



EDITORS
TISA BRYANT
&
ERNEST HARDY

War Diaries
Edited by Tisa Bryant & Ernest Hardy

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War Diaries

Tisa Bryant & Ernest Hardy, Editors

*With love for our young people and
in vigilance against homophobia and bullying,
we dedicate this book to*

Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover

April 17, 1997–April 6, 2009

‡

Jaheem Herrera

July 5, 1997–April 16, 2009

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Foreword

George Ayala & Vallerie Wagner

Our work against the AIDS pandemic can only be won at the cultural level. This is why cultural production organized around the social problem of HIV is so important. Cultural production opens space for us to make meaning of our situations, expose injustices, and craft solutions without having to constantly draw on empiricism to understand our truths. It also permits us to put sex and sexuality on the table for discussion—no hiding, no apologies. *War Diaries* is lyrical and unflinching as it reminds us about the relevance of our bodies. It makes sense that we might want to leave our bodies when under siege. But coming back to our bodies and to one another is crucial to our wellness. Advancements in HIV prevention and treatments, although welcome, cannot alone address the underlying drivers of the AIDS epidemic. Nor will they focus us on the social issues driving AIDS. No matter how quick or easy to administer they may appear to be, empirically derived HIV prevention efforts must not supplant the equally potent power of poetics, image making and storytelling. Empiricism and imagination are both necessary and should inform one other.

It is in this spirit that AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA) and the Global Forum on MSM and HIV (MSMGF) have partnered to present *War Diaries*. Editors Tisa Bryant and Ernest Hardy masterfully bring together a diverse range of poems, short stories and personal essays that lay bear the brutality of social oppression while tapping the resilience and beauty inherent among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people of the African diaspora. *War Diaries* is a complicated syncopation of voice, pain, and triumph that is the story of AIDS.

War Diaries is the fourth in APLA's ongoing series of publications by and for black LGBT folk. APLA has established a tradition of supporting cultural production in local (Los Angeles) and national (U.S.) communities most impacted by HIV. From digital photography to creative writing to outdoor media campaigns, APLA has remained committed to creating vehicles for allowing those most affected by AIDS to tell their stories. Increasingly we find ways to connect this local and national work to that of our colleagues around the globe. Thus working with the MSMGF is about strengthening this shared cultural production, increasing visibility and encouraging collective action with gay men of color in a time of expanding plague.

Foreword

In our common view it makes complete sense to launch *War Diaries* at the XVIII International AIDS Conference in Vienna, and more specifically at the fourth consecutive MSMGF Pre-Conference Event, given how rough 2010 has been for LGBT people worldwide. Same-gender loving men and women in Uganda faced the prospect of execution, visitors to a gay health clinic in Kenya were doused with gasoline, 16 activists were assassinated in the span of six months in Honduras, and roving death-squads tortured, murdered, and dismembered effeminate men in Iraq. In the United States, HIV incidence rates among black gay men continue to be among the highest in the entire world. And as Tisa and Ernest remind us in their thoughtful “Introduction” to *War Diaries*, Los Angeles was recently home to two particularly distressing murders of two prominent and older black gay male cultural workers.

These and other events—from Harlem to Atlanta, Memphis to Philadelphia, Baltimore to Oakland, as well as those occurring in Africa, Central America, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Western Europe too—constitute a pattern of global backsliding on human rights played out on the backs of LGBT people. And LGBT people who are young, living with HIV, or belong to ethnic minority and indigenous groups, shoulder a disproportionately high level of the burden, often as a result of class violence, colonial legacy, and/or religious fundamentalism.

Those of us working in the AIDS sector have a responsibility to denounce these atrocities as wrong, unacceptable and antithetical to public health. Moreover, those of us who are still lifting our pens, our paintbrushes, and our voices have a duty to connect the dots with and for others—to draw connections between the local and the global, especially since the stories and lessons shared here may resonate powerfully with those told by Zimbabwean, Palestinian, Jamaican, Indonesian, Nicaraguan, Belarusian, or Samoan queer activists. This is one of the reasons why works like *War Diaries* are so essential to contemporary AIDS discourses—they link us. They also call us to celebrate similarities and differences, our bodies and bravery, our ingenuity and generosity, our cunning and creativity. APLA and the MSMGF offer our deep gratitude to Ernest, Tisa and all of the talented *War Diaries* contributors for reminding us!

Introduction

Tisa Bryant & Ernest Hardy

We’re in a war. Our lives and those of our brothers and sisters (biological males and females; the surgically altered and psychically self-determining) are undervalued and under attack from every angle. This is true in our own homes, in our churches, in the streets, at our jobs, at school, in the voting booth. We are beaten, raped, disowned, and slaughtered by people we love and whom we thought loved us. We are beaten, raped, slaughtered and just plain old fucked with by people who don’t know us at all. The fact that this is not news to us does not make it less painful for us. We are disproportionately poor, disproportionately sick. We are the scapegoats residing in the interstices of race/sexuality/gender/class/religion/revolution, simultaneously the all-purpose boogeyman and invisible.

But we are visible to each other, seen in all our glory and confusion, love and risk, hilarity and drama. We are becoming increasingly visible to the world, not just as novelties or celebrities, but citizens of agency and promise. We live with a passion for living, despite and because of the historic immensity of the odds against our survival. *We go on.* Learning, growing, mourning and healing, agitating and educating. For this book, we asked for a check-in: where we at, as Black men and the people who love them, nearly thirty years since AIDS first devastated our communities and galvanized our commitment to robust living. What we got is *War Diaries*, a testament to the attentive, fierce love that survival demands, a praisesong for the lovers, the rocks, the ones who have kept us going, kept us woke, kept us sane, and a remembrance of all of our beloved who have passed before us. And, like any collection of writing, true to life, this book occurred in real time. Here, we chronicle the scope of what we endured during the year this book was being assembled.

On July 13, 2008, the badly decomposed body of Professor Lindon Barrett, 46, was found in his Long Beach, CA apartment. According to the coroner’s report, he’d been strangled with a shoelace and was dead several days by the time his body was discovered. The openly gay Barrett was acquainted with his accused murderer, Marlon Martinez, 20, though as of this writing the exact nature of their relationship has not been revealed,

nor has motive. Martinez was arrested driving the murdered Barrett's car; he has pled not guilty to the charges, and is set to stand trial. Keith Harris, a close friend and colleague of Lindon Barrett's, responded to the senselessness and shock of this tragedy by adding Barrett's voice to this volume as part of "In the Life on the Down Low." It is in this spirit of urgency and activism, of naming and knowing, that all of the contributors to *War Diaries* share their visions and their lessons with us, as correspondents and comrades, in dialogue with the workings of the world at large, and in close-up.

The seemingly harmless, gossipy Trinidadian vernacular of Rosamond S. King's poem, "Delroy an Glen in Tantie' Mout," *Yu ent hear bout Delroy in de washroom?/Which Delroy?/Delroy who does always look so sharp, like he mudda still mindin he?/Oh-ho! That Delroy!/Yu ent hear/bout Delroy in de washroom?* sets ironic comment to the news of Baltimore, MD resident Steven Parrish. Parrish, 18, was murdered May 29, 2008, by fellow Bloods gang members, Steven T. Hollis III, 18, and Juan L. Flythe, 17, who discovered a photo and text messages on Parrish's cell-phone that led them to believe he was gay. His assailants allegedly killed Parrish in order to protect the gang's rep before word could get out that they had a faggot on board.

On November 14, 2008, transgendered Black woman Latiesha Green, 22, was murdered as she sat in a car with her gay brother Mark Cannon, 18, outside a house party. Shortly after they pulled up, Dwight DeLee, 20, approached their car shouting obscenities to voice his disapproval of the siblings' sexualities, then went into the house and returned with a .22 rifle that he shot into the car. The bullet grazed Mark's arm but hit Latiesha in the chest. She was pronounced dead later that night.

On December 13, 2008, New Orleans police identified the bodies of friends Felix Pearson, 19; Kenneth Monroe, 27; and Darriel Wilson, 20, all of them gay. The trio had been shot in a house in the 7th Ward two days prior. One of them was dressed in women's clothing. The police believe the slain men knew their assailants.

The list goes on. And because we all contain multiple identities, our ways of seeing ourselves extend to the 28-year-old butch Latina lesbian, who on December 13, 2008 was gang-raped in Richmond, CA by Josue "Pato" Gonzalez, 21; Humberto Hernandez Salvador, 31; 16-year-old Darrell Hodges,

and an unidentified 15-year-old. Authorities think the survivor may have been singled out because of the rainbow flag gay pride bumper-sticker on her car. She was reportedly taunted with homophobic slurs while being repeatedly raped at gunpoint for 45 minutes. As of this writing, Gonzalez, Salvador, and Hodges have plead not guilty. The plea of the 15-year-old, who was held in juvenile detention, had not been released as of this writing. Our points of identification include Oscar Grant III, the 22-year-old Black man and father of a 4-year-old daughter who was shot in the back and killed on New Year's Day 2009 by Johannes Mehserle, 27, a BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) police officer—himself a brand new father at the time of the shooting. As of this writing, Mehserle will stand trial for murder.

But it just doesn't stop. January 2, 2010, Bennett "Ben" Bradley, Director of Audience Development, director and producer at the Fountain Theater in Los Angeles, was found stabbed to death in his apartment. Bradley was in the midst of rehearsals for the theater's production of *The Ballad of Emmett Till*, and being uncharacteristically late, was sought by his stage manager, who discovered his body. On January 5, 25-year-old Jose Fructuoso was arrested, charged with the crime, allegedly confessed, yet pleaded not guilty to murder. Though presumed to be lovers, no details of Bradley and Fructuoso's relationship, nor of the evidence that led police from Bradley's apartment to Fructuoso's, have been released. As of this writing, there has been no visible movement on the case since January 6, when the L.A. Attorney General's office announced \$1 million bail for Fructuoso, and intent to file a complaint with the Los Angeles Superior Court. With the exception of the Oscar Grant murder case, these acts of violence against our community have been underreported in the official news media, grief and outrage localized and silenced in the process, with slow to no discernible movement towards justice.

Kill mi! Wha?! André St. Clair Thompson's narrator questions his father in "My Penis: An Exhibition." If mi was in Jamaica still, yu would have somebody kill me? Yu really a say dat to yu pickney? Wha di fuck? Yu mean you couldn't do it yusef? That the youngest of our village, males under 30 years old, are so often either perpetrators or victims of violence among friends, neighbors, family, lovers, is a sobering fact that doesn't escape notice here, nor in the poems of Reginald Harris, Anton Nimblett,

and Deborah Richards, who gives us the title poem for this collection, “War Diaries,” and reminds us that *a brother is more than a Black man/with a problem/spread around/some are restless others solid*...Eyeing the other end of the spectrum, MR Daniels’ “Why I Needed You: Max Robinson (1939–1988)” draws out the silhouettes of uncles, fathers and big brothers who are missing yet still stand among us.

In late November 2008, the University of Toronto released a study whose conclusions are glaringly obvious to those of us in the life: “Gay men who are not considered sexually desirable are more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior...[and] that young, white, middle-class men are considered much more sexually desirable than men who are racial minorities, over 40 and poor.”¹

Spotlight the phrase “sexually desirable” and put the word “sexually” on ice. Re-work what’s left: *Folks who are not considered desirable are more likely to engage in risky behavior*. It’s old news, but it once again allows us to bring factors of racism, classism and homophobia to the table in a discussion of the causes of self-hate and self-destruction. It sets the stage for a conversation about the interconnectedness of depression, substance abuse, risky sex and general carelessness (taking less care, being less than careful) with self. See: G. Winston James’ poem, “Not a Condom in Sight.”

When Proposition 8, the California ballot measure to outlaw gay marriage, was passed by voters in the November 2008 election cycle, a large and very vocal segment of the white, queer, so-called-community used the blogosphere to unleash finger-pointing outrage whose anti-Black racism wasn’t in the least surprising to Black folks in the life (*twasn’t news at all*), but the velocity and vituperative nature of it was still outrageous. The tenacity with which so many official white, queer community gatekeepers continue to perpetuate the myth/lie that Black folk are the reason the measure passed, and the transparency of their need for a nigger to blame, has deepened racial schisms that are decades old in the LGBTQ rights movement and hundreds of years old in America. Unchecked, this poison can ooze for years to come. Progressive Black hetero allies and (crucially) Black folk who are also LGBTQ were all but ignored during the campaign as queer organizations that were working to defeat the measure dropped the ball on outreach, failing to co-create a shared message of equality with diverse communities. We were ignored or demonized alongside

¹ “Undesirable Gay Men Have Riskier Sex,” United Press International; Toronto, November 28, 2008.

our hetero brothers and sisters when the ballot measure passed. *No one is surprised. All seem comfortable with/our mocking, pray this Tom Thumb dress-up/and pretend will purge us of the thing they fear,/both of us too quiet, different, strange*...(Reginald Harris, “Dream of My Cousin’s Wedding”).

Fortunately, violence and derision towards us are not the sole unifying factors of our Black queer diaspora. There’s plenty of desire and love in this world, and laughter, the joy of bringing pleasure to each other, conjuring other horizons and higher planes. Along with poems from G. Winston James and Reginald Harris, there’s visual art, images that see us alive, mischievous, hot. From the stippled inks of Stevan Gaskill, to Derek Jackson’s photograph gracing the cover, these works are texts unto themselves, lyrical and loaded. There’s something sweet for the eye and for the heart, a moment to catch our breath and contemplate beauty, magic, grace and strength.

Because the thing is, we are a resilient people. We are descended from fighters, and there is fight in us still. You see it in the blogosphere where Black gay and lesbian activists/leaders/thinkers like Rod McCullum, Keith Boykin and Pam Spaulding hold outspoken court on the deeply entwined issues of culture and politics. You see it elsewhere on the internet, where outlets like YouTube showcase the fierce third-wind of Ball culture as it morphs (absorbing and reconfiguring hip-hop culture and high fashion edicts) and vogues into the future. It’s there in academia, where the presence of colored LGBTQ instructors and the unbound scholarship by and about LGBTQ folks of color have grown (and are growing) by leaps and bounds. Settle between the cultural bookends of cyber-communications and the ivory-tower, and you find yourself in the worlds of cinema, recorded music and the written word. In 2008, two of modern R&B’s most innovative men, Rahsaan Patterson and Donnie, came out of the closet as gay. Then there are the powerful cinematic poetics being written — ranging from Julian Breece’s 2009 Sundance Film Festival short film “The Young and Evil” (about one Black gay boy’s tortured quest to become HIV-positive), to *Precious*, openly gay director Lee Daniels’ critically acclaimed adaptation of Sapphire’s novel *Push*, to the much-awaited 2008 DVD release of *The Early Works of Cheryl Dunye*, the trailblazing experimental short films by lesbian filmmaker Dunye, who also began work on her film *The Owls*, from a script by novelist/playwright/culture critic Sarah Schulman. And Black LGBTQ publishing houses are in the midst of a vital rebirth, tapping into

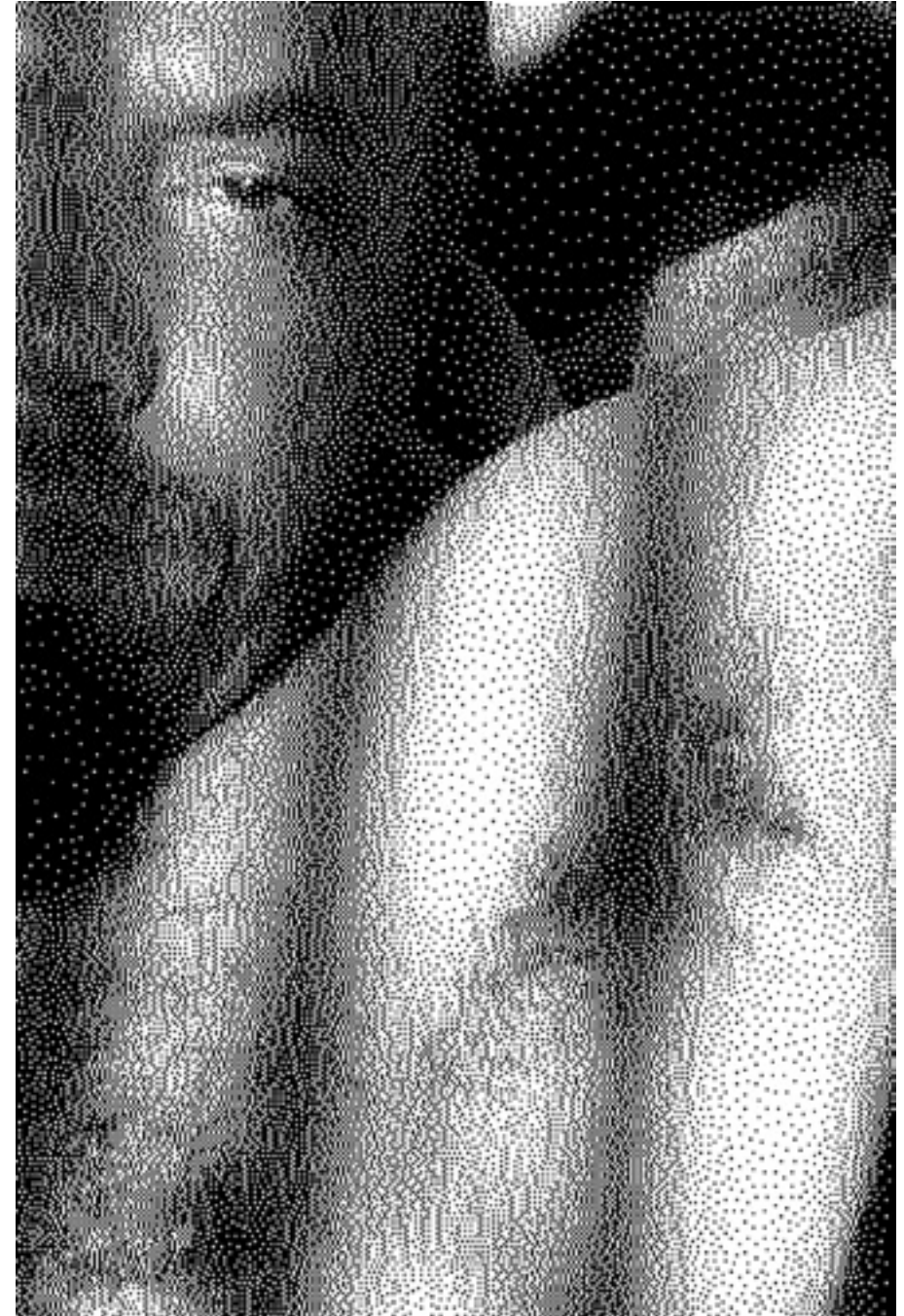
Introduction

a renaissance of poets, novelists, and thinkers. As old political, cultural and financial foundations and mindsets crumble, as the collective psyche is rewired, new voices — new energies and perspectives — come seeping through the cracks. Time is right for a revolution of mind and being.

Then there is the fact of Barack Obama's presidency. Though he is clearly not the Lord-have-mercy-savior that so many thought (and think) him to be, the true value of America's first Black president might simply be in the fact of his election. After eight demoralizing and debilitating Bush/Cheney/Rove years, Obama's garnering of the highest political office in the country jumpstarted in many folks a sense of urgency and possibility — even if that translates into vehement disagreement with some of the President's policies and actions.

Still, there are undoubtedly very difficult days ahead. Perhaps the greatest external tie that binds LGBTQ folk of color to our hetero brethren and sistren of all hues and orientations is the global economic crisis that broke in late 2008 and is still wreaking widespread and far-ranging havoc. Mainstream media and politicians call it a deep "recession." Black folks know this shit is a depression, with domino effects playing out in destabilized local economies and devastated neighborhoods, in skyrocketing unemployment rates, in gentrification that is fueled in part by mass exoduses from Black neighborhoods as folks seek jobs and affordable housing. And by a general sense of unease and uncertainty. Once again, the Negro is the canary in the coalmine. But this is nothing new for us. History lets us know that we can and will survive all of this.

The conversation between contributors in *War Diaries'* collection of poems, short stories, personal essays, images and reportage is threaded with insights and ruminations on many dark, painful issues. But because we — Black folk who are in the life — are so much more than a cataloging of our wounds and despair, the conversation is also full of joy and resistance. We play with language and concepts. We console, challenge and confirm. These writers are all extraordinary talents who delivered extraordinary work. It's work that not only documents this difficult, demanding, often depressing but potential-filled moment in which we live, but also serves to remind us of the beauty, resourcefulness, and depth of spirit of us. It's a celebration of warriors.



Stevan F. Gaskill, *Staring at Myself*, Digital photograph, 318 x 476 pixels (original), 8/15/07

Dream of My Cousin's Wedding
Reginald Harris

for Troy Hutton

We walk down the aisle together, he and I,
holding hands, shaking with held-in giggles:
too serious at thirteen, I am the man atop
the wedding cake come alive with blown-out
Afro and clip-on tie beside a cloud of gauze
and lace, my cousin, billowing, veil hiding
the thin hairs of his first mustache.
No one is surprised. All seem comfortable with
our mocking, pray this Tom Thumb dress-up
and pretend will purge us of the thing they fear,
both of us too quiet, different, strange — they have
suspicions, other names lying in wait to hang
on our thin shoulders if we do not reform, repent,
'grow out of it.'
High on Communion wine transformed
into grape juice, we race to fly out of this
church, those clothes, that small town,
into cities, adulthood, our true names.
Seal our vows of escape with a stolen kiss.

Upon Hearing Leontyne Price on the United Negro College Fund Commercial

Kevin Simmonds

Between ages 8 and 10, I ignored the boys who called me sissy,
sang loudly in an operatic voice all the commercials,
the theme from *Good Times*,
Donna Summer, too.
But my spine lengthened the night I heard
the black fan of your voice open
on primetime.
Turbaned goddess of my Zenith,
the way God struck the anvil of your soprano
when you rang
We're not asking for a handout, just a hand!

To The Mother Of My Openly Gay High School Student:

Anton Nimblett

Three or four boys—
Maybe straight boys—
Three or four white boys
Lure one gay black man to the
Dark edge of Brooklyn.

You are afraid.
But all you show is disgust.

You hear descriptions of
A desolate parking lot—
Gay pickup spot.
And you fill in details of
Sodom in the shadows.

All you show is disgust,
When your son walks in the door:

See how them people are—you say.
Off in some god-forsaken place
doing nastiness.
Is that what you want to be?
Want to do with your life?

Your son just barely in the door
You make him want to flee.

Never mind the three or four boys,
Three or four, the DA hasn't decided yet.
Who chase a 5'6", 145 lb. black man into traffic.
Never mind what they want to be,
To do with their lives.

To The Mother

None of those three or four boys is your son.
I understand.

You look at the News and see your son —
Not the chaser, but the chased.
A lone, 145 lb. black boy.
Not hunter, but prey.
You don't want him chased into traffic.

I understand. He is your son.
Your son walks in the door,
And still you see him running in traffic.

But don't make his life worse
Because you want it to be better.
Don't ask him to change his walk,
Force him to change his clothes.
Don't bind his hands if they gesture large,

Your angry words won't keep him out of traffic.
Screams won't make him straight.

Remember the first time he walked.
You didn't judge the unsteadiness of his gait then.
You enjoyed each shaky step.
Remember his first words.
You didn't examine inflection, critique cadence.
You celebrated.

He is your son.
Remember when you celebrated.

Look past the disgust
And find the fear,
Follow fear to true concern,
Tunnel down to your love. Please.
Make him feel safer at home than in the streets.

Nimblett

He is your son.
Don't let him run to god-forsaken places.

Believe with him that on his twenty-ninth birthday
He will have a safe home of his own
Filled with what he needs —
Dinners and breakfasts,
Fights and make-ups,
Rice and peas and champagne and caviar.

Don't let him run to god-forsaken places, to dark edges.
Help him carve a brighter path.

Let family call and friends drop by.
Let there be love so he won't have to chase it
along dark digital paths that lead to the ones who truly hate.
Let there be a man who loves him.
Like you love his father.

I understand. He is your son.
Your son walks in the door,
Celebrate. He is your son.

Until the father

Kevin Simmonds

Until the father
stops insisting the son fuck
any woman
to cure perversion
the son will crave
every mound
of a Japanese man's body smooth
as baby's teeth,
believing that man's smile
almost the same
as the father's hand warm
on the son's neck
brushing something away.

Eulogy

Kevin Simmonds

But the iron thing they carried, I will not carry.
—Mary Oliver

Silence entered me
by way of my mother.
But it finishes here.

I speak,
am first to believe light lovely
upon my face.

Whatever madness exists,
exists, too, in the capillaries
and they are long in me,
the length of their gratitude carries
deliberately life.

I will not be numb.

Before the anchor,
the hemispheres of my body
will be known to me,

as if in Eden,
before its close.

Basketball

Kevin Simmonds

I've played only once,
which is unnatural, really.
The lesson in it
being so natural.

For when you're caught and can't
— for the life of you —
make it,
you look for an open man
to pass your load.

All that air.

With just a ball as excuse,
I could join the machinery of bodies
feeding a bottomless vowel,
and dangling from it,
the only net I know
made to let go.

Diary in a Dissertation

Ronaldo V. Wilson

The fish

Squid, when jigged, and pulled out of the water, blast their ink into the sky. After being devoured or maybe after escaping (the eye cannot tell escape from striped bass eating squid) their ink underwater appears orange, threads. The light from the dock's lamps make the bay look green. Something deep is cutting below. Such is the case of a friendship bound by the pull of addiction, each leaning to whatever it takes to fill. So how do I return to what I want to say: What were the shooters trying to erase — what were they trying to fill? [TXT: *Have a great run. It's beautiful out.*]¹ This is the case, when the body runs, moves across an abandoned plantation field to days of road and sun, to see a pink fat fag in D&G hater-blockers, or a fag in pink, or a fat pink fag in brown VANZ — what's the difference: belt/stripes/shoe/belt/line? It's all in the voice, what it measures, and how the body sets an argument. My addiction, as in finding myself on my knees on the Route 91 rest stop = the “dead nigger” Hilton Als sees and I see, too, in *Without Sanctuary*², roped to a tree and looking up from his knees, mouth and eyes bulleted into oblivion. *Lemme have it*. I am thinking of two things: how do I make the case that the visual field Barthes describes, the layering of two nuns juxtaposed against riflemen in Nicaragua is as central as the locus I have been tending, a black body riddled with bullets, a sheaf of white streaks in sepia, trying to think about Als' slowing down time by way of imagining the family who returned, to “cut Mother or Cousin Down.”³

The Waiting Room

In the dream, I recall looking down at a list of words that are blown up to size 14 font, that are 'posed to be poems. I have cut contact with my friends,

¹ Text message from the painter Rob Nadeau, Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, June 2008.

² Hilton Als. *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. Ed. James Allen (Santa Fe: Twin Palm Publishers, 2000) 39.

³ *Ibid.* 43.

especially my black ones; and at the heart of my project is to make sense of what it means to be a fragmented black, or to refigure the fragments while breaking apart, as in, dragged, pinched, probed, bulletted. On July 1st, 2008, a giant black woman lay dying on a floor in the Kings County Hospital. Dallas says she was there for 24 hours. Her body lay stretched out, her head and top torso stuck under the immobile seats. Steel Seat Brackets as Arms of Death, I say. The reporter with surveillance video to prove it points out: *here, her body is convulsing, and here, she is dying*. What this has to do with my dissertation is that I need to make the final push. My dad is losing his memory. He does not remember much from the day before, as if every day is new, and each one behind, never happened. In a dream, I am swimming in the ocean — I am not sure where Dallas is, but he is close. There are military helicopters that are painted in camouflage green that first fly above, then they circle around; then they become submarines, vibrating the water I cannot escape. Psychic Powers: The next morning, from T.V., I learn there are dolphins trapped in some river in New Jersey. The state, if needed, decides they may herd the animals back to the ocean with sonar from boats circling around and with choppers, startling them from above.

Difference

When the gum on the white tile has turned black, splotches flat and hard as rock, the world is a panorama of porn. The video booth doors open to cars, some to grease on the face, long flat hair, shaved heads, clits and tongues, and of course thick cocks that fill screen after screen. In a void: Everything is working except what needs to be worked on. What needs to be assembled are the pieces of the plate that broke over the head of a boy in Florida who is forced to participate in the gang rape of his mother. Black, twelve, a pre-teen, 10, 15, at large, 2 caught, then 3, a 4th by DNA from a spent condom. A black mother and her son walk a mile, until a hospital, two hours after the attack. The boys poured cleaning supply in his eyes: Was it bleach, Pine Sol? I find ammonia and soap stuffed in her. They were going to burn them, but they couldn't find a lighter. The sun has not come out for a day, and driving in rain with G.P.S. is easy, because the rain does not matter as much as the blue display which reveals how big and complicated it is becoming to sort between the questions: What were

the shooters trying to erase? What were the rapists trying to rape? The speaker in the project tries to say something. Maybe that is the point, the body never really having a chance at being human, rendered, read, filled and filled, and we fill and fill, and those boys how many, twelve, fourteen, "They hit him and made him do stuff," the woman's brother said, "and when he didn't do it, they made his mom do stuff."⁴ The couches are big and thick, some brown, red, some leather. In this room, there are men who look lost, who are as lost as trying to arrange this loss, as lost as the one at the door, who won't let his pants fall. Or another who says, *you missed it* when he came in a small, silent fountain that pierced the porno-light. Covered by a soft body: What the speaker wants to say: *Move*, but says, *Daddy*—Facsimile—The mother is an immigrant. She was not from there. She went to church. Her son was *good*, the neighbors said.

⁴ Dwayne Robinson. "Victims' Family Reveals Some Gruesome Details of Attack" *Palm Beach Post*. 8 July 2007 <<http://www.palmbeachpost.com/archives/content/archives/index.html>>.

SHOTGUN

Reginald Harris

In school, the only time the frat boys got close
to each other was when they were Getting High.
One would take a toke off a doobie, Hold
the sweet sharp smoke in puffed out cheeks
until another leaned in and the first blew it
into him, the two separated only by a gauzy line
sensimilla.

And what was I, young gay boy in the making,
to make of this? They who'd talk of 'steers and queers'
from Texas, of who among their enemies was 'more homo'
than the rest, repeated brags of female conquests on
and off campus, would then on long, party filled week-
ends meet in darkened rooms to do this. By day the most
unimpeachable of Gay-bashing heterosexuals, by weed transformed:

just guys together leaning close, closer, almost kissing,
sharing an intoxicating fire between pairs of pursed, straight-acting lips.

War Diaries (loose leaf)

Deborah Richards

5 quick you are well, but weary

a brother is more than a black man
with a problem
spread around
some are restless others solid
others in uproar some live long and prosper
a brother can break
awkwardly

13 "the vague hushes"

MIA #1

maybe it was our fault he was hung out to dry
he was always a break neck from danger
now brought down to earth

when he stood his ground our nerves jarred

15 near the brink

MIA #2

there is war around here

20 you need to loiter a little

your
beauty's ever nearer
our memories are strained and jangling

25 tenderly caught and saved

he is here
his skin somewhat beautiful
cut across and open
is a sight
we see more of him than before
it's still unbelievable

exquisite face

31 why nothing exhausts but sympathy

what is not there could
be off the edge
a brother is at odds
virtually
wet warm and bloody
sometimes

Note: "Appendix to The Anniad: leaves from a loose-leaf war diary" by Gwendolyn Brooks is a starting point for this poem.

Why I Needed You: Max Robinson (1939–1988)

MR Daniel

*We need you
We need you
We need you*

Very difficult to sing that song you know, but it is true. All the brothers, all the uncles, grandpas, nephews. You are so necessary to us. Women are strong and very capable. We can do anything—really we can. But there is a left and a right, a yin and a yang, an up and a down, a dark and a light. Need that balance, you know what I'm saying?

— Jill Scott on "The Fact Is (I Need You)" *Live In Paris+* (2008)

My memory is porous, but its edges bend with brilliant pigments. The 1970s. My childhood still in single digits. My mother's close friend became the last wife of the first black national broadcast news anchor. Max Robinson. We visited them, staying in their plush home. Max had children from his other marriages. I never met any of them. Until his new wife had a baby, I was the only child among adults. They would forget I was there. Except Max. He talked to me as though I was someone in particular, as though I was quietly taking it all in — which I was. I had learned to be quiet. To listen as if the quality of my life depended on it — which it usually did.

I can still hear
your mellifluous voice resonant on some visceral level. A tale about elegantly falling down stairs drunk.

When Max talked to me I never felt underestimated. You understand? A bright little black kid. In my case a little black girl. Adults underestimate what your intelligence means, where it lives inside you. Black adults see you as full of promise. They hold you to that — like on the other side, under the caul, you gave your word to be blessed and productive, make a contribution, achieve, uplift the race, etc. Max lived that promise. Contemporary bios say he never felt worthy of the accolades he received, never felt as though he had succeeded enough. I didn't know any of that then. Yet I could recognize the aura of pressure.

Can still recall
a graceful yet firm wrist, framed by a heavy gold chain bracelet.

I grew up next to Boston, Massachusetts. All the black folks I knew bore that aura. An energy field produced by molecules working past full capacity; imagine cells (kidney, blood, brain, bone marrow) never ever truly at a plateau of ease. Many came to Boston for degrees and time: imprimaturs and initials of certification from universities and businesses of certain pedigree. They kept their eyes on the prize. Braved that particular New England racism for the minimum required time, and then lit out on the fastest thing leaving. Returning or relocating to a place they could imagine calling home.

Who, why, where?

Max was bestowed the nickname “loose-lips” by *the media* — his professional home. The WWII “loose-lips (sink ships)” moniker suggests he thoughtlessly and foolishly ran his mouth, when the advised decision would have been to keep it shut. Max made a conscious choice to speak against racism in news media. Arguably, he took a bullet for those who came after. That and his drinking during commercial breaks, moodiness, depression, absences, and a reputation for verbally excoriating his white colleagues was his career’s undoing. Speaking up on issues of race, and his active mentoring undeniably helped the next generation, but the self-destructive elements of his behavior likely too had a downside for those same young black broadcasters who came behind him. Not only in the scrutiny they underwent, but perhaps also in their fear of following the same self-destructive path.

Later still, knowing. 1980s.

Still, I never heard any black journalist say a negative word about Max until around 1983 when I was staying with my mother’s crazy friend C. who was having a gathering of friends; some journalists. By now Max and my mother’s friend had divorced. In the kitchen I overheard the guests. Talking. Gossiping. About Max. Chuckling. A comment about going to Max’s home and being greeted by a “houseboy.” A few guffaws. Another comment: “who does he think he’s fooling?”

Can still see
a nutmeg-chocolate ribbed turtleneck, and tailored, ginger-powder colored slacks, smoothly casual — with a sober dancer’s suave movement down those same stairs. When allowed to purchase my own clothes I wore a similar outfit, sometimes looking like a boy in cornrows, and other times with silver eye-shadow, Bonnie Bell glossed lips, wedged heels, and iron-steamed curls trying to emulate until I realized, despite my boy-hips, I couldn’t wear it as you did.

What to make of that? Confusion. Sadness if Max was in hiding. Questioning if the “houseboy” wasn’t just that? Anger at their glee in his supposed Achilles’ heel — closet punk. Frustrated pride that *I* knew his value, even if they couldn’t perceive it: Faggot ≠ black man of worth.

You painted
mainly portraits I believe, of people you loved: your children. None of the biographies talk about that, or how James Earl Jones bought one of them to impress a woman he was seeing.

I knew Max had AIDS before he died. I knew it wasn’t public knowledge. He also didn’t disclose the avenue of his infection. But he might not have known: alcohol-induced blackouts effectively silence parts of a life.

I wanted to make him a quilt square in the early years of the AIDS Quilt. But I didn’t. I couldn’t imagine making something adequate: partially I didn’t feel I had the right (I wasn’t family); and in retrospect, I didn’t want to let him go. I don’t know if it matters what his sexuality was. If he was gay or bisexual, but couldn’t claim it and/or couldn’t allow his desires breath unless stone drunk, I’m ambivalent about superimposing either identity on him now. I’d rather be challenged, emboldened, and inspired by his complex black masculinity. Seeing him curse out a producer on a youtube.com pre-show satellite feed shows him as diva, righteously incensed orator, dandy, formidably exacting professional, masculine, impeccably tailored and coiffed clotheshorse, troubled, high-strung yet eloquent elocutionist, beautiful and profoundly a black man. He could simultaneously inhabit the postures of pretty-man and bad-ass muthafucker, if those even need to be placed in opposition or figured as dualities.

Why I Needed You

He was a pioneer yes, but for me he was a father-figure who saw me fully — and the way in which he did so was a precious, not dangerous, thing. My own family was flawed enough that his ability to do so, even with the tales of his blackout drunks and flashes of anger, led me to love him, his warmth, brilliance, complexity, and style, and I was proud to do so. Perhaps he recognized (and resonated with) the impending gender complexities of my black childhood and adolescence. Max reflected back to me what he saw of me: even though just a child, *fully* a person of value. I wish he had known that for himself.

The best of you is what I held/hold to for my dream of an uncle, a brother, a nephew, a grandfather, a father.

Delroy an Glen in Tantie' Mout Rosamond S. King

Yu ent hear bout Delroy in de washroom?
Which Delroy?

Delroy who does always look so sharp, like
he mudda still mindin he?

Oh-ho! *That* Delroy!

Yes! Yu ent hear
bout Delroy an de washroom?
Lemme tell it!

Delroy get caught in de washroom by he wuk —
wit a man!

A man!?

A *man*, gyul! Well, yu know dey did
hav to let he go!

I know! But who he was in dere wit?

Me eh know dat, but I hope he does glove dat ting
before he shove dat ting!

Yes, papa-ya! Is how big men want
fuh stick dey ting in evry hole an don
want to covah it!

Is all kind a ting you could catch dese days!

Take Glen! He one a dem bulla from long time,
proclaimin heself like de gospel, an look wha he catch.

But Glen an dis AIDS ting is a ole, ole, story!

He mus be de *fust* Caribbean man to catch AIDS —

And he wouldn't dead!

Glenroy wouldn't dead yet!

Is wha keepin him on dis earth so? He feel he
mus remind we of something?

An wha business he have here? Plenty o dem catch de
ting after him an dead before him.

Some people does have de
decency to go an dead quietly.

But Glen wouldn't dead — an he wouldn't be quiet!

Delroy an Glen in Tantie' Mout

Always in de paper or on de tv talkin bout gay dis
or HIV prevention dat.

Some people does keep dey nastiness to deyself,
but he wouldn't do dat neither!

Eh-hey! Half de bulla in dis country
people does know wha dey do. But yu eh know
who dey doin it wit, neither where. Dey have
decency, I tellin yu!

But wha wrong wit yu? Yu eh read de papers?
Is not only bulla get AIDS, yu know? How yu tink
Elsie get struck down so young?

Dat was too sad, gyul. She leave
two chirren and die. De husban
still chasin all kind o tail!

Me eh know *what* dis country comin to!

Hmm! But yu know,
leavin de nastiness to de side,
Glenroy does talk some sense.
Ah mean — if is tail yu chasin

Whichever kind o tail!

Listen to me nuh! If is tail yu chasin,
yu best protect yuhself!

Yu on soapbox talkin free sex now?

Is how long yu know me?

Too long! Anyhow, who go listen to Glen?

Nobody doh want to stare death in he face!

Is true. Time fuh somebody else
to speak dat truth.

In the life on the down low: where's a black gay man to go?

Keith M. Harris

This essay is a provocation, an experiment in rhetoric, and, by all means, at this point, it is a work in progress.

In 1986, the anthology, *In the Life*, edited by Joseph Beam was released. This anthology was subtitled, *Writings by Black Gay Men*, and served to launch, in retrospect, a black gay renaissance. *In the Life* introduced the young, curious, somewhat clandestine audience to some voices that resonated throughout the late '80s and into the '90s, voices like Essex Hemphill, Craig Harris, Blackberri, Donald Woods, Assotto Saint or already heard voices like Melvin Dixon and Samuel Delaney. Some never heard before and some never heard again.

Beam's anthology emerged when Gay Related Immune Deficiency (G.R.I.D.) had fast become the AIDS crisis and was both perceived and received as white, back when ACT-UP had to be integrated. *In the Life* was dedicated to those who were "in the life," a community identity in which men, specifically black gay men, or homosexuals, were known as such, lived as such, and contributed to the communities at large as such. These men had devised ways, albeit not easy ways, in which their sexual identity was acknowledged, respected for what it was because it was about community, because if one were "in the life," one was in a community. Now understand that this descriptor, "in the life," was not a negation, perhaps a self-segregation, but not a negation. By this, I mean that the dialog of being in the life was not with whiteness, in opposition to or negation of "gay," as much as it was in dialog with black communities. Being in the life signified a collectivity, a subtle way to unquiet sex and life practices kept quiet by larger community strictures, kept quiet for the sake of survival. In the late '80s/early '90s climate of *In the Life*, work like the anthology of poetry, edited by Assotto Saint, entitled *The Road Before Us*, the anthologies *Tongues Untied* and *Brother to Brother*, the journal *Another Country* or the video poetry of Marlon Riggs, or the stories of Randall Kenan, or more work of Hemphill or Melvin Dixon appears voicing a timeliness, an urgency in the need to be heard,

an urgency in the need for community acceptance and an urgency in the need for cultural and community action, because most of these men would be dead by 1995.

In August of 2003, "Double lives on the down low" appears in the *New York Times Magazine*, but first, I want to look at the "in between" of 1986 and 2003, between *In the Life* and the publication of "Double Lives on the Down Low":

Crack has a pop cultural black face by 1986
Rockefeller drug laws bring it home
and the levels of incarceration among black folk
reaches new highs

Easy E
Arthur Ashe
Max Robinson
Patrick Kelly
Willi Smith
die from complications
due to AIDS
Magic Johnson reveals his HIV status

Pam Grier is back and "better than ever"
Thelma Golden scores twice
Will Smith does not kiss the white boy
in *Six Degrees of Separation*,
on the advice of Denzel
The Cosby Show delimits the black televisual future
New Black Cinema and the hood film rise and kill each other
Spike Lee's *She Gotta Have It* to *Bamboozled* become
the markers of a generation
Eddie Murphy and Martin Lawrence and Wesley Snipes get paid for
doing drag
Issac Julien looks for Langston and gives us a queer look with *Young Soul Rebels*
Marlon Riggs, Marlon Riggs
Paris burned, we cried for Venus, and then we laughed

Spin City and *Six Feet Under* have black, gay characters
HBO becomes the site of the visualization
of sex, sexual difference and indifference
but let's not forget Mapplethorpe
and what he did to us
Papa Bush's "Man in a Leisure Suit" was Willie Horton
We went digital but the cops were still analog:
Rodney King, over and over again
Time magazine's was O.J. Simpson
who we should have seen coming
following Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas and
that damned high tech lynching
with desktop publishing
the zines, *Thing*, out of Chicago, and *BLK*, out of LA,
let us know what was going on in black gay communities
and a Million Black Men
march on Washington
Pan Africanism goes Diasporic
and who can forget House music
and the arrival on these shores of dance hall
Oprah builds an empire
and the 2000 census told us that
the black population was shrinking:
I came out during the time of "the endangered black man,"
the speciation of race and gender
in the statistics of death and incarceration
RuPaul, oddly enough, introduced me to Zen
there was that brief moment in NY when
men wore skirts
Brad Pitt appears on the cover of *Vanity Fair*
in a sequined cocktail dress
Nixon
Reagan
Jackie O
are finally put to rest
Toni Morrison wins the Nobel Peace Prize
Meshell Ndegeocello asked for peace beyond passion
and in a familiar fashion there was a marked migration

pattern of black folk from the north to the south
 Jesse ran twice and Clinton was the first
 black president
 hip hop diversified and commodified
 Tupac
 Biggie
 Pat Parker
 Audre Lorde
 June Jordan and
 Barbara Christian
 they all die

Prince became a slave
 transmogrified into a symbol
 and Michael Jackson became our problem
 Jeffrey Dahmer ate white hustlers, Latinos, black men,
 and two Laotian boys
 memory will never serve that correct
 Dinkins tells us that the melting pot
 is a mosaic
 New York crumbles and burns, like something out of the movies, with
 faces of the dead and missing plastered on the subway walls
 from Chambers Street, all the way to Penn Station
 Baby Bush turns on his constituency, friends and the world
 the talented tenth becomes home
 for the new black public intellectual
 Apartheid ends
 Georgia enforces its long forgotten sodomy laws
 Abner Louima is sodomized by the law
 Amadou Diallo mis-interpellates and reaches for his id
 Halle Berry
 and Denzel Washington
 win best actress and best actor
 at the Academy
 this is just a sample
 a few of the things that happened
 between 1986 and 2003

I give this rough and ready sampling to demonstrate that there were things — some good, some bad, some indifferent — happening at the end of the long century and the beginning of the new millennium. Black folk, we were as always, in our given cultural, national state of being, in the field of vision, as it were, still operating in the visual poles of endangerment and entertainment. What is of interest to me is that in this quick summary, we see, particularly in the late '80s and early '90s, a visual cultural presence of black gay men that arguably does not exist anymore. Part of the reason for this, as I mentioned earlier, is that two generations of black gay men, mine and the one before me, have been decimated by AIDS. Another reason may be that in the political climate of the gay and lesbian movement, with its heterosexualization of homosexuality in domesticity, domestic partnership, the language and imagery of marriage, family and equality — black gay men cannot be representative. By this I mean that when we think of the visual rhetoric of things like gay marriage, gay families and partnerships, the legacies of the endangered black man, the always-already-dysfunctional black family, these things disallow the articulation of gay black men, coupled or not, as the gay and lesbian neo-liberal norm.

Another reason for this decrease in visual presence may have to do with black men's entrée into the men's movement in the 90s, most representative in the Million Man March. Both the political and visual rhetoric of the march were straight (though arguably not intentionally or exclusively straight), but inevitably in the religiosity and spirituality of the Million Man March, men's movements, etc., again, the black gay male as image is disallowed, unable to signify within the political agenda of "unity, atonement and brotherhood." And the religiosity of black folk, perhaps in response to the AIDS crisis, perhaps in the recuperation of black masculinity as family responsibility, has no place for black gay men like me. It is in this miasma of presence, absence, and permission that the communitarian, cultural production of the "in the life" identity is lost and the down low rises.

In August of 2003, I sat in my kitchen reading my email, sifting through any number of forwarded emails containing this exposé. I did not read the article for a number of days. I was familiar with the "down low," with being on the down low, this identity of discretion, privacy, and secrecy,

as is often self-described. I remember it first came to my attention with internet and chat rooms in the mid-90s. I would find myself in chat rooms, speaking to black men talking about being on the down low, and when I would ask, “What is ‘on the down low,’” rightfully so the response would be, “If you don’t know, then you’re not on the down low.” I, therefore, had no involvement with it, which is not to say that I have no involvement with black men who did not identify as gay or that I was always willing to be a black man that identified as gay. However, I had no interest in reading this article because I had been out since I was twenty, and very simply, at forty, I really did not have the time or energy to deal with it.

But then my mother asked me about it. And she asked me about it because she read it as being about gay men (and also because the article begins with the discussion of men on the “down low” living in Cleveland, and I had just moved to Ohio). So I read it. And I followed it on the news. I watched J.L. King, the author of the bestselling exposé, *On the Down Low: A Journey into the Lives of “Straight” Black Men Who Sleep with Men*, watched him on Oprah and CNN and became increasingly infuriated by the willful participation, willful life and living of these black men in the discursive (and at this point typical, if not traditional) space of the pathological. Gone was the passionate, political, progressive poetry of black gay men and the black gay renaissance; instead we have the language of ethnography in an article like “Double Lives on the Down Low” or the contradictory, often times confusing, faux jeremiad, faux journey of self discovery, return and redemption found in J. L. King, saying things like:

DL men cannot and will not be associated with anything that would raise questions about his [sic] sexuality. They will not say they are gay, because those three little letters evoke so much fear. Those three letters have them afraid of being ostracized by their community, by their church, by their family. If they tell the truth and say they’re gay or bisexual, they will be called a ‘fag.’ That’s the worst word you can call a black man. When a man is called a fag, it hurts. It basically strips away his manhood (21-22).

King is disingenuous at best. What is basically received from this description is an identity of denial, admittedly, but also one of victimicity, deliberate victimicity, and intractable pathology. Furthermore, King’s DL

is positioned quite violently in opposition to other men, other black men who may reveal them or, worse yet, who may identify themselves as gay or queer or same gender loving or bisexual or simply sexual freewheeling without the internalized burdens of race, without the pathology of blackness and with the courage, fortitude and integrity of self awareness and self definition and political intention. And herein lies the problem: the opposition laid out between black gay men and men on the DL is one that has to be violently maintained because it is a question of manhood, of black manhood, of masculinity and the maintenance of that masculinity.

Now I am a very simple man about certain things: I remember being beaten up, me and a friend of mine, one night on Fulton Mall in Brooklyn, New York, running into a late night chicken joint, asking someone to call the police, being followed into the chicken joint by this young black kid who’s trying to kill us, having another black man intervene, trying to help out, only to step aside when our pursuer turns to him to say, “But they are faggots,” and then this black man sits down, watches me take a bottle in the face. Again, I am simple about certain things: a fag bashing comes with the territory; the attacker was a young kid, as was the friend with whom I had been walking, and really the exchange was between them. But when I saw that motherfucker that had gotten up to help and then sat down to watch, when I saw that motherfucker in a porn shop in Times Square, maybe a week later, in a booth in a porn shop, with his dick hanging out, I asked him why he sat down, and quite frankly he told me, and I quote, “I didn’t want to help no faggot”: a statement which really did not make any sense to me: my identity was not that of a faggot, and both of us were standing in the porn shop—he exposing and me looking, for the same thing: on the down low is straight up low down.

That incident happened about six or seven years ago, and I have not yet let it go, because in the recent, spectral appearance of those on the down low and the death and disappearance of those in the life, I, and so many like me, remain. I am not arguing that we are excluded from black communities, that we have it harder than other groups in black communities, but I do want to suggest that we be careful how we assess, represent, and interrogate this down low phenomenon—a phenomenon and identity in which there is the negation of pleasure. Because of the amount of disavowal, the sexual identity of someone on the DL can only

be about risk, not about community, not about collective politics, not about progressive self-determination. And I do want to suggest that, at best, the DL, being on the down low is perhaps the greatest act of cowardice in contemporary identity politics. Do we really think that the worst thing that can happen to a black man is that he be called a faggot?

My Penis

André St. Clair Thompson

“My Penis” is my one-man show currently in development. It is a performative ethnographic/semi-autobiographical journey through which I interrogate essentialism and authenticity within identity formations. The piece brings up the intersections of class, race and (trans)nationality, and gender with sexuality being the focal point of reference.

Andre goes over to phone, places phone call. The person on the other end is not heard.

Hi daddi.

I'm ok. Yu?

Remember when yu did ketch mi wid da book *One More River to Cross*, dat was signed “To Andre, Enjoy the book. I hope it serves as an oar to cross the rivers in your own life. Keith Boykin.” Di book about black gay men in America. Yu was so upset that I was reading such a book even though I tell yu it was for a class. Yu tell me “no way a school would permit di reading about no battyman and say mi was reading it because mi mussy a battyman.” I was so scared of yu anger dat day dat mi tell yu say mi wasn't gay ova and ova again. Mi nuh know if yu believe me. But mi a tell yu dat mi gay.

[Pause]

Mommy nuh mek mi gay.

[Pause]

No, no, no. Mommy nuh mek me lose respek fi yu. Mi do dat wit fi yu elp lang time!

[Pause]

Wha! Mi begin fi lose respek fi yu when mi was seven, member dats when yu start beating mommy.

[Pause]

Yu jus say dat?! Mi lucky yu neh kill her. You drankcrow. Fi over eight years mi witness yu beat her all kick her outta bed when she was pregnant with Bri-Bri. Yu might as well ave kill her since yu slowly and brutally smothered her soul and the souls of me, Tara, Jordon and Brianna.

[Pause]

Yu nuh get it. Man, ignorance is a curse.

[Pause]

Aw Gawd. Yu don't get a prize fi dat. Yu bringing us come ya from Jamaica to mek a better way fi us in America is not noteworthy. Dat is the bare requirement for being a father. Yu get father of di year by providing a safe, secure and nurturing household fi yu family. Yu never did dat, when terror always come from yu.

[Pause]

Kill mi! Wha?! If mi was in Jamaica still, yu would have somebody kill me. Yu really a say dat to yu pickney?

Wha di fuck? Yu mean you couldn't do it yusef?

[Pause]

Yu know wha? I am not in Jamaica. In fact I am now a United States citizen. So wha yu a go do?

After a moment of listening with increasing expressed aggravation Andre hangs the phone up. Andre begins to hysterically sob and uttering words to express his grief, anguish and a sense of acceptance.

Shit. What am I gonna do? I can't go home. I am now disowned.

Post thought:

The threat of violence made against me by my father is one I fear that is not out of the realm of possibility. Human rights violations against queers in Jamaica are socially and politically sanctioned. On *The Republic of T's* blog, I came across a photographic journey in the day of a brave Jamaican genderqueer who was set upon and severely beaten by a mob. Though police eventually stopped the attack and brought the victim to the hospital, a group of people, who wanted to beat the man on his release, was waiting outside the hospital. No more information is provided. I noticed the victim runs past the Church of Jesus Christ. Noticed this is a communal bashing. Noticed the joy exuded by the gathered crowd having taught the victim a lesson. It looks like a ceremonial procession.

Pictures and event details can be seen at:

<http://www.republicoft.com/2007/04/30/a-bashing-in-jamaica/#more-849>

Herman Finley Is Dead 1947–2005 Jericho Brown

The birds know a day
Made for defeat.
Not one of them sings.
Instead, they make a toilet
Of your newly-washed car.
Don't cry over it. Listen
To the birds — you, too,
Should shut-up. But first,
Tell every alto you know
To hold her muddy breath.
Bid every obese soprano
A forty-day fast.
Get any man who ever sang
In a choir, head bowed,
None praying. Summon
Both the interpreter
And the speaker of tongues.
Pinch their burning lips.
Contact the necessary
Limp-wristed whose every suit
Is an Easter suit, bright
And loud enough to flame
In hell. I want them all
Wearing their worst black.
Call Nelson Demery
And Shanetta Brown.
Tell them to turn off the radio
Whether the station plays
Gospel or blues. Tell them
Herman Finley is dead. Then,
Tell them what God loves,
The truth: the disease
Your mother's mouth won't mention

Herman Finley Is Dead

Got bored with nibbling away
At the insides of his body
And, today, decided
To swallow Herman Finley
Whole. Tell them they must
Chop and torch each piano
Before helping me bolt the doors
Of all the Baptist Churches
From Shreveport to Monroe.
I don't want a single hum.
We will not worship
Save for silence. Watch
The birds shit in peace.
When the choir director's arms
Fall, the choir must not sing.

Pause Jericho Brown

From bed to dresser drawer
And all while rolling latex down
He'd whistle, and I felt
Daily at first, a chore, a long walk
Without trees. If anyone,
I should have known —
I who hate for people to comment
That I must be happy
Just because they hear me hum.
I want to ask
If they ever heard of slavery,
The work song — the best music
Is made of subtraction,
The singer seeks an exit from the scarred body
And opens his mouth
Trying to get out.
Or at least this is how I came to understand
Willie whistling his way into me.
What was my last name? Did he remember?
Had I said? We both wanted to be rid of desire,
How it made even the shower
A rigorous experience. It driving
My coughing Corolla across Highway 90
At the darkest time of morning. It opening
His dead-bolted door.
Us splayed as if for punishment
At every corner of the carpet. Then
Pause for the condom,
Elastic ache against death
Heavy in his hand,
And something our fingernails couldn't reach
Itching out a song. He was not content.
He was not bored.
If I had known the location of my own runaway

Pause

Breath, I too would have found a blues.
Poor Willie, whistling around my last name,
Wrapping his gift in safety. Poor me, thinking
If the man moves inside me
I must be empty, if I hide
Inside the man I must be cold.

To Be Seen Jericho Brown

You will forgive me if I carry the tone of a preacher.
Surely, you understand, a man in the midst of dying

Must have a point, which is not to say that I am dying
Exactly. My doctor tells me I might live

Longer than most, since I see him more than most.
Of course, he cannot be trusted nor can any man

Who promises you life based on his being seen.
Understand also, then, that a point and a message are

Indeed quite different. All messages issue forth from
The chosen: a lunatic, an angel, the whitest

Dove — those who hear the voice of God and other
Good music. A point, on the other hand, is made

By one who chooses but claims to have been chosen
So as not to be punished for bringing bad news:

The preacher, the poet, the doctor — those who talk
About God because they want to speak in metaphors.

My doctor, for instance, insists on the metaphor of war;
It's always the virus that attacks and the cells that fight or

Die fighting. I even remember him saying the word *siege*
When another rash returned. Here I am dying

While he makes a battle of my body — anything to be seen
When all he really means is to grab me by the chin

To Be Seen

And, like God the Father, say through clenched teeth,
Look at me when I'm talking to you. Your healing is

Not in my hands, though I touch as if to make you whole.

pwa 3
or to live with n speak out
jerry (the man who laughs louder than i do)
avery r. young

today i know sneezes be diamonds / my kinky kitchen be gold / each
pound on me be 20 dollar bills n smiles be way mo medicine than them
coral n turquoise ovals that spose to make the monster behave.

today who i got it from **does** matter cause i should thank folk properly fo
gifts / n i *forgive u my nigga* be sunshine cause anything else be rain n i
only need rain to grow the tulips on my back porch since my tap water be
designated fo bathin n washin down the coral n turquoise ovals that spose
to make the monster behave.

today i tell you young folk inside this great right now that i startin livin
when ms. wallace told me i was gonna die. it was that moment i learnt my
name again / n days n air n whether or not i get to experience either one
be a matter of treatin now as the most perfect opportunity to rock love
lovely...

jump jack cause it reminds me my heart still exists / eat broccoli cause its
green / fix mama black eyed peas cause her love the way they look on my
ugly yellow plates. chirrun i love the hell outta a son who never looks at
me as if its my fault that i fucks with them coral n turquoise ovals that
spose to make the monster behave.

in fact him just drew me a daddy day card that had me tearin up a hell
be real bumper sticker n the card read **flyest gent heaven waitin on n**
all i could do from steppin to jesus right then n there n know that seeds
become masterpieces / n him n yall n other things i wanna be n do way
mo to make the monster behave than them coral n turquoise ovals.

Pop Guns
Derek Jackson

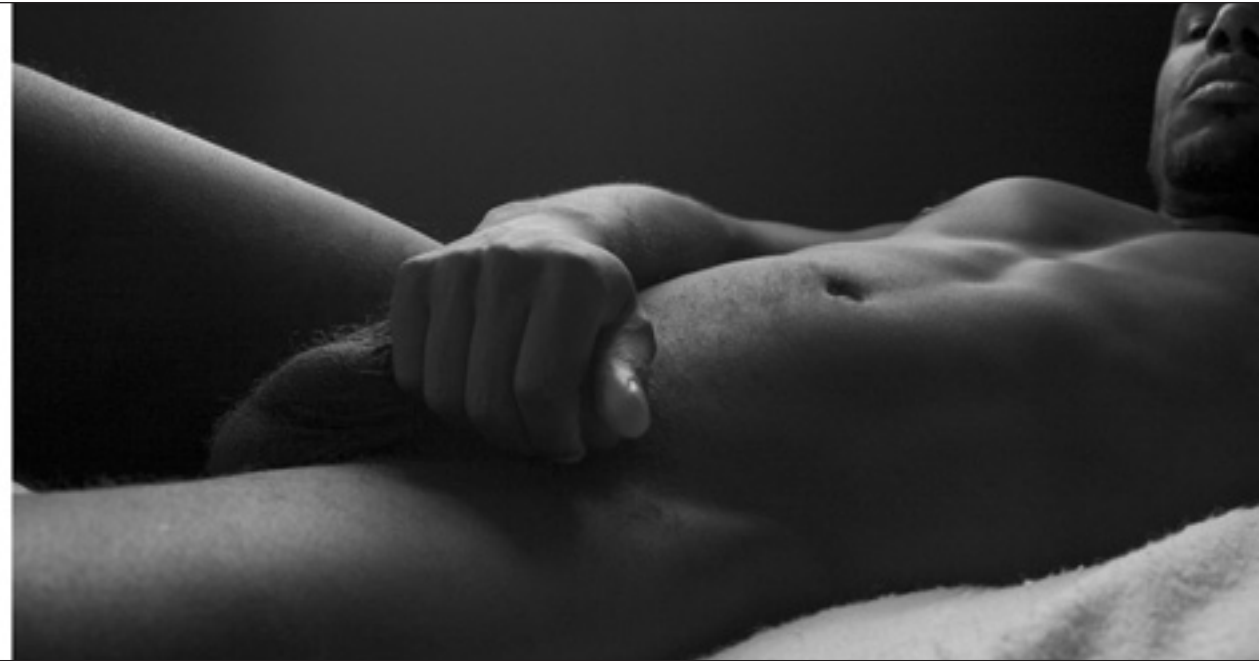
Originals are in color, digital prints, dimensions variable, 2007.



I met him in front of Joe's Smoke Shop



He was so rushed that I couldn't get a hard-on



I let him fuck me instead



He said that was the most he had ever done with a guy



I didn't tell him I was HIV positive



So I didn't feel like I had a right to ask anything about him



I stayed up all night searching the internet for the only thing I knew



He said his name was Mike



Not a Condom in Sight

G. Winston James

Fucking him hard
Him moaning, me moaning

Lovemaking

Rough

Chafing
As sand

Little whimpers

He is cooing
It hurts

I cover his mouth
Gently, firm

He does not
Resist
Because I am
Thrusting love
Deeply
So that he will
Remember
This passion
For days

His flowing tears
Amplify
The loin-buttock-loin
Slap
Fuck this shit is good, baby
Music I hear

When he lets me enter
Unannounced

This is heaven
Coming unrestrained
Inside the one
Who folds himself
Into me as we sleep
Breathing as one lover
Through another

I rise
Sweat smearing gladness
Along his legs
As he leaves
To the bathroom
With a glance of

“Loving you...”

While I drift off
To dream of forever
With him
In this sleep

why me n rich cant juice no mo
averu r. young

rick dont wipe
backwards / shit

be on him nutsack
him only kiss n hug

females / him bam
on my door

all kinda indecent hours
ready to rock

steady / spit all up my
azz / him dont give

no fuck that me n sleep
get along / him only touch

the back of my neck
him never acknowledge

my ding-a-ling work
him lay up

n dry out my refrigerator
then get dressed

to go down
to the gas station

fo blunt paper n pringles
n dont come back

fo weeks at a time
n act like him been gone 10 minutes

tops / n now him wanna
jimmy him joint up

talkin bout him dunno
where i been

a sxsx haiku fo a bass player
tina m. howell as shy boy
not all the way true but real
averç r. çounç

wanna be yo pants
get real tighter when you rise
feel you natural

haiku for a high maintenance lover
averç r. çounç

or baby

how am i gon read
n write *you* poems if you wish
to nut in my eyes?

You Be the Man

Rosamond S. King

You Be the Man I

No quotes is present, and sits in profile behind a screen.
Quotes can be a man or a woman;
No quotes should have a voice and profile of indeterminate gender.
At opening, Quotes is in front of a full-length mirror, fixing hair (with hands) or straightening clothes. Mirror is perpendicular to audience or is an empty frame facing audience.

“I keep falling in love keeling over into it with people I think are men but are women. What does this mean?”

It means you fall in love too much.

“Really. There was this gorgeous East Indian. Waist-length hair. Dark. He was across the room and I was all over him. When he stood up she was obviously a woman. A six footer woman with a mini mini skirt and killer legs. Pretty, but not a man.”

You Be the Man II

No quotes is off stage. Voice to be projected from anywhere.
Quotes can be any gender, crossed, a combination, whatever.
Can also be staged in succession with different races, accents, genders.

You be the man. “I don’t *want* to be the man!” C’mom. You be the man. “But I’m *always* the man.” Because it suits you like skin.
Quotes stops. Looks in a mirror. Turns away from it.
“Fine. What now?” Do what a man does. “What does a man do?” What you usually do, what you always do.
Quotes begins to move.
“I don’t get the point of this.”
Walks around stage.
Is that how a man walks?
“How should I know?” You agreed to be the man. “I *am* the man, I know.
But what now?” Just do what you would normally do. “What I would normally do, or what I would normally do as a man?”
Well, you are the man.
Quotes looks exasperated in the direction of No quotes’ voice.

So you’re not loving drag queens.

“Not at all. I really think they’re men and I’m all ready to swoon – what does this mean?”

“And what if I don’t want to play anymore?” It’s not a game.
“Well, what if I don’t want to *be* anymore?”
Pause.
You don’t want to be? “Not anymore. Yes. Only if I have a choice.” I gave you a choice. “You said ‘You be the man.’” And you agreed. “Why”
Outward, to anybody, spoken together:
Because it fits you like a skin.

Poem
G. Winston James

There are rats writing poetry
in the corners of my room

His pubic hair is tinged
with passion
Oiled mostly on my blood

Our words are flies
dying between thin black sheets
by thousands

Vipers writhe
along the floor

We neither rest in this plague
nor rise
to draw breath

There are vermin waiting
willing locust
they flutter wings
devour song.

Cold and Wet, Tired You Bet...
Ernest Hardy

He gets so sad sometimes. Often, actually. It just wells up in him and breaks messily through the surface. Like in those science-fiction movies where the alien who's been hiding out in human form suddenly rips through its host body, shredding skin and cracking bones. Tentacles and strange limbs protruding from the places where back, legs and arms used to be. Poisonous saliva dripping from massive, double-set fangs that glisten. That's the way his sadness is. Except it's quiet. And it doesn't distort him so dramatically. If anything, it makes him smaller. He shrinks into it as it consumes him. He smiles (no fangs, no gnashing of teeth) and softly wills himself to disappear. He barely makes a sound.

"It's okay," he'll say, unable to look you in the eye. Smiling. "It's okay." His hands clench tightly and thrust deep into pants pockets, straining against the seams as his head bends slightly; he shrugs almost imperceptibly. "I'm cool."

I tremble when this happens. Like a terrified extra in a horror film. But I've learned not to make a sound. I've learned to swallow my own screams. Any reaction from me only twists his anguish, adds garnish of guilt to his psychic platter. My fear is that the transformation, as with the creature on the big screen, reveals the true being lurking beneath skin – in his case, a man so possessed by his demons that they permanently own him. A man made small by history and memory and flight-not-fight reflexes that uncoil at phantom triggers. He believes he's going to hell.

Every kiss is resignation; every fuck is condemnation. He cannot take pleasure in his pleasure. He cannot find the joy in love. Cannot receive it and battles himself when he feels it. He's constantly at odds with his body and with mine. Late at night, I hold him while he flinches within the embrace. I whisper to him, "I would give you the world but I don't believe in the world. But I do believe in you."

He won't let himself feel joy because it fades, so he can't let himself trust it. Sadness and despair have been more faithful. They stay in place. They

dig deep. You can turn your back on them and trust that they will still be there when you turn back around. Waiting. They hang around as long as you feed them and they don't need much to flourish. He hasn't yet learned that joy has to be fed too. It's not self-sustaining. You have to clear a place for it. Make it feel welcome. Let it know that you want it. He hasn't learned that while sadness might seem to subsist solely on cigarettes and coffee, it's constantly snacking behind his back, cleaning out the pantry and the fridge. It's voracious.

We often lie in this fashion in bed at night: I am on my side, facing him. He lies on his back. One of my arms is folded beneath my head while the other safety-belts across his chest. I throw a protective thigh over his thigh. He rests his head on a pillow that is so old, so flat and limp, that it's folded twice to give it heft. His eyes are cast downward, looking absently at his chest and stomach. His arms are akimbo, angled slightly so that each hand nervously flutters a fingertip tap-dance on his lower belly. I stroke his chest. He swallows nervously. We've been together well over a year now and he still has an ingénue's stage fright. No, he has the terror of someone stranded in a completely foreign land sans map or knowledge of the native language. Just before he falls asleep, he turns to his side and softly slides back against me, his ass against my hard-on. I kiss his shoulder, buckling arm and thigh around him.

How it works: You draw up a list of what you want, what you need. Then from that master list you sub-head items that you absolutely must have, things on which you will not compromise. And then you meet someone and fall in love and the list is thrown out a window.

This is the part you may not understand. I lean on him. The Germanic sturdiness of his insecurities and fears are constants in our days, acting almost as guideposts through our nights. They're dependable guardrails. I want to dismantle them so that he — so that we — can be free, but I'm nervous about what that freedom might mean, what might lie beyond it. Will he need me then? Who will he be? And have I come to romanticize the very thing from which I claim to want to free him?

My body can't contain its history. It gives everything away. In repose I sit slightly hunched forward due to hereditary scoliosis. I cannot bend

my right arm properly because I broke it when I was a child; it was set badly but we were too poor to get it corrected after it had healed. When I get flustered I stutter, my eyes blink rapidly and I swallow after every word — hair-trigger heirlooms from constant confrontations with a father embittered because he'd sired a faggot, and he missed no chance to hector, belittle and voice his disgust. Faint scars line my left wrist: Sixteen, without hope, unable to see a future. Death wasn't really the goal, but it was an acceptable risk for the reprieve sought. Molecular memory of my own distress is the root of my empathy for him. My man.

We speak the language of romance novels and five-hankie weepies with utmost sincerity.

"If I save you, will you save me?" I ask him with a smile, sans irony but with ulterior motive. His ego is fragile. I geisha myself three feet behind him to make him feel strong, to mask the strenuous work required to nurture and carry him. He knows but if he knew it would shatter him. And sometimes I coast on the surface of my whispered nocturnal queries, staying above subtext or flipped meaning, letting the words that are spoken do all the heavy lifting. I volley the role of hero into his court. To be truthful, sometimes I do want to be the imperiled Pauline yanked from the rails with only seconds to spare before the steam engine crushes me, confident that the cavalry is on its way and that my life is worth Herculean effort. That it's worth saving. Trembling, endangered captive is a cakewalk compared to 24-hour savior.

"I don't know," he smiles back. "All the magazines and Oprah say you gotta save yourself." (*Sans irony.*)

"Fuck Oprah. I don't give a fuck about myself. I really don't. I don't care if I live or die except for you. I get it up for you. I would take care of you. Would you do the same for me?"

He thinks a long time. I wait. "Okay," he says finally. "I'll take care of you. I'll protect you." He grins sheepishly.

SONNET
Reginald Harris

for Derrick Rojas, Maryland Leather Boy 2008

Many's the time I've seen his mocha-colored back enlaced with scars, stripes, crisscrossed with the interlocking hash marks of his last partner's whip, emblems of a night's hard play, the joys of submission and intensity cascading down from shoulder blade to the still glowing caramel of his plump firm ass.

The crowd parts, stares in awe at his proud display, desire, lust and envy flowing in his broad-smiling wake, our eyes a second licking, soothing balm, a salve to cool down his still-hot flesh, caresses his luscious, passion-tattooed skin.

Untitled Love Song #12
Reginald Harris

When we kiss we shuck our skin,
drop back into our teens: gangly,
uncertain of our bodies, only angles
and sharp elbows, scuffed, ashy knees

unsure voices, husky, cracking out from
a myriad of faces, all curious — this one in love,
that one in lust, one wanting to be inside the other
(*fingers and lips, tongue and dick*), another

waiting to be filled (*mouth and ass, nostrils
and ears*) — children playing dress-
up by undressing, full of pulled punches, giggles,
toothy grins *Show me Yours and I'll show*

you Mine as if our youth were not misspent or lost,
only hiding, waiting for the drop of a shirt, pants. Masks.

Cuerpo de Hombre

Reginald Harris

The waiter's ass sways like a cypress
in the breeze as he carries lunch trays
up a flight of stairs. Reed slim and dark,
rich loam from the Carolinas, he's not
my type anymore: I've outgrown
young men like that, filled out to appreciate
thickness, density, weight: men with legs
like tree trunks, ripe apple full biceps
a temptation waiting to be eaten,
 chests like grassy savannahs, wild plains
overrun with slightly graying hair.
But sometimes a breeze from my youth comes up
envelopes me with the scent of discarded skin,
the men I've left behind, hypnotizes with
a sway and gentle shake, leaves my mouth
watering, tongue babbling like a sylvan brook.

Cheese & Crackers

Ernest Hardy

We sit in the middle of the bed opposite one another, a plate of cheese
and crackers between us, backs curved and heads bowed slightly as we
assemble the snack we then bring to mouths already crammed with
conversation...3 AM confessionals that the pre-dawn air, lingering night
clouds and last-call twinkling stars coax out of us, promising protection
for the vulnerable revelations we present as gifts to one another as heads
are raised and eyes are met for comfort and validation and just plain
acknowledgement. Wearing a sky-blue Ward Cleaver-style pajama set
with white piping (fully buttoned long-sleeve top and long-legged bottom
with no underwear beneath), I sit cross-legged, my arms wrapped tightly
around my chest, hunched over just a bit as I talk...like in a movie whose
audio has died but whose moving images soldier on. But you hear me.
You nod emphatically and sympathetically, building on a point I just made
and that no one else ever understood or maybe never even heard. I relish
this feeling of not feeling stupid or irrelevant. My head almost spins.
Wearing a threadbare wife-beater, you sit with one leg bent and drawn to
your chest and the other angled loosely on the bed. Your dick is exposed
through the gap in your clean-but-dingy boxers and I can't stop looking
at it even as we dive deeper & deeper into uncensored testimonials of
fears and uncertainties we each hope will be soothed by the other, and
if not solved, then at least understood. Your dick sits there like a smug,
fat overstuffed baby that knows it is loved and wanted and the center of
the universe. You slice a bit of cheese from the chunk on the plate, pull a
cracker from the crinkling wrapper, place the cheese on it and then stretch
out your arm for me to take it. I lean forward, extend my tongue and take
it in my mouth, the whole thing. You laugh. I feel like I've just won a gold
Olympic medal, smashing some long-held record. God, I love you. We are
not rich faggots. We rent and will likely never own. The plate we eat
from is chipped on one side, part of a hand-me-down set from your sister.
Our drinking glasses are mismatched, the opposite of chic, filled with
cheap wine. The ancient overtaxed fan sitting in the window is on life-
support and will pull the plug on itself any day now. The mattress sags in
the middle, pulling us down onto each other while we slumber, as though
we need help finding one another in our sleep. We don't. I make my way

Cheese & Crackers

to you across nightmares, fevers and insomnia. You reach for me and wait.
Your voice is deeper when it's unshielded...deeper but also softer. This is
the voice few have heard. It's for me. The camera pulls back and the sound
fades again but our lips keep moving. We are immersed in one another.

French Quarter Kevin Simmonds

for James Baldwin

Instead of art
I'll have one boy
from dusk.
One boy
who knows the relevance
of his body.

Almost no words
will pass between us
until we rinse the hours
from glad bodies
marooned not long enough
for the paradise we took.

Getting Strong

Samiya Bashir

for SSH

Demons be gone!
So too the sirens' song.
Let there be breath and chosen memory.
Forgiveness and forgiveness.

Joy!
a little ha ha and
some wild guffaw
fresh corn and apples
hot baked good things
savored slowly with
all the time in the world—
we've got all the time
in the world

Yes!
we are lifting, curling
raising muscles and flesh
expelling anger and fear
with each out breath in sets
of twelve and fifteen and twenty
and sometimes we stack weight heavy
wear agony on our snotty sleeves
but not every day.

Not every day will feel this way;
walking through molten air
and burning man burning
so hot we want a shot of anything
that promises to cool us down.

Demons and sirens are liars
of the most unscrupulous kind.
Not simple-minded hustlers
trying to win a wary dime but cold-
hearted killers who'll cover you in lime
build a house on your bones
and sell it to your left-behinds
at ten percent over market

Promise we won't listen
to their songs. Promise
we'll forgive ourselves
for days we sit woofers
to ear weeping and pounding.
Promise we'll try not to kick
our bruised and swollen ankles

too hard let in a little joy
a bit of ha ha and some wild guffaw
and remember that not every day will
feel this way
promise.

Addendum

Editors' Note: The following texts came from the official U.S. Government sites for the White House and the Office of the President-Elect.

Plan to Strengthen Civil Rights¹

“The teenagers and college students who left their homes to march in the streets of Birmingham and Montgomery; the mothers who walked instead of taking the bus after a long day of doing somebody else’s laundry and cleaning somebody else’s kitchen— they didn’t brave fire hoses and billy clubs so that their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren would still wonder at the beginning of the 21st century whether their vote would be counted; whether their civil rights would be protected by their government; whether justice would be equal and opportunity would be theirs.... We have more work to do.”
— Barack Obama, Speech at Howard University, September 28, 2007

The Obama-Biden Plan

Barack Obama has spent much of his career fighting to strengthen civil rights as a civil rights attorney, community organizer, Illinois State Senator and U.S. Senator. Whether promoting economic opportunity, working to improve our nation’s education and health system, or protecting the right to vote, Obama has been a powerful advocate for our civil rights.

- **Combat Employment Discrimination:** Obama and Biden will work to overturn the Supreme Court’s recent ruling that curtails racial minorities’ and women’s ability to challenge pay discrimination. They will also pass the Fair Pay Act, to ensure that women receive equal pay for equal work, and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.
- **Expand Hate Crimes Statutes:** Obama and Biden will strengthen federal hate crimes legislation, expand hate crimes protection by

passing the Matthew Shepard Act, and reinvigorate enforcement at the Department of Justice’s Criminal Section.

- **End Deceptive Voting Practices:** Obama will sign into law his legislation that establishes harsh penalties for those who have engaged in voter fraud and provides voters who have been misinformed with accurate and full information so they can vote.
- **End Racial Profiling:** Obama and Biden will ban racial profiling by federal law enforcement agencies and provide federal incentives to state and local police departments to prohibit the practice.
- **Reduce Crime Recidivism by Providing Ex-Offender Support:** Obama and Biden will provide job training, substance abuse and mental health counseling to ex-offenders, so that they are successfully re-integrated into society. Obama and Biden will also create a prison-to-work incentive program to improve ex-offender employment and job retention rates.
- **Eliminate Sentencing Disparities:** Obama and Biden believe the disparity between sentencing crack and powder-based cocaine is wrong and should be completely eliminated.
- **Expand Use of Drug Courts:** Obama and Biden will give first-time, non-violent offenders a chance to serve their sentence, where appropriate, in the type of drug rehabilitation programs that have proven to work better than a prison term in changing bad behavior.

¹ Available at: http://change.gov/agenda/civil_rights_agenda/. Accessed June 2, 2009.

Support for the LGBT Community²

“While we have come a long way since the Stonewall riots in 1969, we still have a lot of work to do. Too often, the issue of LGBT rights is exploited by those seeking to divide us. But at its core, this issue is about who we are as Americans. It’s about whether this nation is going to live up to its founding promise of equality by treating all its citizens with dignity and respect.”

— Barack Obama, June 1, 2007

The Obama-Biden Plan

- **Expand Hate Crimes Statutes:** In 2004, crimes against LGBT Americans constituted the third-highest category of hate crime reported and made up more than 15 percent of such crimes. Barack Obama cosponsored legislation that would expand federal jurisdiction to include violent hate crimes perpetrated because of race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or physical disability. As a state senator, Obama passed tough legislation that made hate crimes and conspiracy to commit them against the law.
- **Fight Workplace Discrimination:** Barack Obama supports the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, and believes that our anti-discrimination employment laws should be expanded to include sexual orientation and gender identity. While an increasing number of employers have extended benefits to their employees’ domestic partners, discrimination based on sexual orientation in the workplace occurs with no federal legal remedy. Obama also sponsored legislation in the Illinois State Senate that would ban employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.
- **Support Full Civil Unions and Federal Rights for LGBT Couples:** Barack Obama supports full civil unions that give same-sex couples legal rights and privileges equal to those of married couples. Obama also believes we need to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act and enact legislation that would ensure that the 1,100+ federal legal rights and benefits currently provided on the basis of marital status are extended to same-sex couples in civil unions and other

² Ibid.

legally-recognized unions. These rights and benefits include the right to assist a loved one in times of emergency, the right to equal health insurance and other employment benefits, and property rights.

- **Oppose a Constitutional Ban on Same-Sex Marriage:** Barack Obama voted against the Federal Marriage Amendment in 2006 which would have defined marriage as between a man and a woman and prevented judicial extension of marriage-like rights to same-sex or other unmarried couples.
- **Repeal Don’t Ask-Don’t Tell:** Barack Obama agrees with former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff John Shalikashvili and other military experts that we need to repeal the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. The key test for military service should be patriotism, a sense of duty, and a willingness to serve. Discrimination should be prohibited. The U.S. government has spent millions of dollars replacing troops kicked out of the military because of their sexual orientation. Additionally, more than 300 language experts have been fired under this policy, including more than 50 who are fluent in Arabic. Obama will work with military leaders to repeal the current policy and ensure it helps accomplish our national defense goals.
- **Expand Adoption Rights:** Barack Obama believes that we must ensure adoption rights for all couples and individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation. He thinks that a child will benefit from a healthy and loving home, whether the parents are gay or not.
- **Promote AIDS Prevention:** In the first year of his presidency, Barack Obama will develop and begin to implement a comprehensive national HIV/AIDS strategy that includes all federal agencies. The strategy will be designed to reduce HIV infections, increase access to care and reduce HIV-related health disparities. Obama will support common sense approaches including age-appropriate sex education that includes information about contraception, combating infection within our prison population through education and contraception, and distributing contraceptives through our public health system. Obama also supports lifting the federal ban on needle exchange, which could dramatically reduce rates of infection among drug users. Obama has also been willing to confront the

stigma—too often tied to homophobia—that continues to surround HIV/AIDS. He will continue to speak out on this issue as president.

- **Empower Women to Prevent HIV/AIDS:** In the United States, the percentage of women diagnosed with AIDS has quadrupled over the last 20 years. Today, women account for more than one quarter of all new HIV/AIDS diagnoses. Barack Obama introduced the Microbicide Development Act, which will accelerate the development of products that empower women in the battle against AIDS. Microbicides are a class of products currently under development that women apply topically to prevent transmission of HIV and other infections.

A Proclamation³

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 1, 2009

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER PRIDE MONTH, 2009

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
A PROCLAMATION

Forty years ago, patrons and supporters of the Stonewall Inn in New York City resisted police harassment that had become all too common for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. Out of this resistance, the LGBT rights movement in America was born. During LGBT Pride Month, we commemorate the events of June 1969 and commit to achieving equal justice under law for LGBT Americans.

LGBT Americans have made, and continue to make, great and lasting contributions that continue to strengthen the fabric of American society. There are many well-respected LGBT leaders in all professional fields, including the arts and business communities. LGBT Americans also

³ Available at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Presidential-Proclamation-LGBT-Pride-Month/. Accessed June 2, 2009.

mobilized the Nation to respond to the domestic HIV/AIDS epidemic and have played a vital role in broadening this country's response to the HIV pandemic.

Due in no small part to the determination and dedication of the LGBT rights movement, more LGBT Americans are living their lives openly today than ever before. I am proud to be the first President to appoint openly LGBT candidates to Senate-confirmed positions in the first 100 days of an Administration. These individuals embody the best qualities we seek in public servants, and across my Administration—in both the White House and the Federal agencies—openly LGBT employees are doing their jobs with distinction and professionalism.

The LGBT rights movement has achieved great progress, but there is more work to be done. LGBT youth should feel safe to learn without the fear of harassment, and LGBT families and seniors should be allowed to live their lives with dignity and respect.

My Administration has partnered with the LGBT community to advance a wide range of initiatives. At the international level, I have joined efforts at the United Nations to decriminalize homosexuality around the world. Here at home, I continue to support measures to bring the full spectrum of equal rights to LGBT Americans. These measures include enhancing hate crimes laws, supporting civil unions and Federal rights for LGBT couples, outlawing discrimination in the workplace, ensuring adoption rights, and ending the existing “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” policy in a way that strengthens our Armed Forces and our national security. We must also commit ourselves to fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic by both reducing the number of HIV infections and providing care and support services to people living with HIV/AIDS across the United States.

These issues affect not only the LGBT community, but also our entire Nation. As long as the promise of equality for all remains unfulfilled, all Americans are affected. If we can work together to advance the principles upon which our Nation was founded, every American will benefit. During LGBT Pride Month, I call upon the LGBT community, the Congress, and the American people to work together to promote equal rights for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim June 2009 as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month. I call upon the people of the United States to turn back discrimination and prejudice everywhere it exists.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this first day of June, in the year of our Lord two thousand nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-third.

BARACK OBAMA

Office of National AIDS Policy⁴

The Office of National AIDS Policy (ONAP) is the White House Office tasked with coordinating the continuing efforts of the government to reduce the number of HIV infections across the United States. Although the office emphasizes prevention through wide-ranging education initiatives, ONAP also helps to coordinate the care and treatment of citizens with HIV/AIDS. In addition, ONAP coordinates with the National Security Council and works with other international bodies to ensure that America's response to the global pandemic is fully integrated with other prevention, care, and treatment efforts around the world. For more information on HIV/AIDS, visit:

- CDC's National Prevention Information Network
(<http://www.cdcnpi.org/>)
- AIDS.gov (<http://www.aids.gov>)
- President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)
(<http://www.pepfar.gov>)

⁴ Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/onap/>. Accessed June 2, 2009.

Through the PEPFAR initiative, America has made enormous progress in responding to the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. The U.S. has helped to expand access to treatment, care, and prevention for people infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS around the world.

Here at home, we also achieved successes in providing care and treatment services to people living with HIV/AIDS, preventing new infections through reductions in the transmission rate of HIV, providing housing and other essential supports, as well as operating a broad research agenda to find a cure, develop better treatments, and develop new interventions to prevent new infections.

As the HIV/AIDS pandemic approaches its thirtieth year, these successes give us much to celebrate, but much work remains to be done. President Obama is committed to re-focusing public attention on the domestic HIV/AIDS epidemic. The President has appointed a health policy expert with strong ties to the HIV/AIDS community to serve as the Director of the Office of National AIDS Policy. He has also worked with CDC to announce the launch of the first new HIV/AIDS education and risk reduction campaign in twenty years, called, Act Against AIDS.

National HIV/AIDS Strategy

One of the President's top HIV/AIDS policy priorities is to lead the development of a National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS). Three key goals for the NHAS are to develop a national plan for:

- Reducing HIV incidence;
- Increasing access to care; and,
- Reducing HIV-related health disparities.

The Administration is committed to developing the NHAS through a process that is inclusive of a broad range of perspectives and stakeholders, and is conducted in a transparent manner. The NHAS will increase awareness and include measurable goals, timelines, and accountability mechanisms.

Health Reform

The President has placed health reform on top of his agenda. Successful reform has enormous potential to improve the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS. As part of reform, the Administration will work to strengthen

Medicaid and Medicare, major sources of health coverage for people with HIV/AIDS; expand access to affordable and reliable private insurance coverage; and promote delivery system reforms to ensure that public and private insurance coverage delivers high quality care. The President is also committed to supporting programs that—like the Ryan White Act—bring marginalized and underserved populations into care.

HIV Prevention

With more than 56,000 new infections in the United States each year, we must do more as a nation to stop the spread of HIV infection. The President believes we must do more to address HIV-related stigma, promote HIV testing, and rely on sound science to focus our prevention efforts on the populations and communities at greatest risk for infection.

Global HIV/AIDS

Around the world, President Obama is determined to assist nations that are greatly burdened by HIV/AIDS. The Administration is committed to the PEPFAR initiative that provides funding and leadership to assist countries in preventing new infections, saving lives through health promotion and treatment, and building the capacity of health systems to respond to the needs of their citizens.

Contributors

Dr. George Ayala currently serves as the Executive Officer of the Global Forum on MSM and HIV (MSMGF). The MSMGF works worldwide against HIV for the health and human rights of men who have sex with men. Dr. Ayala has worked in the nonprofit HIV/AIDS sector, managing prevention, education, capacity building, and community-based research programs for twenty years. A clinical psychologist by training, Dr. Ayala is a former research psychologist at RTI International. His research has mainly focused on understanding the mechanisms through which social discrimination impacts health among ethnic minority men who have sex with men.

Samiya Bashir is the author of *Gospel*, and *Where the Apple Falls*, a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award. Samiya is also editor of *Best Black Women's Erotica 2* and co-editor of *Role Call: A Generational Anthology of Social & Political Black Literature & Art*. She is a founding organizer of Fire & Ink: Festival & Community of LGBT Writers of African Descent and an alumni fellow of Cave Canem. Recently she has served as James Cody Scholar for the James Dick Foundation for the Arts, Writer in Residence at Soul Mountain and Artist in Residence with The Austin Project. Her poetry, stories, articles, essays and editorial work have been widely published. Find out more and samiyabashir.com.

Jericho Brown worked as the speechwriter for the Mayor of New Orleans before receiving his PhD in Creative Writing and Literature from the University of Houston. The recipient of a Bunting Fellowship from the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University and two travel fellowships to the Krakow Poetry Seminar in Poland, Brown teaches creative writing as an Assistant Professor of English at the University of San Diego. His poems have appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *jubilat*, *New England Review*, and *Oxford American*. New Issues Poetry & Prose published his first book *PLEASE*.

Tisa Bryant is the author of *Unexplained Presence* (Leon Works, 2007), and is currently at work on a historical novel set in Barbados. She teaches in the Creative Writing MFA Program at the California Institute of the Arts, and is editor of the literary annual *The Encyclopedia Project*.

MR Daniel is an interdisciplinary artist who works in sound, video, text, performance and installation. Her written, sound, and video work has been performed or exhibited in New York, San Francisco, Minnesota, Cleveland, Seattle and on Greek radio. Currently, MR is a doctoral candidate in Music Composition at Princeton University.

In 1995 **Stevan F. Gaskill** relocated from the deathly winters of his hometown, Detroit, which lacked sufficient HIV care services, to the much milder climate and support services of Los Angeles. Throughout his life he has studied and performed in various media: writing, music, T.V. production, theater and photography to name a few. He has published the photo collection *Perceptive Perspectives*, played the lead in Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, hosted the talk shows *Positive News* and *A Closer Look*, and performed in the singing group Ebony Voices. He writes a monthly column for www.HIVSTOPSWITHUS.org entitled "Black (and Poz) Like Me." He has been living in Oakland since 2006.

Ernest Hardy is a Sundance Fellow and the author of the books *Blood Beats Vols. 1 and 2*. His cultural criticism has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Village Voice*, *Vibe*, *Rolling Stone*, the *LA Times*, *Flaunt* and the *LA Weekly*. He's currently working on a book about visual artist Mark Bradford.

Keith M. Harris is an Associate Professor at the University of California at Riverside in the Departments of Media and Cultural Studies and English. He teaches courses in film studies, film theory, and African-American and African Diaspora film and literature. Dr. Harris' primary research interests are in visual culture (media, film, television and video, especially) and gender and race and ethical constructs of gender and race found in visual cultural production.

Help Desk and Training Manager for the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Maryland, **Reginald Harris** was a Finalist for a Lambda Literary Award and the ForeWord Book of the Year for *10 Tongues: Poems* (Three Conditions Press, 2001). Recipient of Individual Artist Awards for both poetry and fiction from the Maryland State Arts Council, his writing has appeared in numerous journals, anthologies, and other publications. A contributor to *LGBTQ America Today: An*

Encyclopedia (Greenwood Press, 2008) and *Carry The Word: A Bibliography of Black LGBTQ Books* (Vintage Entity Press, 2007), he is currently pretending to work on two manuscripts.

Derek Jackson is a visual artist and performer living in Portland, Maine, and New York City. Jackson is a recipient of numerous awards including funding from: the Maine Arts Commission, the Brooklyn Arts Council, The Djerassi Artist Residency Program, and Momenta Arts.

G. Winston James is a Jamaican-born poet, author, essayist and editor. He holds an M.F.A. in Fiction from Brooklyn College and is the author of the collections *Shaming the Devil: Collected Short Stories*, *The Damaged Good: Poems Around Love* and the Lambda Literary Award finalist collection *Lyric: Poems Along a Broken Road*.

Rosamond S. King, Ph.D., is a creative and critical writer and performer. Her poetry has been published in over a dozen journals and anthologies, and she has performed her distinctive Verse Cabaret style around the world in theatres, nightclubs, and galleries. For more information visit www.rosamondking.com.

Anton Nimblett is a Trinidadian who lives and writes in Brooklyn. He is the author of *Sections of an Orange*, a collection of short stories. His fiction has appeared in the anthology *Our Caribbean* as well as the journals *African American Review*, *African Voices* and *Calabash*. He has presented fiction and poetry at many venues, including: Bowery Poetry Club, Caribbean Cultural Theatre, Cornelia Street Cafe, Kumble Theater, The LGBT Center and Louder Arts Collective. Visit him at SectionsOfAnOrange.com.

Deborah Richards is a writer, teacher and urban walker. Deborah is from London and is currently living on its outer edges. Her work is published in *Chain*, *Leroy Press*, *Nocturnes*, *Encyclopedia*, *Callaloo*, *XCP: Cross Cultural Poetics* and on-line journal *Tarpaulin Sky*.

Kevin Simmonds is a writer and musician originally from New Orleans. Most recently, he wrote the music for *Hope*, a collaboration with poet Kwame Dawes, about the HIV/AIDS crisis in Jamaica. He lives in San Francisco and northern Japan.

Contributors


André St. Clair Thompson, is an interdisciplinary artist: actor/performer, writer, and producer. He is currently a M.F.A. candidate in Acting at California Institute of the Arts. He holds a M.A. in Performance Studies from NYU/Tisch School of the Arts and a B.A. in Sexuality and Society from Brown University.

Vallerie D. Wagner, M.S., joined AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA) in 2007 as the Director of Health and Wellness Programs for the Education Division at APLA, and became Director of Education in July 2008. As the current Director of Education she oversees prevention, community-based research, capacity building assistance, and national programs and publications and is leading the agency's efforts to establish a sexual health center for Black and Latino gay men in south Los Angeles. Ms. Wagner has been a strong advocate for the human rights of the LGBT communities and persons living with AIDS for more than 20 years. She currently serves on the board of directors of the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA).

Ronaldo V. Wilson is the author of *Narrative of the Life of the Brown Boy and the White Man*, winner of the Cave Canem Poetry Prize, forthcoming from University of Pittsburgh Press in Fall 2008 and *Poems of the Black Object*, to be published by Futurepoem Books in Fall 2009.

writer / performer / teaching artist **avery r. young's** style of writing and performance is labeled "Sunday Mornin' Jook-Joint." He has performed internationally and most notably on Hip Hop Theatre Festival, Lollapalooza, BET. His written work has appeared in *Callaloo*, *Teaching Artist Journal*, *To be Left With the Body*, and *Warpland*. He is also a columnist for *Say What Magazine*. Young currently is performing his one-man show *me n'em: cullud boi skitz* and is ready to premiere his new theatre work (*now i am*) *found*.





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