to pace in a space of any size.

Heaving the weight of the blanket
and clear trash bags that contained
all my possessions and prison property
I hunched my shoulders stepped forward,
Head and Eyes Forward.
'It's disrespectful to intrude on a man's personal space
even with your eyes'
Thirty steps in I stop and glanced back
over the space and time I've traveled.
Thirty years said the judge.
With both hands Cee Cee
rolled the three-foot steel lever
in the control box like a light switch.
And magically an opening appeared
accompanied with the crunch and clank
of the mechanisms switching gears.

I step forward, thud of the bag
silenced by the crunch and clank
of the openings disappearance.
two more steps
to the pissed stained stainless steel toilet/sink combo,
outstretched hands touch
opposite facing steel plate walls
nearly palm face down.
I turn, take two steps forward,
and let the pacing begin.

Geronimo

Sound the alarm!
"whoop, whoop"
Maine state prison investigators
in Geronimo's cell
next door.
silently listen
to the rustling and shuffling
of papers as they
rummage through
his mail and
personal property.

Last night, during the
last rays of daylight,
while my partner and
I on high alert
indiscreetly passed
the cannabis sativa
filled swisher sweet
between us,
the two foot
cloud of rising smoke
I blew to my left side,
suddenly changed directions
as Geronimo fell
from nowhere out
of the cloudless moonless
grey autumn sky,
and landed a few feet
away, on the three foot
concrete slab
we were sitting on
with such force
we were peppered
with debris.
he bounced and skid
another ten feet
into the rec yard.

Startled, and scared shitless
by the sudden smack of
battered flesh and
crunch of crushed bone,
my partner dropped and crushed
the bone we were smoking.
as Cee-Ohs converged

on the scene from all
directions with amazing speed,
my partner quickly planted his foot
pulverizing the weed, and we
stood and observed the chaotic scene.
Geronimo's body
unmoving on the concrete
encircled by a conglomerate
of blue uniforms.
limbs contorted and twisted
in unnatural positions,
face froze in a grotesque disposition
I've only seen in horror movies.

Blue uniform with his back to us,
bent down and casually brushed
Geronimo's disheveled hair
to one side, while peeling
the edge of the eight inch
piece of gray duck tape
covering his milky white
mouth and nose
same color as the other-side
of the duck tape.

After the sticky adhesive,
was unceremoniously ripped off
Geronimo's body settled slightly
as his soul departed with the air
trapped in his lungs.
Blue uniform turned the duck tape over
and read the printed word painted
bold in white paint,
G E R O N I M O.

As the search
in the adjoining cell
intensified, first thought
that came to mind
was the contrast
between the gray
sky, duck tape,
and bold white
letters.

Geronimo
do I tell them
about the nights
I thought I heard crying
or me barking on you
when you complained
to the Cee-Ohs
about my hip hop rhymes?
Damn, did my partner

grind the Swisher up
enough for Cee-Ohs
not to find?
With the Cry
GERONIMO
isn't there usually an echo?

As I sit silent as
Geronimo's leap
listening to the sounds
next door. I couldn't
help but feel the fault
was mine. Can't remember
Geronimo's real name
or even if I ever uttered
a kind word.
Guy was
a kind of nerd.
Still he called
the accusation
he pushed his spouse
off a cliff for
her insurance
absurd.

Quietly dressed up,
laced up, and placed
on my ignorant look,
sat on my bunk
in quiet terror
pretending not
to be shook.

Pacing, waiting
fighting off the
burned image
of Geronimo's
last look. Trying
not to contemplate
the courage it
took for Geronimo
to throw his Judge
back his book.

Questions and Conclusions of a Convict

Why can some American
Citizens can take the lives
of other American Citizens,
unarmed or not,
because they
reasonably fear
for their
lives?

Why can't everyone kill the
unruly, defiant kid for
mouthing off like the
Missouri police officer
Killed Michael Brown?
Six rounds to bring
him down. Six rounds
to quell the fearing
welling up inside
the officer till
that last
round.

What if Michael Browns'
skin color, was not
brown, and the same
officer killed a blond
blue-eyed high school
student from Brunswick
Maine strolling with his
friend through town?
Imagine six rounds cutting
that white child down.
Imagine the same officer
telling us his fear
was reasonable
till that last
round.

Hear I sit in this Maine prison cell
dumbfounded, reliving the
four rounds I pounded
in the body of my
assailant. His weapon
presented at trial,
wasn't enough to
convince my all
white jury beyond
a reasonable doubt,
I wasn't guilty.

When I tried to defend
myself, I was told
I wasn't white, and
I wasn't a police
officer reasonable
fearing for his
life that
night.

What cowards our police force
have become. Can't take
a punch, Can't do anything
without their machine guns.
Armored Bodied suits,
Armored vehicles like
tanks, parked in
front of our schools.
What fools we have
become. Allowing an Army
to form within our
midst beholding to
no-one.

Is our police force here in America
only serving and protecting itself?
Isn't it long past time for us
strip them of their immunity
place cameras and microphones
on all of them ... to
serve and protect
ourselves?

Let the Game Begin

Droplets of water fall like tiny missiles
out of the cloudless blue sky, liquid shrapnel
peppers every prisoner and every blade of
luscious blue-green Bermuda grass growing
in the outfield.

With the crack of the staff's bat
the sky burst open. Every prisoner
in the outfield race towards the fly
ball with their gloves open ... hoping
to do the Cee-Oh's team in, because its the
only place within the Maine Department
of Corrections where a prisoner can
get a win.

Black In Maine
'ArsPoetica'

You want to hear my truth?
Who are you?
Where do you come from?
I recited my first psalm
as my mother's son
in Sun Shine Baptist Church
Mother's Day ... Old Earth beaming
and in full bloom like the yellow parakeet
on it's perch. Mom just like all my cousins' moms ...
pushing us to include Jesus in our search.

Now I'm sitting in Maine State Prison's chapel
keeping peek as my partner sharpens a homemade scalpel
Prison Chaplain waving his hands talking about Jesus
Eight officers responding to his inadvertent man-down
barge in wheezing. Everyone freezing, prisoners ordered
against the wall.

Shiny new shoes, royal blue tie, and white shirt
I smiled as Yolanda winked
wearing the same color royal blue skirt.
Reciting poetry is fine
when the emotion is akin
to being presented with your favorite desert.
But writing poetry is designed
for when your inner feelings need work
and patriarchy prevents you from revealing
You're hurt .

For the first time in my life
When I recited poetry
adults listened ... the last time
I discovered poetry ... it was to tell
adults about the horrors of
being Black
and in Prison.

Illusion of Penance

Confined to
Hades
Stone and Steel
Pavilion
One hundred
and sixty two thousand hours
Waiting
To
Embrace
Oblivion.

Walking
Dead
Talking
Heads.

Unsure if the
Words were
Thought or
Said.

Tears shed
Like Sickle Cell Hemoglobin
Flowing through capillaries.

Canary perched in a cage
Feeling what enslaved ancestors
Felt as their love ones were snatched away.

Helpless ...

Stuck
in a never-ending
Groundhogs' Day.

Conscious of the
Sense of feeling
Like an
Infinitesimal
Pinprick of an
Illuminated speck
on the planet
Earth.
Chalk our love ones fate
to the solar wind
and pray the gale
doesn't extinguish
their light.

As my light fades
concluded we are
shades in the
infinite sea of time.

Infinitesimal pinpricks
of illuminated specks
on the planet
Earth.

Holidays of my youth
long gone.
So are the people that
filled them.

May the ancestors watch
over them
Like they watch
over me.

Shed Tears
Like Sick Cell Hemoglobin
Flowing through capillaries.

Feeling the mental
Agony and Anguish of
Antigone
Desdemona
Cordelia &
My mother Effie.

Unsure if their pain
was internal
or external.

Unsure if the
Words were
Thought
or Said.

Commander of Inner Parameter Security

Suit up Boys
no training exercise
march in before
he wakes up
five am
count time.

Operation is simple
purpose is clear
no joy
or celebrations
of Christmas
by convicts
this Year.

Proper procedure
signal to unlock
the door.
Charge in
One at a time.
Big Boy grab that
electrified shield.
Move to the
front of the line.

Now!!!
Go Go Go
grab his arms
You! Place your foot
on his neck.
Aw ... Hell
Make him understand
you are not asking ...
you're taking his respect.

When he complains
haul him away in chains
tell him if he's writing
a complaint.
He can send it
in my name.

Take a deep breath
No time for rest
Line up in front
of the cell on the left
as I recall
he has two or three
complaints on my desk
strip him, cuff him, stuff him
I've heard enough from him.

Follow procedure
this prick is clever
Go, Go, Go
I don't care if
he's praying
or whatever.

Wrap him up
like a X-mas present
this compensation is pleasant
Double-time
and a half
is not as satisfying
when Co's and Convicts
exchange presents.

Black In Maine II
(Dedicated to Philip Kay)

They killed me momma
life sentence over a drunken
driving charge. Who ever
thought six years could be
so hard on the body, or medical
staff being so hard, they won't
help anybody.

Taking care of my body
has never been a hobby
sure I'm big as a house
but my plush interior
and gentle exterior
made me harmless as
a church mouse.

It's Ok Friends laugh
seeing me engulf a
couple pints of ice cream,
maybe four honey buns
in a sitting. C/O claiming
I stole food fired me
from the kitchen.
No time to spend time
bitching. Brothers already
chide me for lack of ambition,
but there are some good brothers
here momma, always offering advice
always offering their assistance.

But not even their assistance
is much help right now. Psychiatrist
no help ... C/O called me retarded
I'm starting to believe it myself.
It's because I don't respond like
they want I've made a target
of myself. Losing rec, placed on
cell restriction, hauled to the
hole, for the slightest
misstep.

Is it because I once
sank to these depths
I can't get any help
when I complained
of stomach pains?
Momma, for week
anything I put down
comes up.

I kept telling them
something is up.
Pain was akin to
being engulfed in
flames. Followed the
rules by submitting
slip after slip, still no
help came.

What else are we
to expect from the
descendants of Cain?
There is no one around
that looks like me in
positions of power
in Maine.

I still don't understand
why no one came to
my aid ... why was a
nurse diagnosing and
treating my Cancer with
Roloids. Cold towels to
control my fever. Charged
me three dollars for the
Tylenol they prescribed
as a pain reliever.

Do you believe me
when I tell you they
killed me? Never believed
crackers were so peeved
now I'm a believer.

Not being as dark as
some brothers, black
daddy, white mother.
Classmates thought
I was Italian, till they saw
my darker younger brother
Some of them distance
themselves from me
so fast they tripped
over each other.

Why my white kin,
let me die in the pen
like some worthless
muther fucker?
Their indifference
shows the value
their heart holds
for brothers.

Drunken driving becomes
a death sentence, twenty
eight year olds aren't suppose
to go before their mothers.
I just hope my words
are felt and heard
clearly articulating
how much I love
ya.

Rest In Pieces Captain Rooster: Punk-Ass Mother-Fucker

When they announced your death
over the intercom and declared
May You Rest in Pieces!
I echoed the sentiment
in my cell
and declared
may you rest in
Pieces!

Resting in Peace
is to good for a Piece
of shit like you.
I hope all past and current prisoners
in the hole
you
Pushed, Punched, and Pummeled
dig up your grave
Piss, Squat
and Shit
on you.

I hope that truck
that hit your
motorcycle
had the weight
of a
choo choo
and the last thing
you remember
is being unable to
hold your
doo doo..

May your blond
beautiful, air-head wife
get fucked by an entire tribe
of Zulu
in front
of
you.
When you get to hell
may they torture you ...
forever keep you under
bright lights ...
and make you
sleep on concrete
too!

Good Samaritan

Forget breakfast on Friday's
run to the bathroom
shit, shower, & shave,
run down the stairs &
rush out of the door sideways,
devoting my time these fines days
conducting reading and discussion
groups for no pay
8 am every Friday
at Maine State Prison.

When you walk out of the
door, check ... make sure you're dressed
correct ... camouflaged clothing
or open toe shoes
and they ask you to return to
the place you just left. No oversized
pants, you must remove your
metal buckled belt.
Keep all camera's, cell phones
and electronic equipment
in the car,
or you may be barred indefinitely
for violating
the institutions law.

Don't forget your volunteer visitor's
badge and Don't forget your training
No matter how bad you may want
too. Don't forget the instruction,
never believes anything a prisoner
says, even if he tells you
the sky is blue. Don't forget
he's only trying to manipulate you.
Don't forget we're your friends
and are only trying to protect you.

(Don't forget the poem for Mark
that kid sure is sharp.)
(Don't forget the book for Tiny
The big fella sure has a heart).
(Don't forget to ask about Kenny
I ain't seen him in a minute.)
(Maybe someone new will come
I'll have prove to them too
my heart is in it)

Old School Cat

Call me a drug addict
I smoke, but check in
Your medicine cabinet
and tell me who is the
addict.

I'll be a bandit, I can't
Stand that holier than
thou shit. You quit! I'm
sick of what you think is
Good and bad for me
shit.

When I was hungry didn't
Nobody give me shit. Then
They sat back and waited
for me to quit. Quit everything
The hustling, the cheating
the hanging out. Meeting
and fucking Mr. Johnson's
spouse.

If I didn't have those things
I couldn't put food in my mouth
or any security if I lost the place
I was staying. I can't see myself
holding my hand out or
praying.

Besides that shit is degrading
I just want to live my life
not go through it like some
cow grazing. Chewing cud,
growing fat, old and lazy.
i can't see myself waking up
staring at the same old lady
Chewing cud right next to
me growing fat, old, and
lazy.

Bitch talking bout she wants
to have my baby. I said for
What, so he can go from
the cradle to the grave G.
They say one out of every

three Black Babies born
will end up right here with
us in the pen. I'd rather not
give the young nigga life, than
to go through this shit we in.

Gangsta Disciple
(Dedicated to Vinny)

Don't make me take theses
twenty inch pythons and wrap
them around you boy. Two
hundred and seventy pounds
of muscles will shake your ass
like a toy.

Don't toy with me about that
being black shit. The writings of
Baraka, Douglass, Du bois,
Cleaver, Ellison, ain't changed
shit. Just ask those crackers
when I was down in solitary
getting kicked. Only way they
know how to handle a brother
with a little wit.

The only things that concerns
me is what I'm going to do
at the end of this bid. It's not
like I wasted my time like
these droopy-eyed kids.

I got three ghetto stories
I gotta publish without a dime.
Donald Goines prose can't
even fuck with mine, and
besides, I got big plans for
that logo of mine. I can
envision the day I see
it on a clothing line.

But how a nigga like me
gon shine. About to be
released with No money
No clothing, No shelter ...
No semblance of a family
I can piece together.

I don't even qualify for
the fifty dollar gate money --
because I won twenty five
dollars during the holiday
spades tournament ...
ain't that funny.

They forcing me to hustle
for my bread ... Nigga, you heard
what I said, They forcing me to
hustle for my bread ...

Exhale

How I so Long to take a deep breath and just Roar
Cut through the snore
Cause even when you see, you ignore
The black man saying 'fuck being poor'
I'm past saying, 'ain't taking no more'.
Just Breathe, Just Roar.

There are Kings behind my closet doors
The black man was Mansa, Pharaoh, and King
Made in the image of the supreme being
Some cringe - but this isn't a reverse racism binge
Attempting to remove negativity of blacks from the social lens
Succumbing to oppression is the sin
And a violation of morality is forgetting where you have been.

At Olduvai tied on leaves of figs
In Northern Africa erected the pyramids
Constructed the Temple of Israel big
Then bowed to Alexander after we did a jig,

Out of Carthage followed Hannibal over high hills
For half a Millennium debated in Spain over new ideas
Survive the cotton fields and dangling heels
Only to still kneel
Knowledge we still yield
Remaining silent while we're still killed
Still restrained with steel.

And I Roar with arching back and clenched fist
Needing a towel for the mist
It was Mali, Timbuktu, and Ethiopia, the last time we were rich
Dirt we still pitched
But there was none of that Nigger shit
I need to sit
and take a deep breath.

Clean Slate

From whence derived
Black Morals, and Black Ethics
The Black rules and beliefs
I've respected?

Ancestors?
Family?
Fate?
Who inscribed
Our blank slate?

Who?
Mother
Mother's Mother
Mother's Mother Mother ...
Implications smother
A European origin
African American culture.

What if you discover
All you hold dear
Instilled with fear
Plantation overseer?

Religion
Superstitions
Traditions
Possibly imposed by
Slaveholding Christians.

"Sinners
In the Hands of an Angry God"
Or was it a lynch mob?
Commanding
Worship Idols, Covet, Murder, Rob.

When mother's mother ...
Disembarked
Jamestown Virginia
What was her
World Vision?

What was Her
Tradition
Morals
Ethics
Religion ...

What was Her Superstition?

One God
One Love
One People
One Mission ...

When we die we all go on living?

Did she study the dead
Enter their heads
Check facts from the books she read
Or did she accept what was said
Consume Colonial bread
Watershed?

Massa brought
Division
How to be
Good Christians.

Trained
Instilled
Taught
Conditioned.

What to Love
What to Hate
What is Crooked
What is Straight.

Time to escape
Make the psychological break
And erase that inscription
Off our Black Slate.

Kush

Get Away
Mysterious Magical place
Origin of my Race
Africa.

Away from Being
Judged by my Skin
Non-Chalanted, Non-Wanted, Taunted,
Viciously Hunted, Perception Blunted.

White Anglo Saxon Protestant ethics En-cultured
Competition, Materialism, Conservatism, Nurtured
Individual over Collective Achievement
A stranger's pain is No cause for bereavement.

Economic concept of scarcities
Influence sociological capacities
Superiority or Inferiority
Guess which has been attributed to the Minority?

World all Wrong
Thought 'No place like Home'
Land of Black Birth
Inflating my Worth.

Nubian Paranoiac Dynasties
King Tut's Ebony-figured relief
No Atheistic Beliefs
No iron-smelting finder's fee.

Full demonstration of Evolution
Oldest evidence of Technological Revolutions
Crop Cultivation, Animal Domestication
Land of the First Civilization.

Utopian image
Suspended
Divisions can't be mended
Reality's not reflecting in it.

Ideal of Bravery
Stands along-side Slavery
Feelings of Brother
Is met with Other.

Motherland, Original Man
Homo Sapien Sapien, Same Clan
White, Black, and Tan
Using the same gland to Brand.

No Safe Place
No get Away
Origin of Human Race
Africa.

African Religion and Philosophy

Are the Ancestors Proud?
History of the Bantu enveloped in shroud
Lost, Destroyed, or simply inaccessible
We are the ones negligible.

Tradition Gone
Orally instructed since using stones
House, Village, District, Kingdom, Empire
Prostrating and dusting before Sire.

African unborn, Living, and all those passed
Consciously grasped
Part of the Community
Everyone looking towards Zamani in unity.

Generations alive in their relatives' minds
Pleased ancestors interceding for mine
Only the Supreme God Endowed
Have you poured out you liquor and bowed?

Omnipotent Moulder worshipped
The rest are held in reverence
Borebore's Supreme
The rest are on the list of created things.

Beings, Spirits, and Divine Entities
Magic, Sorcery, and Rainmaking capabilities
Dance, Sex, and wearing Mask in the rituals
No concept of the individual.

Linguistics show Matrilineal descent
Capturing slaves in war was the intent
Initiation for Maturation
Male Circumcision, Female Castration.

African pathological gestations
Most profound acts of kindness, most debasing
Using the tools of colonization
Oppressed simply took the oppressors places.

No Africa
European constructed nations
No Dark Continent
Racist nonsense.

Ancestors not proud
History is unimportant now
Oppression splintering vision
Dividing religion and living.

Fragments of culture survive
Libations, braiding hair, believing loved ones still alive
Did Mom whisper the Bamtuti phrase 'Thank you for my child'
As she left a plate for the Supreme Being and Bowed?

Liberation

One day I looked in my cell mirror
and discovered I had an addictive personality.
The type when you get lost in something so good
You make it your reality.
Before this moment there was no duality
found myself saying yes
Even if it caused fatalities.
To forget about finalities
I develop different personalities
Believing I could survive occasional casualties
Gone was the Golden Rule
"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"
Gone was any ability to endure being blue
Gone were any feelings about you
Too busy looking out for myself.
You have to understand
For me it took a while to come to grips with Death.
The grief and anguish of losing loved ones
The inevitability of life's conclusion itself
When I found the courage to take a breath
and use poetry to really look inside myself
I liberated myself .
I discovered I had a story to tell
and that I could use poetry from my cell
To my brothers who also want to break through their egg shells
Use poetry to liberate your world
Even if there is no afterlife to which we are hurled
Use it whether we fade back to nothing or walk past pearls
Use it whether we become one with God
or the world.

Easter Recital
(3/31/13)

Mixed emotion
Birthday today
And most sacred holiday
Savior snatched the keys of death away
From the devil
Insurrection
Resurrection
Good triumphs over evil
Past themes echoed in poetry recitals on Easter.

Christian tradition
Psychological conditioning
Spring pastels
Southern belles
Delicious dishes
Hershey's kisses
Colored eggs
All for the blood the Savior shed
Sentenced to death because he challenged Western tradition
By equally distributing bread and fishes.

Last birthday here
Anniversary of incarceration in my 18th year
Sentenced to death
But I've been blessed
Reflection
Insurrection
Resurrection
Good triumphs over evil
Still that little boy reciting poetry on Easter.

Summa Cum Laude

My ignorance of the world
knows no bounds ... hounded
and bounded by a history
that fades into blackness
an empty vastness akin
to the space between the
stars ... the space between
Adam and God ...

My ignorance of the world
knows no bounds ... sounds
like an excuse ... by I defy
you to tell me the age
of domestic abuse ... or
objective truth?

My ignorance of the world
knows no bounds I tell you ...
why some live high on the hog
While I as a child
survived on chitlings,
collard greens and hog malls.

My ignorance of the world
knows no bounds ... how
the paradise of my young
life was built upon the backs
of those black slaves who
would later give my grand-
mother life.

My ignorance of the world
knows no bounds ... compounded
by the ignorance of my people
Compounded by the inability
to not see my mother, as friend,
wife, daughter, teenager, fetus.

My ignorance of the world
knows no bounds ... I thought
I could see what you see
hear what you hear
conclude what you conclude
not knowing that would make
me you.

My ignorance of the world
knows no bounds ... I believed
each seed was judged by its
own deeds ... the good
got a lot, the bad
deserved its lot, so how
is it I've been described
as being bad since
I slid from my Negro-
mother covered in snot?

My ignorance of the world
knew no bounds ... now my
boundary is the poetic line
meter, & metaphorical language
infused with rhyme and
rhythm.

Poetry contains symbolism
embodies objective truth ...
Einstein's hypothesis,
reality is only related to you.
So buried deep within my
poetic lines are the lessons
I learned during my time.

White Light
(Dedicated to all of my many teachers)

Near
Just off my fingertips
So close
Almost touch it
Grasping, reaching
 Longing
 Begging
Wondering how we stop
 The sun from setting.

White Light
Energy, waves, rays, photons
Vision because the atmosphere
 Shatters its weak bonds
Sapien Sapiens behaving as prisms
Bioluminescence organisms
Close your eyes
 Detect by listening
Peeking shrouds the beacon
Clouding the glistening jewel most are seeking.
Grasping, reaching
Snatched away lightening quick
 Leaving regrets as the sun sets.

Striving
Since sun rising
 Love
 Intimacy
Brief possession and Nirvana
Grasping, Claspings, Basking ...
 Forgetting
 Sun rising, Sun setting.

Noble Truth
(Some say the Holy Grail is a chalice
It is really embodied in individuals like Alice.
Dedicated to Alice Rossiter).

During
Every
Chapter of
My Life.

Especially
Through those
Solitary
Nights.

Someone
Shared
Their
Light.

Coincident?
Beneficent?
Fate or Not
Magnificent!

Factor
Statistical
Probability
of Love
Being sent.

When
Sick
Physically penned
Isolated
Will near spent.

No
Evidence
Supporting
Personal God
Myth.

Acknowledge
Being led down
Path of Right
And Soul being
Restored
A bit.

Encountered
Many
Shepherds
Patient
Compassionate.

Unprepared
When they were
Recalled
By the Elements
Or Management.

Denying it!
Not buying it!
Willing them to
Return
From where
They
Went.

Grieving ...
Too
Young and
Inexperienced
Too Separate
Myself from
Attachments.

Brighter Days

A Whirlwind filled with swirling debris
My center is the eye - with a wall of wind surrounding me
The rain that drenches my path
Is similar to the seasonal condensation that floods my past
I've caused many to seek shelter because of my wrath
Cause since birth I figured destruction's my only task.

But I'm cast astride - in mid-stride
By something so gentle - so benign
A high front with a radiant heat like sun rays
As part of me dies I find redemption in the blaze
With head still spinning I wonder is my mind crazed?
It seems I've existed so long in this daze.

I realize this bright light is burning away the haze
And the road I travel is no longer a maze
of course I'm amazed - that my turmoil has begun to fade
The water falling from my eye
Represents hope for brighter days

Black in Maine III
"Last Day"

Amused
Foolishly fearing
Bars were fused;
Confused?
One fifth of a century
Confined to a penitentiary.

Community Confinement officer
Warning me not to snooze--
On her authority
Or any illusions of superiority
Keep priorities straight.
Amused
Foolishly Fearing
When I'm following the rules.

Door buzzed open
Warily approaching the gate
Eyes darting right and left
Guard staring straight.
Amused
Foolishly fearing
Another ruse.

My Muse
And Louie
Awaiting in a VW Passat
Heart and open hatch-back
Labradoodle's tail wagging forth and back
Making room for my plastic sack.
Amused
Foolishly fearing
I'm violating the rules.

Goodbye
Razor wire
Armed guard in tower
Dorm adorned with flowers
Torment of counting hours
Work crews and prison blues.
Amused
Foolishly fearing
Leaving those dudes.

Cruise --
Up to Meeting-Brook
Where two bubbling brooks meet
An eternity of hours
Flowing endlessly
Becoming a Muse
Tranquility
No fear of the penitentiary harming me
Harmony
Close your eyes
Breathe Deep ...
Feel what it feels like to be free..

Gestalt

See Me
standing there
trapped in
perceptive flaw of
experience.

See Me
enthralled
worshipping
appearance.

See Me
caught
in illusion
of light
versus
dark.

See Me
concluded
that it's
bite
versus
bark.

See Me
swear oath
because I
was thinking
small.

See Me
not see you
not see us
not see
et all.

See Me
fail to
understand
man's
nature.

See Me
reject
trust
morals
ethics
neighbors.

See Me
conditioned
refusing
to request
favours.

See Me
drugged out
thugged out
masterminding
capers.

See Me
grieve
alone
confined
to suffer.

See Me
embrace
complete
stranger
of different
culture.

See Me
fasting
praising
higher
power
asking
forgiveness.

See Me
head
in a book
declaring
'I can dig this.'

See Me
pharaoh
mansa
prisoner
leader.

See Me
Buddha
Moses
Muhammad
Jesus.

See Me
introduced to
20 year old
nephews
and nieces.

See Me
look
in this metal
mirror seeing
you seeing in.

See Me
see you fail
to put together
all these
pieces
of
a
man.

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