

BLACK POWERFUL



McSWEENEY'S
SAN FRANCISCO

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BLACK POWERFUL

CURATED BY

NATASHA MARIN



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This book is dedicated to all of us future ancestors. We are here and we are also in the future.

My children—Roman and Sagan—can trace their matrilineal line back eight generations to Claire, my great-great-great-great-grandmother, who with Celestin Valencourt manifested Celestine, my great-great-great-grandmother, who with Pierre Louis mothered at least eight children, one of whom was my great-great-grandmother, Élisabeth. Élisabeth and Mathieu manifested Octalise, my great-grandmother and one of at least twelve children. Octalise, my grandmother's mother, manifested my grandmother, Eastlyn Myra. Eastlyn Myra and Constantine Wellington of Paramin, Maraval, Trinidad, manifested Patricia Margaret, my mother, who with David Marin manifested me and my sister, Nikola. My mother says, "Your children need to know who their family are."

FOREWORD

My mother has a thing for *Family Feud*. It's a daily fix, or perhaps it could be better described as a chosen flogging, as she plops down in her chair with a half-day-old cup of coffee to root for the Black family, because victory is victory is victory.

The questions all begin the same.

"We asked one hundred men," or "We asked one hundred women," followed by some strange but amusing scenario about what one wishes their partner could do better.

My mother yells answers at the television as if she's the sixth member of the Black family. The cousin who tagged along by hiding in the trunk. Yells them as if she's been waiting her whole life to say this particular thing on this particular game show. Yells it like she will get the sixth cut of the money, and be invited back the next day

to defend her title until she wins a sensible family vehicle.

And then, inevitably, the Xs come. Aggressive, jarring. The sound of electrocution, followed by a red stamp flashed across the screen.

Followed by my mother's confusion.

Followed by my mother's swearing.

Followed by her muttering, "Who these hundred people they asking?"

I've often thought about how this show, or at least my mother's viewing experience, would be different if the polling prompt was "We asked one hundred *Black* women," or "We asked one hundred *Black* men," or "We asked one hundred *Black* non-binary folks," and I desperately want to believe that more of my mother's answers would be there when the cards flip. That she'd be right more often. I mean, I usually think she is. And perhaps her percentage would, in fact, go up and the strikes would come down, but I know, despite how badly I want to believe otherwise, she still wouldn't clear each board. She'd still get many answers wrong, not because she's disconnected from the Black experience, but because she is connected to a Black experience that can't be whittled into six responses. A Black experience that can't be contained to a game show or even fully known by polling a hundred of us. Her Black experience—our Black experience—is part of the Black expanse. And like any black expanse, the depths of the ocean or the breadth of space, there is limitlessness.

And within that limitlessness—all that is known, unknown, and evolving—there's power.

What Natasha Marin has done here with the curation of *Black Powerful* is ask the very question I've always imagined. She asked one hundred Black people. She asked them to explore . . . themselves. To explore their autonomy, their daily nativity, their footing. Their power, without qualifying or comparing it to any other idea of what power might be considered. And the answers are all correct. Not an X in sight. No dismissal or embarrassment or befuddlement or slap-in-the-face *snap out of it!* moments like the ones my mother falls victim to while watching network television.

Because this is the network we own.

We are the only family.

And all the answers, this being just a few, are ours.

—Jason Reynolds

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a Black Imagination . . .

There was a whole city where our men could just cry. Men (trans men are men) from everywhere could come to cry surrounded by beauty, good food, fresh air, sunshine, and the love of their brothers. Years of blinking back what has been long earned come to a sighing end and the era of uncried and overdue tears can at last begin. We men cry first for ourselves, for all the years we didn't. Then we cry for everything else—we hold ourselves and rock and sway and sob. The air hums with sighs and shaking shoulders.

Nearby the City of Tears is the City of Laughter. In this city, women (trans women are women) come from the fringes of their most unreleased selves to laugh and cackle and kick and thigh-slap away the hours with their sisters. They begin with

themselves—laughing in screams and peals and snorts—and end with the absurdity of those who have struggled to keep this liberation from them. They laugh with radical rebellion—long and loud—hearty with relief. Those arriving at this City are smiling on the way in. Sisterhood seems safer when we are laughing together as though we are alone.

And forever the City of Tears and the City of Laughter would exist, like sustainable healing communities. And we would laugh and we would cry. And no one but us would be watching.

* * *

In this collection, I have gathered over one hundred Black Diasporic voices to respond to the following prompts:

When do you feel most rooted/indigenous?

When do you feel most powerful?

What does it sound like when you claim yourself?

Describe or imagine a world where you are loved, safe, and valued

When I began this work in 2019, I didn't realize that my life would change so radically. I didn't realize that I would have to become my most powerful self to bring this collection of Black Voices to fruition. With the COVID-19 pandemic, everything was in turmoil. From a place proximate to not existing, I allowed the power of these

voices—the voices of my community in this world (and beyond)—to prop me up when I couldn't do it on my own. Our imagination gives way to our truest power, and now I am imagining (and manifesting) a better world for me and my children. I value creativity, boldness, honesty, open communication, connection, and enduring friendship. I escape to my imagination and find abundant joy.

I gather testimonies as part of my work of collecting and curating these voices. The whole project is audio that I then translate into text because I want to convey actual people's voices and not just data. What intrigues me about imagining new realities is that diasporic Black folks already had access to those spaces pre-displacement. And now we are using our imaginations to fill in what we lost. We have to conjure a future memory of a time where we can go back to doing what we were doing before exploitation and chaos ensued.

My intellectual journey starts with growing up in a household that prioritized higher education as the only possible path. It takes a while to unlearn colonialism, and by the time I was on that journey, I had already earned a master's degree in English from

a [predominantly] white institution. I certainly practiced critical thinking, but I was also subjected to all sorts of projections on my Black body. It's difficult for me to talk about because I'm not sure I can thank these institutions for my current intellectual state. I would have to credit the time I spent listening to Black people and prioritizing Black voices and ideas. The time I give myself to focus on Black voices is the most intellectually and creatively stimulating time.

No one shaping my thoughts is famous, so I would have to start there. I'm not learning from CEOs, I'm learning from single Black moms who have spent time thinking about Blackness and femininity and how those two things concurrently and individually are never respected in the United States. Never cherished and never privileged.

—Excerpts from an interview with Edna Bonhomme
entitled “Like Planting Seeds in Concrete:
Ending Generational Curses to Free Black Minds,”
DADDY Magazine, Together Issue (Berlin, 2020)

When I think of Black people,
I think of power.

—*Sagan O'Brien*

ROOTED/ INDIGENOUS

When do you feel most rooted/indigenous?

LORY IVEY ALEXANDER

**Born and Currently Lives in
Washington, DC**

I feel most rooted to the place where I stand. My ancestors have been on this very land, in this very spot for eons. I feel tied to this earth, to these waters, to this air. I know these trees. I'm the third generation in this very house. I am the tenth generation to live on the land we call the home place. I trace myself and my people beyond world wars, beyond the enslavement, beyond the founding of this nation, beyond the white stumbling upon that we call the founding of the New World. I am Old World indigenous. My indigeneity is rooted in this convergence of humanity. I am the turtle of the island and the shell on my back is the map of my history, the tale of a thousand mothers climbing through the eyes of a hundred needles. I am indigenous to everywhere.

But my story is even older and vaster than that. I am indigenous

to impossibility. I am indigenous to the unfathomable. I am indigenous to the land that is too old to be remembered. I am indigenous to the stars.

DESTINY O. BIRDSONG

Born in Shreveport, Louisiana

Currently Lives in Nashville, Tennessee

I feel most rooted in my house, surrounded by silence. I feel most rooted in poems. I feel most rooted in the telling of my own stories. I feel most rooted when I laugh. I feel most rooted around my friends and when I'm surrounded by their love, which is a complete and perfect gift. I feel most rooted in the corner of my room, watching the birds and talking to God. I feel most rooted when He talks back in signs: cardinals, herons, single white moths. I feel most rooted walking, and in any place that is green, flat, and near water. I feel most rooted surrounded by people who are quietly minding their own business and letting me live.

RAINA J. LEÓN

**Born and Currently Lives in
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

there is a picture of me from when i was twenty. i stood in a courtyard in mallorca. in those days, i traveled very light: a few pieces of fringed fabric, panties, a brush, a toothbrush, a crystal for under my arms, a razor, a passport, a little cash, a journal, and several blue-ink gel pens. all easily carried in a backpack. who took the picture, i don't remember. it is a candid shot. i seem to bend into a fountain, my hair wrapped in white, my braless chest wrapped doubly by a thin dark-blue fabric, slanted over another layer, a tied light-blue fabric wrapped twice around my waist. my shoulders are bare, my shoulder blades chiseled with sharp valleys. i look every bit a statue come to life and beautiful. moss gilds the walls in a green and gold gleam. the sun cuts in sharp lines into the shot that captures my relaxed face, eshy in wonderment at water from

stones. i belong to the time and that moment and yet am timeless, rooted in green and stone. it is a moment of waymaking back to africa, the canary islands, a part of my family's story, a way station from one world into another. This is a moment in which i see myself happy and intuitively finding ways back into myself, into the ways of my ancestors' journeys, each generation within me, a tree layer i slough away.

FRED L. JOINER

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Currently Lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina

I am trying to lean into a kind of awareness that, as a person of African descent, I am a citizen of the world. As a result, I try to find a sense of “home” wherever I am. That said, when visiting my family in coastal South Carolina and in Georgia, I feel a sense of connectedness and rootedness, even though I was born and raised in the greater Northeast (New Jersey and Connecticut).

The first time I left the United States, at seventeen, I went to Kingston, Jamaica; that was the first time I felt a sense of belonging and rootedness that I did not yet have the language to fully describe.

BEN YISRAEL

Born in Fort Worth, Texas

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

Our names are indigenous to earth.
Having birthed algebra and alchemy
We find ourselves in need
Of no immigration papers.

Our future was mapped out
By ancestor architects.

Who always knew the square root of themselves.
And therefore were incapable of being subtracted.
And we imagine—this is why we are still here.

ZEPHYRA R. FENTRESS

Born in Portland, Oregon

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

I am known best by the water. It flows over me, under me,
everywhere.

ERIKA R. HARDAWAY

Born in Queens, New York

Currently Lives in Brooklyn, New York

I feel most indigenous when I am surrounded by Black folks from various parts of the diaspora. In this beautiful space, we engage in conversations about our parents' sayings, habits, and dreams. We are arguing about who makes the best food, though we cannot deny that they're just slightly different ways of preparing the same things. We are struck by the similarities in our testimonies and triumphs. When we look into one another's eyes, we find comfort. When we hold hands in solidarity or hug, I am certain that our ancestors breathe a sigh of relief. In all the violence and chaos, we've found our way back to each other. My Black indigeneity is affirmed when my people remind me that we've always been here. We do not simply exist in the context of white folks' perceived supremacy.

DEIDRE R. GANTT

**Born and Currently Lives in
the Washington Metropolitan Area, Maryland**

I don't know. I feel homeless. Africa doesn't feel as much like home as I wanted it to. America doesn't either. Maybe in my little corner of DC and PG County where I was born and raised, and at least three generations of us before that. It's the literal heart or brain or some critical part of the American beast, and yet it is Blackity Black—with all the whole, multidimensional good and bad and moral gradients that come with our culture. I've lived in so many different places, traveled out looking for something, running from something, running to something. I almost found it in New Orleans. I thought I did. But as they say down there (okay, and in *The Wiz*), it's no place like home. Home is Far Northeast DC, Ward 7, Deanwood, East of the (Anacostia) River, Fairmount Heights, Capitol Heights, Seat Pleasant. The borderland that gave my book its

name. This little collection of neighborhoods and towns, more than even the wider District of Columbia, is where I feel most able to take off my ruby slippers and be myself. Maybe my love and acceptance of this place grows in proportion to how well I learn to love and accept myself. It's a trip because this is where I first learned to believe that I was both unlovable and unacceptable. I have to thank all those other places for helping me unlearn those lessons.

MATTIE M. MOONEY

Born of Liberian/Grebo Diaspora in Dallas, Texas

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

I am African so I feel indigenous every day. But especially when I am around other Black people. There is something so comforting in being in the presence of people that you see yourself in, or that get how you talk, or that understand inside jokes, or that have your back. There is something that feels like home in the company of Black folks that I cannot find anywhere or with anyone else. I feel rooted in my indigeneity when I'm taking a bath, or taking a midday nap, or spending time with my daughter. I feel rooted in my indigeneity when I am talking to my parents, and they apologize or tell me they love me.

TARA BETTS

Born and Raised in Kankakee, Illinois

Currently Lives in Chicago, Illinois

When I talk to Cetáh who lives
on the reservation still, his father
a Black man like mine. Both of us
born in places with three-syllable
names that bubble over tongues
and teeth like water.

How our hands sink in dirt
like prayers and ancestors,
and we both stay breathing
deep with every ache set on
us like hounds from hell.

Someone had to give us wild
talismans to survive long enough

to speak to each other right now.

UNIKA V. NOIEL

Born in Tacoma, Washington

Currently Lives in Edmonds, Washington

I feel most rooted when I'm able to connect with and observe nature (preferably without the input of these loud-ass crows). Watching tiny birds hop carelessly about from branch to branch, full of faith that the one they choose will support them . . . finding food and shelter where they can and making beautiful sounds all the while . . . it reminds me that there is a space in this world where a being can simply be, and that peaceful thought connects me and grounds me with thoughts of how our lives should be . . . could be . . . used to be . . .

JAMES BABATUNDE

**Born and Currently Lives in
Kwara State, Nigeria**

To be honest, Being Black is always a race—running from home. The only time I feel *this is home, this is me* is when I'm filling in documents that ask me to state my origins.

ANDRÉ O. HOILETTE

Born in Kingston, Jamaica
Currently Lives in Denver, Colorado

i feel most rooted with other Caribbean islanders. rooted with cassava and dasheen, with plantain. rooted together with red snapper, fried whole, and festival and dumplings. we are rooted in ackee and saltfish, and in carnival time. here we are rooted on Arawak and Taíno land. we are rooted in sugar and how it thickened in our blood and calloused our hands. how it dims our sight. we root like cuttings from the mother tree and our seed has scattered and rooted on every continent.

CHRISTINE PLATT

Born in Pleasant City, West Palm Beach, Florida

Currently Lives in Washington, DC

The only time I ever feel rooted and not displaced is when I visit my true home—West Africa. And although it is a home where I have no residence, no village to claim or ancestors I can call by name, there is an undeniable connection I have to the country and its people. I feel safe within my brown skin, to laugh loud and dream louder. To exist and thrive as a carefree Black woman rather than survive within the confines of America's white supremacy culture. To be, simply be. And there is no other place I would rather be in the world.

MARIA HAMILTON ABEGUNDE

**Born in New Jersey
Currently Living in Indiana**

I was dreaming of Brazil long before I arrived there. The day I landed on the island of Itaparica, the wind surrounded me and said: “Everything you know is gone. Everything you love has changed.” In that moment, I knew I had arrived home, the same place I had landed centuries before.

Each time I return, the way I walk shifts at the moment I exit the plane. My body feels heavier, as if the Earth herself is pulling me down to reconnect me to the roots that lie at the center of the equator.

I do not need to pretend that I am anything but a big Black woman who can stoop low to the ground and carry water on my head. And look good doing it, because I wear all my most colorful and mismatched fabrics. My hips and shoulders align so that I have

no pain anywhere, which means I can dance for hours barefooted.

When I come home to Brazil I stop remembering that English is my first language. My tongues wrap around words with endless vowels for hours at a time. I sing and make the favorite sounds that bridge words: “eh-eye-ee,” which means everything you can’t find a word for but need to say anyway.

Africa is alive in Bahia. It never died. Everybody knows it. Nobody’s trying to hide it. Even the stones in the street make way for your feet to play them like bata. Joy. Love. Alegria. Amor. Life.

AMBER ATIYA

**Born and Currently Lives in
Brooklyn, New York**

I struggle with feelings of not belonging, of not being a “true” American, and don’t think of myself as simply American but rather Black, sometimes Black American, or, alternatively, as a New Yorker, or more specifically, a Brooklynite. Every year, during spring or summer, I make my pilgrimage to Flatbush, Brooklyn, where I was born and raised. I feel centered there—the quiet side streets to the west, lined with beautiful Victorian houses, the business of the Flatbush Junction to the east, the roti shops, beauty supply stores, and salons along Flatbush Ave. Prospect Park. Brooklyn Botanic Garden, where I would find an empty bench and journal. I miss Mike’s Diner and J’ouvert. Pizza so soaked with grease that when you fold a slice, the oil heats lines of health, wealth, and happiness etched into your palm. Flatbush will always,

always be home to me. Gentrifiers are fleeing the city like crazy due to the pandemic . . . maybe we can finally get a slice of old New York back.

OKWUDILI NEBEOLISA

Born in Nigeria

Currently Lives in Iowa City, Iowa

For me, being indigenous has a lot to do with identity. And you only realize your indigeneity when you're a part of the minority. I don't think I felt indigenous, or Black or African or Nigerian, until I left Nigeria, until I left my home country. So it somehow felt like I left my comfort zone and became aware that I had become *The Other*. I mean, I had become the minority and I was no longer what was common anymore. I felt most indigenous when I left Nigeria and the most indigenous when I came to Iowa, because it's a white-people-dominated place.

WALE AYINLA

**Born and Currently Lives in
Nigeria**

I have lived in Nigeria all my life and the concept of displacement hasn't occurred to me; however, I feel more indigenous when my tribe is being mentioned. I am from the Yoruba tribe, and there is a pride that comes from being referenced, in good manner.

TIFFANY B. GRANTHAM

Born in Goldsboro, North Carolina

Currently Lives in Charlotte, North Carolina

I feel rooted during my trips home. I never use the main highway; I like traveling down the back roads through small towns. As soon as I take the right turn down the stretch of highway leading me to my family home-house, I feel a sense of bliss. Here. Here is where we began. Or at least the part of our journey all my senses connect to. In these cotton fields with rundown tobacco barns and dirt roads and hog pens. Smelling the air after a rain, feeling the sun glaring through the windows, and even the stench of manure that makes me roll up my windows—I love it all.

As a child, I loved visiting my Greats (great aunts and uncles) because I knew they would tell stories of a time before I was born. At their feet is where I first heard the expression, “You gon’ die with yo’ shoes on.” My great aunt was retelling her warning

to a cousin of mine; a warning that his actions could lead to an early death as a young man instead of a peaceful one as an old man.

The Hoodoo practice of ancestral veneration has its traces in the African American community; much like eating black-eyed peas and collards for New Year's to bring in good luck. Growing up, my Christian mother did something similar. Spoons, teacups—something small from past relatives were paired with their pictures on a shelf. She did this without calling it anything. For her, it was and is a small place of remembrance.

As an adult, I decided to practice ancestral veneration to honor past family members. I created an altar to bring them fresh flowers, food, and, sometimes, coffee. Their pictures are surrounded with items they liked when they were here or something that represents them; a baseball for my grandfather, a Homemakers of America pin for my grandmother, and a moon pie for my uncle—his favorite. Even for the ancestors I don't know by name, I'm confident they know mine. I feel as though I have, somehow, tapped into something once treasured in my family but is now long forgotten and taboo.

RASHIDA JAMES-SAADIYA

Born in Washington, DC

Currently Lives in Dakar, Senegal

I feel most rooted after *jummah* when the air is filled with laughter, body oils, bean pie, and a fish sandwich if you got cash, because the elders don't fool with cash apps. There's a calmness that soothes me; perhaps it's the ritual that requires us to greet each other with peace before talking about how busy we are or how crazy the world is at the moment. We look each other in the eye and say, *As-salamu alaykum*—peace be unto you. It's the peace part for me. Someone wishing goodness upon my life with such sincerity that I remember peace is also a birthright.

RAVI HOWARD

Born in Montgomery, Alabama

Currently Lives in Tallahassee, Florida

When I walk on tabby concrete, I think about the makers. This tactile connection helps me to feel rooted in the culture of Black making. The surface under my feet is art, like quilting and bricolage, shaped into something new. Cement made from scratch with what they gathered here, added to the fire. Oyster shells cooked down to lime, dredged rock, found rock, sand, and water. The concrete is smooth enough to walk on, but not so smooth that the texture is erased. What I can see in the stones and remnants of shell is the evidence of gathering. The form was created by folks who were kin to me, even if not directly. I imagine the history of the tabby walks, pathways that led to the sites of gathering—normal schools and the vernacular spaces where the sidewalk itself would have been a part of the lesson, a final project. The power comes from both the

design and the enduring nature of the work that remains a guide.

JAMES CAGNEY

**Born and Currently Lives in
Oakland, California**

I am most rooted when re-creating recipes first taught to me over an ancestor's shoulder. Food is a kind of long-distance umbilical cord to the past, to the other side. I follow the guidance of a Ouija of recipes. Washing greens roots me. Barefoot at an oven promising cornbread, or shoveling earth for a garden, I let the ancestors pull the strings while I stay open for any encore. It is memory that keeps me rooted, how every tool needed has been already slipped into my pocket. At every sink where foam climbs my forearms, voices rise behind me—smoking, fixing, breaking, eating, pressing hair, complaining. But I am here; having survived on everything that was pleaded or spanked into me. I am here through the grease, the blood, the hallelujahs and hatred. I remain here, part of a chandelier of ghosts. I am most rooted beneath the guidance of

the sun, brushing my fingers over the new life pushing up through soil, combed per my grandfather's instruction. And I pull back the steaming cover and, if you let me, will fill your mouth with more than one hundred years of flavor.

BRITTANY SELAH LEE-BEY

**Born in Manassas, Virginia
Currently Lives in Washington, DC**

I feel most rooted around my people. My family in particular. I feel rooted when I'm in South Carolina, watching my aunts and cousins talk shit and eat crabs. Watching my mama play bid whist and woopin' e'ryone's ass. Drinkin' moonshine my brother brewed up. I feel at home in Alabama, doing line dances and taking tequila shots with my sisters and my niece. Going to my grandmama's house, watchin' her watch her stories and spit chewed tobacco in a tin can. I feel most rooted when reading and teaching about Black folklore—Anansi and Brer Rabbit, High John, The People Could Fly. I feel rooted through Hoodoo, Yoruba, oracles, tarot reading, and astrology. I feel rooted when I abandon the identities and labels Europeans forced upon my ancestors and are hurling at me today. I feel indigenous when I commune with my ancestors. The more I

learn from them, the more I feel I'm on the right path. I feel rooted learning about African female kings, Black midwives, Black women root workers, African female merchant leaders. These spirits swirl around and throughout me, reminding me that I'm on a journey to the center of myself. I am rooted in Sankofa.

CHERISE A. POLLARD

Born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Currently Lives in West Chester, Pennsylvania

When I head to the river
with five yellow gourds,
sometimes walking sideways
down an embankment,
mostly sneaking,
waiting for the right time
to pray, to give thanks,
to leave my offering.

When I watch the gourds slip
into the stream, float away,
I don't care if passersby
assume that I am crazy,

or worse, that I am polluting
the environment, for I am
happy to know that the acorn
and butternut squash
and pie pumpkins that I chose
to honor Oshun have been accepted.

ASHLEY M. JONES

**Born and Currently Lives in
Birmingham, Alabama**

I wish I could say that I feel most rooted when thinking of Africa. But because of the act of terrorism enacted on my ancestors, and because America will always kill those things which first gave light, I feel most rooted in the home we built here from blood. I feel it when I'm standing in my parents' backyard, or when I'm behind the wheel on a road toward home. I felt it most acutely when I stood in the red dirt of my maternal grandmother's yard, when I realized she had fought through white patriarchy to raise my mom and so many other children all by herself. I felt it when my aunt Hattie gave me a bit of that red dirt to taste. They tell me this is something folks do in Africa—eat the dirt for its nutrients. I can't say whether or not that's true, but I do know that dirt had something passed down in it. It had something like a motherland in it.

ASIA CREECH

Born in Atlanta, Georgia

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

I feel most indigenous when I dance, when I sing, when I look in the mirror at all this glorious melanin.

MYISHA J. MASTERS

Born in Detroit, Michigan

Currently Lives in New Orleans, Louisiana

The first time I stepped foot in New Orleans
my life
was changed
The people, so free
The colors, so vibrant
The air, thick and heavy
laced with whispers of distant ancestors
dancing
and singing
Ritual in congo square
The energy of this place flowed through my bones in waves
that were in perfect time with the second line celebrating life
or the passing on of another

The first time I stepped foot in New Orleans
I was taken in
greeted with
“welcome home”
and I knew
in that moment
that this
is where I belong

TARYN R. DORSEY

Born in Portland, Oregon

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

Even though I grew up in the Northwest, I felt the most rooted and indigenous when I went to New Orleans, and when I went to Atlanta and even DC. For really, New Orleans was just Blackjoy personified. And, ooh, that freedom of dancing in the street and people, you know, egging you on to do so. The music I think, really, yeah, if anything, I think New Orleans made me feel the most free and most Black and most beautiful.

TERI ELLEN CROSS DAVIS

**Born and Raised in Cleveland, Ohio
Currently Lives Outside of Washington, DC**

I feel the most indigenous when I am away from other people in this country, whether it's a hike in a heavily wooded area or a wide-open space—where there's no one around, I can be myself. When no one is there to pigeonhole me, or question my identity, my race, my body, my presence. I have oddly felt the most indigenous outside this country, when I visited Ireland, and no one questioned my being a poet and being an American and being Black, because they knew the story of who I was from my skin and they admired the choice I made to become a poet or to acknowledge that that's what moved within me. And it saddens me that in most of the places where there are more people who are not of color, I don't feel at home. I feel at risk. I also feel the most indigenous when I am in the four walls of the home of my mother. That's where I feel my roots. A home that

held my grandmother and holds my mother and has held me.

BILLY WEALE

Born in Mesa, Arizona

**Currently Lives in Vancouver,
British Columbia, Canada**

I was nineteen years old, the first time I was ever in a room of mostly Black people, there were probably two white kids in the whole room. But to have nineteen years old be the first time you've ever been in a room with mostly people who looked like you and be really just understood, it was a relief. It was a big sigh at the end of a long day, it was just this huge weight off my shoulders. It was the first time I realized that lack of representation in my social media and just in my day-to-day life. It was the first time I realized how far removed from my culture I was and the lack of education I had on myself. I feel most indigenous when I'm around other Black people, or even just other people of color, people with rich culture and people who just understand what it's like to be a visible minority.

BEVERLY AARONS

Born in Chicago, Illinois

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

When I think about the word “indigenous,” I think about being rooted in a place, having a long history there, having a kind of permanence, a claim, almost like a genetic claim, like, your blood is in the soil. I think I feel most indigenous when I’m alone in nature. When I’m out in a forest, walking among the trees, when I’m on the beach by myself, when I’m looking out at the water in the mountains, I’m looking at the trees and I’m looking at a flower anywhere, like when my hands are in the dirt. When I’m sitting in the grass, it’s not like I’m thinking, “I am indigenous,” no. I just feel like I belong here. This is real, this is the real world. Those mountains, the water, the birds that are flying around chirping—that’s real. Everything else is just bullshit. So I feel rooted. I feel like I belong here. And it doesn’t really matter, like the geography. Like when I’m out in

the woods, when I'm out in nature alone, away from other human beings. When I'm on the beach, when I'm out on the water—oh, I love being in a kayak or a paddleboard or a sailboat. I just started taking up sailing. And when I'm out there, I feel like this is it. I belong here. Because it doesn't matter, nationality or passports or immigration status, all that stuff is just bullshit. I belong on Planet Earth. Whether I am in Africa or the United States or you know, I don't care where it is. I belong there. And I'm reminded of that when I'm in nature.

VANESSA MENDEZ

Global Citizen

**Born and Currently Lives in
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago**

I feel most indigenous, rooted, not displaced on J'ouvert morning, chippin down the road, mud, water, paint, oil, yeah. On my body as if it's a soul washing, you know? A few things actually, not just J'ouvert, but going in the river, humming a deep belly song without words or with words. I was gifted a song in my teenage years, I think I was sixteen.

Yeah, that song I heard, I found out years after actually, a few years ago, like about two years, three years ago, that it's [about] a deity of some sort. And he deals with the river and the water and prosperity and the color blue and white and black.

I feel most indigenous when I go for a walk in the bush. When I pick chanca piedra, or as we call it "seed the under leaf" or "bush," from the backyard and I remember my grandmother on

my mother's side (Grenadian by birth, from Westerhold)—I feel most indigenous when I remember her telling me, “Nessie, go and pick some bush.” That bush is good for belly troubles [like] diarrhea, woman issues, upset stomach, fibroid issues . . . or to steam your yoni on the ninth day after you have your newborn . . . and it is amazing that bush—we use it mainly to get rid of kidney stones. Wow.

DUEWA FRAZIER

Born in Brooklyn, New York

Currently Lives in St. Louis, Missouri

I feel most indigenous when I recall the stories from my now deceased maternal grandmother about our family. She spoke of her roots in Mississippi and my maternal grandfather's roots in South Carolina. She spoke of connections to the South and also of what was known about slavery's impact on our family. I also feel most indigenous when thinking of our family's roots that were traced by one of my uncles. He did years of research to find out how our family came to be. I have also had talks with my father about my paternal lineage, and the family background from the South and the Caribbean by way of Africa. I can look at the pictures of my great-grandparents, who I never met, to imagine their parents, and their parents before them, and how our family came to be from Africa to the present. We were here. We have always

been here. This is when I feel most indigenous.

VALERIE CURTIS-NEWTON

Born in Rockville, Connecticut

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

I would have to say it's when I'm with my people, and some of that is racialized and some of it is people with whom I share experiences. But I'm most myself when I'm with my people without reservation, when it feels familiar. When I was young, I memorized a whole bunch of poems by the great masters, and the one that this question reminds me of, it's a poem called "Weekend Glory" by Maya Angelou. And the last lines of it are "My life ain't heaven / but it sure ain't hell. / I'm not on top / but I call it swell / if I'm able to work / and get paid right / and have the luck to be Black / on a Saturday night." There's something about that Saturday-night Black feeling that, when you have it, when you know it, when you have a sense that it's within your reach, that sort of makes everything okay—I can get through my week, I can face whatever the

challenges are. Because I know in the end, that I'm going to end up with my people in that sense, we got this, and as long as I can do that I'm able to get through that day and then the next day, plan for the next day and the next day.

TRUDY ROZANI

Born in Mthatha, Eastern Cape, South Africa

**Currently Lives in Johannesburg,
Gauteng, South Africa**

I feel most indigenous when I am in the rural areas of my hometown where my parents were born and raised. I also feel most indigenous when I make music inspired by my own culture.

R. ERICA DOYLE

**Born and Currently Lives in
Brooklyn, New York**

Where the hummingbirds carry the spirits of my ancestors.

Where the scarlet ibis follows the paths of our canoes.

You think I'm only driving standard up North Coast Road for show?

Just along this mountain shelf our heads were hung from stakes.

In the cocoa valleys we swallowed them whole into our cells.

Street vendor ask, *How long you in New York?*

On Morne Coco Road, I fade into anyone else on a veranda.

SHAYLA LAWSON

Born in Rochester, Minnesota

Currently Lives in Los Angeles, California

I wake up in the morning and I see my hair; I love it. It is root, rooted. I love that it is a continual craft work that is a part of my connection to my ancestors. It makes me feel beautiful. It makes me feel like I'm always going to be alive.

PHILIP NII OKAIDJA RANDOLPH

Born in Accra, Ghana

Currently Lives in Tacoma, Washington

When I can speak to someone who is not, I wouldn't say from my country, but they can generally understand and relate to my struggle and where I'm coming from and share their own story—the very fact that they can feel comfortable enough to even share with me when I'm able to communicate on a Ghanaian level, and this is, this is something a lot of Ghanaians, I would say most melanated people, have in common, when you can speak without speaking.

TIM LENNON

Born in Providence, Rhode Island
Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

I was wholly formed by this place. And so I think the closest, as I understand it, the closest to that feeling I think I can get is when I'm on the Atlantic Ocean. Standing, I'm standing on shore, looking out at the Atlantic Ocean—all my ancestors, to my knowledge, came from that direction.

SALMA SIDDICK

Born in Harare, Zimbabwe

Currently Lives in Renton, Washington

The foundation of what being African is, is universal to all of us, which is why I feel the most indigenous when I am around African people, even if I have never been to a specific country. And that was something I never experienced until moving here, when I was trying to find a place and people that I connected the most to. And I really found value in that because most of the time we have a shared experience, right? We've all immigrated, our situations may have been slightly different, most of the time they weren't. Because you're definitely treated a different way if you're an immigrant from Africa versus an immigrant from Great Britain, right? And that's both within the former INS, now the USCIS, and within society. So there's this kind of notion of a shared experience, even if you don't even know what that experience is. I feel a connectedness to

that. I also feel a connectedness to my people in a way that I never have before. But I also realize my people are a multitude of things. Right? You are my people.

EBO BARTON

Born in Los Angeles, California

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

I was taught to bring Tupperware and Ziplocs to all-you-can-eat buffets. And that feels, just so you know, like that's who I am and need to be, is that. If it's an all-you-can-eat then I'm gonna take your language and drag it up and make it mine. Right? Where it's like you said, *all I can eat*. And then my cupboard, my spice cupboard definitely makes me feel [indigenous]. And then I feel like, as a very real poor person, we have those meals that are whatever it is that we have, and we just sort of fake, like, whatever it is, and we make it work. That often is what makes me feel like super indigenous, where I'm like, I can create something amazing from my magical spice cupboard and whatever it is that got left in my refrigerator, and make it edible and delicious and survive the next maybe two to three days. Yeah, like that is always something that I . . . yeah. Where I'm just

like, yeah, this must be my ancestors, right? Like, I made this happen.

LAUREN K. ALLEYNE

Born in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Currently Lives in Harrisonburg, Virginia

In the sea. The sea is home.

NADIR SALAAM

**Born in New Haven, Connecticut
Currently Lives in Bellevue, Washington**

I say, dancing, man—when I’m dancing or watching people dance. And I could say that the only place right now that we have that you don’t see no white faces in, still, like exclusively Black kids, is on, like, the street, dancing. You know, it’s like, it’s too insulated. Yes, the only place that we have that’s our own, and even if they copied out one or two that might come in, but that’s going to be popular, because it’s so good. And you know, it’s something that just is natural to Africans, like the way we move, the way we dance, the way the beat hit, the rhythms—all that is just something that’s uniquely us. And people try to, you know, people could try to copy-cat, but when I’m with my people or watching people dancing, in that environment of rhythms and moves, and then I can see the parallels. So not only do you just see us being ourselves, but then

you look at continental Africans also, you see the same moves, the same rhythms. And then you also even see sharing the styles, and not like they see different rhythms and different movements here, they'll build off theirs but then it comes back. And it just shows a continuation of how cultures are embedded within DNA and not within society. And that always, like, you know, makes me feel connected, it makes me feel connected. It doesn't matter, my experience or what my environment is, it's still that African in me, that compels me to move this way and feel this way. So that's when I feel the most indigenous, you know, within my artistic expressions of movement. Peace.

TAROMI LOURDES JOSEPH

Born in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Currently Lives in Atlanta, Georgia

I feel most indigenous when meditating, when trying to connect with my late grandparents; I never knew them. I don't have much information about them. I have pictures, I have names, but they passed before I was born. But I feel connected to them and their history and it gives me power. It gives me a sense of renewal. I also feel grounded when I see people who look like myself, whether it's here, you know, as African Americans, or back home in Trinidad, or up here as Caribbean Americans, when they make major achievements. I tell myself, *You know this is the right time. I'm in the right place. Anything is possible.* And that, too, gives me a sense of renewal and a sense of power and hope. And nothing can stand in my way. No wind can blow me down.

JACQUELINE HARAKIS

Born in Nairobi, Kenya

**Currently Lives in Buckinghamshire,
United Kingdom**

I feel most indigenous, rooted, and not displaced when I am fully tuned into myself. I do this by working every single day on my mindset. Yes, I notice a lot of negativity going on outside of me. Like, what I choose on a daily basis is self-reflection, through meditation, through journaling, through prayer, through connecting with nature. I really love it when I get to go outside and just walk, bare feet on the grass, and feel the ground under my feet, be in the woods, being in the woods with the trees, with wise old trees, and just smelling nature—that's when I feel rooted. And I have to be in a meditative state, which I try to be on a daily basis. And by just appreciation, appreciating the good things that surround me and sending love to those that are having a hard time. If I'm able to support in a way that is seen or felt, I do that whenever I can.

But I feel most rooted when I tune into myself. And I want to say galvanized, I galvanize myself so that when I step out of my safe environment—which, if I’m honest, in this global pandemic, that has been my home with my family—if I’m going to step out, I prepare myself accordingly. And I find myself listening to audio that keeps me rooted. And a lot of times that is music that is meditative—not just any music, meditative music that makes me go into myself. That makes me, reminds me to appreciate the sound on my skin, the wind blowing past my body, and me feeling it, the green of the trees, the beauty of the flowers that are springing up in this time of the spring over here in the UK. And it’s just when I am in a place where I’m appreciating the beauty that is surrounding me, that keeps me rooted wherever I am. I’m not in Africa right now, I’m in the UK. When I’m in Africa, sometimes, I feel displaced simply because I am in a house that does not allow for, or rather that has no access to, nature outside. Meaning that it’s concrete. There’s a concrete jungle. Oh, that really displaces me. So wherever I am in this world, if I’m able to connect with nature, I feel rooted.

ROMAN O'BRIEN

Born in Austin, Texas

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

I think I feel very indigenous when I'm realizing that no one can tell me what to do, that my people have really been through it all and really encompass everything that life is. And now, I'm really not going to take anything from anyone anymore.

MAYA BECK

**Born and Currently Lives in
San Diego, California**

I feel most indigenous when surrounded by the flora of my childhood: eucalyptus trees, bougainvillea flowers, jasmine bushes, ice plant cover, bird-of-paradise . . . Although I came to know these plants by living among them in Southern California, they, too, are transplants with greater families and original homes elsewhere. I feel rooted when thriving together with these childhood friends; when at home, unowned and blooming.

RONE SHAVERS

Born in Chicago, Illinois

Currently Lives in Albany, New York

It's odd, but true. I feel most indigenous wherever the fuck I am because, yes, I am indigenous wherever I choose to be. What I mean by that is there hasn't been a single place in this world where a Black man hasn't stepped foot, so for me to feel rooted, all I need do is (re)claim land in the name of all my OG BIPOC and not let anybody tell me otherwise. Ever.

Still, I get what you mean. I feel so rooted because my whole life has been about finding, creating, and meting out "safe" spaces. All to say that I was never accepted by any group when younger—I'm such an old nerd, they called me Herb—so I had to make my own way. Mainly, most of my life I've had to fight for the right to belong wherever I am, so when I'm made to not feel like I fit in, I remind myself that it's something I've been through before. I tell myself

that I'm in a more or less metaphorical place I've lived in before, and well, I'm then left with two choices. I can retreat into insecure obscurity, or I can just tell myself that I really, truly, sometimes preternaturally belong wherever I happen to be, and that I'm meant to be there. That it's my personal manifest destiny, my territory, and it's all mine . . . I'm most indigenous when I'm at my most mentally expansive.

CLAUDIA ALICK

Born in Memphis, Tennessee

Currently Lives in the Bay Area, California

Black indigeneity is often erased, although it is historically obvious that those of us displaced from Africa during the Middle Passage were, in fact, indigenous peoples.

OKANOMODÉ

**Born and Currently Lives in
Seattle, Washington**

[Rooted] When I'm with my folk in the global Black cosmic village.

[Rooted] In all spaces and places with other Black weirdos, warriors, and freaks, elders, oracles, and Black magik women.

[Rooted] On the dance floor in eye-locked communion with my soul-kin, in '70s, '80s, & '90s R&B ecstasy, exchanging life force with the DJ!

[Rooted] When receiving whispered transmissions from ancestral realms.

INTERLUDE:
ROOT-WORK
FOR EVERYONE BLACK

WISHES FOR 1:11

In the names of the most merciful Sky Mommies, including those who answer to the name Oshun, here is a blessing for the golden-hearted:

May your collective attachment to upholding White Supremacist Patriarchal modes of thought and action give way to a Truth more profoundly rooted in Nature and the natural world.

May you have the fortitude to continue thinking critically in a thoughtless and reactive world.

May your soul settle and give way to an undeniable truth—you are loved, you are safe, and you are protected. You belong. You matter.

May this critical moment in your life be worth the growth and evolution you've actualized as you release and heal from generations

of pain and suffering.

WISHES FOR 2:22

In the names of the most merciful Sky Mommies, including those who answer to the name Ala, here is a blessing for the steel-bellied:

May each sunny day feel like it is especially for you.

May the sun treat you like a long-lost lover, returned—and hold nothing back.

May you give in to what gives you a sense of belonging.

And when the sun lingers in their cloudy covers, refusing to emerge—allow yourself the same languor, the same natural rhythm.

Take forever to rise when you need to, allow the most forbidden thing—rest.

May you hear the people who surround you say with certainty—*I see you and I value you. I see you. I value you. I see you. I value you.*

May your hearing become so selective you can no longer detect anything beyond that heartbeat of love, only love.

WISHES FOR 3:33

In the names of the most merciful Sky Mommies, including those who answer to the name Oya, here is a blessing for the copper-handed:

May you hear yourself making a new path through the ashes of the old-growth forest that you used to be.

May your mind not idle in place around the Hows and the Whys of old-growth forests burned to the ground and still smoldering—you are hovering near the smoke . . . your roots are still wick deep in the Earth.

May you hear the tremor in your voice as you speak your intentions aloud to someone you trust. May you understand what courage is really made of in moments like this.

May your intentions stretch out with the energy of potential beyond where you can go at the moment. May those who are already connected to you beyond space-time feel the tug on this dimensionless line going out in every direction so that you can laugh with recognition *together* when the better reality you created in your mind with your sacred imagination begins manifesting before you in your life.

BLACK POWERFUL

When do you feel most powerful?

RASHAWNA WILSON

**Born and Currently Lives in
Bronx, New York**

When do I feel most powerful, when do I feel most powerful?

When I am home, when I am home.

When do I feel most powerful, when do I feel most powerful?

When I am loved, when I am loved.

When do I feel most powerful, when do I feel most powerful?

With every song, with every song.

When do I feel most powerful, when do I feel most powerful?

When I am home, when I am home. When I am home, when I am home.

ZEPHYRA R. FENTRESS

Born in Portland, Oregon

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

When I am deep in my imagination. Living in a good book or singing my favorite song, I feel most powerful.

SAVANNAH BOWEN

Born in Bronx, New York
Currently Lives in Jacmel, Haiti

When I create. When I write. When I sing. When I am crying tears of clarity.

I feel powerful when I am sharing my feelings with God, and I feel the wind begin to rush from the edges of the ocean and up to meet my skin.

VIVIAN D. PHILLIPS

**Born and Currently Lives in
Seattle, Washington**

I feel most powerful when I have been able to open a door for someone. It can be a real door, a metaphorical door, or a door to a new opportunity or a particular kind of shine/focus. There is something about performing this simple act that feeds my spirit and makes me feel powerful, and I feel equally as bad when I don't but could have.

ANDRÉ O. HOILETTE

Born in Kingston, Jamaica
Currently Lives in Denver, Colorado

i feel most powerful calling to ancestors and to the spirits that are around me, bringing them into my home. i called them with whiskey and sometimes hand-rolled tobacco. i called them with the stones that i love, found on walking trips, with fossils found in creek beds. i called them with my wounds; one where my heart would be. they know who in this world has injured me. they know who in this world aims to peel my black skin like a grape.

i call the spirits to me but not to be ridden. not like the horse, cheval. i stop letting spirits ride me in my twenties. their want is a hunger in the deepest pit. it claws manic at anything to be consumed.

now i bring them closer and set protections around myself, while i ready the mint tea. i cut some ginger and crush it for the

tea. i draw a hot bath and put frankincense on the hot coals. frankincense holds the spirits, settles their hunger so i may send them into the world to perch on the backs of those who hate our beauty. their spirit hands like raptor claws, anchored into the descendants of enslavers.

JOANNA DAVIS-MCELLIGATT

Born in Wichita, Kansas

Currently Lives in Denton, Texas

I feel most powerful when, as Mother Audre Lorde says, I “use my strength in the service of my vision.” I have spent a lot of my time being the only Black person in a sea of white folk, and it’s very difficult to maintain a sense of equilibrium in those environments. They’re designed to make you feel inferior, and incapable of entering into your power—and they do such a good job of making you feel small and confined. I spent years and years being made to feel like I couldn’t speak out, and I was so afraid of being obliterated by whiteness that I wouldn’t. But Mother Lorde also reminds us that silence won’t save or protect us, that it will only make us sick, until the words come out anyway.

My strength is my patience, and my vision is that Black people are integral to the future. When I am able to carve out space with

language, I make a place for myself to enter into where I can exist fully and completely as myself. That is my power.

CHELSEY A. RICHARDSON

**Born and Currently Lives in
Renton, Washington**

Power is something I both struggle with and delight in. I feel it most when I feel connected to someone. I think that connection is a conduit for the kind of electricity that prompts me to feel like there is a world worth fighting for.

RONE SHAVERS

Born in Chicago, Illinois

Currently Lives in Albany, New York

There is no singular action or instance in which I feel more powerful, because I am powerful. I am all the MF power, and I manifest evidence of my power every day, often through the use of five deceptively simple, but surprisingly effective words. These words are: (1) “Yes,” (2) “No,” (3) “Maybe,” and (4-5) “Fuck you.” Now, the rationale behind my choice of vocabulary seems incredibly self-explanatory to me, but for the uninitiated, here are the reasons why:

Yes: because self-affirmation and the affirmation of one’s power is always necessary.

No: because it’s also necessary to stop others’ attempts to take power from you.

Maybe: because it’s the best way to reclaim, retain, or remind

yourself of your power.

Fuck you: because it needs to be said, and especially because there are some people—those who don't understand “yes,” “no,” or “maybe”—who really need to hear it.

So then, when do I feel powerful? I feel powerful whenever I think, speak, or act, because I am determined to do things by and of my own volition.

RACHEL PHILLIPS

Born in Spokane, Washington

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

&

ZAHYR K-R LAUREN

Born in San Jose, California

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

Rachel: Power is about changing behavior, influencing thought and action. I feel most powerful when my words create tangible change in another person's life.

Zahyr: I feel most powerful when I am in my art practice. The act of creating, and the knowledge that what I create will bring light to Black lives, allows me to conjure emotions. For me, power lies in the love of what it means to be able to create at this level and also be Black.

RAINA J. LEÓN

**Born and Currently Lives in
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

a child witnesses his birth

mother said we are not supposed to live forever. mother said
women open the dead gates, usher the spirit into ether commu-
nion. mother said we make the body brave. we carry, but we are
supposed to go too. mother said all vessels break. mother said make
way and return and to water be water. mother said the child. mother
said i will give him life, not my loss. mother said come come come.
i turn and set my head to light.

angel kiss my left eyelid. stork hold release this neck.

the child pushes root-nest. the midwife brushes his hair.

the child bathes in mother. water. rush out blood for push. she
says a name.

mother says spark and sputter. mother says light light. mothers
says feed.

it is my name.

god, oh god. this body.

NAKEESA M. FRAZIER-JENNINGS

Born in Washington, DC

Currently Lives in Pierce County, Washington

I feel (equally as) powerful when I show myself unconditional love and when I engage in advocacy (for myself and for others).

When I was very young, my grandmother told me that I was special and told me that I deserved good things and deserved to have a good life. She modeled unconditional self-love for me. It is because of her that I show unconditional love to myself. Thank goodness she told me and showed me these things. Thank goodness I believed her!

I do not remember a time when I did not have to advocate either for myself or for others. Not enough of us feel empowered to do it, but as a Black person, I have no choice.

REJOICE SIGAUKE

**Born and Currently Lives in
Dublin, Republic of Ireland**

When I serve my people and community in my capacity, it is the greatest feeling that can't be replicated and makes me feel powerful.

I believe that many of us are truly fortunate to be in the places, in spaces, and around people who keep the Ubuntu connection alive!

Life has its challenges, especially for the Black communities, who can be the minority in the countries where we reside outside the continent. I have had the pleasure to share my resources, knowledge, and support, as well as listening and learning, from those near and far from me.

The spirit of Ubuntu is "I am because you are!"

For centuries, we've experienced an erasure via colonialism and slave trade.

Africa still has a limited amount of knowledge left, our elders

who have lived past the mortality age are the only sages who can share and impart their wisdom. It is an honor and a privilege to be standing in places that have been paved by people of color! To me, this is a gift to gain access and the time to restore what has been taken by uniting and bridging the divide that has left many of us feeling displaced and disconnected for centuries! Africa is home to every Black child, we are the sons and daughters of the soil!

MATTIE M. MOONEY

Born of Liberian/Grebo Diaspora in Dallas, Texas

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

I feel most powerful when my daughter talks. She is so self-assured, confident, and aware. All these things that I wish that I was at her age (she's twelve). She has this stare that just pierces through you. This is important because at her age I could not look people in the eye. I was so insecure and scared of everything. My kid will stare at you right in the eyes and never ever waiver, even when she is scared or unsure. I am mind-blown that this kind of life force came from me. I am in awe that I took part in crafting and guiding this young human. Her existence makes me feel both powerful and powerless. Powerless because I know that she is not a possession, and I can only guide her, but I cannot make her believe or do anything in the long run. I feel powerless now having to trust my own guidance, but also her interpretation of

that guidance. It's scary when I think about what the future of her could be, but also I'm an anxious personality; so maybe I have nothing to be afraid of.

MARIA HAMILTON ABEGUNDE

**Born in New Jersey
Currently Living in Indiana**

I feel powerful when I am naked and dreaming. To be with my own skin, not just in it; and to carry that skin and all that it remembers into the liminal space of dreamtime—this is what it means to be free. To recognize when the dream can be invited into the now time and lived—this is what it is to be a child of Spirit, Spirit itself, and most certainly one with the ancestors and all the universes we inhabit. When I am naked, the edges of my skin touch the air and sea, roots and earth, and I know without doubt that I am everything and nothing and will one day live forever in the crest of the wave, a filament of dirt; the dream that is dreaming me and that has not been dreamed yet.

Some days when I am far away from the island, I turn my head into the wind and the sea and salt greet me. I stop everything and

let them settle on me. For those brief moments I am sucking a ripe mango and eating fried fish with my hands. I am dancing under the moon at low tide and waiting for my beloved to wrap his arms around me.

MARIE-OVIDE GINA DORCELY

Born in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti

Currently Lives in Boston, Massachusetts

I am most powerful when I am under the protection of my shades, there and here.

I gather myself up for the onslaught, as I have for what seems like countless centuries. But it isn't coming today. I'll be spared. Some sanctum must have lit up with all my shades. Or the wind may simply—merely—have breezed across and not down on my prosecutor, tantalizing her mind into forgetfulness. It was the shades. Their work is everlasting. The moments of evil and their monuments are assuming their place. Dead relics. But there is a struggle to breathe life continually into their fallen pieces. In the works of the others, mine, I am.

All evil falls.

ANITA WHITE (A.K.A. LADY A)

**Born and Currently Lives in
Seattle, Washington**

I feel most powerful when I'm on stage, when I'm able to tell a story through my lyrics and have somebody actually walk up to me and tell me that something I said or am saying touches their heart. That makes me feel powerful. Makes me feel powerful when I can give back to somebody and give away a part of myself so that they are empowered. My new motto has been "empowered women help empower women." And so I'm hoping what little power I have, or the power that I project when I'm on stage or when I'm just speaking to somebody, helps give some power to somebody else.

DOMINIQUE STEPHENS

**Born and Currently Lives in
Seattle, Washington**

I am at my highest power when I am vocalizing. Especially in the sun. That's when you can't tell me a damn thing! Can't even bother to look at folx until I am ready.

And when it happens . . . Bish! That's that Black Gurl Slap!

NAJAH MONIQUE TODD

Born in Oakland, California

Currently Lives in Tacoma, Washington

I feel my most powerful when I'm investing in myself and my future . . . when I'm working to be a beacon that shows the vast possibilities we have as Black people. . . . I feel my most powerful when I am inspiring Black imagination. . . . The more I inspire and become inspired, I realize I also feel my most powerful when remembering no one comes after a group of individuals, like what has happened to Black people over the course of our existence, unless there is some magic they are trying to either crush or steal . . . or both.

RAGE HEZEKIAH

Born in Beverly, Massachusetts
Currently Lives in Pownal, Vermont

I feel most powerful when I am moving my body, stacking firewood or lugging wood pellets to heat my home. When I am hiking and I gain a view of the quilted horizon. I feel most powerful when I am dancing, my body moving in full expression. I feel whole and alive and healthy and blessed. I feel most powerful when I am singing, belting Whitney Houston or Lizzo in my kitchen. When I am driving with the windows down and wearing sunglasses, grounded in a moment my fourteen-year-old self might have wished for me.

BEVERLY AARONS

Born in Chicago, Illinois

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

I feel powerful when I am telling people to go fuck themselves. Let's be very honest here, you know, I feel powerful when I am telling people to back off out of my life. And what I have experienced over the years is that since I'm a Black woman, many, many people believe that they know my life better than I do. And that they not only have the authority and the right, the obligation, to dictate to me how to live my life, to dictate to me my thoughts—I've had the oddest experiences. And I don't think I've ever really gotten used to this type of dynamic. And so I feel really powerful when I tell those people to go fuck themselves, basically. And because, for me, I think that living in a world like that, where people try to define you and try to cage you, can be very suffocating. And when you're young, when you're a young person and you're still getting to know yourself—I'm

going to say for me, as I was still getting to know myself as a young person, I took on a lot of those stories, I took on those definitions, I took on those narratives to the point where I didn't know who I really was, but I was taking on the definitions that other people were putting on me. And I had to go through an entire process. And really, I don't think that process ever ends, because those narratives are deep, multi-layered, and have been going on. It's almost like I live in a world where I walk around, I know who I am, I know what I'm doing, but it's almost like, they are megaphones just out in the society, on the TV, on the internet—I don't watch television, but for those who do. Everywhere, even out in the street, when you walk on the street. I walk down the street and people were, like, Black bitch or whatever, they, like, saying crazy shit to me. And so you are living in a world like that where the world has foot soldiers out there to tell you who you are, to tell you you're a Black bitch. You can never ever stop redefining and defining and holding on to your definition of who you are. It's nonstop every day, day in, day out. So there's power in that because there is a battle for your mind, for your spirit, for your energy, for your time, for your body, for your soul, for all your resources to be usurped for other people's purposes, because we live in a world where if you are a Black woman, you've been defined as slave, slave! That's it. You're a slave, and the slave is somebody who serves others. So I feel powerful when I am not being a slave to other people's definitions and agendas, when I am taking my time,

INTRODUCTION

my energy, my mind, my life force and directing it into myself, into my agenda, into my goals. That is where I feel most powerful.

SALENNA GREEN

Born in Vancouver, Washington

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

I honestly feel most powerful during a good orgasm.

I feel most powerful doing yoga and feeling my body holding itself in space and time.

I feel most powerful when I allow my energy to flow freely and feel it fill every corner of a room. Since I was a child I've felt powerful and exhilarated during thunder and lightning storms.

My most powerful moments are when I'm appreciating my deep energetic and spiritual connection to myself and all else.

JAMES CAGNEY

**Born and Currently Lives in
Oakland, California**

As a poet, my voice makes me feel most powerful. However I may have felt at other intersections of my life, standing before a room of strangers and performing what I've written, what I love, is a humbling, powerful thing. A poem is a kind of testimony and it can only be transmitted through the truth in one's heart. To testify to my experiences of beauty or horror and be witnessed is an overpowering sensation. Writing is a healing curative—and giving voice to what's been written is to release a pressurized valve. To write is to journey, to speak is to fly. I remember a night years ago when my feelings were dark and sticky and awful—I forced myself to attend an open mic. The room was so crowded and I felt so alone. My poems were angry petitions for release and I kept reciting them until something unlocked. But that night and in a room where

people searched for phone numbers and other temporary salves, I found myself needing something deeper. I needed to scream. I opened my mouth and for the moment the room stopped its distraction, ceased fidgeting. The sudden silent attention scared me, but I kept pouring it out. Writing was an act of composing a healing prescription, speaking it, and being witnessed; finding empathy and connection was frightening, humbling, and essential.

AMBER A. DOE

Born in Washington, DC

Currently Lives in Tucson, Arizona

I don't feel powerful often. I feel the most myself taking care of the people I love.

CURTIS L. CRISLER

Born in Gary, Indiana

Currently Lives in Fort Wayne, Indiana

I feel most powerful when I awake every morning and take that first breath that I'm conscious about. Likewise, when I pay all my bills at the beginning of the month. I have an entire month free from the tethers of life. I am blessed to take my three deep breaths before I fall to sleep, hopefully to take a great one when I awake. Then I can get into them guts called living.

CRYSTAL D. GOOD

**Born and Currently Lives in
Charleston, West Virginia**

I feel most powerful when I win. And winning comes in different ways. For me, sometimes it comes in the courtroom. Sometimes it comes when I meet you face-to-face and you have harmed me and I can look at you and you know that I know who you are. Sometimes a win is when I overcome my own battles to think that I am just the worst piece of shit. And then I rise up and I recognize my humanity. I recognize how I learned to cope. And then I move on. I am most powerful when I win, and when I win I know that I can win again. I wear a T-shirt. Diana Ross wore it. I saw it on Instagram and it says, "I'm gonna win. I'm going to win." I feel most powerful when I walk in the phrase "I'm going to win," and then I win again.

LONDON LAWRENCE

Born in Houston, Texas

Currently Lives in Austin, Texas

I feel most powerful when we are connected, when we are one and when we are recognized for all that we exude. Something that's very interesting is that oftentimes we're talking as if, there's only one of us that can sit at the table when, in reality, we all can sit at the table. And sometimes we forget as we journey through this thing called life that we can pull up the chair and allow our brothers and allow our sisters to sit at the table with us and feel most powerful when we are connected. When we are celebrated, when we are in our truth, when we are in our bag, okay, that metaphoric bag of being able to be accepted for all that we are for our flying and for our individuality, for our strength, our beauty, for our undeniable ability to continue to exist. When I see you and you see me, I feel powerful. I feel celebrated. I feel loved.

VANESSA MENDEZ

Global Citizen

Born and Currently Lives in

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

I feel most powerful when I remember. Memory—when I remember.

AMBER FLAME

Born in Austin, Texas

Currently Lives in Tacoma, Washington

I feel powerful when it is easy to show up as my best self and the creativity flows and the inspiration flows. When I've gone into visionary mode, whether it's deeply personal or for work, or for a friend or for my child, but I know that I am operating on my highest levels. I am elevated. I feel most powerful when I sing with my whole self.

BLACK POWERFUL

CHET'LA SEBREE

Born in Chester, Pennsylvania

Currently Lives in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania

I feel most powerful when I am fully present in my body. I feel like as a Black woman, growing up in predominantly white spaces, I always felt like I was trying to make myself smaller, puzzle myself into a way that was acceptable. And the older I get the more I feel confident, comfortable in my body, but like not just physically in my body, but like physically doing things with my body. And so I love practicing yoga. In college, I was in a West African dance company. In general, I just love to dance, love to move my body, love to be present in my form, in a way that I just don't feel like generally the world wants me to be. You know, even when I think about the way that we work every day, most of us sitting down at a desk. And so I feel powerful when I am fully present in my body, whether that's in movement, or in a high-waisted pant and crop

top. I just love celebrating my curves, and the way my body moves to music and feeling at home in myself— as I, you know, said in response to “Where do I feel most indigenous?” I don’t feel like there’s necessarily always a place where I feel at home. But when I feel at home in my body, in a space, I feel powerful and confident and like I can do anything.

ROMAN O'BRIEN

Born in Austin, Texas

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

I feel powerful when I reflect, but mostly I feel powerful when I foresee things, like Garnet's power of future vision in *Steven Universe*—when I do specific actions to make sure certain outcomes don't occur, because I'm using my big old brain to see into the future and understand the full butterfly effect all types of actions can have, because then it's like I'm actually seeing the big picture. Like, I'm actually seeing the world and changing things.

MAYA BECK

**Born and Currently Lives in
San Diego, California**

I feel powerful when I feel connected, when I tell a story and feel the other being moved, when I sense that minds have been changed or eyes opened, and when the world has been given just the gentlest push into a better direction for us all.

NIA SHUMAKE

**Born and Currently Lives in
Detroit, Michigan**

I feel most powerful when I embrace my softness.

I've learned to lean into that softness in every aspect of life in the ways I affirm and encourage others as well as in setting boundaries and expressing my disdain. My world experiences often make me feel as though I must be the very opposite of soft to be deserving of love, kindness, and respect. But my true strength is found when I navigate life solidly aligned with who I am at the core. By showing up as anything other than that in this world, I am subconsciously telling myself that "I am not enough" as a woman and, moreover, a human.

JADA ROCHELLE GRISSON

Born in Norfolk, Virginia
Currently Lives New Jersey

I feel most powerful when I acknowledge that I am not alone—and have never been. When I am in community with people that love me—even the ones that aren't physically present anymore. When I am brave enough to situate myself in vastness and contend with the fact that my life is multitudinous. I am everything my ancestors ever were and everything I will need to be for as long as I'm here. When I recollect that I am in infinite community, I feel most powerful.



[illegible]

INTRODUCTION

WISHES FOR 4:44

In the names of the most merciful Sky Mommies, including those who answer to the name Yemaya, here is a blessing for the iron-minded:

May your people come for you when you need them the most. May you be surrounded by love, safety, and protection and never be so lonely that you can't sleep through the longest night. May your children choose your real love and care and not the pantomime of parenting being offered by others. May you remind yourself on the worst of days that you have yourself, your beauty, your power, your intelligence, and your imagination to dream into existence exactly what you deserve—joy!

WISHES FOR 5:55

In the names of the most merciful Sky Mommies, including those who answer to the name Odudua, here is a blessing for the silver-tongued:

May your awareness of your mistakes align with your efforts and actions to remedy and course correct in the aftermath.

May your negative self-talk give way to clarity around who you are and how you are supported.

May every single fake friend and supporter disappear/dissolve into dust like half of the universe after Whatshisface snapped his fingers.

May you find renewal in the process of starting over from scratch. May you recognize the luxury of such opportunities as well.



you are not your wounds. You are not the ways you have been wounded. You are more than what has happened to you—you are also making things happen for yourself and others.

INTRODUCTION

BEN KWESI GANTT CRENTSIL

**Born and Currently Lives in
the Washington Metropolitan Area, Maryland**

Deidre (Mother):

So what does this sound like when you claim yourself?

Ben (Son, age 3):

It sounds like this . . . [applause with a beat].

OKANOMODÉ

**Born and Currently Lives in
Seattle, Washington**

Sounds like Harriet Tubman spittin' freedom licks over Linn drums produced by Prince and engineered by Susan Rogers with The Three Degrees and The Brides of Funkenstein on chorus vox.

...like the silent roar of institutions burned to the ground without mercy or malice—just the inevitable necessary end of their times.

...like me in thigh-high leather boots, smoky-eyed and dark-lipped at the helm of *The Pirate Jenny* amid the lightning flash and thunder roll.

...like an angel choir of Marvin Gaye's croonin' "I WANT YOU" in the distance. (A cappella conga version to be exact.)

...like the piano tickle and heart-thump kick drum intro of Natalie Cole's "OUR LOVE" on loop.

BEN YISRAEL

Born in Fort Worth, Texas

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

And we claim ourselves a choir
stretched toward the highest octave of hallelujah.

A chorus of clenched fists all-singing freedom
All lovers swearing
Till death do us part by Any Means Necessary.

It sounds like our ancestors
mumble rapping coded verses of a prayer
on the eve of an uprising that will spell out
our new and ancient names.

CHELSEY A. RICHARDSON

**Born and Currently Lives in
Renton, Washington**

My name is Forever Vibrant, like bullet casings turned brass grill in my mouth. I'm never leaving this earth. I drew straws with my trauma, and I won, so I'm still here.

JP HOWARD

**Born and Currently Lives in
New York City**

It sounds like Black joyous melodies. Can you hear it? When I claim myself, it sounds like memory of Mama laughing so loud and so hard, like the Isley Brothers meets CeCe Peniston, like Lady Day and Sarah Vaughan in sync on vinyl. When I claim myself, when I finally put myself first, when I love up on myself, ain't nothing or no one feel better than that feeling. It feels like *hallelujah* and *ashé* and *amen*. It feels like sexy holy ghost. (Don't tell Mama I said that!) It sounds like memory of Mama and all my "fake aunty" neighbors filling up our little Sugar Hill, Harlem, apartment in the 1970s. It sounds like my childhood, and Mama gossiping while throwing down pots on the stove, and aunties laughing so hard about grown-folks stuff that all I want to do is be a grown-azz sexy Black woman just like them. It makes me spend a whole lifetime listening in,

leaning in, and learning how to claim myself.

LIBRECHT BAKER

**Born and Currently Lives in
Long Beach, California**

I claim myself through my laughter. It can appear gaudy, as a Black hole, or a wretched cacophony for example. I enjoy laughing and simultaneously being uninhibited about my teeth's silver fillings being on full display when I'm feeling joy, tickled, shocked, or enthused about something or someone.

KRISTIN ALANA

Born in Dover, Delaware

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

Have you heard an owl's call in the middle of a clear-sky night?
That's the sound. When I claim myself it's a sound that is neither
in nor out of place, but boldly there.

MARIE-OVIDE GINA DORCELY

Born in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti

Currently Lives in Boston, Massachusetts

What it is not: clear, crystal. More, groundling, in anger. I have run an epee through the body and can hear the sound of swishing at the fall. The evil one has fallen. I am still, not inert. I move under the earth and the small grains rub against each other, making. Sedulous, errant. This is my sound.

RENEE SIMMS

Born in Detroit, Michigan

Currently Lives in Tacoma, Washington

It sounds like the stillness before a storm. When I claim myself,
something spectacular always follows.

SHAQUAN SMITH

Born in Texas and Raised in Flint, Michigan

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

When I claim myself I sound like rain. Free falling effortlessly through the sky without a care in the world. Gently tapping on my surroundings to bring peace and harmony before centering myself.

When I claim myself I sound like wind. Blowing in the trees to bring a refreshing new take on life. Shaping and uplifting others around me with every movement I make.

When I claim myself I sound like thunder. Echoing throughout the night. It's unpredictable, but when you hear it, you feel it. You know that what you are feeling is something real, something that can be rage, but is only passion after overcoming the fierce strikes of reality that flashed without warning.

Before, I couldn't comprehend why I sounded like so many things. It wasn't until I decided to embrace self that I realized it

was all still me. And when I truly claim myself, I sound like a storm.
A survivor of life with a reckoning beyond your belief. My time here
may fall short, but my impact will be everlasting.

BRANDON D. JOHNSON

Born in Gary, Indiana

Currently Lives in Washington, DC

I am Brandon David Johnson, writer, poet, photographer, perpetual student, husband, father, lover of my people, my heritage, myself. I have come for you with love. I have come to you with love. I love for our survival and our progress. I love for our defense. I love because anything less is dangerous. I love.

VIVIAN D. PHILLIPS

**Born and Currently Lives in
Seattle, Washington**

When I claim myself, there is usually no sound. Claiming me means that I am comfortable in silence. I am comfortable silently being with me. That I need no noise or external validation of any kind to fully own me!

BLACK POWERFUL

LORY IVEY ALEXANDER

**Born and Currently Lives in
Washington, DC**

I call myself Lory Ivey, daughter of Cassandra Dione, daughter of Lillian, daughter of Onelia May, daughter of Rosa, daughter of Fleata Canana, daughter of Cecelia, daughter of Eliza. I am the hourglass, and time waits for me. I claim to be the eighth daughter of seven daughters, and in honoring them, I honor myself. I claim myself because this circle of birth is the universe. The womb in me gives birth to generations of thoughts, of feelings, of realities. I am the light in another's night, the star in my own eye, the promise of my mother's dream. I claim myself as my wide hips move to the cadence of the tide's ebb. I claim myself as the salt of my tears crystallizes in the sun's light. I claim myself as I bear witness to others, and in claiming myself, I claim them.

Laying claim on myself is taking ownership of the right to be,

while necessarily denying others' rights to my energy. Claiming is an assertion of the fact of myself without asking for permission to exist. Claiming is standing outside with my arms outstretched, holding space between my palms. Claiming is realizing, without being told, that everything is mine and that I am all of it. I claim myself as I gaze into the night sky.

AFAA M. WEAVER

Born in Baltimore, Maryland

Currently Lives in Pleasant Valley, New York

When I claim myself it is the sound of the dawn rising over the Atlantic onto the place where I was born to two young Black people full of hope, in the city of Baltimore, a central space in the spirit of Black history. It is the sound of the dawn filling my spirit with light as I say out loud, in my own remembrance of the past now rising, “My name is Afaa, and I stand here to humbly receive what is the will of my divine origin so that I may be of service in the campaign of honoring and nurturing Black lives in whatever way, from the most minute act of loving kindness to the grander ways, giving my time to help someone move something important in their lives in some way, material or spiritual, in deed or prayer.”

R. ERICA DOYLE

**Born and Currently Lives in
Brooklyn, New York**

I am Erica, the ruler
Daughter of Cynthia, goddess of the moon,
Daughter of Bernardine Lily, brave and pure,
Daughter of Janine, elegantly compassionate,
Daughter of Alexandrine, protector of the people,
Daughter of Marie-Francoise, beloved of France,
Daughter of Rose, red flower,
Daughter of Nneakolam, let her not lack a mother,
And
Abiona, born during a journey,
And
Nyima, the beautiful one,
And

Zola, love.

GLORIA JACKSON-NEFERTITI

Born in Gulfport, Mississippi

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

I'm Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti, a Black autistic elder, survivor of breast cancer, domestic violence, sexual assault, and religious abuse. I'm powerful beyond measure and much smarter than you realize. I have a heart that fiercely occupies my inner rage.

ABDULLAH-Z'HEIR KHALI

Born in Seattle, Washington

Currently Lives in Renton, Washington

[Drumming] Zulu [drumming] Ubuntu, the drums of my ancestors running through my veins as I come closer to the Master. Please refrain from calling me any other name than Abdullah Z'heir, son of Zanj Yusuf Khali.

KEISHA-GAYE ANDERSON

Born in Kingston, Jamaica

Currently Lives in Brooklyn, New York

It means I am, right now, unapologetically me and I don't care who approves of that. I am a big woman, not petite. I love my stature. I love my locks. I don't need to be accepted; Mother Nature has brought me forth. And here I am. No other approval is necessary. I claim my space and my right to be in this experience as I am right now. Nature has put everything in its proper place, including me.

AMBER FLAME

Born in Austin, Texas

Currently Lives in Tacoma, Washington

It sounds like throat wail, mouth open, full voice release of vocal cords, loud and unafraid of the vulnerable and the chaos that happens when I sing, when I wail, when I cry with my whole self. It sounds like there is a swan's song in my throat.

DENISE BOWEN

Born in Fontana, California

Currently Lives in St. Louis, Missouri

The crack of a jab to the chin
Breaking bones with a grin

The yell after a kick to the shins, cackling
“Get out of my way!”

I stop for no one

CYNTHIA MANICK

**Born and Currently Lives in
Brooklyn, New York**

There's a hurricane in my rib cage and it sounds like fish fries on Friday nights and Grace Jones. The sound pushes past the ribs, past the diaphragm, and my voice says—

I am lovely and amazing. I am minding my business. I don't feel like dancing or singing. My accomplishments don't define me. My womb is never under discussion. Furthermore, I am unable to assist you with anything you need—the Black-woman-let's-take-care-of-the-world bank is hereby closed.

BILLY WEALE

Born in Mesa, Arizona

**Currently Lives in Vancouver,
British Columbia, Canada**

My name is Billy. I'm twenty-two years old. I am strong. I am smart and capable. I'm a queen. I am fucking beautiful. I'm a good person. I'm kind, I'm patient, and I'm funny. This is my life and I'm doing my best.

STEVEN CHRISTOPHER BURRELL

Born in Detroit, Michigan

Currently Lives in Tacoma, Washington

To claim myself is to stand in my power. To stand in my truth and to bring light to things that have been shrouded in darkness for too long. “I am not the one” comes to mind when I think of claiming myself. No one has power over me. No one has rule over me. To claim yourself is to stand in your truth and power. No one can take that away once you do. Their response to you will change once they realize, “You are not the one.”

GLENIS REDMOND

Born in Sumter, South Carolina

Currently Lives in Greenville, South Carolina

I have come through this cancerous fire,
finished in the kiln at the highest heat,
a hard-won beauty lit from within.
I duck and dodge and summon strength as:
Maasai Warrior Southern Sage.
I meet the looks I get with a direct gaze,
Stare translated: *If cancer couldn't kill me, you sho can't.*

TARYN R. DORSEY

Born in Portland, Oregon

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

To fully claim myself sounds like freedom and motherfucking whimsy; my imagination and what I can bring into this life when I claim myself is, again, absolute freedom.

AMA S. ADDO

**Born and Currently Lives in
Glasgow, Scotland**

You have no idea who you are messing with here.

WALE AYINLA

**Born and Currently Lives in
Nigeria**

My name is Wale Ayinla, this body has known too much sadness,
have you any joy to give?



INTRODUCTION

BLACK POWERFUL

WISHES FOR 7:07

In the names of the most merciful Sky Mommies, including those who answer to the name Nana Buluku, here is a blessing:

May you find comfort in your own softness, your own mercy today. May the eclipse bring forth your clearest intentions. May you speak them into existence with a clear mind.

May your heart shed her old calluses like a Korean foot peel and become brand new and baby soft again. May your eagerness to love and be loved reciprocally be met within yourself first. May you see yourself and your children as long stretches of DNA healing all the way back to the beginning with the first mother. May you honor yourself by loving the people you came through and the people who come through you. May you receive what is yours—everything you've knit together with patience and practice.

May you see yourself fully actualized as an individual component within a collective story of abundance that goes through and beyond time.

WISHES FOR 8:08

In the names of the most merciful Sky Mommies, including those who answer to the name Adroa, here is a blessing:

May you open your eyes to another opportunity to love yourself through circumstances deemed wholly unlivable.

May your reality encounter miracles of mercy—airborne and magnetic—mercy that affixes itself to your path, softening the ceaseless blows.

May your soul rest. You, who have been called to exist beyond yourself, again and again, with no fuel beyond trauma . . . you deserve rest. You deserve the space of surrender while protected and safe. May you find pockets of rest from the cold daily brunt of vigilance that keeps you alive.



the fuck you are. May you remember who the fuck you are.

May the next phase in your life feel like Comeuppance Day. Plant new seeds now.

INTRODUCTION

RENEE SIMMS

Born in Detroit, Michigan

Currently Lives in Tacoma, Washington

The plastic table is yea high and square, grooved aluminum around its edge. One side of the table is against a kitchen wall. I sit there with my shoulder quietly pressed into the yellow wall paint. Although my table seats two, I'm the only one sitting. Grandma Turner stands at her countertop. She's cutting a sandwich in half, the long way, which I like. When she's done, she places the plate before me and leaves. Then I'm alone in a sunlit room. I'm eating peanut butter and jelly on Wonder bread. Leon's not home yet. He has Billy Dee hair that's silver with waves my grand-momma loves. Leon's teeth are dark and spaced far apart—he has a surprising smile. A sandwich in their house tastes better somehow. Maybe cause I'm left alone to daydream as I eat. Maybe cause the curtains wave to me from the window over the sink. No one waves or shares imperfect teeth

when you're grown. No one brings you a plate of food just because.

IMANI CAGE

**Born and Currently Lives in
Seattle, Washington**

Oh, when I imagine a kind of world like that, I think I just mainly imagine not being afraid to go outside and get kidnapped or murdered because I'm female or just because of my skin color.

KRISTIN ALANA

Born in Dover, Delaware

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

A world where I am safe and loved is full of hand holding and tenderness, things are beautifully balanced and I can rest wherever I desire, I can play wherever I desire, I can love whomever I desire. Kindness and community are priceless commodities that cannot be bought or sold . . . only received and given in unlimited abundance.

LUIS M. RODRIGUEZ-MOORE

Born in El Centro, California

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

If humans could only understand each other's problems and pain,
then that's one step closer to a safer future.

LAUREN K. ALLEYNE

Born in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Currently Lives in Harrisonburg, Virginia

It's a world that has divested itself of the hunger for power and domination, where the cancer of white supremacy has been fully excised, then the body politic is in full remission. It's a world where I can bring the full gift of my awesome and miraculous humanity and it can be received, expanded, and reflected back to me. It's a world where we all do that for each other. And that love labor lifts us all. It's a world of abundance and vitality and balance and joy. It's a world I don't always believe we can get to, but which I have no choice but to believe is somehow someday possible.

REYNALDO A. JONES

**Born and Currently Lives in
Seattle, Washington**

A world where I feel safe is a world that isn't always watching for every little mistake I do so they can have a reason to pull me down.

BLACK POWERFUL

DEIDRE R. GANTT

**Born and Currently Lives in
the Washington Metropolitan Area, Maryland**

Physically, it's usually the tropics or the country. Maybe both. Because it's warm and green and peaceful. Somewhat peaceful . . . music is in the air. Loud and booming, mellow vibes from nearby or in the distance. Nobody filing noise complaints against it. Music that affirms the best of us, that encourages us to be our best selves, to relax the armor that the unreal world has conditioned us to wear, even with each other sometimes, even with ourselves. No or very few fast food restaurants. No hustle-grind pressure. Kind of like how I experienced Africa and the Caribbean, but culturally Black American and more modern—not bearing the physical scars of colonialism in its architecture, plumbing/sewage, education. A society where the needs, customs, and traditions of Black people are not a “diversity initiative” or marginalized. A place where the systems and art and

daily life is built to help us be our best Black selves without apology.

On a micro level, I've often longed for a geographical village, big-ass homestead, or incorporated town populated by the people who know, love, accept, and respect me. Right now, we are spread all over the diaspora. I think I would feel safe, valued, and loved if I could be in their presence more often, no plane tickets or vacation time, no WhatsApp or video calls. Just walk down the street and sit on the porch and enjoy being together. Proximity matters for building sound, mutually beneficial relationships. At least it does to me.

KAMEKO THOMAS

Born in Shreveport, Louisiana

Currently Lives in Raleigh, North Carolina

For me, a world where I am safe, valued, and loved is a world where my PTSD, major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and ADHD (What can I say? When it rains, it floods) aren't used to gaslight me into accepting the unacceptable. A world where I am no longer a subsection, marginalized by an already marginalized group. A world where I'm finally free from the pressures of having to mask behaviors that are—quite literally—out of my control.

For me, a world where I am safe, valued, and loved is a world where I'm no longer crying myself to sleep at night, exhausted from yet another day spent trying (and failing) to get people to see beyond my letters. A world where I'm given the same consideration and respect that I've freely given to those who refuse to reciprocate. A world where others aren't weaponizing my compromised mental

health to escape dealing with their own.

For me, a world where I am safe, valued, and loved is a world where people aren't using their Neurotypical Privilege™ to oppress me and others like me because it gives them a power they'd otherwise never have.

For me, a world where I am safe, valued, and loved is a world where I'm safe, valued, and loved.

And this world ain't it.

LISA MYERS BULMASH

Born in New Jersey

Currently Living in Snohomish County, Washington

The world where I feel safe is a place where I can walk safely at night, and in the wee hours of the morning. The sight of me passing by a window prompts a wave from another night owl, who then goes back to what they were doing. Head bobs acknowledge me as I wander through a neighborhood that is new to me, snapping the occasional photo.

If there are police officers, they laugh and hang up when Karen calls to object to Black people living their lives.

This world is multiracial as a matter of course. I do not have to stop a conversation in its tracks because someone wants more time to mourn losing the chance to crush another person's imagination. No one has to risk life and limb to move—literally or figuratively, in work or at play, at home or in a room full of people who do not look like you.

In the world where I am valued, people work to live; they do not live to work. Ideally, I'd mandate three months of work and then three months of rest for everyone. If I work a day job, my coworker is on sabbatical; if my family borrows someone's home in another country, my coworker continues our project in a shared virtual space I can access when I return. We do not work ourselves into the ground. Therapy is a given. So is loving, attentive day care. When my kids are in school, someone else's kids spend the day Doing Nothing of Any Particular Value at their own pace.

There is always time for a break.

In the world where I feel loved, non-sexual flirting happens between adults frequently, mainly because humans can't help becoming attached to someone whose difference sparks curiosity. There is no "you're pretty for a Black girl." There is just "pretty." And "ugly," because grossly entitled people will always try to ruin things.

Artists are paid like plumbers and surgeons: no one is paid in exposure bucks.

My government, my schools, and my hospitals recognize that people are messy, and expensive. And then they get on with cleaning up toxic waste. They get on with regular inspections and maintenance and care. They get on with figuring out how to teach children who learn differently, or faster, or slower. They get on with listening to their patients carefully, because sometimes it's hard to say what's really bothering you. They get on with treating chronic

diseases, because people are not expendable.

Humans have decided to repair the world they have, instead of looking for another planet to ruin. Real estate developers and retail businesses have discovered there are other markets besides luxury retail. Hostile architecture is bizarre and shameful. And we as a people practice empathy the way healthy newborns practice breathing.

VERLENA L. JOHNSON

**Born and Currently Lives in
Chicago, Illinois**

I imagine a world in which love is the governing force that guides ALL our actions and interactions. One in which we can acknowledge all our differences based on race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, ability, culture, etc., without judgment. I imagine a world where I can be fully myself as a Black, multiracial lesbian feminist and know that the entirety of my being will be respected and valued. I imagine a world where my son can exist and see himself reflected in all levels of our society, where he knows he is important and magical. I imagine a world where he is treated with love, respect, and as a dimension of God/Goddess. I imagine a world where this is true for all people and animals who inhabit the planet. I imagine a world governed by peace and compassion, where we respect children, our elders, and people with varying

abilities (physically and intellectually). I envision a world where people are not valued for what they produce or what they can contribute, but rather for simply being! I imagine a world where emotional, psychological, and physical violence is a thing of the past and we instead know how to express our frustration and anger in more peaceful ways. I imagine a world where it is safe to be in touch with our feelings and share them with others without fear that they will be used against us as a weapon. I imagine a world where no one goes hungry and everyone has adequate shelter, has excellent medical care, and can live their life's purpose.

EVELIA ARCIS TAYLOR/VIRGIL A. TAYLOR

Born in Seattle, Washington

Currently Lives in Seattle and Tacoma, Washington

Evelia/Virgil (Child):

I think I already live in one.

Amber (Mother):

How so?

Evelia/Virgil:

I mean, I have you and I have my dad and I have a bunch of friends.

And I'm very certain that you guys all love me.

Amber:

Do you feel safe and valued as well?

Evelia/Virgil:

Yep.

SHAYLA LAWSON

Born in Rochester, Minnesota

Currently Lives in Los Angeles, California

There is always food. People can come over any time of the day, in whatever mood that they're in, and know that wherever they find me is a sanctuary. It's a place where they will be loved and respected. It's odd for me to hear that that is my answer. Because I recognize as a Black woman, what I describe in a world where I feel safe, valued, and loved is a world in which I'm doing all of the caring and the caregiving. Because it's still hard for me to imagine safety, value, and love in a capacity where it's something that I am just wholly receiving as opposed to giving; I don't really know what that looks like. I'm trying to reframe my image of myself and open myself up to the possibility that there will be people who create that space for me. But in this stage of where I am, the best that I can do to imagine that feeling is to imagine the ways that I have cultivated

that for myself, in my own home, and that is an extension of the way that I love other people. I have yet to fully experience or imagine what it's like to be loved that way myself yet.

DENISE SHANTÉ BROWN

Born in Charlottesville, Virginia

Currently Lives in Baltimore, Maryland

I see myself walking with radiant love and intentional care toward my community, the people I love and trust. The closer that I get, sunflowers and night-sky petunias bloom at my feet. I'm rooted in my cosmic ancestry, and the future is alive.

I feel light and unburdened. My body shares a life-giving relationship with asking for what she needs and rest is no longer a radical act. Rest is normalized, uncompromised, and prioritized.

I taste the sweet relief of an unclenched jaw. Swallowing wildflower honey and lavender as medicine to my spirit, I taste what it's like to be calm in the full, whole complexity of who I am.

I smell my Granny's cookin' on the cast-iron skillet that has nourished our family for over thirty years. Her "what's love got

to do with it?” shea-butter scent dances around fried catfish and collard greens. Her essence smells like home, a site of resistance where I am never hungry for love.

I hear my father’s voice reading the letters and poems he sent me from a prison cell. “Gone but never for forever.” Rest in peace. Rest in justice.

JP HOWARD

**Born and Currently Lives in
New York City**

In this “imagined” world I am always heard, even when I am quiet; I am seen, valued, and loved. My Blackness, my uniqueness, my diva self, my sad self, my silly self, my Black Mama self, my mother of two Black sons (sons) self, my queer Black self all meet up in this world and are welcomed with wide open arms. I am home here. When I speak I am always heard. I am never silenced in this world. If I am silent in this world, it is because I have chosen to walk in silence. If I scream in this world, I am releasing the other world that I escaped from. *Ayyyyyyyyyy!*

In this imagined world, my screams are ancient and cathartic. I am healed and healing and healer when I scream, when I speak my truth. In this world, there is no room that I cannot enter. In fact, there are no doors to lock me out. I walk with my head held

high. I claim this space / this world / this community as my own.
I am free and I am safe and I am love and I am loved. Ashe!

D'REAL GRAHAM

Born in Ann Arbor, Michigan

Currently Lives in Washington, DC

It is within attempts to coexist in an era distracted by accumulation. These words stitched together are in service to remind the reader to return to the creator whenever the world doesn't appear to be a place where you feel safe, valued, loved.

ALAYA J. CARR

Born in South Florida

Currently Lives in Seattle, Washington

To me, a world where I am safe, valued, and loved necessitates the end of this world. And by that I mean there are no prisons, there are no police. Communities are healthy and can take care of each other; communities keep community members accountable. Everyone is fed. People have their basic needs met, people live comfortably, resources are shared. It means ending toxic waste in our air and in our water. It means reorienting and re-creating what society looks like. So to me the world where I feel safe and valued and loved, again, means we have replaced the world that we live in now with something else, and I think it's possible. I choose to believe that that's possible.

JORDAN A. ROME

Born in Detroit, Michigan

Currently Lives in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico

We damn sure wouldn't be swimming in it. I wouldn't have to beg for inner peace. I wouldn't have to be a product of an environment that doesn't want to see me, not just when literally breathing. Would there even be a nature versus nurture conversation? Probably not in this world. My misdirected rage wouldn't be attributed to freakin' white men, to men who keep killing, men who keep bombing, men who keep raping, men who keep destroying. Can you see me, feel me? You feel me? In the new world I'm cradled by my community that's built around mutualism, radical honesty, and compassion. It's giving me "sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came," *Cheers* type of vibes, you know? People always come before *private*. That's the intention. We do nothing without intention. And

it shows in the eyes of the people. My existence is actually humanized and I have full autonomy over my body and the respect for that is normalized and supported. You know what else is normalized? Resting, not laboring to death, just having your basic needs met. Those little things make me feel safe, valued, and loved. First in my entirety, you see me, feel me. You feel me?

WILL BULL

**Born and Currently Lives in
London, England, United Kingdom**

It all comes back to a sense of belonging. And for such a long time the world found new ways to tell me that I didn't belong, that I wasn't supposed to be here. The more I listened, the more it mocked. I had no confidence being in the world, so I pretended. I played a character. I walked like someone who belonged, ate cereal like someone who belonged, brushed my teeth like someone who belonged. I pretended each day until I forgot I was pretending, until I realized that I wasn't pretending anymore. I belonged. Even the world, which had once been so cruel, had become a friend, an ally. The more I listened, the more it welcomed me home. I came to understand that the sense of belonging I had so desperately wanted had been mine to claim the whole time. It lived within me, waiting.

I belong.

I am safe.

I am valued.

I am loved.

No one could have given that to me, but me.

And no one can take it away either.

NIA SHUMAKE

**Born and Currently Lives in
Detroit, Michigan**

Here, there is no such thing as professionalism. You answer the phone using whatever lingo you please and there is no one put off by you or your tone. No one thinks you're bad at business.

Your pastors live by what they preach and are open-minded too. Your favorite rappers are about that life. Every man that you know adores and cherishes women, not in a sexual way but in a way that you can walk by any corner store, see a crowd of men at the door, and not have to scurry past or look down at your phone.

The voices of sweet older Black women dwell here. There's a lot of "baby" and "you look just like your mama, daddy, auntie, great uncle" here. You're always discovering new cousins because your great grandmother had fiftyseven kids and everybody knows every good song to have ever existed.

INTRODUCTION

WISHES FOR 10:10

In the names of the most merciful Sky Mommies, including those who answer to the name Ade-Fon, here is a blessing for the smokeless fire in your heart:

May you count each day as a triumph over the certainty of death.
May the being alive part of being alive feel more like “Ha-Ha!” and less like “Seriously?!”

May each moment ferry you to the next one, when you have become like a shadow or the sound of dried leaves blowing over the sidewalk.

May you find your own way to surrender and float.

May the universe carry you when you can't carry another thing, another thought, another heavy, sighing breath.

WISHES FOR 11:11

In the names of the most merciful Sky Mommies, including those who answer to the name Inkosazana, here is a blessing for the rhetorical quicksand of your tongue:

May your decision not to fulfill racist social expectations regarding endless strength, resilience, and sacrifice (and to instead rebuke these ideas wholly) make space for your humanity to shine through so that your vulnerable reality cannot be erased.

You are not made of myth—you breathe, you feel. May you find those precious moments where it is safe to grieve what you built with your patience, time, devotion, creativity, and love. May you spend more energy building your future than forensically mourning your past. There is no hope in the past, and you are a creature made of birthright joy and boundless belief. Build something better!

May you realize and take accountability for your own need for growth—where you are most threadbare, most fragile, most frail. Do not ask yourself what's wrong with you, because you are not your trauma. Ask yourself what happened to you and grow in your self-awareness. Only when you see your patterns and reactions can you amend them. May you receive the healing you seek and may you be willing to shed what is no longer offering you nourishment. If you are no longer fed, it is time to feed yourself. It is time to be your own baby bird—it's time to open yourself to the love that's waiting for you. May you give to yourself recklessly, as if spoiling a child. May you find delight in finally being the object of your own affections.

May you wrap your mind around a new reality—one that is free of the negative projections of others. May you unearth the sought-after acceptance and find serenity like warm sunshine in allowing others to be plainly wrong but still free to live and learn.

May you recognize and isolate the specific signs of toxicity and dysfunction that have anchored you and stagnated you—reflect, uproot, and liberate yourself from the ways you've had to survive. You survived. May you see and celebrate how far you've come—your reward is this day, week, month, year. May you receive everything given to you right now with complete gratitude and grace, so

the universe will continue to show you abundance.

Love is not finite—there is so much more for you to receive. Open. Welcome. Be. Today, and every day, you are in control of your thoughts and your choices. May your actions be in alignment with your values. May you feel your significance and honor it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Thank you Nana Twumasi for editing this book, and thank you Amanda Choo Quan for helping to promote it. Thank you Vanessa German for singing to me and my son surrounded by flowers when we needed a poem-song-incantation most last summer.

Cite Black Women every chance you get.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Natasha Marin is a conceptual artist whose people-centered projects have circled the globe since 2012 and have been recognized and acknowledged by *Art Forum*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, NBC, Al Jazeera, Vice, PBS, and others. *Black Imagination* (McSweeney's 2020) and *Black Powerful* have engaged (and paid!) Black folks from all over the PNW region and the world—amplifying, centering, and holding sacred a diverse sample of voices, including LGBTQIA+ Black youth, incarcerated Black women, Black folks with disabilities, unsheltered Black folks, and Black children. Her viral, web-based project, *Reparations*, engaged a quarter of a million people worldwide in the practice of “leveraging privilege,” and earned Marin, a mother of two, death threats by the dozens. She pays the bills by helping individuals and institutions achieve their antiracism goals through creative consulting (NONWHITEWORKS).

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

BEVERLY AARONS is a writer, artist, and game developer. She works across disciplines exploring the intersections of history, hidden current realities, and imagined future worlds. She specializes in making unseen perspectives visible and aims to infuse all of her creative work with a deep sense of emotionality.

MARIA HAMILTON ABEGUNDE is a Memory Keeper, poet, ancestral priest in the Yoruba Orisa tradition, healer, and full-spectrum community doula. She grew up in Grenada (West Indies) and calls Brazil home. She loves to dance, laugh loudly, do nothing, follow dragonflies, watch and read science fiction, and sleep. She is an assistant professor of African American and African Diaspora Studies at Indiana University. She learned how to speak Yoruba and Portuguese through dreams the ancestors sent her.

Born in Scotland to Ghanaian parents, **AMA S. ADDO** has worked in the National Health Service for more than thirty years, spending the last twenty years working with people with intellectual disabilities.

KRISTIN ALANA is a mother of three, visual artist, and author. She is currently focusing on laughter as a healing modality for her journey through chemotherapy.

LORY IVEY ALEXANDER is a multidisciplinary artist exploring themes of history, memory, and identity. Best known for her use of color, her sculptural paintings, and her lyrical writing, Alexander facilitates meditations on the richness of Black and Indigenous American identity by constructing layered textural work based on interviews, historical texts, and her travel following in the footsteps of her ancestors, through the American South and Northeast.

CLAUDIA ALICK is a Black bisexual disabled performer, writer, director, intersectional inclusion expert, and digital producer. She is the founder of Calling Up Justice, a transmedia social justice practice. She performs national leadership as an advisor for various arts and funding organizations and organizes with Unsettling Dramaturgy: Crip and Indigenous Process Design in the Studio. callingupjustice.com.

LAUREN K. ALLEYNE is the author of two collections of poetry, *Difficult Fruit* (2014) and *Honeyfish* (2019), as well as coeditor of *Furious Flower: Seeding the Future of African American Poetry* (2020). Her work has appeared in numerous publications including the *New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Caribbean Writer*,

among others. Her most recent honors include nominations for a 2020 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Poetry, the 2020 Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature, and the Library of Virginia Literary Awards. Born and raised in Trinidad and Tobago, Alleyne currently resides in Harrisonburg, Virginia, where she is a professor of English at James Madison University, and the assistant director of the Furious Flower Poetry Center. More at laurenkalleyne.com. Follow @poetLKA on social media.

KEISHA-GAYE ANDERSON is the river that stood up and walked into a story that flows through the many faces of Jamaica and winds its way through Flatbush Brooklyn, to Southeast Queens, and back to Central Brooklyn. She charts this journey through poetry, fiction, and art to illuminate the layers of the Black diaspora that hold stories of innovation and perseverance. Her books are *Gathering the Waters*, *Everything Is Necessary*, and *A Spell for Living*. Anderson has worked in documentary production for CBS and PBS and contributed feature articles to national consumer magazines. Her art has been featured in numerous exhibitions. More at keishagaye.ink.

AMBER ATIYA is a proud Black lesbian and native Brooklynite. Her work is forthcoming in *The Encyclopedia of Things*, a collaboration with artist Elisabeth Smolarz. She is a member of a women of color writing collective celebrating twenty years in 2022.

WALE AYINLA is a Nigerian poet, essayist, and editor. He is the author of *To Cast a Dream* (Jai-Alai Books, 2021), which was selected by Mahogany Browne for the 2020 Toi Derricotte and Cornelius Eady Chapbook Prize, and *Gone* (Kissing Dynamite Poetry Press, 2022). He is a staff reader for *Adroit Journal*, has several Pushcart Prize nominations, has several Best of the Net and Best New Poets Award nominations, and is published widely.

JAMES BABATUNDE (Babatunde Babafemi Babawale) is a twenty-eight-year-old Queer Nigerian. He currently runs a lending library where he lends books out for free to locals.

LIBRECHT BAKER authored *vetiver* (Finishing Line Press), journeyed with Radar Productions' Sister Spit 2020 tour, and is an English professor. *Afterlife or Bust*, her one-act play, was part of Q Youth Foundation's 2021 Eastside Queer Stories Radio Plays, while her full-length play *Taciturn Beings* was a semi-finalist for the forty-third annual Bay Area Playwrights Festival and part of The Vagrancy's Blossoming: A New Play Reading Series 2019. Other writings appear in *Accolades: A Women Who Submit Anthology*, *Cultural Weekly*, *Solace: Writing, Refuge, and LGBTQ Women of Color*, and other publications, but can also be experienced via Women Who Submit's IGTV for their *Accolades* online reading series and The Vagrancy's "The Life and Death Of," written by June Carryl, via The Vagrancy's webpage.

EBO BARTON comes from salt—from the moment before worlds converge. In this world, we are still trying to articulate that mixed Black and Filipino, transgender and nonbinary, Queer artists and educators not only matter but are precious. In another world, Barton is loved, safe, and valued. The only difference being that the latter is a path they must make themselves. Barton debuted his first published collection of poetry, *Insubordinate*, in 2020. In 2021, *Insubordinate* was named a Washington State Book Award Finalist in the Poetry Category. A leader in arts and activism, Barton is committed to creating opportunities for others to organize, heal, and rejoice. From Alchemy Poetry (with Ben Yisrael) to serving as the 2020 Jack Straw Writing Fellow, Barton's written, performative, and community work demand societal reckoning.

MAYA BECK is a broke blipster, lapsed Muslim, recovering otaku, pan demigirl, socially anxious social justice bard, home-school grad, and speculative fiction writer. She tweets as @mayathebeing, blogs at mayabeck.com, and is pursuing a creative writing MFA at UCSD. Born on Kumeyaay land with a Detroit mom / Chicago dad Black pedigree, she is descended from the Bantu Bubi, and other displaced indigenous folks. Maya is also petmom to a sassy bun named Blossom.

TARA BETTS is the author of *Break the Habit*, *Arc & Hue*, and *Refuse to Disappear*. In addition to working as an editor, a teaching

artist, and a mentor for other writers, she has taught at several universities. She is the inaugural poet for the People Practitioner Fellowship at the University of Chicago and founder of Whirlwind Learning Center. She is the daughter of an African American father and a mother descended from French Canadian immigrants.

BRITTANY SELAH LEE-BEY is a DC-based educator and artist. By day, she is a reading specialist and coaches debate at a secondary school in DC. But by night, she is King Bey, one half of the rap duo Oya Blaq. She is also a language enthusiast with a love for etymology—the study of the origin of words. Her first book is *EtymologyRules: Back to Basics*. Learn more about language and linguistics on her website: etymologyrules.com.

DESTINY O. BIRDSONG is a Southern Black woman writer with albinism who believes genres are fictions. Her work centers relationships between women, the survival of trauma, putting anti-Blackness on blast, and curating joy. She is the first MFA/PhD graduate of Vanderbilt University's English department and the author of two books: the poetry collection *Negotiations*, which was published by Tin House in 2020 and longlisted for the 2021 PEN/Voelcker Award, and the triptych novel *Nobody's Magic*, forthcoming from Grand Central in 2022.

DENISE BOWEN is a poet, writer, crocheter, simmer, and privacy law student who overcomes chronic pain caused by endometriosis, hidradenitis suppurativa, and PTSD on a daily basis. She resides in St. Louis, Missouri, with her cat Flossy and makes a living working remotely as a legal compliance specialist for a tech company. Denise also speaks Brazilian Portuguese and writes constantly to release and process her intense emotions. She hopes that by sharing her innermost spiritual revelations and feelings through poetry, she can inspire others to overcome their pain, embrace authenticity, and know that it's okay to feel.

SAVANNAH BOWEN is a Caribbean American writer, editor, artist, and teacher. When she's not chasing waterfalls in Haiti, she's busy braiding the coarse unruly strands of her heritage and attempting to bring them to unity.

DENISE SHANTÉ BROWN is currently expressing herself through multiple shapes as a queer holistic design strategist, creative coconspirator, and intuitive writer while living with type 1 diabetes. She finds pleasure in bringing people together to nurture their dreams for care, healing, and justice into existence. Her chosen sobriety since September 2019 has expanded her capacity to listen to her own voice and have the courage to write new worlds with words, gatherings, booze-free libations, rituals, and love.

Releasing the burden of trying to move through life, **WILL BULL** focuses instead on allowing life to move through him. Forever becoming and growing with the flow, he has found a home within spoken word, dance, essay and novel writing, music production, love, and whatever expressive form he is called to next—the challenge is staying with one of them long enough to finish a ting! Over the last few years, he has been exploring colonial modernity in all its oppressive manifestations—minds, bodies, cultures, structures; as well as the practices, rituals, and prayers that enable us to cultivate a more liberatory imagination. He’s still learning to write a bio that doesn’t immediately feel constricting and is grateful for these spaces and conversations that hold our evolving fullness.

LISA MYERS BULMASH was born on the East Coast of the United States, but grew up in California. Although she graduated from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), she earned a degree in English Literature rather than visual art. She is a wife and a Black mother who hopes with all her being that her children will never experience the worst of the social conditions that her artwork addresses. She speaks standard American English, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), French, and some Spanish. Most of all, she is someone who expects racial and cultural inclusion in all spaces. She finds it odd to be in monoracial spaces and views people with monoracial friend groups with wariness.

STEVEON CHRISTOPHER BURRELL is a queer Black man originally from Chicago, who has been living in the Pacific Northwest for the past ten years. A communications professional for a community foundation, Burrell spends time riding his bike, cooking, catching up on the many books he hasn't finished, or listening to the vast array of music in his collection.

IMANI CAGE is a Black woman focused on creating artworks and stories that reflect a part of her. She strives for excellence and for understanding different viewpoints.

JAMES CAGNEY is the author of *Black Steel Magnolias in the Hour of Chaos Theory*, winner of the PEN Oakland 2018 Josephine Miles Book Award. His newest book, *Martian: The Saint of Loneliness* is the winner of the 2021 James Laughlin Award from the Academy of American Poets. It is due from Nomadic Press in 2022. For more, please visit jamescagneypoet.com.

ALAYA J. CARR (they/she) is a neurodivergent lover and fighter. They love reading, dancing, and spending time with their loved ones.

ASIA CREECH is differently abled, LGBTQ, formerly incarcerated, and is a survivor of mental illness, domestic violence, and severe childhood trauma.

BEN KWESI GANTT CRENTSIL is a preschooler of African American and Ghanaian parentage. He loves to sing, dance, draw, tell stories, make puppets, and execute sneak hug-attacks! His favorite things include mermaids, science experiments, and jumping.

CURTIS L. CRISLER was born and raised in Gary, Indiana. Crisler has five full-length poetry books, two YA books, and five poetry chapbooks. He's been published in a variety of magazines, journals, and anthologies. He's been an editor and contributing poetry editor. Also, he created the poetry forum called the *sonastic*. Crisler created the Indiana Chitlin Circuit and is a professor of English at Purdue University Fort Wayne (PFW). He can be contacted at poetcrisler.com.

VALERIE CURTIS-NEWTON is a military kid constantly searching for belonging.

Clevelander **TERI ELLEN CROSS DAVIS**, once voted Most Unique in high school, is now an award-winning poet, wife of over twenty years, and mother for some twelve years. She lives in Silver Spring, Maryland.

JOANNA DAVIS-MCELLIGATT is a Black queer mother, an academic living with OCD, and a proud surviving descendant of Mary Alice Allen and Theodore Roosevelt Davis.

AMBER A. DOE lived on a Native reservation as a child. Her father is from Togo, and she lived in New York City until she moved to Tucson to care for her niece. Being a poor single parent artist is the hardest thing she has ever done.

MARIE-OVIDE GINA DORCELY was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and was raised there and in Montclair, New Jersey. She has come to know and understand the scale of the end of race for Black people in the Americas—its termination in genocide and as an agonistic struggle.

TARYN R. DORSEY is a musician, singer, and performer. She started her journey in music by being on the board of Home Alive, joined the play Hot Grits, which led her to be the drummer of the all-Black and women-led punk band NighTraiN. She was also the lead singer of Wiscon, backup singer for Fly Moon Royalty, cocreator of Melanation Station, and DJ Silk Safari of Base Tan. Currently she is a training specialist for a nonprofit where her focus is on restorative practices, healing-centered engagement, radical self-care, and equity and inclusion to staff who work directly with children and families.

R. ERICA DOYLE was born in Brooklyn to Trinidadian immigrant parents. Her debut collection, *proxy* (Belladonna Books, 2013), won the Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry

Society of America and was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award in Lesbian Poetry. Her current project, *A Dreadful Mortality*, explores genealogy, revolution, and intergenerational healing, and excerpts have recently appeared in the Academy of American Poets Poem-a-Day and in *Letters to the Future: Black Women/Radical Writing*. Her work has been published in various journals and anthologies, including *Best American Poetry*, *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing*, and *Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam*.

ZEPHYRA R. FENTRESS is a dreamer and a schemer—an amazing nonbinary Black human with a brain too exceptional to be ‘neurotypical’ who has been schooling folks on this planet for at least a decade. She/they are an animal lover and a human toler-ator, most at home in the water or traveling far away.

AMBER FLAME is an interdisciplinary artist, writer, activist, and educator, whose work explores spirituality and sexuality, grief and loss, motherhood and magic, and the interstitial joy in it all. A former church kid from the Southwest, Flame’s work has been published widely. Flame’s second book of poetry, *apocrifa*, is forthcoming from Red Hen Press. She is the program director of Hedgebrook, which provides fully funded residencies for selected women-identified writers. She is also mother to the extraordinary Virgil Taylor.

DUEWA FRAZIER is a poet, children's author, speaker, and educator. Born in Brooklyn, DuEwa is the author of poetry collections and stories for young readers. Her books include *Godless Under the Bridge: Poems*, *Alice's Musical Debut*, and *Check the Rhyme: An Anthology of Female Poets & Emcees* (nominated for an NAACP Image Award in Outstanding Literary Work—Poetry). She received a writing fellowship in 2021 from the Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing. Her writing has been published widely. She earned an MFA in Creative Writing at The New School in New York City. Visit duewaworld.com.

NAKEESA M. FRAZIER-JENNINGS is a native of Washington, DC, who now calls Seattle, Washington, her home. She is an advocate for race equity, social justice and women's rights, often using the written word to shed light on the many issues faced by people of color and other marginalized communities.

DEIDRE R. GANTT is a poet, playwright, entrepreneur (writer and editor), and boy-mom. After experiencing life in many different states (California, Louisiana, Georgia, Massachusetts) and even a different continent (Ghana, West Africa), she is back in her hometown (for now), raising her son and rediscovering and attracting the village needed to sustain them both.

CRYSTAL D. GOOD, poet/performer/publisher, is finally in

recovery from many karmic lessons. An ornery folk-reporter reporting for duty—building BlackbyGod.org. She holds the completely made-up but totally real office of Social Media Senator for the Digital District of West Virginia.

D'REAL GRAHAM is a place-maker and youth worker who has spent the last twenty-six months pairing food with mumbo sauce and learning about farming while listening to go-go music. He collaborated with Ypsilanti Community Schools leadership to promote intellectual curiosity and risk-taking and has participated in numerous community-focused collaborative projects. His work focuses on exploring and understanding teamwork through place-making methods. With a passion for third-space and equity theory, naps, friendship, and lifelong learning, D'Real continues to explore the intersection between dominant world-views and traditional knowledge in his daily walk.

TIFFANY B. GRANTHAM is the creator of creatiffwriting.com, an outlet for her writing and artwork. A library associate by day, Netflix junkie by night, she received her bachelor of science in JOMC from North Carolina Agriculture and Technical State University and her MFA in writing from Lindenwood University. When she's not writing, she is hosting a social write-in with the Charlotte Writers' Club. She currently lives in Charlotte surrounded by her mini library with a cup of coffee and plant babies.

Black Powerful is her first appearance as a contributing author. Follow her @cre8tiff_browngirl.

SALENNA GREEN (she/they) graduated from the University of Washington Bothell with a bachelor's degree in Community Psychology. Growing up, Green was inspired by her mother who worked first as a teacher and then as youth care specialist. Salenna discovered her passion for nonprofit work after witnessing the impact her mother made in the lives of her clients. Green is passionate about building up Black and Brown youth into leadership positions. Green is dedicated to social justice and racial equity.

JADA ROCHELLE GRISSON is a Black queer woman who is simply doing her best at being.

JACQUELINE HARAKIS is a Kenyan woman living in the United Kingdom.

ERIKA R. HARDAWAY is an educator, daughter, goddaughter, sister, niece, cousin, auntie, godmother, friend, and writer. She is also a cisgender, straight recovering assimilationist, whose personal mission is to disrupt the impact of systemic racism in and out of educational spaces on Black, Brown, and Indigenous children. She believes that it's essential for Black folks to reclaim their history and stories and to create spaces for healing.

RAGE HEZEKIAH is a Cave Canem, Ragdale, and MacDowell Fellow who earned her MFA from Emerson College. She is a recipient of the St. Botolph Emerging Artist Award and serves as editorial liaison at *The Common*. Her collection *Yearn* is a Diode Editions Book Contest winner. She is also the author of *Unslakable* (Paper Nautilus Press, 2019) and *Stray Harbor* (Finishing Line Press, 2019). Rage's poems have been published widely. You can find more of her work at ragehezekiah.com.

ANDRÉ O. HOILETTE is a Jamaican-born poet living in Denver, Colorado. He is a Cave Canem alum, the former editor of *ambulant: A Journal of Poetry & Art*, and the former assistant editor of *Nexus* magazine. He earned an MFA in Fiction and Poetry from Regis University's Mile-High MFA program and is a 2020 Pushcart Prize nominee, a 2021 Frontier Poetry Chapbook Prize finalist, and a 2021 Cave Canem Book Prize semifinalist. He has been published widely.

JP HOWARD is an educator, literary activist, curator, and community builder. Howard is a general poetry editor for *Women's Studies Quarterly* and editor-at-large of Mom Egg Review VOX Online. Her debut poetry collection, *SAY/MIRROR* (The Operating System), was a Lambda Literary finalist. She is also the author of *bury your love poems here* (Belladonna Books) and coeditor of *Sinister Wisdom: Black Lesbians—We Are the Revolution!* JP's

collection *Praise This Complicated Herstory: Legacy, Healing & Revolutionary Poems* is forthcoming from Harlequin Creature. She has received fellowships and grants from Cave Canem, VONA, Lambda, and Brooklyn Arts Council. She curates Women Writers in Bloom Poetry Salon, and her poetry and essays have been published widely. jp-howard.com.

RAVI HOWARD is the author of two novels, *Like, Trees, Walking* and *Driving the King*. In addition to being selected as a finalist for the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award, *Like, Trees, Walking* won the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence. He has received fellowships and awards from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, the Hurston-Wright Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. His writing has been published widely, and he has recorded commentary and fiction for NPR's All Things Considered and Mississippi Public Broadcasting's Thacker Mountain Radio.

GLORIA JACKSON-NEFERTITI (she/her/hers) is a workshop leader ("Transcending Shame," and a workshop on intersectionality called "We Do Not Live Single-Issue Lives," from the popular Audre Lorde quote, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not live single-issue lives."); she is also a panelist, keynote speaker, and frequent podcast guest who is in the process of completing her memoir titled *A Different Drum: A*

Black, Autistic, Polyamorous, Mentally Ill, Former Fundamentalist Christian/Cult Member and Breast Cancer Survivor WHO JUST WANTS TO FIT IN.

RASHIDA JAMES-SAADIYA is a writer and cultural organizer who uses storytelling to connect history with urgent social issues of our time. Her creative and community work is research-based and interdisciplinary, stretching across the fields of sociology, social justice, and religion to challenge gender inequality, urban displacement, and systemic racism. A native of Washington, DC, she is currently living her best life and documenting the constructs of femininity, cultural memory, and faith amongst Muslim women in Dakar, Senegal.

BRANDON D. JOHNSON is the author of *Love's Skin*, *Man Burns Ant*, and *The Strangers Between*, and the coauthor of *The Black Rooster Social Inn: This Is the Place*. He is a Cave Canem Graduate Fellow with a JD from Antioch School of Law and is published widely. One of his fatal flaws is the inability to throw away items with words on them, so Brandon tries to read everything he touches. The pile grows. Brandon lives with his wife and two children in Washington, DC.

VERLENA L. JOHNSON is a Black (multiracial) lesbian visual artist and art historian. She is a mother to a son and believes in

the power of Love. She believes *I AM* is one of the most powerful statements and that we are all divine.

FRED L. JOINER is poet and curator living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

ASHLEY M. JONES is the first Black poet laureate of Alabama. She is an educator and community organizer, and she is the author of three books of poetry.

REYNALDO A. JONES is a student athlete who loves to play video games and enjoys practicing the trumpet.

TAROMI LOURDES JOSEPH first appeared onstage in 2005 with the Trinidad Theatre Workshop (TTW). In 2006, she represented Trinidad and Tobago in the World Championships of Performing Arts (WCOPA) in Hollywood, California. Since then she has been featured in many TV and print commercials throughout Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean. Taromi won the Best Actor Award (Female) at the Worldwide Women's Film Festival and at the Palm Bay Caribe Film Festival in 2019. She is a member of the Screenplay Reading Committee for the 2021 Atlanta Film Festival. She looks forward to landing major and memorable roles in TV and film.

ABDULLAH-Z'HEIR “Zeke” KHALI’s brand The Healthy Hueman and his entire professional application revolves around removing the robotic syndrome of ALL Huemankind and returning us to our roots. Through the three areas of Huemankind existence—food, fitness, and fraternization (family and friends)—it is his aim to bring about a harmony within ourselves, the Planet and all Peoples. Through coaching, training, guiding, hosting, and facilitating, Zeke has developed a unique, energetic, and connective way of conveying meaningful messages to his audiences.

ZAHYR K-R LAUREN (The Artist L.Haz) creates in order to share light and love with community. Lauren comes from a powerful Southern Black matriarchy that migrated from Oklahoma and Mississippi to California with nothing and made something for generations to come. Lauren is also a former human rights investigator and former attorney who has seen firsthand the targeting of Black folks by the carceral state and the continued triumph of Black folks over it all.

LONDON LAWRENCE is a Houston native with three degrees in the areas of communication, anthropology, and liberal studies. As a Black creative it has been his mission to use his platform to not only inform the masses but inspire other people of color to live boldly. He has been featured in the *New York Times* and *Voyager*

magazine. Lawrence also has a profound passion for community, photography, fashion, and creative directing.

SHAYLA LAWSON lives. She is the author of several books, including *This Is Major: Notes on Diana Ross, Dark Girls, and Being Dope*.

Originally from Providence, Rhode Island, **TIM LENNON** has been a culture worker and arts administrator in Seattle, Washington, for the last twenty-plus years. He aspires to be half as awesome as his wife and son.

RAINA J. LEÓN, PhD, practices abundance—seeing it, living it, sharing it, dreaming it. She is a dreaming creative, mother, daughter, sister, madrina, comadre, partner, poet, writer, and teacher educator. She believes in collective action and community work, the profound power of holding space for the telling of our stories, and the liberatory practice of humanizing education. Her fourth full collection of poetry will be *black god mother this body* (Black Freighter Press, 2022). She's currently working on a collection of essays on her experiences in academia as a full professor, tentatively called *What Earth to Tend, What Earth to Salt*. She is a founding editor of The Acentos Review, an online international quarterly journal devoted to the promotion and publication of Latinx arts.

CYNTHIA MANICK is the author of *No Sweet Without Brine* (Amistad-HarperCollins, forthcoming 2023), editor of *The Future of Black: Afrofuturism, Black Comics, and Superhero Poetry* (Blair Publishing, 2021), and author of *Blue Hallelujahs* (Black Lawrence Press, 2016). Manick is the founder of the reading series Soul Sister Revue, and her work has been published widely. She currently serves on the board of the International Women's Writing Guild and the editorial board of Alice James Books.

MYISHA J. MASTERSSON was born and grew up in Detroit, Michigan, and raised in a family of artists and teachers. She is the founder of the Black Roux Culinary Collective, which features a nonprofit urban farm whose primary mission is combating food insecurity. Myisha is a culinary artist, a singer, a poet, and a domestic violence survivor. Myisha is in the process of launching a culinary tour group that focuses on exposing those who generally wouldn't experience foods of the world and international travel.

VANESSA MENDEZ (Zulema) is a Global Citizen born and living in Trinidad and Tobago. She is a mother, fiancée, cousin, dawtah, sistafriend, event creative, and entrepreneur who has dabbled in music, art, and design for a long, long time. She's sharing joy, good vibes, and yummy Black Caribbean concoctions via her vegan lifestyle startup brand Bare Mylk Co., where

she is the main product developer, partner, and bottlewasher. @baremylkco.

MATTIE M. MOONEY is a Liberian-Grebo educator and nonbinary, trans healthcare-access and racial-justice organizer working toward liberation of Black and Brown trans communities in Washington. Cofounder of Trans Women of Color Solidarity Network and one of the creative brains behind Taking Black Pride, Washington's only Black and Brown trans pride event, Mooney is a formerly homeless single parent of a nonbinary child, Rylee, who is "a gift of ancestors." When Mattie is not working, they are healing their relationship to rest and self-care. The biggest lie ever told was that our worth as Black people was predicated on our ability to labor to death, to refuse idleness, and to produce something, anything, whose fruits we would never fully taste. Rest is revolutionary and Mooney is trying to earn their general stripes.

OKWUDILI NEBEOLISA is an MFA candidate at the Iowa Writers Workshop and is one writer who would like to have a pet but doesn't think he'd be able to give it all the attention it needs.

"Being born and raised in the Pacific Northwest makes you a different kind of person," says **UNIKA V. NOIEL**, "We came here in one of the lesser discussed Black Migrations North. The older I get, the more I wish I'd been able to spend more time in the Holly

Park Housing Projects, listening to my great-grandmother's stories of being a slave as a child."

ROMAN O'BRIEN is a queer, bilingual Caribbean high school student in Seattle (Lakeside Class of 2022). In her life, she enjoys playing the cello and listening to her Aquarius brother's ceaseless babble.

OKANOMODÉ [uh-kahn-uh-mah-day] is an expressionist, composer, shape-shifting siren, and performance artist born and raised a little Black faerie-childe in occupied Duwamish territory. Okanomodé was featured as vocalist and lyricist in the critically acclaimed experimental pop opera *Now I'm Fine* by Ahamefule J. Oluo—and was also featured as co-vocalist and co-lyricist in *Susan* (also by Ahamefule J. Oluo), which premiered at On the Boards in Seattle and at Under the Radar Festival at The Public Theater in New York City. He is also featured in the indie film *Thin Skin*, directed by Charles Mudede. With paganfire and Black magik in his blood, the singer, songwriter, composer, and griot Okanomodé—also known as "BrotherSister SoulChilde"—wields music, word, voice, and movement as a means of communion, creating emotional soundscapes and ritual, in both live and recorded forms.

RACHEL PHILLIPS is a child of the African diaspora, an accidental urbanist, and an advocate for regenerative communities.

Her lifelong love of cities has led her to seek out the urban spaces where Black creativity thrives across six continents.

VIVIAN D. PHILLIPS is a communications professional and arts leader. She is cohost of the podcast *doubleXposure*. Vivian is also the founder and editor-in-chief of the online magazine *Arte Noir*, a gathering place to explore and center the dynamic creativity, soulfulness, and power of Black art. Vivian has served in numerous communications and arts leadership roles, most recently with Seattle Theatre Group and Seattle Arts Commission. She currently chairs the board of 4Culture and serves on the University of Washington Foundation Board. Vivian practices as a communications strategic advisor and arts consultant, actively advocating and creating opportunities for the inclusion of Black artists and artists of color in major developments and projects across the city.

CHRISTINE PLATT is a modern-day Renaissance woman also known as The Afrominimalist. From serving as an advocate for policy reform to using the power of storytelling as a tool for social change, Christine's work reflects her practice of living with intention. She holds a BA in Africana Studies, an MA in African American Studies, and a JD in General Law. Christine has written over two dozen literary works for people of all ages.

CHERISE A. POLLARD grew up in central New Jersey, where

her family integrated their neighborhood. She was the first Black woman to be tenured and promoted to full professor in her department. Pollard has survived autoimmune disease and is now an energy healer and mystic as well as a poet and scholar.

PHILIP NII OKAIDJA RANDOLPH is an African-born young creative living in a foreign land; this is not his home, but he does acknowledge every now and then that he can have a home away from home. His full name is Philip Nii Okaidja Adamah Fioo Afe-losolo Adjdemang Okumbour Dacoster Randolph III—he is the first-born of his father, the most beloved by the one who birthed him, a speaker of four native tongues, and above all a Master of Light.

GLENIS REDMOND is nationally renowned award-winning poet and teaching artist traveling the world sharing and teaching poetry. She writes about the strength of her Afro-Carolinian roots, while exploring their weighted and palpable histories. Glenis is a literary community leader dedicated to coaching and uplifting youth poet's voices. Her work has been showcased on NPR and PBS and has been published widely. Her latest book, *The Listening Skin*, will be published by Four Way Books in 2022.

CHELSEY A. RICHARDSON writes the electrical current flowing between words and the spiritual world. She is the single mother and guide to a vibrant girl who can also tap dance, spit a

few hard bars, and stay up all night long. Richardson is a neurodivergent English teacher who was described as a choppy reader by her fourth-grade teacher; a survivor of domestic violence; a daughter of a single mother slash educator slash former Catholic nun and Arkansas-born mechanic who was raised by a freed slave; a sister, best friend, and auntie; and an apartment-dwelling, mixed-ethnicity Black womxn who *slangs* her poetry books on the world wide web.

LUIS M. RODRIGUEZ-MOORE is an African American, Mexican, queer teenager living in Seattle. His family owns a coffee shop (slash community hub) in Beacon Hill, Seattle, called The Station. He is a multidisciplinary artist creating and practicing in theater, digital art, visual art, writing, voice acting, etc., with career aspirations to be a cartoonist or animator of some sort.

JORDAN A. ROME is a queer Black visionary, expressing her desires through writing, performing, and filmmaking. She's originally from the suburbs of Detroit, began her career in Chicago, Illinois, and is currently based in Guadalajara, Mexico. She uses her activist background and tools of creating to deconstruct our understanding of race and body politics in America, which has been a common theme throughout her work. Her recent research explores the psychological effects of being Black in America and documenting the experiences of the Black expatriate.

TRUDY ROZANI lives in Johannesburg, a big ambitious city, and hails from Mthatha, a smaller but just as ambitious a city in South Africa. She is proudly a small-town girl who is making it in the big city. Thanks to the preparation received while living in Cape Town as a teenager and younger adult.

NADIR SALAAM was raised as an American Muslim of African descent—a Five-Percenter. His wife is an immigrant and he is the father of three biracial kids. He is a Black male in the field of education (a unicorn), an antiracist, and a podcast producer who focuses on child advocacy and systemic racism in America.

CHET'LA SEBREE is a poet, editor, and educator who hails from the Mid-Atlantic, which is why she feels most at home near an ocean. A survivor of a many challenges both seen and unseen, Sebree does her best to be present in each unique moment and is grateful for the grit instilled in her by her parents.

RONE SHAVERS is. He just is. He also has a website, where you can find out all sorts of crap about him.

NIA SHUMAKE is a Black woman existing and thriving in Detroit where she writes, consults creatively, and works with Detroit youth.

As a Zimbabwean immigrant with Indian and Pakistani heritage, **SALMA SIDDICK** had to move to the US to understand and recognize how dope her intersectionalities are. Her race is listed as “Asian” on her birth certificate thanks to the major confusion of colonizers! Siddick believes: *We part of a beautiful black mosaic. Every piece and part of us is beautiful, worthy, and necessary.*

RENEE SIMMS is an artist, art lover, Midwesterner, and bourbon drinker living on the traditional homelands of the Puyallup people.

Raised in Flint, Michigan, **SHAQUAN SMITH** has a passion for servicing underrepresented communities and the natural environment. After graduating college, Smith joined the AmeriCorps and worked for the nonprofit EcoWorks. Smith works for the City of Seattle managing a participatory budgeting program that allows communities the opportunity to develop park and street improvements for their neighborhoods. Shaquan continues to use his platform in his environmental work to address the lack of BIPOC representation and the connection between equity and sustainability.

Seattle soul singer, emcee, curator, teacher, Rain City Rock Camp Adult Program director, City of Seattle music commissioner, and Black auntie, **DOMINIQUE STEPHENS** (a.k.a. Adra Boo), performs as part of new wave noir band Hotels, Simone Pin

Productions and Dark Diamonds Burlesque, indie-soul duo Fly Moon Royalty, and as a solo artist, sharing stages with internationally known musicians and burlesque performers across the country. She is also the creator of #BlackHotSunday, events and showcases focused on Blackness to the front!

VIRGIL A. TAYLOR is a nonbinary preteen with both sun and moon in Leo. They live their best free life.

KAMEKO THOMAS is a disabled veteran living and writing at the intersections of race, gender, and invisible disability. She struggled for years with homelessness, psychologically and physically abusive relationships, and near-constant suicidal ideations and attempts. It both saddens and angers her to realize the years spent suffering in silence might not have happened if only she had felt comfortable talking about her mental health needs. It was only through sharing her story that she began the process of accepting ALL of herself, not just the parts others found acceptable or useful. She has a voice, and she has to use it. No one deserves to go through life feeling the way she has felt.

NAJAH MONIQUE TODD is a salon owner, plus-size positivity activist, and pop singer in the local popular band MIRRORGLOSS.

BILLY WEALE is a proud member of the Black and 2SLGBTQ+

community. She is a strong advocate for body positivity and the inclusivity of all sexual orientations and POC in marketing, in the hopes of changing the current narrative in society. A student in Fashion Marketing, Billy is learning to grow and discover more about mental health while navigating adulthood in her twenties.

AFAA M. WEAVER is the author of *Spirit Boxing*. He is a Cave Canem Elder and a lifelong student of Chinese culture. In April 2023, Red Hen Press will publish his next collection of poetry, *A Fire in the Hills*.

Voted 2020 and 2021 Female Blues Performer of the Year by the Washington Blues Society, **ANITA WHITE** (a.k.a. Lady A) was recently nominated by the Soul Cafe Awards (2021) as Best Female Blues Performer of the Year. She is a mentor in the Rhapsody Project, teaching vocal lessons to youth exploring Americana, folk, and blues, and has been called “The Hardest Workin’ Woman in Blues, Soul, Funk, and Gospel.”

RASHAWNA WILSON is a singer-songwriter from the Bronx, New York.

BEN YISRAEL is a poet, an expressionist, a PhD, an explorer, and the author of *A Gorgeous New Language*.

