

Summer 1998

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# MOSAIC

l i t e r a r y   m a g a z i n e

sleepless nights  
reviews  
lorraine hansberry

## woman to woman

jessica care moore  
children's books

sheneska jackson  
interview & excerpt from  
her new book "Blessings"

# african american cultural expo ad

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## MOSAIC

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Publisher Ron Kavanaugh  
Asst. Publisher Jacqueline Jacob  
Editor Lynne d. Johnson  
Circulation Director Taura Ottey

Contributors  
Ma-Lee D., Deatra Haime,  
Anita Doreen Diggs, Michaelyn C. Elder,  
Mo Fleming, Kim Fox, Kim Green,  
Dorothy Harris, Patricia Houser,  
Lynne d. Johnson, Kathleen Morris

Questions and comments should be sent to:  
[magazine@mosaicbooks.com](mailto:magazine@mosaicbooks.com) or

**MOSAIC COMMUNICATIONS**  
314 W 231st St  
Suite 470  
Bronx, NY 10463  
fax: 718-432-1445  
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Jessica Care Moore

# THANK YOU !

This issue is dedicated to women.

With that in mind we would like to give a special thanks to; Maya Angelou, Gwendolyn Brooks, Augusta Baker, Toni Cade Bambara, Elaine Brown, Ashley F. Bryan, Margaret Taylor Burroughs, Octavia Butler, Bebe Moore Campbell, Vinnette Carroll, Barbara Chase-Riboud, Alice Childress, Pearl Cleage, Michelle Cliff, Lucille Clifton, J. California Cooper, Jayne Cortez, Margaret Danner, Angela Davis, Thulani Davis, Alexis Deveau, Rita Dove, Mari Evans, Nikki Giovanni, Eloise Greenfield, Rosa Guy, Virginia Hamilton, Lorraine Hansberry, bell hooks, Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Zora Neal Hurston, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Gayl Jones, June Jordan, Adrienne Kennedy, Jamaica Kincaid, Nella Larson, Audre Lourde, Paule Marshall, Terry McMillan, Louise Meriwether, Anne Moody, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Flora Nwapa, Ann Petry, Carolyn M. Rodgers, Charlemae Hill Rollins, Sonia Sanchez, Ntozake Shange, Ann Alan Shockley, Alice Walker, Margaret Walker, Ida B. Wells, Dorothy West and Phyllis Wheatley.

warner books ad

# “Children are a blessing from God”

This is the message behind Sheneska Jackson's new heartwarming novel, *Blessings*.



Here, the message is wrapped in a blanket of hope, love, friendship and faith.

# sheneska jackson

by Pat Houser

**Pat Houser:** How did the *Blessings* story line evolve?

**Sheneska Jackson:** Zuma was the genesis for the whole book. If a woman is the right age, financially secure and wants to have a child, but doesn't have a man, her life is put on hold. I wanted to write about the childbirth experience, create characters that weren't one-dimensional and set the novel in a place that women could relate to. What better place than a hair salon? I often joke with my mother about artificial insemination, so Zuma's character fell right into place. *Blessings* is about coming to the realization that children are a blessing from God.

**PH:** Your female characters have a strong reserve of inner strength. From where do you draw your strength?

**SJ:** I don't really know. I guess when you come from an environment like South Central, Los Angeles and hear gunshots and helicopters flying overhead, there's a certain amount of strength you must have just to survive. Dakota in *Caught Up In The Rapture* is one of my favorite female characters because of her strength. I like what she stands for and I like that she is the exact opposite of Jazmine cause she gets on my nerves. She was just too good.

**PH:** How do your novels contribute to the current upsurge in African American literature?

**SJ:** My work offers the best of both worlds. I take my readers to exciting places—like the inside of the music industry—and lay out important messages at the same time. In *Caught Up In The Rapture*, I showed that you can get out of the ghetto. And for anyone today who is dating, AIDS is one of the biggest social concerns around. In *Li'l Mama's Rules*, I sent a message to the young ladies: Keep your legs closed and make better decisions.

**PH:** There was talk of John Singleton pursuing the film rights to *Caught Up In The Rapture*. Has that deal been hammered out yet?

**SJ:** John Singleton was interested for a hot minute, but the deal fell through. I was all excited until I heard about all the books that get optioned. Now, even though I have more suitors, I know not to get caught up in Hollywood. Everything takes a really long time.

**PH:** Your earlier work deals with topics such as AIDS and Tourette's Syndrome. How did you perfect the mental images and character reactions in these situations?

**SJ:** I like dealing with real issues and covering a variety of topics in my work. I often do research to find books and articles on how people deal with things. I try to do as little research as possible so that I don't get more caught up in researching than writing. Then I ask myself how I would react to having AIDS or Tourette's Syndrome. That's a whole mess of emotions.

**PH:** Your portrayals of today's black men have little if any male bashing. Do you make a conscious effort not to belittle your male characters?

**SJ:** Yes. I make a conscious effort not to male bash. Before male bashing, every book had to be about life on a plantation. I wanted to focus on social circumstances and deal with contemporary issues that our people could relate to, not concentrate on bashing our men. Xavier, from *Caught Up*, is my favorite male character. He was really fun to write and he's sort of like my male counterpart because he does what he wants and his intentions are good.

**PH:** Is there ever a fear that your next book won't be as good as the last?

**SJ:** Every creative person—actor, musician, writer—wonders what happens if the inspiration stops or if they can't think of anything else. Fortunately, when I'm half way through whatever I'm working on, I know what I'll write about next. I try to write a book a year so that I can build up a solid readership. Right now, I'm working on the sequel to *Caught Up In The Rapture*. Everybody wanted to know if Jazmine and Xavier



were really together and what happens next. But I'm finding it hard to go back in time. It's hard to reconcile this growth that happened as a result of maturation.

**PH:** Do you think there is room for new authors or is the literary market flooded with Terry McMillan wanna-bees?

**SJ:** There is definitely room for everybody, but it's important to make sure that you're working on something that's worth doing. I read black books and I know the stories that are being told. When I was working on *Caught Up In The Rapture*, I knew that my idea was something new and fresh. A lot of authors are trying to write *Waiting To Exhale*, Part 10. That's already been done. Research the field. See what's out there and then write your story. When people pick up a book and discover they've already read it, they won't buy it. The reading public will weed out the McMillan wanna bees.

**PH:** How do you feel about the constant comparison of black authors to Terry McMillan?

**SJ:** That's a double-edged sword. It's a nice comparison, especially when you look at *Disappearing Acts* and *Exhale*. But people always put you in a box because they don't know how to deal with your stuff. You want to stay out of a box so that you'll always have room to grow.

**PH:** Can you describe your growth as a writer?

**SJ:** I'm pushing thirty years old now and writing about different people. I had to mature personally and professionally. *Caught Up* was my first, it's my baby and I loved it. *Li'l Mama's Rules* was by far my most important book. But *Blessings* is the one where I see that I've grown. I dealt with things in a mature way and addressed issues. If it were my first book, I probably would have killed somebody.

**PH:** Do you think writing is a natural talent or something that can be taught?

**SJ:** Just like a singing teacher can't teach some people how to carry a tune, I don't believe you can teach someone how to be innovative or instinctively talented. You can help to hone his or her craft. I teach extension writing courses at UCLA and I focus on characterization, plotting, how to structure a novel, and setting up scenes for the big payoff. I teach at UCLA because when I took writing courses there, I was the only black student in the class. Now people recognize my name, and I'm getting more black students. That's very positive.

**PH:** What authors do you enjoy reading?

**SJ:** The first black novel I read was *Black Boy* by Richard Wright. I was twenty years old in college then. I also liked *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, and I love Walter Mosley. He writes about South Central, Los Angeles set in the 1940's and 1950's. It's interesting to see what the streets looked like back then. I was really intrigued by Jervy Turvelon, author of *Understand This*. He has a way of getting into a character's head that is amazing.

**PH:** How would you define Sheneska Jackson?

**SJ:** I'm headstrong. I take care of my business. I know what I want and understand that nobody is gonna give it to me but me. By age fifteen, I knew that I'd never work for anybody because I don't like people telling me what to do. It's a trip how things turn out. Now I do what I want to do and I write what I want to write. Writing is the perfect career for me.

**PH:** When you're not writing, how do you relax?

**SJ:** I'm not one of those hang out people. I'm a person who really likes to sleep. I can just lie around all day and be happy. I can rent a video, watch a movie or invite friends over and listen to music. I like rap, hip-hop, country, all kinds of music as long as it's good. Maxwell is my favorite artist and Erykah Badu is bad. She'll be around for a very long time.

**PH:** What advice do you offer to aspiring authors?

**SJ:** Have faith. If doctors have to intern, authors have to research their fields, believe in themselves, be creative, and make the readers want more.

**PH:** Do you have a parting message for your readers?

**SJ:** All my readers better get ready. Cause like Sean "Puffy" Combs says, "It Don't Stop!"

Pat Houser is a freelance writer living in Brooklyn, New York. She is the founder of The Ebony Book Club and a New York Chapter Facilitator for the nationally acclaimed Go On Girl Book Club. She has recently completed her debut novel, *Sweet Hellos and Sad Goodbyes*.

**Blessings**  
**by Sheneska Jackson**  
**Simon & Schuster**

From **BLESSINGS** by Sheneska Jackson.  
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Faye tried not to let the curious way in which Pat gawked at her bother her on that first night they met. After all, it was nighttime, Pat was closing up and in walked a complete stranger. Faye would have gawked too if she was in Pat's position. Still, Faye knew the peculiar look on Pat's face was more about her size than the fact that she was an unknown.

Faye had squeezed herself into her one and only church dress and jammed her swollen feet into a pair of white pumps. She approached Pat with the confidence anyone else would show when confronting a possible employer, but when she opened her mouth to state her purpose the only sound audible was that of her cries. "I need a job," she wailed and threw her hands over her face.

At first Pat had thought the woman was crazy. She backed away for a second and watched as the woman's stomach jiggled, pushing in and out, shoulders heaving up and down, her mouth seemingly stuck in the open position. But soon Pat's apprehension turned to compassion. She searched the countertops for a box of tissue, but couldn't find one.

Luckily Faye had come prepared. She opened up the tiny white patent leather purse she carried and searched around, pulling out her wallet, a rosary, and finally a crumpled tissue that looked like it had been used before. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry" Faye whimpered, wiping the sides of her face and trying to control  
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# GETTING

J e s s i c a

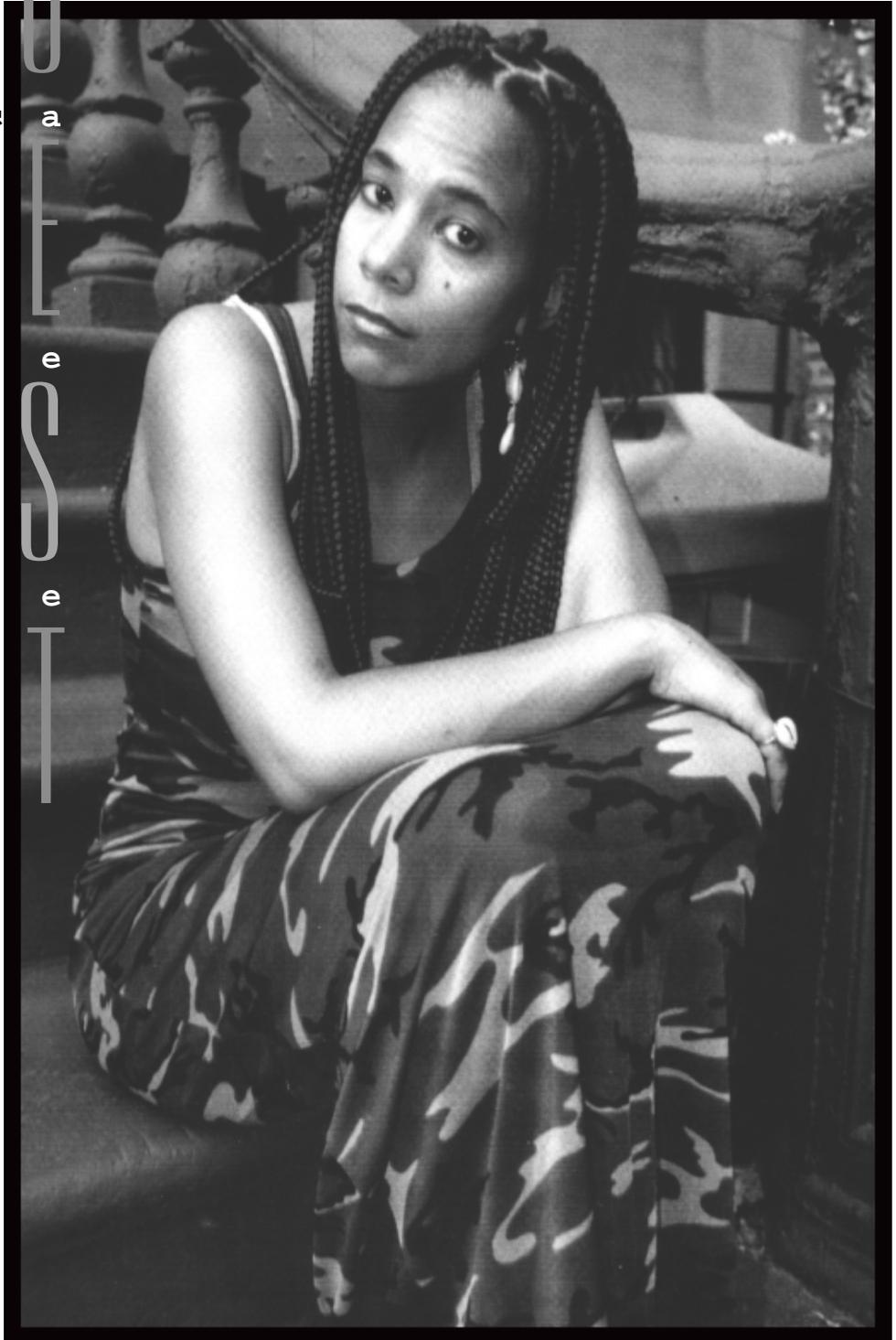
T H E

C a r e

W O R D S

M o o r e

O U T



by Lynne d. Johnson

If you listen to Jessica Care Moore tell it, poetry is more than just an artistic form of expression, it's a business. In fact, Moore says poetry can be effectively marketed to garner reasonable profits. She ought to know, she self-published her own book, *The Words Don't Fit In My Mouth*, which happens to be a bestseller.

"People assume that poetry doesn't sell books. The big names, like Sonia Sanchez and Maya Angelou are making thousands of dollars off their books. According to the marketing reports for this genre, selling 5,000 copies equals a bestseller. So I have a bestseller," says Moore.

Moore started Moore Black Press in August '97 when she launched her book. With a literary agent and a manager things weren't moving quickly enough. "I got tired of waiting," says Moore, "I had been working as a poet and I knew I had an audience. I couldn't wait for publishers to decide I needed a book. It was common sense, I was doing shows. I'm doing Black Expo, I need to have a book. Why should I wait for a big company to legitimize me?"

After earning national and critical acclaim winning a record five weeks in a row reciting her poetry on Amateur Night at the Apollo, Moore knew there was a market. "I have something that people want," she thought. "I need a book so that people like myself can read my stuff." The frustration of doing huge shows, and afterwards selling no books, coupled with fans and peers asking, "Where's your book?" "Where's your CD?" "When are you gonna record something?" "When are you gonna publish a book?" Was the impetus for her company. Poetry was getting mainstream attention in commercials, in movies, on CDs. "And none of us have books," Moore says, "We need to be publishing our work." So, instead of focusing on a record deal she chose to focus on her book. Once she came up with the name for the company, everything else just followed suit.

This is where the artist became entrepreneur. "People publish books and they just publish themselves," explains Moore, "instead of just publishing my book, I said I'm going to incorporate my business. I'm going to get a logo, and I'm going to do it legitimate."

Starting a new business can be difficult for anyone, but especially for artists, who are believed not

to be able to actualize business acumen. Yet Moore had an edge, she knew the poetry scene. She lived it. She also had a network of friends who were living the poetry life too. They would become key players in making Moore Black Press a reality. One Brooklyn based poet, Tyren Allen did her layout. Tony Medina, a poet, editor and professor, edited her book, and her boyfriend, Pierre M. Bonnett "Brown" designed her book cover. "I got friends together who I knew had talent," Moore explains.

If it sounds easy, it wasn't. Releasing her book was only the beginning of the process. "I wiped out my bank account," Moore says, "I put four colors on the cover, which costs a lot of money." Besides, she had no distribution deal. "I have been doing the shipping and record keeping myself," explains Moore, "which isn't poetic at all." She never even went after a distribution deal, but now Barnes and Nobles and other large chains are coming after her. "Barnes and Nobles - they are sending me checks. People are going there and asking for it. Now I get calls, and distributors want to pick it up," says Moore.

Creating Moore Black Press has been a learning process. "I wanted my book to look right, and it's still not how I want it. I have a revised edition coming out. I have another graphic artist doing layout. I just learned," Moore explains. The business is also becoming this whole other thing.

After putting together her own successful book party, Saul Williams, who will star in the forthcoming movie Slam--a movie about poetry that also won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance and has Alfre Woodard saying it's the most important movie made in 25 years--came to Moore and said, "Let's make you the Haki of our movement." For Moore, it was an honor. Williams is one of her favorite poets and her friend. It was also a blessing. The hype of the film has companies coming after him, and he's able to tell them his girl over at Moore Black Press is putting his book, *The Seventh Octave: The Early Writings of Saul Williams* out.

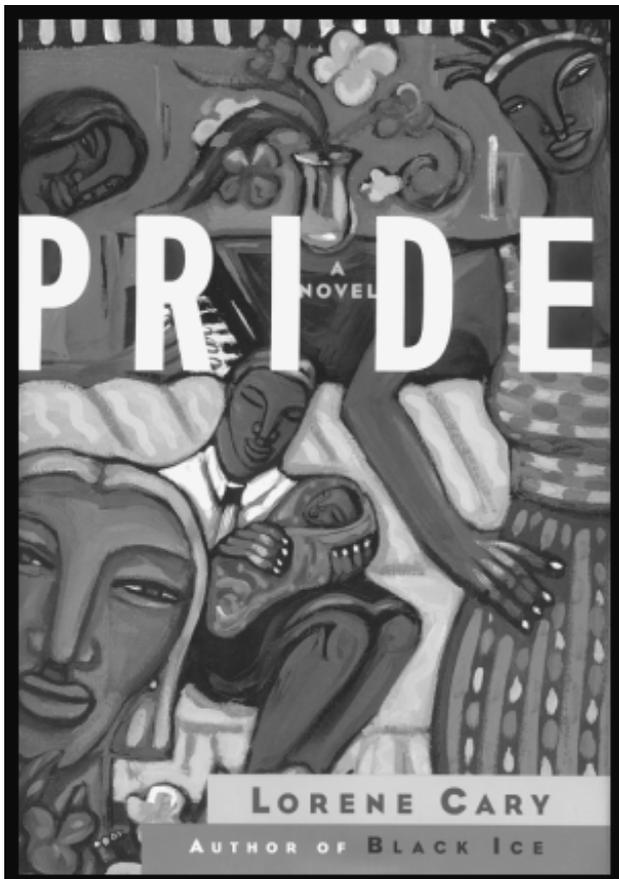
She's doing it one book at a time.

Lynne d. Johnson is the publications editor in the Department of Public Relations and Publications at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in Riverdale, NY. She has written for Beat Down, The Source, OneWorld, Hydro, and on NetNoir.

# Pride

by Lorene Cary  
Nan Talese/Doubleday

Reviewed by Pat Houser



With *Pride*, Lorene Cary has crafted a deeply felt tale of four African American women whose friendship spans the course of a lifetime.

At age nineteen, Roz, the more prominent of the four—some, becomes the Blond Swan of Hiram Prettyman, a bar owner who later turns local politician. Roz doesn't figure out until much later that her "prettyman" is strong on principles but short on discipline as he flirts in more bedrooms than boardrooms. While battling back from cancer, Roz assists Hiram with the biggest election campaign of his career, discretely attends to the woes of her troubled teenaged daughter, and turns a blind eye to the dalliances of her politically social climbing husband. But when Hiram's roving eye leads him to the bedroom of a close friend in Roz's treasured sister circle, she is ill-prepared to confront her cheating mate or Tamara, the so-called friend who doubled as Hiram's lover for nearly fifteen years. The second-rate confrontation between Roz and Tamara leaves a large stain on a friendship in the making since adolescence. But when Roz ignores her husband's gravest act of infidelity, one wonders if this action is a matter of pride or a complete lack self-esteem.

Audrey, a recovering alcoholic who finds solace time and again in the bottle, is the saddest of the group. Her addiction leads to rape, a long estrangement from her son and the loss of an eye. But when her struggle with codependence nearly costs her her life, the unwavering support of her friends

helps her to recover with dignity and pride. Cary's portrait of alcoholism is heightened by fast paced, in your face dialogue that rings, clear and garners the most attention of all her characters.

And finally we meet Arneatha, an Episcopalian priest, who is the true manifestation of pride. For years Arneatha has devoted herself to holy work. But when a new child and a new man enter her life almost simultaneously, Arneatha handles these new challenges with commitment, valiancy and pride while her friends cheer from the sidelines.

Told in alternating voices that resonate with pure honesty, Cary delves beautifully into the lives of each of her characters. An extraordinary blend of equanimity and devotion to time honored friendship, Cary's newest work is truly a matter of pride.

## If I Can Cook/You Know God Can

by Ntozake Shange

Beacon Press

Reviewed by Deatra Haime

Ntozake Shange, in her intricately woven narrative of essays, insights and recipes, gives food its proper perspective within the context of cultural survival. This is not a cookbook, it's a food lesson, a means by which the African diasporic existence is ultimately justified.

If it's true that we are what we eat, then Shange's amazing accomplishment is in defining the process of how we've come to be within the context of how we nourish ourselves. In finely woven tales of enlightenment that mark the "who" of our existence, Shange shows us how food is often at the heart of our realizations.

In a chapter titled "And What Did You Serve? Oh, No, You Did Not!" she connects how love blooms in the face of food ... and especially in a woman's ability to prepare it. We understand, early on, that making the perfect pitcher of Kool-Aid or serving a young boy homebaked sweet potato pie gives us credence beyond how sweetly we smile or how well we bat our eyes. In "Westward Ho! Anywhere Must Be Better'n Here!" she identifies the African American migration west after the Civil War and how the voyage

was fueled by the hunting and farming skills folks learned during slavery. She makes these connections from a fundamental love for and admiration of the development of African contributions to the new world order. Our cultural existence is, primarily, based on our creativity and our will to survive. Shange does our development justice, beyond the stereotypes inflicted by European judgment and misinformation. Our food isn't reflective of our lack of culture, it is, in fact, the very opposite — it's the foundation from which we grow and continue to thrive.

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## The Men of Brewster Place

by Gloria Naylor

Hyperion Books

Reviewed by Anita Doreen Diggs

We all remember *Brewster Place*, it's a dead end street in a decaying neighborhood. A block of crumbling tenements that house people who still have hope even though the powerful people who run their lives have given up on them. Brewster Place is poverty, despair, pride, faith and joy set in a city of plenty.

We recall the women who live there. Mattie Michael who was betrayed by her son. Etta Mae Johnson, the good time gal. Ciel Turner whose husband Eugene runs out on her. Lorraine, the good hearted sister who is gang raped for being a lesbian. Kiswana Brown, the idealistic daughter of middle class parents who moves to the "hood" to "help the people."

In *The Men of Brewster Place*, Gloria Naylor revisits the neighborhood through a series of short stories, marketed as a novel to give the brothers a chance to tell their side of the story.

Basil turns out to be just as sorry as we thought he was in the original novel even though Naylor bravely tries to give him a conscience and a better character in this one.

We always wanted to know why Eugene kept leaving poor Ciel. His answer? "The first time I went home with another man from that bar, it felt so complete. At least it's a short while until the guilt of what I was doing to you came back to wrap itself around my chest." The end of Eugene's tale is even more harrowing and somehow, unbelievable. In summary, Eugene this second time around is a million times worse than the first.

Naylor takes us inside the heads of C.C. Baker and Abshu with much more satisfying results but most absorbing, finely wrought and beautifully narrated tale is the back story of Ben, the superintendent who died in the original novel

Nothing But the Rent

by Sharon Mitchell

Dutton Books

*Reviewed by Deatra Haime*

Heterosexual women have been plagued, maybe since the beginning of time, with the beguiling notion that their worth and reason for being can only be defined within the context of their romantic connection to a man. Yes, this is 1998. And yes, thanks to countless feminist voices, we are supposed to know better, feel better, think better. We've heard ... but are we really believing?

According to the women in Sharon Mitchell's novel, *Nothing But The Rent*, we're still struggling with how to feel valid in our own right. It's the story of four sisters who seem to have everything but can't come to terms with the lack of real love in their lives. Each has a different issue: Cynthia is too fat, Monique is too afraid, Gayle is too shy and Roxanne is too idealistic. Ironically juxtaposed against what they lack is what they actually have. Having met at a small Minnesota college, these women earned degrees and then went on to develop respectable careers in public relations, law, banking and teaching. They are, by all accounts, successful, yet each lives a reality burdened by fruitless at tempt after fruitless attempt to be loved by men who

don't deserve them or running from men who actually do.

That their lives are tangled webs of insecurity, doubt, anger, denial and obsession is frustrating. In the backlash of *Waiting to Exhale* revelations about the insidious nature that often pervades the black male reality, why aren't women stronger? Well, we are, of course — which is why Mitchell's story is entertaining but hardly enlightening. We know this stuff. Maybe we've even lived it.

Rehashing it only serves to justify it. It would be nice to know what happens after women identify the power of self-validation and how they incorporate it into a functional and productive relationship.

The real message in Mitchell's story isn't about the re-tread of why women can't love themselves ... it's about sisterhood. The bond that ties these four women enables each of them to ultimately face their truths and begin the difficult process of self-love. Mitchell doesn't tie up the package with a pretty bow of reconciliation but she does leave us with a sense of hope.

The Healing

by Gayl Jones

Beacon Press

*Reviewed by Kim Fox*

Its been too long since we saw Gayl Jones words on paper and it seems that this time there were not enough pages to read. She creates the story by looping and jumping and adding just the right description to make your imagination work. The vividness of some of the places traveled, conversations heard or held, and the unedited feelings of many of the characters is rich and pleasurable.

*The Healing* is Harlan Jane Eagleton's life as a faith healer, musicians manager, and world traveler. Hers is an eclectic life that is written in staccato style and is in no way boring. Harlan's thoughts are on pulp as they would be in her mind and are often quite humorous.

Sometimes it's a rambling of her thoughts about otherwise trivial things like the definitions of tank towns, emerging talent, and whether there are African Germans or German Africans. However, even the repetition that is intertwined into these otherwise mundane topics is hardly annoying.

Some sections of this novel could hold their own as short stories because each chapter chronicles an uncalculated step in Harlan's colorful world. Jones surprises the reader often and unveils some interesting things along the way like just who is the turtle woman on the books' cover?

## Blanche Cleans Up

by Barbara Neely

Viking Press

*Reviewed by Mo Fleming*

Sometimes you can't do a favor, because it just might turn around and bite you on the backside. *In Blanche Cleans Up*, Barbara Neely's intrepid day worker returns to her beat getting into other people's dirty laundry. In her first two books *Blanche on the Lam* and *Blanche Among the Talented Tenth*, Neely firmly established Blanche White as the first African American housekeeping sleuth. In her latest book the adventure begins when Cousin Charlotte collars Blanche to stand in for her friend Miz Inez. All Blanche has to do is cook for the Brindles until Miz Inez returns.

Saying 'no' outright was never really an option with her mother's favorite cousin, the woman who had taken Blanche in when she first arrived in Boston. So Blanche

finds herself at the home of Allister and Felicia Brindle.

But what should have been an easy week quickly takes a complicated turn. It seems the Boston bluestocking Brindle's have a whole nest of family secrets. None of this would be any of Blanche's business if she hadn't caught Ray-Ray, Miz Inez's son, where he didn't belong. Faster than you can say fillet mignon, people are dying, compromising pictures have disappeared, and Blanche herself has come under scrutiny.

As new characters and subplots are introduced, Neely never loses sight of the main story. After twists turns, lies and false leads, Neely guides us unerringly to a tidy ending that is as satisfying as sherbet on a hot Sunday.

## Roberts vs. Texaco

A True Story of Race and Corporate America

by Bari-Ellen Roberts with Jack E. White

Avon Books

*Reviewed by Kim Fox*

Bari-Ellen Roberts encountered racism on numerous occasions before she arrived at the luxurious Texaco campus. She was raised in conservative Cincinnati and every subtle act of discrimination she faced growing up gave her strength to face the next obstacle. It is no wonder that when faced with Texaco's blatant racism, Roberts went at them with the speed of an Indy race car driver.

However, it seemed that Roberts had an inkling that the atmosphere at Texaco was different before she got on board of what turned out to be the Titanic. Her story, though, provides an ample dose of uplift. After several Texaco employees second guessed her abilities, Roberts still faced countless barriers and dilemmas. One of Roberts strengths was her consistency to make concrete decisions, which helped her stand tall throughout this awful ordeal. Her intelligence and sensibility coupled with her appetite for knowledge were initially the type

of credentials that Texaco sought in an employee, but they were unprepared for dealing with African-Americans in their "lily white" and traditional work environment.

Roberts always handled herself professionally and still had enough courage to put her face and reputation on a class action lawsuit against one of the largest oil companies in the world.

The attitudes and attributes of the Texaco that Roberts was employed for is NOT exclusive to that industry or to that company, but the emergence of the Texaco tapes revealed the naked racism that stood like a Robert Mapplethorpe photo-shockingly-for all to see.

Because of the Texaco situation, Roberts name was in the ears of many executives across the country (and still is) and the outcome should show African-Americans and corporate America how human beings should not be treated.

## The Cultural Connection Bookstore

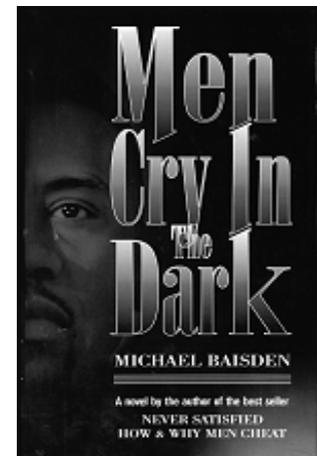
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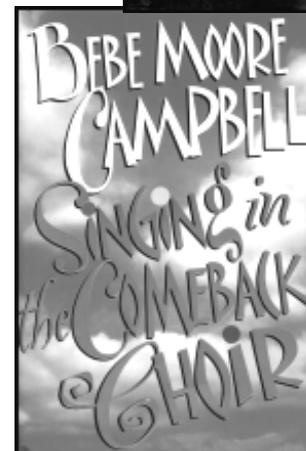
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4. **Friends and Lovers** Eric Jerome Dickey
5. **Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned** Walter Mosley

### Non Fiction

1. **What's Going On** Nathan McCall
2. **Boys To Men** James Earl Hardy
3. **Lay Aside the Weight** T.D. Jakes
4. **Sinbad's Guide to Life** Sinbad
5. **Message to the Black Man** Elijah Muhammad



TITLES TO LOOK FOR

Bebe's By Golly Wow  
by Yolanda Joe  
Doubleday

The anxiously awaited follow-up to her first novel, *He Say, She Say*, takes readers back into the lives of Bebe and her best friend, Sandy, a young radio exec, in a captivating story of love, life, family and relationship.

The Original Buckwheat  
by Reg E. Gaines  
Long Shot Productions  
A book of original poems from the two time Tony Award winner - Best Book for Bring In the Noise, Bring In the Funk.

Black Mama Widow  
by Iceberg Slim  
Old School Books—W.W. Norton  
"Mama Black Widow" is the nickname of Otis Tilson, a comely and tragic, black queen adrift with his brothers and sisters in the dark ghetto world of pimpdom and violent crime. His story is told in the gut-level language of the homosexual underworld—an unforgettable testament of life lived on the margins of a racist and predatory urban hell.



Strong Souls Singing  
African American Books For Our Daughters and Our Sisters  
Edited by Archie Givens  
W.W. Norton

For African American girls and the people who teach and love them, a guide to books that will create pride and desire to learn.

The Farm  
by Clarence Cooper Jr.  
Old School Books  
W.W. Norton  
The Farm is a Dantesque tour of the levels of hell to be found in a federal drug rehabilitation center and a powerful story of love growing in the most unnatural conditions. It is a stylistic tour de force and one of the most honest and unrelenting novels dealing with drug addiction ever written.

The 100 Best Colleges  
For African-American Students  
Revised and Updated Edition  
by Erlene B. Wilson  
Plume  
Finding the right school is made easier with this exceptionally detailed guide for minority students.

## Haneef's Bookstore & Mosi Art Gallery

911 Orange St., Wilmington, DE 19801 / (302) 656-4193

### Non-fiction

1. **One Day My Soul Just Opened Up** Iyana Vansant
2. **In The Meantime** Iyana Vansant
3. **On Air** Tavis Smiley
4. **Heal Thyself** Queen Afua
5. **From Niggas to Gods Vol I** Akil

### Fiction

1. **Fly Girl** Omar Tyree
2. **Trying to Sleep In the Bed You Made** Donna Grant & Virginia Deberry
3. **Sister Sister** Eric Jerome Dickey
4. **Nothing But the Rent** Sharon Mitchell
5. **Push** Sapphire

## A Different Booklist

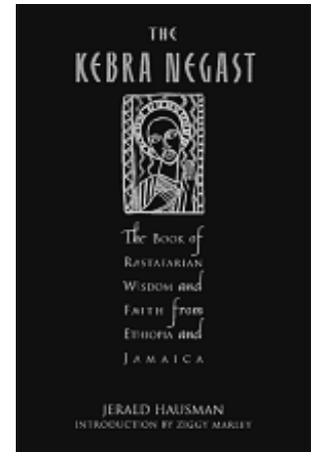
746 Bathurst St, Toronto, Canada M5S2R6 / (416) 538-0889

### Non-Fiction

1. **Looking White People in the Eye : Gender, Race and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms**  
by Sherene H. Razack
2. **The Kebra Nagast : The Lost Bible of Rastafarian Wisdom and Faith from Ethiopia and Jamaica**  
by Jerald Hausman (Editor), Ziggy Marley (Intro)
3. **Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday**  
by Angela Y. Davis
4. **Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean** by Richard D. E. Burton
5. **Feminist Social Thought: A Reader**  
by Diana Tietjens Meyers (Editor)

### Fiction

1. **One Day My Soul Just Opened Up**  
by Iyana Vanzant
2. **Slamming Tar**  
by Cecil Foster
3. **Ma-Ka Diasporic Juks : Contemporary Writing by Queers of African Descent**  
by Debbie Douglas (Editor),  
Courtney McFarlane (Editor), Makeda Silvera
4. **Singing In the Comeback Choir**  
by Bebe Moore Campbell
5. **Land To Light**  
by Dionne Brand



Waiting In Vain  
by Colin Channer  
One World/Ballantine

Waiting in Vain is a page-turning journey through the love triangles and tragedies, career trials and triumphs of the modern African-American man.

A Knock At Midnight  
Inspiration From the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King  
Edited by Claybourne Carson & Peter Holloran  
Warnerbooks

A Knock At the Door is Dr. Kings voice today. It stands as one of his enduring legacies...and a resounding call to the soul. It not only reveals words that shaped our history, but lives and breathes with an urgency and relevance that inspires the greatness in us all.

Defending the Spirit  
by Randall Robinson  
Dutton Books

Randall Robinson chronicles his amazing journey and the obstacles he overcame, rising from poor childhood in the segregated South to infiltrate the white infrastructure of Washington politics.



Reaching Up For Manhood  
Transforming the Lives of Boys in America  
by Geoffrey Canada  
Beacon Press

Geoffrey Canada is president of the Rheedlen Centers for Children and Families in New York City and the recipient of a 1995 Heinz Foundation Award and Parents Magazine Award for his work in child advocacy.

The Seventh Octave  
The Early Writings of Saul Williams  
by Saul Williams  
Moore Black Press  
A young, provocative, and gifted poetic voice, Saul Williams exploded onto New York's poetry scene just a few years ago.

On Air  
The Best of Tavis Smiley

by Tavis Smiley  
Pines One Publications  
Tavis Smiley breaks down the political rhetoric to Black America. Smiley brings us a collector's edition of his thought-provoking and action-guided commentary

# panacea

by Michaelyn Elder

Man-if they only made a pill  
That's all I'd need  
make the  
highs not so high  
and give the lows some lift  
just a pill  
so I can cruise carelessly  
between  
mountain high  
grave deep

I  
hate  
roller coasters-  
and bumper cars  
so why am I here with you?

Man- if they only made a pill

If they only made a pill  
to add peace to my pace  
melody to my madness  
something potent strong, something fierce  
to scare this here funky pain into walkin' away

Michaelyn C. Elder is a 26-year-old senior at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. She completed an independent study with poet Sonia Sanchez in December 1997, and finished a book of poems entitled "Wounded Souls".

# Telling Our Stories

How Black Women Writers Have Defined Black Women in Literature

## Ourselves

by Dorothy Harris

When I was an undergraduate, a cousin asked me, "Why are all of your papers about Black Women?" I know that I gave her an answer which included a discussion about my interest in African American women merely because I am an African American woman. But until she raised it, I never thought about the fact that all of my subjects were African American women.

Twenty years later, I have a better answer for her than the one I gave her in the library that day. I've learned that it is imperative that I participate in creating definitions of African American women, that I take an active role in eradicating negative images of us that were created and perpetuated by others, and that whenever I have the opportunity, I write about what has been written.

When examining the portrayals of African American women in literature written by and about African American women, we can see that these portrayals differ significantly from the portrayals in works by white writers, and by African American male writers. The negative images of African American women to which we are generally exposed exist largely because our society has relied heavily on the images that are created by euro-male centered writers, rather than those portrayed by us. Images of African American women that are created by non-African Americans dominate literature as well as the media, and become the images that both whites and non-whites learn of African Americans. The self-perpetuating images are accepted by mainstream euro-centered white society, and have infiltrated

the consciousness of this country.

When reading the literature of works written by someone whose experience differs from that of the characters, we must factor in the author's biases toward and limited experiences with the subject. Furthermore, we must understand the impact of generalization in literature on the perception of the readers, as well as the impact of the environment in which the author received her/his experience, on the writer. Additionally, the position of the writer in relation to the subject places the writer in the position to define his/her subject, to control the images, and to dictate the ways in which the subject should be perceived by readers. In a society that continues to oppress groups of people, we simply can not rely upon the oppressor for an accurate description of the oppressed. We can not, therefore, rely upon a white male or female writer for an accurate description of African American women.

The negative images of African American women, created by those outside of our communities, continue to assault us while we simultaneously continue to reject them.

A white or male writer who constructs images of

*[continued on page 29]*

# SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

by Kim Green

What does it mean to love a man so, that you can't stand to sleep for fear of missing one of his breaths? You know, because the man you love lies right beside you as you stare at the walls. Fighting sleep to assure your love. You toss and turn to fight doubt, but the reality of your love fights you.

What are you wishing for? More love than you've already been given for one night? More time, knowing that there will be more in the morning? You feel guilty about this selfish boredom. Made guilty by the act of love. A woman who loves...wanting more than you can take, taking more than you can give.

Don't look away for fear that it is you that I address.

It is.

You're lustful and spent. You aren't supposed to feel that. How did you end up this way? What in your life is lacking so that this is all you see? You want to turn to him and beg him not to dream, without you - for he is your dream. You always carry him to sleep with you. Though sleep doesn't come easily in these loving times.

You fell asleep at work today. Pen in hand, head dangling, eyes closed. Trying to sleep where there's nothing to keep you awake. How did you explain? "I'll never do it again, Sir, it's just that...I love." Weakened enough by love to use it as an excuse! You say you're trying to do better to balance your life. How can I accept that from you? He never sleeps at work. He's far too fascinated by the questions of power, money and life. What intrigues you about your daily life?

Awaiting the nights to get to him.

What does it mean to love so that there's never any rest? I want you to explain...

You watch the clock night after night, wishing you could pull him from his dreams - his time away from you. You are desperate, you are displaced. Your heart beats in frustration, trying not to cease of loneliness.

You count your sheep - one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve...and on and on and on until you

can't count anymore.

But you're still not sleeping.

He snores.

He twitches.

His mouth opens slightly, not enough room for you anywhere. You're excluded from this time in his life, and it's the loneliest you've ever had.

You wonder, "How can he sleep without me? After showing his love the way we did? Used and violated. You console yourself, knowing how right this is...

But loneliness burns a hole in you, right now. RIGHT NOW is all that matters. It's all that you feel - it's all that you have. Right now. You've forgotten the passion, the rapture, the space around you and the fluidity of love. Right now, it's all loneliness.

And he snores.

Right now it's loneliness beyond its limits.

Counting again.

Wanting sleep.

Needing sleep.

Lust for sleep.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve...and on and on and on until you can't count anymore - and still no sleep.

I pity you.

He turns over - Maybe to touch you? To bring you from your grave? To tell you he still cares and that he hasn't forgotten? But it has only been ten minutes since you last kissed. How silly of you to think that he has forgotten.

But people do forget.

No. He just turned over.

You're not taking this night rejection well. You want to. I want you to.

You're falling apart. A woman without hope.

You watch him again.

His chest rises, it falls. His breath shoots from his mouth, he brings it back in again and again. The hairs on his chest that he just shared with you, rise and fall. Again and again.

The need to touch him overwhelms you. You can't put up with this loneliness. The fear.

No longer.

You call his name.

No answer.

The whisper heightens.

No answer.

He's far away from you. You are alone there. Anger chokes you. You gasp for air with a cough. He moves at the sound.

Will he touch you now?

Bring you from your grave?

Tell you he still cares?

No- he just moved.

You must end this asphyxiation of self.

You lift your weakened body onto your elbow. You watch the action of his body his body rising and falling. Again and again.

You pick up your comfortless pillow and you place it high above his angelic face. Admiring the curves of his beauty.

He snores.

You bring the pillow to your dry, swollen lips and kiss the center of it.

You slowly place this kiss of yours onto his mouth, that wants to be kissing you. The kiss is like none he's ever had before. It lingers there until

the snoring stops.

Until the rise and fall become only the fall.

You've stopped the snoring.

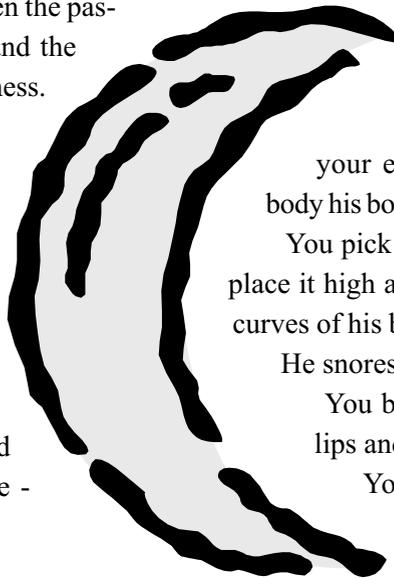
Now you've stopped your pain.

What does it mean to love a man so, that you kill?

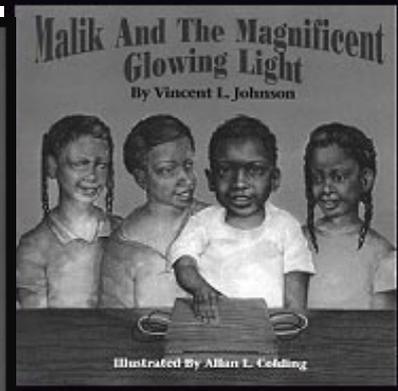
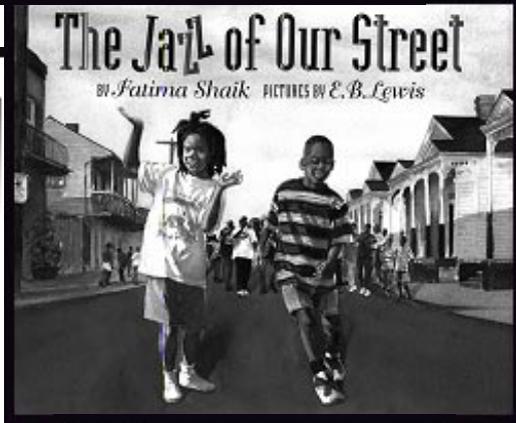
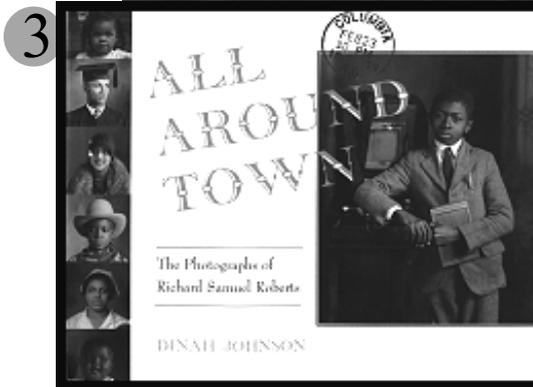
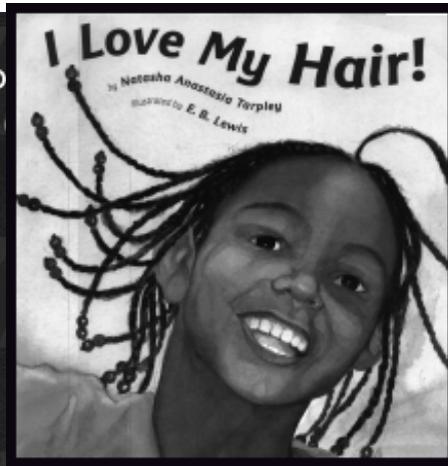
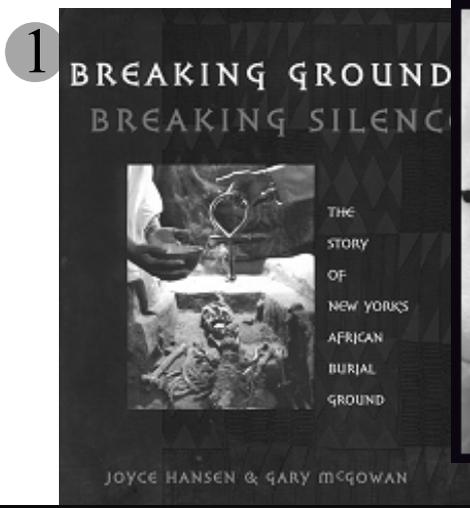
What does it mean?

There are no longer dreams without you.

Kim Green is the author of "On A Mission; A Selected History and Poems of The Last Poets" and "The Truth Of The Matter: Straight Talk For The Aspiring Artist on Getting Into The Music Business." She owns her own communications firm, Veritas Communications and is working on her first novel.



# children's corner



1. Breaking Ground Breaking Silence:  
The Story of New York's African Burial Ground  
by Joyce Hansen & Gary McGowan
2. I Love My Hair  
by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley  
Illustrated by E.B. Lewis
3. All Around Town  
The Photographs of Richard Samuel Roberts  
by Diane Johnson

4. The Jazz of Our Street  
by Fatima Shaik  
Pictures by E.B. Lewis
5. Sol A Sol  
Bilingual Poems Written and Selected by Lori  
Marie Carlson  
Illustrated by Emily Lasker
6. Malik and the Magnificent Glowing Light  
by Vincent L. Johnson  
Illustrated by Allan L. Colding

## The Itch

by Benilde Little  
Simon & Schuster

*Reviewed by Ma-Lee D.*

“Whatcha do in the dark gonna one day come to light,” as my wise Grandma says when folks just don’t “act” right. This saying is profound in Benilde Little’s sophomore novel, *The Itch*, set between New York and Los Angeles about mid 30-something Buppies all trying to obtain the American dream: fame, fortune, power and love. However, there’s one catch: they all have to learn how to obtain these things without hurting others and most importantly, doing so while remaining true to themselves.

The story is centered around the lives of Cullen and Abra Dixon, Natasha Coleman, (Abra and Cullen’s best friend) and Miles Browning, a successful; Managing Director of Goldman Sachs. Cullen, a successful lawyer with hopes of becoming partner at his prestigious law firm, has for most of his adult life played life safely. This explains why he dates and later marries his college sweetheart, Abra. Cullen

admits that Abra wasn’t the prettiest woman he’d ever met but she had the proper “grooming” that a man of his caliber would want thus making her good wife material. It isn’t until Cullen meets Cynthia, an exotic looking model that he becomes honest with himself and realizes that he never really loved his wife Abra. Sadly, his marriage ends, but his journey to finding his true self begins.

*The Itch* is a well-written and courageous novel because the author writes open and honestly about real issues which affect the community: absentee father, psychological issues, poverty, etc. I applaud her courage for making her characters identifiable but most importantly allowing them to realize the problems in their lives and face them. Ms. Little is an artist who’ll be around for a long time as she’s earned her respect as a serious and knowledgeable writer who’s entertaining as well as honest.

## Ella Baker

by Joanne Grant  
John Wiley & Sons

*Reviewed by Kathleen Morris*

It is wonderful to see the growing number of biographies of black women entering the literary marketplace. A new one, *Ella Baker - Freedom Bound*, by Joanne Grant (John Wiley & Sons 1998) hits the bookstores this month.

In the book’s opening chapters, chronicling Ella Baker’s girlhood years, Grant writes “The copper beech filtered the sunlight speckling the small girl on the swing. Flashes of light and shade danced off her white cotton dress and twinkled in her braids.” Please.

It is apparent that Grant was a great admirer of Ms. Baker - which, I think, may have been the biggest obstacle to the book because that fondness caused Grant to airbrush the person that was Ella Baker. Commenting on an angry exchange between a newspaper editor and Ms. Baker, a correspondent, Grant writes, “Her tendency to make her own time schedule was a fault that “dogged” her for the rest of her career - though “dogged” is probably not the right word, as she sailed through doing her best in all circumstances, despite the complaints of those who preferred to hear from

her in a timely fashion.” This chirpy anecdote reveals more about an obstinately headstrong Baker than Ms. Grant might prefer — but it is just such “flesh” that makes a literary or historic figure interesting and real.

Grant does, despite the indulgent musings, paint an exciting picture - particularly once she enters the Civil Rights Era. It is here that she displays her skill as a chronicler - though much of the action takes place with Ms. Baker’s voice just off stage.

For 30 years, Ms. Baker’s work with organizations such as the NAACP, Southern Christian Leadership Conference and SNCC, allowed Ms. Baker entrée into a political world peopled by other leaders of the era, including Dr. King. - for whom she maintained a rather public criticism of.

In the end, I found *Ella Baker - Freedom Bound*, a dilution of the life of a woman whose lifelong dedication to and participation in the struggle for civil rights are a legacy to all who benefit from her efforts.

# WHY I WRITE

by Kathleen Morris

**I** watched the tail-end of a television show last night, where a woman unraveled into madness and, before taking her on life, held a classroom of children hostage, shot six, killed one. A true story, and sadly, not an unfamiliar one. A woman's pain or grief or anger imploding - and then exploding - and her destruction. I started to turn the lights out and get ready for bed, wondering why in the world I had watched such a show before sleep. The sadness I felt was for her - and I wondered, not for the first time, how ever do we begin to address all of the pain in the world?

I think it starts with loneliness. The feeling of aloneness in the midst of family, schoolyard games, lovers, children. That feeling in your stomach that clutches as you swallow tears - the source of which you don't fully understand.

When I was little, I escaped my loneliness in books. Oh books! Stories of people who never felt alone, who never doubted love, who never feared the dark, or growing old, or dying young. And books of tears triumphed over. I could cry for the Ugly Duckling - spurned and despised, so alone and unloved - in a way I could never cry for myself. Besides, he became a swan and found his family and was welcomed home. I cried for Madeleine, the little orphan who stood at the end of two straight lines (the smallest one was Madeleine). I cried because she had no family. I wonder now if I would have spared her my tears had I not known she would be brave, make a friend, do something so everyone would know she was special and love her - before the end of the story. What point were tears for those who would not be saved anyway? I could be Madeleine for a little while too, otherwise, what point were tears for me? And I grew up to be a writer. Why am I not surprised? "Oh, to be talented" people gush as they stand around waiting to have me sign their books. "Why do you write?" they ask - and I struggle to find words to explain. I guess it's because I

have always felt like an outsider - even in my family. The only place where I had a place - was in books. I know I would surely be mad had I not found other worlds, the worlds woven by words, to journey to. And I know I write to reach people in their alone-ness. I want to weave pictures that make a reader, if only for a short time, feel as if she is A Part Of. I write for the woman in the closet of some small town; the woman in a relationship in which love has long since died, afraid to move on because someone is better than no one; the young girl who, in the quiet of her room late at night, cries bitter tears and wonders why she is the one who is different.

I write because I want all women to feel that they have one friend with whom all things are acceptable. One place where they are free to explore that which they cannot give voice to. One moment when there can be laughter or tears in a life where everything sometimes seems so horribly gray.

I write because I want to join the dance that is life - but I fear I never learned those steps. I write because sometimes, even in my lover's arms, I feel the chill of isolation. I write words I cannot speak. Draw places I cannot go. Write of the love and passion I cannot abandon myself to. Yet.

I write to draw a map that might pull together all the fragmented pieces that I am, that other people wish me to be. I write to pull my voice up and out of my Self and to encourage others to do the same, hoping that until they can, they will find safe haven, a place to BE - within the pages of MY books.

Kathleen Morris is the author of *Speaking In Whispers*, *African-American Lesbian Erotica*. She facilitates *The Erotic Pen*, a national writing workshop designed to encourage women in the discovery of their creative and sensual powers through the art of writing. She lives in West Roxbury.

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ACROSS

- 1 Striver's one
- 4 Codlike fish
- 8 Toward the mouth
- 12 Before
- 13 Malarial fever
- 14 Brazilian soccer player
- 15 Formed in 1817 to send free African-Americans to Africa
- 16 The "Th—" is gone"
- 17 "Oh how I wish it would \_\_\_\_\_"
- 18 Kneecap
- 20 Cushion
- 21 Madhubuti was he
- 22 World's Largest Desert
- 25 Kingdom
- 28 How the Chariot swings
- 29 "I ain't to proud to \_\_\_"
- 30 Deavere Smith (1950- )

- 31 Hurston wrote about these and mules
- 32 On sheltered side
- 33 Alimentary canal
- 34 Dunbar's "\_\_\_ and Ivy"
- 35 A woman has these
- 36 Afraid
- 38 Sam and Dave are one
- 39 Taxi or Bandleader
- 40 Person of great influence
- 44 Precedes Rabbit or Fox
- 46 "The revolution will be \_\_\_\_\_"
- 47 Hide of a small beast
- 48 Repeat
- 49 Ireland
- 50 Not a Lager or a Stout
- 51 Capital of Yemen
- 52 Trial
- 53 Born

DOWN

- 1 Countee Cullen: "We shall not always plant while others \_\_\_"
- 2 Killer whale
- 3 Author of "Race Matters"
- 4 Where is the Apollo?
- 5 Dominique is this
- 6 Swahili Eat
- 7 Snakelike fish
- 8 T.V. Talk show host
- 9 Legible
- 10 He was Clay
- 11 Lair
- 19 (1918-1996) The "First" Lady of Jazz
- 20 Foot of an animal
- 22 The "Prodigal" one
- 23 Ishmael (1938-)
- 24 Matures
- 25 Hindu music
- 26 "...When the rainbow is \_\_\_\_\_"
- 27 Precede
- 28 Monetary unit of Albania
- 31 He was "HOT"
- 32 Great age
- 34 Globe
- 35 Richard Bruce the Illustrator
- 37 Hank with a bat
- 38 Angela
- 40 Bog
- 41 Spoken in Ghana and Ivory Coast
- 42 Roofing item
- 43 Fencing sword
- 44 Brassiere
- 45 "\_\_\_ Record": A report on lynching
- 46 Permit

Crossword puzzle designed by Troy Johnson / www.aalbc.com  
 Puzzle #01011198 Copyright © 1997 by the African American Literature Book Club

# WRITE ON

by Mo Fleming

I am not a writer by accident. When I was 10, Aunt Stella (God bless her) encouraged me to keep a diary. Alas, then as now, I am not must of a diarist. Yet, despite my sporadic journal keeping, Aunt Stella's influence has held sway for close to thirty years. Recently I spoke with a several writers to gain an insight into their journey from reader to writer.

Children's book author Evelyn Coleman, has recently written the exciting adult thriller, *'What A Woman's Gotta Do'*, recalls that her father provided her earliest encouragement.

"As a female child he taught me in a very non-gendered environment about life."

Romance author, Gwynne Forster, (*Obsession, Sealed With A Kiss*) also received her first support at home. Her mother, Vivian Johnson, an English teacher wrote short stories to help her students. Mrs. Johnson championed her daughter's youthful poetry, and made many helpful comments on improving Ms. Forster's dissertation, as well as her first professionally published work.

*Bushwick Observer* editor, and free-lance writer Angeli Rasbury remembers showing a friend a short

my developing sense of humor was 'cute'," recalls Lee Meadows, Detroit radio personality, and author of the self-published, *'Silent Conspiracy'*.

Mrs. Robinson enjoyed Meadows', "...outlandish story ideas of action heroes and children who ate until they burst." A dedicated teacher, she was limited in what she could teach in her curriculum, still, "...Mrs. Robinson would often bring in books from her own collection and march us to the library, and direct us to books about other lands and people. She believed that the pen was mightier than the sword and help me to see its truth."

Mr. Gaylord, Mr. Peace, Rev. Ben Foust and Mr. Stanfield were all teachers who noticed Coleman's early writing skills. "I find it interesting now that they were all black men," she said, "Because later when I began reading, I mostly read male writers."

But it was at college in Durham, North Carolina that her english teacher, a white woman, told Coleman that, "I could become a great writer."

Yet despite this early attention and support, the authors I spoke with came to writing from many different areas. Ms. Coleman studied psychology. Meadows was a telecommunications major. Gwynne Forster is a de-

"Fame, success and all that other stuff generally doesn't come with the first book, so don't be disappointed.

story one evening in night court, "She said she liked it and wanted to see more of my writing." Since then Rasbury's work has appeared in *Essence*, *Black Elegance*, *Belle* and *The New York Law Review*.

"I remember my earliest encouragement came from a third grade teacher who seemed to like the idea that

mographer. Angeli Rasbury, an attorney.

None of these authors studied writing in college, although, "I did take a couple of writing workshops while I was a lawyer at the Legal Aid Society to give me something to do that would 'relax' me," Ms. Rasbury states. And after Ms. Coleman won a writing fellow-

ship from the North Carolina Arts Council, “I took as many classes as workshops as possible. Writing classes and conferences are invaluable.”

“I didn’t major in writing,” Meadows said, “But I did take several writing courses as part of my major.” During this time he also “..developed an interest in writing poetry. I was drawn to the use of simple sentences that hone a thought or feeling. I was heavily influenced by the work of Nikki Giovanni and others of that era.”

Not only do writers generally labor in obscurity, but writing by its nature is a solitary pursuit. Meadows is a member of the Detroit Black Writer’s Guild. The Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators and Sisters in Crime have helped Evelyn Coleman’s development, “I am always learning from other writers and other people’s lives. For a short time in my writing career I was totally isolated from people, and I found that my ability to write dialogue really suffered.”

Ms. Rasbury agrees, “I think socializing is important in every aspect of our lives. I would say that some of these experiences are relevant to a writer’s development.”

Indeed most authors, especially first time authors draw heavily on our personal lives for inspiration. If we are living those lives in a vacuum, doing nothing, going nowhere, meeting no one, this will reflect in our writing. Some of the most interesting books in recent years have been memoirs: *Volunteer Slavery, Makes Me Wanna Holler, Gal*. Essays and other works of non-fiction (*Trespassing, The Sistah’s Rules*) draw on our perceptions and observations of life around us. And novels are liberally infused with the life experiences of the authors specialized knowledge of specific careers, lifestyles, hobbies and other interests.

“All the successful writers labored alone in obscurity, but never lost their touch with the world,” Meadows reminds us. Interestingly, Coleman claims, “I am not much of a group person, but I love people. I particularly enjoy other people who want to write and that includes those who are published as well as those waiting to be published.”

Angeli Rasbury has a few good friends who give their impressions of her work, concurring with Meadows who feels that feedback is critical for writers. Cer-

tainly the comments of friends can be helpful, especially friends who are writers, or are in publishing or journalism, and have good editorial skills. Nascent writers can benefit from their perspectives. They can point out strengths and weaknesses, and make valuable suggestions. Conversely, a friend with a less critical eye may like your work, and encourage your efforts, yet their assessments might be more emotional than constructive. Coleman has friends who worked as copy editors and journalists and are “avid readers” who check her work because, “...my husband, Talib, usually reads everything I write first, but he’s a kind and gentle soul...so I can’t go by him. My own children, of course, are afraid I might withhold money if they criticize too much so I don’t use close family to give me impressions, or feedback—just wonderfully complimentary commentary.”

These writers have their own ‘sound’ advice for new writers. “Write for the joy of writing,” Coleman says, “Tell the story you wish to tell even if it’s not commercial. Work on your craft as though it were your job, since hopefully, one day it will be your job.”

Ms. Rasbury shared this valuable lesson, “When an idea comes to your or you make an observation that interests you, write it down so that when the time comes to make use of the idea, you don’t have to go crazy trying to remember it.” Rasbury further recommends, “Don’t be afraid to submit an article to a magazine because it might be rejected. Submit the article, call the editor. See what happens. You may get your piece published, or you may learn about some other piece that the magazine is looking for.”

“Fame, success and all that other stuff generally doesn’t come with the first book, so don’t be disappointed. You have to focus on the ‘body of work’ over the long run and not the short, quick hit. If you’re lucky and it happens..fine, but don’t take it to the bank just yet. It will come in time,” were thoughtful words from Mr. Meadows.

Mo Fleming is President of BCA Books a company dealing in African American literature, editor of the Informed Resource newsletter, a writer and poet most recently published in Crab Orchard Review, and a textile artist specializing in hand-sewn quilts.

## In Another Place, Not Here

by Dionne Brand

Grove/Atlantic

Reviewed by Dorothy Harris

*In Another Place, Not Here*, a novel about two Caribbean women whose lives intersect at significant points of their separate searches, is not simply a novel about a love story between the two women. Readers will be quite disappointed if that is all they are expecting. It is the story of one woman looking for “the revolution,” and finding that the revolution is where she is. It is the story of another woman looking for some place where her life will be different. Both women learn that life for Caribbean women, regardless of where they are, is intertwined with the politics of the place and the time.

Brand employs effective writing tools, especially with regard to the use of language, voice, and characterization in the novel. Written in a circular and non-linear structure, and flowing and fluctuating between countries, characters, voices, scenery, ideas, and themes, the story is told in the tradition of the language of the women about whom it is written. Brand’s language is vivid, sensual, poetic, lyrical, and it is also coarse, disjointed, con-

flicting, and confusing. Steeped in the orality of the culture of its characters, it speaks for those about whom it is written in their language and from their world.

What we learn of the characters, and of the worlds in which they live, we learn through their own eyes. Brand is effective in giving us women’s words, women’s wisdom, women’s worries, women’s issues, women’s bodies, women’s language, women’s spirituality, women’s lives through the eyes of the women themselves.

Reading *In Another Place, Not Here* is work. It commands that the reader engages in the lives in which the characters are involved. Brand does not just give the readers beautiful language and images. That would be too simple. The reader must involve herself with the dialect, the culture, the history, and the geographic vacillation of the characters. It is well worth the journey, though, as the reader completes the novel having experienced, instead of simply having read, the text.

[continued from page 9]

herself. It’s just that I need a job and, and I don’t know where else to go.” She dabbed at her nose and took a deep breath, knowing she was not making the great first impression that she had set out to display. She hadn’t intended to beg, to cry, but she could not help herself. She was desperate. She had children. Mouths to feed. She needed money. “I’ve been braiding hair since I was ten,” she spat out “I do weaves, I, well... I’m not too good with chemicals, but I can help out on washing and conditioning, or if you just need someone to clean up the place. ...”

“Slow down,” Pat said, more concerned with the woman’s mental state than her verbal resume.

“You don’t understand. I need a job. I’ve got two children, my husband died and... and...”

“Ssh,” Pat purred. “It’s going to be all right,” she said. “Everything’s going to work out fine,” she said, eyeing

the rosary the woman still clutched in her hand. “Have you been using that?” she asked and touched the row of beads and the woman’s hand. “Prayer works.”

“I know,” Faye said, suddenly finding strength in the woman’s touch. The last time she’d gone to confession the pastor had told her she had to be strong. He told her to pray for strength, seek it out and meditate in it. She did. Still, when her mind was lulled into thoughts of her dead husband, seeing him slumped over, bleeding blood so red... “Oh God,” Faye screamed as the tears began to flow again.

Pat felt so bad for the stranger that she took her in her arms right then and there and alone in the empty shop the two strangers held on to each other, neither one wanting to be the first to let go.

Two blessings were received that night Faye found a job and Pat found a new friend.

[continued from page 19]

African American women in literature, for instance, has no interest in challenging stereotypes, and can not be relied upon to offer any new definitions of any person outside of his/her experience. Such writers will continue to perpetuate negative images of African American women by maintaining negative depictions of African American women in literature and even in the media. Even as it is clear that we have moved far from the roles by which we were typically defined, the definitions continue to prove to be horrifying and even absurd. We can not assume that the definitions of us by non-African American women writers are to our benefit, but should certainly assume that they are to the benefit of the creators.

The negative images of African American women, created by those outside of our communities, continue to assault us while we simultaneously continue to reject them. The role of negative imaging of African American women is powerful in that it blatantly yet subtly impacts our quality of life. It extends beyond the microcosmic experiences within our immediate communities to the larger macrocosm that includes those entities that create policies that effect our lives.

As African American women, an enormous part of

our own survival relies on combating the negative images that we encounter on a daily basis. It is clear that it is up to African American women to define ourselves, to write our own stories from our perspectives. African American women, as writers, must become the authors of our own definitions. As writers, we place ourselves in the position of control, of ones who are in charge of our subjects, of ones who are responsible for controlling our images and for dictating the ways in which we should be perceived. Because no other writer has been able to be a reliable source for accurately writing about our lives, African American women must tell our stories ourselves.

Anna Julia Cooper wrote in 1892 that: "...our Caucasian barristers are not to blame if they cannot quite put themselves in the dark man's place, neither should the dark man be wholly expected fully and adequately to reproduce the exact Voice of the Black Woman." (Cooper, 1892) Cooper asserted over a century ago how essential it was for African American women to tell our stories, and indicated that if we wait for others to define us, we would be defined inappropriately. She even makes it clear that the "exact" voice of the African American woman is what needs to be produced, and that it can not even be produced by our African American brothers. Cooper's emphasis on the "exact," indicates that the perfect and most accurate descriptions and definitions of our lives come specifically from African American women, not from any one else. She points out the futility of even expecting whites, male or female to write for us. For so long, we have been living with this ridicule that has resulted from the pens of whites and of African American men who have either written us out of existence, or have written what they have determined was to become our lives, and subsequently our destiny. Cooper's point is significant for us to refer to today, even in a time when some scholars are giving more attention to African American women's work. We must be consistently reminded of the need to define ourselves, and of the efforts that work against ours in defining African American women appropriately.

Dorothy Harris is the Director of Pre-admissions Instructional Support Program at UMass Boston where she also teaches Critical Thinking and African American Women's Literature.

## Next issue...

**Blue Collar Blues** by Rosalyn McMillan  
**How to Love A Black Woman** by Dr. Ronn Elmore  
**Staying Married: A Guide for African American Couples** by Anita Doreen Diggs & Dr. Vera S. Pastor  
**Milk In My Coffee** by Eric Jerome Dickey

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# LORRAINE HANSBERRY

Although Lorraine Hansberry's prolific writing career and life were cut short by a bout of cancer at the tender age of 34, her luminous works speak on through the voices of all women writers who are mindful, thoughtful, and revolutionary.

Hansberry's most noted writing was "A Raisin In The Sun," for which she became the first black and youngest playwright, ever to win the New York Drama Critics Award for Best Play Of The Year in 1959. For the play, Hansberry drew from her own experiences to tell the tale of an African-American family's struggle to escape from the ghetto. Prefacing her play, was the poem "A Dream Deferred," which was written by Langston Hughes.

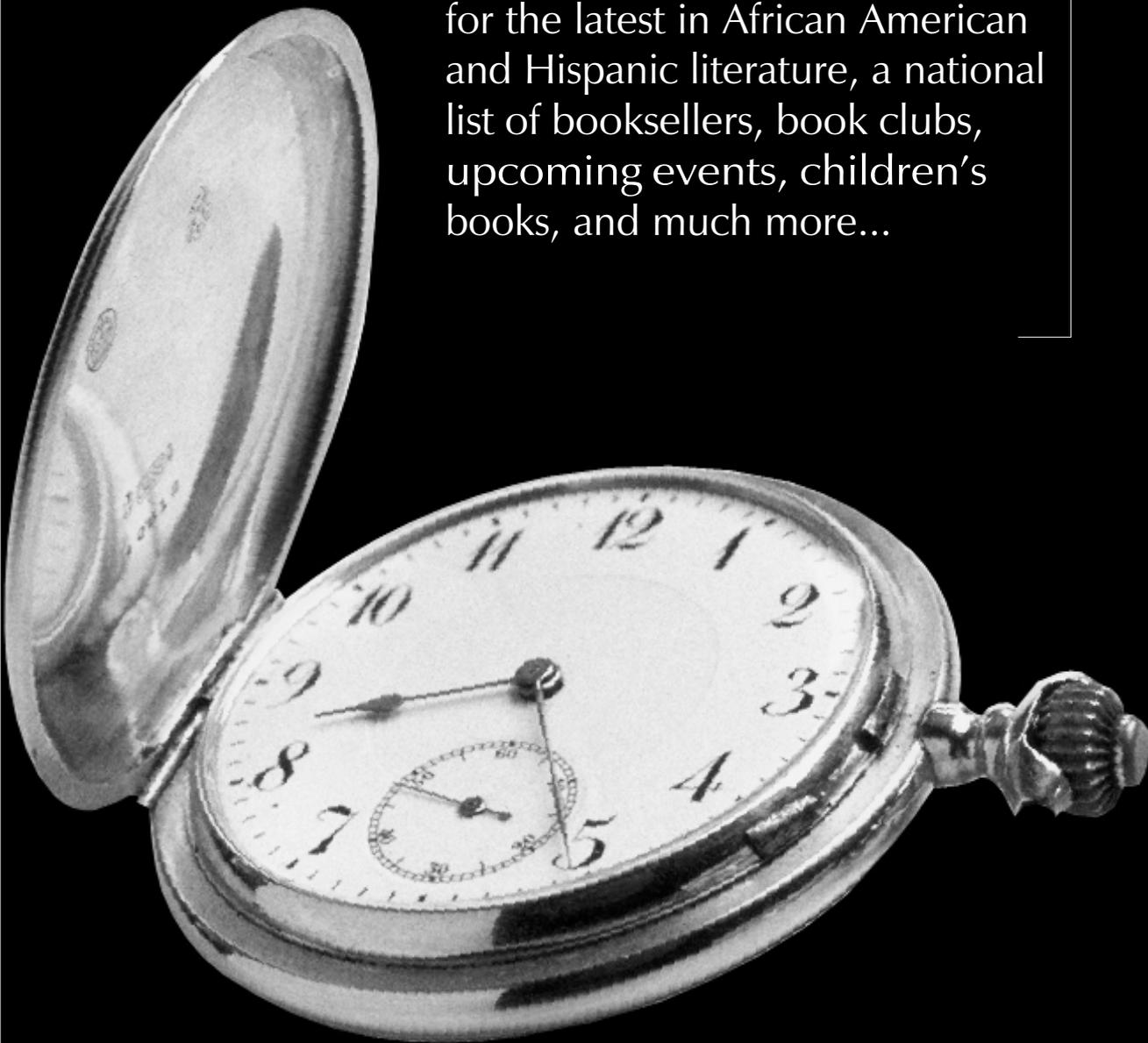
For the few years she lived after her success of "A Raisin In The Sun," Hansberry wrote more plays and many newspaper articles and essays on racism, homophobia, world peace, and other social issues. Her second play, "The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window", received mixed reviews and ran for only 101 nights, closing the night she died.

After her death, her ex-husband, Robert Nemiroff published "Les Blancs: The Collected Last Plays of Lorraine Hansberry," which contained "The Drinking Gourd," "Les Blancs," and "What Use Are Flowers." He also commemorated her life by weaving together pieces of her own writing in an autobiography/biography entitled, "To Be Young Gifted And Black."

She believed that no matter how complex things are, or how futile life may seem, one can always find an issue to stand for. Her spirit of activism, resistance and defiance will continue to reverberate through her works forever, billowing across generations and generations.

- Lynne d. Johnson





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