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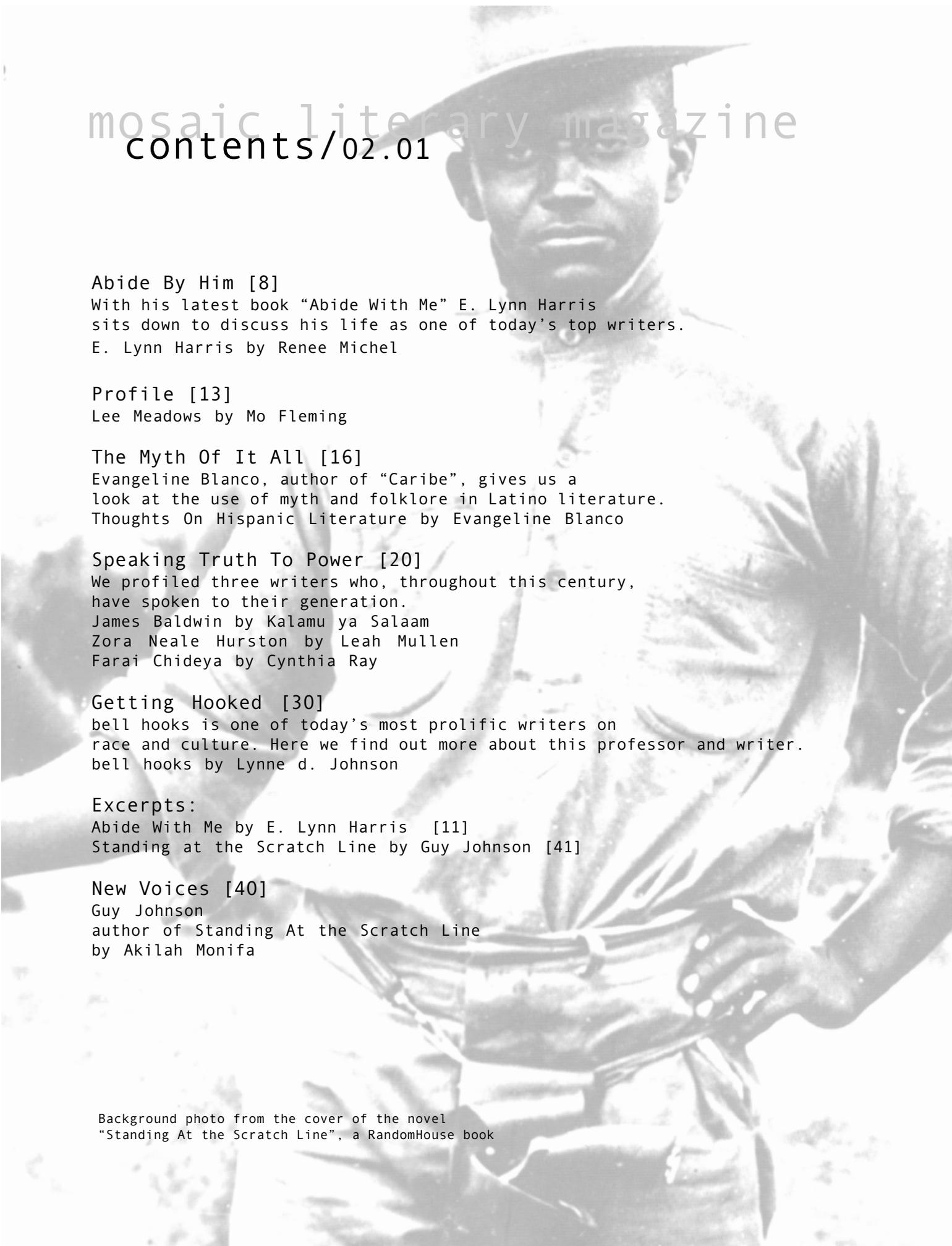
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Hurston

bell hooks
Lolita Files
hispanic literature

E. Lynn
HARRIS

preview his new novel
Abide With Me

James Baldwin



mosaic literary magazine
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02/01

Spring ‘99

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music, race and soul of america by craig werner

boy-wives and female husbands:

studies of african american homosexualities

by stephen o. murray and will roscoe

Coq Au Vin by Charlotte Carter

getting to the good part by lolita files

Here and Now by Kimberla Lawson Roby

inner city blues by paula woods

parable of the talents by octavia butler

Remembered Rapture by bell hooks

shoes on the otha foot by hunter hayes

Something's Wrong With Your Scale by Van Whitfield

Strong Men Keep Coming Portraits On Black Men In America: The
Book of African American Men by Tonya Bolden

Tell No Tales by Eleanor Taylor Bland

watch me fly by myrlie evers-williams

what brothers think, what sisters know

by denene millner and nick chiles

what the music said...by mark anthony neal

Your wife Is Not Your Momma by Wellington Boone

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some things
wrong with
your scale

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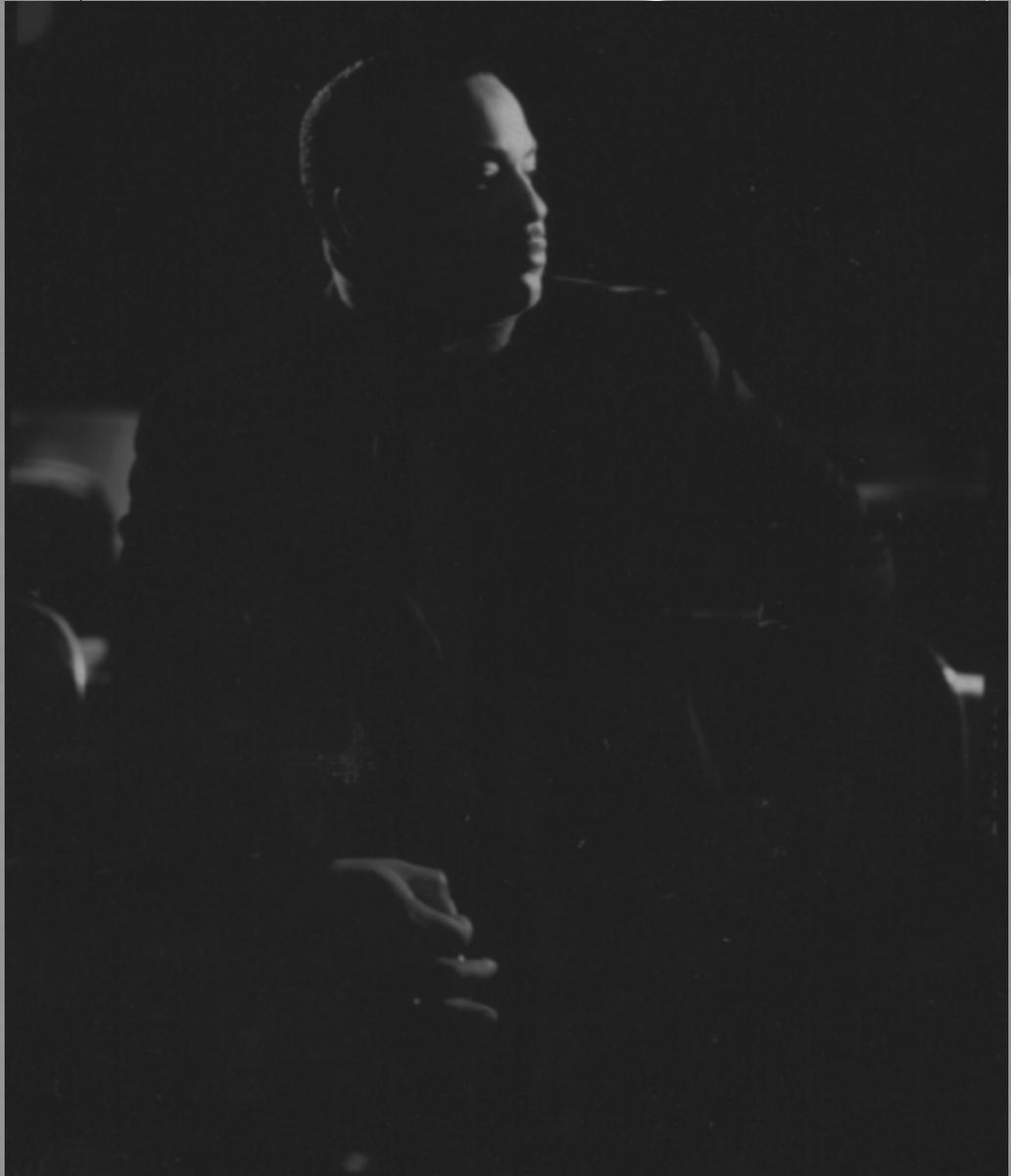
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E. LYNN HARRIS

An Exclusive Interview by Renee Michel

On

any given day, when not working on a novel or involved with his public, E. Lynn Harris, best-selling author of the soon to be released novel *Abide With Me*, can mistakenly be construed as the average guy-next-door.

He is a sports fanatic who orders out for pizza on occasion and enjoys a good bowl of cereal. He loves to read the paper and still can't resist mama's home cooking. He listens to Boyz II Men and Whitney Houston and watches MTV unplugged. During our interview, E. Lynn spoke candidly about his humble, yet ambitious beginnings as a fiction writer. His captivating southern drawl and "down-home" disposition invited me to hang on every word and so I did. It becomes quite evident at the onset how appreciative he is of his largest and most dedicated core of fans, black women.

Born in 1955 in Flint, Michigan and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas, where a young Hillary Clinton actually represented him successfully in a legal dispute. He was raised with three younger sisters in a single-parent household headed by his mother who worked several jobs to keep the family above water. At The University of Arkansas, where he graduated with honors in 1977 with a BA in Journalism, he was the school's first black male cheerleader and the first black yearbook editor. He'd planned to either go on to law school after completing his studies or become a magazine editor. During his senior year, while recruiting African American students on campus for their sales division, IBM offered him a position upon graduation. He accepted and became one of the first African Americans to sell large scale machines in Dallas.

Approaching his thirteenth year in the computer industry, E. Lynn became painfully aware of his ►

unhappiness. His strong dissatisfaction with the corporate structure where he felt he'd lost his autonomy prompted an urgency for change. He'd become the man that he had always wanted to be but didn't like; "a sad façade" he said it was. Mid-way through an interview initiated by a head-hunter -- "while putting on the charm" as he described -- it struck him that he "wanted out." It was a feeling of having "hit rock-bottom" he explained, that made the decision to leave behind his successful corporate career a simple one. Not long after, with the little money he had left in savings, he purchased a computer and began plotting the novel that would catapult him into literary stardom. Interestingly, E. Lynn never dreamed of becoming a best-selling novelist because "the idea", he said "seemed too far-fetched."

"[In 1989/90] Lynn gave me a copy of his book and asked me to tell him what I thought. A few days later I was still [experiencing the initial impact] of the novel." says G. Ewa Ealy, Co-Manager of Shrine of the Black Madonna Bookstore in Atlanta, Georgia. She began selling his novel, *Invisible Life* on consignment. "In less than twenty days we had a bona fide hit. He had a dream and was determined to make it happen." According to E. Lynn though, the dream was basic -- to be fulfilled by working at something he found meaningful. *Invisible Life* was financed on a "hope and a prayer" and by family and close friends. "I was working twelve to fourteen hours a day [had no money], and I was happy," he said fondly of the early days of self-publishing. After making a sales pitch to have his book printed in Nashville, his pool of family and friends rallied in support of him to get the print job off the ground. He confesses, though, that the bulk of the money he owed the printer was paid off at the end of thirty-day cycle of book sales. The novel took off quickly and he sold 10,000 copies before it was re-issued by Consortium Press in 1991 and by Doubleday in 1994. "Even if it had remained my own small business, it was mine and it was something I felt passionate about. Looking back, it's amazing that I accomplished what I did."

While in South Beach recently E. Lynn explained how, while focusing on the memoirs he's now writing, his well known character Basil kept "talking to him" as his characters often do. It isn't unusual for them to dictate their stories. He was under the impression that Basil wanted his story finished. He was, nevertheless, able to keep Basil at bay. Best known for the duality of his bisexual male characters that his novels feature, E. Lynn's books address, such topics as relationships, values, sexuality, family, AIDS, and the corporate culture. His novels have been included on such best-seller lists as The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, USA Today and Essence Magazine. His unique gift for storytelling and ear for dialogue, keep his fans coming back for more. Lonice Woods, a fan from New York says that while reading E. Lynn's novels her emotions often reflect those of the characters. She hopes that straight black men will read E. Lynn's books to develop an understanding that might help take some of the pressure off of homosexual black men to be "something that they are not."

When touring, E. Lynn always visits three types of booksellers; a black, an independent and a chain store. He holds a special place in his heart for black and gay bookstores that supported him when no one else would. The owners of small black community bookstores really do know their product he said. They take the time out to review the books and are in sync with their customers' interests and preferences. As Ewa Ealy put it, "I pride myself in knowing our customers' needs and tastes." E. Lynn feels that it is important for writers and readers to support the small bookseller because they do have a unique significance in our communities.

Black women, he says, responded favorably to his original manuscript. So naturally he wanted to go where he could find them to shop his books. He settled on beauty parlors and the rest is, well you know, history. A strong and growing number of E. Lynn's fans, however, are straight men, mostly white at the moment, from whom he has received significant feedback. One such man,

he'd been exchanging the latest [football] statistics with in a sports chat room. After having discovered E. Lynn's identity [as a novelist], he sent a Christmas card bearing a photo of his son with a note saying how he'd read one of his books for the first time and thoroughly enjoyed his writing. Then there was the pizza delivery guy who was awestruck when he realized to whom he was actually delivering pizza. "Are you *the* E. Lynn Harris?" he eagerly inquired. Surprised, E. Lynn said yes and learned that the young man had read and enjoyed one of his books. About thirty percent or so of his fans are gay men and while on tour, he has met several white women throughout the country who are loyal fans.

While traveling, E. Lynn meets many strangers on planes. He enjoys having one-on-one conversations with people from all walks of life who have differing views about life. If the world were his to change, he said he'd declare it a rule that before judging unfairly an entire group of people, an individual would be required to converse with a member from that group on a one-on-one basis. He says that many of his fans are political opposites and yet they can still appreciate him and his work and vice versa. "We tend to judge people based only on what we see and this doesn't give us an accurate assessment."

Seeing the miracles that happen everyday in his life and in the lives of others keeps E. Lynn spiritually grounded. He also added that Ilanya Vanzant, the self-help author, leaves him a prayer each month and reminds him to stay spiritually-centered and that Nikki Giovanni and Maya Angelou were also supportive of him. To nourish his body, E. Lynn works out at the gym when in Chicago and New York where he has apartments. Two of his favorite hobbies are visiting with friends and family and going to the theatre. I didn't ask E. Lynn the age-old question about what advice he'd give to young people, but if I were to answer for him I believe he'd advise, "To thine own self be true." ★

Abide With Me by E. Lynn Harris

Doubleday Books

It was Thursday afternoon, 2:00 P.M. sharp.

"How was your week?" the doctor asked.

"It's been all good," Basil said.

"Tell me about it."

"I went on a date," Basil said.

"With a man or a woman?" the doctor asked.

Basil became visibly upset and looked sternly at the doctor. After a moment of silence, he asked, "What do you mean a man or a woman? I told you I don't date men. I just sleep with them." Basil felt his body become sweaty thinking about where the doctor was headed with a question like that. Once again, he thought the sessions were not helping.

"Did you have a good time?"

"It was all right. You know, dinner, a movie, and then back to my place for sex."

"On the first date?"

"Of course."

"Did you enjoy it?"

"Damn straight. I met this woman walking down Fifth Avenue near Tiffany's. She was beautiful. I caught her eye and she smiled and stopped. You know when they stop they want some play. So that was my cue. I went over, introduced myself and got the digits. I waited the mandatory three days, called her, and invited her out,"

Basil said confidently. "But she was slick in a way . . . I mean making me call because she wouldn't take my number."

"So how did you end up in bed?"

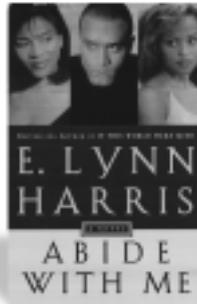
Basil gave the doctor a faint smile of amusement and said, "It was easy. We went to this nice seafood joint and both ordered lobster and after a couple glasses of wine she leaned over and whispered, 'I bet you eat pussy real well,' and I looked at her and said, 'And you know it!'"

"Did you tell her you sleep with men?"

"Fuck no! She didn't ask. That's why I think women are so stupid and why I hate them sometimes."

"Hate is a strong word."

"I know, but that's how I feel sometimes," Basil said somberly. For a second he thought ►



about Yolanda, the last woman he had loved.

"Why do you hate them?"

Basil balled his left fist and pressed it into his cupped right hand. As he turned it firmly, he wanted to hit something or somebody, but he controlled his anger.

"I hate them and I love them. I usually try not to make eye contact with women because when I see them and I see that smile and that ass, then I immediately want to fuck them. And after I fuck them, I hate them. You know, when I get my nut."

"Do you think that's hate?"

"I don't know what you call it but for me it's a strong reaction. I suddenly become sick at the sight and

smell of them. And you know what I really hate is when they ask, 'Do you love me?' I want to tell them that pussy is the best truth serum."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean women ought to ask a man if he loves them right after they've fucked. 'Cause if he says he loves you before you fuck and he stutters after sex, then he don't love the woman, he loves the pussy."

"Why do you think that's true?"

"'Cause I used to date this honey once and I couldn't stand her. But I couldn't break up with her 'cause the pussy was so good. She had this beautiful

ass and I couldn't stand the thought of somebody else hittin' it."

"What didn't you like about her?"

"'Cause she was a dumb bitch but she thought she was so smart. I mean she had gone to City College or some school like that and she thought she knew everything. But the truth of the matter was the bitch didn't know shit. She would misuse big words all the time and that just drove me mofo crazy."

"Why didn't you tell her or correct her?"

"The bitch was so stupid she wouldn't have figured it out."

"And how do you feel about men?"

"What do you mean?"

"What do you think of men?"

Basil suddenly had a picture of Raymond in his head, but quickly replaced it with Monty, a man who had threatened to announce Basil's bisexuality to the world. Basil couldn't stand Monty. Basil really hated his uncle.

"Aw, they're just as bad. If they're gay, then they fall in love with the dick. Mofos love a big dick. And the mofos who ain't gay fall in love with the pussy and the pussy controls them."

"And where does that put you?" the doctor asked.

"On top of any situation 'cause I know what the real deal is when it comes to sex. I understand the power of sex. And once you understand something completely, you can control it."

"Do you really feel the need to have sex with anyone right now?"

"Why not? I'm not depressed or anything like that and when my jimmie gets up, I've got to feed him."

"Do you feel like you're addicted to sex?"

"Didn't you hear what I said just a minute ago? I ain't addicted to jack."

"Do you plan to call this woman again?"

"Fuck no!"

"Why not?"

"'Cause I got what I wanted. If she's lucky she might get a booty call in a couple of months."

"A booty call?"

"Yeah, you know . . . well, maybe you don't. It's when you call somebody late at night, at least after midnight, and you ask them to come over and they know what the deal is."

"I see." The doctor nodded.

"I do know that right now I can't have no honey riding my jock. Calling me every five minutes asking me what I'm doing. That's how they try to get control."

"So you're okay being alone?"

"I ain't alone." Basil knew he had a thick phone book with plenty of numbers to call whenever he became lonely.

"Are you interested in sleeping with men?"

"Not really."

"What does that mean?"

"Like it sounds."

"What about Raymond?"

Basil didn't answer. Again Raymond's face came into Basil's mind. He was silent for about five minutes and then he looked at the doctor and asked, "Isn't my time up?"

"Yes. I'll see you next week."

"Yeah, right." ★

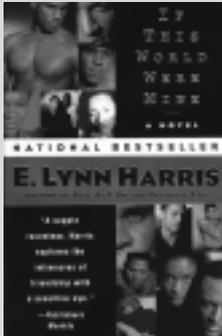
E. Lynn Harris's
previous books include:

Invisible Life

Just As I Am

And This Too Shall Pass

If This World Were Mine



FRESH MEADOWS

Lee Meadows is the author of the bestselling book *Silent Conspiracy*.

by Mo Fleming

Lee Meadows' novel, *Silent Conspiracy* introduces private detective Lincoln Keller, in a unique, five-person "missing persons" case. A group of silken-voiced soul singers on the brink of stardom disappeared without a trace and decades after the fact, Keller is approached to find out why. His search reveals the flip side of the music industry--the people and events off-stage, engaged in dark, dangerous, and deadly business.

Meadows' journey to writing his novel began with the Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew mysteries. Though loved by generations of youths, for a young black boy, something in them was missing. As a teen Meadows drifted away from those mysteries of his childhood, claiming, "There were simply no characters in them that looked like me."

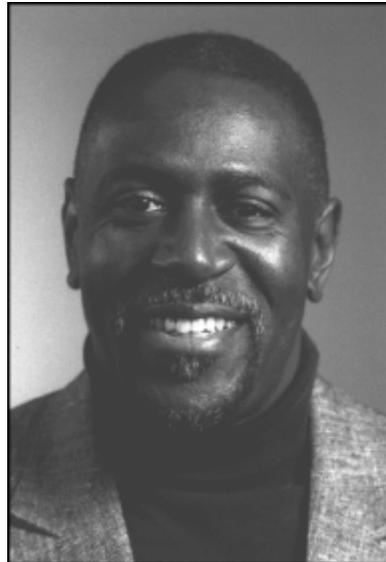
During the late 1960s, Meadows' interests turned to black culture. He became more aware of authors whose work reflected a world closer to his own. His bookshelves began to fill with the literary voices of the Black American Diaspora, writers who explored a political, historical, and fictional perspective grounded in the black experience.

Meadows returned to his early love around 1971-72 after seeing the movie, "Cotton Comes to Harlem." He remembered seeing novels by Chester Himes in his parents' library. Meadows himself began to read Himes, because, "Here was a black man writing mysteries with black characters, from a black viewpoint."

Long fascinated with human behavior, or "the human puzzle" as Meadows describes it, the idea occurred to him that he too could write a mystery. "I love thinking about why people do what they do, and the extent that they go to keep people from knowing what they do."

Subsequently, *Silent Conspiracy* would take several years to write, going through many revisions in the process. Before attempting the genre, Meadows says, "I had to go from being young and certain that I understood, to being middle-aged and knowing that I don't understand."

With *Silent Conspiracy*, Meadows has not only proven his understanding of human nature, but by extension, the mystery genre itself. Look for Lincoln Keller to continue his sleuthing in the upcoming novel, *Above Suspicion*. ★



lee meadows

WRITING & PUBLISHING news

by Pat Houser

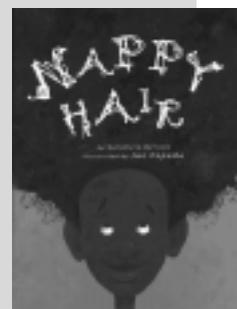
BROWN GIRL IN THE RING

Nalo Hopkinson, author of *Brown Girl in the Ring* and winner of the Warner Aspect First Novel Contest, has received 10 nominations for Best Novel from members of the Science Fiction Writers of America. To top it off, *Brown Girl*, published July 1998, is already in its third printing and is eligible for the Nebula Award preliminary ballot. Stay tuned for Nalo Hopkinson's next work, *Midnight Robber*.



TANGLES OF NAPPY HAIR

Carolivia Herron's *Nappy Hair* caused uproar in a Brooklyn neighborhood. Deemed lyrical and affirming by some and insulting by others, the book resulted in racial tension after a parent photocopied one of its pages and distributed it in her community. When Ruth Sherman presented the book to her redominately black and Hispanic third grade class, parents complained and the teacher was removed from her classroom pending an investigation. Insulting or culturally enriching? You be the judge.



DISNEY JUMPS AT THE SUN

Walt Disney's Jump at the Sun imprint, under Hyperion Books for Children division, plans to publish five new titles this spring in a line of children's books that exclusively focus on black heritage. Target markets range from preschool to young adult. The books deal only with black culture, however, authors, illustrators and target audiences remain unrestricted.



BARNES & NOBLE AND INGRAM

For those who don't know, Barnes & Noble the nation's largest book store chain, has made an offer to buy Ingram Distributors, the nation's largest distributor of books to both chain and independent booksellers. The deal is being studied closely by the government to see if this deal will lead to Barnes & Noble having a monopoly on books that should be available to all booksellers. What this will mean to the dynamics of selling books, only time will tell. For more information visit: www.bookweb.org

MOSQUITO

Gayl Jones is back with her second novel since the tragic encounter that resulted in her husband's suicide during an altercation with the police. *Mosquito* is the story of Sojourner Nadine Jane Johnson, also known as Mosquito, an African American truck driver.



The author of *Corregidora*, *Eva's Man*

and last year's *The Healing*, Jones's new novel takes a deep look into the issues of self-definition and self-identification. The need to be yourself in a multicultural and multiracial society.

Contact Pat Houser at pathouser@aol.com

DIALOGUE '99

OCTOBER 15, 16 & 17, 1999

Fernwood Resort & Conference Center In the Beautiful Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania is the setting for The Sister 2 Sister Network presents Dialogue '99. This literary expo and weekend retreat is a networking symposium where authors, readers and writers dialogue through a "Meet and Mix" evening mixer, seminars, author workshops, panel discussions, a book bazaar, book signings, and a banquet dinner followed by an inspirational/gospel send-off. Set against the scenic backdrop of the Pocono Mountains, Dialogue'99 is a literary conference and weekend retreat you won't want to miss. Weekend packages include all seminars and workshops, deluxe accommodations, breakfast and dinner daily, and all Fernwood Resort amenities. Convenient payment plans available. For conference pricing and conference information, interested authors and participants may email Dialog99@aol.com.

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If you think Mosaic Literary Magazine is the only magazine bringing black literature to black people think again. There are many publications interested in the support of black words. For more information on publications like; Anansi, Rhapsody In Black, Dialogue and many others visit: <http://www.aalbc.com/magazine.htm>

DREAMING THOUGHTS ON HISPANIC LITERATURE IN LATIN

by Evangeline Blanco

Nobel prize winner Gabriel García Márquez said that every good novel is a poetical transposition of reality.

Myths and folk tales figure highly in Hispanic Literature because they contain the nature of human experience. The stories reach the unconscious center of the mind and erase doubt as readers identify with the story lines depicting universal hopes and fears.

Average European and United States citizens favor clear, simple realism and that type of fiction also convinces readers. Hispanic taste differs for two possible reasons: their land and their culture.

There is a magical quality to our land mass. We have fire-spewing volcanoes and fearsome hurricanes. We have dense, wet jungles and impenetrable rain forests, mirror smooth rivers so wide one cannot see the other side, and trees so tall they blot out the sky. We have lush, tropical fruit, plants, animals as well as ruinous earthquakes and bizarre tornadoes. As told by Mr. García Márquez, a tornado in Colombia once lifted an entire circus. Imagine living through the sight of bears and giraffes flying through air.

When Europeans landed in the "New World," they found indigenous peoples fully interactive with their

myths. These Europeans brought with them Africans who also maintained their ties to the wisdom of myth and folklore.

Present day Hispanics have inherited these cultural contributions.

Modern readers accustomed to plain escapism may become lost in the details of magical or exaggerated realism. While instinctively feeling something is right with the vision, they may fail to see the reality.

Mr. García Márquez's best known work is *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In that novel, a character rises to the sky with the help of a sheet. The theme of his book, the title suggests, is solitude or aloneness. The reality is that, ultimately, we are alone at the most important junctures of our lives: birth, death, and personal hardships that others can sympathize or even help with but do not feel exactly. The author, who could have used a tornado for the woman's ascension (as in *The Wizard of Oz*) did not do so. He claimed much trouble finding the right image to help his character rise until he used the sheet. (Shades of Aladdin and the magic carpet? Only the author can answer.)

In Mexican author's Laura Esquivel's "Like Water for Chocolate," we learn the following about the

female protagonist:

1. An unborn girl child, aware of the fate awaiting her, sheds many tears while still within her mother's womb. A flood accompanies her birth. That flood almost washes away the birthing table and leaves behind ten bags of salt.
2. The breasts of a teenage virgin produce enough milk to feed her sister's infant son.
3. Righteous indignation makes a woman boil so that she becomes like water for melting chocolate.
4. The family cook transfers her moods, feelings and thoughts to whatever dish she prepares. Those who eat the food are physically affected, sometimes humorously, sometimes disastrously.

In this book, Mexican recipes often interrupt the flow of the narrative but readers forgive the intrusion of cooking lessons and continue to be fascinated.

They never lose sight that the novel is a love story. With love all things are possible.

Other themes recur in Hispanic literature in one form or another. Shorter stories use the folklore of the "hidden woman" that seems embedded in Hispanic consciousness.

While in Puerto Rico researching my novel, *Caribe*, I met a lively octogenarian. He had the body of a prize-winning boxer and a mind and memory so sharp it cut steel. That, by itself, seemed magical. He swore the following story was true.

In early colonial Puerto Rico a rich, white Spaniard built a huge house and bought a beautiful black slave. He chained her to the attic of his house from where she could barely see through a slit in a tiny wooden and triangular window. He imprisoned her for the rest of her natural life and used her for sex. The man told anyone hearing her cries for help (in her native language) that she was his elderly, insane mother. This woman bore him children which he passed off as the offspring of other slaves. Some of these children, especially the lighter-skinned, gained his confidence and inherited his wealth. The slave died of old age in the attic. Decades later the house fell apart. It was then that townspeople found her skeleton still bound to chains.

To prove his story, my eighty-two-year-old friend cited names, dates, and addresses. His tale fit the theme of my novel but I did not use it. It sounded too familiar. Later, when I went through my bookcase, I

understood why.

In *Tales of Eva Luna* by Chilean novelist Isabel Allende, a man imprisons a woman in a well too deep for her to climb out of to escape. He keeps his inconvenient lover there for the rest of her life.

That potent dramatization is more hard-hitting than a dry report about powerless women in male ruled society.

One situation drawn from myth and folk tale recurs most often. The Trickster, widely identified with Native American and African cultures, is usually an ancestor, male or female, with supernatural powers. He or she brings life, food, and survival techniques to ordinary humans. At other times, Trickster, as the name implies, can be downright mean.

In Cristina Garcia's novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*, we learn that Felicia, mother and provider, sets fire to her philandering husband. She studies voodoo and obsesses about food, specifically coconuts. Her daughters remember how Felicia helped them celebrate their ninth birthday. The entire fourth grade went to their house for a frosted cake and homemade cone hats. Their mother wore a satin cape and sparkles on her face. She entertained the children with magic tricks and provided a donkey piñata. Then Felicia blindfolded daughter Luz and handed her a broom with which to burst it. When Luz did so, the piñata released long, gooey tentacles of raw egg which smeared the hair and clothing of all the children. Felicia yelled, "Come back soon," and shook with laughter. Daughters Milagros and Luz retired to their bedroom, bits of eggshell still in their hair, and cried.

Here, Trickster is not a supernatural being who falls from the sky but a human parent. The reality is the duality or imperfection of all. Anyone is capable of doing harm even, or especially, those we depend upon.

Tales portray innate knowledge as in the "hidden woman" stories. They become myth if they marry instinct with heroism or religious beliefs to explain the unknown.

The following is a contrast of styles. One technique is simple, the other dense.

In Sandra Benítez's *Bitter Ground*, a Pipil woman looking for water waits until just after dawn so that mists will not play tricks with her eyes. "Mercedes adjusted the empty water jug balanced on her ➤

head. She pulled her shawl more tightly over her nose and mouth, a protection against the cunning spirits hovering in these early hours."

First Mercedes fears the "Guardias" or military and simply looks around nervously. Then she fears "cunning spirits." Against those, she covers her nose and mouth. This reflects folk wisdom to safeguard against invisible germs or "spirits" found in cool, breezy mornings.

In *The Storyteller*, by Peru's Mario Vargas Llosa, one character and the narrator/storyteller discuss a man who believes his wife is a demon because she miscarries children and wears too many ornaments. Tasurinchi speaks:

"The machikanari is an evil sorcerer because he serves the breather-out of demons, Kientibakori, and because the kamagarinis, who are his little devils, help him prepare spells..."

Tasurinchi tells that he met a sneezing man from the Viracocha who showed "the filth of his soul," because "green snot ran" from his nose. He says he almost died from confronting this demon and continues speaking: "...remind him that it's the man who goes

'achoo' who is a devil and not the woman who gives birth to dead children or wears many bright-colored necklaces."

Invisible germs are cunning spirits. A human contaminated by germs is a devil. Both can bring death to people who, surrounded by the strength and solitude of nature, lack good nutrition and medicine.

Was Mr. García Márquez correct about what makes a good novel? Consider one of civilization's oldest enduring stories and a common present day occurrence. We know that third party interference can ruin marriages. In the Garden of Eden, a serpent caused a change in Adam and Eve's relationship.

Myth or poetical transposition of what really happens?

Dense presentation may be complex and require more thought than fast, easy reading. Yet, fiction with drama heightened through images drawn from myth creates great literature. It endures because it presents situations that reach the human psyche. Hispanic literature uses myths and folk tales as a different way of seeing things that occur in the lives of many. ★

"The deterioration of African-American family and the need for responsible fatherhood are two of the most pressing issues of many that face our culture as we approach the new millennium!"

Omar Tyree author of *Single Mom*



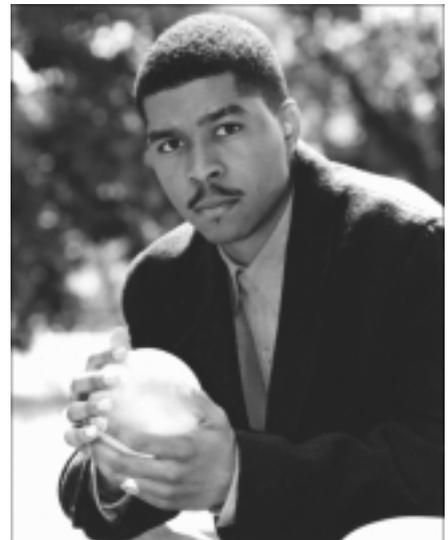
Read Omar Tyree's previous hit novel "A Do Right Man"



"And without being able to celebrate and identify the strong, dedicated, and thoughtful black men of our community, we will, unfortunately, continue to produce more single mother households!"

Visit Omar Tyree @ www.omartyree.com for much, much more.

"Be a father to a child and a man to a woman."



Writing the Synopsis that Sells

By Donna Hill

For the writer, particularly the beginner, one of the most important crafts to master is that of composing the synopsis. The synopsis is the first indicator to an editor about a writer's ability, not only as a craftsman, but as a storyteller. The synopsis is the proverbial foot in the door, the appetizer before the main course, the first and lasting impression. The synopsis sells your book to the editor, their boss, the editorial committee and the publication committee. You can't sell your book without one.

Unfortunately, many writers underestimate the importance of this magic wand, and the mechanics involved in waving it, believing instead that their 500 page tome is all that is necessary. Keep in mind, however, that the average editor receives hundreds of manuscripts per month, each wanting to be read. There must be some mechanism that will trigger interest. That something is the synopsis -- a narrative account detailing the major elements of your novel.

The writer's working synopsis or outline is quite different from what is to be sent to an editor. Generally, a synopsis for submission can be written after a good draft of the second or third chapter of the book is completed, based on a detailed outline. Your synopsis must be compelling and told in the third person, present tense. The flow must be logical as well as chronological and be rife with pertinent details. Be sure to pack your synopsis with action verbs and to conclude with a clear resolution.

Avoid excessive use of adjectives

and adverbs, which will suggest to the editor a weakness in your writing. Be certain to use action verbs and be careful to show, not tell as much as possible. In detailing your synopsis, don't be coy. Do not leave out the climax of the story in the hope of piquing the editor's interest. It doesn't work, and will invariably land your synopsis back in your mailbox or the circular file. Be explicit about the conflict and crisis of the story, the goals of the characters, how they will evolve, and how the issues of your story will be satisfactorily concluded.

A general rule of thumb is five to ten pages for every 100,000 words. However, if publication guidelines require two single-spaced or twenty-five double-spaced pages, then that's what should be submitted.

Early in my writing career, I was told by an agent that the opening paragraph of the synopsis should read as if I wanted it to be the back copy for my novel. It was advice I never forgot.

Here is a short example from my synopsis of *The Seduction of Innocence* that was recently sold to Kensington Publishing:

After surviving the fatal car crash that killed her husband and young daughter, Rayne Holland futilely attempts to put her life back together, but one year later finds herself confined to the psychiatric unit of Cedar Grove Medical Center. Once a Hollywood filmmaker on the rise, Rayne is now trapped in her own mind, (continued on page 47)



Karina Skvirsky

donna hill

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

In this issue we look at three writers who throughout this century have spoken to, for and about their generation.

Zora Neale Hurston

Leah Mullen profiles one of black America's great writers and sheds new light on her life.

James Baldwin

Did you know James Baldwin was one of the first "spoken word" artist? Kalama ya Salaam sheds light on James Baldwin's poetry recordings.

Farai Chideya

Journalist and activist Ms. Chideya sat down with Cynthia Ray to explain what motivates her to speak out when necessary.



James

BALDWIN

THE PREACHER POET

by Kalamu ya Salaam

James Baldwin voiced us — articulated black experiences with a searing intensity. Even if you could not read, once you heard Baldwin, you were convinced of the power of words. His ability to move air was such that it spoke to us, proclaiming what it meant to be flesh, and black. He told us of the here and now, told of barbarians who feared life in others and those who truly lived. He spoke to their hatred of black people, telling us that their hatred was but a mask for the intense hatred they felt for themselves and the sordid, twisted mess they had made of their own lives.

The gritty texture of Baldwin's voice testified to the realities of black life, the ups, the downs, the terrors, as well as the hard-worn tenderness found in our sometimes brief, but frequent stolen moments of exquisite love. He was no romantic, but oh how he loved. He loved us all and gave his all in the love of us.

It is easy to think of Baldwin as an Old Testament prophet, raining down fire and brimstone. He was, after all, a professional evangelist as a teen. It is easy to think of Baldwin as a Shakespeare in and of Harlem since his command of language is now legendary. But it is wrong to reference Baldwin solely from outside of black culture. Think of this black voice as a black life-force, as the sound of us, as the sound of living, as a drum. A drum, an insistent beating drum, whose rhythm was synchronous with our own heartbeats.

The fullest appreciation of James Baldwin the writer is not understood until James Baldwin the voice is heard. Once your heart was moved by the way this

(continued on page 44)

Farai

CHIDEYA



Her True Colors by Cynthia Ray

I was invited in to share cookies and conversation with Farai Chideya on an unseasonably mild winter evening. Like most probably, I knew of Farai because of the media attention that her 1995 book *Don't Believe the Hype: Fighting Cultural Misinformation About African-Americans* received. In it, Farai (admirably) hammered away at many of the media's most commonly used facts and figures about the socio-economic status of black citizens in the United States to find that there was more to the story than just pure percentages. She picked apart these not-so-damning (after all) statistics to support her argument with a kind of persistence that is meant to impact the apathetic and desensitized among us. *Don't Believe the Hype* was written to be used like a bible — as ammunition against disbelievers. Now in its eighth printing, it is a balm for those who are not so willing to swallow whole every so-called fact spewed out by the evening news or accept the black experience in America as one of the ultimate scapegoat. Farai has since established herself even more widely as a keen observer, chronicler and reporter. But it was as a staunch dismantler of misinterpretation and misperception that she earned the respect, awe and appreciation of her core audience.

At 28, Farai Chideya's work history reads heavy hitter after heavy hitter: Newsweek, MTV, and CNN. Currently, she is a political and cultural analyst for ABC News. Farai also contributes to VIBE as its National Affairs Editor. During this decade, her byline has appeared in The New York Times, SPIN, and Essence, among others. As a freelance writer, Farai has covered a myriad of topics from affirmative action

(continued on page 46)

Zora Neale
HURSTON



A Genius of the South
by Leah Mullen

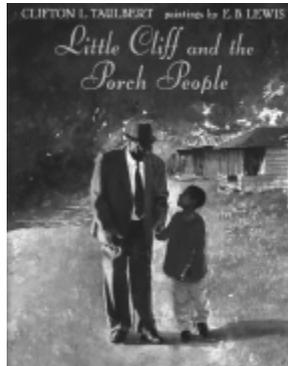
During Kwanzaa last December as we poured libation to honor our great ancestors, I called the name Zora Neale Hurston dedicating several drops of sacred water to her memory.

I am not alone in remembering Zora, who is arguably the most celebrated black female writer of this century. Although she died almost 40 years ago, her work, most notably, her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is still being sold. Two magazines, *American Visions* and *African Voices* recently published a "rediscovered" work by Zora called "Under the Bridge." The acclaimed actress Ruby Dee has written in the preface to her new book, *My One Good Nerve*, that she was "inspired by Zora Neale Hurston."

Zora was born on January 7, 1891 in Eatonville, Florida, the fifth of eight children to John Hurston, a carpenter and Baptist preacher, and Lucy Potts Hurston, a former schoolteacher. While attending Howard University in 1921, Zora published her first short story, *John Redding Goes to Sea* in *Stylus*, the school's literary magazine. From 1925-28, Zora attended Barnard College where she studied anthropology.

Zora's focus on African-American culture, particularly her unique use of Southern, black vernacular -- or what is today called Ebonics -- in her writing attracted criticism, but also, much praise. Maya Angelou wrote in the foreword to Zora's re-released autobiography, *Dust Tracks on A Road*, that Zora "chose to write her own version of life."
(continued on page 44)

Children's Corner



Little Cliff and the Porch People
by Clifton L. Taulbert
Paintings by E.B. Lewis
Dial Books



Zinzi
by Lynette C. Velasco
Illustrations by John Higgins
Worldwide Publications Inc.

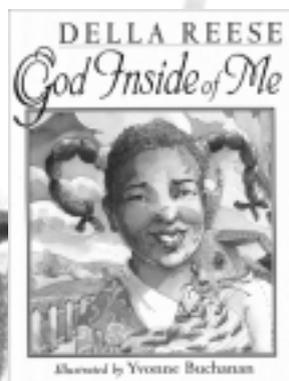


A Band of Angels
by Deborah Hopkinson
Illustrated by Raul Colon
Antheneum Books

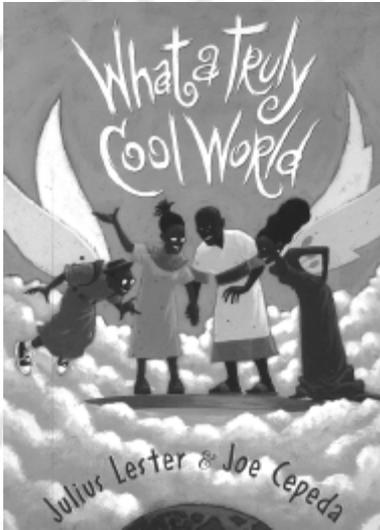


Come On Rain
by Karen Hesse
Pictures by Jon J. Muth
Scholastic Books

Through exquisite language and acute observation, Newberry Medalist Karen Hesse recreates the glorious experience of a quenching rainstorm on a sweltering hot day. Jon J. Muth's masterful and lyrical watercolors perfectly reflect the spirit of the text.



God Inside of Me
by Della Reese
Illustrated by Yvonne Buchanan
Jump At the Sun Books



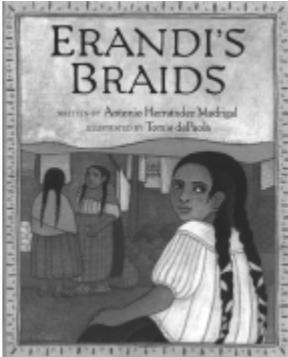
What A Truly Cool World
by Julius Lester & Joe Cepeda
Scholastic Press

In this hilarious fractured Creation story, the truly amazing team of Julius Lester and Joe Cepeda imagine a world so truly cool readers of all ages will feel privileged to live there.



Fair Ball
14 Great Stars From Baseball's Negro Leagues
by Jonah Winter
Scholastic Press

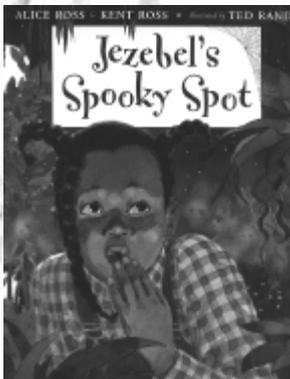
Children's Corner



Erandi's Braids
by Antonio Hernandez Madrigal
Illustrated by Tomie dePaola
Putnam Books



On Mardi Gras Day
by Fatima Shaik
Paintings by Floyd Cooper
Dial Books



Jezebel's Spooky Spot
by Alice Ross & Kent Ross
Illustrated by Ted Rand
Dutton Books

BESTSELLERS LISTS

Afrocentric Bookstore

333 S. State St. Chicago, IL 60604 (312) 939-1956

1. **The Lady, Her Lover and Her Lord** by T.D. Jakes
2. **Ladies First: Revelations of A Strong Woman** by Queen Latifah
3. **When All Hell Breaks Loose** by Camika Spencer
4. **Our Kind of People: Inside America's Black Upper Class** by Lawrence Otis Graham
5. **What Brothers Think, What Sisters Know** by Nick Chiles and Denene Millner
6. **Here and Now** by Kimberla Lawson Roby
7. **Something's Wrong With Your Scale** by Van Whitfield
8. **Barbara Jordan: An American Hero** by Mary Beth Rogers
9. **The Color of Our Future** by Farai Chideya
10. **No More Sheets: The Truth About Sex** by Juanita Bynum



Freedom Now Bookstore

2118 Candler Road Decatur, GA 30032 (404) 288-9880

1. **The Autobiography of Malcolm X** by Malcolm X w/Alex Haley
2. **Acts of Faith** by Iyanla Vanzant
3. **In the Meantime** by Iyanla Vanzant
4. **Assata: An Autobiography** by Assata Shakur
5. **African Holistic Health** by Llaila O. Afrika
6. **Kupigana Ngumi: The Art of Self Defense Vol. I** by Watani Tyehimba
7. **Return to the African Mother Principle of Male and Female Equality** by Oba T'Shaka
8. **Reparations Yes!...** by Nkechi Taifa, Imari Abubakari Obadele and Chokwe Lumumba
9. **Conspiracy: Unraveling the Assassination of Malcolm X** by Baba Zak Condo
10. **Behold A Pale Horse** by William Cooper



TITLES TO LOOK FOR

The Intuitionist
by Colson Whitehead
Anchor Books

The Mitt Man
by Mel Taylor
William Morrow

Great Books For
African American
Children
by Pamela Toussaint
Plume Books



Another Africa
by Robert Lyons and Chinua Achebe
Anchor Books

The Hairstons
An American Family in Black and White
by Henry Wiencek
St Martin's Press

Right Here, Right Now
by Trey Ellis
Simon & Schuster

Afro Awakenings

2419 S. Collins St. Arlington, TX 76014 (817) 265-0001

1. **One Day My Soul Just Opened Up** by Iyanla Vanzant
2. **The Lady, Her Lover, and Her Lord** by T.D. Jakes
3. **When All Hell Breaks Loose** by Camika Spencer
4. **Milk In My Coffee** by Eric Jerome Dickey
5. **Men Cry In the Dark** by Michael Baisden
6. **Nappy Hair** by Carolivia Herron
7. **Wake of the Wind** by J. California Cooper
8. **Cliff and the Porch People** by Clifton Taubert
9. **Blue Collar Blues** by Rosalyn McMillan
10. **Blue Light** by Walter Mosley



Yoruba Book Center

610 New York Avenue Brooklyn, NY (718) 774-5800

1. **Ancestors: Hidden Hands Healing Spirits** by Min. Ra Ifagbemi (Babalawo)
2. **Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites** by J. Omosade Awolalu
3. **Rites of Passage** by Iya Afin Ayobunmi Sangode
4. **Intro to Yoruba Philosophy, Religion and Literature** by Yemi D. Ogunyemi
5. **Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus** by Wande Adimbola
6. **The Covenant of the Earth** by Yemi D Ogunyemi
7. **Ifa's Obi Abata "The Little Oracle That Goes A Long Way"** by Min. Ra Ifagbemi (Babalawo)
8. **The Religion of the Yoruba** by J. Olumide Lucas
9. **Divine Inspiration** by Phyllis Galembo
10. **Faith, Fancies and Fetish** by Stephen S. Farrow

The Good Black
A True Story of Race in America
by Paul M. Barrett
Dutton Books

Temples
by Vincent Williams
La Caille Nous Books

Among Others
by Lois Griffith
Crown Publishers



Imani All Mine
by Connie Rose Porter
Houghton Mifflin

A Miracle Everyday
by Marita Golden
Anchor Books

Actions Speak Louder
by Shandra Hill
Pullen Press

TITLES TO LOOK FOR



bell
hooks
writing for life

by Lynne d. Johnson

Photo credit: Andy

It is a busy time in bell hooks' life. It is the evening of the release her new book, *Remembered Rapture: The Writer at Work*, and it is the eve of 1999. Today, which happens to be New Year's Eve. She has an interview with a writer from Mosaic. She also has a leak in her bathroom, and she is waiting for the plumber to attend to it. There are also two friends who will come by to toast in the New Year. Both are professors, like hooks, who teaches English at City College in New York. Her phone rings endlessly. And, to top it all off, she is hurriedly finishing a poem that is a tad past deadline.

The interviewer, who is apologetically late due to train complications, arrives first at hooks' New York apartment, which is a testament to minimalism itself. There are no airs put on, no holier-than-thou attitude, no fire breathing. There is only calm, serene peace, as well as a love of the written word and disdain for the racist patriarchal system disguised as capitalism. It is one writer to another, sharing Chinese food and food for thought.

Since 1981, hooks has been producing books and articles at a prolific rate. There are 17 books in total, and numerous articles, with subject matter spanning the gamut of feminism, race and racism, popular culture, visual art, education, and herself. Her latest offering microscopically views how race, gender, and class shape a writer's work and life. As in a previous work, *Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life*, hooks answers the questions that many ask about her life as a writer and her work. Where *Wounds of Passion* speaks of her foundation, *Remembered Rapture* serves as pause and reflection.

Hooks' writing life began at the age of 10 in her hometown of Hopkinsville, Kentucky. At this time, and throughout her undergraduate years, her writing took form in the creative arena as she mainly focused on poetry. At the age of 19, outraged by the dearth of material about black women, hooks, urged by her partner, wrote her first book, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Through 1990, she wrote three more books after *Ain't I a Woman's* publication in 1981. And she has written at least a

book or two a year from 1990 on.

"My excitement about writing begins with reading," hooks exclaims. Raised as a Baptist, hooks' missionary task was to read to people who couldn't read. In *Remembered Rapture*, she talks about going to the homes of elderly black folk and how much that impressed upon her consciousness, not only the power of writing and reading but also the shame attached to not being able to do that in a world where everything you do is attached to that.

"I think people forget racial apartheid," hooks says emphatically. "So many people take racial integration for granted. I went to all black schools that didn't have the tools, the things that white schools had. For those of us raised in racial apartheid, the whole art of reading and writing has so much more meaning." Hooks imparts this history, as she takes issue with the rampant illiteracy that exists today among so many young people. "Especially young black men," she professes with candor. "So many teachers don't care whether young black males are learning to read and write. I feel that it is one of the primary forms of cultural genocide that is happening to us as a people -- the failure of the public school system to teach black children how to read and write."

It's interesting that hooks declares this at a time when the system is praising instructional technology and the use of computers in the classroom. "This leans to global transnational capitalism," explains hooks. "Partially we are looking at a world where so many people don't read and write to the extent that you can make the visual dominate over people. People who don't read and write, through illustrations, can learn how to use computers, especially when you have voice now with computers. At some point, people really have to develop the skills of reading and writing to be able to go anywhere with that (computers and information technology.) Transnational capitalism would rather have a laboring class that can use computers without having high literacy skills." (continued on page 49)

“Writing is my passion. It is a way to experience the ecstatic.” - bell hooks, *Remembered Rapture*

Inner City Blues

by Paula L. Woods

W.W. Norton Books

Reviewed by Donna Hill

Detective Charlotte Justice is just what the world of crime fighting ordered. Sassy, smart, streetwise, and sexy, Detective Justice makes an unforgettable debut in *Inner City Blues* by Paula L. Woods.

From the opening page, the author hits the reader right between the eyes with her sharp prose and on target dialogue. The reader is immediately immersed into Charlotte Justice's world, a spider web of sexism, racism, police politics, male chauvinism, a host of colorful characters, and of course, the hunt for whodunit, with a hot side order of romance for extra flavor.

Inner City Blues is set against the backdrop of the Los Angeles riots, following the historic Rodney King verdict. As part of the Robbery/Homicide Division, (RHD), detective Justice, the only black female, on a busload of overworked, highly agitated white officers who are trolling the litter-ridden streets hellbent on putting down any further instances of insurrection. And as the old saying goes, if you look hard enough for trouble you're bound to find it.



Trouble comes in the form of Doctor Lance Mitchell who happened to be jogging along at the wrong place, the wrong time, and after curfew. 'Looking suspicious' according to the leader of the wolf pack, the officers disembark with the intention of 'checking him out.' What begins as a stop and search becomes the trigger for a series of events that range from unexplained dead bodies, and police cover-ups, to solving a fourteen-year-old mystery.

In the alley not far from where Doctor Mitchell is being 'questioned' the dead body of one-time radical Cinque Lewis is found. What's significant about this dead body is that it's of the man who murdered the husband and daughter of detective Charlotte Justice fourteen years earlier. On one hand she is relieved that he is finally dead, on the other, she needs to know why he did it and where he'd been hiding since the day that changed her life. To complicate matters further, Doctor Mitchell's wallet is found beneath the dead body. Is Lance Mitchell a murderer or is he being set up?

As Charlotte Justice begins her search for the truth, we see not only a savvy police officer doing her duty but a woman who has been carrying around a burden so heavy it rendered her incapable of any sustained emotional involvement.

Paula L. Woods has done an exceptional job of weaving in the intricacies of a homicide investigation while peppering it with a cast of suspects, dead ends, dead bodies, and a dose of gang violence and philosophy. The pacing is even with never a dull moment. Woods' character development sparkles, with her secondary characters giving outstanding performances. One favorite is Justice's next door neighbor Mrs. Franklin, who would just as soon bake a chocolate cake as whip out her trusty Colt.45.

Watch Me Fly
by Myrlie Evers-Williams
with Melinda Blati
Little Brown

Reviewed by Robert Fleming

Termed an “instructive autobiography,” *Watch Me Fly: What I Learned On The Way To Becoming The Woman I Was Meant To Be* takes us behind the dignified public facade of Myrlie Evers-Williams, the NAACP chair- woman and widow of slain civil rights legend Medgar Evers, to reveal her transformation from Myrlie Louise Beasley from Vicksburg to big city power diva Myrlie Evers-Williams. The real Myrlie is a strong-willed, courageous, towering figure. She only came into her own after the June 12, 1963 slaying of her husband by a Klan lackey outside her Mississippi home, leaving her with three small children and very little money.

The memoir begins with the long-awaited February 5, 1994 conviction of Medgar’s killer, Byron de la Beckwith. Evers-Williams is finally able to rest easy with the knowledge that she accomplished the nearly impossible: getting a white man convicted for the murder of a black man in Mississippi. But the road to personal fulfillment was not an easy one for this proud black woman forced to fight her long-suffering widow image to become one of the most honored African American women in the nation. She survives the post-Medgar years in California with virtually no financial aid from the NAACP, returns to college; persists to earn enough clout to influence Fortune 500 companies and the Beltway “good ole boy” network,

and challenge the lackluster all-male leadership of the weakened black civil rights movement. Some of the black community’s more revered leaders come up short here as they pass through the prism of her laser-sharp analysis.

Possibly, the true value of this book can be found in her frank depictions of her quest for change and justice, her determination to overcome the opposition of those who only viewed her as a woman, her search for emotional wholeness after Medgar’s death and her innate need to make a difference in her community despite adversity and loss. What sets this memoir apart from several other over-hyped celebrity outings is that Myrlie Evers-Williams actually has something to boast about but does not. To her credit, everything is told without any ego or pretense – just an exceptional view from a woman telling her story as she sees it. Hers is the whole truth, and nothing but.

Boy-Wives and Female
Husbands: Studies of
African Homosexualities
by Stephen O. Murray
and Will Roscoe
St. Martin’s Press

Reviewed by Dorothy Harris

If you have ever wondered about myths which imply that there are no homosexuals in Africa, that homosexuality is a white person’s “disease” or that Europeans introduced homosexuality to Africa and to her descendants, then pick up *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies in African Homosexualities*.

This comprehensive text includes an 1899 letter by a European observer whose discussions about his observations of homosexuality in Zanzibar include the common implication that they were influenced by Westerners. It also includes essays written by scholars from varying disciplines in the social sciences which discuss the existence of homosexuality in contemporary Africa.

While some perspectives consider the existence of same-sex relationships which are perceived by African communities as homosexual, others struggle with discussing relationships that appear to be homosexual by Western standards, but are not considered homosexual in African communities. In *When a Woman Loves a Woman*, for instance, the researcher/writer Kendall could not find any women during her research who identified as lesbian. Nevertheless, she witnessed and talked to women in homo-erotic relationships. Kendall suggests that significant to questioning sexuality in Africa is an understanding of Western constructs of sex and sexualities and African definitions of the same. The complication with her research in a community whose perception of homosexuality is different from those of Westerners would explain why Kendall found no women in Lesotho who identified as lesbians, despite being involved in intimate relationships with women.

Boy-Wives and Female ►



Husbands promises major contributions to social-science fields. It will also give insight to any layperson's understanding of homosexuality in Africa as it dispels myths while giving insightful African anthropological, geographical, historical, and sociological background.

Here and Now
by Kimberla Lawson Roby
Kensington Press
Reviewed by Nikki Taylor

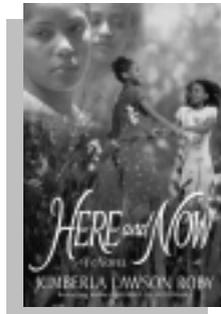
In Kimberla Lawson Roby's second novel, *Here and Now*, she has created a moving story which unfolds and states that "blood is thicker than water." Marcella and Racquel are two sisters who are so close, they have passionately become involved in life by overcoming the strife of loss, pain and disaster.

For Marcella, Ashley and Nicholas are her everything. While at times raising two children alone in Chicago's projects is not easy, she is determined to stay in the race, even though she receives no support from the children's knucklehead father, Tyrone. At the age of twenty-eight, Marcella learns that it's never too late to follow your dreams. She is determined to make the best life for herself and the children. With the support of her family and the constant motivational force of her best friend, Sharon, Marcella sets out to fulfill the goal of earning a degree in Accounting from Covington Park University. She is

also eager to make the best of her new romance with Darryl. For Marcella, life is marvelous. She is living a fantasy come true until the unexpected happens and she is caught in a downward spiral of tragedy and loss.

Racquel has the kind of life that most women would die for, she's intelligent, has a good job, a nice home and a loving husband, Kevin. Despite the stream of unconditional love that he gives, and for all of the fun moments they've shared, there's still something missing from Racquel's life. That something is a baby. Desperate to fill the void of the broken home during her childhood years, and eager to forgive herself of a deep hidden secret that she has kept from her family and husband, Racquel becomes obsessed with trying to conceive. More important than anything else in the world, she believes that having a baby is a joyous and precious gift. Racquel becomes so involved in trying to reach her goal, she is unprepared for the worst nightmare of her entire life.

Told in tones of joy and sadness, Lawson displays impressive powers of emotion and grace. This is not just a tale of survival, but a tale that vividly shows how sisterhood is a condition of truth, strength, determination and love. Lawson's literary voices of *Here and Now* opens a touching and powerful window to the soul of life and the understanding of triumph.



A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race & The Soul of America
by Craig Werner
Plume Books
Reviewed by Tracy Grant

In *A Change Is Gonna Come*, Professor Craig Werner provides an in-depth cultural study of black music within the social and political contexts in the last half of the 20th Century. At times, Werner's perspective is very insightful and provocative, but jumbled and incoherent at others. While Werner has brilliantly researched the history of dozens of important musical artists, he covers so much material that it is sometimes difficult to discern his conclusions. He emphasizes the impact of soul, blues and 'rhythm & blues' greats of decades past by illustrating the conditions that bore the artists and their songs. However, in doing so, he often gets lost in his message; clearly the music reflected the times during each occasion, but after reading the book, it's difficult to tell if Werner hasn't also asserted that the times reflected the music as well.

To be fair, Werner is an academic; he teaches Afro-American studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As such, *A Change Is Gonna Come* is very much academic fodder and sometimes a chore to read. The central theory seems to be that by looking at the influence of black music, from the 1940s to today, one can recognize the undercurrent that defines American culture socially, and

very often politically, particularly in the '60s. In many cases, Werner is brilliant in revealing the impact of black musicians; he does particularly well with Mahalia Jackson, Sam Cooke and a host of early blues artists.

Werner is acutely aware of the influence of Southern singers and musicians in the '50s and '60s; the fact that many African-American artists influenced large white acts like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones is well documented. However, the book fails to acknowledge the black musical roots of Elvis Presley (as he himself did), choosing instead to gloss over "interracial rock and roll in the fifties" in a discussion about Memphis' Sun Studios and Sam Phillips. These inconsistencies are rampant in *A*

Change Is Gonna Come. Werner is very thorough in his coverage of Motown, Stax and Philadelphia International Records and their respective artists, yet when it comes time to

deal with more recent history and the influence of rap music, these artists don't receive the same treatment. He gives a grudging mention to Run D.M.C., KRS-One, the Wu-Tang Clan and Tupac Shakur, but no real conclusions are drawn; rather they are included as a tepid attempt to balance the work.

If you like music history and African-American history, *A Change Is Gonna Come* may satisfy

you. Werner presents a wealth of information but don't expect any groundbreaking perspectives.

Strong Men Keep Coming Portraits on Black Men in America: The Book of African American Men
by Tonya Bolden
John Wiley & Sons
Reviewed by Vatisha Smith

Tears. Triumphs. Tribulations. Tests. All are and continue to be a part of the black male journey and experience. We know the stories, especially the ones of those we've immortalized: Martin, Malcolm, and Medgar. Ask any person of color living in America today who these leaders and their philosophies were and you'll get bold, clear answers. Anything but bring frowns of shame and cries of race betrayal. But what about Bob Moses, The Scottsboro Boys or even Dave Dinwiddie? Who are they? What part did these men play in American History? Tonya Bolden felt we should know and rightfully so – her book, *Strong Men Keep Coming* is long overdue.

Strong Men tells the stories of over 150 black men. Our men. Stories that we've never and may never read in history books. The text is divided into two parts: Part I delves into the lives of those she calls our Forefathers. Part II chronicles the Sons of the Dawn, men who "in the wake of some gains, some new opportunities, reached for things their fore-

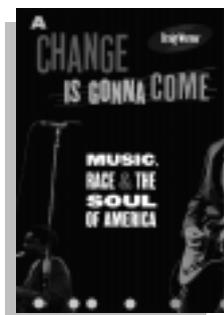
fathers never thought to dream." Bolden is determined to give these men their due. Men, who as slaves bought their own freedom and worked like dogs for the money to buy their families: (Broteer.) Men who knew and eventually became a part of the legends of the Old West: (Nat Love) and even men who were so beat down and defeated that they just stopped: (Robert the Hermit).

Told in glorious detail, Bolden does an excellent job of obtaining information I suspect was very hard to come by. She even provides photos to give the reader a chance to connect faces to names. Many will question why some are in the book and not others. I say to them (and suspect Tonya Bolden would agree) that her book need not be the only, but merely the first of its kind to come.

Remembered Rapture
by bell hooks
Henry Holt and Company
Reviewed by Deatra Haimé

All writers struggle with the task of transforming our 26-letter alphabet into meaning. Choices of configuration are infinite and the chooser is endlessly challenged to excavate the perfect order to render truth. This task bonds those who dare and creates a reality that is both burdensome and triumphant. bell hooks, in her 17th book *Remembered Rapture*, turns the process on itself in an attempt to marry the cause and effect of putting words down.

(cont. on page 37)



Children of the Dream Our Own Stories of Growing Up Black in America by Laurel Holliday

Pocket Books

Reviewed by Kathy Morris

Released during Black History Month, *Children of the Dream - Our Own Stories of Growing Up Black In America*, is the fourth book in her *Children of Conflict* series. *Children of the Dream* explores how far we have come – and how short we have fallen – from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream for racial justice in America.

This collection of thirty-eight personal essays was written by African Americans from twenty-two states and ranging in age from eleven to seventy-five. The stories tell of experiences with segregation, integration and the violence of racism, as well as our own struggles with self-love and acceptance, black pride and respect.

At seventy-five, Arline Lorraine Piper, the oldest contributor, tells of growing up in Boston, Massachusetts, and of her excitement at starting first grade at a predominantly white school. Even as her childish elation gives way to the horror of confronting the contempt of white America for the first time, her story manages to reveal our community's enduring heart and spirit, and our ability to move beyond the pain and humiliation of living in a racist society to maintain our humanity.

There are stories of color-blind friendship, tales of the search for self-identity and the struggle to understand what it means to be told we are "too white" by our own people – based not only on skin color and hair texture, but class, education and experiences. The

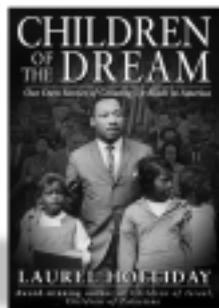
number of such stories in this collection reveal how many of us feel ostracized by our own communities, and leave us wondering who makes and maintains the "black" standard.

One of the most memorable stories was written by California death row inmate Anthony Ross and tells of his childhood ending

at the point of a white policeman's gun and the seeds of anger and frustration that are planted in a black child's heart upon realizing that he cannot be protected from racist violence. Ross' story illustrates one of the origins of rage embodied by so many of our black men in prison. Ross writes: "... I stood there, my black skin

seeming to take on some awful substance that separated me from everything, making me conscious of who I was, who I was not ... They started hitting and kicking my whole body. Every ounce of emotion I had was being beat out of me. A seething hatred would be the only thing left."

Not all of the stories are so tragic. Some reflect knowledge or strength acquired, some bring smiles of warm remembrance to the reader. Ms. Holliday has done an admirable job of editing this collection. For the most part, the stories are cohesive and effective and the selection gives us a panoramic view of living black in white America in the twentieth century. These stories are not only our history but also reveal the work we have yet to do. ★



(cont. from page 35)

Though hooks' work is often criticized for being overly veiled in intellectual rhetoric, there is no denying that she is prolific. *Remembered Rapture* is a view into her life of words and how her very being is a definition of a writer at work. This is not a simple confession, however, because hooks discusses her reality from a number of perspectives: the little girl wanting to escape the darkness of being unrealized; the woman yearning for spiritual truth; the black feminist seeking acceptance from the so-called literary canon; the proverbial David fighting the publishing industry Goliath; the intellectual at work; and most simply, she who loves the written word.

It may be impossible for hooks to extend a vision of herself without first devouring its cultural/political/spiritual relevance and then regurgitating a new breed of understanding that has broader implications than her own solitary existence. It is perhaps this self-consumption that makes her winsome and possibly benign. Her everything-but-the-kitchen-sink technique has an interesting way of inspiring awe but leaves her work curiously devoid of emotion. hooks attempt at confession, explanation and self-revelation is often one dimensional as she stands on the outside looking in. The joy in this collection of 23 essays is the astonishing breadth of her knowledge and the keenness with which she overlaps her writer's life onto the American literary landscape.

Of course, it is brave to put words down and even braver to explore the demons which compel the madness of writing. Certainly, hooks is a genius but in the endless stream of intellectualism, a glimpse of her soul or that which exists independent of her tireless consideration, would add a new dimension to the *why* of her pursuit.

Your Wife Is Not Your
Mama:
How You Can Have
Heaven In Your Home
by Wellington Boone
Doubleday

Reviewed by Sandra L. West

Humility. Service. Virginity. Christ. These are a few ingredients for a heavenly marriage – but the greatest of them is Christ. So writes Wellington Boone in *Your Wife Is Not Your Mama: How You Can Have Heaven In Your Home*, a guide of practical advice on building a happy marriage from courtship to child rearing.

In this ten chapter Christian how-to book, Boone kneels in prayer for a revival in the hearts of married men. Not always a model Christian, Boone challenges his brothers to be great husbands through humility and service to God and their mates. He encourages men to ask themselves "What would Jesus do?" and then listen to and act upon the biblical response.

This happy husband speaks directly to immature, dominant, selfish men. How wrong, Boone declares, as he tells the real-life

story of "The Ironed Outfit." It seems that Mrs. Boone was taking a shower when her husband noticed that she had not laid out an outfit to wear for that day. He went to her closet, choose three outfits and began to pick from them for her. When she came out of the shower, an amazed Mrs. Boone wanted to know what in the world he was doing. He said, with eyes cast down in submission, "Honey, I just love you. I didn't see that you had prepared anything to wear and I wanted you to have something."

The spontaneous gift of ironed clothes is humbling. He served her as Christ serves the church and Boone confesses with joy that it blew her mind. She cried, as he ironed, overwhelmed by his humility, service and gesture of unconditional love. The Bible says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." Boone says, "A home where the woman out-serves the man misrepresents heaven."

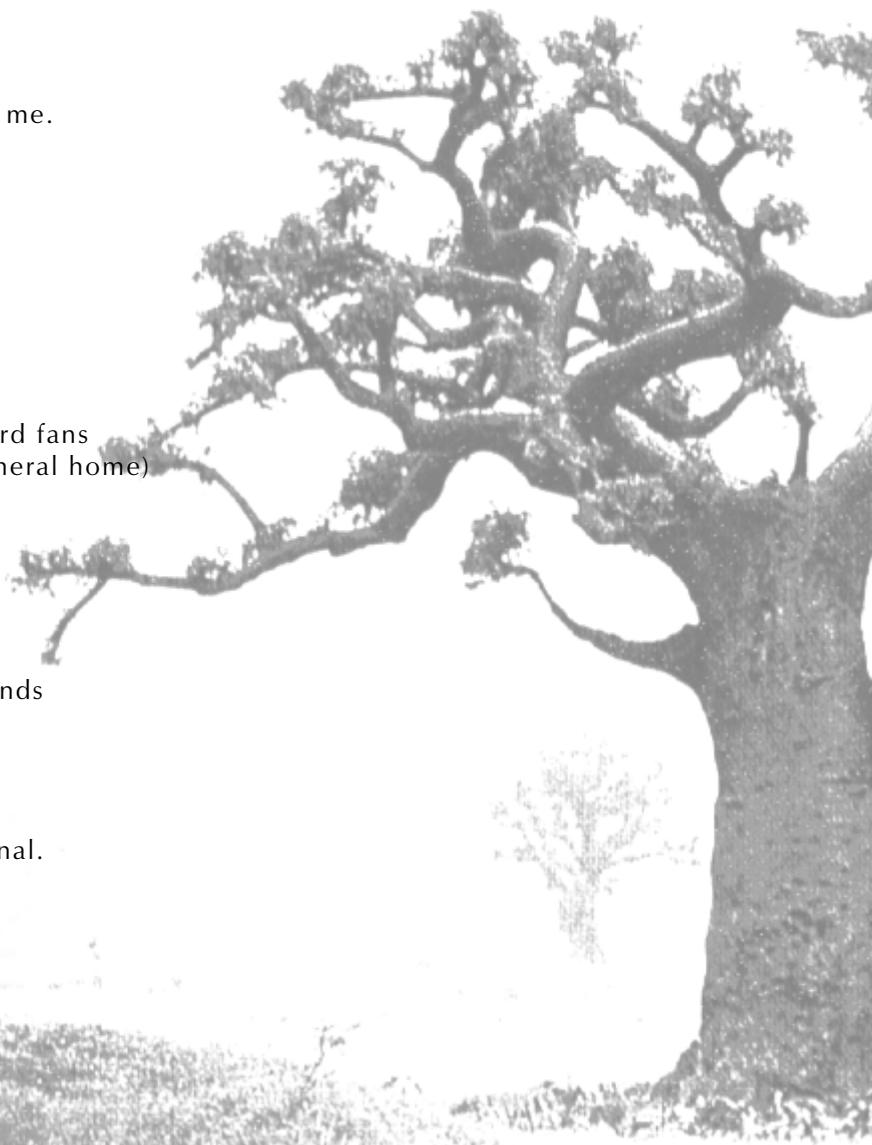
Throughout the book, Boone discusses how to cultivate relationship with God through gratitude, exercise, fasting, or a kind word to a friend. He praises women, like his wife Katheryn, who encourage their spouses to be strong men in Christ. He advocates that men listen to their mates, gives advice on attitude adjustment when egos flare and talks about the position of husband as priest of the home. Pre-marital relationships are addressed. Boone engages in dialogue about dating, outlines a leadership (continued on page 48)

Loving you is church
the spreading of thighs is communion
body and blood
resurrected in our union
Loving you is church
where prayers are punctuated with profanities
the only God I refer to
is the piece of Providence dancing with me
Your medium is in me
speaking in tongues
begging for penance
that you might have loved
before this moment
But now, loving you is church.
Each ridge of your spine a pew.
Your eyes lengthy corridors
leading me on a path
of righteousness
and even into the valley
of the shadow of death.
Crucified by your body,
resurrected by the sermon
you whisper in my ear.
The warmth of your breath blessing me.
Loving you is church
because our sweat mingles
evaporates
distills
itself into holy water.
Because I know a sister
can rock her hips
when she catches
the holy ghost.
Because I need a thousand cardboard fans
(sponsored by the neighborhood funeral home)
to be wavin' around our bed.
Because the tithe comes
not from my wallet
but from my heart & soul
as it should.

Because when preaching & praxis ends
the last rites of this
liberation theology.
I resume reflection
upon reincarnation & reuniting
since loving you is nondenominational.
Loving is church.

loving
you
is
church

by Tara Betts



AMONG WOMEN

by Nicole C. Kearney

Among women,
It is common knowledge
That we have carried the weight of this world
In our "stomachs," upon our backs,
and riding on our hips and on our heads.

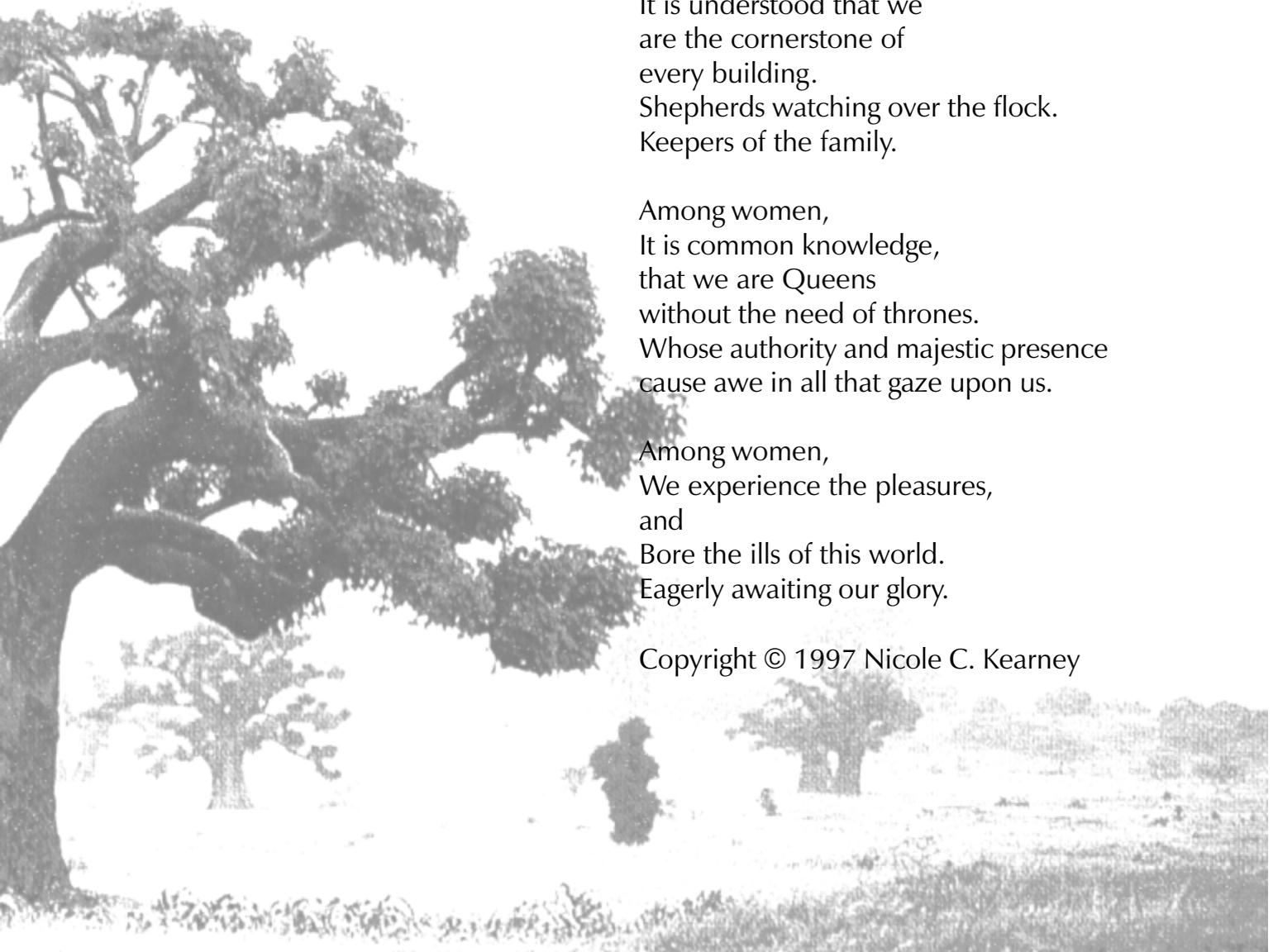
Among women,
Our hearts have poured out
songs of freedom, stories of joy and wonder
and tales of woe and sorrow.

Among women,
It is understood that we
are the cornerstone of
every building.
Shepherds watching over the flock.
Keepers of the family.

Among women,
It is common knowledge,
that we are Queens
without the need of thrones.
Whose authority and majestic presence
cause awe in all that gaze upon us.

Among women,
We experience the pleasures,
and
Bore the ills of this world.
Eagerly awaiting our glory.

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Starting From Scratch

Guy Johnson takes on the challenge of history, legacy and loyalty in his first novel, "Standing At the Scratch Line."

by Akilah Monifa

"The greatest thing I've ever done is to raise a wonderful son named Guy Johnson," says Maya Angelou. "He's a grand fellow and a wonderful writer. He has a new novel called *Standing at the Scratch Line* out from Random House..."

"In the early 1900s, when bare-knuckle fights were still common, a line was scratched in the dirt or on the pavement and the two fighters were brought to stand on opposite sides. At a preordained signal the fight would begin, then the line could be crossed. In gambler's rules, if one of the fighters suffered a knockdown, there was a break in the action. The man who delivered the blow returned to the scratch line and waited. The fighter who suffered the knockdown had to get up and walk back to the scratch line if he wanted to continue. If he did not come to scratch within an agreed-upon time frame, the fight was stopped, and the man standing

at the line was declared the winner." That's how Guy Johnson begins his sweeping historical novel.

They say that there is always some truth in fiction and Johnson spent a great deal of time in the research of this tome. He began writing at 18 years old. He published poetry and then decided to try his hand at short story writing. He started writing a story about his late grandfather, Bailey Johnson, to whom the book is dedicated. More precisely the story was about "a grandson in reaction to his grandfather and it became a novel of about three or four hundred pages. The grandfather appears as flashbacks..."

He then researched the time period his grand-

father came out of. He began to better understand his grandfather, who died when Guy was 16 years old.

He also understood why people of African descent fought, particularly with knives and guns. It was a product of the times. He then did research on the 369th, the most decorated battalion (and a black battalion) in WWI and were not allowed to march in the victory march in Paris. Subsequently New York City allowed a victory march in Harlem. So Guy changed his focus and wrote a "historical novel that represented black people I knew, not cowards, not people beaten down by racism."

His grandfather used to tell him "Boy don't blame nothing on racism. It's like gravity, you



guy johnson

Alain McLaughlin

just gotta keep pushing against it. If you don't do something about it, that's your fault." This was Guy's family background. He was unaware of his grandfather's love until he wrote "Scratch Line." Guy has managed a bar on Spain's Costa del Sol, ran a photo-safari service from London through Morocco and Algeria to the Spanish Sahara, worked on the oil rigs in Kuwait and been a personnel manager for the city of Oakland, California.

With his writing he wants to "offset the media's representation of black people. [To tell] a different story, one about a black man who didn't beat up on his woman, who wasn't involved in drugs..." The main character, King Tremain, was written as a backdrop to another novel he was working on. As the pages grew, Guy realized that he had material for at least another novel.

He was also fortunate to be assigned to an editor at Random House who fought for the book and the length. Guy has several other projects in the works, including a sequel to "Standing at the Scratch Line." He is "not yet at the [literary] peak" and knows, despite the publication of his novel, that he has work to do. He "wants to be one of the dominant and great writers of this time period." He states he is still learning and is preparing for what he will write. He is polishing his craft. "If you wait for inspiration, you will never write." He rewrote the novel more than 20 times. His mother taught him that writing is 1/10 inspiration if you are fortunate and 9/10 perspiration. She also admonished, "Don't fall in love with your words. Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite, and rewrite some more." He is of course deeply grateful to his mother, Maya Angelou for the greatest gift for encouraging him and not judging him. ★

STANDING AT THE SCRATCH LINE

by Guy Johnson

From *Standing At the Scratch Line*
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Captain Grey stood up. "Alright men, remain as you were. Corporal Harrison, get your team together for tonight. I'll have three trucks ready for you to start on by midnight. And Sergeant Tremain, heed my warning. You're a good soldier and a leader among the men. I'd hate to see you get court-martialed for gambling!" Captain Grey saluted and left the tent.

Big Ed waited until the captain left and sputtered, "I don't know what's wrong with you guys. He offered you positions behind the lines. You got a real good chance making it through the war alive."

"Working as a porter and stevedore?" Professor asked. "I've taken too much humiliation to become a soldier to give it up. As long as the army wants me in a menial job, I prefer to carry a gun!"

"Menial, that's just a word!" Big Ed said. "All that matters is that you live through the war. Now that I'm working as a mechanic in motorized transport, I ain't had to lift a gun in months."

"You's called a porter They didn't make you no mechanic, you just work as a mechanic. If they made you a mechanic, the white boys would shit a brick," King observed. "They treat you like shit and they know you know ten times more than they do about truck repair, but they still treat you like shit!"

"If I'm alive and healthy at the end of the war, bein' treated like shit will be worth it," Big Ed answered. "I got me some farm work in my future. I'm looking forward to feeling that dark Nebraska soil between my fingers."

"Ain't nothin' I want that is worth takin' shit for," King said.

"That's 'cause you don't really want nothin'. If you wanted somethin', you'd sacrifice your pride," Big Ed said.

"You got it wrong," King answered. "I do want somethin', but there ain't nothin' I want more than bein' my own man." King stood up and made his way out of the tent. Big Ed and Professor followed him out. "Ask Professor why he chose to go back to the front. He say he ain't a man of violence."

It was brisk and cold. The brightness of the stars were dimmed somewhat by the bright perimeter lights around the encampment. The three men stood in front of several long rows of tents, many of which were lit by the glow of kerosene lamps, and heard the sounds of men laughing and talking (*continued on page 47*)

PAGE TURNERS

GOD IS CHANGE

By Trent Fitzgerald

My paranoia has settled in and I'm getting worried. As the Y2K approaches, I see cannibalism, poverty, racism and global warming in our future. Oh, my bad, it's 1999 and not damn thing has changed. However, by the end of the year we could face a bug even a can of Raid could not handle: the Millennium Bug. The bug is in computers, which are not calibrated to translate that the year-ending digits 00 means 2000 and not the 1900. Failure to calculate this date sensitive instruction could mean a worldwide computer shut-down. I have spoken to a few technology nerds and although there is some concern that computer driven systems may fail on January 1, 2000, there's no need to build bomb shelters.

But I'm not worried about that bug; I'm more concerned about what kind of spirituality books we will be reading today for a better tomorrow? We can find our Spirit in literary documents such as the Bible, Koran or Sutras, however, I found another spiritual fulfillment in reading Science Fiction. SF, as its properly called, is an obscure genre whose books are always tucked away in the back of the bookstore near the children's section.

Having just finished reading it, I can tell you

That *Parable Of The Talents* (Seven Stories Press, \$24.95) is a moving, earthy, and spiritual Science Fiction novel. *Talents* is written in a "journal entry" style by Octavia E. Butler, a Hugo and Nebula award winner whose *Pattern Master* series have defined the SF genre.

In *Talents*, a young woman named Larkin, reads from her deceased mother's journal and discovers a world in 2032 riddled with gangs, slavery, murder and a fascistic dictator.

The book's antidote comes in a form of a Religion called Earthseed where God is actually Change and people can shape God. The book's outlook on spirituality comes from the quotes of Earthseed like: "God is Change and in the end, God Prevails." Clearly, this is not a substitute for the scriptures in the Holy Bible, but you can get a healthy dose of spirituality from reading *Talents*.

Finally, a few words from Earthseed: "To shape God. With wisdom and forethought. To benefit your world. Your People, Your life. Minimize harm. Ask questions [and] seek answers. Learn. Teach."

Ah, now we are ready to step into the Millennium. ★



crossword puzzle

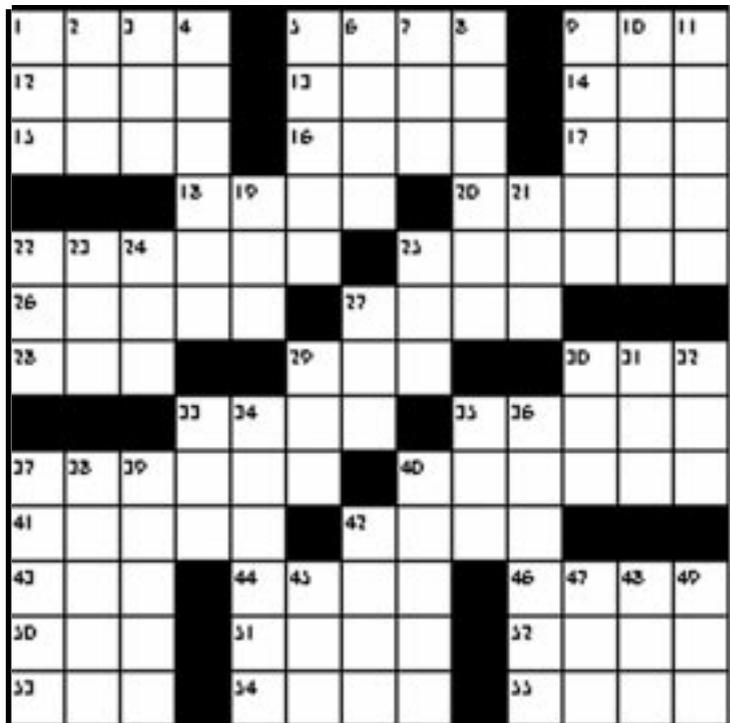
DOWN

- 1 Sound a black sheep makes
- 2 Antiquity
- 3 Madhubuti was he
- 4 Suitable for Lent
- 5 Distributed cards
- 6 West's "_____ Matters"
- 7 Powdery residue
- 8 Eccentric man
- 9 "___ Allen" Brooks Pulitzer (1950)
- 10 Get to know
- 11 Indian tent
- 19 Donkey
- 21 He was Clay
- 22 Actress and Social Activist
- 23 I have
- 24 Ruthie Bolton 1994
- 25 Did possess
- 27 "Them that's got shall..."
- 29 Slender bar
- 30 Son of Amiri Baraka
- 31 Dennis recently said this to Carmen
- 32 Hurston wrote about these and mules
- 33 Hurried
- 34 "Sassafrass, Cypress and _____"
- 35 Wright's "Native" one
- 36 Against Ferguson in "separate but equal"
- 37 Horizontal
- 38 Overjoy
- 39 Cavalry weapon
- 40 Small hand drum
- 42 King's "Letter from a Birmingham _____"
- 45 Indian dish
- 47 Malt beverage
- 48 Body of water
- 49 R.A. founded this church

ACROSS

- 1 hooks (1952-)
- 5 "childhood remembrances are always a ___ if you're Black"
- 9 High-pitched
- 12 On sheltered side
- 13 Achebe's "No longer at _____"
- 14 Born
- 15 Capital of Yemen
- 16 Continuous dull pain
- 17 "One ___ of her hair is the only perfect circle in nature," - Herron

- 18 Charles Johnson's 1991 "Oxherding _____"
- 20 Third largest African Country
- 22 John H. Johnson begins publishing the "Negro _____"
- 25 Ms. Johnson from the Harlem Renaissance
- 26 Author of "Vive Noir!"
- 27 Swahili Car
- 28 Snakelike fish
- 29 "___ Record": A report on lynching
- 30 Jordan rarely hits this
- 33 By Gwendolyn Brooks
- 35 "Calling it what it is"
- 37 Late Congressman
- 40 Melvin B. (1898-1966)
- 41 Antelope
- 42 Miss Pittman's first name
- 43 Ivan ___ Sertina
- 44 Wells-Barnett
- 46 Swahili Seven
- 50 And so on
- 51 Oprah's middle name
- 52 A movie featuring Saul Williams
- 53 Shelter
- 54 Earthen pot
- 55 Swahili He



(James Baldwin: cont. from page 21)

man moved words can you understand that the power he brought, the fire he brought was no mere mental exercise, that Baldwin was indeed an elemental force of nature. Baldwin was full of passion and the very fire light of life. To reduce him simply to books is to miss the music that this man made of words.

Thus, if you think you know James Baldwin, if you think you love our literature and you have never heard him deliver the word, and you do not have his spoken word CD — then you don't really know the breadth and depth of James Baldwin.

Between September 19, 1986 and September 18, 1987, James Baldwin spent a year working on a spoken word CD with producers/composers/musicians David Linx and Pierre Van Dormael. Recorded in Brussels, France and New York City, "A Lover's Question" (Les Disques du Crepuscule, Austria) is a masterpiece of merging words with music; a precursor to what is now a popular art form.

The producers succeed in more than providing a sonic backdrop for the words; they actually composed orchestrations that both complemented and mirrored the intent and expression inherent in Baldwin's delivery of his complex poems. The success is then on three levels: the poems is phat, the music is tight, and the musicians respond with an exhilarating verve that let's you know they too were giving their all, giving their love and not simply going through the changes to get paid.

Aside from a brief musical introduction and an elegiac solo rendition of Thomas Dorsey's "Precious Lord" on which Baldwin talk-sings the famous gospel composition, there are only three poems on this CD. One poem, "The Art of Love," features operatic vocalist Deborah Brown and is done as an art song, an interlude between two poetic suites.

The two-part "A Lover's Question" continues in the vein of the "Fire Next Time." Baldwin questions the citizens of his birth nation as to their desire to hate: "Why / have you allowed / yourself / to become so grimly / wicked?" and "No man can have a / harlot / for a lover / nor stay in bed forever / with a lie. / He must rise up / and face the morning / sky / and himself, in the / mirror / of his lover's eye." As Baldwin knew, true love is always honest even though

honesty is seldom an easy fact to live with in a land where lies and commerce replace truth and reciprocity.

The concluding number is the three part opus "Inventory / On Being 52" and it is the introspective Baldwin fingering his own wounds (some of them self-inflicted). He does not flinch as he cross-examines his own life and realizes the terrible costs of his mistakes, the terrible beauty of embracing both the terrors and joys of being human. Baldwin manages in a stream of consciousness style to encourage us to live the good life, suggesting that we not simply march to the beat of a different drummer, but to be the different drummer.

Tap out the real rhythms of life with your every footstep in the dark, your every embrace of what you and others are. Reject the wisdom of materialism / accept the wisdom of the earth. Thus Baldwin says, "Perhaps the stars will / help, / or the water, / a stone may have / something to tell me, / and I owe a favor to a / couple of old trees."

Inventory / On Being 52 is a deep song Baldwin sings, but then, as he says, "My father's son / does not easily / surrender. / My mother's son / pressed on." Every young poet needs this old man's CD in their collection, this compass of compassion, this example of the passionate heights the spoken word can attain. If you as a poet do not know "A Lover's Question," then you do not know the full history of your own human heartbeat. ★

(Hurston cont. from page 23) Still others disagree. Tony Martin, in his book, *Literary Garveyism* wrote that Zora and other artists of the Harlem Renaissance were loyal mainly to white philanthropy. Martin notes that Zora benefited from early exposure in *Negro World*, a publication run by Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, the largest Pan-African mass organization in history. Yet despite this, according to Martin, Zora later publicly denounced Garvey to gain "entry into the mainstream of white acceptance."

Throughout her controversial and tumultuous career as a writer/folklorist, Zora traveled extensively throughout the South and the Caribbean creating an amazingly large body of work over a 30 year period. She wrote essays, poems, *(continued on page 46)*

A Writer's Responsibility

by Kathleen E. Morris

To whom are writers responsible? I have always answered *I am responsible to myself*. This answer seems smug and self-centered to some people, but only because they don't realize that "myself" includes the reality that my *Self* as a writer is inextricably connected to my African-American community.

Barbara Christian observed in her 1985 work [Black Feminist Criticism - Perspectives on Black Women Writers](#) that our task, as black writers, has historically been and continues to be the creation of worlds and heroines that define, demythologize and offer new paradigms of our identities.

As a writer, I choose to focus on the education and uplifting of my community. My activism and thus, my writing, is centered on liberation — of our minds, bodies, lives. Through my fiction and non-fiction writing, I attempt to create new definitions and standards of understanding based on our shared African American histories.

But both the publishing world and the black community can be brutal to the writer who wishes to write beyond currently "acceptable" subjects. Many writers capitulate because they want to be published. As artists, we want our words to be read, our creative work affirmed. But in so doing, are we not participating in the continued creative oppression of the spectrum of black voices and experiences that fall beyond the scope of popular culture? I make no judgment here, merely ask the question.

One of the ways we have been able

to push our voices and experiences out and into the world is through fiction. Fiction has long been used as a vehicle to re-educate and incite social change. Our works of fiction allow us to subtly insert new images, offer wider experiential exposure to larger numbers of readers than textbooks or scholarly writings can reach. Fiction has been an effective, non-threatening vehicle for taking revolutionary ideas out of the classrooms and into the streets.

What is not being published? Some of the subjects that come immediately to mind are issues of class or color *within* our communities and developing self definitions of who we are as people of color in our worlds and in the world at large; black lesbian lives - how we deal with identifiers like butch/femme or the struggles of married women and/or mothers coming out; the schism between the black queer community and the Church — and how that alienation impacts our spiritual and personal lives; and there is insufficient text out there for black women across the board — about our sexuality, our bodies, our Selves as healthy, sensual, sexual beings.

As we move into the next millennium, it is my hope that through our writing and by the choices we make in our everyday lives — our lives which fuel the stories we write — that more writers will be able to truthfully to answer, when asked about a writer's responsibility, "I am responsible to myself" — and more of us will know exactly what that means. ★



kathy morris

(*Hurston cont. from page 44*) short stories, and novels, yet she could barely forge a living. Tragically, despite her many contributions, on January 28, 1960, Zora died forgotten and penniless without even enough money left behind to pay for a gravestone to mark her final resting place. Her work would have died with her had it not been for a revival of interest sparked in the 1970's by Alice Walker, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author and Robert Hemmenway, author of *Zora Neale Hurston, A Literary Biography*.

Last October, twenty-five years after Alice Walker and a friend searched through a forgotten section of an Eatonville graveyard to find Zora's unmarked grave, writer Gloria Naylor was profiled in *Essence Magazine* as one of several black female millionaires. Fortunately, African American writers of today are reaping the financial rewards for their work.

Unfortunately, we cannot repay Zora what we owe her in dollars, but we can remember her as "A Genius of the South," the phrase Alice Walker had inscribed on her gravestone. ★

(*Chideya: cont. from page 22*)

to white supremacists. Her "reporterly but not boring" writing style also reveals a real eye and ear for the art of storytelling. "I think that the kind of writing I do incorporates some anthropology, some sociology, some literature. I believe that journalism can be inter-disciplinary."

A work of fiction is in her future. She has an idea for an action-adventure screenplay and has penned a soon-to-be-published short story. So it seems that while she's finely honed her skills in journalism, there is still more literary ground for this diverse and well-versed writer to cover.

As a bona fide media *figurette*, on-line, in print and on the tube, she is a triple-threat who is holding her own. Appropriately, in 1997, *Newsweek* named her to its Century Club of "100 people to watch as we approach the year 2000".

Clearly this Harvard-educated, award-winning journalist is hitting her mark. While others are writing about — and milking for all its worth — every angle of the fast-approaching millennium and

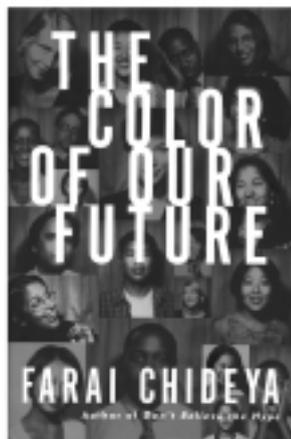
its irksome Y2K problems, Farai Chideya chose to tackle another consequential question in her new book, *The Color of Our Future*. She has looked ahead into the next half century of American life to examine the inevitable change in American demographics. The standard "black", "white", and "other" boxes used now to categorize without consideration of race, ethnicity and additional cultural factors will be even more inconclusive in just over five decades from now. By the year 2050, America will have become so thoroughly racially mixed that whites will no longer be the racial majority. The reality will be that of a majority-minority population. "Many of the people who are aware of it don't like it. Rather than pretending that this tension doesn't exist, we better talk about it and deal with it before we get into even worse racial divisions." The postscript? This "changing racial composition" holds some potentially messy personal, social and political implications for America, ethnic melting pot that it is.

Farai, who is African (her dad is Shona from Zimbabwe) and American (her mom is black and from Baltimore), suggests that "Multiculturalism is feared because it represents a legitimization of people of color in an intellectual sense, in a cultural sense, in a historical sense."

What's possible for America is going to be realized by the "Millennium Generation".

These fifteen to twenty-five year-olds are, by all accounts, more multi-racial than any other age group in American society. Farai chose this generation to write about partly because she has the most affinity for it. She sees *The Color of Our Future* as "a racial book with a generational angle. I'm taking a slice of the racial issue." She adds, "As most would agree, young people today have a different experience with race."

Since race has been confined exclusively to black and white issues, beginning with our presence in this (*continued on page 53*)



(Scratch Line: Cont. from page 41) as well as the clanking of engines and machinery.

Rubbing his hands for warmth, Big Ed asked Professor, "Why did you choose to go back to the front? It sure don't seem smart."

"Because I'm fed up with all this prejudice and I can't seem to escape it as long as I'm around American whites! This bullshit with the brakes is just another part of an unrelenting saga of whites needing to keep us down in the midst of fighting a war. You'd think that they would want to concentrate on their enemies."

Professor waved his hand beyond the camp, indicating the German lines. "The war is much clearer to me when I'm out there, especially if I'm going to be fighting alongside the French. The enemy is clearer. The enemy is always the Germans.

"I came here to fight for my country and show that my people are worthy of being treated as first-class citizens. Yet I see for every victory we win, it's being discounted or attributed to someone else.

It's driving me crazy. For all the blood that has been spilt, not a damn thing has been proven. The Three hundred Fifty-first will be wiped off the record books as if it never existed: All those colored men who died will never get credit for their courage and sacrifice!"

"That's the problem with all them rules and morals and shit you got, Professor; the world don't care 'bout that," King said, bending down to touch his toes. The cot had made him slightly stiff. "The world don't care about that. It gon' do what it has always done. The strong take all and the hell with the meek. You tryin' to hold on to them rules while the world's going crazy is like a mouse tryin' to cross a meadow durin' a cattle stampede. The whole world's shakin' around you. It don't matter how fast you run or how good you do whatever you doin', if you don't find a hole soon, and a deep one, it's your butt."

"Ain't you got no rules, LT?" Big Ed asked.

"I just got two rules: be courageous and don't take no shit.'" ★



(Synopsis: cont. from page 19) consumed by guilt and remorse. Her only moments of solace are sitting in the magnificent garden at Cedar Grove watching the reels of her life play before her, as she writes the script where everyone is saved...

The Seduction of Innocence dissects the lives of five people who all believe their lives are fine just the way they are, until Rayne's breakdown and her odyssey toward healing force them to look into the mirror of their souls. Each one must make a choice to change their future...

Your synopsis is your greatest selling tool. Don't sell your novel short by submitting a careless synopsis. Craft it with as much time and care as you would your manuscript. It must be typed, double-spaced, include your name, address and phone number on the top left hand corner, and the approximate word count and market (i.e., women's fiction, horror, mystery, etc.) on the top right hand side.

If you can master these techniques, the odds of your manuscript being seriously read increase exponentially. I know mine did. ★

Crossword puzzle answers

B	E	L	L		D	R	A	G		A	L	T		
A	L	E	E		E	A	S	E		N	E	E		
A	D	E	N		A	C	H	E		N	A	P		
					T	A	L	E		Z	A	I	R	E
D	I	G	E	S	T			H	E	L	E	N	E	
E	V	A	N	S			G	A	R	I				
E	E	L				R	E	D			R	I	M	
					R	I	O	T		S	P	A	D	E
L	E	L	A	N	D			T	O	L	S	O	N	
E	L	A	N	D			J	A	N	E				
V	A	N			I	D	A	B		S	A	B	A	
E	T	C			G	A	I	L		S	L	A	M	
L	E	E			O	L	L	A		Y	E	Y	E	

(Reviews: cont. from page 37) lifestyle for men to follow before and after marriage, and confirms a message about male virginity using Jesus Christ as a role model.

Boone's sincerity comes through in his energetic writing style. For those who are not "members of the choir," readability may plod in spots where Boone sometimes utilizes heavy Apostolic Christian rhetoric such as using the word "saints" when referring to church members. But so motivated and dedicated is he that you want to reach out and embrace his victories for your own. For those who want to walk his way, there are activities and prayers in every chapter.

The flaw may be that Biblical references and stories outweigh personal narratives – readers maintain a higher level of interest when guidebooks are inundated with real-life anecdotes such as the heartwarming story of *The Ironed Outfit*. Boone tells several such stories in which the reader may recognize himself or herself.

If you're comfortable with a Christian-based perspective, *Your Wife Is Not Your Mama* could be a solution to fractured family life.

Coq Au Vin
A Nanette Hayes Mystery
by Charlotte Carter
Mysterious Press

Reviewed by Sadeqa Y. Murray

Charlotte Carter has definitely done her homework with *Coq Au Vin*. She has painted a very romantic but dangerous picture of Paris. Her descriptions of the streets and markets are so vivid that the reader can

practically smell and taste the food. Her knowledge and love for African American jazz and blues jumps off the page, dances up your spine and leaves a smile upon your face and good feelings in your heart.

Nanette grew up loving and idolizing her stylishly beautiful Aunt Vivian. Vivian has inspired Nanette's love for jazz and free and easy living. Naturally, when Nanette's mother receives a telegram from Paris saying that Vivian's in trouble, Nanette is on the next plane to Paris, a city that she adores.

In Nanette's search for Vivian she meets a host of players including Gigi Lacroix, whom she pays to help find her aunt. Nanette is also being sidetracked by steamy nights and long afternoons with Andre, a Detroit-born American who has no intention of ever returning home. When things actually start going well for Nanette, Gigi turns up dead, and she and Andre are forced to plunge deep into the dark past of the underworld *le jazz hot*.

The text of *Coq Au Vin* flows beautifully, every thought evolves into the next without any pauses. It is very apparent that Carter knew the places and people that she described and all of her ideas are very well developed and explained. Carter's description of places, food and faces captures the reader in a way that makes you

feel as if you are sitting ring side watching the action. There is always some type of conflict to resolve in this fast-paced story, and it is definitely an exciting and intriguing read. The constant presence of good jazz-colors the text and really adds to the character and depth of the story. This is not your everyday mystery novel, in fact, Carter has created a new-age style of mystery writing for the genre with this must read book.

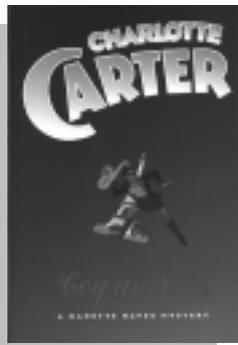
**What the Music Said:
Black Popular Music
and Black Public
Culture**
by Mark Anthony Neal
Routledge

Reviewed by Trent Fitzgerald

"Unless the black artist establishes a 'Black Aesthetic' he [or she] will have no future at all. To accept the white aesthetic is to accept a society that will not allow him [or her] to live. The black artist must create new forms and along with black authorities; [s]he must create new history, symbols, myths and must be accountable for it only to the black people."

-Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement"

"Governed by the sensibilities of black folks who fought the everyday struggle of survival, in which white racism was one of the many demons," writes music anthologist Mark Anthony Neal in *What The Music Said*, "I would understand that these barber-shops, beauty parlors and stoops were part of the formal and informal institutions of the Black Public (cont. on page 50)



(bell hooks: cont. from page 31)

While shifting gears into this highly-charged discourse, hooks and the interviewer decide to finish their Chinese food, take a break and toast the new year with the champagne brought over by one of the visiting professors. Afterward, they return to the discussion of hooks' book and her life as a writer.

Embarking upon the journey of the critical writer was not hooks' initial intent. "I thought I'd be doing this sexy, exciting writing - fiction, poetry," hooks remembers fondly. "As a child, one of my biggest influences was Emily Dickinson. Here you have this consummate artist, the person who lives for their poetry -- there's no world beyond it -- and doesn't interface with the world at all. That changed my early image of being a writer."

Remembered Rapture talks about that writer. Not only is the book a reader for hooks' fans, but it is a response to her critics who say she writes too much.

"We could not have a bookstore with just books by black women," says hooks. "white women can have a bookstore that is just books by white women, 'cause they've written just that much. I think that's deep. I feel there's so much to write about. I feel like I could write until eternity because there are so many aspects of black life that we just don't talk about - like sexuality. If we went to the library today and tried to find books about black people and love we wouldn't find two."

Like the absence of books about black women prompted hooks to write her own story, the absence of books about black love is propelling her into new territory.

"I'm the love goddess these days," hooks states in a half-joking, half-serious tone. "My next three books are gonna all be about love. One that will come out this time next year is called *When Angels Speak of Love*, and the one after that is about black people and love, and just the metaphysics of how we think."

Appalled at the offensive nature of *Nappy Hair*, hooks will also soon release a children's book entitled *Happy to be Nappy*, which deals with the love of black hair. It's a book that expresses her idea that black self-esteem begins with loving ourselves.

Back to the subject at hand, isn't there a

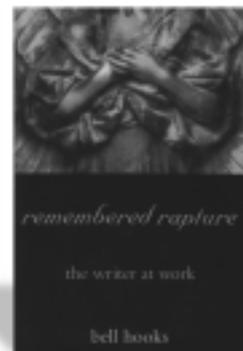
proliferation of books by black writers and about black folks nowadays? "We both know that there are a lot of books being written by and about black people right now that are just trash - like substandard housing. We don't want quantity over quality, they're not antithetical to one another. Why can't we have both?"

"I don't think all my books are great. *Yearning* and *Black Looks* are my favorites. I think books vary and books fill different needs. Every now and then you have a pulse of something that hasn't been talked about much before and you're sort of seeing in a way that opens doors, illuminates. Sometimes you add to a body of knowledge that's already existing, and sometimes you're saying something new for the first time and it's exciting."

This excitement leads this cultural critic, eclectic thinker, teacher, impassioned reader and writer to the written word. Often revered, often criticized, hooks is best known for taking a stalwart stand for the thoughts and ideas she believes in. Mostly, she believes in the power of the written word.

Responding to a world of white supremacist capitalism, hooks values the importance of the title black woman writer. Yet she is not always thinking of herself or her writing in terms of race and gender. "When I wake up in the morning and I am tired and grumpy, and I don't have all the things I want in life I don't get up and say 'I'm a black woman, let me get to the work of black writing.' I usually wake up in the morning and say, 'I got work to do, I'm a writer.' My writing is for everybody and they respond to it in different ways."

Overall, hooks' writing incites intellectual discussion and heated debate, it stirs passion and thought, but mostly, it exists as a body of serious work from a black woman writer. Whether one loves or hates hooks, to not embrace the importance of her roles in the arenas of writer and public intellectual, and to not acknowledge the significance of the landmark she has planted in this century, is a slap in the face of literacy (freedom) for all. ★



(Reviews: cont. from page 48)
Sphere." The Black Public Sphere, according to Neal, is a community where political discussions and the black aesthetic are produced and debated. Neal values this Public Sphere and critiques the history from which it emerged. He also explains its connection to the music and politics that would later shape his cultural antennae.

Neal proceeds to tackle not only the economic, social, and political dimensions of black music history, but also the exploitation by the music industry and Hollywood of black culture – particularly in soul and hip-hop music. His coverage stretches from the release of Jackie Wilson's single "Lonely Teardrops" in 1958 to Marvin Gaye's seminal recording "What's Going On" to '70's funk, to late '80s hip-hop, and through the late '90's secularized R&B music.

Though his explanations suffer from too much rhetoric, the book is exhaustively researched and passionately written. Neal's strength lies in his adept coverage of artists in black music. In particular, he sheds powerful light on Marvin Gaye, Parliament-Funkadelic, Berry Gordy, Public Enemy (though KRS-One and Rakim are noticeably absent), Kirk Franklin and scores of other prominent artists whose musical legacies coincides with the ongoing legacies of the Black Struggle Movements.

On par with smart books such as Amiri Baraka's *Black Music*, Nelson George's *Hip-Hop America* and Brian Ward's *Just My Soul Responding, What The Music Said* effectively hammers home the idea

that black music has a spiritual, musical and political connection to our communal souls.

Getting to the Good Part
by Lolita Files
Warner Books
Reviewed by Duval

Written with an urban tongue and upbeat swing, Lolita Files captivates us with a novel full of drama, emotion, and lots of fun. Nothing short of her first book, *Scenes From a Sistah*, the sequel, *Getting to the Good Part*, finds home.

Files still has her two main characters Misty Fine and Reesy Snowden living in New York City, but she's about to twist and turn their lives so they can find themselves as well as one another. As Misty fulfills her destiny with a good position in a prestigious company, she falls in love with co-worker Rick Hodges – and he is all the man Misty will ever need.

Reesy, feeling alienated by Misty's romance, questions whether she still has a best friend. Always in control of the elements that comprise her life – her relationship with her parents, her endeavor to become a Broadway star, and keeping her sexual partners at a distance – she finds she cannot control Misty's emotions or the way Misty feels about Rick. Just the same, Reesy's world is changing.

She lands a part in an off-Broadway production which

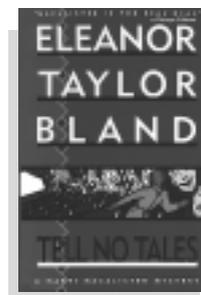
eventually casts her in the leading role. While on her elevated plateau with her career and life, in comes Dandre, a man with whom she had a brief past encounter which caused her to resign from a job. She views this as a chance for revenge and takes him on as a lover, but as she's about to wreak havoc on his world, the script flips and she loses all control. In the end, only true love and friendship can save the day.

Files has brought Scarlett O'Hara into the 90s in the guise of Reesy Snowden and tells a tale of what real friendship and love can be if you give them a chance.

Tell No Tales
by Eleanor Taylor Bland
St. Martin's Press
Reviewed by Nichole L. Shields

Combine a thirty-year-old closed murder case, along with a string of recent murders, topped with the mummified remains of a young black woman, and what do you have, another Marti MacAlister mystery.

Tell No Tales, the seventh Marti MacAlister mystery written by Eleanor Taylor Bland is set in the small town of Lincoln Prairie, IL. The main character, Marti MacAlister, services the Lincoln Prairie police department as the only female black detective. The recent newlywed and mother of three is called from her honeymoon to investigate the murder of a rich, white, elderly recluse with a history of mental



illness. Days before, MacAlister's partner Jessenovik, assigned to another case: the finding of a mummified, young, black woman at one of Lincoln Prairie's closed theatres. The Lincoln Prairie police department is under pressure to close the recluse's murder, as MacAlister and her partner work long hours to find a motive and connect any missing clues to both murders.

However, there's a possibility that the cases may be connected, and as leads and suspects become known, they too are murdered and are added to the body count. MacAlister and Jessenovik must again review all of the cases individually and try to piece together how they connect. Nevertheless, Jessenovik has an idea as to who could be behind the murders -- or at least provide substantial information — and his silence puts a strain on his relationship with MacAlister. Will MacAlister allow Jessenovik to ruin their leads because of his belief in fellow "good cops"? Will Jessenovik's silence cause his partner and other members of the department to fall prey to the killer?

Bland's ability to keep the story an interesting page-turner is accomplished by introducing a hodge-podge of interesting characters, multiple plots along with a few predictable and a few not-so-predictable leads, Bland's attempt to keep *Tell No Tale*

entertaining was distinctively accomplished and is a must read. Bland is well on her way to becoming one of America's most talented mystery writers.

**What Brothers Think,
What Sistahs Know:
The Real Deal on Love
and Relationships**
by Denene Millner
and Nick Chiles
William Morrow & Co.

Reviewed by Duval

Straight from the hip with no holds barred, in a truthful, honest, direct, and provocative manner, Denene Millner, author of *The Sistahs' Rules* and her husband Nick Chiles collaborate on this African American version of *Men are from Mars, Women Are From Venus*. Or, what they call a survival guide to understanding what the opposite sex is thinking.

Neither Millner nor Chiles are psychiatrists or psychologists; they are an average black American couple who explore the views of other brothers and sistahs on what they are wanting, needing, and looking for in the opposite sex. They hope this document will shed light on what the other half is thinking when it comes to love and relationships.

What Brothers Think, What Sistahs Know takes its readers through three degrees of Interactions: The Meeting Stage, Getting the Love you Need, and Keeping it Alive. Each degree is covers questions we all have about the opposite sex and are handled

first by the Sistahs' response and then the Brothers'. Millner and Chiles are not trying to speak on behalf of every brother and sistah, because no two are alike, but their intent is for the responses to be used as a sounding board where both sides can come together to reach a common bond, or at least discuss and understand our interactions.

Dialogue has now been initiated between the mates and whether they ultimately agree or disagree, Millner and Chiles open the door for making or breaking relationships of the love persuasion. The next step is yours.

**Something's Wrong
With Your Scale!**
by Van Whitfield
Doubleday

Reviewed by Sadeqa Y. Murray

Van Whitfield's second novel, *Something's Wrong With Your Scale*, is a romantic comedy that is sure to make you laugh out loud whether you are on the train, a plane or in the comfort of your own living room.

Sonny Walker is a thirty-something, Mr. Nice Guy who has just been dumped by his love interest, the beautiful and talented cooking Marsha, because of an extra seventy pounds that he has some how picked up in the year or so they've been dating. Sonny fed up with: being dumped by his woman, working in the loose ball section of Sports Authority for two years without being promoted, and being the butt end of his two best friends jokes is determined to lose weight. ➤



Sonny joins FutraSystem Weight Loss Center where he meets Kayla, an equally overweight women whom Sonny couldn't fathom dating. How could he? Kayla eats just as much and he does and weighs twice as much as the women he usually dates—well when he used to date.

Although Sonny doesn't view Kayla as a love interest, he feels at ease with her and tends to be himself when they hang out. But after a few late night dinners at *Uncle Leon's*, Kayla's charm, ambition and wit out weighs her size and eating habits and Sonny starts to fall head over heels for her. Kayla makes Sonny feel like a regular man and not just a man with a noticeable weight problem. Kayla seemed equally interested in Sonny, that is until he meets her over zealous live-in "friend," Jonathan James Leslie.

Whitfield has done a marvelous job in taking an overly sensitive topic, "being-overweight," and combined it with humor to make it an issue that doesn't seem so bad after all. He takes you into the lives of two overweight people and how they deal with the extra pounds, the work environment and people's insensitive reactions to their size. This is a heartwarming story that shows the courage of battling the bulge and finding true self worth no matter what size the department stores say you should be. Whitfield's writing style not only keeps you turning page after page but leaves you wanting more.



Shoes On The Otha Foot by Hunter Hayes

Stone Edge Press
Reviewed by Kelwyn Wright

Shoes On The Otha Foot tells the story of good (not to mention good-looking) Leslie and her thirty-five year old recent divorcee cousin, Rachele. These two peas-in-the-pod are trying to get ahead and are constantly hindered, if not all the way pulled down, by some doggish man. And *all mens is dogs, ya dig?* Ain't a good one on God's green earth.

Not a single one. Either married (and cheating) or single (and cheating), gay (and cheating) or in jail (and cheating). Except for hardworking, sweet talking Benjamin who might be the black Prince Leslie has been waiting for all her life.

Of course there are complications. First is the age thing: Benjamin is 34 and Leslie is 19. The age thing, however, pales in comparison to the woman thang. Benjamin has one, and he and his 13 year old son live with her. Leslie, wise to the ways of doggish men, will not let one casually break her heart – which is of course like an egg: hard-shelled and all soft and gooey inside. She resolves to keep her guard up.

As self-possessed and knowing Benjamin continues to saunter into her life, Leslie is suspicious and wary, but also interested. Benjamin affects her in a real, something-she-can-feel, kind of way, and, despite her best efforts to evict him, he invades her thoughts, her dreams... and eventually her bed.

Shoes On The Otha Foot chugs on for 248 pages and never picks up much steam. What plot tension there is – will she or won't she? – is dispensed with rather early. The prose itself is relatively harmless; despite the odd and frequent use of "your" for "you're," it is competent enough not to jar you from the chugging.

Terry McMillan (of the *Waiting To Exhale* franchise) has been accused of many literary crimes of commission and omission, but what she is most guilty of is creating this sub-genre of "sister-girl" novels that compels every bourgeois honey and around-the-way girl not only to commit their thoughts to paper and to seek publication, but to expect that we, the reader, might be interested in reading it. Hunter Hayes should have resisted the urge.

Parable of the Talents by Octavia E. Butler

Seven Stories Press
Reviewed by Camika Spencer

If ever there was a beautiful patchwork quilt designed with history in each square and purpose in each thread, then its literary counterpart is Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents*.

As the follow up to *Parable of the Sower*, *Talents* continues the life and travels of Lauren Oya Olamina Bankole, a young survivor during the primary years of the turn of the millennium in the years 2014 - 2032. This journal-turned-novel shares Lauren's survival of an Earth in chaos, including entries from her husband who is twenty five years her senior, her kidnapped daughter and easily lead and naive bro-ther to help

chronicle how she survived and why she survived such turbulent times. Times yet to come.

The book begins at the Acorn settlement, a community of motley survivors who have come together to protect, grow, share and nurture one another in a world consumed by greed, hate, fear and forced religion. They are bound together by a single belief called Earthseed. However simple this set up reads, it is destined for destruction in a world where anything outside of the Christian-America movement is considered a cult. Once the "one world" government catches wind of the so-called heathen run Acorn, they invade, kill, enslave, rape and kidnap in the name of "all that is good and of God". It is at this time that the heroine finds herself being tested on her faith and inner strength. She is enslaved for seventeen months, her husband is killed and her two-month-old daughter is kidnapped. All she has to get her through is the faith that she will find her daughter and her belief in Earthseed, which restates that God is change and change is inevitable.

Parable of the Talents leaves nothing out with its twists and turns. From the time the reader picks up the book to the time the book is laid to rest, the reader will find him or herself engulfed in the futuristic realities of Lauren Bankole and her group of Earthseed followers.

The author does an excellent job informing the reader. The book is highly visual in it's descriptive imagery and that only re-enforces the believability of the book. So much so that it will actually change the reader's thoughts on what the world is becoming and what it can potentially be. It demands internal revolution of the reader. *Parable of the Talents* also parallels past lifetimes with gut wrenching alertness. It defines what happens with complacency whether the year is 1872 or 2002.

If you haven't read the author's first book, *Parable of the Sower*, there will be some important things you may not understand. The book seems to be retelling things to make a point, so it can't totally stand on it's own. Although the book is disappointing and hard to swallow at times, on the whole, *Parable of the Talents* is an enjoyable, highly emotional and realistic read. It will also move the reader into picking up other novels by Octavia E. Butler. ★

(*Chideya: cont. from page 46*) country, the changing demographics reveal not just inter-generational obstacles but also opportunities across racial lines and ethnic borders. Farai says she struggled with how to frame the book in terms of the black community. "I think blacks have the most to lose in this transition. We're the most vulnerable group in American society and the group most likely to be discriminated against. And so we're going to have to deal with these changes in a very intelligent way. We're going to have make allies of different races."

Farai Chideya, whose calm and articulate voice defines her writing, stays the course even as she is busy dialoguing with her audience and helping those who have the power to shape the future consider the impact of a vastly changing scenario — that of race and ethnicity in American culture. "What I hope to do with this book is lead people through an emotional journey where maybe they do start out with some fears, but by the end, there's more enlightenment." ★

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Phyllis Wheatley

by India Savage Anderson



The controversial and enslaved 18th century black poet, Phillis Wheatley, has the distinction of being the first black American woman and only the second woman to publish a book.

Around 1760, Wheatley journeyed from Senegal, Africa to Boston, Massachusetts when she was about 6 years old. It was a journey that would not only take her many miles from her native land, but also a long distance from her African cultural perspective. Within 16 months of her arrival in the Americas, she demonstrated her remarkable abilities by mastering the English language. Her first published poem, entitled “On the Death of The Rev. Mr. George Whitefield,” appeared when she was 17. During her residence in England, the “Sable Muse,” as she came to be called by her British admirers, published her first volume of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, when she was not yet 20. Wheatley’s health, which had always been unpredictable, deteriorated after the death of her owners, freedom, and her introduction to the abysmal living conditions experienced by most freed blacks in Boston. She died at age 31.

Wheatley’s poetry reflects the influence of the biblical and neoclassic education she received. Her poems are essentially love poems — expressions of the love for her new found home, religion and culture. Wheatley’s themes about God and morality give her poetry a timeless quality.

Some literary critics label her poetry overly sentimental and rigid. Some social critics can’t forgive her of her failure to protest slavery. Wheatley, however, followed a fundamental rule of writing. She wrote about what she knew. Her knowledge uplifted her and she endeavored to uplift other blacks through her writing, as evidenced when she wrote, “Take him, ye Africans, he longs for you,You shall be sons, and kings and priests to God.” Wheatley lived during a period when there existed an overtly sanctioned societal assault to oppress the African culture, especially the genius within. Yet, she managed to shine brilliantly. Wheatley represents an outstanding voice in the black community, even if everyone does not agree with the message her voice carries.

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