

Volume 1 Issue 2

TIGER LILY

MAGAZINE BY WOMEN OF COLOUR



KATHERINE DUNHAM
Leah Creque-Harris

**300 YEARS OF BLACK WOMEN
IN CANADIAN HISTORY**
Adrienne Shadd

**NATIVE WOMEN
SAY NO TO RACISM**
Toronto Native Women's Resource Centre

ALAIDE FOPPA
Marjorie Agosin

**INTERVIEW WITH TORONTO
WOMEN'S PRESS**
Ayanna Black

**THE WELL-BEING
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A Salute to Black Women

In this current issue of *Tiger Lily* we pay special tribute to Black Women.

February is Black History Month in North America. It is the month when everyone acknowledges that Blacks exist as a people, but that is not good enough.

One month is not enough time to list our achievements and contributions in the building and shaping of this continent. One month cannot begin to tell our stories—stories that must be told, in order for us to be part of history and a part of a nation.

In the New World, the contributions of Black People and People of Colour have been omitted from the pages of history. On the odd occasion when we are mentioned, we have only been given a footnote.

Yet, our ancestors too made the wilderness bloom, tilled the soil, built schools, started newspapers and entered political life, and through our churches the heart and soul of a people were kept alive. We were also liberators and abolitionists seeking justice and fighting for freedom.

For a better life, we left rural villages for urban settings, islands for continents. We suffered loneliness and alienation, racism, sexism, and class prejudice, and the battle for survival was constant. But Black women kept going, for they had a vision that around the corner there would be a better life for themselves and for their families.

As we enter the 21st century, history is on our side. Black women are in the forefront of political, social and educational change. Our voices can no longer go unheralded, our demands can no longer be denied.

We also wish to share the joy of being alive, the joy of womanhood. Though our struggles are many, there is joy in the beauty of nature, the smiles of children, in the wisdom of our Elders and in the abundant joy of having loving families and very good friends.

We seek harmony with our sisters both at home and abroad, for it is with our sisters that we will draw our strength, that we will

maintain our courage and remain the visionaries that we are.

To all the unsung heroines both past and present, both indigenous and immigrant, we thank you for being there, for paving the way, for showing us that courage, tenacity and compassion are admirable qualities to strive for. We are proud to walk in your footsteps.

Tiger Lily magazine urges you to support the artists. They keep our creative and collective memories alive. Be vigilant in ensuring that historical research includes the contributions and achievements of Black People and People of Colour.

Support organizations and associations that seek political and social justice for all.

We at *Tiger Lily* are committed to equality, social justice and the preservation of our culture and history.

In November, 1986, *Tiger Lily* magazine was launched with a great deal of fanfare, fun and goodwill. We wish to thank all the wonderful people who came together to make the occasion memorable.

MAKE THE DREAM A REALITY

Tiger Lily is a contemporary magazine that focusses on issues of culture, the arts, literature and social concern. How can you help *Tiger Lily* remain viable and strong?

- Become a subscriber. (Only \$14.75 a year!)
- Give a gift subscription to a friend.
- If you are in business or manage a business, place an ad with us.
- Donate your talents. We need writers, artists, illustrators.
- We are happy to consider fiction and non-fiction articles from the Black diaspora, Latin American, South and East Asian, and Native Women.

Ann Wallace

TIGER LILY

MAGAZINE

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We Need History

Our Long and Rich Presence



In a recent publication of the *Royal Bank Reporter* (Fall, 1986), eight women are honoured as "firsts" in the field of education. There is Harriet Starr Stewart, the first woman to receive a graduate degree in Canada in 1883; Carrie Derik was the first woman to be made a full professor in 1912; and Pauline Jewett became the first woman president of a major university, Simon Fraser University, from 1974 to 1978. That these women are all White is not surprising since Women of Colour are generally absent from such chronicles. History as it relates to Blacks in Canada is virtually non-existent in mainstream textbooks.

In the documentation of Canadian history, the contributions made by People of Colour have been omitted; in chronicling the achievements of Canadian women, Women of Colour have been omitted. Yet, the records show that Black People and People of Colour have been here for hundreds of years and have helped to shape and develop our Canadian society.

Among some of our gifted pioneers was Mary Ann Shadd, writer, lecturer, abolitionist, lawyer and the first Black woman editor of a newspaper in North America. She was also a "first" in the field of education when she established an integrated, independent school in Windsor, Ontario. The liberator, Harriet Tubman of the famous Underground Railroad, and Rose Fortune, Canada's first self-appointed policewoman, are further examples of gifted women who have been excluded from the pages of Canadian history.

In comparison with what mainstream history and culture teach us, the study of Black history in Canada as a discipline is in a healthy state, and there is a wealth of historical data, particularly on the early Black settlements of Ontario and the Maritimes. Within this context, however, there has been no research

focussing on the Black female, and in Women's Studies programmes, there is virtually no literature about Black women in Canada from which to draw. In the United States, it almost seems as if Black American women, especially in connection with certain "social problems" (the Black "matriarchal family", the preponderance of female-headed households, and so forth) have been studied to death. By contrast, there are no statistics on female employment outside the home, or data on Black family life in Canada which allow us to compare ourselves to our American sisters, or to provide an assessment of these questions from a Black Canadian perspective.

Given our "colonial" situation in relation to the dominant society, and the lack of positive images of Black women in the media, when they exist at all, it becomes doubly important that we attempt to rectify, or at least counteract this situation by writing our own history. In fact, it is crucial that we ourselves undertake this task because no one is going to do it for us. Our children must be provided role models with which they can identify, and young Black women need the kind of inspiration that comes from reading about the Black heroines of our past. Beyond these important considerations, it is about time people knew that Blacks have a 350 year history in Canada, and that Black people—both men and women—have made significant contributions to this society. Perhaps more and more members of the dominant culture will take it upon themselves to find out about, and include us in their writings.

We need history! Hopefully this special edition of *Tiger Lily* provides a first step toward the discovery and retelling of our long and rich presence, not just in Black Canadian history, but in Canadian history as a whole.

Adrienne Shadd

300 Years of Black Women in Canadian History:

circa 1700-1980

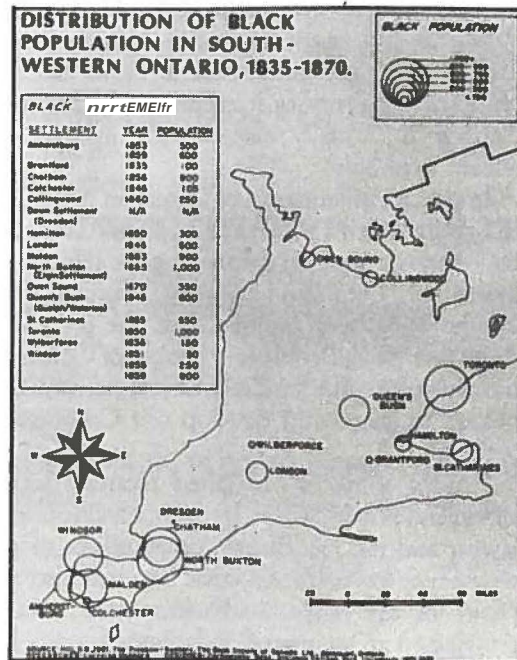
by Adrienne Shadd

Canada is widely viewed as a country whose forefathers were either English or French—and always White. The common perception is that Canada's experience with people of colour is a relatively recent one, and that racial minorities are new immigrants from some other part of the globe. Somehow, the tendency is to forget that Native peoples were here first; and that Blacks have been here since the earliest European settlers is a fact that has been lost from the collective memory. This absence of the achievements and contributions of Blacks and other people of colour, however, is a distortion of the historical record and presents an inaccurate image of Canada and its cultural heritage.

The following article on the study of Black women in Canadian history is, therefore, admittedly spotty and incomplete. Much of the historical writing on Blacks has focussed on the activities and achievements of men, forcing one to piece together bits of information here and there, in order to formulate a broader picture of Black life from a woman's perspective.

Upon learning that she was to be sold, a female slave named Marie-Joseph Angelique set fire to her master's home in 1734. The fire spread and destroyed a part of the city of Montreal. Angelique was recaptured and sentenced to hang for arson (Hill, 1981:91; Walker, 1980:22).

The above account is perhaps the earliest record of daring and defiance of a Black



woman in Canada and sets the stage for a long and compelling story of strength, determination, and the willingness to endure. That story has yet to be told, however, for there are few historical writings specifically about Black women in Canada and virtually no studies on the Black female in this country.' Daurene Lewis, mayor of Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia and, 'as the first Black woman mayor in Canada, a pioneer in her own right, recently stated that the activities and lives of Black women have tended to be overshadowed by records of their husbands' achievements. "In many cases, their memories and experiences were their own and will remain with them locked in time."

Despite the dearth of literature on this topic, there remains a legacy of spirit and achievement bequeathed to us from women such as Harriet Tubman, Mary Ann Shadd, Mary Branton Tule, and Carrie Best, women who have had a notable impact on the society of their time. What have the day-to-day

struggles — their triumphs, their activities — of the average Black woman been throughout history? The following introduction to the study of Black women in Canadian history will examine the lives of some of our heroines and focus on the conditions and activities of the average woman depicted in the history of Blacks in Canada traced from the early 1600s into the twentieth century.

Black history in Canada dates back to the early French settlements of seventeenth-century New France, when slaves, both Black and native, were used to alleviate a chronic shortage of unskilled labour. The first known Black Canadian was a young boy from Madagascar, baptized Olivier Le Jeune. He was brought to New France as a slave in 1628 and sold to a Quebec resident. By the time of the British Conquest in 1759, there were more than a thousand slaves, about half living in and around Montreal. Most were employed as domestic servants, and few households possessed more than two or three slaves.

TO BE SOLD,

A BLACK WOMAN, named
PEGGY, aged about forty years ; and a
Black boy her son, named JUPITER, aged
about fifteen years, both of them the property of the
Subscriber.

The Woman is a tolerable Cook and washer woman
and perfectly understands making Soap and Candles.

The Boy is tall and strong of his age, and has been
employed in Country business, but brought up prin-
cipally as a House Servant—They are each of them
Servants for life. The Price for the Wowan is one
hundred and fifty Dollars—for the Boy two hundred
Dollars, payable in three years with Interest from the
day of Sale and to be properly secured by Bond &c.—
But one fourth less will be taken in ready Money.

PETER RUSSELL.

York, Feb. 10th 1806.

Many Black women slaves were being traded or sold, bequeathed along with property. The Quebec Gazette in 1783 published the following announcement:

TO BE SOLD

A Negro Wench about 18 years of age... She has had the Small Pox. The Wench has a good character and is exposed to sale only from the owner having no use for her at present. Likewise to be disposed of a handsome Bay Mare (Walker, 1980:20).

Such advertisements were common in this period, as were notices offering rewards for the return of runaway slaves.

Under British rule, slavery was given greater impetus and became associated with a single race—the Blacks. The absence of a plantation-type economy militated against the evolution of slavery as an important institution, and consequently, the number of Blacks in British North America remained small. However, by the latter part of the eighteenth century, several successive waves of “immigration” substantially increased these numbers.

The first major wave of Black migration to Canada comprised those Blacks who came with the United Empire Loyalists after the American Revolution (1776-1781). The “Black Loyalists” were a group of at least 3500 freed Black men, women and children who were transported to Nova Scotia by the British in 1783. Most had been emancipated in order to weaken the South and obtain labourers for the British forces. Other Blacks came as slaves accompanying their United Empire Loyalist masters. At least ten percent of all Loyalists were Black, a little-known fact that was ignored by historians until recently.

One-third or more of the Black Loyalist men served in the Revolutionary War effort, as intelligence agents and guides through slave territory, soldiers, sailors, pilots on coastal waters and officers of all-Black regiments. Many were skilled craftsmen such as carpenters, blacksmiths and sawyers (Walker, 1976:5-6,47). Women did the cooking, washing and sewing.

Upon arrival in Nova Scotia, free women engaged in raising families and helping to establish communities. Since Blacks were settled in segregated communities, they built their own schools and churches. Officials commented on the strength of family ties among the Black Loyalists, and observed that ‘family’ went beyond the British definition to include godchildren or simply Black people

from the same community. Common-law marriages were frequent and the children of such unions were baptized and treated the same as those of legally-sanctioned unions (Walker, 1976:85). Whether these customs emerged from slavery, or as in the case of the extended family, can be traced to West African pre-slave origins, the Black Loyalists had begun to develop communities with their own institutions and social mores, and women played a vital role in this development.

One notable deviation from this pattern was Rose Fortune, daughter of Loyalist refugees who arrived at the Port of Annapolis in 1783 when Rose was just ten years old.¹ Colourful by appearance as well as personality, Rose was short in stature, and wore a man’s hat, man’s frock coat, dress, apron and men’s boots. Ms. Fortune became Canada’s first (self-appointed) policewoman, who not only imposed curfews but enforced them as well, making her rounds of the Lower Town every night and sending stragglers home to bed. Rose also provided a trucking service for ferry boat passengers, hauling bags from the ferries to hotels using, of all things — a wheelbarrow! Although never married, she had two daughters, and is the great-great-great grandmother of Mayor Daurene Lewis.

Many Black Loyalists were unhappy in Nova Scotia. They had been promised not only their freedom, but also land, and the full rights of British subjects under the law. These expectations went largely unmet, given a situation in which White Loyalists, officers and soldiers were accorded priority in the granting of land and other assistance. After much effort to make their grievances known, approximately one-third emigrated to Sierra Leone in 1792. To this day, descendants of the Loyalists still refer to themselves as the “Nova Scotians” (Walker, 1976).

A third group of about 2000, known as the “Refugees” (Winks, 1971) quickly replenished the numbers of Blacks in the province. Escaped slaves from the American South, they landed in 1815 after being granted freedom for deserting their masters and joining the British during the War of 1812. Thus, Black Refugees and the remaining Loyalists established the oldest settlements of free Blacks in Canada.

Another major influx of Blacks made their way largely to Ontario in the period known as the fugitive slave era (1815-1861). Of those who escaped from slavery, the road to

freedom took place on the legendary "Underground Railroad".

The Underground Railroad comprised a series of secret routes which slaves followed as they passed through the northern states. Some routes were organized "stations" where sympathetic Whites or free Blacks assisted the runaways with food, shelter, and information as to where they could find the next safe haven. In some cases, "conductors" would accompany them to the next station (Walker, 1980:49).

One of the most famous underground conductors was a woman by the name of Harriet Tubman. Born a slave in Maryland about 1823, Ms. Tubman herself fled from slavery in 1849 and moved to St. Catharines, Ontario in 1851. She was personally responsible for freeing over three hundred slaves during nineteen separate trips to the deep south (Ontario Education Communications Authority, 1979:24). Well-known for the many disguises she and her parties used on their journeys, Ms. Tubman was considered a military genius, although she could neither read nor write.

Just prior to the outbreak of the American Civil War, Tubman returned to the U.S. and subsequently served as a nurse, scout and spy with the Union Army. She eventually retired in Auburn, New York. There she founded a home for the aged, where she died in 1913 (Hill, 1981:39).

An estimated 40,000 Blacks arrived in Ontario during the fugitive slave period. A proportion of this group were not runaway slaves from the southern states, but free Blacks from the North and the upper slave states, who were fleeing anti-Negro legislation, in particular the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.⁴

Shortly after the passage of this Act, a free woman "of colour" from Delaware moved to Windsor, Ontario to investigate the possibilities of settlement there for her family and other American Blacks. Mary Ann Shadd, teacher, author, lecturer, school principal, lawyer, wife and mother, also became the first woman editor of a weekly newspaper in North America. "The Provincial Freeman" was published between 1854 and 1859, first in Windsor, then Toronto, and finally in Chatham (Hancock, 1973; D'Oyley and Braithwaite, 1973).

Already well-known as a writer and Abolitionist, it is not surprising that the newspaper supported the Abolitionist cause and Canada as a place of settlement for Blacks. It reported news of interest to the race, attacked the



Mary Ann Shadd

management of several Black communal experiments, and opposed segregation. In addition to her editorial responsibilities, Mary Ann found time to run a small school in Windsor (Hancock, 1973:190-91).

In the summer of 1856, she married Thomas F. Carey of Toronto, a barber, and they moved to Chatham. There, Shadd continued her involvement with the newspaper until it ceased publication in 1859. By 1864, Mary Ann Shadd Carey was teaching in Michigan. With the outbreak of the Civil War, she was commissioned as a recruiting officer to enlist a Black regiment — probably the only woman to do so. After the war Mrs. Carey moved to Washington D.C. where she taught and later served as principal of three large schools. She wrote regularly for the *New National Era* and *The Advocate*, edited by Frederick Douglass and John Wesley Cromwell respectively. She also became a member of the National Women's Suffrage Association in 1881. Still teaching, Mary Ann enrolled in the Law Faculty of Howard University and upon graduating, established a successful law practice at the age of sixty (D'Oyley and Braithwaite, 1973). At the time of her death on June 5, 1893, she could look back on a life of achievement and distinction, as one of the great women pioneers of the nineteenth century.

Most of the early Black settlements in Canada were located in the Maritimes or Ontario. However, a group of free Blacks from California sailed for Victoria, British Columbia in 1858. This group of six to eight hundred were fleeing increasingly restrictive legislation

Table 1
Occupational Categories of Black Females 17 years and over
Chatham, Ontario, 1851, 1861, 1871

Categories	(Percent)		(Percent)		(Percent)	
	1851	% Employed	1861	% Employed	1871	% Employed
Skilled/Semi-Skilled	0	0	15.1	51.0	4.5	42.0
Independents	0	0	1.1	3.6	0	0
Unskilled	5.4	100.0	13.2	44.5	6.2	58.1
Farmer	0	0	.3	1.0	0	0
Total Employed	5.4	100.0	29.7	100.1	10.7	100.1
Unemployed	16.3		23.0		35.5	
Housewife	78.3		47.3		54.0	
Total Percent	100.0		100.0		100.9	
Total Number of Cases	(92)		(370)		(290)	

Source: *Census of Canada, Town of Chatham, 1851, 1861, 1871*. From John Walton, "Blacks in Buxton and Chatham, Ontario, 1830-1890: Did the 49th Parallel Make A Difference?", Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International), 1979: p. 265, Table 3.3, p. 291, Table 4.6, p. 328, Table 5.10.

against Blacks in that state (Walker, 1980:56-57). The Prairies also became a place of settlement when 200 Oklahoma Blacks settled in Saskatchewan in 1909, and another 300 settled in Alberta in 1910. Most established farms and supplemented their incomes during the winter months in nearby towns and cities (ibid:68-9).

Black women were homesteaders alongside the men, taking an active part in settling the land and developing communities. In some cases, as forementioned, women were leaders of their communities. A prominent member of the California migration was Sylvia Stark, who, along with her husband Louis Stark, arrived on Saltspring Island, B.C. with 15 cows and bought 100 acres of land. A former slave, Mrs. Stark died there in 1944 at the age of 106 (Winks, 1971:278). One of the leaders of Maidstone, Saskatchewan, where Blacks first took up land in the early 1900s was Mattie Hayes. "(A) slim and determined woman of sixty who had been born a slave in Georgia, (s)he and her husband Joseph brought their ten sons and three daughters, and their grandchildren from Tulsa and Muskogee, together with ten other families.. (U)ntil her death in 1953 'Mammy' Hayes was the matriarch of Maidstone." (ibid:303).

In terms of employment outside the home in the nineteenth century, it is clear that most women did not pursue independent careers, for it was still considered improper for a woman to be active in the commercial or business worlds (Walton, 1979:129). Women were encouraged to care for the home, and when they worked, it was out of extreme necessity, or because of their special family situations (ibid:192). Nevertheless, Walton has compiled valuable census information which reveals female employment and occupational choices in Chatham, Ontario⁵ for the period 1851-1871.

As shown in Table 1, only 5 of 92 women who were seventeen years of age or older worked in 1851, and of these, three were servants and two were labourers. Most were housewives — 78 percent, and 11 percent of this group were widows or wives whose husbands were absent. Out of 16 percent who were unemployed, 8 percent were unmarried young ladies living at home (ibid:63).

The overwhelming majority of Chatham's Blacks married, and the typical family was a two parent household with at least two children. Not only did women and children not work at this time, but they apparently did not need employment, according to Walton,

given the opportunities for skilled labour and independent proprietorship among men (*ibid*: 63-65).⁶

In 1861, the percentage of women who were employed jumped to 30 percent, a marked increase even though the majority of women still did not work. Walton attributes this phenomenon to the impact of the depression of 1857, in which a sizeable proportion of "middle-class" occupations were lost, and skilled workers and independents were forced to change jobs or move away (*ibid*:126).

Clearly, more women entered the labour market to supplement their husbands' incomes. Out of 56 skilled or semi-skilled women, almost two-thirds (35) were seamstresses, 7 were cooks and there were two each of teachers, nurses, milliners, stewardesses and mid-wives. There was 1 editor (no doubt Mary Ann Shadd), 1 weaver, 1 shoebinder and 1 missionary. Many of these jobs were performed in the home. Women who were listed as independents comprised 2 grocers, 1 tavernkeeper and 1 innkeeper. In all of these latter cases, the women worked alongside their husbands, who were the proprietors of the business. Those employed in the skilled/semi-skilled and independent categories were invariably married to men in these same categories, or they were the widows of such men (*ibid*:129).

A sizeable number of women (44 percent) were also employed in unskilled occupations such as servants, washerwomen or labourers. These women were likewise married to, or were the widows of men in unskilled occupations (*ibid*).

By 1871, the proportion of employed females had declined to 10 percent, with 42 percent of these in skilled or semi-skilled jobs, a decrease of 9 percent over the previous decade. Fifty-eight percent were unskilled, representing an increase of 14 percent over 1861. Furthermore, the range of skilled occupations had decreased from 11 to 3. Ten women were seamstresses, 2 were milliners, and one was a teacher. There were no women engaged in independent businesses (*ibid*: 190).

Chatham was again experiencing relative economic prosperity in the early 1870s, and one would assume that the decline in female employment occurred because employment opportunities for Black men were again more plentiful. This supposition is supported by the fact that most women who worked were either unmarried, widowed, or married with

the husband absent. The large percentage of "unemployed" females (35 percent) who were not housewives must largely be explained by the proportion of adult females who are single or widowed in 1871. This figure is 41 percent for women as compared with only 22 percent for men. Why such a large percentage could not find employment is unclear, although Walton suggests that "middle-class" women were more restricted in their occupational choices because they could not be servants or washerwomen and still be deemed "respectable" (*ibid*:191). How these unemployed women without husbands managed is certainly a mystery.

That there were Black women in need is borne out by the fact that in January 1854, Black wives in Chatham formed a benevolent organization entitled the Victoria Reform Benevolent Society. Its function was to provide money or "social relief" to women-in-need on a temporary basis. Such aid was not to exceed six months, except in extreme cases. It also provided money for the burial of its members. In order to join, one had to pay a monthly fee (which meant that the organization was not for the poor), and members could not be alcoholics, prostitutes, already ill or practice polyandry. That these conditions were stipulated in the constitution implies their existence in more than rare cases among Chatham Black women (*ibid*:71).

After the Civil War, it is estimated that three-quarters of the "fugitive" Blacks returned to the U.S. in the decades following the outbreak of hostilities. This was not only because slavery had ended in the United States, removing the need for Canada as a haven from slavery, but also because Black labour had become expendable with the influx of many more Whites of varying skills and talents. After the 1870s, therefore, the position of Blacks declined in south-western Ontario (Walton, 1979) and the rest of Canada (Greaves, 1930; Winks, 1971).

Black immigration into Canada in the first half of the twentieth century had diminished to a trickle, with the exceptions of the Prairie movements of 1909-1910 and during World War I, when a group of Jamaicans was imported to work in the coal mines of Sydney, Nova Scotia. Men from the U.S. and to a lesser extent from the Caribbean, were coming to work on the railroad, and women from the Caribbean were immigrating to work as domestics. In the meantime, Black Canadians



Sunday School Group. The church played an important role in the lives of Black families. Much of the socializing in the communities took place after the regular Sunday services.

continued to move south of the border, long after the post-Civil War exodus, including those whose families had lived here for several generations.⁷

Greaves (1930) states that the majority of men in the cities were employed as sleeping car porters, and most women were domestics. Of women, she states:

A few who are light in colour find employment as waitresses, but unless they have no marked negroid features coloured girls cannot obtain work in offices or stores. A few are also teachers in Negro schools, but the field here is too limited and unremunerative to attract the really capable (ibid:56).

In 1941, 80 percent of employed Black women in Montreal were domestics (Potter, 1964:142) and in many Maritime communities, it is still the only employment available for Black females (Walker, 1980:132).

While it is clear that the vast majority were relegated to stereotyped occupations, as were their male counterparts, Black women did distinguish themselves in other areas. According to D'Oyley and Braithwaite "... the Canadian (B)lack woman, until recently, made her greatest contributions through

humanitarian pursuits" by becoming involved in community work, service clubs and other such organizations that worked toward the betterment of the race, or the larger society.

As noted earlier, the Victoria Reform Benevolent Society offered aid to indigent women in mid-nineteenth century Chatham. In 1882, the Women's Home Missionary Society of Amherstburg, Ontario was formed, and marked the emergence of women into positions of leadership in the church for the first time. Elizabeth Shreve, sister of Mary Ann Shadd, was its first president, and Mary Branton, who was born in Chatham in 1860, trained as a missionary there. Later, Mary Branton travelled to Africa, where she married John Tule, a Bantu missionary, and founded the Mary Branton Tule School in South Africa. There and later in Liberia, she gained considerable local fame for her work (Winks, 1971:344). In Halifax in 1914, female members of the church organized themselves into a group called Women at the Well, to help raise funds for the establishment of a normal and industrial school in that city (Winks, 1971:348; D'Oyley and Braithwaite, 1973).

In the 1920s a Little Mother's League was formed in Montreal to make 'Negro

girls proficient...in household duties.' The Phyllis Wheatley Art Club, formed in 1922 by Mrs. Lillian Rutherford offered cultural stimulation and later developed in the 1930s into the Negro Theatre Guild of Montreal. Women's Charitable Benevolent Association, founded 1919...worked tirelessly to look after the poor and the sick, to run soup kitchens, roll bandages for the Red Cross, and to provide temporary homes for returning soldiers (D'Oyley and Braithwaite, *ibid.*).

The Canadian Negro Women's Association of Toronto has a long list of humanitarian and social service credits since its inception in 1951, and was the sponsoring organization for the Congress of Black Women of Canada in 1973 (*ibid.*). These are just some of the organizations which women have formed over the years.

Of the many individuals who have made significant contributions, Carrie Best has probably received the most recognition for her humanitarian work. Mrs. Best, wife of a Canadian National Railway porter, was honoured with the Order of Canada Award and an honorary Doctorate of Laws from Saint Francis Xavier University — both in 1975 — for her long involvement with community affairs and civil rights. Born in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia in 1903, Best has had a notable career as newspaper editor and columnist (publishing *The Clarion* between 1946 and 1956), radio commentator, researcher and organizer of several human rights struggles. She has been active in several organizations such as the Status of Women Council and a Nova Scotia Task Force, called the Group of Seven. Her autobiography, published in 1977, is not a conventional life story, but presents a collection of newspaper articles she has written, letters, early historical documents, poetry, and the portraits of other Black citizens, confirming the impression that this is not the biography of one individual but rather of an entire community — a fitting testament to Carrie Best's unending dedication to her fellow man (Walker, 1980:180; Braithwaite, 1977:20).

With the liberalization of Canadian society in the sixties, a process which had begun much earlier with the enactment of the Canada Fair Employment Practices Act of 1953, many of the more blatant employment barriers began to break down. Black employees became more common in department stores, restaurants

and offices. In 1962, and more extensively in 1966, Canadian immigration policy was reformed so that families of landed immigrants could be admitted and Canadians could also "sponsor" those who might not otherwise meet the requirements (Walker, 1980:71). This produced a massive increase in the number of immigrants from the Caribbean and to a lesser extent Africa, many of whom are skilled and educated. These new Canadians have shattered traditional employment patterns, and it has meant that more and more Black women are opting for careers in the business and professional worlds, as opposed to remaining in traditional occupations.

An interesting question related to the study of Black women is whether the Black female in Canada has been accorded greater independence within the family and her community, as has been asserted for her counterparts in the U.S. Evolving from slavery and reinforced by the dictates of poverty, Black women have also been providers for their families, and sometimes, the sole breadwinner of the household. Hence, they have not been placed in the same situation of dependence as White women (Walker, 1980:159).

At present, data which would respond to such an enquiry is scant, to say the least. Black women in Chatham sought employment to supplement their husbands' earnings during the years following the Depression of 1857 (as reflected in the 1861 census). A survey of Halifax and Africville Blacks in 1959 showed that 28 percent of mid-city families and 16 percent of Africville families were headed by females (Institute of Public Affairs, 1962:8). Of course, these bits of information suffer from the lack of corresponding figures for White women, so that a true comparison cannot be made. However, data from the 1971 census for women in Ontario illustrate that Black women do tend to have higher employment (and unemployment) rates when compared with other women. As Table 2 illustrates, 49 percent of Black Canadian-born respondents, and 68 percent of Black immigrant women were employed in 1971, as compared with 43 percent of all other Canadian-born women and 42 percent of all other immigrants. Likewise, their unemployment rates were much higher, at 6.2 percent and 7.3 percent for Canadian-born and immigrant Black women and approximately 3.9 percent for all other women combined.

Table 2

Labour Force Participation of Four Sub-Samples of Females 15 years and over in Ontario CMA's, *1971 (percent)

Labour Force Status	Census Sub-Samples			
	Canadian-Born Blacks	Foreign-Born Blacks	All Other Canadian-Born	All Other Foreign-Born
Employed	49.0	67.9	43.0	41.9
Unemployed	6.2	7.3	3.9	3.8
Not in Labour Force	44.6	24.8	53.1	54.4
Total Percent	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Number of Cases	(1930)	(11495)	(1187835)	(614905)

Source: Census of Canada, 1971, derived from a Statistics Canada Custom Tabulation.

*Census Metropolitan Area:

A main labour market area having a population of 100,000 or more. Ontario CMA's include Hamilton, Kitchener, London, St. Catharines-Niagara, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Windsor, and the Ontario part of Ottawa-Hull.

However, it would be interesting to find out whether this greater labour force activity was primarily a phenomenon of low income families among Blacks or whether it crossed class lines. In the case of Black immigrant women their high employment rate is at least partly explained by the continuing migration of Caribbean females who work as domestics. It is also partly explained by the high percentage of skilled, educated people — both men and women — who are immigrating from the Caribbean, Africa and the United States, the bulk of which has occurred since the 1960s.

In the contemporary period, therefore, the Black woman finds herself in a contradictory situation. On the one hand, employment discrimination still exists, and is particularly severe against Black and immigrant women. A study of ethnic groups in the Toronto labour market found that while job qualifications (eg. years of schooling, work experience, and so forth) generally accounted for much of the differential in job status among various ethnic groups, an exception was found in the case of "West Indians". Although both men and women had relatively high levels of education,

their job status and incomes were quite low (Reitz, Calzavaro and Dasko, 1981).

On the other hand, women of colour are breaking down the barriers to achievement in practically every career field. There are Black women represented on the national political scene, such as Rosemary Brown, member of Parliament in the British Columbia Legislature. Originally from Jamaica, Ms. Brown ran for the national leadership of the New Democratic Party in 1975, where she came in second. Anne Cools, who was born in Barbados and educated in Montreal, was appointed to the Canadian Senate in 1984 after a distinguished career in the field of social work. The first minority to sit on the Board of Directors of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is a Black woman from Montreal, Mairuth Sarsfield. Her appointment came after a remarkable career as a writer, television broadcaster, publicist, Senior Information Officer in Canada's Department of External Affairs and Canadian representative at the U.N. based in Nairobi — just to name some of her accomplishments. Then there is Daurene Lewis, a successful businesswoman and owner

of Studio Wefan in Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia. A former nurse and teacher of nursing, Ms. Lewis weaves the articles which are sold in her store, and just happens to be the mayor of her town!

The examples of these four women show what can be achieved and what is being achieved by Black women in contemporary Canada. They take their place alongside the educators, lawyers, doctors, artists and community workers who defy the racist stereotypes which continue to prevail. However, it is the chronicling of their lives, and the lives of countless other Black mothers, wives, sisters and daughters which must serve as a beginning in the effort to contradict the dominant (mis)perception. And it is a task which we, as Black women, must undertake, for it is our responsibility to ensure that we are no longer left out of the mosaic, that our contributions are duly noted. The time has come!

Adrienne Shadd has her M.A. in Sociology. She is a researcher and is planning to work on a book on Black Canadian Women. ➤

NOTES

- 1 One exception is Rella Braithwaite's *THE BLACK WOMAN IN CANADA*, West Hill, Ontario, 1977, in which the lives of a number of notable Black women are surveyed. An earlier work, co-edited with Enid D'Oyley entitled *WOMEN OF OUR TIMES*, Toronto, The Canadian Negro Women's Association Inc., 1973 is very similar, but has an introduction on women in history. This latter work is referred to in this article.
- 2 Excerpt from a speech to the Ontario Black History Society Annual General Meeting, September, 1986.
- 3 *The Nova Scotian*, Saturday March 2, 1985, and speech to the Ontario Black History Society Annual General Meeting, September, 1986.
- 4 This bill, an appeasement to southern pro-slavery interests, allowed a citizen to arrest and detain any person of African descent suspected of being a runaway slave. Alleged runaways did not have the benefit of jury trials.
- 5 Prior to the Civil War, Ontario received the largest number of fugitives from the U.S. and was considered a "mecca" for Blacks at this time. Opportunities for employment, particularly of the skilled and semi-skilled variety, were plentiful, and a number of families established their own businesses (Walton, 1979).
- 6 Fifty-one percent of Chatham's Black males in 1851 were employed in skilled or semi-skilled crafts, such as carpenter, shoemaker, blacksmith, grocer, etc. According to Walton, this far exceeded the percentage of males working in these types of jobs in northern U.S. cities (Walton, 1979:62-65).
- 7 Blacks, as others in Canada, emigrated to the United States mainly because of the greater employment opportunities that existed there. Ironically, this was especially true in the case of Blacks because the

American Black community was more completely segregated, with its own universities, hospitals, newspapers, law firms and businesses. For the ambitious, there was greater chance of acceptance into a Black American college than a White Canadian one, and upon graduation was more certain of a successful career in such professions as law or medicine in the American Black community than in Canada (Walker, 1980:67).

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Preserving Black Heritage in Ontario

by Glace W. Lawrence

On November 4, 1963, a historic event took place at what was the Fine Art Gallery of the Toronto Public Library at College and St. George Streets. It was an exhibition of books, newspapers, pictures and manuscripts titled "The Negro In Ontario In The Nineteenth Century." The Toronto Negro Business and Professional Men's Association sponsored the exhibition (the first of its kind in the city), and it was attended by hundreds of people from Toronto and across the province of Ontario.

Today, the history of Blacks in Canada spans some 350 years and in Ontario it is over 200 years old. To many this is still a little known fact, despite the 1963 exhibition and other Black history events which have followed. But there is an organization that is trying to change this lack of awareness of Black history.

The Ontario Black History Society was founded on June 6, 1978, at a very informal gathering amongst friends, at the home of Dan and Donna Hill in a Toronto suburb. This meeting resulted in the first slate of officers for the organization. They were: Dr. Daniel G. Hill, President, Wilson O. Brooks, Vice-President, Donna Hill, Secretary-Treasurer, Lorraine D. Hubbard, Recording Secretary & Historian, Joan Kaczmarek, Research Secretary and Fran Brooks, member-at-large.

The Society's aims and objectives were eventually developed: to foster public interest and stimulate research in Ontario Black History; to sponsor educational conferences and exhibits in the field of Ontario Black History; to promote the inclusion of material on Ontario Black history in school curricula and to co-operate with other organizations in commemorating Canadian Black history.

One of the first projects undertaken by the Society was to play a major role in the unveiling and hanging of the restored portrait of William Peyton Hubbard, Ontario's first

major Black politician, in Toronto's new City Hall. There was also a subsequent plaque unveiling at Hubbard's former home. In 1981, the Society mounted a major travelling exhibition, "Black History in Early Ontario". This exhibition educated the public about the many contributions made by Blacks to Ontario for over 200 years.

Today, the Society has a number of ongoing programs. There is Oral History, a method of documenting history through audio-taped interviews with members of Ontario's Black communities. The program was initially started in co-operation with the Multicultural History Society of Ontario. But the Society's Public Education Program is by far the most active of all of its programs throughout the year, especially during Black History Month.

Recently, the Society published a teacher's guide to accompany its new video "A Proud Past — A Promising Future", the 200 year history of Blacks in Ontario. The video and guide is being distributed to schools, libraries, universities, related institutions of learning as well as the Society's close-to-250 strong membership, by School Services of Canada.

The future looks good for the Ontario Black History Society. This is largely due to the commitment, hard work and foresight of its Board of directors, its membership, staff and the continued interest of its founding members. One of the main reasons why the Society continues to thrive is because its Directors follow a very simple formula — they never forget the Society's aims and objectives. In 1988 when the Ontario Black History Society celebrates its 10th anniversary, the small inscription on its letterhead will continue to read "a registered non-profit organization dedicated to the study of Black history in Ontario".

Glace W. Lawrence is Executive Director of the Ontario Black History Society. ▶

Alaide Foppa: So She Will Not Be Forgotten

for Alba Guzman

by Marjorie Agosin

translated by Janice E. Molloy



Marjorie Agosin

To disappear, to cease to exist, as if by a diabolical magic act, has already become a daily occurrence under the authoritarian governments of Latin America. Curiously, in 1966, Guatemala initiated this monstrous system that erases every trace of life of the missing person. In the Second World War, the Nazis were able to preserve the traces of thousands of victims assassinated in the gas chambers or dead from fear and pain. Nevertheless, the Latin American militaries have been either very skillful or very sinister by erasing every sign of the lost being.¹

The Latin American woman writer also suffers a fate similar to that of the disappeared. Many times, she is alive but no one knows that she exists and her writings, considered to be lightweight, shapeless, womanly things, pass into the annals of oblivion.

Alaide Foppa suffers this double disappearance. First, she disappeared in Guatemala in December of 1980, and still not a trace of her has been found. Foppa represents the inherited destiny of the woman writer who disappears, who evaporates in the physical, real

plane as she does in the plane of her writings. Despite the tremendous importance of Alaide Foppa as a founder of and assiduous collaborator on the magazine *Fem* as well as of her poetic work, Foppa is disappearing from readings, from classrooms, but not from the memory of those who knew her.

This short piece simply attempts to rescue Alaide Foppa from oblivion, to situate her within a solid cultural context and to hope that in the future her work will be re-evaluated and will begin to be read within the appropriate canon.

My interest in Alaide Foppa began thanks to Alba Guzman, an educator and the current director of a program on the education of indigenous women. It was Alba who constantly mentioned Alaide and her sober, profound way of telling transcendental truths about the exploitation of indigenous people and, in particular, of indigenous Guatemalan women. Alaide also represented a model and a form of life for the women of her class.

Born in 1936 in Italy in the lap of a bourgeois family, raised in Europe and on Guatemalan ranches, Alaide learned to understand her privileged situation, and transferred her worries to indigenous and marginal people, especially women.

Alaide Foppa settled in Mexico for approximately twenty years and again in the 1970s. Married to a Guatemalan politician, Alfonso Solorzano, both left Guatemala for political reasons. Nevertheless, during the entire period of exile in Mexico, Alaide returned often to her beloved Guatemala until the last time in the month of December, 1980 when she and her driver were kidnapped upon leaving her home.

Foppa showed incredible activity in Mexico: she taught courses in Italian Literature in the School of Humanities of U.S.A.C. and began a radio program in Mexico City in the 1970s called Women's Forum. Alaide Foppa was one of the first to raise the consciousness of middle-class women by presenting in her forum numerous interviews with maids, indigenous women, and herbalists.

One of the most interesting aspects of Alaide Foppa's writings are her essays on the condition of women in general. They are without a doubt pioneering works for Mexico in the 1970s, and constitute true foundations of thought and ideology on the status of Latin American women.

Among Foppa's more outstanding essays we encounter the following: "Anatomy is Not Destiny," "Salary for Domestic Work," "Of Herbs and Herbalists" and "The Place of Maids."¹ Foppa's style as an essayist is agile, pleasant and inquisitive. She questions, invades, and returns to ancient history as in her essay "Anatomy is not Destiny," where she refers to the function of women from Biblical times to the present, an epoch in which a woman's body existed only for procreation; therefore she had to dedicate to it all of her attention.

The comments that Alaide makes about the menstrual flow and its negative associations for women are revealing, since from the time of the Levites, when women had to isolate themselves for seven days, this has been considered to be a dirty activity. This same connection occurs when discussing maternity, where the woman isolated herself for seven days if she gave birth to a girl.

The essay continues to make parallels between the different roles of women that also relegate her to inferiority, as well as to examine the different ways in which biology in a patriarchal society has collaborated in the marginalization of women. I repeat that these essays represent for Alaide's epoch radical openings in a society where woman was still not permitted to think about her anatomy much less her destiny.

"Of Herbs and Herbalists" is a magnificent interview devoted to two herbalists in a town in the outer regions of Mexico called Amatlan. Through this interview, where Foppa never acts as an intruder, but rather as a mere observer anxious to learn, the reader also learns about the tradition of the herbalists, so typically female and so typically Latin American.

The reader observes that the mystery of this popular knowledge is unmasked and converted into a daily and vital activity. Foppa says: "I thought I would discover secrets, would approach what they call popular knowledge, and I encountered a simple, dry woman who carried out her job without any mystery, who helped people however she could. Later I found out — she did not tell me herself — that Vicenta organized a small hospital of four rooms in Amatlan (*Fem* 4, May-June 1980, p. 52).

Along with her work as an essayist, which embraced a varied gamut of topics such as the ones mentioned, Alaide Foppa wrote five books of poems gathered into one edition that was completed and edited by her mother in

1982. The following books are included in this anthology: *The Luckless Woman* (*La sin ventura*), *My Fingers* (*Los dedos di mi mano*), *Although it is Nighttime* (*Aunque es de noche*), *Garland of Spring* (*Guinalda de primavera*), *Praise of my Body* (*Elogio de mi cuerpo*) and *Words and Time* (*Las palabras y el tiempo*)⁴.

A careful reading of her poetic trajectory points to the inherited destiny of women; effectively woman is the central theme and, at times, an obsessive motive. Her best known book, *My Fingers*, is dedicated exclusively to the theme of maternity as complete surrender but also as limitation, as in the second poem of the collection, which is untitled: Clear light of morning/I wish for your eyes/softness of early grass/for your hair/and in your chest heart of flame. Oh who would be able/to sew in your soul a garden/But I am only/your blind transitory dwelling (p. 126).

The cited book of poems expresses feelings of uneasiness as in the following verse: I will be able to allow myself to be injured again/but today mister/remove from my side/the things that hurt me (p. 128).

The poetry of Foppa revolves around women and, in particular, around the image of the woman who waits, the woman who, although not yet free, yearns for a better destiny. But also in her last poetic work, entitled *Praise of my Body*, Alaide celebrates the feminine; she exalts and loves it. Her poems are epigrammatic, marking a radical change from her previous imagist and metaphoric poetry. Alaide talks about the mouth, the breasts, the waist, the genitalia, never in a narcissistic tone but instead, in a delicate and precise fashion as in the poem entitled "Mouth": Where the tongue/light serpent of delight/undulates softly/and shelters the miracle of the word (p. 33).

The last book of Alaide Foppa, *Words and Time*, is her most profound and philosophical work. Alaide, now with a mature voice and a style that is always more synthetic and precise, goes in search of the unities between body-spirit, life-death and, above all, in search of a more transcendental communication.

Her best known poem and the one that alludes to the condition that marked her during her life is the poem "Women", (p. 81), presented here in its entirety:

*A being that does not stop being
Not the remote artificial rose
of which the poets sing
Not the wicked witch that
the inquisitors burned*

*Not the feared and desired prostitute.
Not the blessed mother
Not the withered and mocked spinster
Not the one obliged to be good
Not the one obliged to be bad
Not the one that lives
because they let her live
Not the one that must always
say yes
A being that tries to
know who it is
and that begins to exist.*

The essential purpose of this short essay is to make Alaide Foppa appear, to return her to life so that her figure will not belong only to a cult of ghosts. It is important that in future studies her life be reconstructed, since so little is known about her, that her formation under the care of indigenous nannies be discussed, that her feminist political ideology be studied and, above all, that her poetic work be rescued.

It is difficult to find the work of Alaide Foppa and it seems that only the magazine *Fem* remembers her constantly. Her name is overlooked in anthologies of Latin American poetry and her essays are not mentioned.

Alaide Foppa does not only represent a missing woman writer but also an important political figure of Latin American feminism. She deserves to appear, she deserves to be read.

Marjorie Agosin, originally from Chile, is a poet/writer who teaches Spanish Literature at Wellesley College, Boston, U.S.A. ▶

FOOTNOTES

- 1 For more information about disappearances in Latin America see the reports of Amnesty International for the respective countries.
- 2 The magazine *Fem*, one of the oldest feminist magazines in Latin America, was founded by Alaide Foppa and others in 1970.
- 3 The principle and most accessible articles of Foppa are the following:
 - 1) "Of Herbs and Herbalists." *Fem* 4-14, May-June 1980, pp. 51-53.
 - 2) "What Women Write." *Fem* 3-10, January-October 1979, pp. 5-7.
 - 3) "Anatomy is not Destiny." *Fem* 2-1, October-December 1976, pp. 8-13.
 - 4) "Daughters—Mothers—Daughters Mothers." *Fem* 3-9, October-December 1978, pp. 5-6.
- 4 The publishing house that appears in this edition in care of the mother of Alaide Foppa is Servimensa Centroamericana, Guatemala City. All of the references correspond to this edition, published in 1986, since all previous editions are out-of-print.

The Well-being of the Aged

by Victoria Lee

Ageing is a normal life process. In Western society, however, the aged are often viewed as diseased. Among the negative stereotypes attached to the elderly are such derogatory terms as old-fashioned, rigid, cantankerous, cute and docile, senile, helpless. As a result, they are seen as different, alien, no longer human beings. Even the term "elderly" can be pejorative yet it should not be, since it has its roots in a term used to describe a senate member or governing body — someone presumed to be venerable and wise.

There are many reasons for this discrimination and stereotyping. Our society emphasizes economic productivity and casts aside people who are no longer actively producing dollars — those who have become an economic burden. Discrimination against the elderly is a distorted expression of our overwhelming fear of death, the inevitable consequence of ageing.

However, we can no longer turn a blind eye to this particular age group, for its numbers are increasing steadily. The birthrate has declined and medical and social advances have increased the average life-expectancy. Statistics Canada predicts that by the year 2000, 12 percent of the population will be at least 65 years of age, an increase from 9.5 percent in 1980. By the year 2025, most of the baby-boom generation will be 65 years or older.

During recent years, interest in the aged population has increased. In the fields of

Medicine and Psychiatry, the care of geriatrics is now considered to be a valid sub-specialty field. Social and economic policy-makers are beginning to address the needs of the elderly. The aged themselves are also beginning to organize into a political force which can no longer be ignored.

Who are the aged? By convention, we mean those who are over 65 years of age. However, this is a heterogeneous group and similar chronological age does not imply similar levels of physical or psychological health for different individuals.

There are, nonetheless, several generalizations which can be made about the aged as a group. For example, since the 1960s, there are more women over 65 than men. Over one-half of these women are widowed as opposed to one-quarter of elderly men, who more often than not tend to remarry. A significant proportion of the aged live alone; this is especially true of elderly women. Contrary to popular belief, only a small proportion are institutionalized. The elderly are quite likely to be poor, and again, this is more true for elderly women. Housing is often substandard and physical and mental illness take their toll. The aged are more likely to have at least one or more health problems, as opposed to the younger age groups. They use medical and

hospital services more often, and suffer longer periods of disability. Chronic illnesses like arthritis are more likely to occur, and they often suffer multiple illnesses.

Major causes of death in this age group include ischemic heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, and cancer. The aged are also more likely to receive multiple prescription medications as well as many over-the-counter drugs and are therefore at risk for toxic reactions. The incidence of depression and suicide also increases with age, the elderly white man being at high risk.

The World Health Organization defines health not just as an absence of disease but as a state of "complete physical, mental and social well-being". One's physical health naturally affects one's ability to adapt to environmental stresses. On the other hand, one's mental health affects susceptibility to physical illness. Mental and physical health is therefore strongly influenced by factors alluded to earlier: income security, housing, degree of interpersonal support, leisure activities, and societal attitudes. If our society is to address the well-being of its geriatric population, we must be prepared to take a holistic approach to the situation.

In terms of health care, the general policy should be no different than one for younger age groups. Adequate access to good medical services must be provided. Health promotion and disease prevention must be priorities, with emphasis on adequate nutrition, exercise and maintaining a good lifestyle. More specifically, physicians and health care workers must be alert to the fact that the elderly do have unique kinds of health problems. They must also recognize that the elderly should not be treated any differently from younger patients in terms of a satisfactory level of care. This means their problems must be adequately investigated and treated, and they must not be regarded as complaining nuisances who are old and in the process of dying anyway.

Mental health needs must be considered more seriously. Old age is a period characterised by numerous changes, and in particular, a period of loss: not only can there be loss of a job and income, loss of a spouse, family and friends, and loss of physical health, but there can also be changes in one's role and subsequent adjustments in one's self-concept and confidence. These issues are important considerations which must be dealt with.

However, loss does not always imply negative consequences. Old age does not preclude the capacity to adapt and to learn

from one's experiences. An individual is also more likely to grow and adapt to change if the surrounding environment is sympathetic and supportive.

A supportive environment not only entails financial, social and medical support, but also involves a positive attitude, encouragement of a sense of pride and dignity, and most importantly — independence. The elderly have much to contribute in terms of life experience and wisdom and this must be valued. The aged are what we will all become. There is no "them" and "us" — only "us".

The next issue of Tiger Lily will include an article which focusses on the special problems of the elderly women in our society.

Dr. Victoria Lee was born in Toronto of parents who emigrated from Mainland China. She is a physician in her final year of specialty training in psychiatry in Toronto and is planning a career in geriatric psychiatry. ➤

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This Is Not a Poem

by Himani Bannerji



Cathy Bellales

DOING TIME

I

This is not a poem, nor the introduction to my poems, because I cannot write poetry anymore. It's more like a note, or a memo, which I frequently write, forget to give and one day it finds its way to the nearest waste-paper basket, or drops onto the sidewalk. People step on it, it has muddy splotches all over, and finally wedges itself between the iron grids of the air vent. And then...and so on...

II

But as I was saying I cannot write poems anymore because I don't know what language, what words, what metaphors or myths I could use to describe the world around me or express what I feel or think about it. And I am not sure that there should be any more of these metaphors around, or myths, or signs and symbols, or whatever they call them. In fact never more than now I feel, things have been ever more of themselves. They are what they are. They are fully un-covered. All the bricks, barbed wires, concrete, chrome, glass, gasses, bombs, helicopters, dogs and Wallstreet journals are there for us to see. If we who are not white, and, (therefore, black and) also women, have not yet seen that here we live in a prison, that we are doing time, then we are fools, playing unenjoyable games with ourselves. I won't go so far, however, as to say that we deserve what we get.

III

The prison, it might be objected, is a metaphor, a myth that I, and others like myself, have constructed to mythicize our petty problems, to glorify, romanticize our trivial lives. A prisoner's complex similar to the martyr complex — too ready to call for more nails, whips, chains, etc. ... But I disagree, and won't explain anymore. Instead I am saying that for us the much touted word "freedom" is the dishing out of a myth or a metaphor, covering up the prison in which we live, where, and I insist, we are doing time. We, who here everyday live by saying 'Yes, boss', or become con-men and -women and gamblers and card sharpers, who won't admit that a fissure as sure and fine as a cleaver's edge divides us from the architects who sit in their insured towers, live here in greater if not as great a subordination as in South Africa, where the huge white lid has blown off.

IV

What am I saying? I am saying that I will not associate with anyone except fellow prisoners and conspirators. Anyone who can give orders, even of the smallest kind, is in the rank of the guards, even those who think that they can. The complacent, even those who only deep down, can hear the still small voice of comfort, even in dream, are to be seen as traitors. All frills and fripperies, tacky and otherwise, are to be torn down. Bedrooms, workplaces, streets are only to be seen as exercise yards, where by dropping coins in the turnstiles we can simulate notions — horizontal or vertical. Prisons when furnished by trendy designers don't become homes but burial parlours.

V

'Oh, how bitter, angry and impatient you have become' you might say — looking at me sorrowfully, across the table in a restaurant which is choking on its own expensive menu and from the walls of which dead Mayans, Aztecs and Incas stare at me eyelessly. The flute of the Andes and those hard decisions that you have to make and others also. (Progressive lawyers are about to defend Chilean torturers.) There are also as we know, two sides to everything — it is the other side of freedom. (The woman was nice, it will be said, she just watched, like those uniforms, with their nifty little gold buttons...you have already been divided from me.) I see the glass divider fall between us. On the other side you are cleaner and fine-edged. Your hair is clean brown like leaves in autumn. Does it have an effect on how you think?

VI

It can't possibly. I am assailed by trivia. My mind drifts, I am not listening to a word you say. Actually I am bored. Bored with clever words, with your politics of little spaces, your little good deeds for Africa, your NGOs, your talking socialism, your healthfood, Birkenstock shoes, obsessive preoccupation with your personal extinction. I am so bored that I could call you a liar even if I didn't believe it. I look out at the night sky, a few stars are visible for a change, and idly construct a private zodiac of a Soweto necklace. 'How personally you 'take things?' Do I? I guess I do. Since when? I look at my old poems. Yes — there is a break there. Gone are the days when I had a 'private' private life — when a bad love affair hurt me more than the newspaper in the morning. 'You have no personal life anymore?' you say, shaking your head ever so little. No, I don't. It's a kind of luxury this personal life. And besides, as Ruth First said, before they blew her to bits, in her 117 days, personal life is constructed with a personal history, personal tokens, which you give up at the warden's office as you enter, and wear the clothes that others do. Yes, I have no personal life — but then again, don't I? I have become so many people.

Himani Bannerji was born in India, and lived in Bangladesh between 1947 and 1959. She lived in Calcutta between 1959 and 1969, where she completed her university education and taught in the English and Comparative Literature departments of Jadavpur University. She came to Toronto, Canada in 1969, and has been living there, with frequent returns to India, teaching since 1975 in Social Science and Women's Studies, at Atkinson College, York University.

Native Women Say No To Racism

by The Toronto Native Women's Resource Centre:

"We struggle against racism to ensure our daily survival"

This year's theme of "No to Racism" has always been the central struggle of Native Women. Racism is not a new issue in our lives and, as awareness fades after International Women's Day 1986, for those who do not experience its direct effects, our struggle will continue. That is not to say that the fight against racism is the responsibility of Women of Colour only. Each woman must confront her own internalized racism as well as addressing racism in society. It is not enough to simply gain awareness but to take direct action against racism in all its forms. Racism affects all our lives, however indirect that effect may be. We as Native Women struggle against racism to ensure our daily survival and that of our children and our people.

The genocide that began with the arrival of Europeans continues to this day: Genocide in the form of exploitation and destruction of the earth by the greed of imperialist governments and multinational corporations. Today 90% of all uranium mined is extracted from Indian land, affecting most directly Native Women with cancer rates two times the national average, miscarriage rates three times the national average and birth defects two times the national average.

Genocide is further evidenced by the high percentage of Native Women who are sterilized without their knowledge or informed consent. Other women fight for the right to free and safe abortion; we fight for the right to bear children, healthy children. Racism is at the root of this genocide; racism that continues the deliberate and systematic destruction of all indigenous peoples.

Despite changes the education system is still ineffective when dealing with Native children. Our dropout rate is the highest in North America. The system still treats our children as second-class citizens in their own land, passing these attitudes on to non-Native students and teachers. The textbooks our children must learn from have censored the history of colonization to the point of excluding the truth about the genocide of our people. Native people have taken responsibility for their children's education with "Native Way" or "Survival" schools run by Native people, taught by Native teachers and with a Native-oriented curriculum based on traditional teachings of our people. Native children respond positively to this type of education but these schools are too few in number. We say "No to Racism" in the education system; for we want our children strong, independent and proud of what is rightfully theirs!

Native Women remain the highest unemployed population in Canada. We have the lowest participation rate in the workforce, lower than non-Native women regardless of age. We are already in a double jeopardy situation based on class and gender, add to this racism and it is a triple jeopardy situation. Most jobs attainable are therefore menial, low-paid positions in an environment that remains sexist and racist, leading to our social incineration. Tokenistic government emphasis on programs that offer possible entry or re-entry into the workforce encourage Native Women into fields that non-Native women are breaking away from. As on most levels we are at the end of the promotion and advancement

line — if we are lucky enough to be hired in the first place. The average income of Native women is 50% of the average income of non-Native women. This income disparity affects the attainment of basic necessities such as affordable housing, adequate health care and proper nutrition, ultimately subjugating and demoralizing our people as a whole. We say "No to Racism" in its various forms in the workforce.

Native Women bear the brunt of the racist criminal "justice" system in this country. Native Women are more likely to be detained before trial and most likely to be incarcerated after trial. Native Women constitute 90% of the population at the provincial "correctional" centre in Saskatchewan and 45-50% of the population at the federal prison for women in Ontario. The racism that begins with police and continues through the courts, does not end at the prison gates. The prison system continues and maintains this racism resulting in the denial of freedoms as basic as the right to practise our traditional ceremonies. Freedom of religion does not extend to Native Women prisoners.

We say no to racist governments that impose boundaries that would divide Native people. As sovereign nations of this continent, we do not recognize the boundaries of states, provinces, territories and countries. We will not be divided!

As Native Women we also say "No to Tokenism" an extension of racism which perpetuates itself. We as Native Women are capable of forming our own networks, facilitating our own workshops and addressing our own issues. No one knows the full extent of our struggles better than we do. In the future we direct that all non-Native women place themselves in a learning position and that the responsibility for racism be taken up among yourselves. The results of collective guilt are patronizing and we demand that control over our concerns remain in our hands. We join with all women in saying "No to Racism" in the women's movement.

This statement is not a litany of our oppressions but rather a reflection of the reality of our lives. In our attempts to educate non-native people we will not allow ourselves to be victimized. We, who have survived the many and varied forms of genocide imposed upon us through colonization and neo-colonization, are still here! We the source of life and strength of our people will continue the struggle.

We believe that as Native Women, our lives have been invalidated, our words silenced and

our struggle unrecognized. It is ironic that we — whose nations recognize women as the original creative force, the leaders, the decision makers, the teachers — are yet unheard. Despite racist attempts to repress our voice as Native Women, we will be heard, for we hear each other's words. It is our recognition, our acknowledgement and our definition of who we are that is important. The majority of us are not and have never been willing to allow that definition to come from outside. We struggle against those outside oppressions that affect who we are and who "they" would have us be. To that end we struggle against the racism that would define us only to the extremes of "Indian Princess" and "Squaw."

We join with our sister, Paula Gunn Allen in her essay, "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism":

"The name by which the tribes and nations refer to the greatest kind of woman-power is 'Grandmother' or 'elder woman power.'"

"If judicious modeling of the traditions of the various native nations was practised in the Americas, the place of women in society would become central, the distribution of goods and power would be egalitarian, the elderly would be respected, honoured and protected as a primary social and cultural resource, the ideals of physical beauty would be considerably enlarged (including 'fat,' strong-featured women, grey-haired and wrinkled individuals and others who, in contemporary American culture are viewed as 'ugly.') Additionally, the destruction of the biota, the life-sphere, and of the natural resources of the planet would be curtailed and the spiritual nature of human and non-human life would become a primary ordering principle of human society. And if the traditional tribal systems that are emulated include those who have been pacifist since 'time immemorial,' war as a major ordering principle of human society would cease."

"Feminists too often believe that no one has ever experienced the kind of society that empowered women and made that empowerment the basis of its rules of civilization."

Sinister Wisdom, Winter 1984

We reaffirm this belief in the power of Native Women and continue the struggle against the racism that would suppress this belief and practice! We extend our solidarity to our South African sisters, third world women and all Women of Colour!

Written by the Toronto Native Women's Resource Centre for the International Women's Day Newsletter in March 1986 and reprinted with kind permission. ➤

Only Her Hairdresser Knows for Sure

by Carol Talbot

I could write my life story around “hair”. Maybe I’ll write a chapter, anyway. Being one of the light-skinned “high yeller”¹ Talbots, my hair has been, in times past, the bane of my existence, but now, in my enlightened days, the badge of my identity. I’ll bet you could measure individual black’s degrees of radicalism in their lives with a dated record of their age and changing hairstyles. A scientist could make up some interesting graphs, for example, correlating some celebrities’ hairstyles with dates and current events. But seeing as I’m not a scientist ...

“Woe is me,” lamented Mom as she struggled to get some control over my unruly locks—“naps”, really. Every day she brushed and combed and pulled and tugged order back into Marilyn’s and my hair. We had the “bad” hair. I remember mine seemed to be a special problem when I was a baby. Mom complained that it was so short and fuzzy it defeated all her efforts at organization—you know, she was and is a very organized individual! Maybe that’s why in all those baby pictures of me you often just see one big bow on top of the fuzz, a public indication that a noble effort had been made.

Blessed be the day when our hair grew long enough to put into braids. Mom would go as high as four braids, but not on her life would you ever see *her daughters* with all those little parts and braids “like Topsy”. I for one had a real sense of superiority over some of those with “badder” hair who had to wear those tight little braids.

Mom had all kinds of strategies to combat that “bad stuff”. When our hair was washed (about every two weeks, ’cause the longer we went between washings the more control could be exerted), she would olive oil it, (castor oil sometimes, because that would

really condition it, make it less kinky, but it was expensive or something), part it in sections (really!—but only at home where nobody could see), and twist it into what we hilariously called “knobs”. When it dried she would then put it into one of the braided styles mentioned earlier.

Very occasionally we got “ringlets”. These could be achieved by winding the wet hair around rags and then removing the rags carefully when the hair was dry. What a joy to go swinging with those to church! Of course, they only lasted one day, if that, soon reverting to their customary miscellaneous fuzz that must be quickly disguised in the interminable braids.

Sometimes Mom went to really drastic lengths in her battles against our hair. Once I remember her tying pop bottles on the ends to “stretch it”. She also tried washing it in “Super suds”—after all, who knows what such a powerful detergent could do! Another time she went all out and cut our hair off like boys’ in hopes that with a fresh start it might come in “good”.

Then, around grade six or so, we were judged too old for braids. “Knobs”, curlers, short hair, nylon “mojoes”, pincurls, egg shampoos, 100 daily strokes, ponytails were all enlisted in this ongoing war (escalated to the status of war because of the armaments and troops needed). Marilyn and I both were heavily involved with Mom’s workings on our heads. I never knew what it was like to go to bed without a head cover until I was twenty.

Finally, Mom decided to resort to Aunt Kathleen’s hot comb. New agonies were visited upon us as Mom began to sweat over our heads every second Saturday in the greasy hot and secret ritual of *really* straightening our

hair. Gone were the knobs, the braids, and the tugging and the pulling. Instead we now had the dubious improvement of cringing under the hot comb in the unpractised and sometimes dangerous hands of Mom. The back of the neck was the worst. My skin crawled when I *thought* that she was coming too close, and sometimes she was! You can imagine the problems that we sometimes had trying to explain burns in such outlandish places as the top of the ear or nape of the neck.

We were happy with our greasy, umbrella styles. We had passable imitations of the "good stuff" as long as we didn't get caught in the rain. Oh boy! You didn't want to get your hair wet! Water was the *number one menace* to our new hairdos. Even a little too much humidity would slowly set those stiff strands in motion...But...rain...Heaven forbid...on an unprotected 'do, well, bye-bye hairdo— instantaneously. Those naps could shoot back "home" so fast your eyeballs could snap. Now we didn't want to let out the little secret of our hair to the white folks out there, especially our school friends. We didn't want to be any different than we could help, so you can understand why we became a little neurotic about carrying those little fold-up rain hats

around. We wouldn't go out on a cloudless day in the middle of a drought without our little rainhats stashed somewhere on our persons! You know, that's the main reason I never learned to swim well at high school: I never wanted to get my hair wet!

When I went to university the hair problem was professionally dispatched to the capable hands of a black hairdresser. She did a job so good that truly "only my hairdresser knew for sure."

Then came the sixties. There I was, way up in the northern bush scrabbling for literature on Martin Luther King, the Black Muslims, and the Civil Rights Movement in the States. I read everything I came across and finally I was moved to do it. I let those marvelous chemical straighteners grow out and went "natural".

That was the beginning of the most significant years of my life. My Afro was a public statement of my identify and the knowledge and courage it took to make that statement were the first small steps toward evolving towards a really "black" me.

Carol Talbot is a poet, writer and educator. She lives in London, Ontario. This excerpt is from "Growing Up Black in Canada", reprinted with the kind permission of Williams-Wallace Publishers. ▶



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Katherine Dunham's Multicultural Influence

by Leah Creque-Harris

Katherine Dunham, a consummate artist and scholar of anthropology, fascinates audiences throughout the world with her fascinating rhythms and exotic dancing. The Dunham technique evolved from social dances and primitive rites of the West Indies, Africa and South America into a major American art form. Miss Dunham is considered a pioneer of the American dance movement, along with Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey and her

idol, Isadora Duncan. Dunham's innovative rhythms and movements, derived from people of African descent, served to establish the existence of a distinct and viable black aesthetic, in an era when black cultural expression was unrecognized.

Dunham and her company were highly acclaimed for their authenticity and professional integrity. The rituals and customs of the countries that she studied formed the themes for her creations. She created an art

form for the impeccable execution of authentic folk dance movements by carefully developing highly stylized and precise movements.

Audiences throughout the world were thrilled at Dunham's unparalleled theatricality. Elaborate sets and costumes designed by her husband, John Pratt, transported the audience to the lush tropical settings where dancing thrives. The use of live music, especially sonorous drums from Africa and Haiti, heightened the drama. And though the dancers appeared to move with wild abandon, their movements were based upon a system of dance technique that could not be achieved without intensive training.

The progression of Dunham's career was as fluid as her dance movements. The young Katherine Dunham left her home in Glen Ellyn, Illinois to join her brother Albert at the University of Chicago. Outside of her academic pursuits, which led to a degree in anthropology, Dunham also studied ballet and became active in theatre.

Even before she finished college Dunham had begun to teach to support her studies, and had formed a small dance company to showcase her choreography. In 1934, she was asked to perform at the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition (the Chicago World's Fair).

Armed with the knowledge from her anthropological studies that such popular dances as the Cake Walk were derived from African dance, Dunham went to the Rosenwald Foundation for money to study the influence of the African dance tradition. After demonstrating the contrast between classical ballet and African dancing, she received a travel fellowship in February 1935 to the West Indies.

On her first trip, to Jamaica, she studied the Accompong community, where Maroons retained their African lifestyle. Descendants of West African Koromantees who were sold into slavery in Jamaica, the Maroons fled to the mountains of the island, where they built their own community and ferociously defended themselves against white invasions. Dunham befriended these people, and they shared with her their ancient customs and beliefs. Later in her career, Dunham chronicled her first field experience in *Journey to Accompong*, published in 1946.

Next came Martinique, where Dunham learned the exciting fighting dance, L'Ag'Ya, which eventually became part of her repertoire. In Trinidad, she was introduced to the ritualistic dancing of the Shango cult, which

prepared her for her longest and most intensive research project, a study of dance in the religious rites of Haiti.

Her innate charm melted away any reluctance that the Haitians had about sharing their most secret rites and traditions with a stranger. Sharing a common racial heritage, she found she could break down barriers that others might have found difficult to surmount. "I was a young and energetic field researcher. I had my letters of introduction from Melville Herskovits. Understanding the culture, I lived among the people. I took a recorder and played Duke Ellington records and the people would come around. I danced on toe and inevitably they would want to show me their dances, which I encouraged." Dunham was eager to learn more about her heritage and identity and they were equally curious about her.

In Haiti, Dunham was warmly received by all sectors of society. She particularly cultivated the friendships of the peasant practitioners of vodun. These friends admitted Dunham into religious ceremonies where she witnessed the cathartic effect of dance in its religious aspect. Drawn into this culture, she became an initiate into vodun at the highest level. In her book, *Island Possessed* (1969), she describes her three-day initiation and her discovery of one of dance's most important purposes, to physiologically and psychologically prepare the dancer for a "possession", a spiritual awakening.

After her return from Haiti in 1936, Dunham reassembled her company and began touring with new dances that reflected what she learned in the islands. Some would say that she never abandoned her work as an anthropologist. Her performances were a learning experience for audiences throughout the world.

In 1940, Dunham developed the choreography for the all-Negro Broadway musical, *Cabin in the Sky*, starring Ethel Waters. Dunham also performed in the musical as Georgia Brown and toured with the production after its long run on Broadway. This success gave her company a great deal of exposure, and they began touring the world. Once the company became established, Dunham began to write and lecture about her field experiences and her theories about the social and political implications of dance. She published her thesis, *Dances of Haiti* (1947) first in Mexico and France and later in the United States. Her autobiography, *A Touch of Innocence* (1959) written during an extended

stay in Japan which described her bittersweet childhood, showed that her talents were manifold.

Dunham strongly believes in the integration of the arts as a way of life. She composed music and songs for her company's performances and performed as a singer and actress as well. For relaxation, she painted. Exhibitions of her paintings were held throughout Europe and South America. Dr. Albirda Rose, Associate Professor of Dance at San Francisco State, marvels at Miss Dunham's many abilities, "At the same time Dunham was doing work that was commercially popular to keep the company solvent, she was able to maintain her artistic integrity. It is amazing to me that she could write a book, continue to choreograph and compose and still make cornbread."

These talents proved invaluable during the lean times when she needed extra funds for the support of her company, which received neither government nor foundation subsidy. When asked how she was able to remain afloat, Miss Dunham responded, "It's amazing, I just don't know how. I have some inner faith and correctness, and I used my energy properly. We excited people and they loved us."

The typical Dunham company performance would include a primitive dance sequence of social and religious dances from the West Indies and a segment devoted to Afro-American dance in the blues tradition. Last would be a rendition of folk dancing indigenous to the country in which they were performing. Every dance was tied to a well-constructed story line, so that the audience was not lost in the abstract movements so typical of traditional western dance.

Like most black artists of that era, the work of the Katherine Dunham Dance Company was more warmly received abroad than in the United States. Haiti's president, Paul Magloire, rolled out the red carpet for her. Dunham bought a second home there—Habitation Leclerc—which served as an off-season headquarters for the company.

Her influence on the countries through which she toured was profound. Heads of state and dignitaries were eager to surround themselves with Dunham and her company. Because of her dedication to restoring ethnic cultures worldwide, she convinced many government officials that a national ballet company was greatly needed. She is credited with having helped to establish Ballet Folklorico

de Mexico and Les Ballets Senegal.

Dunham worked closely with the president of Senegal, the Negritude poet Leopold Senghor, and played an important role in the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Senegal in 1966. She also helped to establish the slave-trade museum at Gore Island. In Europe, Dunham was sought after for her lectures on ethnology. In 1948 she was inducted into the Royal Society of Anthropology in London and in 1949 she was inducted into the Parisian Royal Anthropological Society. In Mexico, Brazil and New Zealand her company's performances were combined with lectures on the anthropology of dance.

Dunham and her company were indeed cultural ambassadors for the United States, although entirely without official backing. The State Department never sponsored a goodwill cultural tour for the Dunham Company. Dunham's request for support was flatly refused because of a dance, entitled, "Southland" that portrayed a lynching scene.

Dunham's racial pride was evident throughout her career. At home, where her company was consistently denied hotel accommodations, Dunham successfully sued hotels in Cincinnati and Chicago. In 1944, after a performance in Louisville, where blacks were restricted to the balcony, she announced onstage that she would not return until blacks were treated with equality.

Reflecting about the myths that were attributed to black people, Miss Dunham reminisces, "The first myth that was dispelled was that onstage we were all clowns. The minstrel thing hung over for a long time. You must remember that my first stage performance was in 1936. We also changed the concept of beauty. We weren't pushing black is beautiful. We just showed it."

"We also had an effect on Hollywood. Hollywood wanted us to change the mixture of my company. They wanted light-skinned ladies with straight hair. But some of them did not dance our style. I saw no reason to change because of Hollywood." Among Dunham's numerous motion pictures abroad and in Hollywood are *Carnival of Rhythm* (1939), Hollywood's first dance film in colour, *Star Spangled Rhythm* (1941), *Stormy Weather* (1943) and *Casbah* (1949).

As a humanitarian, Dunham's energies were never focussed solely on her own art. In the late fifties, she opened a medical clinic at her residence in Haiti after the death of a child

due to inadequate health care and actually administered medical treatments herself. She has carried out a lifelong program of education through the arts, both in Haiti and in the United States. At her New York-based school, founded in 1944, she offered instruction in dance, theatrical studies and cultural studies as well as foreign languages.

The integration of the arts with humanities and social science has become her signature, and the Dunham student is a multi-dimensional artist. Students and former performers in her company include dancer/activist, Julie Belafonte; choreographers Alvin Ailey, Talley Beatty, Janet Collins and Robert Joffrey; entertainer, Eartha Kitt; opera singer, Leo Coleman; and actors Marlon Brando, Lee Strasburg and James Dean.

"We had in our completely rounded program, performing arts, academics, and humanities. In the humanities our instruction in languages would always be conversational. We taught French and Creole, Spanish and a little Afro-Cuban. Whatever was available we'd put in. We had an instructor who had studied in Russia so we offered Russian. I think that socialization to dance, to any of the arts is a good way to teach. We were trying to help mould them into the ways and customs not only of their own society but of other people so that their horizons could be broadened, they could travel and they could think of other people and other countries. It was good for them."

The Dunham tradition continues in modern times in what seems an unlikely place, East St. Louis. When Dunham decided in 1965 to retire from the stage, she returned as artist-in-residence at Southern Illinois University (S.I.U.), where her archives have been established.

Later, in 1967 she became the founder and director of the Performing Arts Training Centre at S.I.U.'s East St. Louis campus. "I was simply attracted to East St. Louis because it was so rich in culture. Josephine Baker, Miles Davis and Tina Turner were born here." Dunham's presence has brought the arts to the forefront of this already culturally rich area.

But like many other wellsprings of black culture throughout the world, the city is an economically depressed area scarred by boarded-up buildings and jobless citizens and a high crime rate. Coming to the city at the height of unrest in the 1960s, Dunham became involved. "I have always gone into areas where there is oppression and social and political injustice."

"While I was abroad, I thought that everything was solved. But it wasn't solved. We offered cultural programs for all ages, from youths to senior citizens, producing poetry, plays and music. I found working with young people was great—a creative thing to do. Once you create you don't stop."

Through her Centre, Dunham dance technique, music and humanities are taught to preserve the Dunham tradition. Dunham has given young people in East St. Louis an outlet and a world view that has saved many from wasting their lives.

In 1977, Dunham and her dedicated colleague, Jeanelle Stovall, reopened the Katherine Dunham Museum which had originally been founded in 1968 as the Dynamic Museum. It exhibits her travels, as well as memorabilia from the company's performances, including the exquisite costumes worn by Miss Dunham. The museum is still called the Dynamic Museum because children are encouraged to touch the many items on display for learning purposes. "As groups of children go through someone describes the cultures to which the pieces of sculpture belong. I think the whole thing of socialization and formal education is the way we should teach our children." Every summer, dance troupe alumni reunite in East St. Louis for the Dunham Intensive Technique Seminar, which attracts students from all over the world, many of whom are dance instructors themselves. Dunham is on site during the seminar and teaches an occasional master class and lecture.

At 77, she moves through the latter years of her life with as much grace and poise as she once brought to the stage. She divides her time between East St. Louis and Haiti, where she continues to promote the indigenous culture of the island. She hosts Vaudun ceremonies, works with local dances and is part of the social and artistic fabric of the island. She continues to travel and to lecture on the prevalence of cults among deprived people. She was recently named a Fulbright scholar and is currently lecturing in Brazil.

She is a master and a sage, who links ancient rhythms to cultural history. She demonstrated to the world the harmony of diverse cultures and the universality of dance as a medium of cultural expression. "Dance is an essential part of life that has always been with me."

Leah Creque-Harris is a fund-raiser at Spelman College and is completing her Ph. D. in West African Literature. She lives in Atlanta. ▶

Working with Collectives

An Interview with Toronto Women's Press: Margie Wolfe and Maureen Fitzgerald

by Ayanna Black



Cathy Bellwales

The series of articles and interviews on Collectives which began in the first issue of *Tiger Lily* will explore various modes of working together that women have been developing while attempting to work together. Both women of colour and white women have organized collectives as a way of breaking down patriarchal structures and hierarchical ways of working together. We wanted to change the systems our white brothers built and to bring equality into the workplace. Their structures were never developed with women in mind, let alone Women of Colour. Women wanted to share the power and take control of their lives, and in the process to build a new society with women's input.

We want to explore how women work in collectives, to examine how things have changed. Has the women's movement perpetuated the white, male, hierarchical structure under a new umbrella of white, middle-class women?

bell hooks, who has worked with varied groups in the U.S., states in *Feminist Theory: From*

Margin to Centre that . . . "white feminist activists now include writings by Women of Colour on course outlines, or hire one woman of Colour to teach a class about her ethnic group, or make sure one or more women of Colour are represented in feminist organizations (even though this contribution by Women of Colour is needed and valuable) more often than not they are attempting to cover up the fact that they are totally unwilling to surrender their hegemonic dominance of theory and praxis, a dominance which they would not have established were this not a white supremacist, capitalist state."

In November I interviewed four women from the Collective at Toronto Women's Press: Larissa Cairncross, Nila Gupta, Margie Wolfe and Maureen Fitzgerald. I had intended to have a group interview. However, the two women of Colour requested to be interviewed separately. Due to the length of the interviews, we will print the interview with Nila Gupta and Larissa Cairncross in the forthcoming issue of *Tiger Lily*.

TIGER LILY

Why did you decide to develop a women's press?

WOLFE

The Toronto Women's Press began in 1972, long before I joined the press. I came to the press in 1977 because I was interested in working with a feminist organization in a collective non-hierarchical structure and I love books and so it was the perfect place for me. We saw there was a need to publish material that was coming out of a growing women's movement.

FITZGERALD

The press began when a group of women who were teaching Women's Studies at the University of Toronto wanted to publish *Women Unite*, a book on women's liberation in Canada. They took it to various publishers but the response they got from mainstream publishers involved a process they did not want to engage in. The women wanted to maintain some control over the book and they did not want to put it into the hands of other editors. They decided the best route was to publish it themselves. The press began with a deliberate attempt to maintain autonomy over publication.

TIGER LILY

Did *Women Unite* include any women of colour?

FITZGERALD

No — there wasn't as far as I know of and I don't know whether there was any debate or discussion or even an awareness of it. When you look at the early almanacs we published there was some visual presence of women of colour even though it was a period of time when there wasn't much visibility for women of colour. Most of the visibility involved Third World issues because the war in Vietnam was on so there was some representation of Vietnamese women and some of the struggles in Angola were represented, but they were from a white woman's point-of-view.

TIGER LILY

Do you have women of colour on your present collective?

WOLFE

At the present we have three women of colour in different manuscript groups. It's important to have women of colour working in the press because it's time to hear other

voices and discover how we connect. I don't mean that we are counting on *them* to connect us with women of colour because they expressed resentment at us for expecting them to be the bridge. We always expect them to be the connectors. It does not absolve us — we white women — of our responsibilities in making connections with women of colour. But, they have an important role to play in that area, and also in challenging us around our own racism — the ways in which we maintain or reinforce the structures of racism.

TIGER LILY

Would you elaborate on that?

FITZGERALD

I think it has more to do with keeping women invisible. Although it is not a conscious thing, it falls more into insensitivity, lack of awareness, the sins of omission — a sort of blindness that doesn't quite see that when we have spoken for women, we have often only been speaking for *some* factions of women. We haven't been speaking for *all* women. I would say that the women we have spoken for are white, middle-class and university-educated. I think, by and large, there has not been an increasing awareness of our own limitations.

TIGER LILY

Why do you think this has happened? With all the material available and the awareness of so many other special interest groups in the women's movement, women of colour have *always* been excluded. Why the blindness?

FITZGERALD

It's been difficult for white women to recognize our own privilege. We have to recognize that privilege before we can give it up. You would think that because women are feminists and have particular struggles that we would appreciate other people's struggles more readily and see the parallels. You would hope that feminists would see some of the parallels in what women of colour are saying about racism: what women were saying to men ten years ago.

TIGER LILY

What changes must women make if we are saying that we must develop a new society? As middle-class white women how do you see these changes affecting poor white women? Do you think white women can do it alone?

WOLFE

There are all kinds of struggles that we have to continue to work on but it's not ever been something white women thought we were

going to do alone. We recognize that it is not a white world.

FITZGERALD

In making ties between us it is important to recognize our commonality and appreciate our differences. I think this scares women. When I have suggested to white women the parallels between what women of colour are saying about racism to what we said about sexism they say but that's different: "We were talking about men and since we're all women we can not be divided in the same way." We must appreciate and understand the anger of women of colour. We elevated this notion of commonality — that we are all sisters — and haven't appreciated or respected the areas that divide us.

A lot of white women's arrogance is not in expecting we can do it all but that we have very little responsibility in this. We discussed this issue on International Women's Day last year and there was a real expression of 'this is enough' and that demands must be strong and insistent. We are very motivated to change and I think change comes from people's anger.

TIGER LILY

Let's talk March 8th: International Women's Day.

FITZGERALD

I should make it clear that I wasn't involved in organizing for March 8th of last year so this is the hearsay version — some from women of colour, some from white women. For the first time a large group of women of colour started to organize to have their demands heard. For the first time women of colour were visible and I really welcomed it. For the first time I saw a colleague of mine — a black woman — wearing an International Women's Day button. I've been involved in organizing I.W.D. in the past and I always longed for *everybody* to be wearing a button. I remember handing out leaflets at the Bay and Bloor subway as women were going to work — the majority of whom were women of colour — and I wondered what this leaflet and its images said to them. This year the theme of racism was kept predominant and the activity of women of colour was also predominant.

TIGER LILY

Do you still see the divisiveness as a negative aspect in the sense that March 8th was a successful event? Do you feel the women's movement has become integrated and what about strategies for change?

WOLFE

For me personally, the result of the I.W.D. struggles is that I now belong to a white women's group that meets monthly to discuss feminism and racism. I'm not sure if we'd be meeting now if these issues had not been raised. So for me it has been a positive thing.

I'm not clear about strategies. The question of white women struggling on their own to deal with problems as opposed to working together with women of colour to deal with the issues. It is not clear to me and I find it problematic as a way of working together, or rather not working together. When I attended I.W.D. the divisions were clear. I realize it happened because people wanted to feel comfortable but it wasn't integrated. When you came into a March 8 Coalition meeting there were many white women but there also was a group of women of colour who sat together in one group. It may have been for strategy reasons and that is perfectly legitimate. But I don't think it is integrated in the way we usually mean.

TIGER LILY

What I meant to say was it integrated in terms of ideas or ideology? It is interesting you noticed a group of black women sitting together. I have gone to many women's groups and have seen a group of white women working together but there has never been anyone question it.

WOLFE

No, No. It's not a question of working together. I believe strongly and positively in an autonomous black women's group. What I am not sure about is that you come into a meeting and you separate yourself in that kind of way. I have no problem at all with people organizing and struggling with issues that are of particular concern to them. I am not sure that the way to deal with it is to separate ourselves, especially the way March 8th was organized — many people working together.

FITZGERALD

I actually think that at times in a meeting it is really necessary to separate and caucus. A caucus can be formed of any constituency. For example, in one of our manuscript groups at the press, it was necessary for the women of colour to caucus, to withdraw, to discuss separately and to work out their positions. That works well. There is a whole development of theory around the relationship between caucus and group. It has been very

useful in working with mixed male-and-female groups to have a women's caucus. For women to struggle to have a women's caucus can actually at times separate itself from the other group.

WOLFE

That is not what I am talking about. What I am talking about is for the entire period of a meeting not to caucus and not to work together. You separate yourself physically for the basis of separating yourself physically — not for talking or meeting. That is a whole different thing. For I totally agree with what you have just said.

FITZGERALD

Doesn't that also reflect the way in which our society is segregated — people sit with who they know.

TIGER LILY

Let's go back to the collective at Women's Press. When did the press decide to involve women of colour and how did you two become involved in that process of change?

FITZGERALD

I was in a manuscript group that was developing an anthology. We decided that we really were very limited. We wrote to a group that we knew called Lesbians of Colour and asked them if they were interested in joining us in this project. Four women from the group came and two of them stayed with our group.

We realized the group was too homogeneous and that we weren't getting manuscripts from diverse groups of lesbians. We were getting manuscripts from women we already knew or writers who had already published work. I think being lesbians we were aware there were lesbians of colour out there, also working class women and women that we call bar dykes. A whole set of women that we were not connected to. We wanted our invitations to the anthology to reach beyond our familiar networks.

TIGER LILY

Now that you are aware of how your press is viewed, how do you see changing that image in the future?

FITZGERALD

It is something we will have to work hard on but, most of all, we need to change our own consciousness. We have started anti-racist workshops to try and become aware of the ways in which the press and its working groups have maintained invisibility regarding women of colour. We are starting to figure out ways in

which we can change that.

It means structurally changing the press so that we incorporate women of colour into our working groups and in our staff. We have started reading and becoming aware of Native women, Black women, and Asian women who are working in the field of writing. We are beginning to make connections, and are becoming conscious of transforming our networks and working hard at both.

TIGER LILY

How are you going to get manuscripts from women of colour?

FITZGERALD

I think one of the things we have to do is to start looking for places where women of colour are writing. *Tiger Lily* is a good example. We should be contacting women who are writing; publishers who go out, approach writers, talk up projects, and acquire manuscripts.

We need to find more time to do all of that. Our priorities have to change to other communities. I have become more aware by going to the Toronto Women's Bookstore and browsing, reading — I recently picked up a novel by a Native woman I hadn't heard of before. You have to read, look, and be out there talking to people.

We have to find ways of supporting other women. Many women of colour write poetry and since the press doesn't publish poetry, maybe we should reconsider. We are reconsidering what we do to see where we have created barriers.

TIGER LILY

In the women's movement in general, the women's books and journals that have been published have, by and large, excluded women of colour. Why do you think this is so?

WOLFE

I think the answer to that is in everything we have talked about today. I think the material we have produced reflects what has happened. I have begun to think more in terms of the work that we do regarding the whole issue of race. I look around at not just the feminist community but at the publishing community in general and I see there are very few, not just women of colour but people of colour, within both communities. This has got to change.

Ayanna Black's first book of poetry, No Contingencies, has just been published by Williams-Wallace. ▶

Defining Ourselves

by Zanana Akande

For years women have been struggling to find their identities. Traditionally we have been identified as 'wives and mothers'—roles society expected us to know intuitively. Marriage was 'the prize': a lifestyle which took us from one man's care (our father's) to another's (our husband's); and from one passive role, *the supported*, to another, *the supporter*.

The image of wife and mother was so important that women often endured drastic physical changes to sustain it, sometimes to the point of endangering their lives. Many women suffered emotional traumas achieving and maintaining this image; and they existed under questionable economic conditions to support it.

Within the majority culture, women nurtured the family, and were epitomized as 'ideal'. Black women, too, aspired to, and generally achieved the labels of wife and mother. However, social, economic, and labour pressures limited the employment of the Black male and forced Black women into the workforce, often as the primary bread winners, creating strife within marriages. Through subsequent separations and often divorce, women still clung to their identification as wives.

For some women the fruits of their unions were all that remained to remind them of marriages that had once existed. These women assumed the responsibilities of both parents, demonstrating the warmth, tenderness, and care traditionally associated with women and motherhood, as well as the strength, determination, and maintenance of the epitomized male. Yet they lamented the absence of the male image they had inadvertently provided. It would seem that the so-called male traits were unrecognizable in a woman; or those same traits in women were classified differently—negatively, as aggressiveness, stubbornness, and uncompromising attitudes.

Another group of Black women were caught in 'spasmodic' relationships which

were influenced as much by the social and economic tide, as they were by the depth of the affections of the partners. The women focussed their energies alternately on maintaining the relationship, and maintaining the household. Is it any wonder that role confusion resulted in women being accused of assuming the male part in the relationship? Often in response to such accusations, Black women would acquiesce, if only temporarily, to more overt subservience.

Perhaps the most *subverted* were those Black women who actually achieved 'the dream', the lifestyle. For even if they were employed outside the home to supplement the family income, the protective custody they enjoyed encouraged their continued existence in the realm of the powerless. Removed from the uncertainty of 'the less fortunate', they had husbands, homes, and families—a relative stability that spelled contentment. Eventually, the contentment became a blind that blocked out any discomfort which could have provoked thought and motivated change.

Many Black women, like most women in the western world, continued in the accidents that had become their lives, with only one goal in mind—the achievement of the status of wife. In retrospect, we recognize women's naivety in the simplicity of such a goal, but they were encouraged by society and systematically taught through education to be passive. Such images of women were nurtured in the family, established by the churches, taught by the schools, expected and exploited in the labour force, maintained by the politicians, reflected by the artists, echoed in the songs.

It is interesting, but not surprising, that the leaders of our Black cultures did not persuade women to accept more permanent active roles in society rather than waiting until the real thing came along: a man. In fact, the Black churches emphasized the importance of woman's duty to and support of her husband, and her recognition of and adherence to his leadership. The ministers were male; the

leadership was male. Black men had been socialized to expect to lead and to rule, if only intermittently, if only to have power over women, their wives and their families.

Eventually . . . often reluctantly, Black women began to recognize the limitations of the roles they had been forced into and the lifestyles they had tried to emulate. They also recognized that if women's situation was poor, Black women's situation was worse, positioned as they are at the bottom of the sociological hierarchy.

Gradually, but not without struggle, Black women began to achieve status in a variety of other roles. Their new identities are found in the occupational and professional world—accountants, lawyers, technicians, writers, politicians. The labels are varied, but they represent Black women's arrival in areas that have inherent or potential power.

It is power that comes from growing financial independence, allowing women to direct and control their lives. It is power that comes from the achievement of positions among the ranks of the policy makers and administrators. It is power that comes from a realization that sisterhood is powerful, collectively, and that it can wield economic and political clout if it is focussed to support political directions, to effect change.

It is not the purpose of this article to chronicle women's struggle to achieve power; much has been and will continue to be written to document that struggle. However, it is important to emphasize that the power that was denied us as 'wives and mothers', the

producers of labour, has become ours only as we, ourselves, move more aggressively and competitively into the workforce, plotting our occupational futures and demanding just rewards for our labours. It is our occupational, professional, and political identifications which have rendered us from the status of the irrelevant and dependent, and continue to redefine us as a growing force in our society. These identifications which we have struggled for, form another profile of Black women's involvement in society, not simply a rejection of the traditional single role of 'wife and mother'.

The awareness of this struggle has led many of us to redefine ourselves, and add to our identities, to select and use the labels appropriate to our situation and our environment. Such choices are not unlike those experienced and enjoyed by men for generations—not removing or minimizing their role as husband and father, neither dominating nor influencing their occupational definition, but rather selecting the audience for and relevance of that identification.

Black women, indeed all women, are unaccustomed to such selection. Therefore, we must make our choices consciously, deliberately, and with the awareness that as we define ourselves so shall we be treated—and then sometimes only with reluctance, and in defiance. It is, however, a primary step.

Tell me, who are you?

Zanana Akande is an educator and a school principal in Toronto.

LIVEWIRE

from THE WOMEN'S PRESS

The Women's Press, London are looking for Women of Colour who are writing for the age group 13 years and upwards. Our new list for teenagers, our LIVEWIRE books, will be launched with four titles in Spring 1987 and we are looking for strong novels from other countries to include in our forthcoming list. If you are writing for this age group and have a manuscript or book proposal which you would like to discuss with us please write to **Carole Spedding, LIVEWIRE, The Women's Press, 34 Great Sutton Street, London EC1V 0DX.**

Politics of Identities

In view
by Marva Jackson



Cathy Bellefleur

AFRICVILLE

Faith Nolan

Producer: Multicultural Women in Concert

WINDSONG

Sathima Bea Benjamin

Producer: Abdullah Ibrahim

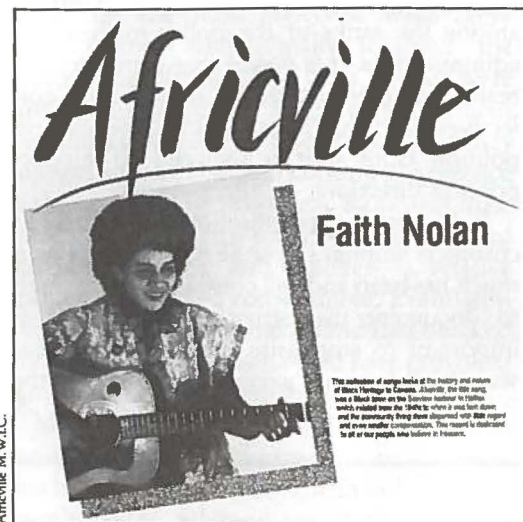
HOUSE OF SLEEPING BEAUTIES

Lucia Hwong

Producer: Kurt Munkacsi

AFRICVILLE is a collection of stories told by fifth-generation black Canadian **Faith Nolan**. Her self-produced debut LP is dedicated to the history of Africville, a small town comprised of people living on the Seaview harbour in Halifax. It existed from the 1840s until the government tore it down in 1969 with no compensation made to the community which has since dispersed across Canada. Stories such as this are the essence of AFRICVILLE.

With co-producer Lionel Williams (who also plays bass and fender guitar) Nolan paints a multi-textured picture of the history of blacks in Canada, those who were slaves and those who were not. The players are jazz pianist Kingsley Etienne, drummer Archie Alleyne, and Tony Ellington on congas and cowbells. Nolan handles all of the acoustic



Africville M.W.I.C.

slide guitar and harmonica work. Her singing style is strong, clear yet emotive, and multi-talented actress Diana Braithwaite lends her voice for some of the background vocals. Braithwaite's son, Star, is the soloist with the Mary Ann Shadd Singers telling the little-known tale of a Canadian pioneer, "Mary Ann Shadd," who died in 1893, was a school teacher and became:

"A newspaper editor
Then she became a lawyer
She was the first Black woman
To become all of these things".

Using different styles of music, from country blues to reggae, Nolan imbues each message with a feeling of joy and optimism.

She celebrates the independent spirit in her acapella tribute to "Marie Joseph Angelique," a Montreal slave who was burned because:

"She ran away from the home
she could never call her own
to burn Mount Royal down...
...my soul is my own
for no man to keep."

In the song "Edith Clayton", Nolan talks about a fellow Nova Scotian who weaves baskets in the old African style passed down by her mother from her grandmother. The weaving is a positive action and a simple one, but the fact that such a tradition still exists is inspirational in itself.

"...Weave on Sister Clayton,
Stop the war and stop the hating,
weave on sister weave on."

During 1984 Faith Nolan organized a concert, a cultural showcase for women from many different backgrounds. One of the results was the formation of Nolan's company, Multicultural Women In Concert Records (MWIC), which has enabled her to record her work independently. Already working on her next album, Nolan writes her own music and lyrics. One of the most "accessible" songs on the album AFRICVILLE, "Divide and Rule" with its steady reggae rhythm, has become an anthem for many community groups across North America.

"Everybody ask me what country
am I from
I say I'm from the world."

With AFRICVILLE, Faith Nolan shares a very specific history with the rest of the world.

Originally from Capetown, **Sathima Bea Benjamin**, a "coloured" South African, once again affirms her support for the struggle against apartheid with WINDSONG, her fourth album. Recorded in 1985 for EKAPA, the company Benjamin founded with her husband, pianist Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand) in 1979, WINDSONG was issued by California jazz label Blackhawk Records last year.

Filled with warm, muted tones this album is dedicated to "the resilient, remarkable and courageous mothers and daughters of the struggle for peace and liberation" in Benjamin's homeland. She begins every performance with her version of the age old lament "Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child" which is included on WINDSONG, building from an

acapella beginning into Billy Higgins' softly poignant African drumming. The rich vocal style, honed by years of performance with people like Duke Ellington, who brought Benjamin and Ibrahim to the United States in 1965, is reminiscent of Billie Holiday.

A writer as well as a vocalist, Benjamin is responsible for all of the musical arrangements and includes three of her own compositions — "Windsong", "Lady Day", and "Dreams".

"...Your dreams both old and new
You can make them all come true
Just believe in them
Search for the meaning in them
Reflect, then start to do all you can
To make all your thunderous dreams
To make all your thunderous dreams
come true...."

This mother of two: a son, 16, and a daughter, 10, had a dream of personal freedom come true in the summer of 1986 when, at age 50, she became an American citizen. Benjamin's belief in the cultural boycott against the South



African government was strengthened in 1976 during her last visit to her birthplace by the Soweto riots. Drawing inspiration from her religion and her countrymen who are willing to give their lives for their beliefs, Benjamin says that the struggle is "not about throwing whites out, but having a South Africa for everyone". Echoes of Sathima Bea Benjamin's South Africa can be heard in the album's title song.

Musical traditions are important to Benjamin and "Windsong" is the result of the friendship of four performers and a producer, including pianist Kenny Barron and bassist Buster Williams, striving to create a balanced unit. There is room for everyone to share the spotlight and that's what this album is all about

— sharing. WINDSONG contains music for those in need of “a warm caress”.

“I believe that today a young generation of composers has begun to appear. And the thing which distinguishes them from other composers, and which is particularly impressive to me, is that they represent in their person a dual tradition.”

These are the words of renowned composer Philip Glass taken from the liner notes on **Lucia Hwong's** debut album for Private Music, **HOUSE OF SLEEPING BEAUTIES**. A graduate student at Columbia University in New York, Lucia Hwong met Philip Glass while doing her thesis on one of his operas as part of her studies for a master's degree in ethnomusicology.

Produced by Glass' producer Kurt Munkacsi, **HOUSE OF SLEEPING BEAUTIES** branches into several areas of music. Side A features the “Tibet Suite” which resulted from Hwong's research trip to Tibet after Central China Television had commissioned her to write



music for a five-hour documentary. Dora Orenstein's sensitive and powerful vocals combine with instrumentation that mixes both Eastern and Western cultures. Synthesizers representing modern technology are played by Michael Riesman, Peter Rafelson, Masayoshi Imamura, and Lucia Hwong. Some of the other instruments used are the Chinese lute, “the pipa,” Chinese zithers, and saxophones.

“...what I had discussed in my thesis years ago was a world view, a world culture beginning, that there are works of art now that have no exact geographical boundaries ... but belong to a “super culture” ... There is a connection

between ...an acceptance of different aesthetics and an eclecticism that doesn't mean that you just slap one thing into another but the combinations are made by choice...”

David Hwang, who plays violin on the LP, inspired the music for side B. Male/female relationships are the focus of a play “House of Sleeping Beauties” written by Hwang and Lucia Hwong reflects the “passion plus the anger plus the gentleness” through the music. Her compositions contain an ethereal quality, as in “Virgin Dance” which features vocalist Patti Lupone (Broadway star of “Evita”), similar to that found in the works of Swiss harpist Andreas Vollenweider, but Hwong provides more than the positive view.

“...The melodies, the scales that I really like...Gypsy scales, Japanese scales and I really like Renaissance music. One of my favourite composer/performers is Alan Stivell who plays the celtic harp...”

In the beginning Lucia Hwong had difficulty establishing credibility as a serious composer but since returning to university this talented performer has developed her strengths in the disciplines of theatre, dance and literature. Raised in Los Angeles, first-generation American, Hwong, whose mother is well-known Asian actress Lisa Lu, comes from a long tradition of performance. **HOUSE OF SLEEPING BEAUTIES** is dedicated to the memory of her grandmother Madame T.C. Lu who was a popular Chinese opera star in the early 1900s. While her Chinese tradition has helped in Hwong's work she says that,

“...It has been on one side and on the other — something I fought against but benefitted by the sense of discipline ... In rebelling against it I tried to discover a form of discipline that stemmed from more spontaneity and passion...”

Busy producing music for the PBS TV American Playhouse theatre production “Paper Angels,” a dance piece for performance later this year, and “Lotus”, which she acted in for the American Film Institute, Lucia Hwong still has that master's degree in ethnomusicology on the back burner. **HOUSE OF SLEEPING BEAUTIES** is a cultural lesson in itself.

Marva Jackson is a music programmer on Toronto's alternative community radio station CKLN-FM and is currently compiling The Band File, a biography of the Canadian independent music scene. ➤

A Tradition in Full Bloom

by Leslie Sanders

Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century

Edited by William L. Andrews

Indiana University Press

pp. 245/\$14.95

Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition

Edited by Marjorie Pryse

and Hortense J. Spillers

Indiana University Press

pp. 266/\$15.50

In "Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, An American Female of Colour (1846)," the author of the longest of the three autobiographies in *Sisters of the Spirits*, twice affirms her belief in the rightness of women's subordinate role:

That woman is dependent on and subject to man, is the dictate of nature; that the man is not created for the woman, but the woman for the man, is that of Scripture (1 Cor. 11:9). These principles lie at the foundation of the family and social systems; and their violation is a very immoral act" (61-2).

Later she insists: "It is true, that in the ordinary course of Church arrangements and order, the Apostle Paul laid it down as a rule, that females should not speak in the church, nor be suffered to teach; but," she adds, "the Scriptures make it evident that this rule was not intended to limit the extraordinary directions of the Holy Ghost, in reference to female Evangelists, or oracular sisters; nor to be rigidly observed in peculiar circumstances" (124).

Disturbing comments these, especially as they come from a coloured lady preacher of great renown, a woman who began her career against her husband's wishes, one who left her child in the care of others after his untimely death in order to better pursue her mission, one who was deterred neither by sexism nor by racism and who preached to great effect in slave and free states, as well as in England. What are we to make of such comments?

Reading Mrs. Elaw's spiritual autobiography, as well as those of Jarena Lee's (1836) and Mrs. Julia A.J. Foote's (1879), the others included in *Sisters of the Spirit*, we learn much of how women subverted the institutions and the language that oppressed them. Overtly, Elaw accepts women's inferiority; her strategy is to "pull rank" by insisting, throughout her autobiography, that she simply is responding to the call of a man far greater than father, husband or minister: the Lord himself. Mrs. Foote, more forthright than her predecessor, rebels against the men who torment her. In her chapter called "Women in the Gospel," she reminds both women and men that "There is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:29). Mrs. Lee is the least direct, but she too pits mere men against her calling from the Lord. All three of these spiritual autobiographies are rich stratagems for pursuing one's calling in spite of opposition, as well as for reconciling feminism with the strictures of a misogynist church. In effect, God makes "men" of these brave women, giving them the strength, tenacity and sense of freedom necessary to confront and overcome all obstacles in their paths.

Initially, many readers may be put off by the language of these tales of sin, conversion, and sanctification; certainly all will wish mightily that these women had told us more of their daily lives and more worldly feelings. But one soon falls under their spell and becomes

attuned to the complexity of what they strive to communicate in their tales of the spirit.

Helping us decipher the codes that black women writers have used in order to express their thoughts is directly the subject of *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition*. This superb collection of essays on Black American women writers is already and deservedly a standard text on the subject. It includes entire essays on Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Ann Petry, Margaret Walker, Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Octavia Butler, and Toni Cade Bambara, as well as thematic essays on relationships between black and white women in American fiction, and on the tradition of Afro-American women's writing.

In her introductory essay, Margorie Pryse traces how Black American women writers have established for themselves the authority or "right" to create a literature. She concentrates on Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker, arguing that Hurston first established the unrefutable claim, and that Walker, taking Hurston as her model, brought to fruition the literary directions Hurston had taken. However, Pryse's discussion is far-reaching. Hurston's accomplishments rely on the multitude of nineteenth-century black women writers,

unknown to us because their works are out-of-print or in journals and proceedings buried in libraries and archives. These women, writing about the oppressions of race and sex, both in fiction and non-fiction, established, if not an artistic presence, certainly a tradition of written expression by black women.

Elaw, Lee and Foote, like many of their white contemporaries, took their authority as writers from the Lord, but they extended the usual domain of the spiritual biography to include devastating analyses of both racism and sexism. Later writers about whom we read in *Conjuring*, for example, Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Fauset and Ann Petry, spoke with more freedom, and were silenced by critical neglect rather than by the strictures of the genre in which they wrote. Yet many of the essays in *Conjuring* are devoted to the most recent writers, Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall and Octavia Butler, who are only a small sample of the tremendous flowering of writing by black women. As a history of black women's writing, *Conjuring* is a joyful work, for it establishes the existence of a tradition now in full bloom.

Leslie Sanders teaches Afro-American Literature at York University in Toronto, Canada. ▶

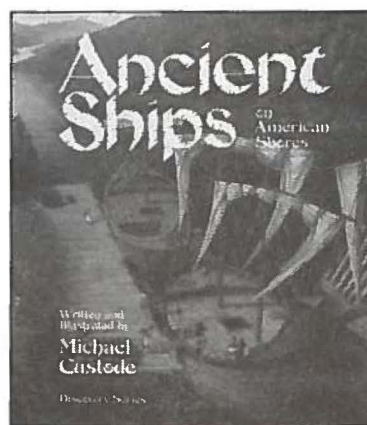


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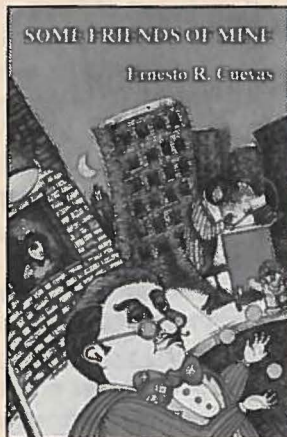
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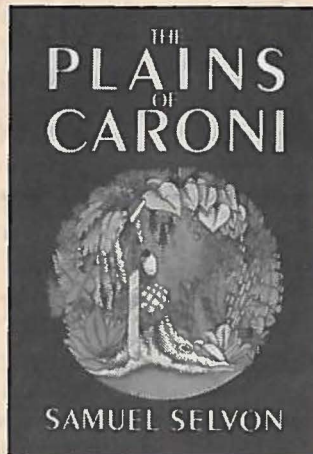
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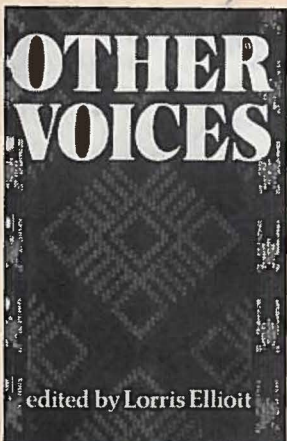
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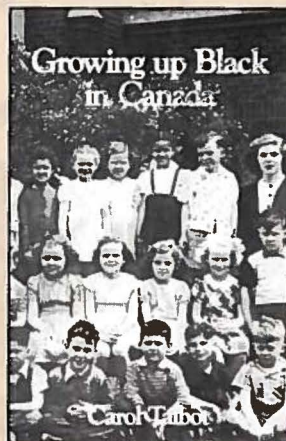
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