

# **LIBERATION POETRY**



## **AN ANTHOLOGY**

**Edited by Tontongi and Jill Netchinsky**

# **The Anthology of Liberation Poetry**

Edited by Tontongi and Jill Netchinsky

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# Introduction

“There are words like *Freedom*  
Sweet and wonderful to say  
On my heartstrings freedom sings  
All day everyday [...]”

—Langston Hughes

## On Liberation Poetry

AS A POETICS OF CONSCIOUSNESS, LIBERATION POETRY emphasizes the elements of communication and sharing. Like roots reggae, rap/hiphop or Haitian *samba-ginen* music, liberation poetry is born of rage, torment, exile and testimony to a certain experience of being. Its practitioners seek meaning beyond the official ideology and depiction of reality by the powers that be, which often disguise the interests of the ruling class in the representation of that reality. For liberation poetry, political engagement is an intrinsic part of its continuous questioning of the social environment and the conditions and outlook of the people who live in that environment.

It was a mistake, in his formulation of a *littérature engagée* that should serve to help change oppressive socio-political orders, for Jean-Paul Sartre to cast poetry as an unwanted child given to caprices, and poets as fetishizers of images or players with words whom one “should not imagine they aim to discern the truth neither to expose it.” Liberation poetry agrees, rather, with another formulation from the thinker who bestowed upon literature such a tremendous mission for revolutionary change, that “naming is changing.” Stressing intellectual integrity and political courage as cardinal virtues of the experience of being, liberation poetry dismisses, without appeal, those uses of poetry to “prettify” or mask the ugliness of living. Poetry engendered by necessity, urgency and immanent tragedy, the poetry of liberation upends the post-modern discourse of normalization of horror, whose main tenet expounds the belief that humanity has reached the so-called “end of history,” encouraging an attitude of passivity, platitude, self-contentment, and, ultimately, complicity with the current political order and its practice of oppression.

Liberation poetry knows that its inherent alterity can serve both the master’s need of decorative transcendence and the oppressed’s craving for cosmic escape. Because of that alterity, poetry can also serve to formulate another ontology of consciousness, a different way of feeling and apprehending

reality. Poets like Vladimir Mayakovsky, Aimé Césaire, Roque Dalton, Amiri Baraka, Paul Laraque, and Mahmoud Darwish exemplify this tension, and also this transcendence, within the alterity of poetry, between *rêverie sublime* and social action. Like the African *griots*, who use poetry to preserve personal and community memory, these poets and many others have not only used poetry to proffer (and reveal) the non-said, they have also joined the collective political *praxis* to change reality as social participants: as artists, writers, teachers, translators, journalists, media-communicators, community and political activists, public intellectuals, and other cultural actors or agents.

While their poetic expressions emanate from a search for universal beauty, their political engagement has, through a symbiotic dialectical process, legitimized the relevancy, or preferably, the *finality* of their poetic emotions. Through their dual embrace of poetic creation and political militancy, they have accomplished what Paolo Freire would call the “*praxis of freedom*.”

Beside its expression in print and spoken word, liberation poetry’s ideal is very much alive in music. The poem-songs of artists like Jean Ferrat, Pete Seeger, Mutaburuka, Martha Jean-Claude, Manno Charlemagne, Lucky Dube, Pablo Milanés, and Bob Marley testify to the application of musical creativity as both medium of communication and agent of change. Among so many examples is the remembered image of Bob Marley performing before tens of thousands of people at Harvard Stadium in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1979. The student-dominated crowds came for the music and the social event, then took in the meaning as the great reggae artist dedicated both the spirit and the proceeds of the festival to the armed struggle of Black Africans against the apartheid system in what was then white-dominated Rhodesia, making clear that music had regained its osmosis with beauty, dance, pleasure and liberation.

### **Anti-hegemonic poetics: freedom from coded language**

Liberation poetry comprises an *anti-hegemonic* poetics which challenges the existing power structure from a radical perspective. Both the language and spirit of this poetics glow with rage against the injustices of the social order, and seek to use this light to uncover the hidden truths in people’s everyday dealing with oppression and alienation. The poet’s own demons may be overcome by what we would call his/her identification with his/her consciousness. The magic of the non-said is diluted in the rage to name its by-product; it is revealed in an avalanche of candid clarities, giving way

to a process of identification and localization of the factors of oppression and alienation. The consciousness of the poet is an on-going process that evolves in a changing environment. This attitude differs from the Dadaist's definition of the authentic poet as someone who pulls his gun and randomly shoots into the crowd. The poetry of liberation believes that no rationale for an act of folly, ignorance or evil can justify horror.

*To be continued...*



From the left, Everett Hoagland, Tontongi, Brenda Walcott, Tennessee Reed, Ishmael Reed, Menelik Van der Meer (back), Askia Touré, Joselyn Almeida, Neil Callender (back), Tony Medina, Martin Beveridge at the Pierre Menard Gallery, November 2010.

—*photo by Glen Shapland.*

## The Thing Between Us

In the winter  
this roomy ghetto  
Queen Anne is hard to heat  
Made of Oak and Maple it  
survived the big one of '06.  
You were made of plastic  
and survived only two years  
those were good years for us  
On that last night  
we surfed until 3

*To be continued...*

—*Ishmael Reed* is an essayist, novelist, poet and playwright, and a prize-winner in all categories. One of his latest books is *Barack Obama and the Jim Crow Media*, ed. Baraka Book, Montreal, 2010.

# Joselyn M. Almeida

---

## Lejos de ti

Este mar no tiene fondo ni orilla,  
Solo el sabor amargo de las millas  
Que viajo día a día sin saber porqué.  
He olvidado la razón que me lanzó

lejos de aquella tierra, lejos de tí.  
Te sueño junto a las rosas,  
Entre los mangos y las azucenas  
Leyendo a Becquer mientras la tele

con el volumen subido para que oiga  
el abuelo sordo la última noticia  
no alcanza a ahogar ese ultimo verso  
*Volverán...*

*Pero aquellas que aprendieron nuestros nombres  
Esas no volverán.*

## Far from You

This sea has neither bottom nor shore,  
Only the bitter taste of miles  
I have traveled every day  
without knowing why.  
I have forgotten the reason that sent me

far from that land, far from you.  
I dream you among the roses,  
Among the mango trees and white lilies  
Reading Becquer while the TV

blares in the background  
so that your deaf grandfather  
does not miss the latest story.  
But it cannot drown this last verse—  
*They will return...*

*But those that learnt our names  
Those will not return.*

*To be continued...*



# Marc Arena

---

## Poems from a Reconstitution

### Amendment I

#### *Literacy*

Full authority to see to  
the pursuit of the freedom to write,  
become literate,  
and learn to write their form,  
as citizen,  
of this plane of existence,  
is hereby vested,  
in the only branch of government,  
the heart,  
the secret government,  
the mind,  
and the body politic,  
the body.

### Amendment II

#### *Rights of the audience*

No audience  
shall sustain silence  
unless bound to it  
by the spirit of the reading.  
If members of the audience  
find themselves  
in immediate opposition  
to the words  
or the voice of the worder  
they are free to remain silent  
and equally free to express  
their grievances  
concurrent to the reading  
in any such form of protest  
that effectively conveys  
their discontent.  
Violence shall be permitted  
metaphorically only.

*To be continued...*

# Neil Callender

---

## **The Green**

Along the apron of New Haven's green,  
the "fallen-aparts" loiter on the streets,  
spend hazy hours in coffee shops or  
park benches. Despair falls from their  
oblong frames the way leaves shed from trees.  
Defeated, they seem too bewildered to resist  
or plot rebellion.

The "comfortables" pilgrimage  
to Yale's cathedral library to worship at the altar  
of learning to master the fields of mastery. Within  
its massive walls the initiates connect to the voices  
of the dead, converse with the grey eminences and  
polymaths and power wielders of history.  
The "comfortables" never suppose that the 'fallen-aparts'  
in their hungry multitudes may lie in wait for them  
outside those very walls and its taciturn geometry.

## **All Glories**

Slavery and Sherman and the Seminoles—the story  
been sung long in the lo country, the blood done dried,  
the bones been buried, dug up and reburied, built over.  
But the spirits have their say anyway.

Sweet tea and savagery, crab cakes and cruelty.  
Red rice and Red summer and red blood at Marion Square.

Pour swamp water libation for the Egungun,  
leave butter cake in sweetgrass baskets for  
the Ancestors.

For those who perished in the barracoons  
and pest houses, who hanged with Denmark,  
joined up with Higginson's Volunteers,  
for the enraged mothers who poisoned  
their son-stealing masters, burned down  
the houses of daughter-raping masters.  
All glories to the Egungun.

*To be continued...*

# Martin Espada

---

## **Imagine the Angels of Bread**

This is the year that squatters evict landlords,  
gazing like admirals from the rail  
of the roofdeck  
or levitating hands in praise  
of steam in the shower;  
this is the year  
that shawled refugees deport judges  
who stare at the floor  
and their swollen feet  
as files are stamped  
with their destination;  
this is the year that police revolvers,  
stove-hot, blister the fingers  
of raging cops,  
and nightsticks splinter  
in their palms;  
this is the year  
that darkskinned men  
lynched a century ago  
return to sip coffee quietly  
with the apologizing descendants  
of their executioners.

This is the year that those  
who swim the border's undertow  
and shiver in boxcars  
are greeted with trumpets and drums  
at the first railroad crossing  
on the other side;  
this is the year that the hands  
pulling tomatoes from the vine  
uproot the deed to the earth that sprouts the vine,  
the hands canning tomatoes  
are named in the will  
that owns the bedlam of the cannery;  
this is the year that the eyes  
stinging from the poison that purifies toilets  
awaken at last to the sight  
of a rooster-loud hillside,

*To be continued...*

dear earthling leader  
look in the mirror  
see if it's you  
who cares  
who loves  
who shares  
who reaches  
who teaches  
about the gifts  
of creation  
of the ear and art in earth  
of the ear and art in heart

*To be continued...*

—*Mel King*

## first fruits

home. december  
twenty six, one  
past midnight.  
glitzy christmas  
past by one  
minute. mao's  
birthdate now.  
and the first  
day of kwanzaa.  
harvest.  
home.

(December 26, 2000)

—Gary Hicks

*To be continued...*



From the left, Askia Touré, Tontongi, Neil Callender, Aldo Tambellini and Gary Hicks (seated).

—photo by T. Melenik Van der Meer

# Jack Hirschman

---

*"We gather the stillness to us  
In the same breath as earth.  
The seven rainbows 'round our  
eyelids are gates to bliss.*

*We tell your mouth our secret  
Ink, the river we adore.  
In a drum there is a belly  
To be fed."*

—Haitian song by Aleksand Akao, translated  
from Haitian by Jack Hirschman

## **The Salt Point Arcane**

*(for TontonGuy)*

We've waited at the end to tell the day  
it can rest in our dark arms.  
Now we have all night  
to change skins,  
to put the slices together  
until the wild cock-crows.

For it's the darkness  
with the sun of being  
this presence that pulls me  
out of my own mouth.

In the eyes  
of my fingers,  
hills.

In the leaves  
of my palms,  
rivers.

In the twin  
caves of the ears  
I've heard  
half the heart's red,  
the other half black.

*To be continued...*

# Everett Hoagland

---

## From Ground Zero

*...while the tale of how we suffer...and  
how we may triumph is never new, it always  
must be heard...it's the only light we've got  
in all this darkness... —James Baldwin*

Our thoughts and prayers rise to the jet  
stream at *this* ground zero and drift  
toward eternity like floating Japanese  
memorial lanterns. At Ground Zero, USA,

hopefully, we shall come to see, to divine  
what is holy, what is hateful, deep within  
our private darkneses, when we gaze up

at both wholly empty towering spaces,  
edifices of air as many stories high as there  
were victims.

Ground Zero: the post-Hiroshima point where

we, collectively,  
as propheted nations  
heavenward world,  
ensouled species,  
of profit-driven foreign policies,  
O, so woefully, hit bottom.

From here, by all that was,  
by all who were  
cruelly burned to crematory ash,  
and in the name of all those gone,  
massacred, ground  
down to irreducible dust,

mashed into hate-made mortar  
of their first memorial,  
the eternal day-after wreckage  
in our mass  
TV memory, the only way out of it  
is up.

We must salvage the shards  
of truth and light in our minds beyond  
sorely cratered jingoism at Ground Zero,

*To be continued...*

we're eating the whip  
the whip is eating us

we're eating death  
death is eating us

what a sorrow upon us  
nothing is left for us

a whole people has become children  
children they are nursing to sleep  
to keep them from being eaten by crabs  
a whole people has become children

a whole people has become zombies  
zombies they put to work  
for a soulless clique's sake  
a whole people has become zombies

a whole people has become boat-people  
running from the river's flow  
ending up at high seas  
a whole people has become boat-people

a whole people has become prisoners  
trading Haiti's dungeons  
for Miami's concentration camp  
a whole people has become prisoners

But liberty will not die  
if you're ready to die for it  
Karl Marx is talking with Toussaint Louverture  
Lenin is chatting with Dessalines

Soon we become masters of our destiny  
we shall have no more masters  
Haiti will not die  
if we're ready to die for it

(...) God will not save us  
there's no savior to save us  
what which will save us  
is weapon and revolution

Queen Sun has risen up  
Comrade General Sun has stood up  
liberty will not die  
if we're ready to die for it.

—*Paul Laraque*, translated from Haitian Creole by Tontongi

*To be continued...*





From left Tontongi, Edwidge Danticat, Paul Laraque and Patrick Sylvain, at Laraque's house in New York City in 2002. —*photo Tanbou/Doumafis Lafontan.*

*To be continued...*

# Tony Medina

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## **Oui oui, c'est la vie**

*(for Marc Oriol)*

the barbed wire fence passes through my blood  
evaporating my flesh split like confetti  
I am watching this parade of violence  
like a silent movie in slow motion  
the whites of my eyes are pendulous  
my thighs rubber as the world tumbles  
about me buildings colliding into clouds  
clouds spinning around like fat clumsy pigeons  
a mad procession of guards with barbed wire smiles  
this is the celebration of death  
I've always longed for  
someone is tying my hands behind  
my back another is holding me down  
another is sweeping my feet off the ground  
the soldier pounding the stone on my back  
must think I always wanted to die  
like this

## **From a Child in Goma, Zaire**

I will say goodbye  
to the planes  
by waving my hand  
in the air

I will say goodbye  
to my hand  
by watching it  
fall off  
my wrist

## **How to Become a United States Citizen**

- Place a TV on your altar
- Wallpaper the cross on your rosary with dollars
- Sing "The Star Spangled Banner" while rinsing with Scope or Listerine

*To be continued...*

# Ashley Rose Salomon

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## **Detroit: Collapse of a Kingdom**

As I walk these abandoned streets of Detroit, all I see is a past.  
a kingdom vast with culture. A land of the use-to-be American dream.

But right now as you can see, boarded up buildings by the bunch now  
replace an at once industrial money Mecca.

Off to your right, Grand Central station now stands vacant—  
but my mother told me there was a time when those rails led to  
freedom.

Because financially speaking, Detroit was America's queen and like  
royalty we crowned her.

She wore Motown hit records playing in sync, linked around her neck  
like rubies.

She hand fed all her citizens with silver spoons made from the melt  
down of Cadillac candy coated rims.

But unfortunately, those paths paved by the automobile have led to a  
sudden dead end.

Detroit's economic-odometer currently reads 0 miles per hour  
not a triple a (aaa) in sight not a mayor since Coleman Young to do the  
sistah right so today, she remains stranded.

And as the rest of America moves at light year speeds into these new  
times Detroit is left behind in a digital divide

the first casualty of this capitalist war

America's greed has brought this queen to her knees.

For our own capital we have turned her into the murder capital we  
have allowed her children to be murdered in their sleep by police I  
watched these people march the street trying to redeem Aiyanna's 7  
year old dream.

Luckily, the citizens of this city are Oguns from the womb

leading the way with their voices as swords

forced to endure being ignored by a country that once adored her

pay attention to how in downtown Motown

trees literally grow from the roofs of abandoned skyscrapers!

Land and sidewalks covered in pot holes and unmaintained shrubs

because there is no money to pay for landscapers!

there is no labor!

I am sorry to say it, don't shoot the messenger but

America has raped her.

*To be continued...*

# Aldo Tambellini

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November 5, 1990

To Lorca

met garcia lorca  
standing under  
the gigantic  
dish antenna  
the signal  
bouncing off  
the bloody moon &  
back past years  
into a jungle  
lorca tells me  
of the people  
vomiting on  
new york city streets  
while famished dogs  
tear off the livers  
of the homeless living  
in subterranean tunnels  
then I see  
lorca's skeleton  
passing by silently  
then I say  
I know you  
from the underbelly below  
the brooklyn bridge  
they killed you  
for being a poet

write the poem  
when the mind is a huge sore  
attacked by a billion flies  
write the poem  
when pain explodes  
a shooting star in the sky  
write the poem  
when earth's daily rotation  
revolves in revolution  
burn the poem  
set on fire a constellation

November 7, 1998

*"He has done more damage with the pen than others have done with the pistol."*

Alanzo Ruiz, the Falangist who came to arrest Lorca.  
The squad executed Lorca at the Fountain of Tears, August 1936.

*To be continued...*



**believing that creativity & freedom  
are as essential as breathing oxygen is for  
LIFE**

*To be continued...*



Ishmael Reed and Askia Touré

—photo by Glen Shapland

*To be continued...*

# Tony Menelik Van Der Meer

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## **Bye Baby**

Two words...  
a pre Katrina  
Ameriklan lullaby  
left a mother rocking in her chair  
    childless,  
humming the blues  
like Lady Day.  
    *bye baby*  
Overcrowded church goers  
with popsicle stick cardboard fans  
in their hands,  
fanning away centuries of  
salty sweat  
and bitter tears,  
caused by Mississippi's redneck *Ajogun*,  
with shot guns  
who knocked on  
Mose Wrights door of no return  
on a wretched southern night,  
"lookin for the boy  
who been doin  
all that talkin"  
    *bye baby*

Motown do whoppers  
with process hair,  
got record deals  
for those kind of lyrics,  
As long as they sang them  
to "colored" girls.  
    *Bye baby*

Mamie Bradley  
chanted back a resistance melody  
letting the world see  
Emmett's tortured and bloated  
14 year old face  
lying in a transatlantic coffin  
waiting for the ancestors to bring him home.  
    *bye baby*

*To be continued...*

# Brenda Walcott

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## Excerpts From My Cuban Reveries (1978–1998)

### Cuba '78

Johnetta Cole  
She loves  
Her passion embracing  
A comrade, a child, a lover  
She loves  
She frightens  
Serious about change  
Impatient with whiners  
*She frightens*  
She erupts  
Loves to laugh  
Make noise; talk crudely  
She erupts  
She thinks  
Her eye disconnects  
Seeming unwilling to  
Blink  
To shut out any stimuli  
She thinks  
She is unbridled black  
Female energy  
She loves

This was Johnetta Cole, the professor of anthropology who would lead us on an expedition to Cuba at the peak of its socialist revolution. (The twentieth anniversary.) Johnetta was a professor at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, who was much respected and loved by the people of Cuba. She would later go on to become the President of Spellman College.

### Cuba, December 27, 1978

After much hustling and shifting of money and children and time, I am at the airport in Tampa, Florida, waiting for my plane to take off. Sharon Dunn and I both have nervous stomachs. The woodsman is waiting to say goodbye. Suddenly we must get in the plane, no build up just get on, we're leaving. The woodsman is in the men's room. I can't tell him goodbye. It is somehow fitting, though startling. I just have to make the transition quick  
*To be continued...*



# Anna Wexler

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*“Papa San Di: The Visible Archives” construct a rescue narrative from the escape of two white boys from their family’s burning coffee plantation near Cap Français, Saint Domingue in 1791. In family memoirs, letters and 19th century travelers’ accounts, Papa San Di is figured as the “faithful slave valet” who risked his life to rescue the boys from imminent massacre and a house on fire set by insurgent slaves. He led them out an open window in their bedroom, across the roof and down into the coffee fields where they hid until nightfall. From there he carried them to temporary safety at the home of their uncle in Cap Français and on to Charleston, SC where he contributed to their financial support until they came of age. He lived the remaining years of his life, approximately 1820–1852, on a sugar plantation in Limonar, Matanzas, inherited by one of the boys from their uncle who fled Saint Domingue for Cuba during the slave revolts. Upon Papa San Di’s death at 90, the family was shocked to discover an “African amulet” under the shirt of their faithful servant who had regularly summoned the plantation slaves for evening prayers. “The Invisible Archives” tell another story through the mouths of little Vodou spirits, the sacred twins, Marasa 1 & 2, and the child born after them, the Dosa.*

## **Papa San Di: The Invisible Archives**

*Marasa 2*

The coffee trees were in bloom. The splendor of their white flowers was the first proof of the overseer’s vigilance, his hovering shadow immune to sorcery.

*Marasa 1*

You speak through tainted archives, fading letters that exaggerate the beauty of the trees to pacify an absent master. It was near the end of August, too late for blossoms. He paused there to watch the coffee berries glow in the afterglow of the miraculous fire.

*Marasa 2*

He paused because the twins were tired. M pa gen manman isit, they cried, from a lullaby he sang them every night. I have no mother here. I left my mother in Africa.

*Dosa*

They were not twins. Spirits brand everything they see with their own image. Because I am the last of the first children, the third who follows the twins, I could never outwit my loneliness that way. It clings

*To be continued...*

than bin Laden has in his entire career. The first two days of the coke-head's war is code-named "Shock and Awe," a reference to the terror instilled when 800 Tomahawk cruise missiles demolish Baghdad. The Pentagon boasts the attack will match Hiroshima in its devastation.

Shock and Awe. Shock? Yes, shocking. Awe? One almost hears them wanting to say awesome, like an adolescent, clutching the joystick of a video game. The line between reality and video games, blurred enough in the first Gulf War, now seems lost upon these damaged souls of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Shock and Awe? More like shock and horror. Shock that America would murder thousands of civilians in an unprovoked first strike. Horror at what monsters we've become.

—Richard-Wilhelm



Gary Hicks (left background) with Howard Zinn in an anti-war demonstration in Boston, in 2003.

*To be continued...*

## Profiles of the Contributors

**Joselyn M. Almeida** is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where she teaches courses on the literature of the Romantic period and the literature of piracy and mutiny. She is the editor of *Romanticism and the Anglo-Hispanic Imaginary* (Rodopi 2010), a collection of essays that examines the circulation of peoples and culture between Britain, Spain, and Latin America. Her book *Reimagining the Transatlantic, 1780–1890*, is forthcoming from Ashgate.

**Ali Al-Sabbagh** was born in the United States of America in Boston MA. He is a human rights advocate and student. He currently serves on the communications committee for the Cultural Café Collective. He has a deep appreciation for positive Hip Hop, Spoken Word, and Poetry. He loves to travel both domestically and internationally for pleasure but also most importantly to meet people from different cultures. He has earned his Bachelors of Art from the University of Massachusetts Boston with his degree being in Africana Studies and his Minor in Anthropology. Ali currently teaches grade school children English and Math at the Martin E. Young elementary school in Randolph MA. In the tradition of Jim Smith, Author Ashe, and Althea Gibson he is an associate instructor at Sportsmen's Tennis Center working with the "little tennis" players in Dorchester MA.

**Marc Arena** was born in the United States. A poet and producer from Southern Westchester, NY., he's been involved with the non-profit teen writing organization Urban Word NYC since 2001 and has been writing and making music since high school. A graduate of Wesleyan University, he plans to attend graduate school at the University of Chicago. His work can be found in publications on Trilingual Press and at: [www.myspace.com/beatsbytroubadour](http://www.myspace.com/beatsbytroubadour).

**Soul Brown a.k.a. "The Freedom Prophetess"** was born in the USA; she mixes spoken word poetry with other arts to celebrate the histories and global experiences of black people and to incite liberation against oppression. When performing her work in poetry venues and other spots, she is known to use music, sound, video, and other forms of diverse media to expand the expression of her ideas and create environments for transformation. Her arts and cultural criticisms and essays have been published in ArtsMedia, Birthrights, The Boston Globe, Community Glue and more.

**Richard Cambridge** was born in the USA. He's been a continuing presence in the Boston/Cambridge poetry scene, mixing poetry, dance and drama in many of his representations. Cambridge has supported the movement to free Mumia Abu Jamal, and to end the US embargo against Cuba.

**Neil Callender** was born in Brooklyn, New York. He grew up in the suburbs of Long Island before going off to college in Rhode Island where he had his baptism in political activism in the growing anti-apartheid movement and in opposition to CIA campus recruitment, among other causes. He is an ardent supporter of the Cuban Revolution and submits that capitalism is both cruel and irrational. He has been a unionist in the airline worker industry. He started writing poetry in 1994. In 2005 he received his MFA in Poetry Writing from Vermont College. He has said: “For me poetry has become a vital expression, a search for truth both momentary and lasting, a search for beauty through language, our most intimate gift.” Neil Callender is a professor at Roxbury Community College.

**Berthony Dupont** was born in Haiti. Poet and a political militant, he believes that poetry can be put to the service of political liberation. He published *Plye pa kase* (“Plyed But Not Broken”) in 1997, a collection of poems in Kreyòl. He is the author of the history book *Jean-Jacques Dessalines: Itinéraire d’un révolutionnaire*, 2006. Dupont currently resides in Brooklyn, New York, where is the Director of the influential weekly *Haiti Liberté*.

**Martín Espada** was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1957. He has published sixteen books, most recently *Alabanza: New and Selected Poems*, *The Republic of Poetry*, and *Crucifixion in the Plaza de Armas*. His many awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship and the National Hispanic Cultural Center Literary Award. A former tenant lawyer, Espada is a professor in the English Department at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

**L’Mercie Frazier** was born in the USA. Poet, actress, costume-maker and storyteller she’s been an important figure in the Boston’s artistic scene. Her work places the emphasis on memory and critical consciousness. L’Mercie Frazier is the Director of Education at the Boston Museum of Afro-American History.

**Patricia Frisella** lives on a tree farm with her husband, sometimes her college age children, and a menagerie of creatures large and small. She is President of the Poetry Society of New Hampshire, a 501(c)3 dedicated to promoting poetry. Recently she edited the anthology, *The Other Side of Sorrow, Poets Speak Out about Conflict, War and Peace*, which won the 2006 Independent Publishers IPPY Bronze Award. She is currently organizing a full day conference on the *Kalevala*, the Finnish National epic, *The Kalevala—From Myth to Marimekko*.

**Regie O’Hare Gibson:** Author, songwriter, educator and workshop facilitator Regie Gibson has read taught, lectured and performed at universities, theaters

and various other venues in seven countries most recently Monfalcone, Italy. He performs with Neon JuJu—a literary music ensemble that fuses literature with American funk, jazz and blues and European classical elements. He has received his MFA in poetry from New England College.

**Marc D. Goldfinger** is the former editor of Cambridge's Spare Change News. He also produced a critically acclaimed Jazz/Spoken Word CD with the Jeff Robinson Trio—"Getting Fixed," about heroin addiction. Marc is a contributor to the Boston Metro, What's Up magazine which helps homeless people, and the Weekly Dig. His poetry has been published around the world. He is also the recipient of a Cambridge Poetry Award, and was one of the contributors to *City of Poets/18 Boston Voices*.

**Calvin Hicks** historically exemplified the artist as the articulator of the people's resistance to oppression, when he, as a member of "The Harlem Writers Guild" which included writers such as John O. Killans, Maya Angelou, John Henrick Clarke, Sahra Wright and Rosa Guy, led the first demonstration staged at the general assembly of the United Nations in 1961. This was to bring the world's attention to the role the USA played in the murder of Patrice Lumumba who was one of the first revolutionaries to gain the independence of an African nation from European imperialism.

**Gary Hicks** was born in the USA; he is a poet and political activist who has devoted his adult life to a personal regimen of rebellion and repudiation against the powers that be. At age nineteen, in the sixties, he refused the military draft and was given a jail sentence as a consequence. "I couldn't bear to fight for the imperialist war of the same racist Establishment that is oppressing my people," he said later. Since then, he has been a constant available presence to the multiple struggles for justice and human rights in the US. In past years he has read poetry in various cultural venues in Boston, New England, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. He has participated in the "poetry slams" in the Cambridge and Boston areas. In 1998, he was a member of Team Boston at the National Poetry Slam Festival in Austin, Texas. Gary Hicks has coauthored with Tontongi the poetry book, *The Dream of Being* (Nouvelle Stratégie, 1992) and is the author of *A Pen is like a piece. You Pick it up. You Use it* (VB Documentation Publishing, 1997). Gary Hicks lives now in Berkeley, California. He is a member of the Communist Party, USA.

**Jack Hirschman** was born in the USA. He is a poet and translator. He has written 76 volumes of poetry and translations spanning over 40 years. He has been an ardent cultural activist in San Francisco, one of the great

and most eloquent voices of poetry in the USA. He has published among others *The Xibalba Arcane*, Azul Editions, 1994, *The Graffiti Arcane*, 1995 and *Xibalba II*, 2001. He has translated works by poets Paul Laraque and Gary Daniel from Haitian Creole into English. He coedited the celebrated *Open Gate: An anthology of Haitian Creole Poetry*, Curbstone Press, 2001, the first Haitian Creole-English anthology ever published. Jack Hirschman is the editor of *Left Curve*, a literary and political magazine published in San Francisco.

**Everett Hoagland** was New Bedford's first poet laureate from 1994 to 1998 and an educator for nearly 40 years. He has had poetry readings all over the USA and in Ghana, Cuba and China. His poetry has been published in the *American Poetry Review*, *Callaloo*, *The Crisis*, *Cross Cultural Poetics*, *Drum Voices*, *Essence*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *The People's Weekly World*, *The Providence Journal*, *The Progressive*, *Political Affairs*, as well as in anthologies such as *African American Literature* (eds. Gilyard & Wardi), *Afro Asia: revolutionary... connections*, *The Best American Poetry 2002*, *The Body Electric*, *Bum Rush The Page* and *The Oxford Anthology of African American Poetry*.

**Paul Laraque** (1920–2007) was born in Haiti. He befriended André Breton during the Surrealist guru's historic visit to Haiti in December 1945. He lived in the United States since 1961. Young officer in the Haitian army in the fifties, he published subversive poems under the pseudonym Jacques Lenoir. He was deprived of his Haitian citizenship from 1964 to 1986 for opposition to the Duvaliers' dictatorship. He received in 1979 Cuba's Casas de las Americas Poetry Prize for his work *Les armes quotidiennes / Poésie quotidienne* ("The Everyday Weapons / Everyday Poetry"). He has published, among others, *Ce qui demeure* ("What has remained"), *Festibal* ("Slingshot"), and the auto-anthology *Oeuvres incomplètes* ("Incomplete Works"). He was one of the editors and authors of *Open Gate: An anthology of Haitian Creole Poetry*, Curbstone Press, 2001. He copublished with his brother Franck Laraque the critical memoir, *Haiti: entre la lutte et l'espoir* ("Haiti: Between Struggle and Hope"), Edition Cidihca, 2004.

**Daniel Laurent** was born in Haiti. Poet and musician, he's made the two genres interchangeable in his representations. A co-founder of the band Batwèl Rada, he later created his own band Tjovi Ginen whose first CD was released in 1999. Laurent has taught in high schools in Boston and New York City. Tjovi Ginen is about to release its second CD that includes songs against the Iraq war and against the US' kidnapping of Haiti's former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Daniel Laurent lives in Haiti where he is the principal of an alternative school.



**Denizé Lauture** was born in Haiti; he teaches at Saint Thomas Aquinas College in Sparkill, New York, where he was the recipient of the 1994 Board of Trustees Award for Excellence. Lauture is also a multilingual performance poet. He has read at the United Nations, the American Museum of Natural History, the Poetry Society of America, the New York Public Library, Gracie Mansion, etc. He resides in the Bronx, New York, with his wife and two sons. Lauture writes poetry in Haitian Creole, French and English. Abroad, his poetry has been published in the West Indies, France, Spain and Canada. He has authored three volumes of poetry, *The Blues of the Lightning Metamorphosis*, 1987, in Creole, *When the Denizen weeps*, 1989, in English, and *Madichon sanba dlo nan sensè a* (“Sanba’s Curse and Water in Sensè River”). He has also published two children books, *Father and Son*, Putnam 1993, and *Running the Road to ABC*, Simon and Schuster, fall 1995. *Father and Son* was one of the five books nominated to the NAACP’s 1993 Image Awards. *Running the Road to ABC* had won the Coretta Scott King Award in 1996.

**Danielle Legros Georges** is a poet, essayist, an Associate Professor in the Creative Arts in Learning Division of Lesley University, and the author of a book of poems *Maroon* (Curbstone Press, 2001). Her work has appeared in many reviews, literary journals and anthologies, including *Agni*, *The American Poetry Review*, *The Butterfly’s Way*, *Callaloo*, *The Caribbean Writer*, *Consequence*, *Poeisis*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Tanbou*, *Role Call: A Generational Anthology of Social and Political Black Literature & Art*, *Women’s Review of Books*. She has been featured on National Public Radio, The Bill Moyers Journal (PBS), and The Voice of America programs. Her awards for writing include MacDowell Colony and LEF fellowships, and the PEN New England Discovery Award.

**Tony Medina** was born in the USA; he is the author of eleven books, the most recent of which are *DeShawn Days*, *Love to Langston*, *Bum Rush the Page*, *Role Call* and *Committed to Breathing*. His poetry, fiction and essays appear in over twenty anthologies and two CD compilations. Born and raised in the Bronx and a resident of Harlem, Medina has taught English and Creative Writing at several universities, including Long Island University’s Brooklyn campus, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY and Binghamton University, SUNY.

**Jill Netchinsky-Toussaint** was born in the USA; poet, literary critic and educator, she wrote her Ph.D. thesis on slaves’ narratives in Cuba and Latin America. Her research and teaching have centered on Latin American/Caribbean literature and culture, with emphases on the African Diaspora and

women writers. A recipient of a research grant from the Mellon Foundation and a former Fellow of the W.E.B. DuBois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University, she has taught at several US universities, including the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Middlebury College and Tufts University. Her publications include poems, translations, and essays on Cuban and Puerto Rican writers and narratives of slavery. A lifelong community organizer, Netchinsky-Toussaint helped launch in 1999 the Haiti Outreach Program at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Netchinsky now works in Spanish bilingual editing and educational curriculum.

**Tanya Pérez-Brennan** was born in Boston to a Colombian mother and Irish-American father. Her family moved to Salvador, Bahia, Brazil when she was eight years old, where they lived for six years. After obtaining an undergraduate degree in Latin American Studies from the University of Massachusetts Boston, Tanya went to New York City, where she earned a Master's degree at Columbia University's School of Journalism. Following graduation, she worked as an Arts Columnist and Features Writer at *The Florida Times-Union* in Jacksonville and as a Government Reporter at *The Orlando Sentinel*. She was also a regular contributor to *The Boston Globe* and has written for several publications, including *ReVista-Harvard Review of Latin America*. Her poetry has been published in *The 21st Century* and Harvard University's student magazine, *Zalacaín*. Tanya lives in Boston, where she works as a freelance journalist and medical and legal interpreter. She is currently working on her first novel.

**Thomas Phillips** was born in Brooklyn, NY, and lived in Boston, MA for 12 years before returning to New York City in the 1990's. He was a powerful poetic voice in the Boston's homeless empowerment movement, reading in several venues. He published in 1987 his first poetry book, *Rent Free*, co-authored with Raffy Woolf. Tom Phillips now resides in Queens, NY, and works with HIV-infected women at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility just outside NYC.

**Ashley Rose Salomon** is a Haitian-American poet, performer, educator and activist from Boston Massachusetts. She is a by product of the mean streets of Boston and owes her successes to her mother, youth workers, teachers and mentors in her life that encouraged her to use words to save herself and other youth in her community. Ashley Rose now uses her education from Northeastern University and life experience to help empower youth in her community. Currently she teaches full-time with Americorps as a PeaceFirst teacher in Boston. She has also founded her own non-profit



called ARTOVOTION which teaches arts such as spoken-word, poetry, step, and dance in the form of workshops for youth in the Boston Public School system and community centers across the city. Through her work with non-profits, youth centers and teen drug rehabilitation centers she has been successful in sowing seeds of change that are now blossoming throughout the inner city. She hopes to continue using poetry as a vehicle to enlighten the community to use peace and poetry as a means of overcoming oppression.

**Margie Shaheed** believes writing transforms lives. A poet, writer, educator, lecturer, and performance artist, she stays connected to the world by hosting poetry readings where published poets share the stage with less established ones in a community setting, and by conducting creative writing workshops for all ages. Her work is published in literary journals including Good Foot Poetry Magazine (2002), Medicinal Purposes Literary Review (2001), and Essence Magazine (2000). Other writing credits include her self-published chapbook, *everything i need is in my bag* (1999). She has been a featured poet in various US cities, and was an Artist as Catalyst 2000 grant recipient, a program of the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation. She is currently completing her first full volume of poetry entitled, *Code Breakers & Tongue Shakers*.

**Cheo Jeffery Allen Solder** was born in Los Angeles, California. He is a poet, writer, playwright, screenwriter, local community activist and improvisational musician. After a twenty year hiatus from the creative scene, he began writing and playing again two years ago. His main concern is to impart the knowledge and wisdom he has gained from extensive world travel and a long and actively lived life to a younger generation. When asked to describe himself, he simply stated that he is just another brother from the 'Hood.

**Patrick Sylvain** was born in Haiti; poet and educator, he is the author of many Creole and English poetry books and stories, including *Malakwa*, 1992, *Zansèt*, 1994, *Love, Envy and Loss*, 2005. Besides poetry, he has written plays, short stories, including contributions to the collection of essays and stories *The Butterfly's Way*, edited by Edwidge Danticat, the *Anthology of Haitian Poets in Massachusetts*, 1998, the English-Creole *Open Gate: Anthology of Haitian Creole Poetry*, 2001, edited by Jacques Hirschman and Paul Laraque. Sylvain has published in many reviews and journals, including *Abafazi*, *African American Review*, *AGNI*, *American Poetry Anthology*, *American Poetry Review Callaloo*, *Caribbean Writer*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Haiti Progrès*, *Haiti en Marche*, *Compost*, *Essence*, *Howth Castle*, *In The Tradition: An Anthology of Young Black Writers*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Moody Street Review*, *MuleTeeth*,

*Ploughshares, Prisma, Revue Noire, Tanbou, Waterways, Worcester Review,* and the journal of the State University of Massachusetts in Boston, *Mass Media*. Sylvain is Visiting Lecturer in Latin American Studies at Brown University where he teaches courses in Haitian languages and culture. He has also taught Haitian language at Harvard.

**Aldo Tambellini** born in Syracuse, New York 1930, father from Sao Paulo, Brazil, mother from Italy; taken to Italy at eighteen months, lived in Lucca (Tuscany). During WWII Aldo miraculously survived an air-raid which destroyed his neighborhood and killed 21 of his neighbors and wounded many others. He returned to the US in 1946. BFA in Painting, '54, Syracuse University; Teaching Fellowship, University of Notre Dame, MFA Sculpture, '59. Moved to New York City's Lower East Side, '59. Called "A Syracuse Rebel in New York," he founded the "counter-culture," Group Center." Began "Black Film Series," "Black TV," won the Grand Prix, Oberhausen International Film Festival, 1969. Pioneered in the video art movement in the late 1960s; experimented with "Electromedia Performances." Founded the Gate Theatre, '66 co-founded with Otto Piene, The Black Gate Theater for performances and installations, '67. 1978–1984 a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT organized international interactive Media Communication Projects. Sao Paolo Biennale, '83. His poetry is widely published and included in several anthologies. Produced an anti-war digital film with poetry "LISTEN," 2005 won the New England Festival and the Syracuse International Film Festival, 2006. Aldo is the 2007 Syracuse International Film Festival Lifetime Achievement Award recipient. He received the Key to the City of Cambridge, MA. in recognition of his contribution to the cultural environment of the City. In 2010, the Italian Government awarded Aldo a Gold Medal of the Lucchesi Nel Mondo in recognition of his contribution to Culture.

**Tontongi** (aka Eddy Toussaint) was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and has been in the USA since 1976 following a two-year sojourn in France. Poet, critic and essayist, Tontongi writes in Haitian, French and English and has published, among others, the poetry books *Cri de Rêve*, (French/Haitian, 1986); *The Dream of Being* (English, 1992); and the epic, bilingual poem *The Vodou Gods' Joy / Rejwisans kwa yo* (English/Haitian, 1997); *Critique de la francophonie haïtienne* (French/Haitian, 2008), a sociolinguistic essay, is about the relation of power between French and Haitian Creole in Haiti. His latest book is a trilingual volume *Poetica Agwe: Poems, Essays, and Testimonial on Resistance, Peace and the Ideal of Being*, 2011. The author is published in many anthologies, among them, *Vodou: Visions and Voices of Haiti*, 1998; the *Anthology of Haitian Poets in Massachusetts*, 1998; the English-Creole

*Open Gate: Anthology of Haitian Creole Poetry*, 2001; *Revolution / Revolisyon / Révolution: An Artistic Commemoration of the Haitian Revolution* (2004). Tontongi is the editor of the trilingual politico-literary journal *Tanbou*, online at [www.tanbou.com](http://www.tanbou.com).

**Askia M. Touré** is a visionary *Djali* (griot), an award-winning poet, and co-founder of the eminent Black Arts movement, America's largest literary/cultural movement. He's also an activist/educator: he pioneered Africana Studies at San Francisco State U. in 1967, along with writer/professors Sonia Sanchez and Amiri Baraka. *Their most outstanding student is the legendary actor Danny Glover*. In the field of literature, Askia is the author of 8 books, and is anthologised in over forty anthologies of Modern American poetry, including reviews in France, Italy, India and the Chinese Peoples Republic. His latest collections, *Mother Earth Responds*, and *African Affirmations*, are paeons to our Planet. His film, *Doubledutch*, won Best Director at the 2003 Roxbury International Film Festival. (The film is based on Toure's womanist screen-play of the same name.) Askia's human rights activism reflects his peace & environmentalist vision. He can be reached on *Facebook*, and at: [askia38@yahoo.com](mailto:askia38@yahoo.com).

**Tony Menelik Van Der Meer** has been a Senior lecturer in the Africana Studies Department at the University of Massachusetts Boston. He is a founding member of the *Cultural Café, Collective*, an affiliate organization with the *African American Master in Artist Residency Program (AAMARP)*—an adjunct program of Northeastern University's African American Studies Department. Tony is also co-editor of the book, *State of the Race, Creating Our 21st Century: Where Do We Go From Here*, published by Diaspora Press, 2004.

**Frantz "Kiki" Wainwright** was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in 1937. He migrated to the USA in 1969. He lived in New York before moving to Miami in 1982 where he obtained a Bachelor Degree in Social Work from Florida International University. Kiki Wainwright has numerous talents. He is a former professional dancer and choreographer. He is a singer, songwriter, musician, storyteller, poet, actor and comedian. He has published in Creole, French, and English. Among his publications are: *Tap-Tap* (1981), progressive music on long-playing record; *Pikliz* (1988), poetry; *Les Sentiers de l'Aube* (1993), poetry; *Zepon File* (1994), poetry; *Rara Liberation* (1997), progressive music on CD and Cassette; *Bonifas ak Malefis* (1999), Haitian Folktales; *When The Going Gets Tough...* (2003), Short Stories and Poetry. He is a founding member of Sositye Koukouy of Miami, a Haitian literary group.

**Brenda Walcott** was born in Brooklyn, New York. Poet, playwright and educator, she has developed “non-Eurocentric and arts based curriculum development projects” for the cities of Cambridge, Boston and New York. She is a writer who has refused to separate her work as an artist from her work as a teacher. She produced and presented the musical drama *Tongues of Fire* at MIT (music by George A. Russell and Archie Shepp) with public acclamation. Poet, Brenda Walcott has been reading poetry for decades in many venues in New York and Boston. She is one of the authors in *Mumia: A Poetry Anthology*, 1996 and the anthology, *bum rush the page*, 2001. She organized a Homeless Counter Convention during the Democratic Convention in Boston in 2004 for which she wrote and directed her latest play: *Beyond Survival*.

**Anna Wexler** works with text, installation and ritually configured performance to distill legacies of oppression and visionary resistance. Her recent individual and collaborative works have engaged with military production at the height of the Iraq War, the ongoing catastrophe of the Haitian earthquake, and a performative commemoration in progress of a cooperative in Marseille that provided sanctuary for Jewish refugees, artists, and leftists during the Nazi Occupation of France. She is on the faculty of the Springfield College School of Human Services in Boston and a member of the Mobius Artists Group that supports experimental work in all media. She considers the opportunity to participate in the ritual healing traditions of Haitian Vodou and Cuban Santeria to be the pivotal moment in her education as an interdisciplinary artist.

**Richard Wilhelm** was born in the USA; he has studied journalism but works as a mental health counselor. A serious painter, he has exhibited in solo and group shows in the Boston area. He is one of three coeditors of *City of Poets*, *18 Boston Voices*, and serves as the art editor of Ibbetson Street Press. His poems have been published in Ibbetson Street, Spare Change, the Somerville News, and Crooked River Press, which quoted one poem in full in the 2002 Poet’s Market. He has read at Boston area venues such as Book Cellar, McIntyre and Moore, the Dire Reader Series at the Out of the Blue Gallery, the Cambridge Public Library, and the Tapestry of Voices series at Borders Books.

### **Authors selected in “poem-epigraphs”:**

Langston Hughes, Ishmael Reed, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Nikki Giovanni, Amiri Baraka, Julia Alvarez, Mel King, Jacques Roumain, Katha Pollitt, William Wordsworth, Jean Genet, Sonia Sanchez, Quincy Troupe, Robert Bly, Pablo Neruda, William O’Daly.

The book has 36 authors, 320 pages,  
27 photos and 4 graphics

“Like the African *griots*, who use poetry to preserve personal and community memory, these poets and many others have not only used poetry to proffer (and reveal) the non-said, they have also joined the collective political *praxis* to change reality as social participants: as artists, writers, teachers, translators, journalists, media-communicators, community and political activists, public intellectuals, and other cultural actors or agents.

While their poetic expressions emanate from a search for universal beauty, their political engagement has, through a symbiotic dialectical process, legitimized the relevancy, or preferably, the *finality* of their poetic emotions. Through their dual embrace of poetic creation and political militancy, they have accomplished what Paolo Freire would call the “*praxis of freedom*.”

—From the Introduction, “On Liberation Poetry”

### Contributors:

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