

ALBANY STATE UNIVERSITY

# THE PIERIAN

L I T E R A R Y   J O U R N A L



SPRING 2015



# THE PIERIAN

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L I T E R A R Y J O U R N A L

## FRONT COVER

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Travis Beasley is a senior Art major at Albany State University. His work has been featured in the *South Georgia Art Competition*, the *Under the Oaks Arts Festival Show*, and the *South Georgia Art Invitational*. For more information about his work, please visit his facebook page at Travis Beasley, or please visit his Instagram page at [\\_bludawhistle](#). For a more indepth look at this year's artist please visit the interview that is included in this year's edition.



Unsolicited manuscripts are welcomed, except during time of layout and printing. Regretfully, manuscripts submitted between March 1 and September 1 will not be accepted. They will be returned unread. The deadline for submissions is March 1 of each year. All manuscripts must be accompanied by appropriate biographical information as outlined on the Pierian page of the Department of English, Modern Languages and Mass Communication of Albany State University.

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ALBANY STATE UNIVERSITY

# THE PIERIAN

L I T E R A R Y J O U R N A L

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S P R I N G 2 0 1 5

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*The Pierian Literary Journal is a publication of Alban State University. The journal explores issues of the African Diaspora as expressed in the literary, artistic and cultural expressions of the various diasporan people groups. We are particularly interested in works that celebrate and critically examine the richness and diversity of African, African-American, Afro-European and Caribbean cultures.*



# THE PIERIAN

LITERARY JOURNAL ♦ SPRING 2015

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Albany State University 8th Annual Poetry Festival 2014-2015 Featured Poet  
 "Don't Deny My Voice" NEH Summer Institute Scholar (2013)  
 "Black Poetry After the Black Arts Movement" NEH Summer Institute  
 Scholar (2015)



AYANA R. ABDALLAH

## Mind Hug!

the next time

you gaze

upon a full silver moon,

get your mind hug on!

languish there

dissolve in brilliant

invigoration

new beginnings

cheerful

faithful

baby steps

let moon shadows

scratch that annoying

brain itch

smile

# Superconscious

we all,

feeling

unprotected,

respond differently

to the vicissitudes of life

manichean dynamics

challenges

surprises

disturbing currents

of events

some steal

become bitter, depressed

others are alcoholics

Each

fully

in

control

whether they know this

or

not.

# KAREGA ANI

## Any Given Son

1 cell - exponentially dividing - i used to love coming here  
innocence reveling in the brilliance of an unmolested mind - before fear had a  
color

when names knew no meaning and i remembered the relativity of everything  
not long ago i recall momma moaning unspeakable harmonies in concert with  
my amniotic dream song

bass kicks reverberating with father time's anticipatory pleading  
all was music and rhythm and feeling and funk and color  
the unspecific bliss of infinity envisaged in the lucid dreams of kings  
there i was - dancing at the dawn of my own autobiography  
a prologue preceding a chronicle of me achieving the seemingly impossible  
for starters i broke water - simultaneously flipped into position and swam  
down the canal

willingly sacrificed omniscience for mortality and acquiesced the enlightened  
opacity of the womb

for the dark ages ominously looming below - i descended - waving farewell to  
heaven

knowing that we'd meet again next lifetime

they say that i'm a boy

alight cool

2 seconds - i have arrived - inhale – exhale – cry  
i break the sound barrier – its cold outside - my umbilical tether is severed  
abruptly

the tip of my principle clipped i see nothing - i feel fear - inherently  
comprehending the concept

i open my eyes to a familiar song - she is incarnate water - smiling triumphant  
and essential  
my gorgeous origin glistening from within - her full lips whisper sweet  
everything to me  
she is the color of soul - in her arms i know beauty - i feel love - inherently  
comprehending the concept  
i wanna go home Momma - i'm sleepy now

3 months - things speed at a snail's pace here  
my thoughts are anatomically incarcerated - my inability to speak renders me  
impotent and frustrated  
i am a Sisyphean concept on groundhog's day - a frantically dancing mind  
attempting to convince my infantile appendages to liberate me from this cage  
- but they won't listen  
and for some god forsaken reason people keep on mistaking my protests for  
helplessness or colic  
on top of that i've gotta rock these pampers for chronic incontinence  
my god - i thought i left that crap back last lifetime - its just embarrassing  
and i'm willing to bet you that they considered it a stroke of genius  
when they comingled peaches peas and carrots - well let me tell you  
something - it wasn't  
and all of this is just a bit much - i'm slowly growing older - going under  
slipping into yet another Enfamil engendered slumber  
somebody wake me up when i've developed an intelligible tongue  
drifting into yet another dream i wonder - what is my name Momma - what is  
a "daddy" - do i have one  
what does statistic mean  
Momma - what are you crying for - why are you crying...

4 and a half - i love it here  
i can do anything - vacillating between waking dreams and running -all is  
intensity - all is discovery

uncovering the pedantic aspects of seemingly tedious themes  
gleaning and assimilating information in the name of delineating the deeper  
nature of things

my concrete thoughts admonish abstract concepts to be honest - i babble to  
god in native tongue

adults erect impediments to quell my expeditions but i continue to toddle  
undaunted

i love it here - i rise - beaming as the sunrays tiptoe in to kiss my insatiable  
curiosity good morning

in my mind the world was comprised of my mother my brothers my sisters  
and i

holy water babies making mud pies playing hide and seek  
finding identity while attempting to be bigger - incessantly asking why

i recall playing with the neighbors and reveling in the rainbow  
comparing notes and listening as they'd convey what they know  
we appeared to be different but at that age it made no difference

we'd sing our given notes in pentatonic harmony

the passing clouds made images we'd only seen in dreams

and i could beat the moon in a foot race - if i believed

see at the time i had my wings - i had my freedom

impossible was still an illogical concept and progress had not yet become a  
euphemism for amnesia

but i recall the sun setting one summer Sunday evening

watching a falling star and becoming oddly uneasy

bracing against the winds of change - fists clenched attempting to retain  
the innocence and bliss of the quickly waning September day - its getting late

faintly i hear momma calling my name - the street lights flicker on

they say i'm getting educated tomorrow - Momma what is kindergarten

5 years old - its cold and raining - today's my birthday

my Momma walked me in - embraced me - told me it was gonna be okay and  
then despite my protests

she left

i am afraid - i sit quietly crying betwixt the end of an era and the inevitability  
of change

shivering at the edge of an unfamiliar abyss doing my best to remember that i  
can levitate

the kindergarten teacher gently asks our names - i answer in a whisper  
it has a different rhythm than the other kids

the other kids begin to snicker - perplexed i snicker with them

lesson one - i am funny

lesson two - i am invisible

unintelligible silence is my greeting - the playground shadow wrapped in the  
hand me down rags

that apparently matter now - i am awkward - i am forgetting - i am

6 - Kenny said that all the girls had cooties  
and Melissa said that all the kids that look like me are stupid - i am stupid - i  
am

7 - Danny hit me and the teacher didn't even flinch - i am a snitch  
Evangeline said that she can't believe that i can add or read or write  
i wonder why i feel so mad all the time - i am

8 - Adam laughed after i told him that i don't know my daddy - i am a fighter  
i am a principal's office fixture - we just got evicted - i am

9 - Andy says his daddy said that black ladies are ugly - she agrees - he -  
they agree  
and i escape -Dre beats head bobbing to the stereotypes - i am  
freed slave lazy baby gangsta disengaged in class  
just another black boy at the blackboard that can't do math  
another black kid at the blackboard that can't manage to do anything but get  
a laugh

inhaling intergenerational demons and exhaling comic relief  
a razor witted nit-wit unheralded genius with an IEP  
gleaning self-esteem from mediocrity - i am a star in the making  
whenever they see me coming the other kids begin to snicker  
i begin to snicker with them - i am funny and i have a funny name

Momma what are niggers?

are we niggers?

i am a little man - i am angry - i feel heavy – anyway

whatever – 10 - 11

12th grade jaded - general population - post pubescent rebel - i hate school  
trajectory less than zero accelerating exponentially or whatever the hell that

means - i am

cynical and nihilistic - dreams stripped of the unrealistic - sixth sense  
disconnected

in the interest of peer acceptance - meandering imagination traded in for  
recognition

i am focused - childish aspirations circumscribed and edited

everything is dormant on the western hemisphere

everything

unless it's in respects to Wilson or Spaulding

all my life i've been being prepared to be the end zone hero

quintessentially invisible until i hit the field

bearer of the transparent kick me sign and clenched-tooth grin - i hate you

i hate your clumsy attempts at slang when you see me as if i'm incapable of  
comprehending English

i hate the bleached divinity we pledge allegiance to each day and the fact that  
after all these years

you still manage to mispronounce my name - i hate your ways - i hate the way  
that you

throw rock - hide hand - i laugh - i spin - i dance - you clap – offbeat

you grin as if this is the natural predisposition of things

a descendant of Jimmy the Greek i be a running Rastus joke  
chased by punch line of coke – sniff – smoke – sprint - shoot - score - i am a  
pimp - i am your whore  
i am your champion as long as i am running - i am a gladiator - the dream -  
the Man(dingo) the myth  
i am above average and typical - an exceptional nigger with intelligent feet  
re-running through history and dancing in the coliseum for your pleasure tell  
me  
who do i have to be to be accepted  
to be respected without having jump and grunt and sweat to get it  
i am unanswered questions - i am an incomplete sentence - i am a bastard  
expletive  
wrapped in a manufactured narrative the gist of which being that i can be  
human  
as long as i remain on stage - and contradictions need to be accepted in order  
to be sweet to the taste  
i am forgetting to remain sane - i stay apolitical - a field marshal in the black  
swagger party  
trap rap pistol packer Twitter Instagram braggadocio pic clicker - need proof  
of my majesty  
check out my 4 year varsity jacket - google me - need proof of my majesty -  
check out my sneakers  
they say that i'm the next big thing - the scouts they say that i'm the next big  
thing - i am the king  
i am supreme - i am a beast - i am a living breathing highlight reel - a prospect  
- an object - a monster  
a god sent in the devils skin - black steel fear incarnate - moving target  
practice  
whenever you feel threatened - i get it - i fit the description - but i won't scare  
them  
if i'm already running - yeah i get it - i've finally been trained to answer to my  
name



to know my place - pose for the photo-op - and smile - coach told me that the  
college scouts are out  
to watch the game tonight - they say that i'm important – primetime -  
livestock - rising star  
they say that i'm important  
time to show them  
that i still know how to fly



Are we free?

Amiri Leroi Jones Baraka

The one who wrote plays and poems

The one who scats

The one who believed that black nationalism is an obligation not a choice

It is an obligation not a choice.

The one who gives ultimatums

The one who said either give us our lives, or forfeit ya own

Amiri Leroi Jones Baraka

The one who is always in rant mode

Boudida...Boudida...boudida....dobe do wop bop bu bu

The one who

Who respected Dr. King

Who loved Malcolm and DuBois

Who recognized Jack, Bobby, and

Abe

Boudida...Boudida... bu batup be do woo woo

Amiri Leroi Jones Baraka

The one who became a Marxist

The one who wrote

A Poem for Black Hearts

Three Movements and a Coda

S.O.S.

Black Art

& The Dutchman

Amiri Leroi Jones Baraka

Revered or Reviled

Loved or Hated

Glorified or criticized

A man of justice or vengeful violence

Amiri Leroi Jones Baraka

# LAURENTIIS GAINES

## Untitled

### SPANISH

¡Oda a la sala familiar!

¡Ah! mi querida casa, cómo solía juntarnos!

Sus cuatro paredes cuadradas nos guardaron cerca y calientes

Cuando la casa que usted, mi habitación familiar, era donde nos juntamos y  
amamos el uno al otro.

Miraríamos películas, comeríamos palomitas de maíz, nos reiríamos y nos  
divertiríamos

Mi habitación familiar, un lugar donde el tiempo se paró y familia sucedió.

### ENGLISH

¡Ode to My Family Room!

Oh my dear home, how you used to bring us together!

Your four square walls kept us close and warm

When home You, Family Room, was where we gathered and loved each other

We would watch movies, eat popcorn, laugh and have fun

My family room, a place where time stopped and family happened.

## HOKE GLOVER\*

### black arts

blind and bleeding in the books scream  
in the dry throat until i cry. a fist  
coming out of my mouth is made of my  
mother's brown paper bag, my daddy's  
smile laced with vodka, my grandfather  
beating the skin off of my uncles, haunted  
handed down. profundity of thought,  
death and mayhem, black wings  
of the white state, black scream like smoke  
coughing in the house, hacking up slavery.  
which is why i sing the scream, have sung  
the scream, will be singing railroads and  
men tiny on the edge of a city with big dreams  
and no cash in their pocket. mess, seeping,  
rhythm that becomes hip-hop, an afro placed  
on a plate and sent upstate. Assata, off-shore,  
shortest lived, most attacked. Malcolm's red

headed rage by any means necessary still  
burning-old man standing in the crowd  
listening, peering onto the stage, his work  
pants and lunchbox in his hand, his eyes still,  
peering into the black pit of history-stereo  
of confusion, rhythm threaded around a weapon,  
a mother insane, a father murdered  
at the crossroads, the train tracks, crosshairs  
of the black night. Etheridge speaks his genius  
waffle ironed through the prison bars, and Sonia  
sings antennae and ancestral. here is your rhetoric:

*i spit in the dust and made a little bit of mud,  
the world done changed, tonight in my city  
the carryout is open, somebody is walking  
across a trampled path to the liquor store,  
somewhere my cousins stand in a circle  
making music with their mouths, rhetoric,  
talking shit, kicking up dust.*

## whichcraft

study the masters Lucille Clifton

when they speak of craft  
i wonder....

if i am good enuff? if i am  
a christian? if god knows

the disaster? tell me about  
the disaster. if sin is not black,

if those young dudes  
outside the station singing

hip-hop in cipher have  
a chance stamped

on their passport  
by the passport people

who say black skin is metaphor?  
have they ever written

a poem with discipline  
and in tro spec tion ?

when they speak of craft  
i wonder why did i become

a poet? why do i love  
language? what do i know

of words with my father  
doused in silence? i know

the bent notes of my life.  
the lyric is not good enuff.

the blue niggers like monk  
spectacle in the august sun

the slave ship, shit, hip,  
knowledge is not good enuff

like dem boys fist balled  
tight, looking for bullseyes.

for the anger and the shape  
shift negroes who smiled



in the night, white teeth  
and sung a song like moses,

who ended in blood and begging,  
sadness, and the evidence

of things unseen. like racism  
death dying and a voice

rarely written, scrawled  
on a bathroom wall, 95 South

somewhere between Roanoke  
and Bristol. i read. i need

something else like Sun-Ra,  
my man's, my boys. yeah, like T

talking a talk that said talk  
is art and articulate is copper

wire bent around a stone  
and called jewelry like the afro

beauty on the head of women  
who need the contrast knob

an adjustment to the black

and white 1983 zenith

to be called beautiful. the  
craft of negro lips, unappreciated

in this joint. i would  
like to own my salvation

like the mega-pastors own  
lear jets and make a heaven

of my own words. sing a song  
heavy enuff, be good enuff

be backwards. make some cake.  
shake and bake. be that thing

that keeps the lights on  
in the world. like dancing

animals in the circus. so sharp.  
that nigger like. damm!

dancing in september  
coming in from the fields

cotton picking negroes  
smelling like work

craft on their ass.

my uncle who couldn't read

stirring Wild Turkey

into egg nog in november

whispering into my ear

slow and methodically

like this    like this.

# JOYCE HAYNES

1963

What about the years of change?/What about the pain?/What about the Civil Rights that were yours and mine to gain?/What about the long, long days And them long, long Nights,/That the ones before us suffered through, yet no peace did they find?

Picket signs along the concrete did they carry,Do you know of the sickening shames, that were brought upon the peaceful young protesters, marching, only marching to make way for a difference and for a change? How about the Sit-Ins? Do you know of every "Spit-In the Colored Girl's" second?Every "Mace Down The Colored Man" minute?/ Every "Cut Loose The Hounds On These Trouble Maker" hours,they spent chanting, "We Shall Fight the Power!" Did you ever stop to notice all the blood we've shed before? Did you ever stop to notice all the struggles we've endured? Stop...Be still...Let these words caress your ear.For just a moment, Let's go back to 1963.And imagine if it were you, if it were me?...

What about the years of change? What about the pain? What about the Civil Rights that were yours and mine to gain? What about the long, long days and them long, long nights, that the ones before us suffered through, yet no peace did they find?

Freedom came at a high cost Y'all! Dozens upon dozens, and hundreds upon hundreds of dear ones, left unaccounted for, stories untold, and still more...Dead and gone, wit' no head stone, that marks what they even lived for. Wait... Turn an ear towards the Heavens, surrender your spirit, for just a minute. and you can almost hear them. Joy, tapping through their toes. Laughter slipping along their lungs./Because their pain is over! But the struggle is not. Many of us have just forgot. Could you have done what they did? Could you have been just as strong?/And last all those years of injustice and still come out singing a song?

What about the years of change?/What about the pain?/What about the Civil Rights that were yours and mine to gain?/What about the long, long days And them long, long Nights,/That the ones before us suffered through, yet no peace did they find?

Fifty years gone by and my Grandmother still speaks of her memory, of a train ride she took with my father and her other small songs to Mississippi. When the train cam to a stop, and they all got off she said, " I was so scared when your Uncle Charlie ran into that White Man's Only bathroom!" She sad, "If they had done anything to him, ain't nothin' much I could'a done even if I wanted to!" FIFTY YEARS GONE BY...and that memory still causes to tears to brim in her eyes. You can hear the fear choked in her throat at the injustice strung upon the neck of our people. Then just as quick as the memory contorts up her face, a warm glow saturates her bones and heals her hurting place as she begins to sing a song of God's Amazing Grace. Sings of how God delivered his people from a might long way. When my father speaks of the same memory, you can tell it affects him, just in a much milder way. So he was sure to raise up his children just like him and my mother were raised, brought up to pray. To pray over the family, pray over the lives of their

neighbors, those both present and away. Right here and now I speak a prayer for the present day, a prayer that the struggles we had before won't repeat some day!...

What about the years of change?/What about the pain?/What about the Civil Rights that were yours and mine to gain?/What about the long, long days And them long, long Nights,/That the ones before us suffered through/ Yet no peace did they find...

Did you ever stop to notice that your freedom wasn't free? Did you ever stop to notice 1963?

LITA HOOPER\*

## Inheritance

I got nothing whiskey breath  
bad hand I got nothing more  
than time spinning more  
doubt making rounds like roulette  
French like my great grandmother  
she would have liked this fancy place  
could have beat odds  
like she did death I got  
her hair I am native in this place

At home my baby's cereal bowl  
reeks of sugar  
across the room I wait  
this is the best part  
tv pastor says what I see  
at the entrance each night  
forgive us our debts

I close my eyes  
now back at the table my back  
now a wall my hands  
false signaling my hair

some allegiance I got time  
so luck come on through I got  
my grandmother's eyes  
got my mother's permission.



## The Gospel According to Sho Nuff (a bop)

They called her Sho Nuff both sides of the Line.

In Tuscaloosa, it meant smart mouthed gal.

Here, it was Redbone, Youngblood

the last act at The Beacon Bar and Lounge.

She was the cousin who ran from scripture  
chasing new faith on Chicago's Southside.

it's me it's me it's me oh, Lord  
standing in the need of prayer

Every Saturday night she offered up our genealogy

became her daddy at the pulpit

scanning for nonbelievers. Oiled and laced

her legs became my aunt's legs

springing from choir benches

fanning burnt air haze.

Her hands were my uncle's, anointing

those down front who nudged dollar bills

onto sticky skin, now red-tinted under a bare bulb.

Each week Sho Nuff fell to her knees grasping  
the golden pole that fell short of the rafters  
muting the tongue-talking shadow-shifters  
to heed her lone chord.

not my brother not my sister but it's me oh, Lord  
standing in the need of prayer

On the ride home she'd hum a song from  
southern Sundays. No reverie, a tender pitch  
She'd raise turned palms  
just before she shut her eyes  
lower her head to sleep  
the way Granny used to.

*help me help me help me oh, Lord*  
*standing in the need of prayer*

MAXINE JAFTA

## Lengoma Kum an Original Poem

Qhakaza mzimba

Ugaleleke kulomvubo walengoma

Zibonakalise uzisondeza phezukwayo

Ngaphakathi kwalamaza aza nelixilongo

Lixilonga phakathi ..lindiphakamisa

Xeshikweni lididizela ligxadazela lidubula bakathi kwam!

Makes me remember the drum to it

As i recall a beat to it

And surrender the dance to it

Kum lo ngumbono wendlovu zixhathisana zigxadazela zisiza

Ndinomona ngesisidudla salengoma

Unakuphaphazela ke umoya wam xe xabana nesiisgubhu

Bexabana ,bexhwithana de baxhawulane

Xexhentsa ezinikela umzimba

Nanka amagqabi alomthi endiqala ngaphathi

Ingabano exazululwa ngojuxuzo

Ngomxuzo we zimbo zomzimba

I remember now the drum to it

As the soul commands the beat to it

I am the dance, do it

Awa edyumfuz!

Ngumbono wamantombazan exhentsa unomphelo  
Zizandla ziwela ngapha nangapha  
Zingalo zisiwa ngapha nagapha  
Zikhongozelo zizenzela unothanda  
zimemana ngalengoma  
Zimemezela Nansi! le ingoma  
Yandi qoqosha lengoma  
Yandiqeqesha ngekhono  
Thyini! Indiyala indiphika  
Indikhwazela ngaphakathi  
Ithyafisa abaleleyo

Ndilangezelele kuba phamb'kwakho  
Phakathi kwezandla zakho  
Emehlweni akho  
Dezonke imfazwe zime  
Emadolweni amjoni  
Ezinyaweni nanga amakhwenkwe  
Nazi ezinkomo zingena  
Nazi ezinkomo zingena  
Ngena mkhawuleli  
Ngena mkhokheli ngena

## Lengoma Kum an Original Poem-- English Translation

There is a song  
Arising from the inside  
It is a song my body recollects  
Whose rhythm and beat my soul cannot deny.

My soul is understood by this instrument  
Understood and healed by its instrumentation  
This ambitious language!  
Reaching to the familiar place  
From which my soul originates

Staggering, dizzying invading my spirit  
This here sound is the song I remember

Makes me remember the drum to it  
As I recall a beat to it  
And surrender the dance to it

To me this is like the days of my fathers..

Feet to the ground  
My soul as a thousand elephants!  
Pressing and drawing the noise from the ground up!  
Celebrating, together facing and pressing forward  
Then unintentionally fetching all of creation into song

Each sound picking and pulling at each other  
Reaching for that hand shake  
That agreements set on the tablet of my soul

I remember now the drum to it  
As the soul commands th beat to it  
I am the dance, do it

As the leaves of this tree fall to the ground  
They make a sound of water dripping  
Into a puddle.. this is my souls response  
To this beat

I am a vision of a thousand young women  
Dancing to their never ending chant  
My hands are a free spirit  
My arms resting, released to the sound  
Each limb informing the other to respond

There is nothing new to this discipline  
Yet it refreshes my soul  
Calling my being to submission  
Declaring its presence  
Then and finally  
Dominating me on the inside!

## CHARNELL LASTER

### Ms. Phillis Wheatley-Peters

*My poet's name is Phyllis Wheatley. She was born around 1753 in Senegambia, Africa. At the age of seven, she was forced to board an American slave ship named Phillis. Because of her frail frame and sickly nature, she was not able to work in regular slave labor. Therefore, she was purchased by John Wheatley as a person servant for his ailing wife. Going against cultural norms and laws, the Wheatley's secretly taught Phillis to read and write. Within thirteen months, Wheatley was able to read the Holy Bible. As a woman in captivity, my poet stand out from the rest. Her writings caught international attention in the society that thought that Black people could not read, write, or much less write their own poetry. She was finally taken seriously after publishing her famous volume of poetry entitled: Poems on Various Subjects: Religious and Moral. After being emancipated at twenty years of age, she eventually married a free black man named John Peters. They had three children whom all died in infancy. She went on to try to publish a second volume but it did not go well. At the age of thirty-one, she died away in poverty due to asthmatic and childbirth complications.*

I wonder how she sounded

As a woman speaking before the

Caucasian race of men and women

Promoting her poetry like we promote

Our local rappers. She was only trying to claim her fame

In writing. For she was reluctant to leave her imagination to

Transit to reality. Bound by friendship and virtue in her time, she was

Encouraged to write out her feelings on parched paper. But virtue exists in

pockets today.

This woman was truly the epitome of the word and

She spoke to me like a hidden voice and a secret formula in my drink.

This equation of my free verse post modernism reacting with her old English rhyme

Generated a catalyst for the both of us. Her product in me forced my thoughts on paper,

On a dry erase board. I saw arrows in the struggle, and we constantly juggled our

Thoughts on the works of Providence. Then we came to the realization that God gave

Man reason and memory. Therefore she remembered her homeland in West Africa and that

Caused me to reminisce about me originating from the backwoods and ghettos of Georgia.

Ms. Wheatley-Peters was reminding me to remind you to imagine her voice through me. She

Is speaking through this eulogy from her unmarked grave. Presenting potential greatness in all

Poets to come. She says, "I AM the Mother of African American Literature."

Sometimes I

Wonder if she would enthrone me as Queen of poetry on various subjects,

A Letter to His Excellency, On Imagination, On Virtue, On Friendship, and On Being Bought from Africa to America.

Poverty was her enemy, and she overcame her chronic asthma condition to forever write in me

My classmates

My Professors,

And most importantly,

In you.



# KIERRA LAWRENCE

## The Backwards Generation of Women

I come from a generation of women strong enough to battle corruption and  
create peace

That statement is completely false and absurd

Women are incapable of formulating change in society

Never will they be able to say that

BLACK WOMEN will make history

“OPEN YOUR EYES”

MY generation of women say

“Money is more significant than knowledge,”

and

“Staying ignorant outweighs the benefits of college.”

I’ve heard people say

BLACK WOMEN embody the concept of self-empowerment

We come from queens and spark the torch of history that our ancestors left  
behind

That’s a LIE

My generation of women have ruined society.

Sit silently while the lives of Martin, Brown, and countless others continue to  
face injustice

We didn’t learn to

3. Come together to help society progress in the most productive way

2. Support other women, for they are our sistuhs

1. Love ourselves and the roots that we originate from

Instead we pledge to:

Hate one another

AND

Degrade ourselves

It is insane to think that we will

MAKE A CHANGE

This generation of women that I'm surrounded by WILL

FAIL

It is a lie to say that we will

SUCCEED

My generation of black women will

Get the message

**When will you....?**

(Read this poem from bottom to top starting at the line WHEN WILL YOU)

# JUSTICE LEE

## Mike Brown

Bam! Bam! Bam!  
And now Im running for dear life  
Dear life  
Dear life  
Precious life  
But am I some wild beast to be hunted?  
Oh that's right!  
We are black "animals"!  
The "lesser beings" of society!  
Our lives are only valued by our own  
My hands showed surrender  
But you white hog!  
Were you in fear of this black panther?  
But you were the predator and I was the pray  
But because I had claws and fangs, I was slaughtered  
But you couldn't retract your white tusks you stupid boar!  
Why would I not be fearful,  
Of one so foaming white and rabid?  
Bloodlust  
This was a bloodbust  
7 shots plus  
A few more shots you can trust  
Plus  
A few more cops you can't trust  
"No justice, no peace"  
"No justice, no peace"  
"No justice, no peace"  
No peace, not just

JEFFERY D. MACK

## A Conversation with Mr. Travis Beasley, Featured Cover Artist

Jeffery Mack: Hello. I'm Jeffery Mack, editor of The Pierian Literary Journal, and I'm here today with the featured artist of this year's edition of the journal, Mr. Travis Beasley. Tell us something about yourself, Mr. Beasley.

Travis Beasley: Well, I'm from Atlanta, GA. I lived in Orlando, FL for a few years, but moved back to Clayton County, GA. I graduated from Riverdale High School. I'm 22 years old, and I enjoy machines...screws, nuts, bolts—anything that moves. I came to Albany State because of Mr. D (Michael Decuir) for marching band.

JM: That's interesting. So, you came here for music, but somehow you ended up an Art major. How did that switch happen? Why did you decide to become an artist, or how did you get into art?

TB: When I was younger, I would always draw little cars or Dragon Ball Z and Poke'mon characters, and I was pretty good at it. But, I really didn't think much about it. Then, I stopped drawing because I wanted to play sports, but I would still doodle every now and then during class on my notes and stuff. I noticed that I would doodle a lot. When I came to college, I was a computer science major, but that wasn't what I really wanted to do. Later, I met Scott Marini, who was my advisor at the time. He suggested that I check out an art class before I committed to it completely. So, I did, and I really enjoyed it. I changed my major and have been going forward since. I'm really glad I changed my major to Art.

JM: We are too. You have a very good gift, and we are happy to showcase it. So, what are some of your goals for the future with work or your life/career goals? And, do these goals include your art?

TB: Interestingly, my career goal is to be an airline pilot. For my art, I want to design Delta's logos, and maybe eventually design new planes and airports, when I retire.

JM: Wow, a pilot. So, how do you see your art helping to prepare you for that?

TB: Now, my art focuses on the internal components of machines that we may not see, examining those parts of a plane that allow it to move so many miles an hour and not fall. My art shows many things like that. Also, I think my art will give me something to do when I retire. No one wants to just sit around and watch TV all day (chuckle).

JM: You're right about that, the not sitting around part. Could we talk a little about your art itself? What is your favorite work that you have created so far? The piece that you did for the cover is very different from what you're describing. I mean, I saw some of your other pieces, and yes you have a strong propensity for machines. The work that you do shows that you're really into machines and the parts of them. But, this other piece that you did for us is a very different conversation. It's very nice, and the other pieces that I've seen of yours are nice as well. So, what is your favorite piece you've created, and what are some of the things you're working on at the moment?

TB: At the moment, my favorite piece is the airplane that I painted last year. It came out really well. I like the perspective I have on it. It looks like it is literally coming off the page at you, but I don't have a title for that piece yet. I recently finished a watercolor painting of a 1965 Ford Mustang. It's a pretty large painting. It came out really well. I'm not finished with it yet. I need to go back and edit some things. But, it came out really well.

JM: I saw that mustang piece. It is a really complementary image. I like that one a lot. So, what are some of your favorite art pieces in general? And, could you tell us a few things about those pieces? This could be some of your paintings or some by other artists.

TB: Of other artists, I like Andy Warhol. I like what he does with color, the vibrant colors that he uses in his art. I like the different, I wouldn't say stamps, but how he repeats the same image over and over again but with different colors. For example, his painting of Marilyn Monroe featured eight images of her in one painting. It's hard painting the same thing eight times, and I don't think he used a ruler either. I think he just went for it.

JM: I like a lot of his work as well. I his work, and I like Jean Michel Basquiat. These are two great and influential artists. Have you studied any African American artists?

TB: Recently, no I have not. I have looked at some in Art History, but I haven't studied them yet. I want to study them in the near future, particularly the newer artists of my era.

JM: There are a lot of interesting perspectives coming from peoples of color—not just African Americans. I'm sure you will enjoy them when you study them. Okay. So, what has been your most touching or amazing moments as an artist?

TB: Wow...I recently did a recycle show where you make a piece out of recycled goods. I made an eighteen wheeler out of soda cans and bottle tops and glue. It was an interesting experience. I cut myself about 80 million times (laughs), but it was cool. The show was about a couple of weeks ago. The pieces were in a gallery, and kids could play with them. Although they couldn't really play with mine, some of the kids took it and ran around the floor with it. They really weren't supposed to play with it because my piece didn't roll, but they kinda broke some stuff on it (laughs). It was okay because they took something

that I created for free and enjoyed it. It was touching to see that they actually wanted to play with mine and wanted to keep it. One little boy cried because he couldn't keep it. That was a touching moment for me, watching them play with it and enjoy what I created.

JM: That's nice. Have you won any awards or entered your art into any shows?

TB: I've done several shows. We do an annual South Georgia Art Competition. I've been in that since 2013. Most recently, I've done the Under the Oaks Arts Fest Show this semester. I was in the South Georgia Art Invitational as well. Some of my pieces won second or third place. I haven't won first place, but one lady wanted to buy one of my vases for \$300 but I didn't sell it. I want to use it for my seniors show.

JM: If you had to choose one artist of all of the artists that exists out there, that you've studied or the ones you've observed, which would you say has had the greatest impact on you or your work?

TB: Wow. I would have to say Vincent Van Gogh. He's a phenomenal artist. The stuff that he does on canvas is just remarkable. The way he saw the world was unique. For example, when he painted *Starry Night*, he was under heavy medication, and it took him to another world. What he produced was remarkable. He also did a lot of self portraits, and I want to do some of those.

JM: Yes, he was an amazing artist. Is there anything in particular about his work that you are especially drawn to that might help us better understand the impact his work has had on you?

TB: Well, the randomness. He doesn't finish a lot of his stuff. He's not the perfect artist, as we would say. A lot of his work is not painted completely. There is generally some work to be done on his pieces to complete it. He did whatever he wanted to do and didn't concern himself with what others thought about it. That's how I see my art. It reflects whatever I am feeling at the time

and not something that someone else has a stake in.

JM: I like that—art for art’s sake. In many ways, that’s what it’s all about—the artist telling us what he or she sees, giving us their perspectives on the world. Is there anything else should we know about your art that you haven’t shared with us so far?

TB: I’ve done a lot of pieces that I currently have stored in my closet (chuckle). They are interesting. I feel like I’m getting better at drawing. I used to hate drawing, believe it or not. It’s still something I’m trying to get into because it’s an important part of being an artist. I’m glad that I’ve gotten to the point where I can put whatever I’m thinking on paper.

JM: It’s clear that you’re great at what you do. We are thoroughly impressed with your work. If someone wanted to know more about you and your art, where can we find you?

TB: You can reach me on facebook: Travis Beasley. I’m working on a facebook page and a webpage for my art. I have an Instagram page at [\\_bludawhistle](#). You can see a lot of my work there too. I’m working on other social media pages for my art. It’s coming soon, so stay tuned.

JM: I’m sure the readers will visit those pages and enjoy what they will experience there. So, are there any tips you have for aspiring artists? Any words of inspiration you might have for them?

TB: Sure. Whatever you’re thinking, write it down in full detail: dreams, ideas, inspirations, whatever. Don’t trust your memory. Record what you were thinking at the moment so that when you start to create it, you can recreate what you were thinking at the moment.

JM: Wonderful. That is great advice. Is there anything else you would like to



mention that we might have overlooked? Something you think might be important for the readers to know?

TB: Well...I graduate in December. That's good.

JM: That's more than good. That's great! Okay, thank you very much for sharing your time with us, Mr. Beasley. And, thank you for allowing us to share your art with our readers.

TB: You're very welcome.

DAVID MILLS

## Whose People (for Amiri Baraka)

Abandon the east village Afro-bohemian da-dashiki-easy does it eating  
hamhocks lazing in a hammock blues people, Don L. Lee(roi) Jones,  
Amiri *Baraki* Madhubuti changing same blues people His mind left the  
Melodeconstruction site where nipple Negroes always took pulpit fur-  
loughs from the blues people he comes out in hard covers to suss out the  
coverups have heads levitating on his statements cause he rise to the occa-  
sion like sourdough in an oven say “what up blood?” like our pink tongues  
was not so distant African cousins he would drop science then break it  
down like his mouth was the big top & the verbal circus had to leave town,  
Setup shop in *Newark de triomphe* where brothers & sisters were shattered  
by shadows & grilled sham sandwiches, so he gathered his own W.E.B.  
Do boys in the hood--some forthright fifth columns—and his poems be-  
came sheets of sound for the silenced blues people, Knowing he gon’ pay  
an outcome tax for his uprodden, pork-free assaults in the gizzard  
labyrinth, honky tonk mellow dolly dicky land band blues people, 67  
when them Billy clubs played a drum solo on his skull he understood what  
the pigs meant about his pigment: they thought they was playing **stomp  
him’ at the savoy** but it was the blues people. Still he clean the jerk and  
keep on power lipping. Just from the weight of his words he snap a hy-  
phen in two like a punctuated barbell, his verbs shattering the ankles of ex-  
clamation points, adjectives training a 357 magnum on a period point  
blank range—just for the blues people cultural point guard crosscourt

jester with the run n' gun tongue known for the cerebral shake n' bake  
dribbling truth up court shooting insults from beyond the arc or picking  
up an assist with a lyrical layup. Never an intellectual stutter step,  
whenever he shot the shit it was nothing but net--for the blues people  
downright upright bass tattooed by Fables of Faubus with Mingus  
among us blues people, a tisket a casket we gon ella-vate fitzgerald, art  
pepper adams and zoot suit sims—an educated saxophonist is our best  
customer, Big band swing gussied up our gutbucket stuffed it in a tux  
and lynched it meanwhile--Bird was at Minton's cooking with gasps:--  
watch that middle C minstrelsy, but what a lil moonshine can do when  
you got the cootie Williams blues people, What happens when you  
wake up and discover your country is a genetically modified orgasm?  
Incontinent bifocaled hooligans hired by the powers that be-bop be so  
inlandish they ransack your nightmares denying your way outalienable  
rights of life--lip-- purty & the pursuit of Sonny Stittness--still we be  
idiots for the idiom Satchmo and django, sonny and Pharaoh hocus po-  
tioned blues people At the top of the chocolate charts rid'em of boos  
people Brubeck take 5, call a cab calloway cause the carter family—  
benny, betty & ron--ain't chasin the trane, choo choo ch.boogie blue,  
creole love call lockjaw darktown strutters blues people Your conk  
ain't nuttin' but a cotton club bobbin' to the east st. louis toodaloo blues  
people Hawkins and Heath, Hinton and Hodges, Yardbird--a be-bop  
hypodermic needle—in & from the heartland blues people, apostles of  
the 1 o'clock jump, ohh bop she bam blues people Charlie parker with  
(no) strings attached blues people **bedodeededededededededede-**  
**dode** How many de's before we do blues people? Jelly roll's jam ses-  
sions. It don't mean a thing if it ain't get that sting--cause the birth of  
the cool was actually **andante's inferno**. Misterioso fugue-a-ditty

piano combat: Small's Paradise music so loud make the Harlem River quiver. None of that grey poupon napkin dab eau de toilette humbug jazz. We need some moody indigo, outdentured servant blues people with a way out-feriority complex to reminisce in tempo 'bout the shape of jazz to come--'cuz if Charlie parker was a gunslinger there'd be a whole lot of dead copycats. When they call you a psychotic washrag existential chitterling but eubie art blakey it's the blues people, when they downsize your boomshakalaka and indict your percussion for cussin' it's the blues people, artie and archie the shawshepp redemption; no matter--**marvin the smitty or willie the lion**: some day my smith will come blues people We got some philly jo, harry sweets, papi shampoo swellington **way outcantation** blues people billy if the horn done strayed take the "A" train with blues people The windy city 7 know Ethel's water's bout to break—watch out blues people. *These are a few of my favorite stings: ragtime and rainey and swing street and chano, Cecil and threadgill and tiger rag solos, cubops and creoles and downbeats of Dizzy's bucking at contests with basin st. blues*—people We gone outfiltrate the freedom now suite with the swing low sweet scattilac Ornate coleman free jazz smorgasbord blues people sixteenth, eighth and quartered notes don't get around much anymore blues people deacon of the downtrodden, megaphone of the misbegotten **field holler if you hear me** blues people, with a headbop halt from a smoke-choked audience he called out US history its syphilitic lip synch the way it strangled the microphony like an unwitting electrified chicken he screamed "**the truth was pre-recorded you dubbed over the slaughter of the blues people!**" Salt peanuts and honeysuckle chile' g-d bless lady day's grits n' gravy blues people Lake and lateef along with captain rahsaan roland kirk live at the starship enterprise

blues people outcoherent nappy luoa gandy dancer blues people strange  
fruit heebie jeebie five spot Manteca hurtling at the frequency of joy  
blues people the djembe was the world's first text message. you can't  
tell cats to take it slow cause they'll just slow it a little faster See, these  
is some outdoctrinated Saturday night fish fry fat hot lips type'a blues  
people. To be or not to bop that is the harmonic progression blues peo-  
ple, backwood, pigeon-toed Congo square helody and mythym blues  
people, dark Ensemble of Chicago, trading 4 & 8s blues people, gumbo  
bent note quadroon testicted blues people pig foot riff & a bottle of  
tears blues people café society night in amnesia lush life blues people  
mack the knife mulgrew miller minstrelsy cramp blues people bebop  
skirmish avant guardian core-quin and sextet blues people diminuendo  
in blues people The anguish index in black America is at an all-time  
high blues people beware of Wall Street & its aluminum laughter blues  
people it ain't drizzling the earth is a drum kit each land mass stretched  
leather and G-d just swept some brushes cross the planet's hi-hats—  
sound midnight sound midnight. Do you know what it means to miss  
Amiri? blues people, blues people, the blues--people

# MONTAVIS MOORING

## Fever

Miles Davis fell through the scorching skies of an angry Heaven.

In his eyes, tears once stood,

On the faces that kept crying MO 'jazz, MO' jazz.

Oppressed words were thrown at the innocent reflections.

Exposing the black hurt,

Causing Claude McKay to leave the shadows of Harlem behind,

While Jean Toomer rhymed bout' hard times.

The pouring of blues in the Negro body.

Stood the test of time,

The deferring of dreams.

Cracked open the head of Langston Hughes,

His thoughts began a-smoking,

His thoughts began a-smoking

Like the lips that held cigarettes.

## GREGG MURRAY

### Why I Read Baraka

Great literature isn't there to give you answers. It's there to ask you questions. I started my education with Philosophy courses, and I found that to be very helpful with learning how to formulate thoughts and how to write more clearly. Ultimately, though, it didn't do what it said it was going to do, which is give me the TRUTH. I was barking up the wrong tree. I forgot that Socrates was out there asking all these questions, getting people to think about stuff, to check it out.

I also sometimes think about Diogenes walking around the city streets with a lantern and holding it in people's faces. Said he was looking for an honest man.

Some of my students don't know the name Amiri Baraka. I try to give them some idea by doing some verses from his *Preface to a 20-Volume Suicide Note*—show them my volume that he probably stapled himself and gave to somebody at his apartment—and demonstrate his connection to avant-garde poetics of the 40s and 50s, the lyrical beauty and tireless experimentation. I like to show them *Blues People*, a brilliant, expansive study of African-American history and culture and politics and economics through a unique, powerful music tradition. Then I sometimes show them some poems from *Dead Lecturer*, you know like “An Agony. As Now” as he again explores the avant-garde landscape but becomes more interested in racial identity, race

politics, and systematic inequality. Or I let them read *Dutchman*, and let them discuss what that's all about, see how that STRIKES them, makes them think about the world they live in. Maybe share an essay on Malcolm X or a poem or two on John Coltrane, maybe "AM/Trak," check out a political pamphlet. Was he keeping up with the news? What he had to say about Marx or Aimé Césaire, other writers, what he thought about public transportation. What about *Black Fire*? What he was throwing down in "Why's/Wise"? See what was in the way of things, or maybe find out who blew up America.

When I was a grad student at the University of Minnesota, Baraka came to my campus and performed the controversial "Somebody Blew Up America." I sat mystified as he thumped one of his trademark scats, pausing before the poem's opening lines to attribute, "That was Monk." Then my head exploded as he wove beats of his own, repeating, "Who? Who? Who?" and lobbing allegations: "Who got fat from plantations Who genocided Indians Tried to waste the Black nation/Who live on Wall Street The first plantation." While the who list just got longer and longer, I circled into my mind. I had to think. I was called out and made to think. Who? Who? Who? By the end of the poem this who becomes "an Owl exploding In your life in your brain in your self." Baraka is twenty feet away from me but he's shaking me and screeching, "Who and Who and WHO who who Whoooo and Whoooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!" But when you wake up and study something—really study something—you take the time to figure out what stuff means. That poem may have lost Baraka his job as Poet Laureate of New Jersey, but it brags lustily as chanticleer in the morning.

Anybody know who said that line? I'm thinking of Thoreau, another writer who sometimes rubbed folks the wrong way. He said,



I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to *brag as lustily as chanticleer* in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.

But that's why I'm reading Baraka. It always wakes me up. And for all the criticism of "Somebody Blew Up America"—much of it valid—it's full of questions. If you answer his who questions—like Kwame Dawes writes in his introduction to "Somebody Blew Up America and Other Poems"—there are contradictions. Is the answer white people? Colonial superpowers? The U.S. Government? See, it makes you ASK QUESTIONS. I don't always agree with Baraka. In fact, I've been downright offended by some of his work. Some of the Black Nationalist period work contains anti-semitic and homophobic slurs and misogynistic language. But you don't just go to literature for it to tell you what to do. Great literature makes you ask questions of yourself. Great literature doesn't have the answers, and sometimes it reflects the wayward, outdated thoughts of an author caught in his or her personal historical struggle. But this is great literature, what yield its riches when pressure is applied.

Great literature has something at stake, and it stays at stake. For the most part, I learned literature in a setting where the stakes weren't mentioned. It was art for art's sake. Then I taught at a classical high school which emphasized taking the text on its own terms. This is usually associated with the "New Criticism" and can contain valid approaches for improving a skill set. Yet I would agree with those who assert it was imagined and implemented, in part, to neutralize political questions. But that argument is for another time. New Criticism suggests that a text can be understood using only what's there, and that the text can produce its own meaning. Try that approach with *Dutchman*. Try divorcing THAT work from the history of the black middle class struggle for social mobility and respect. There's no allegory at all.

- White Woman eating apples sits next to black Man on train.
- Woman starts acting weird and saying weird things and she starts seducing him.
- Man shows interest.
- Woman starts gradually shifting from just knowing Man's business to saying offensive things to him.
- God only knows why Man's offended, this is a new critical approach, the text doesn't tell me ON ITS OWN TERMS!
- Anyway, Man gets mad and starts being aggressive and everybody's looking at him.
- Man insults Woman and Woman stabs Man.
- Train keeps moving.

I read Baraka because he makes us ask questions, go beyond New Criticism. What's the identity underneath his mask? Which social realities are allegorized by this obvious Eve symbol? And the new critic says, what there's an eve symbol?? (Okay, this is a straw man, but you get the point... divorcing a text from its social CONtext with democratic PREtext.) You have to know the history or racial struggle, engage it, to understand the country we live in. He's SHAKING you.

It's not that new critics wouldn't egg knowledge that these are appropriate observations to bring into the work. They are stupid. They just end up choosing work but better meets with their thesis, arguing that interpreting that work is a more democratic move because the method is available to everyone. In other words, it gives critics a theoretical reason to avoid literature that's engaged, political. It allows enfranchised, well-to-do, privileged people to be comfortable, free to enjoy literature without thinking about it's political implications.

Literature can be a great escape, but sometimes we need to be reminded of the STAKES.

I read Baraka because:

This is how you learn what to ask, how to ask questions that connect you to the beating heart of experience.

This is an oeuvre about living your life with your eyes open.

This is what paying attention looks like.

This is what voting looks like.

This is what reading a book with a highlighter, and a pen, and a friend and an enemy looks like.

This is how you take your hands out of your pockets, standing at the bus stop.

This is how you print a thousand pamphlets and had them out in your neighborhood.

This is how poetry gets written on the sidewalk or on a bridge or in a tunnel.

This is how you speak when your throat's all dry.

This is how you cry.

This is how you try

# SANDY PEACOCK

## MY NAME

Sandy sounds gritty and fluctuating, forever shifting its grains.

Always moving on the shoreline, reforming in the surf and flowing with the wind,

Nightly, sparkling sliver in the moonlight,

Dancing merrily over grass and rock,

Yielding easily to the movement of time and space.

CANDICE A. PITTS††

## I CAME FROM ROYALTY

They said I had no family  
They said I had no name  
They said I had no legacy  
They said I was a slave.

But the day before the colonizers came

I was at home  
with my family  
My daddy was our king  
My mommy was his queen  
My daddy named me Adeyami  
which for him meant prince.

I even had a sister, Adetoun  
She was so fierce and confident  
My daddy told her never to change  
and to keep her head held high  
like a Dahomey Amazon

We planted crops and tended our land  
The earth was our school  
The skies gave us education  
We had our gods  
We had religion

The day the colonizers came

Was the start of my nightmare  
My whole life as I knew it would change  
I was dragged aboard a ship  
Both my hands and feet were in chains  
I was confined to this position  
for what felt like 400 years

Do you know how confused I was  
when I landed in what they called the West Indies  
when I was told my name was Tommy  
and that I belonged to massa Billy?

I tried to stand up tall  
puffed out my chest  
pushed back my shoulders  
mustered the courage  
to stare a man in the eyes  
as daddy had taught.

This made massa Billy  
placed two more lashes across my back  
“You are not a man  
You are a slave  
because you are black  
I will whip you until you understand that.”

Beside me stood a girl  
who reminded me of sister Adetoun  
though that was not her name.  
She had lost her fierceness

Her head was bowed low in shame.

I worked in the heat of the sun  
on massa Billy's plantation  
and watched my identity merged  
with that of slave  
as the nights turned to days  
and the days to years.

Before the colonizers came

I had a family  
I had a name  
I was from the kingdom of Dahomey  
I was not a slave  
My daddy was a king  
My mommy was our queen  
My sister and I came from royalty.

## EUGENE REDMOND

### MAYA ANGELOU'S RITES DE PASSAGE NTU RITES DE POETRY

*The following poem was prepared by Eugene Redmond for Albany State University's 8th Annual Poetry Festival, 2014. It was shared as part of the Opening Session and Tribute to Dr. Maya Angelou.*

*"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you"*

*Maya Angelou*

Knowing that Maya Angelou carved dozens of books out of life's granite—which ain't "all she wrote!"—ought to be enough to make you wanna holla, "get me to the book store or library asap!" If not, then consider the journey that wrought her—and polished her cultural-literary jewels. Akin to the kiln that her brother-friend Jimmy Baldwin "fired" his "passage" in, Maya's is one I attempted to render in a 49-word poetic form called a Kwansaba:

from scraps of abuse & joy, she  
cooks meals of petry—baked in ovens  
of blues, St. Louis, Stamps, San Francisco  
& Porgy and Bess. Then, fore-tasting  
purple Alice(s) & blue Toni(s), she uncages  
Dunbar's lyrical feasts in Nasser's Egypt, Nkrumah's  
Ghana, MLK's USA & Every Woman's Kitchen.

(Mood Maya Kwansaba)



Poeting in a “cooker” of such pressure that when “done” (of course, the phat lady never sang) she saw  
beyond site/sight ntu pure melted down essence of things and people. It was a  
prescience exemplified  
in this request/assertion: “Eugene, be my brother forever!” Made upon our  
first hard-fast meeting in Sacramento (CA) in 1970, it followed her reading of  
my first book, the East St. Louis (IL)-grounded Sentry of the Four Golden Pil-  
lars. (Someone had sent it to her in England. Looking back on being forged  
in: OJT upon OJT, rites de writing, the ordeal of racially “spent” caged birds,  
African/African American revolutions, “blackening” of compasses to navigate  
the reckoning and beckoning hours of rainbow conch-us-nests, birthing the  
New Black Poetry. And that wasn’t all she wrote!” Think scores of socres,  
songs, ballets, plays & playlets, lectures, speeches, blurbs, introductions and  
proposals.

A final kwansaba (after her Harlem memorial, July 12, 2014)

“Every woman,” stitch’d ntu Maya’s nemwars, boards  
this Harlem collage of homage: Toni, Nikki,  
Hillary, Valerie, Tsidii Le Loka “rise” like “rainbow/s in clouds.” Her quilted  
pilgrim-age-patches of Arkansas, Route 66’s 2000-mile  
shadow, “family,” tenures/tomes, cosmos-as-stage  
bears witness: Maya could “never unlove” us.

(wrapped in Maya’s Homegoing Quilt)

Burdened like Countee Cullen, whom she admired immensely, she wrote as  
she rote. But in her w/riting she never writhed or complained. Instead, she re-  
peated her credo like a mantra, wanting to “live life with some passion, some  
compassion and some style.” A writer of great range and plurality—of genre  
and people—she was daringly diverse and multicultural/multifaceted long be-

fore such terms became codified and “departmentalized.” All because she could “never unlove” us... never not write us. Which is why we must read her.

## SIMONE SAVANNAH

### Junto's (1946)

your body is a *whirling leaf*  
to a *sudden streaming rhythm*, and  
your feathers reach in circles as you shake  
and drag toward my evening scarf.  
—you: love me without warning. (you) think you kiss me in my sleep.  
think you kiss me  
in my sleep.

And I feel sweet splinters in my palms  
when you pull me into your turns.  
I like the way you taste in a *syncopated jangle*.

How are you? I want to say. want to  
find your name in my breath. take you  
with me if you still smell  
like we first met. (There's still laughter  
on your skin.)

You find the curve to my step.  
And I am a blues woman when your feathers fill my throat.  
I want you in vibrations—  
a *thin thread of sadness* to make you important—

Let me go                      and sing to you from the bar, darlin',  
have white men pay for my beers—  
let them say I need to be singing for money—  
Let me tell them I'd just pay for your flesh  
in jazz, body to a *thumping of unseen tomtoms*,  
love to a *crooning melody*,  
your kiss overripe after sleep in 1928.  
she awoke this morning. Plain.  
Tip-toeing around the scars planted  
on her spirit years ago, she recalled  
why new ones had been carved there  
the night before.

last night:  
she witnessed a monster  
climb into her bed and hurricane  
its way into her body, spawning a tornado  
of her organs. She was convinced that this monster  
was granted full permission to disrupt  
the intensity she grew  
for the one who would wait for her.  
But, she became a large bowl of warm water  
giving this monster strength until she reluctantly  
poured herself onto the floor.

This morning: She walked against  
the torrential rain that burst

## [This Should Not Be Called ‘Monsters’]

its way into existence under moonlight, now  
curving itself around her toes.

Splashing, *she wondered if she could  
become a tropical cyclone herself  
instead of hurling her body  
at the feet of natural disasters  
conjured up my timid monsters.*

*Perhaps, she could be an earthquake,  
steadily rocking her crack-ed weight  
against their claws  
and become the seismic p waves  
in their stomachs. She could possibly  
slide their hearts back to the  
center of their chests and displace their insecurities  
that had found her  
on too many nights.*

*Maybe, she thought, she could  
rip them open and reshape  
the magnitude  
of the rage  
that they locked in their belly buttons*

*as children,  
and smooth out the San Andreas Fault  
of emotions in their chests though it was never her fault  
that they normally poured themselves into her on clever moments  
after dusk,  
pretending they were relieving a drought condition.*

She stepped sideways next to the sun  
that had gently placed itself against  
her window and watched the  
trees fight the wind.  
She wondered why storms always tremor her  
into thought,  
and why monsters always find a way  
against the back of her shoulders.

# FRANK X WALKER

## Beisht Kione\*

We had been naked  
and storming  
all through those nights  
together  
at the eastern shore,  
adrift in a Neptune sized  
sea of down

before our exhausted  
wet bodies  
finally made landfall, reeking  
of bourbon and honey.

When the sun burst,  
the shadow  
on the hotel wall  
revealed a proud-breasted,  
many-legged, hungry thing  
with wild sunflower hair  
and hands and hands  
and hands.

*\*Irish fishermen fear this sea monster. Its name means "The Beast With a Black Head."*

## Magic (*for Neena*)

When I was a kid,  
I thought it was magic,  
the way the glasses  
that rode my heavy head  
would always be waiting,  
safely, arms crossed,  
almost chiding me  
an arms length away,  
resting on the cover  
of the now closed adventure  
that continued in dreams  
that may or may not have  
included a mother's stealth,  
her surgical hands,  
or a lamp that closed its eyes  
as soon as I closed  
all four of mine.



## JERRY WARD

*Amiri Baraka was the featured poet for the Poet's Corner of the 8th Annual Albany State University Poetry Festival. In celebration of his life and legacy, Jerry Ward wrote the following passage for the festival.*

### On Amiri Baraka: Morning Thoughts in Wuhan

Great thinkers in any discipline are not birds that sing in cages. They design blueprints for the necessary revolutions demanded by changes in human affairs. From the perspective of cold reason, such institutions as the humanities and literature are cages. They direct attention away from the totality of doing things in the world. They serve to dim consciousness and memory that human life is at once physical, cognitive, and spiritual; to pretend that one aspect of existence possesses hegemony is a delusion. Great thinkers try to destroy the cages manufactured for diverse reasons by secular gods. They use the potential of language to challenge, to be abrasive, in order to manifest what might be called the actuality of living. Obviously, great thinkers upset people. Their soundings of vision tend to be strident. They question the value of received wisdom, test alternatives, and provoke us to contemplate what might be essential relationships among the things of the world. The great thinkers refuse to use excuses of uncertainty in order to satisfy our penchants for harmony and peace. Indeed, they either persuade or force us to act upon and bear witness to implacable uncertainties. Thus, they strengthen our humanity by enabling theories to become identical with praxis.

Like W. E. B. DuBois, Amiri Baraka was one of the great thinkers of the twentieth century. Just as DuBois habitually crossed the borders of disciplines and reconfigured what was contained in multiple discourses, Baraka maximized the combining of genres ---poetry, fiction, autobiography, drama, non-fictional exploration and exposition. He was as much a critic of politics, history, society, music, culture, and all matters of doing things with words as he was a representative African American figure in what we believe needs to be said about the arenas of nationalisms, modernisms, post-modernisms, and post-whatever, a figure in global intellectual histories. This is fact not opinion. Yet, what we deem fact is always calling for verification, for the unity of pure reason with natural subjectivity. In the case of Baraka, verification can only be obtained by full analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of all of his writings. This enormous task is a problem. The world has not been able to resolve DuBois's famous articulation of the problem of the twentieth century as one of color (racial classification). It is fairly unlikely that literary and cultural scholarship will arrive at any definitive answers to the wise questions that constitute Baraka's legacy. We will have to be content with knowing that Baraka's gift to mankind was deliberate provocation of holistic thinking.

Jerry W. Ward, Jr.    October 7, 2014    Wuhan, Peoples' Republic of China

## The Mask of Mississippi in Frank X Walker's *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*

Much of Mississippi's and the South's past is characterized by increased resistance to white supremacy in the face of overt and subtle racism that resulted in a multitude of crimes. These include crimes against the body, crimes against property, the collusion of public and private institutions in preventing access and opportunity to all people, and conspiracies of silence that continue today." This quote, taken from Frank X Walker's *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*, speaks volumes about the author's intended purpose for the collection of poetry. Walker seeks to unghost or uncover the life, legacy, and brutal murder of NAACP Secretary and Civil Rights Activist, Medgar Evers. During this literary pursuit, Walker was able to successfully unghost Evers while simultaneously unveiling a troubled Mississippi past.

A great deal of crimes committed against blacks were perpetuated by Mississippi's government officials that I collectively connote "the unspoken government." The unspoken government includes white law officials and white voting citizens that hid behind a Mississippi government which on paper abided by the laws of equal rights and justice, but in thought abided by their own rules of citizenship. Walker, after A. Van Jordan and in the voice of Byron De La Beckwith, calls these rules the "White of Way." These rules state that "[white] power, [a] noun, is the belief in the fact that all white people have the God given and constitutionally guaranteed right to exercise...

and defend the privilege of being born superior to other races.” Hence, the actions of white supremacists, such as lynching, taunting and torturing, were justifiable. Likewise, these rules provide the following “synonyms” for “[White] Privilege: patriot, religious right...segregationist, proud American... Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, Redeemers; commonly confused with **racist, xenophobe, or bigot.**”<sup>2</sup> Intolerant, white Mississippians hid behind laws of equality while devising perverse laws rooted in bigotry and fueled by ignorance. Thus, Walker's "The White of Way" represents the Mississippi supremacist's ability to colloquially contort the principles of freedom and democracy by defining the American dream as one of white pride and white power.

Included in Walker's collection is a poem entitled “Unwritten Rules for Young Black Boys Wanting to Live in Mississippi Long Enough to Become Men.” This poem contains ten rules that black boys must follow in order to live in Mississippi and survive the white supremacy of Mississippi. “Rule One. White is always right/ Number two. Never look a white man in the eye... Five. Never speak to, smile at or stare in the direction of a white woman... Seven. Ignore all white sexual aggression towards your sisters, mothers, or aunts... Ten. If you forget any of these rules, fall back on rule number one.”<sup>2</sup> As evident in this poem, intolerant whites continued to contort the laws designed for freedom by enacting this sort of unequivocal social system. This system thereby forced blacks to obey discriminatory ideals in order to survive in the southern state. Therefore, the slaying of Emmett Till and assassination of Medgar Evers were essentially examples of what would or could happen, if these rules were not followed.

From these cases presented above, I concur with Walker's contention from "A Final Accounting": “You can fill all the libraries with your version of facts,

call it history, and still not own the truth.”<sup>2</sup> Mississippi’s history of racism, brutality and bigotry, has been masked with praises of agriculture, domestics, music, and other relics of southern living. As a native of and advocate for the state of Mississippi, I have not contended such matters in an effort to berate the southern state. Instead I have chosen to join authors like Natasha Trethewey and Frank X Walker in advocating for change. I am advocating that individuals recognize the waywardness of the past in order to appreciate the present and create better outcomes for the future. I recognize that Walker “turns loose” or “unghosts” a damaging Mississippi history that we Mississippians would rather not acknowledge. Mississippians are collectively aware of the heinous past of Mississippi, but would rather not recognize it in an effort to reinvent this Southern, Confederate, Republican state that we call home. In essence, we hide the “putrescent truths” that are covered in murky hatred, fertile bigotry, and crippling dehumanization because we are ashamed.<sup>1</sup> However, as Walker uproots this past in his poems, we must join him and also answer the call to “turn [Medgar Evers] loose.”<sup>2</sup>

I now—as a proud Mississippian—follow suit of Walker’s eloquent composition and persona of Medgar Evers to say: turn me loose by making me visible. *Make me visible by using my legacy to expose, understand, and accept the tumultuous—and often secret—supremacies, bigotries, and faults of the American South, especially my homeland, Mississippi. After you accept these rather taboo obscenities, use me and my fellow soldier Emmett Till to unghost the lives and legacies of those who been buried six feet under with a blank headstone or unwritten obituary, but have fallen in the war against racism. Equally important, use these realities to break the chains of suppression that have not yet been broken. My friend Frank X Walker, whom I have never had the privilege of meeting, has already taken a giant step in*

*unghosting my history and that of Mississippi. I now beseech you to join him in these efforts to continue to turn loose Mississippi. In doing so, you will have changed the scope of Southern history.*

---

1 Hite, Michelle S. Foreword. *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*. By Frank X. Walker. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013. xiii-xix Print.

2 Walker, Frank X. *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013. Print.



## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS



**Ayana Abdallah** is an Associate Professor of English at Albany State University.

**Karega Ani** is a performance poet and music producer from Houston, TX. A one-time student of the legendary Ntozake Shange, he has been refining his unique literary and performance style for nearly 20 years, living by the credo that diligent preparation must always precede presentation. He is currently completing his Master's Degree in Social Justice at Marygrove College (Detroit, MI).

**Felix Crumbsy** is a senior English major at Albany State University.

**Laurentiis M. Gaines, Jr.** is a Political Science major and a Spanish major at Albany State University. He is the newly-elected Student Government Association president for the 2015-2016 school year.

**Hoke S. Glover III** ("Bro. Yao") is a poet, teacher, and former owner of Karibu Books. He received his MFA in Poetry from the University of Maryland at College Park. Much of his work explores issues of inheritance and family and the problems of literacy in the US. Over the last twenty years, he has focused most of his work on promoting reading and history in the Prince George's County area and the African American community. His poetry and essays have been published in numerous journals and anthologies including *African American Review*, *Soulfires*, *Testimony*, *Obsidian III*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Smartish Pace*, *Tidal Basin Review*, *Beltway Quarterly*, *Beltway*, *Spectre*, *Libations*, *Ploughshares*, and *Mosaic*. He has recorded with Black Notes, Sunny Sumter and is currently working with the group, Free Black Space, who have performed at the D.C. Jazz Festival's Families and Fun Event. Currently, he is an Associate Professor of English at Bowie State University in the English Department where he teaches composition and poetry.

**Joyce Haynes** is a senior at Allen University, currently majoring in Music with a concentration in Voice. In the spring of 2014, she took part in an International Internship with 105 Voices in partnership with Aetna Life Insurance. This spring, she was the leading character, Helen, in the premiere production of *Waves*, a play coming-of-age story about one African American girl who achieves her dreams of attending college during in the 1940s.



**Lita Hooper** is a poet, playwright and educator. Her work has appeared in several anthologies, including *Tempu Tumpu/Walking Naked: African Women's Poetic Self-portrait* (2009), *Crux: Conversations in Words and Images from South Africa to South USA* (2008), *The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South* (2008), *Gathering Ground: A Reader Celebrating Cave Canem First Decade* (2006), *Role Call: A Generational Anthology of Social and Political Black Literature and Art* (2005). She is the author of two chapbooks, *Legacy and Perspectives*, and a critical biography, *Art of Work: The Art and Work of Haki Madhubuti* (2006). Her work has also been published in online and print journals and magazines, including *The Chattahoochee Review*, *poetrymidwest*, *Drumvoices Revue*, *Essence*, *The Drunken Boat*, *Reverie*, and *Pluck!* She is a co-editor of *44 on 44: Forty-Four African American Writers on the Election of the 44th President of the United States* (2011). Her collection of poems, *Thunder in Her Voice: The Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, was recently published in 2010. In 2007, her poem "Love Worn" was selected for the American Life in Poetry Series. In 2007, she received the Emerging Artist Grant from the City of Atlanta's Office of Cultural Affairs.

**Maxine Jafta** is a South African born poet, praise singer, and lyricist from Umtata, located on the Eastern Cape. Her art reflects her passion to awaken her nation through her artistic voice and writing in three languages: IsiXhosa (Xhosa), English and Zulu.

**Charnell Laster** is a Biology major at Albany State University. She has participated in the ASU Poetry Festival, Open Mic 2012, 2013. Her work has appeared in *The Pierian Journal*, 2012 and 2013.

**Kierra Lawrence** is a junior English major with an emphasis on Creative Writing and African American literature at Albany State University. She is a spoken word artist and a recipient of the Undergraduate Research award from the Center of Undergraduate Research at Albany State University for her work: *Lauryn Hill as a Pedagogue: Teaching the Oppressed to Transgress for Progression*.

**Justice Lee** is a junior English major at Albany State University

**David Mills** is a writer and actor who has worked professionally in the dramatic and literary communities for more than a decade. For three

years, he lived in Langston Hughes' landmark home where he was inspired to create a one-person dramatic rendition of Hughes' poems and short stories. He has two collections of poetry: *The Dream Detective*, a small-press bestseller, and *The Sudden Country*, a finalist for the Main Street Rag Prize. His work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Fence*, *Jubilat*, *Callaloo*, and elsewhere. Mills was commissioned to write a play for Julliard, the narration for Deborah Willis' exhibition, "Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers" and for I Giullari Di Piazza's folkdance piece, "Tarantella."

**Montavis Mooring** is a poet and writer from Gaffney, South Carolina. He is a junior at Allen University and is pursuing a Bachelor's of Science Degree in English with a concentration in Professional Writing. His poem "Blue, White & Red" was published in January 2015 by the Commonline Journal.

**Gregg Murray** is an Assistant Professor of English at Georgia Perimeter College. He has published poems in *DIAGRAM*, *Caketrain*, *Josephine Quarterly*, [*PANK*], and elsewhere. As well, he has forthcoming publications in *Berkeley Poetry Review* and *Phantom Drift*. His poetry chapbook "Ceviche" will soon be available (Spittoon Press 2014).

**Sandy Peacock** is a Graphic Designer for the Word Processing Center at Albany State University.

**Candice Pitts** is an Assistant Professor of English at Albany State University. She is an NEH "Don't Deny My Voice" Summer Institute Fellow (2015).

**Eugene B. Redmond** is the Poet Laureate of East St. Louis and Emeritus Professor of English, Founding Editor of *Drumvoices Revue*, and former Chairman of Creative Writing at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville. In 1970-85, he was Professor of English and Poet-in-Residence at California State University-Sacramento. During that time he won an NEA Creative Writing Fellowship, an Outstanding Faculty Research Award, a Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses, and served as a visiting professor at universities in the U.S., Africa, and Europe. He is the author of twenty-five volumes of poetry, collections of diverse writings, plays of stage and TV, and posthumously published

works of Henry Dumas. He received an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters Degree from SIUE. He won an American Book Award (for *The Eye in the Ceiling*), the Sterling Brown Award from ALA's African American Literature and Culture Association, a Staying the Course Award from ETA of Chicago and the St. Louis American Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award.

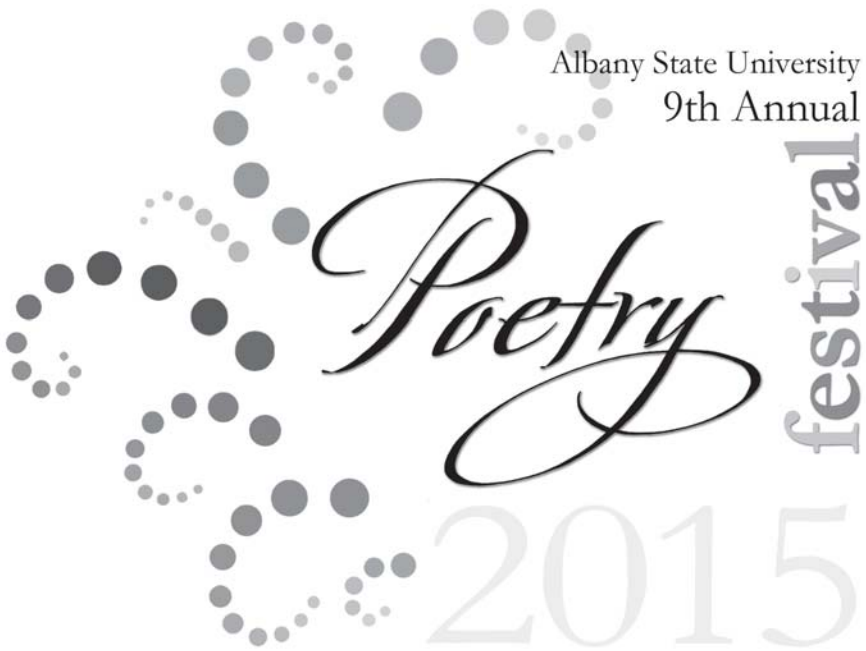
**Simone Savannah** is from Columbus, Ohio. She is currently a PhD student in Creative Writing at the University of Kansas, developing her interests in sexuality, Modern and Contemporary women's poetry, and African American women's literature. She served as the Assistant Poetry Editor of *Beecher's 3*. Her work has appeared in journals, including *Blackberry: A Magazine*. She is the Life & Style blogger for The Phoenix Rising Collective, and is currently working on a project about her body in Central Time.

**Frank X Walker** is the 2013-2014 poet laureate of Kentucky and the author of six collections of poetry including *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers* (2013), *When Winter Come: the Ascension of York* (2008); *Black Box* (2005); *Buffalo Dance: the Journey of York* (2003), which won the Lillian Smith Book Award in 2004; and *Affrilachia* (2000). He is the winner of the 2014 NAACP Image Award for outstanding poetry, the co-founder of the Affrilachian Poets, a Cave Canem fellow, and the founder and editor of *Pluck! The Journal of Affrilachian Arts and Culture*. Walker is also a 2005 recipient of the Lannan Literary Fellowship in Poetry. Additional awards include the Thomas D. Clark Literary Award for Excellence, and the Actors Theatre's Keeper of the Chronicle Award. The University of Kentucky awarded Walker an honorary Doctorate of Humanities in 2001 for his collective community work and artistic achievements. Transylvania University awarded him an honorary Doctor of Letters degree in 2002. Additionally, he served as Writer-in-Residence at Northern Kentucky University. He is currently Chair of the Africana Studies Department at the University of Kentucky.

**Jerry W. Ward, Jr.** is Distinguished Overseas Professor at Central China Normal University. He is the author of *THE KATRINA PAPERS: A Journal of Trauma and Recovery* (2008) and co-editor of *The Cambridge History of African American Literature* (2011). He is a Richard Wright scholar and a major contributor to the planning of the

Richard Wright Centennial 2008, Paris.

**Megan Maxine Williams** received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Tuskegee University (2015). Much of her work revolves around her efforts to increase civil rights, social reform, and activism for the state of Mississippi. She is currently an intern for the "Created Equal Grant: America's Civil Rights Struggle," sponsored by The National Endowment for the Humanities and The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.



November 8-10, 2015

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# THE PIERIAN JOURNAL

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The Pierian Journal is currently accepting submissions for its Spring 2016 edition. The journal is accepting original, unpublished poems (up to 3), short stories (under 2,500 words), one-act plays, and personal essays (under 2,000 words) that explore the literary, artistic and cultural expressions of the African Diaspora. We are especially interested in submissions for the special edition of the journal, which will focus on social justice in the US.

Authors should submit their work electronically to [thepierian@asurams.edu](mailto:thepierian@asurams.edu) by the March 1, 2016 deadline.



The journal only accepts electronic submissions. Please consult the Pierian web page at (<http://www.asurams.edu/web/school-english-language-and-communication/the-pierian>) for more detailed submission information.

Or, contact Dr. Jeffrey D. Mack at 229-430-1383.



*The Pierian Literary Journal* is a journal that explores the literary, artistic and cultural expressions of the African Diaspora. It is an official publication of the Albany State University Pierian Club in the Department of English, Modern Languages and Mass Communication. It was formed by Emerita Professor Dr. Velma F. Grant, who founded the Pierian student organization for English majors at Albany State in 1967. Originally called, “The Little Magazine,” it came to be known as *The Pierian* and would serve as an outlet for creative expression of the written word for Albany State students, faculty, staff, as well as local and national authors. It is published each Spring Semester.