

The Value of African-American Poetry

In Community Settings

A thesis presented

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The Value of African American Poetry

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Dedication

To the beautiful, warm spirit of my nephew, Ricky.

To the vibrant expression of joy and heartache, pleasure and pain, simplicity and wisdom reflected in the words of African American poets.

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First of all, I want to acknowledge the men and women who contributed their time, feelings and observations to the creation of this initiative. In order to present the data collection, 9 men and women volunteered to share their perspectives with me. I am sincerely grateful. The process fluctuated between subjective interpretation and personal introspection.

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Abstract

This research study presents the perspectives of nine residents of Duluth, MN and Superior, WI (the "Twin Ports") upon the reading of African American poetry. The study attempts to assess the importance of exposure to African American poetry and the significance of interacting with the published work. The hope is to move toward an appreciation of African American artistry for the purpose of more equitable relationships across racial divides.

Keeping the rich literary expression of African American stories and experiences alive nurtures the spirit, giving shape to the past and foundation to the future. This study seeks to examine the potential for enrichment, through reading African American poetry in community settings for people in and around the Twin Ports area.

Keywords: African American culture, African American poetry, community,
Dominant White culture, storytelling

Keyword Definitions

Primarily, the keywords are meant to be understood in their colloquial sense, with a few specific variations. Here, I have defined each term, as applied most frequently throughout this study:

African American Culture encompasses the food, the language, the music, the attitudes and values of African American people, as influenced by slavery, the church, the family and the neighborhood.

African American poetry is the written, creative expression of thoughts, feelings and experiences displayed in the present study by acclaimed authors, through their patterns of unique language, rhythm and rhyme.

Community is defined as a collective group of people, of men, women and children in the Twin Ports region. At times, the word “community” will refer to the 9 participants interviewed in the present research study. At other times, "community" will indicate a specific group. The designation of Black or African American, White or of European descent will be noted, when and where the specification applies.

Dominant White culture refers to the elite, ruling class in America. The Dominant White culture is comprised of people of European descent, who set the political, economic and military

standard, in a manner imposing and maintaining the White ideology, norm, value and world view, onto people with brown and black skin.

Storytelling is the cultural practice of recounting events in order to illustrate a moral belief, a reason for caution or to offer wisdom.

Chapter I: Introduction

In September of 2012, I volunteered to teach an African American Poetry course at the University For Seniors, an extension of the University of Minnesota in Duluth. The University For Seniors is a self-enrichment program in which community members assume the position of teaching interesting subjects to a student body – primarily comprised of White, retired, professional senior citizens. The courses offered through the University For Seniors are not accredited. There are no textbooks or standardized tests.

In the African American Poetry class, I instructed 11 students of European descent, in four two-hour classes. I found the experience to be multi-faceted in that the seniors moved from a place of interest and intrigue, while reading the work of newly introduced poets, to a state of disbelief and anger.

I sensed the disbelief to be based in resentment toward an educational system that had withheld information about prolific writers. A number of the enrollees were retired English teachers who seemed angry to discover they had not been taught about the African American poets I was presenting to them. Unbeknownst to me, I was encountering the initial elements of qualitative inquiry. What is the source of vehemence from the European elders with regard to the African American poetry?

During the same period of time, I became aware of African American Poetry Day, a holiday celebrated on October 17th honoring the birthday of Jupiter Hammon (1711-c. 1795), who was the first African American to publish poetry. With this information, I contacted a community coordinator of an after-school program based in the City of Duluth. The programming offered tutoring, assistance with homework and recreational sports to young

people between the ages of 7 and 14. The coordinator and I discussed giving the kids the opportunity to recite African American poetry to the community at large. I attended a number of the after-school gatherings to familiarize the students with the poetry.

The coordinator and I scheduled a date and time for a public presentation and, within five days of the advertisement, over one hundred parents and their children, school principals and the superintendent of ISD709 schools were together in the Central Administration Building's auditorium listening to low income students and Students of Color enthusiastically read the work of African American authors.

Again, I observed behaviors directing me toward a natural point of inquiry. Why are people, both Black and White, excited about this topic?

Between my experience with the senior citizens and the young people, I knew the poetry tapped into some source of controversial energy. I can offer conjecture about the reactionary momentum driving the members of each group but I would rather have a formal process in which to record the impact. In this research study, I have presented literature to 9 community members in order to answer the question: "What is the controversial energy connected to reading African American poetry?" The responses given by the men and women selected for this study will serve to explain: "Why does the reading of African American poetry create a reactionary momentum"?

Chapter II: Literature Review

The preceding questions are good questions, curious musings that prompt a more generalized understanding of the potential use of poetry. For decades, researchers across several disciplinary thresholds have relied on poetry as a unique art form in which to enhance expression and touch subtle ways of knowing. An extensive review of the literature will provide a context in which to assess the influences of poetry as referenced for personal and group development. A number of academic studies have documented the use of poetry, in varying situations including the K – 12 curricula to enrich the minds of students and in the community for civic participation. The overview of the research begins with poetry as incorporated into classroom environments.

Researcher Vincent A. Ciardiello presents the manner in which a social justice consciousness can be nurtured with elementary school children. In his article “Talking Walls: A Case for Social Justice Poetry in Childhood Literacy”, examples are given to show the manner in which children were exposed to social conditions of oppressed people in order to witness compassionate responses and to reinforce democratic principles (Ciardiello, 2010). The quotes of notable figures such as Nelson Mandela (1918 – 2013) and Adrienne Rich (1929 – 2012) were included in the traditional lessons thereby supporting the notion that children will empathize with those who have been oppressed (p 470). The suggestion is children are never too young to learn about fairness and compassion. Students can be engaged in discussions and assignments using poetry as a catalyst to become interested in the well being of other people.

The most prominent directive reinforced in the essay is the notion that civil responsibility is learned and developed by classroom interaction and subject matter learning.

“Young students have a natural interest in issues involving matters of fairness and social justice (Ciardiello, p 472). In this example, the researcher found personal issues to be an effective foundation in lessons about global issues involving discrimination against racial and ethnic groups.

Earnest Murrell and Jeffrey M. R. Duncan-Andrade begin the article, “Promoting Academic Literacy with Urban Youth by Engaging Hip-hop Culture”, with the implications of recent data that forecasts the decrease in minority teachers by 5% while the number of minority students increase by 41%, within the next decade (Digest of Education Statistics).

Teachers are attempting to connect with students with a consideration of cross-cultural realities. Since teachers have been aware of their students’ consumption of hip-hop music, they have initiated a blending of popular music and the classroom experience.

21st century students across racial backgrounds frequently buy and listen to hip-hop music. To a large extent, the lyrics reflect the everyday reality of urban students’ lives. As articulated by Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (1921-1997), the raising of critical consciousness in oppressed groups is the first step in helping them attain critical literacy and perhaps freedom from oppressive ideologies.

Author Chapman Hood Frazier teaches poetry writing and secondary English Methods at Longwood University, Farmville, Virginia. In his paper, “Building Community Through Poetry” presented at the National Council of Teachers of English Conference on College Composition and Communication, Frazier asserts “When approached as an imaginative, communal activity, good teaching involves creating an environment that supports students and allows them to explore, discover, and question their assumptions about the class, the content, the world, and

their perceptions in a situation of mutual support. Poetry writing, at its core, can help initiate such 'imaginative possibilities.' The process of creating a poem not only demonstrates the inherent characteristics of the imaginative experience, but, when it is written and shared in a supportive group, validates diverse student voices and establishes the foundation for a classroom community" (p 2).

Thus far, the overview of the research has noted ways educators have used poetry to enhance classroom learning with students in elementary, middle and high school. Poetry has been accessed as an avenue for learning in higher educational settings as well. Researchers M. E. Blake and S. T. Cashwell sought to arrange an educational environment in which social work students and practitioners would shift their thoughts about diverse populations. In their article "Use of Poetry to Facilitate Communication about Diversity," the researchers found the reading, writing and subsequent composition of poetry, expanded the knowledge base of research subjects with regard to gender and cultural diversity. Since, about 25% of the U. S. population identify themselves as Persons of Color, there are recommendations for social workers, psychologists and other helping professionals to develop competence in working with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

In a 3-hour workshop, the researchers administered two data collection instruments: the Group Environment Scale (Moos & Humphrey, 1974) and the author-constructed "Inventory for Images of Diversity". 52 members of a Social Work Department were divided into 4 groups – 1 group was faculty and 3 groups were comprised of undergraduate students. The poems selected were taken from three anthologies: *Unsettling America* (Gillan & Gillan, 1994), *Cries of the Spirit* (Sewell, 1991), and *Claiming the Spirit Within* (Sewell, 1996). The first

contains poems by ethnically diverse poets. The two Sewell anthologies focus primarily on poems pertaining to women's issues; however, many of the poems address diversity either directly or indirectly.

The research findings seem to indicate that the model's interweaving of cognitive and affective elements has potential for creating changes among the individual's perception of other cultures, consistent with the recommendations of Rudman, Ashmore, and Gary (2001). In this case, the poetry was implemented for the exclusive purpose of changing attitudes of racially diverse groups differing from the research subjects. The research was conducted in a college with an understanding that the research subjects would interact with their female clients and with their Clients of Color with more sensitivity.

Poetry is frequently used as a means of therapeutic or personal development (Kempler, 2003). The academic discussion of poetry will now include a community's access to the genre. A variety of poetry groups have been operating in community-based settings. One example is the Neighborhood Writing Alliance based in Chicago, Illinois (Neighborhood Writing Alliance, 2011). The Neighborhood Writing Alliance provokes dialogue, builds community, and promotes change by providing opportunities for adults in Chicago's underserved neighborhoods to write, publish, and perform works about their lives.

A review of the literature acknowledges the educational potential, healing quality and the self-empowering role associated with interacting with poetry. The reading, writing and performing of poetry can align the reader with internal processes, natural to human validation. Poetry, in particular, has a way of creating far reaching circuits of confirmation that comforts and appeases the internal self.

While poetry has been used in a variety of ways for purposes of individual and societal change, thus far, I have not found the study that uses the “reading” of poetry, in post-secondary environments to educate and sensitize adults in the community about racial issues. A research study is warranted in order to assess the manner in which the community at large can be effective as a change agent by influencing the racist climate in the Twin Ports area through the reading of acclaimed poets. Contemporary African American literature can be incorporated to enhance personal, academic and civic enrichment. This research study is significant in raising awareness about distinguished African American writers in light of the collective mainstream body of literary work. Further, there are implications for building community leadership and empowerment. This study exemplifies a process serving to promote the expansion of literary knowledge, the place of racial inclusion and a deeper sense of humanity.

Chapter III: Qualitative Research Theories

One of the schools of thought pointing directly toward observation of human behavior is phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophical discipline emphasizing a focus on subjective experiences and interpretations of the world. In the case of the current research, I am searching for the core experiences and interpretations motivating an interest in African American poetry.

Historically, phenomenology has been integral to several social research disciplines including psychology, sociology and social work (www.socialresearchmethods.net). A researcher concerned with phenomenology wants to understand how the world appears to others. In addition to being a philosophical perspective, phenomenology is sometimes considered an approach in qualitative research methods. I have determined a qualitative research method to be the most complimentary course of action in light of the personal nature of the study. The qualitative research method entails a direct involvement with specific events to be recorded and interpreted through a researcher's observation. While quantitative research counts numbers, tabulates statistics and concludes with tallies based in the ranking of numerical findings, qualitative research acquires in-depth understanding (Lindlof and Taylor, p. 175), with the use of varying techniques including reports of information and verbatim conversations.

In qualitative research, methods such as interviewing and discourse analysis are particularly conducive to acquiring an understanding of the knowledge, experience and world view, of research subjects (Lindlof and Taylor, p. 174). By engaging a pre-determined group of people in purposeful conversation, information can be gained effectively revealing significant

experiences. The interviewing method has intricacies pointing to data collected over pregnant pauses, personal stories and spontaneous associations.

A researcher has the option to acquire abstract information like perceptions, societal attitudes and opinions, during an interview, while fully anticipating concomitant layers of surprise data (Lindlof and Taylor, p. 175). Through the person – to – person exchange, qualitative researchers can discover the details about residents and a community, cultural norms and events, individual and collective behaviors. The approach has three major forms, namely the ethnographic, informant and respondent interview.

The respondent interview is the central method for data collection in the present study and I will offer a detailed consideration of its scope. One of the major figures in 20th century American Sociology, Paul Lazarsfeld (1944) founded the Bureau of Applied Social Research, at Columbia University. In part, Lazarsfeld contributed to the study of communication by identifying the goal of the respondent interview (Lindlof and Taylor, p 176). According to Lazarsfeld, the respondent interview carries certain purposeful outcomes; namely, to clarify the meaning of common concepts and opinions, to distinguish the decisive elements of an expressed opinion, to determine what influenced a person to form an opinion and to classify complex attitude patterns.

Throughout the 20th century, researchers interested in embracing the tenets of feminist theory, poststructuralism and/or cultural studies have expanded the respondent interview (Lindlof and Taylor, p 178). Studies conducted through these social science disciplines reference interview talk, as a manifestation of the discursive formations that circulate broadly in society, for example, gender, racial, sexual and political discourses (Lindlof and Taylor, 178). The men

and women answering interview questions are seen as subjects using discourses, in order to make sense of their position in their immediate environment and in the structure of the larger society.

With the directives for respondent interviewing in mind, I approached 9 community members and posed the question, “What do you think?” The men and women were presented with African American poetry for the purpose of accumulating and analyzing their interpretations. Their opinions, observations and reflections are being treated as stable and valid perspectives on the literary material.

The respondent interview has been designated as the method for data collection and the narrative approach is being designated as the method for data presentation. In this case, the narrative is more than a story; the narrative is a procedure treating records of data, as a complete picture. “Narrative styles of qualitative research generate multiple perspectives and accounts, representing a variety of voices and stories” (Holley and Colyar, p. 117). Narratives are stories containing specific elements, including the characters, the plot and the point of view.

The characters are the people playing key roles, as actors giving dimension to specific traits and complexities (Holley and Colyar, p. 119). The plot describes the events that make up a story – events relating to each other in a patterned sequence. The point of view is the manner in which a story is depicted for the reading audience.

Throughout this research study, the narrative elements have a multi-dimensional application. The poets reveal a story and their poetry will convey an adjacent story. The

research study subjects bring a worldview enveloped within a story and their worldview will add a perspective, a story.

To summarize, this research study closely examines the phenomenological processes of its research participants through qualitative tools most conducive to capturing sensitivity and personal accounts. Poetry can be seen as a tool of qualitative research that can be used to investigate human phenomena (Thomas, 2004) out of its reflection of lived experiences and acquired attitudes. The study uses a qualitative method of inquiry for its data collection, since the objective is concerned with genuine observation and meaning. Sets of interviewing questions will employ the respondent interview as a face-to-face resource for information. Additionally, the study will be presented in a narrative style which will include characters – various men and women, plot – numerous occurrences interfacing with courses of action and point of view -- multiple layers of meaning.

Thus far, I have revisited the basic impetus supporting my decision to conduct a research study in the introductory section. I have given a descriptive outline of the style and sequence for acquiring qualitative information. The data has a format that flows logically with various aspects of observation being woven together thread by thread, forming a unique narrative tapestry. While each component of a research study carries its own merit; the components exist in a larger context. The next section presents the more abstract points of reference in which to hold research, namely theoretical frameworks.

“Everything we do in life is rooted in theory. Whether we consciously explore the reasons we have a particular perspective or take a particular action there is also an underlying system shaping thought and practice” (bell hooks 2000, p. 19). At this point, I will begin an

overview of the role of theoretical perspectives, as related to general belief systems and socially accepted practices. Then I will present two theories setting parameters in which to place the core of this study. After the explanation of the relative theories, I will conclude by relaying the significance of each theory to the research initiative.

Theories are built upon a foundation of basic philosophical assumptions, which belong to one of three categories, namely, assumptions about epistemology - knowledge, ontology – reality or axiology – value. Theoretical perspectives can assist with the process of indexing wide spectrums of thought. Theories organize propositions, explanations and principles showing an aspect of human experience (Littlejohn and Ross, p. 20). Through theories, experiences are minimized to a set of categories focusing upon certain patterns, relationships and variables.

The first perspective to consider with regard to this study is Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory purposely places race and racism under analysis. Racism is defined as the structure embedded in society that systematically advantages Whites and disadvantages People of Color.

The goal of Critical Race Theory is to dismantle systematic inequity by calling attention to it. Racism is the core reason for racial inequality in education, employment and other societal structures. Racism relates directly to and results directly from the racialized history of the United States. A deliberate and focused emphasis is placed on race and the problematizing of the neutrality associated with dominant ideologies.

Critical Race Theory positions race and racism at a central point in both historical and contemporary contexts (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Yosso (2005) defines Critical Race Theory in education as “a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses. [The analysis] is conceived as a social

justice initiative that works toward the liberatory potential of schooling” (p. 74). Critical Race scholars believe that racial analysis can be used to enhance the understanding of teachers, practitioners and other professionals in identifying the educational barriers that affect People of Color (Taylor, 2009). Scholars seeking a new way to analyze systematic racial inequality in law, education, and other dimensions of society are exploring the theory around the world.

The second perspective applied to this study is Critical Theory, a conceptual framework that questions assumptions the average person has come to believe to be true about society. Critical Theory contends that reality is created and shaped, by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender-based forces that have been reified over time into social structures becoming viewed as natural (Lindlof and Taylor, p 88).

The perspective using Critical Theory challenges the reality of social structures. The approach relies on dialogical methods combining observation and interview with approaches fostering conversation and reflection. Social systems are seen as "political" universally across the board – to a greater or lesser extent. With the socio-political lens in hand, critical theorists assume the responsibility of confronting, exposing and changing forces rooted in oppression, which are subtle, entangled and multi-layered (Lindlof & Taylor, p55).

The French theorist Louis Althusser (1918 – 1990) connected Freudian theories of identity formation to Marxist theories of political-economic influence. In his essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus,” Althusser argued that the discourses of "institutional state apparatuses” such as public education "hail" cultural members to assume various "subject positions.”

These positions involve forms of identity whose practical reproduction is essential for the maintenance of dominant institutions, a process known as "interpellation". According to Althusser, once cultural members are positioned as subjects, they become unconscious of themselves, unconscious of each other and unconscious of their world through a complex field of forces.

Each of these theories offers a manner in which to conceptualize the propositions within this study. I will incorporate the tenets of Critical Race Theory and Critical Theory, in turn, in order to illustrate their practical application to key elements.

Critical Race Theory assists with identifying how policies and practices uphold and perpetuate White, dominant culture mainstream norms. The educational system in the United States has disregarded the literary contribution of African American poets in K – 12 classroom curricula. Consequently, the graduates of the public educational system acquire advanced credentials and work in the educational field and in various other professions without an exposure to and an appreciation for African American thought, experience and worldview.

Critical Race Theory places racially based inequities within social systems under a microscope. The social and political structure demarcations in the United States support practices and policies of Black inferiority and White superiority in order to establish and maintain a ruling class that serves its own interests. Majority of the citizens in our society are processed through a system being exposed, almost exclusively, to the accomplished European male. In addition to an educational system that affirms White history, literature, exploration and scientific innovation, forces such as media, in every form celebrate the Euro-centric value and debase the Afro-centric existence.

A purposeful examination of the issue on a local level is as good an example as any. Several societal forces point toward the construction of a regional absence, of African American authority and scholarship. In the State of Wisconsin and in the State of Minnesota, the educational system makes negligible attempts to acknowledge African Americans in the K-12 curriculum under the guise of “multi-cultural lessons. The frequency of exposure to multi-cultural lessons is exclusively at the discretion of the individual instructor. “Schools and teachers treat the language, prior knowledge, and values of African Americans as aberrant ...” (Ladson-Billings, p. 206).

In the State of Wisconsin, teachers are required to review history, American literature and World literature to fulfill benchmarks within state mandates (<http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/standards/pdf/ela-stds-app-a-revision.pdf>), with administrative encouragement to cover the work of First Nation People. In the State of Minnesota, teachers have the option to incorporate lessons about diverse populations in the K-12 classroom curriculums. Teachers are asked to plan lessons based on the reading, writing and critiquing of the work of culturally diverse primary sources, especially Native American. The Minnesota State Board of Education encourages teachers to meet certain benchmarks in their English instruction such as having students analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text, including those from diverse cultures (<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/stds/ela>). While teachers are expected to instruct their students about People of Color, the primary focus is placed on inclusion of the literary work of Indigenous People.

Critical Theory supports the next consideration about the assumptions around the standardized educational model that makes learning the exclusive responsibility of formal classroom environments. Critical Theory helps with an analysis of political forces in which particular educational practices are edified while others are diminished throughout society in order to maintain a historically based paradigm. The current educational achievement gap has this prescriptive model of education in a discretionary position. The previously accepted norm of, at the very least, an uninterrupted 12-year duration of education has come under scrutiny. To a large extent, this study is challenging the reified construction of the widely accepted, normalized educational process that has education defined as attending school throughout the K-12 grades, completing a 4 year college education and perhaps earning an advanced degree. A number of established institutions within society can accommodate academic goals. Several community resources can be accessed in order to enhance learning, including community centers, churches and neighborhood organizations e.g., the Boys and Girls Club.

While the circumstance of omitting African American scholarship and having learning take place primarily in the public school system is a reality across the nation, the dominant White administration operating in the Twin Ports area exemplifies the repression of African American writers in the classroom and in the fabric of the region. A case has been made to show some of the historical, socio-political dynamics behind the constraint of African American Poetry. The exclusion of African American literature stems from a socio-political structure dominated by European norms and values. Furthermore, the extensive number of community-based resources has not incorporated African American Poetry into the alternative learning models.

In summary, Critical Race Theory as well as Critical Theory have application in the realm of this study since each perspective offers a basic understanding of the rudimentary mechanisms at play in the restriction of African American value in the educational system. African American poetry is ignored due to a mindset within a country where Whiteness has been determined, over time, to be the single, most preferable standard. The suppression of African American contribution maintains a belief and allegiance to dominant White ideologies essential to the maintenance of an exclusive privileged class. The educational system that reinforces Whiteness and European leadership, in part by ignoring Blackness and African American scholarship, is facing paradigm shifts that beg for innovative pedagogy in the classroom and elsewhere.

The position reinforced in this study is one that states African American Poetry has value and since the value receives little affirmation in the formal educational setting, the value can be acknowledged outside of the classroom, throughout the community. During the winter months of 2016, I embarked on the concrete steps required to begin a formal process of inquiry, analysis and documentation for this research endeavor. The insight gained will enrich an understanding of the comprehensive merit of African American poetry.

Chapter IV: Methodology

I began the formal research process with a submission of my research proposal to the University of Wisconsin, Superior Institutional Review Board (IRB). In December of 2015, I received approval from the IRB, to conduct the research study. As I approached various men and women, I disclosed that they were being invited to partake in a research study and their responses would be detailed in a final data collection. Each of the research participants was a volunteer who read and signed a hard copy of an Informed Consent Form prior to their involvement as research participants.

In my role as a researcher, I contemplated the important practice of reflexivity, which is “the process of critical self-reflection on one’s biases and theoretical predispositions” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 260). For this reason, I attempted to allow the data collection to occur without constraint, as much as possible. I did not attempt to control the information being expressed during the interviewing process.

However, I worked with a population of people who have pursued advanced education. All of the participants in the study currently attend college or have completed a degree. I do not believe that this fact skewed the results of the data, but I will say my choice of research participants somewhat insured a more critical interpretation of the poetry. Additionally, I did not engage people randomly, with the use of the Yellow Pages; I had encountered each participant in the past or I selected them through the recommendations of an acquaintance.

Systematically, I chose a process to collect data for the present study. I was mindful of the lessons well learned during my facilitation of the reading and discussion of African American poetry for community groups. A review of the manner in which I had interacted with

the public and with the published work was a natural place to begin moving forward with the topic using qualitative research methods.

Since I was not aware of a collection of African American poetry that included the pictures, biographies and bibliographies of the authors, I assumed the task of creating such a collection. The booklet includes the work of seven African American poets, which spans from the early 20th century to the present day. The booklet displays the photos, biographies, between one and three sample poems and the bibliography of each author. I selected Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906), Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000), James A. Emanuel (1921-2013), Margaret Walker (1915-1998), Amiri Baraka (1934-2014), Audre Lorde (1934-1992) and Michael Harper (1938-2016).

An aspect of the research study is to understand the manner in which African American writing has been excluded from the standard public school curricula. I hoped to highlight this point and to expand the knowledge base with regard to the topic of African American Poets for my research participants. So for this reason, I omitted writings of such acclaimed, nationally recognized authors as Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Nikki Giovanni and Alice Walker.

The content of the African American poetry booklet has features that naturally integrate techniques of qualitative research. According to Harper (2002), photo-elicitation employs visual materials to trigger a subject's commentary about aspects of a scene. In photo-elicitation interviews, the questions reference pictures as a point of departure to ask about processes and activities that are not literally represented in the images (Caldarola, 1985).

The visual images of each African American poet were an important feature of the poetry booklet. Every picture tells a story. My goal was to reinforce the study of the work of

poets – many of whom were scholars – as undoubtedly men and women with Black and Brown skin. The intention was to include photos for the purpose of adding a humanizing element that would result in a more meaningful experience for the research participants.

Another technique I employed in this research process I will characterize as an extension of the vignettes. Traditionally, vignettes are used as either a self-contained technique or in conjunction with other interviewing methods (Barter and Arnold, 2000; Spalding & Phillips, 2007). Vignettes are "short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond" (Finch, 1987, p. 105).

In this case, the African American poems are not short stories in the classic sense of the phrase. However, the poems were being presented with a parallel purpose and result. When interviewed respondents accept a vignette as a good representation of their social reality, it can be an effective way of opening a discussion of cultural norms, cultural values and communicative systems.

The research materials were assembled thoughtfully, over a two-month period of time; the recruitment of research participants was contemplated for a period of time, as well. In total, I conducted 5 interview sessions, with 3 men and 6 women. The interviews were conducted in various public settings such as conference rooms, local restaurants and community centers.

The first session was with a male, African American community leader from Duluth. The second was with an African American woman living in the Twin Ports area. The third interview was with a group of African students who were recruited through an email correspondence with the assistance of a University of Wisconsin, Superior administrator. The fourth session was

an interview between 2 female contemporaries and myself, one was a Woman of Color and the other woman was White. Finally, the fifth interview was conducted with 2 people--a Man of Color and a White female contemporary--from the City of Duluth.

As mentioned previously, interviewing has been recognized as an effective method for the collection and analysis of qualitative data. I was encouraged by the prospect of interviewing because the process is a heart-to-heart manner in which to document the subjective responses to the literature. Each interview was arranged to span between 1 and three hours, with the individual sessions taking place within 10-day intervals.

As an interviewer, I wanted to be mindful of the details of my process. "Interviewers will hone their skills if they work within a set amount of time and have to fit their technique to it" (Seidman, p 14). I allotted an average 2-hour time frame to allow enough time for the material to be read and discussed in a conversational style. Furthermore, if interviewers are dealing with a considerable number of participants, interviews need to be scheduled so that one session can be completed prior to moving on to the next (Seidman, p 14).

For the purpose of coherence and in order to contrast similarities and differences, researchers establish a standardized pattern (Lindlof and Taylor, p 174) to follow during a respondent interview, even though the questions may differ from interviewee to interviewee.

The qualitative research study begins with an open-ended questionnaire designed to assess the general knowledge base of the participants. Each member of the study answered the following series of questions: (See Appendix AAP: F3.)

Would you say that you enjoy poetry, in general?

Have you read African American poetry?

When were you first introduced to African American Poetry?

What were the circumstances around your exposure to African American poetry?

Do you have a favorite author? If yes, what is his or her name?

As a researcher, my initial thought was to have the interviewees complete a second questionnaire at the conclusion of the process. However, while speaking with the participants, I found it necessary to adjust this self-imposed component. I asked the respondents to read the closing questionnaire two-thirds of the way through the interview in order to set a framework for the final goal. The participants seemed to show a sense of relief. They seemed to relax and to be comforted by having a context in which to frame their perspectives. (See appendix AAP: F5.).

What are the benefits of an examination of African American Poetry?

What is the educational implication?

What are the implications for the community through reading African American Poetry?

Do you belong to groups that might benefit from the reading and discussion of African American Poetry? Please, explain.

In what innovative ways can African American Poetry be used throughout the community?

I separated the data into several streams of information. The data collection was fluid in nature. I interviewed 9 people, who read 17 poems by 7 different African – American poets. In the research findings I attempt to capture the research participants' most compelling insights to the literature. Each respondent observed different elements in an ebb and flow manner.

The research study respondents offered their observations about the poets and the lives of the poets, the poetry and the connotation of the poetry. At times the interviewees tied specific lines of poetry to their personal experience. At other times, the reactions were theoretical, abstract thoughts about the concepts within the poetry, as related to society at large. My challenge is to present a circular experience in a linear fashion, to place spoken words into a concrete, written form.

Chapter V: The Research

A. The Process

The process of analyzing the collected data involves dividing the information into categories. Once the categories have been established, sub-categories referred to as themes are noted in order to have distinct topics for discussion. In this study, I have identified 3 major categories, namely, history, African American culture and storytelling--3 aspects referenced most frequently by the respondents.

In addition, the research study respondents noted a number of themes. Many of the themes were mentioned briefly as a reaction to the poetry collection as a whole or due to the phrases within a specific poem. The sub-categories of acclaimed authors, dominant White culture and poetry were mentioned several times, throughout the data collection.

The findings of the research begin with the fictitious name of the interviewee, a few details under the umbrella term demographic information and a brief description of their role in the community. I have given each respondent a pseudonym to conceal his or her identity in compliance with standards of confidentiality.

The record of the interview session opens with the respondent's pseudonym and his or her general exposure to poetry. The summary of the statements given during the pre-session question segment of the interview is presented to relay the former knowledge base of the participants, giving a context to their exposure to African American poetry. (See Appendix AAP F: 1) Then, introductory information about a given interviewees' position on a poem is presented. The introductory portion is followed either by a copy of the poem being referenced or by the verbatim answers given at the interview.

B. The People, the Poems

i. Anthony

Anthony is an African American administrator at a university in the Duluth – Superior community. He and his family have lived in the Twin Ports area for over 15 years. He has earned his Bachelor's Degree in Business from the University of Wisconsin, Superior. Anthony is called upon to address racially based conflicts in the City of Duluth. He is a member of a number of local civil-rights groups and he mentors young people in a variety of arenas throughout the city.

The interview was scheduled for a weekday afternoon in Anthony's office on the college campus adjacent to the office of cultural affairs. He began by saying that he reads poetry frequently and has read the more commonly known authors such as Langston Hughes and Nikki Giovanni. During our interview, Anthony read a poem to me written by Jeffery Canada – another one of his favorite poets.

The discussion became focused on his concern about how the poets, their lives and their publications have been disregarded by mainstream culture. Anthony made the following statement on the subject: "When we think of American literature, African Americans are not part of that box."

Anthony viewed the samples of African American poetry as a glimpse into the pain and struggle of African American people. He considered the poetry to be a powerful source of information that has the potential to unite people. Anthony made several comments: "The poetry can be inspirational for our community; the poetry can be useful in telling the narrative. ... Some of the poetry unites us; some of the poetry brings us together. For example, the 'Negro National Anthem' and some of the gospel hymns."

Through the research study, Anthony was being introduced to the life and work of James A. Emanuel, a prolific writer – who invented Jazz Haiku. He expressed an appreciation for the poem, “A Fool For Evergreen,” (1991); by saying the poem represented the never-ending state of hopefulness characterizing the mindset of many Black people.

“A Fool for Evergreen”

little bit of fool in me

Hides behind my inmost tree

And pops into the narrow path

I walk blindfolded by my wrath

Or shrunken by some twist of pain,

Some hope that will not wind again.

He ogles with his antic eyes

and somersaults a you're-not-wise

Until the patches in his pants

Go color wheeling through my glance

So fast that I cannot recall

That I was mad or sad at all.

A little bit of fool in me

Keeps evergreen my inmost tree (Emanuel, 1991).

A number of issues arose for Anthony during the review of the literature. He spoke to the possible complication around using the poetry in education by saying:

There may be fear connected to great works of [African American] art. White instructors may not be comfortable talking about the pain of African American people, racism and slavery. Pain, slavery, loss and the Black relationship are topics that need to be acknowledged in order to be taught. Teachers in the public educational system are not comfortable having that conversation with Kids of Color.

Anthony revered the poetry as potentially being meaningful throughout the Black community. He was clear about engaging the Black community, in the reading of poetry, as a means in which to reaffirm education and to reinforce cultural pride, prior to involving White people. He offered his thoughts on the theme of storytelling in the context of Black men, in particular, by sharing the following words:

Many Men of Color do not have a platform in which the story, the experience, can be told and shared, particularly with other Men of Color. His story is my story. People of Color have had a collective experience when it comes to police and other systems...

With the passing along of stories comes the passing along of wisdom.

As an African American man, working professionally with a diverse population of young people, Anthony confirmed the value of exposing the Black community to the literature. He was adamant about the healing component of such exposure. He reiterated the affirming power of making a space for people -- especially African American men to tell their stories. Anthony holds storytelling as a supportive practice in the empowerment of Black people. He holds this view since, especially, in his words, "We were enslaved for over 325 years; we had been in slavery longer than we have been free."

ii. Melanie

The second research participant, Melanie is a wife, a mother and an improvisational dancer. As an African American woman, she is devoted to incorporating African themes into her performances. Several years ago, she completed a Master's Degree in Spiritual Counseling. She and her husband manage a small business and have lived in the Twin Ports area for over 15 years.

During our conversation, Melanie revisited her childhood memories of reading stories authored by the Jewish poet, playwright and songwriter, Shel Silverstein (1930 – 1999). She noted her exposure to African American poetry as occurring in high school, through the play "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When The Rainbow Is Enuf" by Ntozake Shange (1948 - present).

The theme of storytelling was prominent during Melanie's interview and storytelling is one component of Melanie's stage repertoire. She was the sole interviewee who asked to have a copy of the African American poetry booklet prior to our meeting. She spoke extensively about the importance, the value of honoring our personal journeys. She extended the general connotation of poetry by saying "The Negro Spirituals are a form of poetry; modern day rap is a form of poetry, as well."

As an interviewee, Melanie was the respondent who superimposed the poetry onto a concrete reality. While other respondents extracted aspects of the words from the poetry to then converse about various themes, Melanie allowed the poetry to draw the truth; she allowed the poetry to build the frame in which to see lived experience. She explained, "We deal with the weight of generational trauma. The poetry brings one face-to-face with the harshness

of the African American community; it also captures the gifts of hope and a beautiful spirit. There are the gifts of who we might be as African heritage people.”

“We Wear The Mask” (1913) by Paul Laurence Dunbar – a prolific writer, who was among the first African American poets to earn a living through his craft – is a multi-dimensional piece. If for a moment, the notion of a mask is considered, several layers of meaning emerge, such as, a mask in ceremony, masking identity, masking insecurity or masking an intention. Melanie was one of two respondents to interpret the poem as it appears below:

“We Wear the Mask”

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,--
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be otherwise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile

Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
 But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask (Dunbar, 1913)!

Melanie made a number of forthright comments about the poem. She alluded to the tender condition of being human, susceptible to hurt and inclined toward self-protectiveness.

The emotional interpretation of Dunbar's lines was captured in the following words:

We hide behind masks; we wear masks for survival; there is almost too much pain to remain exposed; if you reveal your pain, people pounce on it but some incredible things can happen when people take away their masks... People tend to avoid showing their vulnerability.

In the poem, "The Struggle Staggers Us," (1942) by Margaret Walker—the lifelong writer of human rights poetry—polar opposites of comfort and pain, complacency and activism, fear and love are being conveyed to the reader as our human "plight." Melanie was the first interviewee to offer an extensive observation of the poem presented below:

"The Struggle Staggers Us"

Our birth and death are easy hours, like sleep
 and food and drink. The struggle staggers us
 for bread, for pride, for simple dignity.
 And this is more than fighting to exist;
 more than revolt and war and human odds.
 There is a journey from the me to you.
 There is a journey from the you to me.

A union of the two strange worlds must be.

Ours is a struggle from a too-warm bed;
too cluttered with a patience full of sleep.

Out of this blackness we must struggle forth;
from want of bread, of pride, of dignity.

Struggle between the morning and the night.

This marks our years; this settles, too, our plight (Walker, 1942).

In response to this poem, Melanie addressed the conflict between living a life of privilege and a life of little means. Her words held together the disconcerting polar opposites of poverty and privilege despair and hope. I had an appreciation for her succinct remarks:

It can be very challenging to actually motivate one's energy toward moving ... yourself, to a higher level of care, fairness and justice when you are fairly comfortable. There are people who do not move into that struggle because they are so busy trying to survive and yet there are those amazing people who are trying to survive and still move into the struggle. Some aspects of the struggle belong to people who do not struggle to get all of their needs met. The irony is that if all of our needs are met then we may become too complacent to be concerned with the struggle.

Melanie made interesting observations about the socio-economic status of the poets. Her insight is noteworthy because it speaks to the commitment to social justice from positions of privilege. Her comments, which appear below, rather nicely conflate elements of the Black experience:

Many of the poets were privileged compared to the community around them; however perhaps they were hit enough with harshness to take their gifts and privilege and respond to it. [In the poetry,] the worlds come together, one of vibrancy, creativity and our rhythms and also include despair, anger and violence.

Melanie's qualities as an artist were reflected in her responses. She clearly noted the themes characterizing African American culture. In a fashion similar to her value of storytelling, Melanie shared an awareness of the explicit value of poetry as a vehicle for deeper truths. In her own words, she spoke to the relevance for the community: "The poetry is a starting point for meaningful conversation. ... The poems can {be a way to} address the African American experience in North America. The poetry is a gentle introduction into harder conversations."

Melanie's responses carried her natural embrace of the spectrum of importance in the lyrical words, themselves and in their application to the community which places emphasis on the theme of African American poetry and culture. She referenced the paradox of a people—violated historically—who have been able to manifest creativity from places of internal resilience.

Melanie had detailed opinions about the poetry's application in the local area. She told me of a community group to which she belonged that could benefit from reading the authors' works. The interview was solid, grounded and showed promise for future engagement. Toward the end of our meeting, she shared a quote she remembered by Audre Lorde who was speaking about Black Women: "We have been sad long enough to make this earth either weep or grow fertile."

iii. Robert, Evelyn, Anna

One of the interview sessions took place on the University of Wisconsin campus, with 3 undergraduate students. The students were born in Africa and came forward to partake in the study.

Robert is an economics major at the University of Wisconsin, Superior. Robert was born in Cameroon and has lived in the United States for 6 years. He said the authors with whom he is most familiar are the continental Africans from his formative education. During Black History Month, he says African American literature is brought to the forefront and that tends to be the time when he focuses on the literary work.

Robert was the only respondent primarily absorbed in writing as a craft. He read the poetry making comments about the writing process. He offered the following words, while considering the process one exercise in making sense of the world: “Maybe poets just write to get their thoughts and feelings out and then make it fancy later. These poets wrote to express the experiences and struggles of Black people... People should try to speak to see whether something good comes out of it.”

While a majority of Robert’s comments were connected to the theme of poetry itself -- the abbreviated lines and the rhyme patterns -- he pointed to issues referenced by other research participants. Robert had similar insights as Anthony and Melanie, in that he recognized the circumstance of “struggle” reflected in the poetry.

At the current time, Evelyn is a sophomore at UWS. She was born in Nigeria and came to the United States to study political science and sociology. She did not mention specific aspects of the lives of the authors or any of the details of the poetry itself. Her approach to the poetry

was theoretical in that taken in its entirety she remarked about the information as capturing the folklore of a culture:

African American poetry is part of what defines African American people. In the same way history and stories are shared back home in Africa, African American poetry can be shared today, as a part of culture. {This} poetry gives us the opportunity to connect to how the poets felt when they experienced different things. ... There are a lot of benefits to reading other people's literature because it exposes you to ... what they think and how they live their lives. Literature is a part of the author and it is a way for them to express their culture.

Evelyn held views similar to previous respondents, in that, she saw a value in the reinforcing of culture, history and storytelling. While Anthony pointed to the value of storytelling from a personal point and Melanie made reference to storytelling as an intrinsic component of being a human being, I considered Evelyn's comments to be valid as a more abstract, ideological frame of reference.

Anna is a senior at UWS in the Communicating Arts Program. She was born in Nigeria and has lived in Wisconsin, for over 5 years. Anna clearly stated that she does not read literature very often; primarily she reads what is required for her college courses.

During the interview session she seemed particularly interested in the poem "Ka'Ba" (1972) by the scholar and radical poet, Amiri Baraka. She seemed surprised to see the word as the title of a poem since she knows that in some African countries Ka' ba is a type of clothing, a distinct type of dress, comparable to what Americans would refer to as a lounge outfit. Anna made interesting comparisons between Africans and African Americans, in her comments:

There is not a separate classification between African history and African American history since both people experienced colonization and slavery. Poetry is about how someone feels about what is going on around them... The way to feel good and to understand about life is to talk or to write... African American poetry is part of the past; you have to know your past in order to know where you are going.

Anna spoke to the state of some of the Black students that she sees around her, across the campus. She mentioned Black students as being lost, due to a lack of information such as African American poetry. She reiterated the similarities of the internal way of being of each group

Black people are the same everywhere; you can see it in the culture. They act the same and they do the same things. ... In the village, we would sit around a fire and eat food, while our parents told us stories about our grandparents, their lives and the traditions. We were to have our oral histories.

The interview flowed with each student speaking in turn, in a respectful almost rhythmic manner. As the biographies, poems and bibliographies were being read, one poem held their interest for a period of time. The poem was a second penned by Paul Laurence Dunbar, entitled "The Pool" (1913).

"The Pool"

By the pool that I see in my dreams, dear love,
I have sat with you time and again;
And listened beneath the dank leaves, dear love,
To the sibilant sound of the rain.

And the pool, it is silvery bright, dear love,
And as pure as the heart of a maid,
As sparkling and dimpling, it darkles and shines
In the depths of the heart of the glade.

But, oh, I've a wish in my soul, dear love,
(The wish of a dreamer, it seems,)
That I might wash free of my sins, dear love
In the pool that I see in my dreams (Dunbar, 1913).

Each of the students expressed an appreciation for this particular poem. They seemed to have a certain amount of admiration for a writer suspended in the subtleties of nature. One student questioned the meaning of the word "sibilant."

In the moment, I was able to capitalize on another aspect of the wealth within poetry. The use of unique, lesser-known language is frequently part of an author's craft. I chose to slow the interaction and take advantage of a teachable moment.

I asked the students to look for the definition on their cell phones. The word sibilant refers to a hissing sound, the hissing sound of something. The students were excited to learn the meaning of a new word. They re-read the stanza and seemed to appreciate the additional layer of meaning given to the poem, by adding the denotation of the word sibilant.

iv. Helen, Erica

The first meeting with two participants occurred at Chester Creek Café – a popular eatery in the City of Duluth. I met with Helen and Erica, who became acquainted with one another through their association with a local, religious organization. The interview began in a circular pattern with each of us introducing ourselves and sharing personal information such as our birthplaces, our time spent in Duluth and our community affiliations.

In this section, initially, the responses have been recorded separately for the purpose of distinguishing voice. Then, in the places where the women have given responses to the same theme, I have labeled their respective commentary.

I became acquainted with Helen over 10 years ago through a racial equity initiative – Anti-racism Dialog Study Circles. Helen has a Master’s Degree in Divinity and she has been a minister in the City of Duluth since 1999. At the present time, she is retired and involved in various community initiatives.

Helen said she has read the writing of the more popular African American poets. While she was a minister, she said she included the work of African American poets to enhance her sermons. She approached the data collection, in its entirety, by addressing the overall power of poetry. She made thoughtful suggestions about the role poetry can play in the community:

I wonder if poetry can be a way of helping people to be less afraid of things they don’t understand... Poetry is a way to respect someone else’s emotional experience that is different than yours... In factual discussions, we can argue {about the factual information}, but poetry recognizes that people’s experience belongs to them... There is

a permission to have the reality of your own experience... Your experience is your experience and it's legitimate.

Helen elaborated on her belief in poetry as a tender manner in which to engage the community. Her position identified the subjectivity of poetry as being effective in embracing feelings. She suggested poetry acts as a unifying means in which to engage the humanity of the reader, by saying, "Poetry allows people to say, 'that is my experience', {I think} people are more generous with poetry."

The reality of historical pain became central to the conversation. At first, Helen made a contrasting emphasis on the way in which the American Culture attempts to foster and promote as much pleasure as possible and, if necessary, to use drugs to neutralize pain and create a pleasant state of mind. Eventually, the natural and unavoidable place for pain became the focus of her words:

One thing that is striking about the poetry is that it deals with pain. The dominant culture avoids pain and there is a stigma about being in pain. ... Is it possible for this poetry to help people with acknowledging their own pain? For people who deny pain, through the poetry, they can become more sensitive to the pain of others and therefore more able to empathize with others.

Helen made significant comments about the role poetry can play as a focal point, legitimizing painful experiences. She saw a value in a reader empathizing with the pain of others in order to facilitate connecting with the experiences of other people.

I met Erica, for the first time, through the interview session. Erica has recently become a resident in the Twin Ports. She has a Ph. D. in Women's Studies and works as a professor, at the

University of Minnesota, Duluth. She was not born in the United States and consequently has not been exposed to African American poetry prior to her academic study.

Erica brought a scholarly analysis into the process. One rather compelling point was her observation that the African American poets had supportive relationships with their White contemporaries which was conducive to their professional careers and contrary to the racist climate of the nation. She offered interesting observations in the remarks below:

The relationship between the Black authors and their White contemporaries is surprising, to the extent of mentoring and training African American poets, {it} seems ahistorical. That professional relationship building was not happening anywhere else and yet it was happening in this community, so maybe there is something about the creative energy that is imbedded in the literature that was able to break those divides. I think it is significant that African Americans and White people were having a professional and meaningful exchange in 1915. ... It may give strength and legitimize joining the struggle to Whites who may be hesitant of the movement.

Erica discussed the absence of African American poets in the educational system. She spoke of the exclusionary practices of the White culture. She offered a comparison between the practices accepted behind closed doors and the practices that become policy in the following:

There is a difference between what happens informally and then what becomes formalized, what becomes institutionalized. There is a politics of education. ... People try to find a justification for why oppression exists, if we can get away from why this structure of inequality exists then we can alleviate it. To some extent poetry allows us to do that because it focuses on emotion, speaking to people's feelings.

Many of Erica's comments directly addressed racism. She dared to scrutinize the research inquiry, by suggesting the answer to the question, "Is there value in reading African American poetry?" is implied through the interrogative, when she stated, "The question only makes sense in a society that does not value it. We would not have to ask the question if the society valued it. ... To some extent, we can question the question. Would we ask the question for White poets?"

Erica seemed adamant about the implied prejudices within the research question. As the researcher, I was intrigued, humbled and thrilled all within several overlapping moments. She continued her point implicating the exclusionary practices of the dominant White culture: "{Do we} ask 'Is it beneficial to read White poets?' We sort of take it for granted."

In addition, Erica spoke to the dominant White culture's practice of ridiculing certain people. She referenced the work of Jamaican born sociologist, political activist and cultural theorist, Stuart Hall (1932 – 2014) who framed notions of stereotypes that have historically considered some cultures "anti-intellectual". She elaborated by speaking to the Europeans who were deemed to be the more "cultured peoples," while the Africans were regarded as the more "natural peoples."

Erica continued by saying the aforementioned categories were noted to suggest how, in a racialized society where Whiteness is positioned as the normative, everyone is ranked and categorized in relation to that standardized position. She recognized the scholarship of the African American Poets as being a sharp contrast to a perpetuated belief that African Americans have not held positions of accomplishment. She spent time on the subject by making the following comments:

You can see the poets as erudite, which may come as a surprise to many people. They are so highly educated and have followed the standardized structure. They entered places of power to publish and to teach. This would come as a surprise to many people, the {poets} embracing of the European classical canons.

Erica's thoughts about the relevance of the poetry, when presented to members of the community had powerful implications in terms of challenging racism. She sensed the poetry could play a role in shifting the mindset of those who hold a narrow view of African American potential, capacity and contribution. Her remarks pointed toward the poetry being a catalyst for change: "The education around African American Poetry could change someone's views and prejudices."

Helen and Erica relished the poem "A Litany For Survival" (2009) – the frequently anthologized poem by feminist and civil rights activist Audre Lorde. In the lines 15 through 30, Lorde's words grapple with loss and fear.

"A Litany for Survival"

For those of us

who were imprinted with fear

like a faint line in the center of our foreheads

learning to be afraid with our mother's milk

for by this weapon

this illusion of some safety to be found

the heavy-footed hoped to silence us

For all of us

this instant and this triumph

We were never meant to survive.

And when the sun rises we are afraid

it might not remain

when the sun sets we are afraid

it might not rise in the morning

when our stomachs are full we are afraid

of indigestion

when our stomachs are empty we are afraid

we may never eat again

when we are loved we are afraid

love will vanish

when we are alone we are afraid

love will never return

and when we speak we are afraid

our words will not be heard

nor welcomed

but when we are silent

we are still afraid

So it is better to speak

remembering

we were never meant to survive (Lorde, 1968).

The socio-cultural and socio-political perspectives offered by Helen and Erica were a critical contribution to the research collection. Each of these respondents related to the overriding emphasis on fear in Audre Lord's words. Helen spoke of the fear based reluctance in the Twin Ports area to break away from the polite confines of the White reserve. Erica added the fear she senses from students reluctant to approach her, as a Professor of Color. Each of the women made comments about the manner in which fear is utilized, in the United States, where the dominant White culture benefits through the maintenance of racial division.

The women supported one another's responses at times and at other times each woman had a distinct interpretation. Both Helen and Erica agreed that the poetry should be readily available throughout the community. However, each had specific ideas about the reason and the approach. I have posted their respective opinions below, with Helen stating:

There needs to be education put into place about African American Poetry. I don't think people are aware of all that exists. Education about information like African American Poetry needs to be integrated in to our lives. Let's say during the M L K community celebrations; it would be helpful to have a segment that broadens African American Literary contribution, so that King's voice is a voice in a larger context and people don't see Martin Luther King as the only African American scholar.

Erica responded to the poetry, in general terms by saying, "African American poetry should be taken for granted; we should also take for granted {African American} poetry as a

part of the lexicon, a part of the curriculum. This should not be something we have to go outside of the educational system to study.”

v. Terese

The final interview occurred with two people who became acquainted through the bonds built between their children. Both Terese and Vince are sports enthusiasts who came to realize their like mindedness while carpooling their children back and forth to after school sporting events. In addition to a passion for track and basketball, they have collaborated on community projects around the issue of social, political and economic equity. I met with them in the quiet of the spacious narthex, at Peace Church, one Saturday morning in March.

Terese is the participant with the distinct honor of being born and raised in the Twin Ports. She has read the more frequently anthologized African American poets, as a part of her post-secondary schooling. Terese has a Ph. D. in history from UMD. She has taught history at the College of St. Scholastica for 10 years. She was most interested in the lives of the poets and was most curious about their personal life journeys.

Terese seemed clear about what a study of the poetry could offer to the community:

The implication for learning for students is to gain a historical context and the stories of African American poets that spans over one hundred years. There is minimal coverage of information outside of the dominant culture portrayals. The exposure of acclaimed authors is a benefit to all students, educating people about poetry, incorporating past and present social history that reveals the experience of African American people while encouraging an appreciation of poetry.”

In the process of reading the poetry, Terese expressed an understanding of the sentiments conveyed in “A Sunset of the City”, by Pulitzer Prize winning author Gwendolyn Brooks (1963):

“A Sunset of the City”

Already I am no longer looked at with lechery or love.

My daughters and sons have put me away with marbles and dolls,

Are gone from the house.

My husband and lovers are pleasant or somewhat polite

And night is night.

It is a real chill out,

The genuine thing.

I am not deceived, I do not think it is still summer

Because sun stays and birds continue to sing.

It is summer-gone that I see, it is summer-gone.

The sweet flowers indrying and dying down,

The grasses forgetting their blaze and consenting to brown.

It is a real chill out. The fall crisp comes.

I am aware there is winter to heed.

There is no warm house

That is fitted with my need.

I am cold in this cold house this house

Whose washed echoes are tremulous down lost halls.

I am a woman, and dusty, standing among new affairs.

I am a woman who hurries through her prayers. ... (Brooks, 1963).

Terese said she related to the poem as a reflection of her feelings about the changing roles and demands throughout the course of motherhood. She reviewed the most meaningful lines again and again, becoming rhythmic and almost meditative over the words. I observed what seemed to be a state of profound sensitivity. Terese was engaged in the process, to the point of becoming emotional, on the verge of tears throughout the meeting.

vi. Vince

Currently, Vince serves as the programming coordinator of a 501(c)(3) organization. He is of Latino descent and spent his formative years on the West coast in Phoenix, Arizona. Vince is married with 3 children and has lived locally for 15 years.

Vince earned a Bachelor's Degree in Liberal Arts while living in the San Francisco Bay area. He was the only respondent who actually stated that he loves poetry, with Pablo Neruda and Audre Lorde designated as his favorite poets. He referenced the initial intrigue he experiences when he sees poetry on the page:

The things that have made history something I want to know is material like poetry. The words are very brief; they contain a lot more than just the letters and the words on the

page. The appearance of words on the page evoke thoughts of a particular group or a particular topic or a particular time in history. ... The more you learn about different aspects of a culture over time, over distance then the more you learn about the people in front of you.

Vince was practical in his approach to the interviewing process. He referenced the poetry as text allowing the words to act as a grounded foundation for meaning. He offered a socially mindful interpretation of Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" (1913). He spoke to a second, relevant interpretation, from the viewpoint of a Man of Color posing a position based in survival on the street in a racist country:

African Americans had to have a certain way of acting around people who were White. Their way of acting didn't necessarily show what they were feeling, what they were going through, what they were thinking. African – Americans were trying to show what they thought White people wanted to see.

Vince gave a poignant reading of Walker's "The Struggle Staggers Us" (1942). He placed emphasis on the meaning of lines 6, 7 and 8. He read and then re-read the lines, aloud prior to explaining their significance:

There is a journey from the me to you.

There is a journey from the you to me.

A union of the two strange worlds must be.

...

Struggle between the morning and the night.

This marks our years; this settles, too, our plight (Walker 1942).

In Vince's estimation the lines "The journey from the me to you; the journey from the you to me" were the very essence of the plight of humanity. The inability to allow oneself to connect with those around us is what causes the sum total of the conflict, in the world. If we can make the journey, the journey – "a union of the two strange worlds" - this would settle our human plight.

Vince's recitation and his interpretation of a third poem was compelling and worthy of discussion. He spoke about having an affinity for a portion of Brown University's Professor of Literature and Creative Writing, Michael Harper's poem, "Dear John, Dear Coltrane" (2000). He reiterated lines 30 to 42 as they appear below:

a love supreme, a love supreme-

Why you so black?

cause I am

Why you so funky?

cause I am

Why you so black?

cause I am

Why you so sweet?

cause I am

Why you so black?

cause I am (Harper, 2000)

The manner in which Vince read the poem placed emphasis on the words, "cause I am", with such an emphasis, as to perhaps allude to the Biblical verse - "I am that which I am", from

Exodus, 3:14 – the verse in which God reveals Himself to the Prophet Moses. His repetition of the words speaks to what a number of spiritual disciplines claim to be the core truth of human dignity. People matter because they exist.

Both Terese and Vince captured a sensitivity within the poetry that I considered clear, honest and heartfelt. Each of them had responses coming close to saying “this is ‘me’ within these lines” on the page. Interestingly enough as respondents, they acted as real-time examples of the spectrum of possibilities for the times when community members engage with the personal implication of the poetry.

C. "American History"

During a number of the interviews, one particular poem became the sole, focal point of discussion. However, in one case the reading of a poem garnered attention, within several interviews. With the reading of “American History” another selection by Michael Harper (2000), a number of interviewees gave a fairly dramatic response. The poem gave several people the opportunity to speak to the historical method of subversion imposed on African American people, by the dominant culture.

“American History”

Those four black girls blown up
in that Alabama church
remind me of five hundred
middle passage blacks,
in a net, under water

in Charleston harbor

so redcoats wouldn't find them.

Can't find what you can't see

can you (Harper, 1970)?

Several of the research respondents offered very clear interpretations of the literal and symbolic meaning within the last line of Michael Harper's poem "American History." I want to draw attention to these particular responses, since metaphorically there are implications, for the overarching focus of the study, itself. The last lines of the poem read, "Can't find what you can't see/Can you?"

Helen responded by saying, "If something is pushed down so that it is invisible then it can't penetrate your awareness at all." Erica said, "If you don't see it then you don't have to grapple with it; if you hide it, suppress it, submerge it then you don't have to deal with the meaning of it or who you are."

Terese replied to the question about the last line of "American History" by stating, "Cover up. If you can't find it, it doesn't exist, if you don't talk about it then it doesn't exist; it's out of our history it doesn't exist because we don't look for it. The history is painful, there are many traumatic histories."

The respondents' words point to the Dominant White culture's practice of hiding heinous crimes and the genocide against African American people. The interviewees' response to "American History" directly relates to the purpose and goal of the research study. The paradoxical manner in which their responses apply to this endeavor was a pleasant unforeseen and unintentional consequence. In part, the argument being presented in the research is that

African American poetry has been “pushed down” and “covered up,” so that we as citizens, in this country “do not grapple with African American scholarship;” and as a nation African American contribution has been made invisible so that it can’t penetrate our awareness, at all.”

Chapter VI: Research Findings

Generally speaking, the research participants have been exposed to African American Poetry but have not read African American poetry frequently. The poetry recognized most often was that of the nationally celebrated authors, such as, Maya Angelou. Most of the respondents have an appreciation for poetry and conveyed their sense of value for its meaning and purpose.

Robert and Vince interacted with the poetry as an aesthetic. Their reaction came about in response to the sight of abbreviated lines on the page. One of the female respondents, Terese had a pronounced reaction to the poem "A Sunset of the City", by Gwendolyn Brooks, as a familiar reflection of the stages in the life cycle and of her feelings as a woman and as a mother.

The reading and discussion of poetry touches a spectrum of potential. Anthony read the poetry responding from a place of personal experience. Melanie made references to the common thread within a common core of sisters and brothers. Evelyn offered her views in cognitive terms, contemplating the value of poetry intellectually. The distinction is worthwhile in affirming poetry as being capable of engaging the heart, mind and the spirit, of the reader.

Melanie, Helen and Erica saw the poetry as a catalyst for meaningful community conversation. Each of them gave witness to the poetry as a healing process mirroring the experience common to African American families, neighborhoods and communities.

Several research participants spoke to the benefit of the poetry, as specifically related to community settings. Melanie said, "The benefit {of the poetry} is to bring to the forefront the gifts and struggles of African American people. There is a benefit in inspiring conversation and

awareness. When people are drawn into the history, it increases the concepts of justice and injustice. The community can be invited to address issues that are ignored, masked or unacknowledged.”

Helen said, “The poetry is beneficial in that I can identify with the feelings of the words and the experience being expressed.”

Terese stated that, “A benefit is in the different topics that are being studied and how those topics can be applied to history. African American history is unique within the confines of American History. Learning about history, culture and applying literary achievements of acclaimed poets will benefit all students. The poetry offers an opportunity to learn history and the opportunity to interact with others. African American poetry can be presented in workshops, coffee shops, chats and writing classes.”

Vince said, “There is a benefit in being a part of another culture, the pain and the struggle, in their power, joy and love. Community activist groups can {use the poetry to} discuss the different possibilities and the different realities and approaches to empowerment.”

The research findings suggest African American poetry has value, for the individual as an art form and in the community as historical literary contribution. The research participants validated the importance of keeping the rich heritage of the African American journey nurtured as a means in which to legitimize individual and collective experience, cultural norms and cultural pride.

Various aspects of the research confirmed the truth-telling power of poetry. In a number of instances, the African American poetry stood as a reflection of a given participant’s story. “Stories bring meaning into our lives, convey values and emotions, aid in reaffirming and

validating our lives and experiences, and have the ability to connect us with our inner-selves, with others and with society” (Atkinson, 2002). “Studies have shown that storytelling can help participants to view their experiences from different perspectives and make sense of them” (Murray 2003).

The participants clearly recognized the racist, exclusionary practices, within the educational system. The research respondents consider the African American poets and their writing, to serve as examples of contributing professionals overlooked by the dominant White educational system.

Chapter VII: Discussion

As an African American woman, I spent my early years in a more racially diverse area of the country: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey. I lived in a diverse neighborhood and attended predominantly White Schools. I was aware of the racism around me in my formative years but my relocation to the Midwest brought a more severe experience of discrimination and exclusion. At least in part, my sense is racism stems from a lack of exposure to African American culture. Since my relocation to this region of the country, more than once, I have spoken with White people who have said, “I never saw a Black person until I went to college.”

The work I assumed as a community organizer began with my relocation to Duluth, Minnesota. For a number of years, I contributed to the community by designing, coordinating and implementing anti-racism, racial equity initiatives, in an array of settings. As a facilitator of anti-racism trainings, I have seen the sensitivity brought about when White people are exposed to the nuances of the underlying causes of racial divides.

With a concern about just treatment and equitable resources, I am posing questions about the cultural divides I see around me. Considering the racial justice initiatives adopted throughout the Duluth-Superior community such as The People’s Institute – Undoing Racism Training, the Anti-racism Dialog Study Circles, and Cracking the Shell of Whiteness, few have incorporated African American literary work.

In this research study, I have implemented research methods and recorded the findings for the purpose of engaging the community in racially inclusive change. I am interested in making changes—no matter how small—in the oppressive local climate. I have witnessed the

modifications in racially based exclusion when prejudicial thinking is identified and confronted; the modifications have led to changes in attitudes, policies and practices.

This research initiative is intended to capture a glimpse of the outcome resulting from exposure to a specific body of work, namely African American Poetry. The “reading” of poetry has been presented to students in schools for a deepening of socio-civil engagement. The writing of poetry has been a resource, for personal healing and growth, in community settings. I have not found a post-secondary, community based study that uses the reading of poetry to inform and sensitize a community group in order to bridge racial divides.

The data collected for the study outlines numerous aspects of the use, if not the necessity for African American poetry, throughout the community. Community members have deemed African American poetry to have cultural value and literary merit. I have a great deal of respect for the findings; I appreciate the time and effort the respondents committed to this study.

However, I found some of the responses troubling because they reflect – what I am certain is an unintentional bias. I am offering a few of my observations as a researcher and as a Black woman with a Critical Race theoretical perspective. I want to create a space for clarity by calling attention to racial inaccuracy. I have taken the comments out of the context of the interviewing sessions, to further insure anonymity. The following statements were made by some of the interviewees, in the midst of their bewilderment:

“Some of the poetry does not specifically express the African American experience.”

“The poetry is gentle and soft.”

“ Some of the poetry is less forthright, some is more transparent, clearly expressing the difficulty of being Black.”

As a researcher and as a racial equity trainer, I would be remiss if I were to ignore stereotypes being cast in a study working to combat racial stereotypes. I take issue with notions of African American poetry lacking the qualities of some pre-determined form or content. I am concerned with thoughts of this poetry being less authentic out of no mention of racism, pain, oppression and/or cruelty.

I am taking the time to emphasize that African American people are people perfectly justified in expressing the sweet impressions of nature, of walking hand-in-hand with a lover and the splendor of an autumn sunset. African American poets do not need to be restricted - should I say further restricted - but rather can and should pour words out as artists, from the full wealth of being alive, which inevitably includes noticing a light summer breeze while walking along the beach, the touch of a loved one, tossing a child in the air and winning a ball game. Essentially, I am saying the poetry has validity in all of its configurations.

Furthermore, a number of the research participants' standpoints tapped into a superficial pain in contrast to a historical pain characterized by generational loss and suffering. Metaphorically, I can say a fresh paper cut causes a great deal of pain. However, it is not the pain of a knife wound. The paper cut will not last as long, has not penetrated as deeply and is more easily healed.

Chapter VIII: Conclusion

African American poetry has value for community members in the Twin Ports area. The participants interviewed for the current study found the images, biographies, poetry and the bibliographies to be meaningful as an introspective and informative activity. For a majority of the research participants, the interviewing sessions were a period of discovery manifesting in new words, sweet images, harsh realities and the juxtaposing of dissimilar pairs.

The respondents had an appreciation for the poetry, on a personal level, in addition to the educational implication for the community. Men and women, across racial and socio-economic divides considered the poets to be worthwhile as artisans and published authors. Reading African American poetry has the potential to foster healing and assist with bridging people across racial divides. Through poetry - a respected yet sensitive approach – the community can engage in hurtful topics such as exclusion and racism.

The respondents found the poetry to be a useful tool in bringing the community together as a catalyst for meaningful conversation and potentially shifting racial prejudices. For African American people, the poetry can stand as a resource, for expanding positive self-worth and cultural pride. The accounts presented in the literature reflect the thoughts, feelings and in many cases the lived experiences, of Black people.

The research study has presented contemporary literature to construct personal, academic and civic application for adults in the Duluth – Superior Twin Ports area. The research study is significant in raising awareness about the contribution of African American writers to the collective body of literary work. Further, there are positive implications for the building of personal empowerment and community leadership. The study and the process serve to

promote an expanded knowledge base and a deepening sense of internal cultural pride for African Americans. The study serves to enhance the knowledge base and affirm cultural relevance for the general population.

After all of this, if I am to complete the journey by referencing the controversial energy and the reactionary momentum described in the introduction, I suspect the reading and discussion of African American poetry elicits controversy because it refutes the negative profiles of Black people perpetuated throughout our racialized nation. On one hand, the European elders were shaken to discover the rarely disclosed level of scholarly achievement of the African American writers. In contrast, the after-school community members displayed a reactionary momentum out of a refreshing sense of enthusiasm given access to the identical, rarely disclosed level of African American scholarly achievement.

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Appendices

University of Wisconsin, Superior

IRB Proposal, Protocol #1225

FROM: Treasure Jenkins

As the student researcher for “The Use of African American Poetry In Community Settings” study, I would like to submit an addendum to my IRB research proposal. I have listed the areas in which my research process will be augmented for future data collection.

I will recruit participants for my research study by approaching individual students or sets of students; individual community members or sets of community members to read, Annalise and evaluate African American Poets and their literary work.

The length of the focus group discussion will change to 2 (two) hours.

The number of research study participants will be between 9 – 12 people.

In addition to the modification of the method of recruitment, I have expanded the number of literary work to 7 poets by including the work of Margaret Walker & Michael Harper.

Thank You for Your consideration

Treasure Jenkins

- **NOTE TO RESEARCHER: ALL DOCUMENTS FOR RESEARCH MUST BE INCLUDED IN A SINGLE FILE!***

Name: Treasure Jenkins

Email: tjenkin4@uwsuper.edu; oceantaj@gmail.com

Phone number: (218) 724-4105

Status: Graduate Student

Name of faculty sponsor/mentor: Alison Wielgus

Faculty member’s email address: awielgus@uwsuper.edu

Anticipated start date: January 10, 2016

Anticipated end date: May 15, 2016

Does this project specifically recruit any vulnerable populations including but not limited to:

Minors No

Pregnant women? No

Prisoners? No

People with cognitive
delays? No

People hospitalized
in nursing homes, etc.? No

Other vulnerable groups: No

Will you be deceiving your participants? Please note: withholding details about the specifics of your hypothesis **does not** constitute deception. However, misleading participants about the nature of the research question or about the nature of the task they will be completing **does** constitute deception.

No

Are the names/identities of your participants included on the data itself? Or, if someone looked at your data would she / he be able to identify the participant from the data or instrument?
No

Are you gathering any biological samples as part of your research? No

Minimal risk is when the likelihood that participating in your research will not cause harm or discomfort (including physical, mental, emotional, social, or economic) that is greater than those a person would normally encounter in daily life.

Does this research pose greater than minimal risk to participants? No.

Title of project: The Value of African American Poetry in Community Settings

1. Briefly describe your research question (50 words or less):

RESEARCH QUESTION: What value will reading the biographies, poetry and bibliographies of African American authors have for college students / community members? Will African American Poetry have implications in self-esteem and civic engagement when evaluated by college students / community members?

2. Will participants include individuals from specific populations (e.g. children, pregnant women, prisoners or people with cognitive delays)?

The people in my research study will not include members of “specific populations.” In addition, the men and women who choose to participate in the research study will be given a pseudonym which will be their exclusive identifier in the research.

- a. **If your participants will include individuals from specific populations, please specify the population(s) and briefly describe any special precautions you will use.**

3. Briefly describe how you will recruit participants for your study (make sure to include any institutional affiliations of your participants). Please include any recruiting materials in an appendix.

In order to recruit participants for my research study, I will contact the advisors or the chairperson of various UWS groups. Additionally, in order to gather information from a cross-section of the community, I will approach a variety of students or community members from the Twin Ports area to partake in my research study. I will require the completion of the Informed Consent Form (AAP: F 1) from each participant.

4. How many individuals do you expect to participate in your study?

The research project “The Value of African – American Poetry in Community Settings” will be a qualitative overview of the perspectives of between 9 – 12 people.

I will organize and facilitate several workshops / discussion groups; each session will have the attendance of 2 – 3 participants and be designated as approximately 2 hours in duration. During the workshops I will present the work of several African American poets. (See appendix AAP: F4.) The “focus groups” will be recorded conversations about the collection of poetry in order to gather information i.e. the responses, perspectives and feelings of the focus group members in order to document the potential role of the literature.

5. Briefly describe what participants in your study will do and where it will take place. Make sure to reference any and all materials/surveys/tests/assessments that will be used. (All materials *must* be included in an Appendix).

The participants in this study will offer their responses, interpretations and projections for the use of African American poetry throughout the community, in education and in civic engagement.

I am interested in observing and recording responses to African American poetry by people from different socio – economic and ethnic backgrounds. My research consists of a series of workshops designed to review and discuss African American poetry for its relevance to current world views, life experiences and community engagement.

The research sessions will occur in a classroom, conference room, restaurant or in a community center yet to be determined. The location will be selected according to its availability and access, its spaciousness and comfort level.

Initially, the participants in my research study will complete an informed consent form. (See appendix AAP: F1.) Second, participants will complete a questionnaire to document their familiarity with the subject of African American poetry. (See appendix AAP: F3.) Members of the study will attend a 2 (two) hour focus group where the work of several African American poets will be read, discussed and analyzed for its contemporary application. (See appendix AAP: F4.) The focus group session will conclude with the completion of a post – session questionnaire (See appendix AAP: F5.) which is designed to capture the significance of the literary work in our societal climate.

- 6. Please describe any risks and benefits your research may have for your participants. Please make sure to include whether the data could damage your participants' reputation or make them liable to conviction. (For example, one study's risks might include boredom and eye-strain. The same study's benefits might include satisfaction from contributing to scientific knowledge and greater self-awareness.**

I do not believe the research study will have detrimental effects for the participants or to their reputations. One potential benefit of the study may be a deeper appreciation for the historical journey characterizing the African – American experience.

- 7. What procedures will you use to ensure that the information your participants provide will remain confidential? In other words, how will you keep your data secure?**

During the data collection for my research, I will use an audio recording device. The participants will overtly have instruction designed to protect their identity; the use of pseudonyms will help to insure anonymity during the recording process. There will be no duplication of the tape recordings. The recorded information will be transcribed onto my computer and placed in a folder under a secured password.

- 8. Will your study use deception? (Please note: withholding details about the specifics of your hypothesis *does not* constitute deception. However, misleading participants about the nature of the research question or about the nature of the task they will be completing *does* constitute deception.)**

My research project will not include deception.

- a. **If your project includes deception, please fully describe the process you will use, why the deception is necessary and a full description of your debriefing procedures. Projects using deception should include their full debriefing statement here.**

9. **Do you have funding for this research? Yes No**

- a. **If so, state the name of the funding agency or department (For example, NIH, NSF, Faculty Development Grant, McNair Scholar).**

At the present time, I do not have funding for this research study.

10. **Where do you plan to present/publish or share your research?**

As a Graduate Student in the Communication Arts Program at the University of Wisconsin, Superior, I have chosen to complete the Master's Degree with a Thesis Project. The Use of African American Poetry in Community Settings research study will be presented to a faculty research committee in order to complete my Master's Degree. The faculty members sitting on my research review committee are Alison Wielgus (chair), Martha Einerson and Ephraim Nikoi.

11. **Will participants be compensated? How?**

If I am able to secure funding I would like to offer each of the participants in my research study \$20 as a token of gratitude for their involvement. Additionally, I will provide a time appropriate light meal during each workshop session.

12. **Will a written informed consent form be used and signed by participants?**

- a. **If yes, attach the informed consent form (see below)**
- b. **If no, explain how the research meets each of the following criteria such that the research qualifies for a waiver of informed consent:**
 - i. **Research could not be conducted practicably without the waiver;**
 - ii. **Research involves no more than minimal risk to participants;**
 - iii. **Waiver will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of participants;**
 - iv. **Participants will be provided with pertinent information in some other format.**

Yes. I will require a written consent form from each of the members of my research study. (See AAP: F1.)

ONLY FOR PEOPLE USING RECORDING (VIDEO OR AUDIO):

1. Will you conduct all interviews yourself or will you have assistance (including a translator)? * With Assistance

During the workshop sessions, I will have an assistant in the room in order to keep the group processes flowing smoothly. The assistant will complete a "Statement of Confidentiality form (See AAP: F2) prior to the research sessions. The assistant will monitor the tape recorder and observe the dynamic between group members.

I will record the discussions about the literature and all interviews with an audio recorder. The recordings will be converted into text and secured on my computer with a password known only to me.

2. How will you secure the data so that the participants' image and/or voice are kept confidential?

I will secure the audio recordings in a locked file cabinet in my home.

Please read the following statement carefully:

I have read the UWS IRB Regulations. I will comply with the informed consent requirement, and I will inform the IRB if significant changes are made in the proposed study. I certify that all the information contained in this proposal is truthful.

Submitting this proposal means that you affirm the above and will comply with the content. This counts as your legally binding signature.

SUBMITTED TO: IRB – Eric Edwards, IRB Chair

WAIT!!!

Did you include your Informed Consent Document and any materials that you will use during your study?

AAP: F1 INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANT**Title of Study: The Value of African American Poetry In Community Settings**

You are invited to be in a research study on an analysis of the role African American Poetry may play throughout the community, at large.

You have been selected as a possible participant because of your membership in a UWS student organization, your enrollment as a college student, your residence in the Twin Ports area and because you may have a significant contribution to share with regard to this subject matter.

Please read this form and ask me any questions you may have prior to agreeing to be in the study. Please understand that when a researcher involves people in their research, the researcher is required to explain your rights as "a subject in a research study." The researcher is required to disclose what will be done with the information collected and whether your name will appear anywhere, any potential risks involved from such participation, and who you can contact with your questions and any complaints.

I must document that I have provided you with this information before you decide whether or not you will participate in the research.

This study is being conducted by

Name: Treasure A Jenkins

Affiliation as part of: U W S Communication Arts Graduate Program

The purpose of this study is to assess the value of African American poetry with various community members, through reading, discussing and analyzing the authors and samples of their published work.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to complete an initial questionnaire to determine your familiarity with African American Poets. I will require your attendance at a 2 (two) hour workshop where I will facilitate participants in the reading of the biographies, poems and the bibliographies of several poets. The research study will conclude with a post-session questionnaire to summarize your thoughts and feelings about the poets and the implications of their work.

If you decide to partake in this research study, I will strongly encourage the use of a pseudonym. The workshop sessions will be recorded and anonymity will support a secure, respectful environment. Your identity will be held in the utmost regard. Confidentiality is of the utmost importance to me as a researcher. The group members will only be known to me, my assistant and to each other. The recordings will be transcribed and placed on my computer and placed under a secured password.

This study can potentially add to a sense of pride related to African American literary contribution. The participants in the study will benefit from the study and discussion of African American writers. At least in part, the information in this study will serve to directly refute the historically based negative stereotypes perpetuated about African Americans.

FOR INTERESTED RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

As a researcher, I am interested in the reactions of the reading of this work. I want full, honest participation from each group member. Accepting participation in the study means you will express all of your thoughts and feelings, whether positive or negative about the African American poets and their writings. Participants are expected to be present for the entire 2 hour duration of the workshop session.

DECLINING THE STUDY

I appreciate the consideration given to the elements of this study, by all interested parties. If you want to refuse to be involved in the study; you may decline at any time prior to the beginning of the workshop session. There is no adverse consequence for the refusal to partake in the study.

AN EARLY WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY

If someone has an unforeseen circumstance preventing the completion of the workshop, he or she may leave early. However, no part of their response will be included in the study findings. Only the responses from the group members that have completed the entire study will be included in the final research report.

FOR ANY QUESTIONS AND IN CASE OF ANY COMPLAINTS

CONTACT INFORMATION

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UWS Faculty Advisor: Alison Wielgus

Phone: (715) 394 – 8057

Email: awielgus@uwsuper.edu

A copy of this form is provided for your use.

Statement of Consent

Participant's Name:

Date:

This template has been adapted from the University of Minnesota form.

AAP: F2 STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

The Use of African American Poetry in Community Settings research project will involve the authentic responses from a variety of community members. The information gathered during this research project must be held in the utmost confidence.

As a researcher, I have promised to secure the identity of each participant contributing to the research. There must be complete anonymity with regard to the identity of the research respondents.

As an assistant in this research study, you are required to maintain confidentiality. The details of the research workshops may not be shared with anyone. The comments expressed and subsequently recorded may not be repeated to another person outside of the workshop setting(s).

I understand that as an assistant in The Use of African American Poetry In Community Settings research study, I must keep all information confidential. The information may not be shared with anyone other than the researcher – Treasure A. Jenkins.

Signature of Research Assistant:

Date Signed:

Signature of Researcher:

AAP: F3 African American Poetry Pre-session Questionnaire

1: Would you say that you enjoy poetry, in general?

2: Have you read African American poetry?

3: When were you first introduced to African American Poetry?

4: What were the circumstances around your exposure to African American poetry?

5: Do you have a favorite author? If yes, what is his or her name?

Thank you for your participation.

AAP: F4 AFRICAN AMERICAN POETRY BOOKLET

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

Paul Laurence Dunbar was born in Dayton, Ohio to parents who had escaped from slavery. Dunbar's father was a veteran of the American Civil War, having served in the 55th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment and the 5th Massachusetts Colored Cavalry Regiment. His parents instilled a love of learning and a love for history in him. He was a student at an all-white high school, Dayton Central High School, and he participated actively as a student.

During high school, Dunbar was both the editor of the school newspaper and class president, as well as the president of the school literary society. He had started the first African American newsletter in Dayton. He wrote his first poem at age 6 and gave his first public recital at age 9.



Dunbar's first published work came in a newspaper distributed by his high school friends Wilbur and Orville Wright, who owned a printing plant. The Wright Brothers later invested in the Dayton Tattler, a newspaper aimed at the black community, edited and published by Dunbar.

His first collection of poetry, *Oak and Ivy*, was published in 1892 and attracted the attention of James Whitcomb Riley, the popular "Hoosier Poet". Both Riley and Dunbar wrote poems in Standard English and dialect. His second book, *Majors and Minors* (1895) brought him national fame and the patronage of William Dean Howells, the novelist and critic and editor of Harper's Weekly. After Howells' praise, his first two books were combined as *Lyrics of Lowly Life* and Dunbar started on a career of international literary fame. He moved to Washington, D.C., in the LeDroit Park neighborhood. While in Washington, he attended Howard University.

Dunbar's wife Alice Dunbar Nelson was a famous poet as well. A graduate of Dillard University in New Orleans, her most famous works include a short story entitled "Violets". She and her husband also wrote books of poetry as companion pieces. An account of their love, life and marriage was depicted in a play by Kathleen McGhee-Anderson titled *Oak and Ivy*.

He kept a lifelong friendship with the Wrights, and was associated with Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington and Brand Whitlock.

Dunbar was honored with a ceremonial sword by President Theodore Roosevelt.

He wrote a dozen books of poetry, four books of short stories, five novels, and a play. He also wrote lyrics for “In Dahomey” - the first musical written and performed entirely by African Americans to appear on Broadway in 1903. The musical comedy played successfully touring England and America, over a period of four years - one of the more successful theatrical productions of its time.

Dunbar’s essays and poems were published widely in the leading journals of the day. His work appeared in *Harper’s Weekly*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Denver Post*, *Current Literature* and a number of other publications.

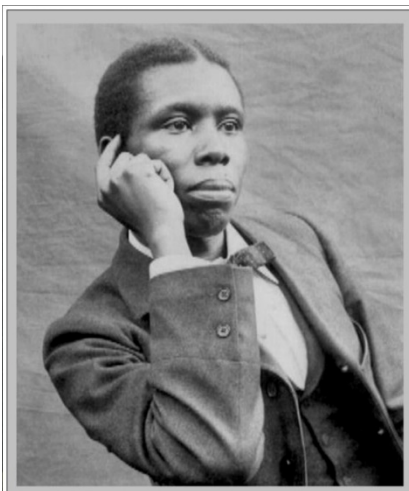
During his life, considerable emphasis was laid on the fact that Dunbar was of pure African descent, with no white ancestors.

Dunbar's work is known for its colorful language and use of dialect, and a conversational tone, with a brilliant rhetorical structure. Dunbar traveled to England in 1897 to recite his works on the London literary circuit. He met the brilliant young black composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor who set some of his poems to music and who was influenced by Dunbar to use African and American Negro songs and tunes in future compositions.

After his return, Dunbar took a job at the Library of Congress in Washington. In 1900, Dunbar was diagnosed with tuberculosis, and moved to Colorado with his wife on the advice of his doctors. Dunbar died at age thirty-three on February 9, 1906 from tuberculosis, and was interred in the Woodland Cemetery, Dayton, Ohio.

(From “Paul Laurence Dunbar.” *New World Encyclopedia*. 9 Dec. 2016.
<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Paul_Laurence_Dunbar>.)

“The Pool”



By the pool that I see in my dreams, dear love,
I have sat with you time and again;
And listened beneath the dank leaves, dear love,
To the sibilant sound of the rain.

And the pool, it is silvery bright, dear love,
And as pure as the heart of a maid,
As sparkling and dimpling, it darkles and shines
In the depths of the heart of the glade.

But, oh, I 've a wish in my soul, dear love,

(The wish of a dreamer, it seems,)

That I might wash free of my sins, dear love,

In the pool that I see in my dreams.

(From *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar*, 1913)

“Sympathy”

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
 When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
 When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
 And the river flows like a stream of glass;
 When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
 And the faint perfume from its chalice steals - -

I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
 Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
 For he must fly back to his perch and cling
 When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
 And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
 And they pulse again with a keener sting--
 I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
 When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,--
 When he beats his bars and he would be free;
 It is not a carol of joy or glee,
 But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
 But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings--
 I know why the caged bird sings!

(From “Oak and Ivy,” 1892)

“We Wear the Mask”

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,--
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be overwise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!

(From “Lyrics of Lowly Life,” 1896)



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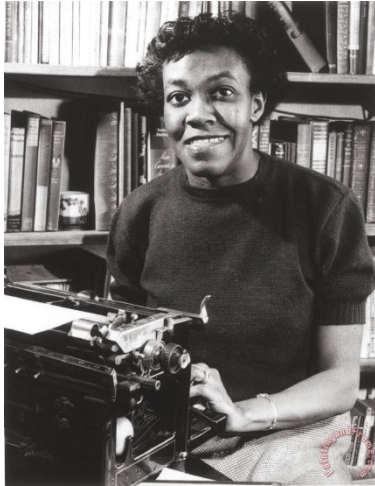
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GWENDOLYN BROOKS

Gwendolyn Brooks was born in Topeka, Kansas, on June 7, 1917. When Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks was six weeks old, her family relocated to Chicago, Illinois, as part of the Great Migration. Brooks attended three high schools: the prestigious, integrated Hyde Park High School; the all-black Wendell Phillips Academy High School; and the integrated Englewood High School. The racial prejudice that she encountered at some of these institutions would shape her understanding of social dynamics in the United States and influence her writing. In 1936, Brooks graduated from Wilson Junior College, having already begun to write and publish her work.

Brooks published her first poem in a children's magazine when she was 13 years old; by the time she was 16 she had published approximately 75 poems. She began submitting her work to the *Chicago Defender*, a leading African American newspaper. Her work included ballads, sonnets and free verse, drawing on musical rhythms and the content of inner city Chicago. She would later say of this time in her life, "I felt that I had to write. Even if I had never been published, I knew that I would go on writing, enjoying it and experiencing the challenge."

In order to support herself, Brooks worked as a secretary while she developed as a poet. She took part in poetry workshops, including one organized by Inez Cunningham Stark, an affluent woman with a literary background. While Stark was white, all of the participants in her workshop were African American. Brooks made great strides during this period, garnering official recognition. In 1943, her work received an award from the Midwestern Writers' Conference.

Brooks published her first book of poetry, *A Street in Bronzeville*, in 1945. The book was an instant success, leading to a Guggenheim Fellowship and other honors. Her second book, *Annie Allen*, appeared in 1949. Brooks won the Pulitzer Prize in poetry for *Annie Allen*, making her the first African American to win the coveted Pulitzer. Other honors received throughout her lifetime include Poetry magazine's Eunice Tietjens Prize.

In the early 1960s, Brooks embarked on a teaching career as an instructor of creative writing. She taught at Columbia College in Chicago, Chicago State University, Northeastern Illinois University, Columbia University and the University of Wisconsin.

Throughout her teaching career, she continued to write and publish. Her long poem "In the Mecca," published in 1968, was nominated for a National Book Award in poetry.



“The Rites for Cousin Vit”

Carried her unprotesting out the door.
 Kicked back the casket-stand. But it can't hold her,
 That stuff and satin aiming to enfold her,
 The lid's contrition nor the bolts before.
 Oh oh. Too much. Too much. Even now, surmise,
 She rises in the sunshine. There she goes,
 Back to the bars she knew and the repose
 In love-rooms and the things in people's eyes.
 Too vital and too squeaking. Must emerge.
 Even now she does the snake-hips with a hiss,
 Slops the bad wine across her shantung, talks
 Of pregnancy, guitars and bridgework, walks
 In parks or alleys, comes haply on the verge
 Of happiness, haply hysterics. Is.
 (From *Annie Allen*, 1949)

“A Sunset of the City”

Already I am no longer looked at with lechery or love.
 My daughters and sons have put me away with marbles and dolls,
 Are gone from the house.
 My husband and lovers are pleasant or somewhat polite
 And night is night.

It is a real chill out,
 The genuine thing.
 I am not deceived, I do not think it is still summer
 Because sun stays and birds continue to sing.

It is summer-gone that I see, it is summer-gone.
 The sweet flowers indrying and dying down,
 The grasses forgetting their blaze and consenting to brown.

It is a real chill out. The fall crisp comes.
 I am aware there is winter to heed.
 There is no warm house
 That is fitted with my need.
 I am cold in this cold house this house
 Whose washed echoes are tremulous down lost halls.
 I am a woman, and dusty, standing among new affairs.

I am a woman who hurries through her prayers.

Tin intimations of a quiet core to be my
 Desert and my dear relief
 Come: there shall be such islanding from grief,
 And small communion with the master shore.
 Twang they. And I incline this ear to tin,
 Consult a dual dilemma. Whether to dry
 In humming pallor or to leap and die.

Somebody muffed it? Somebody wanted to joke.

(From *Selected Poems*, 1963)

"The Sonnet-Ballad"

Oh mother, mother, where is happiness?
 They took my lover's tallness off to war,
 Left me lamenting. Now I cannot guess
 What I can use an empty heart-cup for.
 He won't be coming back here any more.
 Some day the war will end, but, oh, I knew
 When he went walking grandly out that door
 That my sweet love would have to be untrue.
 Would have to be untrue. Would have to court
 Coquettish death, whose impudent and strange
 Possessive arms and beauty (of a sort)
 Can make a hard man hesitate--and change.
 And he will be the one to stammer, "Yes."
 Oh mother, mother, where is happiness?
 From *Annie Allen*, 1949)

Annie Allen (1949), for which she won the Pulitzer Prize, is a loosely connected series of poems related to a black girl's growing up in Chicago. The same theme was used for Brooks's novel *Maud Martha* (1953). *The Bean Eaters* (1960) contains some of her best verse. Her *Selected Poems* (1963) was followed in 1967 by *The Wall* and in 1968 by *In the Mecca*, half of which is a long narrative poem about people in the Mecca, a vast, fortress like apartment building erected on the South Side of Chicago in 1891, which had long since deteriorated into a slum. The second half of the book contains individual poems, among which the most noteworthy are "Boy Breaking Glass" and "Malcolm X." In addition, Brooks wrote children's poetry: *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* (1956). "We Real Cool" (1966) remains her most popular poem. The autobiographical *Report from Part One* (1972) was an assemblage of personal memoirs, interviews, and letters.

(From "Gwendolyn Brooks." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 8 Dec. 2016.
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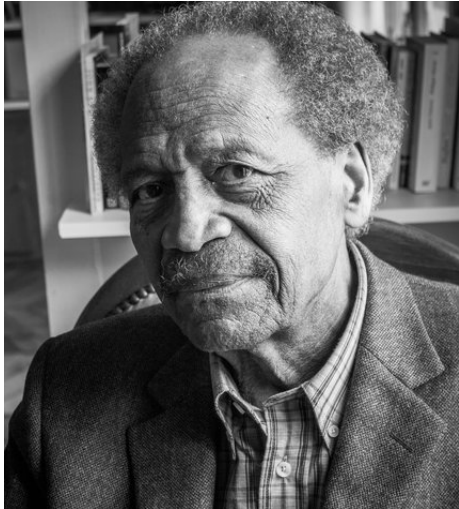
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JAMES ANDREW EMANUEL

James Andrew Emanuel was born on June 15, 1921, in Alliance, Nebraska, the fifth of seven children. While in his formative years, he listened to his mother read stories from the Bible and the *Saturday Evening Post*, the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Booker T. Washington's autobiography. Emanuel knew early in life that he wanted to be a writer. He memorized popular poetry, wrote poems, mystery and detective stories. He graduated from high school as valedictorian.

During his teenage years, Emanuel worked at a variety of jobs throughout the Midwest. At the age of 20, he moved to Washington, D.C., to work as the confidential secretary to the assistant inspector general of the U.S. Army. In order to attend college he joined the army in 1944, serving in the South Pacific. Emanuel married Mattie Etha Johnson and the couple had a son, James Andrew Jr. Emanuel graduated from Howard University and worked at the Chicago Army and Air Force Induction Station while pursuing his master's degree at Northwestern University. While working toward his Ph.D. at Columbia University, Emanuel taught English and commercial subjects at the Harlem YWCA Business School. He taught English at the City College of New York (CCNY) while writing his dissertation on the black author and poet Langston Hughes.

Emanuel's earliest poems appeared in college publications and in *Ebony Rhythm* in 1948. By the late 1950s he was deeply involved in verse, writing traditional poems in the styles of English masters. As Emanuel's friendship with Langston Hughes developed, he gained a critical reader for his early drafts. From Hughes he learned to write with the consciousness of the black experience. With a goal of reaching the largest possible audience, Emanuel wrote in clear and simple language. In 1958 his poetry began appearing in various periodicals, including the *New York Times*, *Negro Digest*, *Midwest Quarterly*, and *Freedomways*. By 1964 Emanuel was giving public poetry readings.

Emanuel loved and respected the energy and passion of youth. His son James, Jr., inspired numerous poems including "A Clown at Ten." Acutely aware of his heritage as a black poet, Emanuel became increasingly interested in other overlooked black writers. In 1966 he initiated CCNY's first course on black poetry, leading to several essays and the book version of his dissertation on Hughes. In 1968 he co-edited *Black Symphony*, the first major anthology of black American writing in 30 years. Emanuel judged his writings on Hughes and in *Black Symphony* to be among his best prose.

In 1966, Emanuel became embroiled in racial politics when he ran for the Mount Vernon, New York, school board. Conducting an all-black campaign, he called for curriculum reforms, including the teaching of black literature, and he organized a black boycott of local merchants. Emanuel and his family were publicly attacked and investigated, as described in the poem "For

'Mr. Dudley,' a Black Spy." The experience radicalized Emanuel and his marriage began to deteriorate.

Emanuel's poems from this period were collected in *Panther Man*. In the preface he described them as "a reflection of personal, racially meaningful predicaments," stemming from "my feelings about the most abysmal evil in the modern world: American racism." The title poem referred to the 1969 murders of Black Panthers Mark Clark and Fred Hampton by Chicago police: "Wouldnt think // t look at m // he was so damn bad // they had t sneak up on m, // shoot m in his head // in his bed // sleepin // Afroed up 3 inches // smilin gunpowder." Like *The Treehouse*, *Panther Man* garnered scant critical notice.

Between 1970 and 1975 Emanuel was general editor of five volumes on black American poets, part of the Broadside Critics series. In his analysis of the poetic process, *How I Write/2*, he analyzed his own poems and those of other black poets.

Emanuel spent several years teaching at French universities in the late 1960s and early 1970s. By 1973 he was back in New York, in the midst of a bitter divorce and completely cut off from his son. Emanuel had met Marie-France Bertrand in Toulouse in 1972, and she became his companion and the focus of his love poems. Her mother's home, Le Barry, France, became the poet's retreat.

The poems in *Black Man Abroad* describe Emanuel's personal struggle to rise above heartbreak and poetic stagnation. These poems were longer, more personal, and more complex, often dealing with parental, racial, and romantic love.

Emanuel began receiving recognition through *A Chisel in the Dark*, which included 22 poems from *The Treehouse* and *Panther Man* which had become unavailable. Returning to the University of Toulouse, France, Emanuel taught courses on his own poetry and directed theses on black literary figures. *A Poet's Mind* was an anthology including Emanuel's poems with text and exercises, for use by foreign students of English.

Following his retirement from CCNY, Emanuel traveled and lived in Europe. The 215 poems in *Whole Grain* represented the many broad themes that Emanuel had developed throughout his career.

Invented "Jazz Haiku"

During the 1990s Emanuel invented a form he called "jazz haiku," combining the musical expression of black Americans with the strict structure of Japanese haiku. In the process he transformed haiku from a single, simple expression, to include narrative, rhyme, and vastly expanded subject matter. "Dizzy Gillespie (News of His Death)" reads: "Dizzy's bellows pumps // Jazz balloon inflates, floats high // Earth listens, stands by." Critic Brian Gilmore described Emanuel's work in *Black Issues Book Review*: "Emanuel is not afraid to blend poetry's traditions and innovations onto the canvas in a seemingly endless series of haikus paying tribute to the first 'world music' and, in effect, producing jazz riffs on the page for the reader."

Emanuel's only son died in 1983, prompting the poem "Deadly James (For All the Victims of Police Brutality)." Emanuel rarely spoke of his son's death, except to say that he committed suicide after being beaten by "three cowardly cops." Emanuel moved to Paris in 1984, where he lived until his death in 2013. He taught English at the University of Toulouse and the University of Grenoble. James A. Emanuel passed away on September 28, 2013, at the age of 92.

"‘I’m a Jazz Singer,’ She Replied”

He dug what she said:
bright jellies, smooth marmalade
spread on warm brown bread.

"Jazz" from drowsy lips
orchids lift to honeybees
floating on long sips.

"Jazz": quick fingerpops
pancake on a griddle-top
of memories. Stop.

"Jazz": mysterious
as nutmeg, missing fingers,
gold, Less serious.

"Jazz": cool bannister.
Don't need no stair. Ways to climb
when the sax is there.

(From *Whole Grain: Collected Poems*, 1991)

"A Fool for Evergreen"

A little bit of fool in me
 Hides behind my inmost tree
 And pops into the narrow path
 I walk blindfolded by my wrath
 Or shrunken by some twist of pain,
 Some hope that will not wind again.
 He ogles with his antic eyes
 and somersaults a you're-not-wise
 Until the patches in his pants
 Go colorwheeling through my glance
 So fast that I cannot recall
 That I was mad or sad at all.
 A little bit of fool in me
 Keeps evergreen my inmost tree.

(From *Whole Grain: Collected Poems*, 1991)

Emanuel's essays, poems, and other writings have appeared in numerous periodicals and more than 120 anthologies. He wrote two unpublished autobiographies: *From the Bad Lands to the Capital* (1943-44) and *Snowflakes and Steel: My Life as a Poet, 1971-1980*.

(From "Emanuel, James A. 1921–." *Contemporary Black Biography*. . *Encyclopedia.com*. 9 Dec. 2016 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.)



Education: Howard University, Washington, DC, BA (summa cum laude), 1950

Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, MA, 1953

Columbia University, New York City, PhD, 1962.

Military Service: U.S. Army, 93rd infantry Division, staff sergeant, 1944-46.

Career: Poet and author, 1948—; City College of New York, instructor, 1957-62; City College of New York, assistant professor, 1962-70; City College of New York, associate professor, 1970-72; City College of New York, professor, 1972-84, University of

Grenoble, Fulbright professor, 1968-69; Broadside Critics Series, general editor, 1969-75; University of Toulouse, visiting professor, 1971-73, 1979-81; University of Warsaw, Fulbright professor, 1975-76.

Awards: U.S. Army Commendation Ribbon; John Hay Whitney Found Opportunity fellowship, 1952-54; Eugene F. Saxton Memorial Trust fellowship, 1964; Black American Literature Forum, special distinction award for poetry, 1978; American Biographical Institute, Notable American, 1979.

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AUDRE LORDE

Audre Geraldine Lorde, sometimes referred to as Gamba Adisa or Rey Domini, was born on February 18, 1934, in New York, NY. She was the daughter of Frederic Byron (a real estate broker) and Linda (Belmar) Lorde.

Lorde and her sisters grew up in an apartment at 142nd Street and Lenox Avenue. Her father found work as a real estate broker, and frugal living enabled him to send his daughters to Catholic school. Lorde loved to read and often memorized passages of poetry that she found relevant to her experience. When other people's poetry no longer corresponded to the depths of her own feelings, she began to write herself.

"I wrote poetry in the seventh or eighth grade and loved music," she told *Progressive*. "Some teachers encouraged me, and I expressed a lot of things about how I felt. I was one of the editors of our high-school magazine and wrote a love sonnet for the magazine. But a teacher said ... it couldn't be published. So I submitted it to *Seventeen* magazine and it was published there."

After graduating from New York's Hunter High School in 1951, Lorde spent a few years working in Manhattan and traveling in other parts of North America. A pivotal experience occurred when she visited Mexico and saw a more tolerant racial climate.

"I'd always had the feeling I was strange, different, that there was something wrong with me," she told *Progressive*. "In Mexico I learned to walk upright, to say the things I felt."

Lorde returned to New York and earned a bachelor's degree at Hunter College—now a part of the City University of New York. She then took a master's degree in library science at Columbia University, finishing her studies in 1961.

Audre Lorde became engaged as a political activist, a feminist, and a writer. She married a white Brooklyn attorney in 1962 and wrote poetry while working as a librarian at Town School in New York.

Additionally, Lorde taught English at Hunter College. She started giving poetry readings and publishing her verse in the late 1960s, a very important time in the evolution of black American letters when a number of articulate, passionate poets and lecturers used their writing as a means to explore themes such as racism and empowerment. Lorde was among those who wrote and spoke openly about issues such as lesbianism, women's rights, and bigotry. Early poems such as "The American Cancer Society or There Is More Than One Way to Skin a Coon"

and “The Brown Menace or Poem to the Survival of Roaches” deal with white America’s not-so-subtle attempts to eradicate black culture.

In 1968 her first volume of poetry, *The First Cities*, was published, and Lorde briefly left New York to become poet-in-residence at Toogaloo College in Mississippi. After eight years of marriage, Lorde and her husband divorced but remained active in the lives of their young son and daughter.

Lorde’s anger toward personal and political injustice and her first poetic expression of her lesbianism was explored in *Cables to Rage* (1970). *Coal* (1976), a compilation of earlier works, was Lorde’s first release by a major publisher, and it earned critical notice. Most critics consider *The Black Unicorn* (1978) to be her finest poetic work. In it she turned from the urban themes of her early work, looking instead to Africa, and wrote on her role as mother and daughter, using rich imagery and mythology.

Lorde’s fame as a poet was well established by the mid-1970s. She began a long teaching career in a series of American universities, culminating in her being named Thomas Hunter Professor of English at Hunter College. Her third book of poetry, *From a Land Where Other People Live*, was nominated for a National Book Award in 1974 and is still considered one of the landmark works of black literature from the 1970’s.

Late in 1978 Lorde was stricken with breast cancer. She was 44 at the time. The experience of undergoing a mastectomy brought her into contact with a new realm of feminist problems: against the “advice” of the health care workers who attended her, she refused to wear a prosthesis that would help to mask the results of the surgery. Instead she spoke and wrote openly about her operation in an attempt to share her particular experience with other women facing the same disease. At a time when one woman in ten might expect to contract breast cancer, Lorde’s was among the pioneering written works about the personal, emotional side of the ordeal. Her book on the subject, *The Cancer Journals*, was published in 1980 and remains in print today.

Recognizing that other women writers needed a forum for their work, Lorde and African American writer and activist Barbara Smith created a new publishing house Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press in 1980. During the same period, Lorde helped to found a political committee called Sisterhood in Support of Sisters in South Africa. She remained active with both ventures until her death.

Lorde’s first illness opened new paths of self-expression. Although she continued to write and publish poetry, she also finished a novel/memoir in 1982 entitled *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. In addition, she contributed numerous essays on political and health care topics to left wing and black-audience periodicals.

On February 1, 1984—two weeks before her 50th birthday—Lorde was diagnosed with liver cancer. The condition is very serious and usually results in death within two years. Once again Lorde was confronted with an American medical establishment with its routines and callous

disregard for feelings. Doctors told her to have surgery right away; otherwise she would soon die a terribly painful death. In her 1988 book *A Burst of Light*, Lorde chronicled her decision not to accept the strategy of her New York tumor specialist, as well as her subsequent treatment in Europe with homeopathic medicine and meditation.

Lorde underwent experimental treatment in Germany and Switzerland, and she lived much longer than American doctors had predicted. One lasting ramification of her health problems was a change in her home address. A resident of New York City most of her life, she decided to move to the United States Virgin Islands, where the warmer weather might be more congenial to her cure. For the remainder of her life she traveled between her home in St. Croix and destinations in America at which she taught, lectured, or engaged in her political and publishing activities.

Lorde continued writing and speaking on important political and social issues as her health deteriorated yet again in the late 1980s. Following the devastation caused to St. Croix by Hurricane Hugo in 1989, she helped organize relief efforts in the American cities where she was so well known. She taught at Hunter College as often as she could, and she received honorary doctorate degrees from several colleges, including Oberlin and Haverford. Also in 1989 her work *A Burst of Light* won the American Book Award for nonfiction.

Lorde's poetry collection, *Undersong: Chosen Poems Old and New*, was published in 1992.

Audre Lorde died on November 17, 1992 in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. Her last volume of poetry, *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance*, was published posthumously, in 1993.



Over her long career, Audre Lorde received numerous accolades, including an American Book Award for *A Burst of Life* in 1989. She is remembered today for being a great warrior poet who valiantly fought many personal and political battles with her words.

(From "Audre Lorde Biography." *Biography.com*. 8 Dec. 2016.
<<http://www.biography.com/people/audre-lorde-214108>>.)

"A Litany for Survival"

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot

Indulge the passing dreams of choice

who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns

looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours;

For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.

And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid
of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard

nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.

(From *First Cities*, 1968)



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The Cancer Journals (nonfiction), Spinsters Ink, 1980.

Chosen Poems Old and New, Norton, 1982.

Zami: A New Spelling of My Name (fiction), Crossing Press, 1982.

Sister Outsider (nonfiction), Crossing Press, 1984.

Our Dead Behind Us (poetry), Norton, 1986.

A Burst of Light (nonfiction), Firebrand Books, 1988.

Author of fiction under pseudonym Rey Domini; contributor to poetry anthologies and magazines.

Selected awards: National Endowment for the Arts grants, 1968 and 1981; National Book Award nominee for poetry, 1974, for *From a Land Where Other People Live*; Borough of Manhattan President's Award for literary excellence, 1987

American Book Award, 1989, for *A Burst of Light*

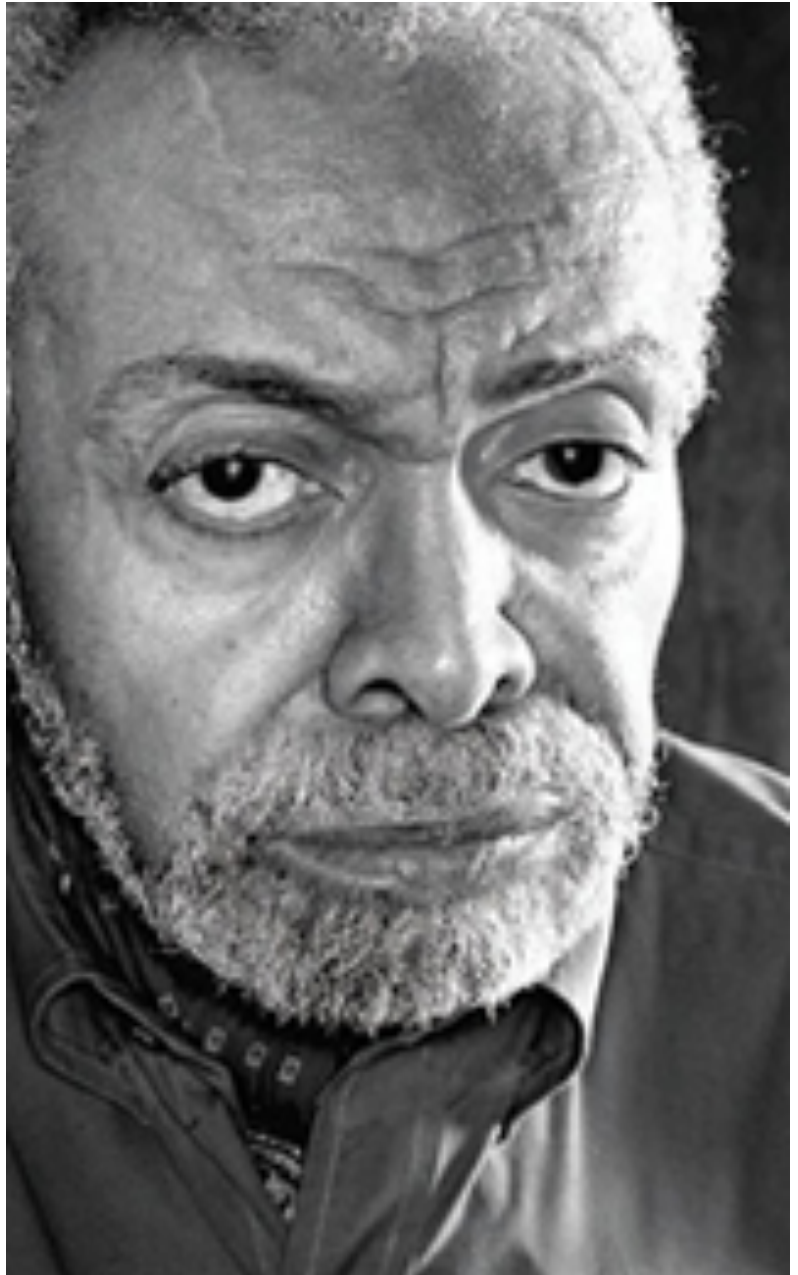
Walt Whitman Citation of Merit, 1991 (recipient becomes poet laureate of New York).

AMIRI BARAKA

Amiri Baraka was born Everett Leroy Jones on October 7, 1934 in Newark, New Jersey, U.S. Baraka was an American poet and playwright who published provocative works that assiduously presented the experiences and suppressed anger of black Americans in a white-dominated society.

After graduating from Howard University (B.A., 1953), Jones served in the U.S. Air Force but was dishonorably discharged after three years because he was suspected (wrongly at that time) of having communist affiliations. He attended graduate school at Columbia University in New York City. In the 1950s he moved to Greenwich Village, where he associated with writers of the beat generation and founded two literary magazines and a small publishing company.

One of these was the poetry magazine *Yugen*, which published the work of Beat writers such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, editing the publication with his wife, Hettie Cohen.



Baraka began writing under the name LeRoi Jones in the late 1950s and produced his first major collection of poetry, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*, in 1961. His first significant play, *Dutchman* (1964; film 1967), which recounted an explosive confrontation on a train between a black intellectual and a white woman who murders him, won the 1964 Obie Award for best Off-Broadway American play.

Baraka won critical attention and notoriety during this period when four of his plays—*Dutchman*, *The Toilet*, *The Baptism*, and *The Slave*—were produced Off-Broadway in New York City.

Following the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, Jones became increasingly focused on Black Nationalism. That year he left his white Jewish wife and moved to Harlem. There he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre, which staged many of his works prior to its closure in the late 1960s.

Baraka returned to Newark, and in 1967 he married poet Sylvia Robinson (now known as Amina Baraka). That year he also founded the Spirit House Players, which produced, among other works, two of Baraka's plays against police brutality: *Police* and *Arm Yrself or Harm Yrself*.

As a provocative political analyst, he wrote many works that expressed a strident anger toward the racism of mainstream white American society, and was an important figure in the Black Arts movement of the 1960s and 70s, which echoed the aims of the Black Power movement. In 1968, he co-edited *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* with Larry Neal and his play *Home on the Range* was performed as a benefit for the Black Panther party. That same year he became a Muslim, changing his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka. ("Imamu" means "spiritual leader.") He assumed leadership of his own black Muslim organization, Kawaïda.

From 1968 to 1975, Baraka was chairman of the Committee for Unified Newark, a black united front organization. In 1969, his *Great Goodness of Life* became part of the successful "Black Quartet" off-Broadway, and his play *Slave Ship* was widely reviewed. Baraka was a founder and chairman of the Congress of African People, a national Pan-Africanist organization with chapters in 15 cities, and he was one of the chief organizers of the National Black Political Convention, which convened in Gary, Indiana, in 1972 to organize a more unified political stance for African Americans.

In 1974 Baraka adopted a Marxist Leninist philosophy and dropped the spiritual title "Imamu." In 1983, he and Amina Baraka edited *Confirmation: An Anthology of African American Women*, which won an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation, and in 1987 they published *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues*. The *Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka* was published in 1984.

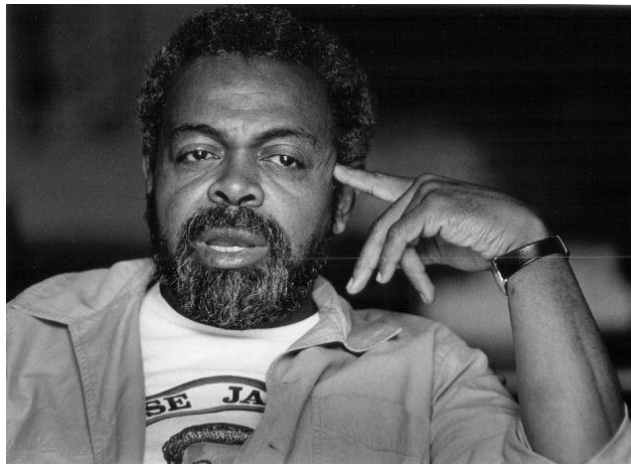
Amiri Baraka's numerous literary prizes and honors include fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, the PEN/Faulkner Award, the Rockefeller

Foundation Award for Drama, the Langston Hughes Award from the City College of New York, and a lifetime achievement award from the Before Columbus Foundation.

Baraka taught at a number of colleges and universities, and was named New Jersey's third poet laureate in 2002.

Baraka is known for his aggressive, incendiary style. His writing is controversial and has often polarized readers. His poem "Somebody Blew up America," a response to the attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, was criticized for suggesting that Israel had foreknowledge of the 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. The resulting controversy led to unsuccessful demands for his resignation or firing. In 2003 the state legislature eliminated the poet laureateship to remove him from the position.

A prolific writer, Baraka has penned more than 50 books, including fiction, music criticism, essays, short stories, poetry and plays. His collected fiction was published in 2000.



“Ka’Ba”

A closed window looks down
on a dirty courtyard, and black people
call across or scream or walk across
defying physics in the stream of their will

Our world is full of sound

Our world is more lovely than anyone's
tho we suffer, and kill each other
and sometimes fail to walk the air

We are beautiful people
with african imaginations
full of masks and dances and swelling chants

with african eyes, and noses, and arms,
though we sprawl in grey chains in a place
full of winters, when what we want is sun.

We have been captured,
brothers. And we labor
to make our getaway, into
the ancient image, into a new

correspondence with ourselves
and our black family. We read magic
now we need the spells, to rise up
return, destroy, and create. What will be
the sacred words?

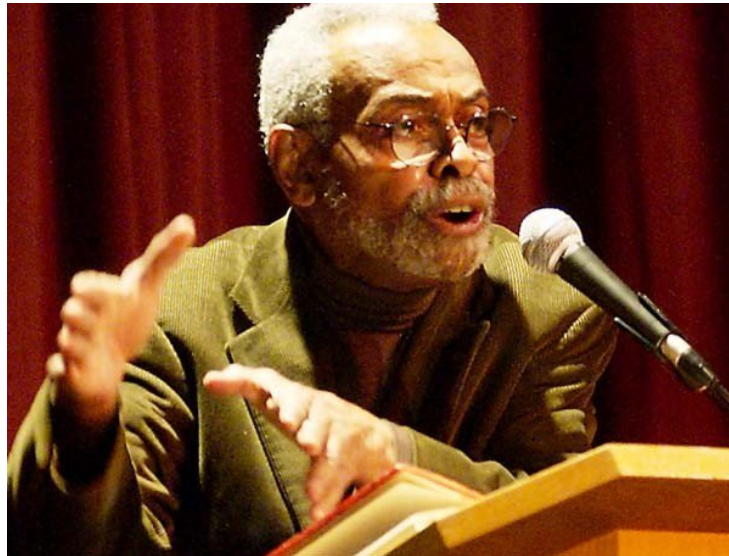
(From *S O S: Poems 1961 – 2013, 2014*)

"A Poem for Speculative Hipsters"

He had got, finally,
to the forest
of motives. There were no
owls, or hunters. No Connie Chatterleys
resting beautifully
on their backs, having casually
brought socialism
to England.
Only ideas,

and their opposites
Like,
he was really
nowhere.

(From *Preface To A 20 Volume Suicide Note*, 1961)



Baraka taught poetry at the New School for Social Research in New York, literature at the University of Buffalo, and drama at Columbia University. He taught at San Francisco State University, Yale University and George Washington University. He was co-director, with his wife, of Kimako's Blues People, a community arts space. Since 1979, he taught at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, where at the time of his death he was emeritus professor of Africana studies.

Baraka died on January 9, 2014 in Newark, New Jersey at the age of 79. He is survived by his wife, Amina Baraka, two daughters from his first marriage and four children from his second.

(From "Amiri Baraka Biography." *Biography.com*. 8 Dec. 2016.
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Black Power Chant (1972)
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MARGARET A. WALKER



Margaret Abigail Walker sometimes referred to as Alexander was born on July 7, 1915 in Birmingham, Alabama. She was the daughter of Sigismund Walker - a Jamaican-born Methodist minister with a deep love of classic literature and philosophy. A graduate of North-western University, Sigismund Walker had married music teacher Marion Dozier Walker; when their only child was still young, they relocated to New Orleans. Also present in the Walker household was grandmother Elvira “Vry” Ware Dozier, who helped care for the little girl and told her fantastic bedtime stories about “slavery time.”

The South in which Alexander grew up was still peopled by older African Americans who had been born into slavery. Her great-grandmother—Vry’s mother—died just a month before Alexander’s birth, but passed on the tales of a harsh life on the plantation to Vry, who entertained her granddaughter with them. Though obvious changes had occurred in the intervening decades, discrimination and violence were still commonplace in 1920s New Orleans.

Alexander attended a private school, and earned her high school diploma by the age of fourteen. Both of her parents were instructors at New Orleans University (now Dillard University), and Alexander enrolled there as a teenager. After two years, she decided to

transfer to Northwestern University in the Chicago area in an attempt to escape the racism of the South. She was dismayed to find that prejudice and mistreatment plagued blacks who lived in sophisticated urban cities, too.

In 1932, Alexander met the poet Langston Hughes. Raised in a home that boasted an impressive library of titles by African American writers, she was already a great fan of Hughes and his work, and well acquainted with the literary achievements of the Harlem Renaissance that he and others had launched during the previous decade. Hughes encouraged the aspiring writer, and her first poem appeared in *Crisis*, W.E.B. DuBois's journal, in 1934. During her senior year, she began handing in assignments based on her grandmother's tales of life before and after slavery, but decided she needed more time to pursue it as a work of fiction. After graduation from Northwestern, Alexander was hired by the Works Progress Administration, the New Deal federal agency aimed at relieving the unemployment of the Great Depression through building and improvement projects. Assigned to work with delinquent females, Alexander became deeply interested in one of Chicago's ethnic neighborhoods that was an unusual merging of Italian American and African American families, and began an uncompleted novel about it she tentatively entitled "Goose Island."

Later while on staff at the WPA Federal Writer's Project, Alexander came to know Nelson Algren, Katherine Dunham, and Richard Wright, as well as several other up-and-coming personalities in the city. She and Wright shared many ideas and opinions, and developed a keen interest in each other's literary endeavors. Over the next three years they contributed to and encouraged each other's work: Wright helped Alexander fine-tune her verse, and wakened her interest in leftist political theory; in turn, she mailed him Chicago newspaper clippings about a young black man accused of rape. This story would form the basis for Wright's 1940 novel *Native Son*.

In 1942, Alexander became the first African American to win a leading literary competition with her work "For My People. The work was published by Yale University Press after winning the university's Younger Poet's Award, a coveted literary prize. The publication of Alexander's volume marked the first book of poetry published by an African American woman since 1918. The sentiments expressed in her acclaimed volume would later become inspirational, often cited verse during the civil-rights era.

While teaching at West Virginia State College, She wed Firnist James Alexander, a disabled war veteran, in June of 1943. They began a family the following year that would number four children - Marion Elizabeth, Firnist James, Sigismund Walker and Margaret Elvira.

In 1949 she became a professor of English at Jackson State College in Mississippi (now Jackson State University).

With the success of *For My People* behind her, Alexander began working in earnest on a historical novel based on her grandmother Vvry's tales of nineteenth-century black life. She fit in research on what would become *Jubilee* between her obligations as a working mother; for years she pored over historical documents across the South, read an immense amount of literature on the Civil War period, and cultivated helpful professional contacts with scholars and librarians in several states.

In 1962 Alexander, although a mother of four children, she took leave from her job and went back to the University of Iowa to earn a Ph.D. in English. Her manuscript became her dissertation, and she typed the last sentence of *Jubilee* in April of 1965, nearly three decades after beginning it as a Northwestern University student. Published in 1966, *Jubilee* recreates the life of Alexander's great-grandmother, here named Vvry, from her birth as a slave on a Georgia plantation. Divided into three sections—the antebellum years, the Civil War era, and the Reconstruction period—Vvry's tale stands in literary form as representative of untold thousands, based on Alexander's exhaustive amount of research into African American social and economic realities of the Old South.

Jubilee became a bestseller, and was translated into several European languages. Alexander continued to teach at Jackson State, and set up the school's black studies program in 1968. She published her second book of poetry, *Prophets for a New Day*, in 1970. Less political than *For My People*, its poems reveal a more spiritual direction.



“The Struggle Staggers Us”

Our birth and death are easy hours, like sleep
and food and drink. The struggle staggers us
for bread, for pride, for simple dignity.
And this is more than fighting to exist;
more than revolt and war and human odds.
There is a journey from the me to you.
There is a journey from the you to me.
A union of the two strange worlds must be.

Ours is a struggle from a too-warm bed;
too cluttered with a patience full of sleep.
Out of this blackness we must struggle forth;
from want of bread, of pride, of dignity.
Struggle between the morning and the night.
This marks our years; this settles, too, our plight.

(From *For My People*, 1942)

The Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black Peoples at Jackson State was later renamed in her honor, as was the street in the city on which she lived. Her last published work was the 1997 volume *On Being Female, Black, and Free: Essays by Margaret Walker, 1932–1992*. She died of cancer at the home of her daughter, Marion Colmon, in Chicago on November 30th of 1998. A documentary film, *For My People: The Life and Writing of Margaret Walker*, appeared the following year, and contains interviews with Alexander and those who knew her.

Though a younger generation of African American writers had long eclipsed the pioneering accomplishments of Margaret Walker Alexander by the time of her death at age 83 in 1998, the poet, novelist and academic had enjoyed friendships that spanned nearly a century of black literary achievement—from Langston Hughes to Alice Walker—and was well known and vividly remembered to many in the African American literary community.

(From “Alexander, Margaret Walker 1915-1998.” *Contemporary Black Biography*.
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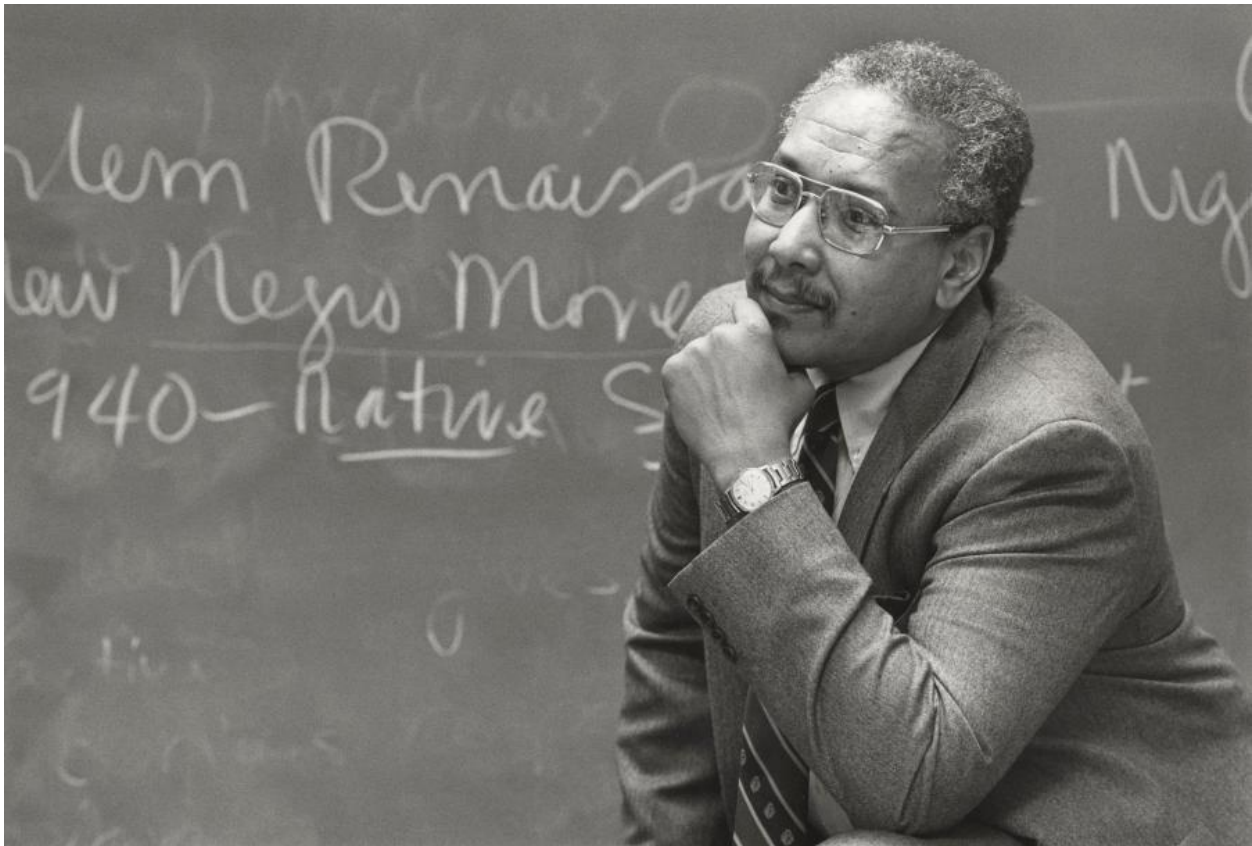
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MICHAEL S. HARPER



Michael S. Harper, in full, Michael Steven Harper was born on March 18, 1938 in New York, New York, U. S. Harper is an African American poet whose sensitive, personal verse is concerned with ancestral kinship, jazz and the blues, and the separation of the races in America.

Harper grew up in New York City and in West Los Angeles.

The son of Walter Warren Harper, a postal worker, and Katherine Johnson Harper, a medical stenographer. Harper recalls his family's move in 1951 to a predominantly white Los Angeles neighborhood grappling with racial tension as a traumatic enough experience to "make" him a poet. Harper's family had an extensive record collection that profoundly affected his poetry.

Encouraged to pursue medicine, Harper became only a marginal student after an asthma condition kept him from participating in a junior high gym class, which earned him a failing grade keeping him off the honor roll. At Dorsey High School in Los Angeles, Harper was placed on the vocational track, a situation his father had to "straighten out" so that his son could move

toward a medical career. During high school, Harper avoided preparing to become a doctor, and he even got significant encouragement from a college zoology professor who told him that black people could not get into medical school. During his high school years Harper wrote a few poems, but he had not yet considered writing as an option for a career.

In 1955, he enrolled at Los Angeles City College, and then Los Angeles State College, which he attended until 1961, during which time he was also employed as a postal worker. He says that his life began here. Many of his coworkers were educated black men like Harper's father who had bumped against the glass ceiling of advancement in the American workplace. Their experiences, which they shared freely, and his own experience of segregated housing at the Iowa Writer's Workshop formed the foundation of Harper's assessment of America as a schizophrenic society. Nonetheless, Harper credits his years at Los Angeles State, where he read John Keats's letters and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, for preparing him for the Iowa Writers Workshop, which he began in 1961. After a year there, Harper taught at various schools, including Pasadena City College (1962), Contra Costa College (1964-1968), and California State College (now University, 1968-1969).

As the only black student in both his poetry and fiction classes at Iowa, Harper encountered painter Oliver Lee Jackson, who would influence Harper's thinking. Moreover, he lived in segregated housing, which runs counter to the democratic principles of this nation and best illustrates what Harper calls the schizophrenia of this society. This idea encompasses more than the politics and legacy of racial segregation; it is involved in the very English we speak and the logic we follow. Such binary oppositions as white and black, hot and cold, set the language against itself through a mode of thinking that separates and opposes, contrary to what Harper sees as a holistic universe where humanity is a reflection of the universe, and the universe is a reflection of humanity. This philosophy serves as a basis for the themes, aesthetics, and strategies of his poetry, which include music, kinship, history, and mythology.

For Harper, history and mythology are similar in that neither is fully constituted or contained by its written or commonly understood versions. Such mythologies as white supremacy, and the marred history it engenders, too rigidly encase humanity in static categories. Manipulating old European and American myths and creating new ones illustrates a goal and technique Harper uses throughout his poetry, beginning with his first volume, *Dear John Dear Coltrane* (1970). In the volume, John Coltrane, who Harper knew, is both the man and his jazz, the talented and tragic musician, and his holistic worldview and redemptive music. With an understanding of black music similar to W. E. B. Du Bois's in his description of the African American "sorrow songs," Harper includes the music of poetry as similar affirmation of the importance of articulating suffering to gain from it and survive it. Here, as in Harper's later volumes, musical rhythm replaces traditional metrics in the poetry without sacrificing craft. Coltrane becomes a link between the personal and historical, pain and its expression, suffering and love. To extend these themes, Harper devotes a section of the volume to poems about his own kin, thematically and literally personalizing history so that family ties become continuities of humanity as they link the individual with both a personal and collective history. This opening and overlapping of historical and personal possibility, in the context of Harper's interest in

music, seems to provide a handle on Harper's difficult and abstract concept of musical and poetic modality.



"American History"

Those four black girls blown up
in that Alabama church
remind me of five hundred
middle passage blacks,
in a net, under water
in Charleston harbor
so redcoats wouldn't find them.
Can't find what you can't see
can you?

(From *Songlines In Michaeltree: New and Collected Poems*, 2002)

"Dear John, Dear Coltrane"

a love supreme, a love supreme-

Sex fingers toes
in the marketplace
near your father's church
in hamlet, North Carolina-

witness to this love
 in this calm fallow
 of these minds, there is no substitute for pain:
 genitals gone or going,
 seed burned out,
 you tuck the roots in the earth,
 turn back, and move
 by the river through the swamps,
 singing a love supreme, a love supreme;
 what does it all mean?
 Loss, so great each black
 woman expects your failure
 in mute change, the seed gone.
 You plod up into the electric city-
 your song now crystal and
 the blues. You pick up the horn
 with some will and blow
 into the freezing night:
 a love supreme, a love supreme-
 Dawn comes and you cook
 up the thick sin 'tween
 impotence and death, fuel
 the tenor sax cannibal
 heart, genital and sweat
 that makes you clean-
 a love supreme, a love supreme-

Why you so black?
 cause I am
 Why you so funky?
 cause I am
 Why you so black?
 cause I am
 Why you so sweet?
 cause I am
 Why you so black?
 cause I am

So sick
 you couldn't play Naima,
 so flat we ached
 for song you'd concealed
 with your own blood,
 your diseased liver gave

out its purity,
 the inflated heart
 pumps out, the tenor kiss,
 tenor love

(From *Dear John, Dear Coltrane: Poems*, 1985)

In his subsequent volumes, Harper built upon and expanded his philosophy and repertoire of themes and strategies. In 1971, *History Is Your Own Heartbeat* garnered Harper the Poetry Award of the Black Academy of Arts and Letters. Instead of famous musicians, the volume focuses on Harper's family to explore similar issues as Harper's previous volume. Next, *Song: I Want a Witness* (1972) uses black religion as a subtext for its meditations on black history, while, in the second section, the volume dialogues with William Faulkner's short story "The Bear," adding an element of literary history to Harper's thematics. From this volume also comes the limited edition *Photographs: Negatives: History as Apple Tree* (1972). *Nightmare Begins Responsibility*, a volume published in 1975, is another variation on the poet's philosophy of kinship, history, the wholistic universe, and an individual's responsibility to all of these. In many ways, it serves as the sequel to both *Song: I Want a Witness* and *Debridement* (1973), and is considered Harper's richest volume. In it, Harper uses poems to address kinship in a jazz-blues idiom; to consider the death of his friend Ralph Albert Dickey; to affirm responsible action, like Jackie Robinson's, in the face of a racist nightmare; and to establish the poet's literary, personal, and historical ties to other African American literary and historical figures. *Images of Kin* (1977) earned Harper the Melville-Cane Award and a nomination for the 1978 National Book Award. Three other volumes, *Rhode Island, Eight Poems* (1981), *Healing Song for the Inner Ear* (1985), and a limited edition entitled *Songlines: Mosaics* (1991) have since been published.

By the mid-1970s, Harper's reputation as a poet, scholar, and teacher was firmly established. Among many other awards, such as the National Institute of Arts and Letters Creative Writing Award (1972), a Guggenheim fellowship (1976), and a National Endowment for the Arts grant (1977), Harper received an American specialist grant in 1977, with which he traveled to Ghana, South Africa, Zaire, Senegal, Gambia, Botswana, Zambia, and Tanzania. In several published interviews, Harper affirms the influence this trip had on his thinking and writing. Among Harper's former students are Gayl Jones, Melvin Dixon, and Anthony Walton. Harper, poet laureate of the state of Rhode Island, is currently a professor at Brown University, where he teaches literature and creative writing.

(From *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. Ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Foster Smith and Trudier Harris. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.)



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AAP: F5 EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE

1: What are the benefits of an examination of African American Poetry?

2: What is the educational implication?

3: What are the implications for the community through reading African American Poetry?

4: Do you belong to groups that might benefit from the reading and discussion of African American Poetry? Please, explain?

5: In what innovative ways can African American Poetry be used throughout the community?

THANK YOU! YOUR PARTICIPATION HAS BEEN VERY VALUABLE!