Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Writing Awards

Collection of Winning Poetry and Prose

January 15, 2001
Carnegie Mellon

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Writing Awards

Collection of Winning Poetry and Prose

January 15, 2001
Some Hip-Hop Show

Music is shaking this bright mid-summer day. Bumping vibrant air into our bodies, pushing us into thick oscillations to broken beats. The papery cotton of my white Oxford shirt rubs against the thick softness of hoodies at my left and right.

I think about my mom’s usual reaction to this music, not a favorable one at all. She wants melody and can’t justify the lyrics’ meaning for the beauty of their beat. I think about her metered didactics on community and the trends of isolation and distrust rising in our society, on how they move her.

Then the music pips off. Some fuse has broken. The circuitry of this park cannot handle the power it takes to bring unity to this peppered crowd. All bodies hand in some pose for a second, having just been reborn into a rhythmless world. They start to scan their surroundings. Some hip-hop elder feels the judgments bubble up a little, the heavy throb that had been hammering it down now gone.

“Beat box!” He yells, “beat box!”

An MC to the left picks up where the dead turntables left off. He starts spitting and hissing. He is alone for a second but knows we need time to come back. An MC to the right pops his hands together over his head and scans us like a wise father. The MC to the center charges up his lungs and calls us to clapping, ‘cause they ain’t no music, ‘less we makin’ it.

Hands come together. Then they come together harder. Them MCs left, right and center are respectively spitting, clapping, and calling for us to clap harder, to bring back the thump. We try with all we have to tell ourselves, to tell each other, that the circuitry of our humanity can handle the power it takes to bring unity to this crowd.

The music booms back on and we cheer and try to believe that we need it.
Race: The Endless Marathon

Race runs like beads of sweat down my white face, into my blond hair. We are all made in the form of god; we are all made of dirt. We are all such stuff that dreams are made of. A foreigner would barely be able to tell one race from another. We probably look uniform and tedious to cats. Indiscernible from each other, one exactly like another. Our faces melt even closer together when observed by the stars.

I’ve known people who were so bored that they were bigots (you wonder why it’s more common in small towns.) They scared the Mowambis back to Africa, where they were condemned to certain death. I remember the mother of thirteen- one my god sister, born here, another with child herself, and eleven in between- telling me that she would rather die at home than here.

Race consumes us all to the point where we can’t see past it. It is wholly a part of our lives as much as other stupid things, like McDonalds. What would life be like without McDonalds? Considerably less gresny, I assume. Given a bit more open-mindedness and a couple of centuries, and black and white will probably have blended to a uniform shade of gray.

There seems to be some strand of our DNA, some chemical released in our brain that draws us to our own kind. Are we looking for security, family, or people that understand us? In ancient times were we drawn to people like us because they were sure to know where home is, to speak our language? Is there some primitive reason why we still seek those like us? If so, then like most other primitive thoughts, we should be able to cast it aside, and forget it. It isn’t as easy as it sounds. Individually we make exceptions, but as a whole our country is divided as if by a wall. But walls fall; people can tear them down as easily as a perforated edge.

We are all the makers of our own destinies. We don’t have to preach what we don’t believe. We can make up our own minds however we choose. The young can renounce the old ways. Time doesn’t have to stand still. Our future doesn’t have to be molded out of the past. It can be sculpted by whatever we choose. I may be so purely white that people try to put me in their coffee, and shovel me off their sidewalks- but we need to understand that it doesn’t really mean anything.

I love poetry slams, but they make me feel guilty. Am I really holding the black man down just by existing? They give me evil eyes and looks asking for my demise. They write poems about how evil white people are, and how much we destroy them, staring right into my soul the whole time. They don’t like me because they think that I don’t like them. It is only lack of communication that holds us all down.

We all run this race that has lasted for a millennia (or two). We are all exhausted. The muscles in my legs are liquefying from this infinite running. There is no end in sight to this race; we just have to let it go. Stop running. Fatigue runs across us more fluidly than sweat. No one will win when there is no finish line. We will all just die in the process.
Discrimination

Discrimination is something I can’t relate to because I’m used to it. I don’t talk about my problems and usually let them lie. I’ve seen discrimination before as I’m sure many people have, but I don’t think or talk about it because in my opinion, what will it change? People’s minds can’t be changed. The myth today is that by all people coming together and talking out their differences issues like intolerance and discrimination will all of a sudden no longer exist. What a beautiful dream, and that’s all it is.

True over the years the world has made progress in moving towards equality for all people. So-called advanced and leaps forward have all been made in the name of the now hackneyed term “Brighter Future” I don’t see it that way. I believe our much-glorified evolution was nothing more than a big mood swing. All that jazz about the days when the races were separated and then mankind learned the error of their ways is more than unbelievable, it’s impossible. Events like all the racial turmoil of the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s are now in the class of Fads. What I’m getting at is that the only reason that changes occurred is because America got bored with all the chaos and rioting.

You can only tie the girl to the train tracks so many times before the whole scenario gets old. Yes we came together. People of all colors shook hands and said “It’s cool; let’s just be friends and forget about the whole messy deal!” Come in and get serious. Take a good look around at the world. Discrimination in my opinion is now at a controlled anger pitch. The only reason things are “better” now is that now if someone were to come forward with their prejudiced feelings they’d be in a lot of trouble. Every job has rules against discrimination and if broken the employee would lose their job. Do you honestly think these rules are always followed?

America tries to push it’s ugly side under a rug and ignore the problem while in other countries the nasty side of the human condition runs rampant. No one in Today’s society of ‘move now, keep moving and send an apology note to those you hurt while moving faster’ aren’t for one second going to come together and try to stop discrimination.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not totally down on humanity. It’s just that I’ve learned not to trust a majority of them, and from what the world has shown me so far I’m going to carry these feelings to my grave.
Run Like the Wind

My grandfather always told me, Be like your-self, but not like anyone else.
You are to run like the wind, and never look back, I mean never look back.
My Grandfather always told me, run to the edge of the lake and try to escape. Imagine the hounds sniffing the
grounds looking for you.
Run like the wind escaping from your owner. Running through the woods never looking back, not knowing
where one’s going.
Follow the north star to guide you to freedom. Run like the wind and never look back. Run grandson run.
Never shall I forget those last words you said “You live to obey and die to be free.” Never shall I forget those
words as I run like the wind.
Essay. Honorable Mention. High School
Terriann Bacon

Being Young and Black

There was this girl named Mykele Johnson, who lived in a neighborhood that consisted of mostly white people. Mykele’s father was a successful lawyer and he just bought their house about three years ago. In her neighborhood, she didn’t really experience racism that much until she got to high school and started dressing like she was in a gang and started hanging around people who were in one.

One night as Mykele was outside on the corner with her friends Michael, Micah, Jerome, and Jessica, a white police officer approached them about a robbery that had happened early that evening. He asked them where they had been Mykele asked why did he want to know where they had been earlier. He said because there was robbery at the convenience store around the corner. Therefore, she asked what does that have to do with us. The officer said because you five fit the description of the robbers. Micah said we do not have to answer any of your questions because that is none of your business where we were earlier. Jessica told her not to talk to the officer that way because he could say that we were not cooperating with him and take them in for questioning. Jessica said if you really must know we were in school all day long. If you do not believe us, you can talk to our principal because we were in her office all day long.

The officer then asked where were you all after school. Jerome said, now that is really none of your business because we had personal business to tend to. The officer was getting annoyed by what they were saying and called for back up. When back up came, they made all of the teens get on the ground and spread their arms and legs. One of the teens had a blade on them, another had a nickle bag of weed. The officer’s partner asked what are you doing with this on you. Michael said we were going to smoke the weed and the blade is to protect ourselves. They decided to take them all in for committing robbery because they decided that they did it without asking anymore questions, for illegal drugs, and for concealed weapons. When they got to the station, they were asked to be in a line up. The witness that they had was an old white man who could barely see and did not know what was what. He identified three different people when they asked him if he was sure about the perp. The police took his word for it and booked Mykele, Jessica, and Jerome on the charge of robbery. They stayed there for about four hours.

Later that night, the night shift was out patrolling and they got a call that there was a disturbance at a liquor store. When they got there, five black teens looked like the black teens that they had in holding. They arrested them and took them to the station. One out of the five told everything that had gone on earlier that day. They released Mykele, Jessica, and Jerome from holding and let them call home. When Mykele’s father showed up to get them, he asked did you call their parents after they were picked up. Then he asked did they call their lawyer. Then Mr. Johnson said do not even answer because you did not know how I know because I am their parent and their lawyer. Then he asked why were they picked up in the first place. One officer said because we suspected them of robbing a liquor store, then found the real people who did it. Mr. Johnson said so you picked them up because they were five black kids standing on the corner looking as if they committed a crime. Then Mr. Johnson said I would see you in court because you did not follow the correct procedures in handling a case. Mr. Johnson did take them to court and he was awarded $10,000 for their pain and suffering.

The moral of my story is that, you should be careful of your friends and where you hang out at that you can be picked up for S.W.B. STANDING WHILE BLACK.
Old Country

One day my friend Victor and I went to a restaurant called the Old Country Buffet. One thing you should know about Victor is, he’s black. When we got to the Old Country Buffet, you pay before you eat, so we paid and went to find a table. We got the table and went up to go get our food. We got it and sat back down. We ate all of our food and left the plates on the table because that’s what you’re supposed to do in this restaurant.

So we went back up for our second helping. When we got back to our table, my plate and cup were gone but Victor’s were still there. Every time you leave the table the bus boys are supposed to take all of the dishes, but they had only taken mine. I just told him not to worry about it, and next time he comes he will take his dishes. So Victor said okay and we continued to eat.

After we finished our second helping, we went back up for dessert and when we came back, Victor’s plates were, once again still there, and mine of course were gone. So we asked to see the manager and when he came out we said, “Who was supposed to clear the plates off of our table?” He said, “I cleared them off.” And then we asked why he didn’t take Victor’s and he said, “I don’t like niggers.”

So we left, went back to Victor’s house and called their main office, told them our story and they said that he would be dealt with properly. The next time we went back to the Old Country Buffet, there was a new manager.
Shiksa

He called me Woman, so I called him Boy. We worked on physics problems together, studied Shakespeare, talked about books. He studied Marxism and had the Manifesto on a shelf by his bed. I liked his body: short, broad-shouldered, compact and quick. I liked his black hair and his Jewish nose.

Boy’s father was a retired rabbi. Julie, my lily-white and Catholic best friend, loved to watch movies like “Fiddler on the Roof” and “Yentil.” She said I wasn’t good enough for a rabbi’s son. Julie let me know I was a shiksa.

One Friday after school, I walked with Boy down a main street of his predominantly Jewish neighborhood, Squirrel Hill. I mentioned Julie’s term for me to Boy. He laughed, and put his headphones on. As we walked, Boy listened to rap music, to Mos Def and to Dr. Octagon. After a time, he passed his headphones to me and let me listen for a few minutes. I passed them back to him.

“The lyrics are too fast; I can’t understand the song. How can you?”

“Woman, you’re just too slow. I’m used to it.”

We walked by some girls in long skirts, long pony tails and tennis shoes: orthodox girls, straight out of the Yeshiva. Boy looked at them and said to me, “Better a shiksa than one of those.”

In his room, Boy changed his shirt. Like all of his clothes, the shirts were Triple Five Soul, a hip-hop brand favored by black rappers. We sat, talked, and kissed. I tried to make friends with his cats, who he loved more than anything or anyone. His cats curled in his lap, on his shoulders, and he cooed tender baby talk to them.

Then I sat down for Sabbath dinner with Boy’s family. His father wanted him to wear a yarmulke, Boy refused, so they compromised with Boy wearing a Triple Five Soul hat to cover his head. Boy leaned back from the table. I leaned in. I liked to hear the rabbi singing and blessing, it was more interesting than Grace.

For Hanukkah, I went over Boy’s house and brought him a tin of Italian Christmas cookies that my mother made: pizelles and chocolate-covered biscotti. He told me, “Woman, I would love you, but you’re not black and you’re not a cat.”

“You’re not black either, Boy.”

“Yes, I am.”

“How do you figure?”

“Woman, I just am.”

The next week, Boy said we weren’t officially a couple. He took a beautiful black girl out on a few dates. She refused to kiss him, though. She told her friends he was trying too hard, then she told him she just wanted to be friends.

A little while later, Boy and I broke up. Julie said she always knew I didn’t deserve a rabbi’s son. I still see Boy often at school, but he doesn’t call me Woman anymore, he calls me by my name. I think he’s dating a nice Jewish girl.
Essay. Honorable Mention. High School
Jamar J. Dailey

Fit the Description

One day while in downtown Pittsburgh, I decided to go into one of its respected department stores and do some holiday shopping. Well as soon as I got off the elevator in Men’s Apparel, a Caucasian sales clerk approached me to ask if I needed any help. I told her no and walked deeper onto the floor and began my search for clothing. A few moments later the clerk, who I would later learn to be Mary Jo, comes up to me asks if there was anything in particular that I was looking for.

Figures. This isn’t the first time that something like this has happened to me. Sadly, it seems like whenever I go to a clothing store I’m always being pursued or followed, as if I have “Thief” or “Trouble” written on my forehead. I’d later learn, as a young adult, that it was my skin that branded me as a thief.

So I give her the benefit of the doubt, I mean, maybe she’s just doing her job, right? So I give her a smile and say, “No, thank you, I’m just browsing.” That’s when she comes at me with, smugly, and says, “Well everything over here is expensive, you know, the clearance section is over there.” Pointing at a clearance sign above a bin in the far corner of the floor.

Feeling the blood rush to my face, I tried my hardest to keep my cool and not tell her where she could put that clearance sign. Instead, I returned her fake smile and asked her to get me her manager. She lost her smile.

Enough is enough, I’m sick and tired of being followed and stalked every time I come into a store. Ther’s a lot more to me than my skin color, you know? Just who does she think she is? Yeah I’m doing the right thing, I’ll just trust in the system and go to her boss and let him know how his employee likes to treat hi potential consumers, that ought to fix her wagon. As all of these though were going in my head, a short, balding, Caucasian man, maybe in his mid-40’s, approaches me with a stern face.

I extended my hand and gave him a firm handshake, introduced myself and told him what happened and how I felt about it. He listened intently, I almost thought he himself was getting upset. I guess I should have known better. When I was finished, he replied with, and I’ll never forget it, “Well, Mary Jo’s been with us for a long time now and I’m sure she didn’t mean anything by it, besides, you do fit the description of a lifter, so she was only…” I wasn’t about to let him finish his sentence. Angry now, I snapped with, “Excuse me? What do you mean I fit the description of a ‘lifter’?” Before he could even answer I just asked him for the name and number of the district manager, He reluctantly gave it to me and I stuck the paper in my pocket, not before saying, “Let’s see if he thinks I ‘fit the description’ of a lifter.”

While on the bus home I was thinking about what just happened and was just about to feel good about myself when a bad day turned worse. After I got off my bus and began walking down the street a police car pulled over and the police officer inside yelled from the open window for me to “Hold it right there.” I paused. I’ve never been in trouble with the police a day in my life. I’d better just do as he says.

He asked me where was I coming from, I told him but he didn’t believe me. “No, you were up on N. Charles Street, weren’t you?” I told him, that I’d just gotten off the bus from town. He then asked me to “assume the position.” Assuming it was a position that I gotten into often. Not knowing what he was talking about, I asked him, what was all of this about. He told me again, this time a little louder, to assume the position, this time people nearby heard him and were beginning to crowd. It was the most embarrassing and scariest experience of my life. Was I going to jail? What did I do wrong? Fumbling I bent over and placed my hands on the hood of his car. No, that wasn’t the position, he put his foot in between my legs and kicked my legs apart even more. Hissing, “Where is it? Where’s the gun?”

Gun?! He began patting me down, rubbing hard on my back and buttocks, feeling on my chest and crotch. “Where did you hide it, “he yelled. I felt like crying. By this time it looked like the entire neighborhood was watching. Just then he got a call on his radio in the police car. He left me there and checked it. I didn’t hear much of what was being said, only the other officer on the radio saying, “We got ‘em!”

The officer then got out off the car, tried to adjust my now wrinkled clothes, and told me I was free to go. As I was gathering my things and tried to avoid stares, the officer said, “Sorry, it’s just that…you fit the description of the guy.”

I ran home stormed up to my room, dug out the piece of paper in my pocket with the name and number of the district manager, tore it up, threw it in the waste basket. After that I turned on the radio, got in my bed, with the lights out, still wearing my street clothes, and cried my eyes out.
All That Jazz

Looking at my hand. I think geographic thoughts about the valleys and hills formed by veins and tendons. Light complexion makes skin an arid desert. I think we all came out of Africa. Some flew south, some flew west, and some flew over the cuckoo’s nest. So that empires later a White cock could say to a black hen, I own you. But people can’t own people, they can but they shouldn’t. If you’re lost it’s okay, so am I. I know that it boils down to races and rights, and all that jazz. I know that blacks invented jazz and it was good. I know that no one is black. Some Aborigines are maroon, and people from Sri Lanka seem almost gray. I know that grown-up say the damnest things like; you shouldn’t talk about tones in skin. Tones make the music, the jazz of continents and dignity. I am telling it all wrong and must repeat for clarity: It all boils down to race.

Boiling water in a memory. I sit beside a country club’s kitchen. Old brown woman with worried features pours out a pot of boiling water. It all started in Africa. Then the water charges further, spilling and flowing. Some hot water turns light brown in The dusty road, Some dark in the dense daisy bed, Some over rocks where it is almost gray, on a drying leaf, it is maroon. People aren’t water, but they change their form and color wherever they flow, Native American’s are not like Africans, Native Americans have a deeper groove at the root of their incisors. Asians have a deposit of fat above the eyes, but Europeans don’t. Differences. Broad generalizing statements that are true, defining and wonderful. My hand is large and fair, my neighbor’s hand small and dark. Now that I’m done I’ll sum this nonsense up. My hand, desert and the movement of people and water, Black hens, white boys at country clubs, earth in hot water, the incisors of the Americans, the fat above the eye, the thousand hues of water and jazz. Let’s end on jazz, the improvised tones of our skin. We are a stunning composition, respect this. Hot water. Jazz.
Poetry. Second Place. High School
Shane Creepingbear

When I was young
There were no other races than red,
Not red skin,
But redneck
I grew up in Small Town, Ohio (right by the lake)
In second grade there was a black girl.
The only black girl in Small Town
In second grade I would watch kids call her
Monkey and
Nigger
In second grade I did not know what those words meant
I knew I wasn’t black but
In second grade I didn’t know I wasn’t white

Nobody asked but
I knew I wasn’t black
One teacher treated me differently
Than the other kids in Small Town
Once I was sent into the hall for sneezing too loud
Once I had to sit in the hall for not bringing the “right”
Crayons to school

No one asked if I wanted to play
At recess I sat alone
I would swing on the swings
See how tall I could make a pile of rocks
But I couldn’t play football, or tag
I was never asked to
I didn’t care, they never teased me
The teachers never asked me questions
Neither did the kids

When I finally found out I was never going to turn white
I was confused, though excited
I’m an Indian I told people
They were fascinated

Now they asked me how to hunt, and make tomahawks.
You Live Where?

Oh you live in Homewood
Is what people say to me
When I tell them where I live
Sometimes I’ll invite
Someone to my house
They say oh great
Where do you live
Then I tell that that
I live in Homewood
And they’ll say
“Ya know what
I have something to do
That day”
The funny part is
I never told them
What day they could come over
Funny how things
Work like that
One place that is predominantly
African American
People pee their pants
Just thinking about living there
How sad
I’ve lived here for nine years
I turned out good
I’m not stupid if that’s
What you think
But I’m not the
Smartest it’s a shame
That I can’t go
Past Rite Aid
Without someone my
Age or older
After four
Or I can’t even go
To the playground
Anymore
Because it’s inhabitants
Are not only little smart ass
Brats but drug dealers and
Violent 5
year Olds
People would be
Amazed at all
These little monsters know
About life
I wouldn't be
Surprised.
If some of them
Knew what sex was
And had their very own
First hand experience at it
I know a girl
At Eleven
Had an abortion
I know a girl
Fourteen
Had a beautiful baby gairl
And she took her to the
Playground the day she gets out
Of the hospital
How sad
At first I even felt sorry
For those type of people
But then I realized
That they probably
Feel sorry enough for them
Just last month my best friend
Was jumped by those little row house kids
Who are simply jealous
Because the people who live on my street
Don’t need charities
And thrift shops
Or use food stamps
Whatever the hell those are
I bet if those row kids read
What I was writing
They’d probably kill me
Or beat me up really bad
But who knows
They might think that this poem
Isn’t about them
Who knows how there
Minds work
But seriously
There are some good families
Out there
Like mine

Not saying' that my family's like
The Brady Bunch
But we're closer than most
One thing I'll never understand
Is how Homewood went bad so fast
I talk to my neighbor
That looks like Yoda
And she says Homewood was cool back then
I don't know how far back
But for people not to remember how good it was
It must have been a long time ago
She said there was a movie theater
Shops that actually had doors
There was everything
It just made us both pissed off
Because of these little hoodlums
That moved in
And evicted the good natured people
And now not even roaches
Will live in some houses
In Homewood
But in other houses
They are so big and beautiful
But people ruin them
Even before they were in mint condition
They would probably sell for about forty maybe fifty
Thousand
But if it was in another
Neighborhood
Like Squirrel Hill
It would be one hundred thousand dollars
If not more
Things like this just really,
Really piss me off
I hate people these people
For ruining everything
This was a good place
People just ruined it
Except for a few of you
Like my friends who are my family
Who have made my life here
Enjoyable through the unbearable
Parts of life
I love Homewood
But not its roaches
Goofy Little White Girl

Poetry. Third Place. High School
Brianna Dunleavy

Goofy Little White Girl

Summer of '92
I was all of six years
and missing my front teeth.
My bangs were chopped and mangled
like I had paid a drunkard to cut them.
Goofy little white girl.
That's what I was.
Goofy little white girl
that lived in East Liberty.
I didn't like white people.
I only saw beauty in shades of brown.

Summer of '92
I spent my first night over a friend's house.
There were eight of us.
Seven black,
and me.
Goofy little white girl.
They listened to Kris Kross
and made up little dances.
I had yet to acquire a sense of rhythm.
They plaited and beaded each others hair.
My hair was too short,
and mangled,
and white.
I had white peoples hair.
Sitting with them it was inescapable.
I was a goofy little white girl.

Summer of '92
The temperature rose to 90.
The black cement was scorching
under bare feet.
Porches were lined
with small, sweating black children.
Tons of big brown eyes
looking utterly bored.
Tons of small brown faces
looking utterly hot.
Summer of '92
a big black teenager
with a big white grin
and a big silver wrench
was our godsend.
He took the wrench
and muscles straining in the heat,
opened up the fire hydrant.
Clear water came gushing out
over sweat stained brows,
big brown smiling faces,
and bright brown eyes.
Waves of clear water;
waves of brown skin,
and me.
Wet, smiling
goofy little white girl.

Summer of '92
I learned a lesson
while sitting on the black cement
in a sea of black faces
surrounded in clear water.
For that second it no longer mattered
That I was a goofy little white girl,
or if I had been black,
or yellow,
or polka dotted.
Everything was just wet.
Clear.
The way things should be.
You scooped her tan body up
Into your ivory arms and he kissed her
With his cinnamon lips.
You rested your auburn head
against his mahogany chest and sighed
deeply as you both
clenched on to the bronzed baby.
He looked through your clear cobalt eyes with
Red beams of love and ran his hands through
Baby’s fuzzy, honey-brown hair.
The three create a landscape of
Colors and shapes and forms.
Simple equations of one and one creating one.
They are of one skin.
The lines and swirls creating
prints and patterns on the paper where they
press Baby’s inked up feet.
Why?

May I ask you a question?
I mean no harm, but why do you look at the color of my skin
Instead of me?

I do walk and talk like you. Don’t I?
So why do you look at the color of my skin?

I do the same things as you.
Like I can ride a bike, have the same education as you,
And probably have better grades.
So why do you look at the color of my skin?

When you shoot me, don’t I bleed?
When you hurt me, don’t I cry?
When you say something funny, don’t I laugh?
So why do you look at the color of my skin?

Wow! You let me go from slavery and still you treat me bad.
And all those years wasted picking cotton in your field.
What if I told you to pick cotton in my field because I want to be lazy
And work you without pay?
I don’t think you’d like that idea.

You look at me like trash
But I’m the one who cooked your food
I picked your cotton so you could be warm (what about me I get cold too)
Look at all these thing I did for you.
So why do you look at the color of my skin?

You say God is white.
You say Adam and Eve are white too.
(Let’s just refresh our memory) you say that God made Adam out of dirt,
right?
(Now tell me) what color is dirt?
It surely doesn’t have the color of you.
Whose skin is closer to the color of dirt?
Mine is surely not the color of yours.
But let’s not get into that.
But for real do you see where I’m going with this.
Why look at the color of my skin
Because in today's world
I can be your doctor keeping you alive.
I can be your lawyer
Getting you justice even though you didn't give me mine
I can be your teacher
Teaching you the way you didn't want me to learn.
I can be your minister guiding you in God's way.
And I can be your friend.
There when you need me.
I can be all these things.

Helping and guiding you when you're in need.

So answer my question
WHY DO YOU LOOK AT THE COLOR OF MY SKIN?
Poetry: Honorable Mention. High School
Andre Farrow

Judgment Day

Rich People look at me and say
He ain’t going to be nothing
A black kid from the ghetto
He wears his pants baggy
Shirts too big
And doesn’t speak proper English
He even walks with a limp
And he doesn’t use yes and no, ma’am
Talking to his own mom.

I look back at them and say
I’m going to be just like that rose
The grew through concrete
So when you stand there and admire that rose
Admire me too, because I overcame
The struggle the rose went through.

So look past my color, the way I dress and
The way I talk. Get to know me
Before you judge me.
They gave us looks that day.
Men don’t care. They just look at you like they can see something.
Some of them made passes – two girls with affection screams “Sex.”
Others called us “dykes.”
The Women really stung, though.
Women pretend not to notice,
they have more “dignity” than that.
Their looks hurt more than the men’s through the dark glasses.
When I got home I cried,
but on the street I faked bravery.
I had to do it for her.
Maybe since I was taller,
maybe since I felt bad for her, either way
I bought her Ice Cream
  to make her smile.
It was the kind of soft serve that is swirled;
    chocolate on one side
    vanilla on other.

I don’t know what struck them more:
The fact that we didn’t care if they saw two girls Holding Hands.
Or that a Jewish girl wasn’t afraid to get her hands Stained
by a Coffe and Cream colored girl.

And I wondered if these same people same people
stared at her parents.
I imagined them.
a tall Black Boy
and a little Hispanic Girl.
He would take her out at night

when their deep colors could blend with the darkness.
Poetry. Honorable Mention. High School
Heather Jarrett

Yellow School Bus

I got onto a yellow bus
this morning, filled
with white and black kids.
Laughing talking,
with the black girls in the back
singing their hearts out.
I joined in, but not
too loud,
with my favorite
Hip Hop song.
But because of my blue eyes and
white skin,
the boy in front said
that I wasn’t allowed
to sing my song
because it was sung by
a black artist and
“nigga” was sacred
only to African Americans.
I looked at the girl next to me,
who was blacker then
the boy,
opening my mouth to defend my taste.
She said, it’s an argument you’ll never win.
I knew this,
the whole ride home
I sat in silence.
Poetry. Honorable Mention. High School
Marshall Slayton

Sticker

The night before Passover,
I go shopping with my mother.

We go to the supermarket
to buy food for the next seven days.
There is one aisle in the store,
full of kosher products.
My mother has a bad back,
and it’s my duty to reach the highest shelves.

I stumble upon a small red sticker,
With bold white font lying on the shelf
along with a thin black swastika, that read:
“HITLER WAS RIGHT.”

I grab the sticker,
and shove it in my pocket.
I was glad that my mother didn’t see it,
because she grew up as an Orthodox Jew.

I run away from my mother,
and to the bathrooms.

I pull the sticker out of my pocket,
and don’t even glance at it.
Instead, I tear it into the smallest pieces possible.

I take the ashes,
and sprinkle them into the toilet.
I turn towards the sink,
and wash all the dirt off.
He Had a Dream: Haiku

Martin had a dream.
His dream one night changed the world.
He gave me my best friend.

Her name is Jasmine.
I met her at school one day.
We are so alike.

Both of us have eyes.
From which we observe the world.
Black, White, all races.

There is no color.
We see everyone equal.
Especially us.

Our parents don’t care.
And our friends don’t seem to mind.
We couldn’t care less.

We share our friendship.
And love the companionship.
Martin let it be.

His dream was of us.
He saw our color blindness.
He smiled upon it.

He saw the loved shared.
And wanted that for the world.
He made his dream real.

With the love of God.
And Martin’s giving spirit.
He made the world blind.

Took away color.
Took away color boundaries.
Gave equality.

We thank you Martin.
Thank you for equality.
Thank you for Jasmine.
Exiliada

Quiero la luz humilde que ilumina
Cuerpo y alma en un ser, en uno solo.
Mi equilibrio ordinario es mi gran arte.
-Jore Guillén, "Descaminado"

I seek the humble light that enlightens
Body and soul into one being, only one.
My simple equilibrium of self is my
masterpiece.

There are people in this world who describe themselves as ones who don’t quite fit in. I would say that for most of my childhood, I was one of those. I didn’t fit in at school because I wasn’t American enough. I spoke a different language, ate different food, and just looked different. I didn’t fit within the Indian community because I wasn’t Indian enough. I played outside with the boys during Indian functions, hair tousled and clothes awry, instead of primly sitting inside, dressed in my finest Indian clothing, like all of the other girls. And because I didn’t fit anywhere, I did what a lot of other misfit children do – I created my own world. "Neema-land" I called it. I had my own set of morals, I practiced my own set of traditions, and I only followed the rules that were written in the Neema-land books. I borrowed heavily from the worlds around me, but Neema-land was mine—and I was the only person who truly inhabited it.

Until recently, I haven’t had the words to describe the life I created for myself, or the struggles that I went through in trying to balance between being “too Indian” and “not Indian enough”. I’ve read about it a hundred times in immigrant literature – this attempt to balance between cultures seems to be a common theme among 1st generation Americans, and we all seem to be obsessed with the need to write about our struggle, probably because it has played such a strong role in defining our characters.

However, this semester I enrolled in a class entitled, “Spanish Poets and Playwrights of Exile.” And suddenly, in reading the work of Unamuno, Lorca, Caso, Salinas, and Alberti, I’ve found the vocabulary I need to describe my life. These authors left Spain in the 1920s because they couldn’t bear to watch the country they loved – their patria – be destroyed by Francisco Franco. From afar – from Argentina, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Italy, America, France – they watched their countrymen struggle and suffer under fascist rule, watched the country split into factions of fascists, liberals, and indifferents, watched as the España that they loved so much was destroyed and replaced by a country full of turmoil.

Taken away from their homelands, these writers could write very little that didn’t have undertones of exile. Almost every play had a character who was conflicted – facing the struggles that an exile undergoes. Virtually every poem was full of nostalgia for home and childhood, sentiments of loss and displacement, or criticism for the country in which they were being forced to make their home.

The general characteristics of this generation of exiled writers are described in an essay entitled “Poetry and the Solitude of Exile” by Angelina Muñiz-Huberman. Muñiz-Huberman describes el exilio as being displaced – whether it is a physical displacement, an emotional displacement, or a spiritual one, doesn’t matter. Exile deals with the sentiments of loss and fragmentation of self that cause a person to seek out new limits…or a new land…in order to make themselves whole again. In the case of these writers, their limits, and their new land, could not be found in existing realities. For them to be whole again, they have to create a new reality – a world that is neither here, nor there, but rather some combination of the two that only exists for them. They create this world in their minds, express it through their writing, and live in it until the point when they are able to accept enough of the reality that they are confronted with to join it.

I read about these poets and playwrights…about their frustration at losing their language, pain at being separated from their culture, and their feelings of fragmentation, and finally found the words that define me: Desplazada, destierra, transplantada, exiliadita. My parents were migrantes – people who left their país natal for economic and social reasons. For 21 years, I have been an exilio – someone whose displacement was forced by decisions outside my control. And like Lorca, Unamuno, Caso, Salinas, and Alberti, the fragmentation of self that I felt led me to create a third world for myself – something neither Indian, nor American, nor Indian-American, but rather a combination of all three. A world without a demographic descriptor, with limits that I was constantly redefining, that contained elements from my past, present, and future, from my Indian heritage and my American upbringing, but wasn’t any one of these in totality.

****
My parents came to this country before I was born. They left India because my father sought opportunities that India didn’t have to offer him. He wanted to make a better life for himself, for his wife, for the children that they would have together. He wanted to be able to send money home to his family, and have it actually be worth something. He wanted to get away from the disapproving frowns of a father who hadn’t wanted him to become a doctor, hadn’t wanted him to marry my mother, hadn’t wanted him to come to the United States. His immigration to the United States was purely by choice.

My mother made the decision to leave India the moment she agreed to marry my father. She gave up the scholarship that she had received to study Home Economics at the University of Iowa, married my father just 2 months after first meeting him, said goodbye to him a week later when he left for the U.S., and spent the next year shuttling back between her parents’ house and her in-laws’ house, trying to make a good impression on her in-laws but not always succeeding. A year after my father had moved to New York City, my mother joined him in a tiny apartment in Queens. So began their life in America.

Like all children of immigrants however, my sister and I were not given a choice in the decision as to where we would spend our childhoods. She was born in Queens, New York and lived there until the age of two, when the family moved to Charleston, West Virginia. I was born in Charleston five years later, and my family has lived there ever since.

“Why West Virginia?” people always ask.

I can only shrug my shoulders or shake my head and try to explain that when my father was offered a job working as a physician at the Union Carbide Plant in Institute, WV, he took it. He took it based on one visit, made in August of 1974. Things like quality of education, diversity of community, and availability of cultural events didn’t really play into his decision. It was a job, and he needed a job. It was money, and he needed money. What else was there to consider?

26 years later, although the plant has undergone multiple changes in name and management, “Doc” is still the plant physician – the guy who everyone sees for their physicals, their flu shots, their drug tests, their on-the-job injuries. 26 years later, my parents still live at 5303 Pamela Circle: A two-story, 3-bedroom, 2-bathroom house with white siding, maroon shutters, and carpet that has been around since I was two. I should know – I learned to write my letters in it. The Cunninghams still live across the street from us; the Withrows, Mondays, Riecks, Carnes, and Castos still live down the street. The basketball hoops that Andy Carney, Lee Withrow, and I put up 12 years ago are still there, and our initials are still visible in the part of the street that had to be re-paved about 10 years ago. Brian Weaver committed suicide in 1993. Mr. Starcher was hit by a train and killed 5 months ago. Mr. Weaver died of liver cancer 3 months ago. Mr. Turner moved into a bigger house, the Lunardinis moved to Pittsburgh. These are the kinds of changes that we see on Pamela Circle. Over the course of the thirty-odd years that my family has lived there, the changes have been few, but that has made each and every one of them more difficult to endure.

This is where I spent the first 18 years of my life.

****

Even though I was aware from very early on that I was not like most of the people around me, I didn’t realize that my ethnicity made me different in any negative sense until the year I turned eight. Up to that point, I had played on my street every afternoon with the other children of the neighborhood, gone to school, swum on the swim team, and played softball and basketball without ever feeling strange about the fact that I was one of only two Indians to do so.

But one day during third grade, some track and field athletes from West Virginia State College came to visit my elementary school, and show us some of their techniques. I was thrilled. At age eight, I had aspirations of being a discus-thrower, and so I waited in line with my friend John Michael to talk to the discus-thrower who had come as part of the group.

We were standing in the multi-purpose room talking when a short, fat, red-headed boy with lots of freckles came up to us. He sneered, slapped me across the face, and said, “Get out of my way, nigger.” I started crying…and moved out of the way.

The red-headed boy was named J.R. Hammond. 13 years later, I still remember his name and his face, although I’m almost positive he doesn’t know mine, if he even ever did. Although my gym teacher Mrs. Evans was crying herself when she came to console me, J.R. didn’t get in trouble for what he had done. I remember being told that he was too young to know any better. And I, ashamed, didn’t tell my parents, so they couldn’t push for him to be punished, either.
At eight, I didn’t know what the word “nigger” meant. I only knew that it was something bad, and that when combined with that slap, it meant that J.R. Hammond hated me. But somehow, I came to the realization that something about me made J.R. Hammond angry…That I was different, and that since different made me get slapped and called names, different was bad.

Suddenly, I didn’t want to take Indian food to school for lunch anymore. I used to love taking my favorite Indian foods — lemon rice, thepla, chakri, and upama — to school in my lunchbox. Not anymore.

“Only peanut butter and jelly sandwiches,” I told my mom. She complied without questioning me. I ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches every school day after that — from 3rd grade all the way through 12th grade.

I felt embarrassed if I had to go into a store on the way to an Indian function and I was dressed in Indian clothes.

“I’ll sit in the car while you go in,” I would tell my parents. Casting it up to being one of my strange quirks, they would leave me in the car and go about their business. And I would sit, and roast in the sun, and freeze in the winter, and be bored out of my mind for the 15, 30 or 60 minutes that they would spend in the store.

I would criticize my mother harshly if she spoke to me in Gujarati when we were in public. “Mom, don’t do that!” I would whisper furiously. “Speak in English. We live in America.” And so she stopped speaking Gujarati when we were in public.

I pushed away every aspect of difference that I could. I probably would have bleached my skin if I thought it would turn it white. The way to not be hurt, I thought, was to make it so that I didn’t stick out. And yet, I couldn’t be American either…at least, not in the West Virginian sense of the word. I tried… I played the sports, traded the cards, read the comics, and ate some of the food. I listened to country music, played the guitar, even had a pair of cowboy boots — all part of the futile attempt to Americanize.

At one point, there was nothing I wanted more than a Bowery Boys t-shirt. Every “cool” person in my school had one — a red t-shirt with a blue “X” across the front and the X had white stars in it. Some of them had lettering on the back that said things like, “The South Will Rise Again.” Not that I knew what that meant, of course. So I wanted one and wanted one and wanted one, but never got one. It wasn’t until years later, when I came to understand the significance of the rebel flag — what it represented during the Civil War, and what it represents today — that I thought back on those Bowery Boys t-shirts and was disgusted that I had ever wanted one. I came to hate rebel flags. I started to visibly shudder when I came into contact with the people who wore Bowery Boys t-shirts, who draped rebel flags on their walls, or displayed them on their license plates. But even though I grew to abhor these symbols of racism, I never learned to hate the people who displayed them with such pride. My initial tendency was to hate them…it was easy to point a finger at a group of people, and make a generalization that all of them were evil based on the clothing that they chose to wear, the paraphernalia that they chose to flaunt. But every time I would begin to make a generalization, I would meet a “redneck” who would break the stereotype that I was trying to form. Sometimes, because I was a friend of their sister’s or girlfriend’s, they would be nice to me. The would say hi at school, or sit with me or lunch, or give me a ride home…and then I couldn’t hate them. Sometimes they would ever stick up for me when I was being harassed by another racist, and then I definitely couldn’t hate them. It seemed so contradictory…but I came to realize that if people knew me — heard about me from their sisters and girlfriends, talked to me on the phone, worked together with me on homework — before they knew my race, all of the rebel flag beliefs that they tried to espouse seemed to fall away.

Over time, I managed to bury as much of my Indian-ness as possible, and embraced as many elements of being American as possible, and yet found myself a complete jumble of cultures. Neither here, nor there, neither Indian, nor American. Years later, I would see the term “Indian-American” in the demographics section on standardized tests, but that wasn’t me, either. I wasn’t Indian, and I wasn’t American. The only thing about the word that did strike a chord with me was the hyphen — the link between the two words. When it stands alone, a hyphen means nothing. In between two words, it speaks volumes about the struggle to pull two very different words together and make them into one.

****

I played sports from the time I was about seven years old onwards. From 2nd grade to 6th grade, I was the only girl in an all boy’s basketball league, and loved the attention that I received because of it. When I went into a game, the crowd would yell and clap and stomp on the bleachers as though I were the star of the game. When I scored a basket, people were on their feet cheering as though I made a half-court shot, even if I’d only hit a lay-up.
It was such a self-esteem boost every time. There I was, this scrawny little Indian girl, with big glasses, teeth that stuck out, and a long braid of black hair that went all the way down her back who had to shoot “granny” style until 4th grade because she wasn’t strong enough to shoot like a boy, and despite all of that, or maybe because of it, people loved me.

You can imagine my surprise, then, when upon entering middle school and joining the girls’ basketball team, I found myself being booed by fans at away games. In 7th grade, we went to play at Elkview Middle School, which is located in a town that city-people would describe as “the sticks”. There, the crowd booed, threw ice, heckled, and mocked me and the two African-American girls on my team. When one of the girls tripped and busted her lip, a malicious snicker rippled through the crowd. And after the game, we went back to our bus only to find that some Elkview fans had urinated all over it.

That was only the beginning. For the next five years, I was called everything from “Mr. Miyagi” to “Speedy Gonzalez,” was asked questions like, “Where is your papoose?”, was harassed with calls of “Andale, andale, arriba!” and strange-sounding attempts at Japanese karate language. Certain schools were worse than others: Elkview, Ripley, Sissonville, Man. The days on which we were scheduled to play at those schools were game days that I dreaded. In those towns, my coaches wouldn’t let me out of their sight unless a teammate accompanied me to where it was that I needed to go. They tried to make it funny—tried to help my laugh off the comments. “Right, Neema,” they’d say when I told them about yet another Mr. Miyagi comment. “Because you really look like a 70-year old Japanese man, don’t you?” Nevertheless, it stung.

****

Things only got worse as I got older, largely because I was more conscious of the prejudices that seemed to crop up all around me. I didn’t go looking for them, but they seemed to be intent on finding me and hurting me.

Senior year of high school, Miss Hayhurst’s History class: Justin Canfield sits in the seat in front of mine. He has a voice like Jeff Foxworthy’s (The “You might be a redneck if…” guy), a head that is disproportionately large for his skinny body, and an obnoxious personality. Anytime I make a comment that goes against what he believes, he proclaims to the class that I am “un-American”, and moves his desk five feet away from mine. One time I made the mistake of saying that I don’t think communism is a particularly bad economic system, and that if implemented properly (without an authoritarian government in tow) it could be really effective in a country like India where the economic disparity between rich and poor is so vast.

“You believe in communism? That’s un-American!” big-headed, sharp-nosed, stupid-looking Justin Canfield shouts, scooting his desk away.

“You communist. You pinko!” Ryan McCarthy, also known as Waldo (from “Where’s Waldo”, because that’s who he looks like, only fatter) calls out.

Miss Hayhurst says nothing.

My other classmates, even though who are my close friends, say nothing.

For the rest of the year, any comments that I make, regardless of their content, find themselves being punctuated by the statements, “Yeah well, you’re un-American,” or “Yeah well, you’re a pinko. You don’t count.”

****

I told a professore about what it was like to grow up in West Virginia…what it was like to be spit on, slapped, threatened, and despaired for who I was.

“Weren’t you angry?” he asked. “Didn’t you hate them?”

I wasn’t. I didn’t. My reaction when faced with prejudice was to blame it on myself…to internalize it instead of placing the blame on other people.

“It wasn’t their fault,” I protested. “They didn’t know any better.”

“That’s typical, Neema. Always the martyr…always taking responsibility for things that aren’t even your fault. Ignorance is someone’s fault…you’re allowed to blame them for it,” my well-meaning professor said.
"No...I can't. If I hated everyone who had a problem with me...evey person who was ignorant...every person who treated me badly, I don't think I'd be able to get out of bed in the morning. Once you start hating a person, you start a chain...It's easier to hate the next person, and then the next person after that is even easier to hate, and eventually, you'll hate just about everyone. That's too jaded of a perspective for me." I knew I wasn't getting anywhere with this discussion, but I continued to try to make him see my point of view.

"OK...but this way, you ended up hating yourself for no good reason. Which is better? Hating other people, or hating youself?"

"Hating myself," I said. "That's something that I can get over. I can struggle with it and come to terms with who I am, and accept that...even if it takes me a really long time. Hating other people isn't something that I think can be overcome."

Some might call this skewed logic. Maybe it is, but for me the thought of hating someone – despising them for any extended period of time because they've hurt me – leaves me cold. I feel like the moment you start to hate, it becomes more difficult to love. Your heart gets a little harder, a little smaller, every time, and you begin to lose your sense of wonder about the world, your appreciation for the good in people. The last thing I want in life is to end up like Dr. Seuss's Grinch, with a heart that is two sizes too small. If that's skewed logic, so be it.

****

Every exile eventually comes to terms with his position in life. He gets farther and farther away from his past, and closer to his present, is able to piece the fragments of himself back together, and finally is able to leave behind the world he has created for himself, and join the real world.

It may take years...it took me 13. 13 years full of struggling to appreciate who I was and where I came from, along with multiple trips to India, where I’ve learned what an amazing heritage I have to take pride in, and what wonderful relatives I have to love and look up to. But 13 years after J.R. Hammond broke my identity into fragments, I can finally say that I am comfortable with being an Indian-American. I can espouse individualism, hard work, rationalism, and feminism, and still touch my elder's feet out of respect, put my family first, and believe in the mysticism of Indian mythology. I can speak a mixture of Gujarati and English, switching back and forth so quickly that even I forget which language I am speaking. I can eat Indian food with a spoon, and pasta with my fingers, and wear an Indian kurta on top of blue jeans. But I’m proud of the mixture of cultures and lifestyles that I contain – proud of this new culture, new world, new way of life that I've been able to create for myself. In a sense, I feel like Whitman: "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes." And finally...finally, those multitudes have come together to form a whole.
The Power of Nonviolence

Growing up in the ever so diverse society we live in today, I have come to realize that violence and hatred are key reasons that prevent us from achieving world peace. As a teenager, I have always looked up to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., for his patience and intellectual approach on preaching nonviolence. Even at times when the future looked dim during the days of the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King continued on his peaceful nonviolence campaign. The positive impact his messages have on society is now greater than ever, especially to the ears that need it the most: the youths of today.

"Principle three" on Dr. King’s list of "Six Principles of Nonviolence" really relates to how I think and feel towards nonviolence and the paths we must take to understand each other. I myself have never been the violent, confrontational type, much of that because I have always doubted that fighting and physical action can do much good. It is disappointing to see violence every night on the news, factional groups at odds and ends with each other. Though it angers me to watch as helpless victims are unknowingly caught in gang-warfare or just at the wrong place at the wrong time, I feel sorrow and sadness for the instigators of these thoughtless crimes. It's the lack of faith and ignorance that causes these people to commit acts of violence against others and humanity itself. It's so true what Dr. King says, these offenders of peace and non-violence are really victims of their own crimes.

The LA riots in 1992 was a clear example of what Dr. King would have discouraged against. As I sat home and watched as helpless merchants and families lost businesses and along with it, their years of dreams and goals, all burnt by one sweep of violent rage. And what exactly did rioters gain from their destruction? Maybe television coverage and animosity from the rest of the world as they looked on with concern and anger from t.v. at home. The nonviolent approach in this case would have sought a compromise with the rioters and the police authorities. If Dr. King could, he would have tried to peacefully patch up the problem by serving as the "prophet" between the minorities and the police. All in all, most of those who were out there that day destroying and rioting in the streets will carry a guilty conscience, inflicted on themselves by their own actions, forever. However, if they had considered the consequences of their actions, they might have approached it in a more peaceful manner, which might have benefited both sides. That is what nonviolence does for you, it helps bring the two opposing sides together by faith and contemplation, and together meet at a fork in the road.

For myself, when I get angry or find the need to release my frustration, I just try to calm down. Thinking and relaxing in a solitary place really helps me focus on what is the real problem, and how I should deal with it. I try to weigh both sides of everything I do, the effects, good or bad and what comes out to be the most reasonable approach in solving the dilemma. Nevertheless, we all slip occasionally, but it is the big decisions in life we need to think deeply about and consider. The greatest thing about Dr. King’s principles is that they apply to every one of us, not just blacks or minorities. He preached nonviolence, hope and patience to the world. Today, it isn’t unusual for me to hear his name brought up in conversations or mentioned for his honorable message to society as a whole.

In the end, those who can find ways to deal nonviolently can have trust in themselves and gain that trust from others as well. We just need to stop once in a while, take a deep breath and have faith in the path that lies ahead of us. Those who succeed are those who have acquired the skill to get along peacefully and positively. Like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, nonviolence creates the winner in us and helps us help unite this world better in each step we take in life.
OFF-WHITE

Scientists state there are seventeen thousand colors –
Artists say they've found even more
Yet most people claim to know only a few.
having no knowledge of shade, tone, or hue
they list only black, white, yellow, and red.
But there are seventeen thousand colors.

I am off-white.
I am the eggshell colored walls
of a middle class living room.
I am dusty rose
I am blood and water mixed
and spilled on the carpet.
I am burnt umber
black hair dyed so many times over
red and crispy under the sun
like silky bacon.
I am fine blushed wine
from my cheeks to my lips
to my toenails.
I am mellow yellow American soda pop
Sweet corn and Indian corn bred together.
The sauce and the spice on your spaghetti.
I am green with the envy
of the clover in Ireland.
And the Native American tattoo on my back
red and black.
I am the stars and stripes
that wave from the flagpole
on my off-white one-car garage.

I am off-white. Not quite pure.
Not quite Ivory soap, but just as sensitive
Not quite good enough for the tenth generation
Episcopal choir boy who loves me.
Not quite tough enough for the asphalt
black girls who sported against me.
Not quite exotic enough to wear wildflowers
in my hair that looks black inside,
red outside, like my tattoo.
Not quite white enough to shop at the Gap
to wear one of the two or three colors
they pick out of seventeen thousand.
To be one of the two or three colors we pick
out of seventeen thousand.
Tobacco and Curry Leaves

I am from the West Virginian hills
but I have traveled to hot wastelands
where the cracked, brown earth thirsts for water.
I have traveled to hard cathedrals
where the gray, cold stones
never feel the sun's golden warmth.
And I have traveled to humid coastlines
where the deep blue stretches to the white horizon.

I have seen the Malaysian hospital
where my mother was born
its pink plastered walls now crumbled,
its wooden steps in splinters.
Heat has cracked the once solid windows.

I have run through the streets where my father was a boy.
Inhaling Indian dust, feeling my skin
blacken under the sun, headily placing my feet
on brown soil, where my father once stepped.

I am a hill-billy. I am a Brahmin.
I have worn straw hats and cowboy boots
while my friends rubbed sweet tobacco.
I have lounged on porches playing guitar
while the paint peeled off jalopies sputtering by.

I have sat in church among women in gingham dresses
and men in blue overalls singing praises.
I have adorned saris and bindi in ancient Hindu temples while the Ganges River hummed by.

I am West and East; I live among pick-up trucks
and bull carts, breathe rhododendron and jasmine,
eat pizza and curry and seek the shelter
Of all my homes.
Division's Ghosts

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of this creed -- we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."
-Martin Luther King, Jr.

I. Mentally the Negro is inferior to the White." — Encyclopedia Brittanica, 11 ed., 1911

(Ghosts are colorless).
He squats, surveys his dead
black body, watches white men
walk away. Jerks his gaze
over his bloated face, bullet hole.
Cotton gin enslaves his neck.

II. Sexual Deviations: Homosexuality. Even though many find their practices distasteful, they remain unable to substitute normal sexual behavior for them. — DSM II, 1968

(Ghosts are sexless).
He sighs, turns his back
to his blood-caked face.
Each red streak spells faggot.
His body, a dangling scarecrow
against a fence of intolerance.

III. "I do not think witchcraft is a religion." — George W. Bush, 2000, when asked if Wicca should be banned from recognition.

(Ghosts serve the same Spirit).
She peers at Good Christians
burying her battered body –
closed casket, Cross included.
Our God reigns, they sing.
They tightly pack the dirt.
Jonathan Reese

To Those It Concerns

Dear Corporate America of Past and Present:

It has come to my attention that
we communicate through things –
things you make and we buy.
Money is a linguist.
It translates years of evolved dialect.
Its green represents our black voice,
and its absence is laryngitis.
Math is the universal language because it gives us the power
to add dollars and cents, in exchange of currency.

Dear Philosophers:

Allow me to answer your age-old question.
We are the trees from over seas,
bearing our strength as leaves.
Even if you were around,
if our trees fell, they wouldn’t make a sound.
R&B, Soul, Funk, Jazz, and Hip-Hop would be silenced.

Dear Darwin, Freud, Nietzsche, Marx and political assassins:

We are the eternal chain gang,
linked by our ancestors and their past pain.
Our climb up the evolutionary latter is spiracle—
forming double helical patterns that look like springs.

Oppress and repress us,
and experience recoil,
the recoil of red anger, black aspirations,
and green envy.

We’ll shoot too.
Shoot beyond
our Crispus Attucks, your Abe Lincoln,
our Martin Luther King, your John Kennedy
our Malcolm X

We will shoot up higher than heroin
and far beyond the three-point line.

Nigga huntin’ season is over,
and we’re taking the soiled white sheets cause it’s laundry time.

Dear Brothers and Sisters:
We communicate through things,
things they make and we buy.
Guns, alcohol, ...drugs —
The American Dream.
College Kids

We all went together
to the bar down the way
in the so-called hood.

We all passed the grown men
on the curb drinking 40 ounces
and playing craps.

We all saw the homeless woman
holding her two children
very close to her bosom.

We all saw the vacant lots,
which were filled with decaying trash
and broken glass.

We all felt the despair in the air
and saw it on the faces
of all the children.

But after the drinks and
the laughs we all went back
to our dorm rooms.

And when asked the next day
did we want to do community service...
We all did nothing.
West Memphis fishbowl shatter

A green Chevy Nova with a small “Just Married” sign in the back window and a solitary tin can rattling from the back bumper pulls in front of a duplex. The street is lined with mirror image houses, lined up like butterflies around the Bethlehem Steel plant that stretches throughout Lackawanna, just south of Buffalo. A man gets out and hurries around to the other side to help a woman out of the car. The chivalrous act, and his slight bow upon opening the door, makes her blush and smile, and they kiss lightly before walking hand-in-hand up to their first house. Young and anxious, that evening he walks to the mill for his first job, and she begins to make their new house a home, placing mementos and photos around the living room. At the end of the street next to the mill, an island separates the lanes of traffic, and there on a marble block, is perched a bust of Christopher Columbus.

Most of Bethlehem’s buildings will be torn down in the 80’s. And because of Love Canal, the land will carry the stigma of poisons lurking in the soil and the massive concrete foundations. Columbus will gaze valiantly out over a barren wasteland surrounded by a barbed wire fence, sailing headlong into a sea of emptiness. Scrap piles and weeds, the only thing between him and Lake Erie. But in 1974, old Chris smiles as he watches the progress — the smoke stacks belching foamy white clouds, the men pouring in and out of the plant, the barges filled with steel heading out to the world.

Working on third shift, the pay is good and the job is easy, and the man holds onto the hope that he will get transferred to days. Occasionally he recalls old war films he’d seen in grade school, the flow of molten steel in forms often compared to the circulatory system — the steel was the lifeblood of the machine that would win the war. But the once mighty Bethlehem has grown too large, become too inefficient, and the works begin to wither and die. An old enemy returns. The Japanese are making steel cheaper and better, and the man gets laid-off.

Others in the neighborhood get laid-off too, and most meet at a local bar and talk for hours, discussing whether they’ll get called back. The guys close to retirement are angry, and their sons with young kids, a new house, and car payments are scared — everyone is upset, and blaming the Japanese offers no solace. Everyone carries their feelings like a tumor, looking to either drown it or find a way to hack it out — most do both. As the sky turns violet with the deepening twilight, old grudges and hostilities find an accomplice in the alcohol consumed, and arguments and fights break out.

The man returns home with seven stitches and a dozen roses. The thread holds back the warm fuzziness in his hand, but there is no restraining the woman’s fury. She threatens to move back in with her parents if he doesn’t have a job in a week. Dawn breaks. The man visits a friend of the family and is offered a job in a suburb north of the city. Dusk settles. Sitting in his only suit, the suit he got married in, the man listens as the bank manager talks about the mortgage. The man hears thirty years. He’s only been alive for twenty. Looking over, he sees the woman smile at him. He attempts a smile, fails. She reaches out, grabs his hand, and rubs the bandage softly as if to say, forget about last night. I love you. Let’s start again.

Bob awoke in a darkened room with a dry mouth and the smell of a dusty heater coil hovering around him, a slight burn, not yet full combustion. Twelve hours of driving had left him with a feeling of perpetual motion, and even in bed Bob still felt as though he was moving, all his possessions packed in the U-Haul providing a tangible momentum he couldn’t escape. He thought about the dream. He’d never talked with our dad about working at Bethlehem, and didn’t ever recall seeing a scar, no outward sign of harm done. As Bob closed his eyes to try and get some sleep, he heard a noise, this one from outside. There are some noises that are unmistakable, and the back of a U-Haul opening is one of them: the steel wheels on the steel track, the spring-loaded rumbling. He looked over to my bed, where I was breathing a tiny snore over the constant hum of traffic on the interstate, blind and naïve like I’d been for so long.

There were rational options available to Bob, but the philosopher had settled his bill and ambled off to the Mississippi River to ponder the Tao of water, and the warrior had arrived in his stead. Bob was already out of bed searching through boxes we had brought in from the car that we were towing. We were worried about someone breaking into it, and if the philosopher has stuck around, they could have discussed that decision, but Bob had found what he was looking for. There it was, in a box of miscellaneous things, the baseball bat we had used a decade before with our father while dreaming of stardom.
Bob’s mind ignited as he thought of those failed dreams, his failed relationships, all the things he was trying to leave behind. The philosopher might have said Bob was running away. Opening the door slowly, he felt the primal shock of cold and fear in his gut; he gripped the bat tighter.

A staircase leading to the second floor was located right outside the door, and Bob crouched behind it and watched. It wa a three-man operation, a three-penny opera of thievery. The halogen lights illuminating the parking lot provided sharp images and crisp, empty shadows. Three young black men, they couldn’t have been older than Bob, went about the task of taking his belongings. The guy carrying Bob’s computer to the truck was wearing all black and an orange wool cap. Walking from the U-Haul to the pick-up truck, he didn’t durry, didn’t seem to care he was altering a person’s life.

Shivering from the cold, Bob looked down at the bat, made for Little League. There were three of them, and Bob knew he couldn’t do anything, and the anger began to recede. Examining the bat, the worn handle, he remembered those evenings when our father would come home from work and take us to the park to teach us how to hit, catch, and throw in the dwindling daylight. The thought of our dad brought with it a wave of memories – what else had he taught us?

At mid-semester break, our parents drove to visit Bob at school for a day. They were proud he was doing well in his first year; high school had not been easy for him. As they sat in his dorm room, a friend came by with a picture from a party – Bob with a beer and his arm around a black girl named Maria. The rest of the day our father didn’t utter another word. Two decades of repression had been exposed to the light of day and it closed off his throat, almost paralyzed him.

The next weekend, he called and ordered Bob to come home so they could discuss the situation, but very little talking occurred. That photo set off a shockwave that ripped thorough our family. The fault line that was hidden beneath our suburban happiness reached the surface. At the time I was in high school and still believed our father was always right. I had never known a black person, never had a girlfriend, and didn’t know that when two lovers kissed, the eyes were closed because what was felt inside was important. It wasn’t until I went to college and pulled off our dad’s filters, that I realized I had been wrong. Bob and I talked it out; I apologized and he forgave me. But that weekend, both our mother and I took the path of least resistance and didn’t say anything. We watched our father ask Bob if he loved Maria, and watched him say yes. The punch hit Bob square in the eye and turned it black, and our father hated that too.

Hunched on the floodplain of the greatest river on the continent, Bob was jolted out of his vision by a bang. Looking up, he saw his safe being placed on the bed of the truck. As he watched his possessions being stolen, he felt the distinct void of his past, felt Maria saying she couldn’t be in a relationship with him because of his family. With each breath he could feel the resistance of the precarious future in the dense cold air.

Bob imagined our families’ reaction upon hearing about the burglary, our grandparents saying black were no good, and our father feeling as though his prejudice was somehow justified. A rage coursed through Bob, and he couldn’t wait any longer, he had to stop this. Moving gracefully on the balls of his feet, he walked silently to the pick up truck. They can’t drive without a windshield, he thought. Coiled like a snake, the bat was his open mouth and fangs, his rage and fear were the venom of his bite. Through the tunnel vision of his anger he took aim at the window. He connected. The window exploded forward into a million rock-salt emeralds.

One of the burlars jumped from the back of the U-Haul and yelled “what the fuck!” and pointed a gun at Bob. The metal of the gun winked in the bright light as the burglar waved his hands. He seemed as scared as Bob was, and kept repeating “what the fuck!” over and over. It was the first time Bob had seen a gun in person; it seemed so small. Dropping the bat, Bob put his arms out, palms extended outward, his chest heaving with deeply drawn breaths. All he could think was, I don’t want to die.

Startled by the crash of the windshield, I awoke and saw Bob’s bed empty. Groggy and frightened, I walked to the window and pulled back the curtain. There, next to the U-Haul in a pool of light, as if lit by a flashbulb illumination, I saw a photo: a guy in an orange wool cap, a pistol pointed at Bob standing with his hands out, puffs of labored breaths streaming from both men, a finger on a trigger. I’d like to say I saw the burglar put down the gun. I’d like to say they talked it out, got some beers, sat someplace warm and traded stories about how things were coming up in the suburbs, making it in the projects, how they ended up there that evening. I wish I could. But the desk attendant had heard the glass shatter, saw the scene playing out on the security camera, and called the police.
As I ran out of the room, fear gripped my stomach so tightly I began to urinate. Red and blue flashes filled the darkness as a police car screeched around the corner of the motel. I stopped a few feet from the door and watched the burglar turn and point his gun at the approaching car. It stopped and the officers emerged and took position crouched behind their open doors, their guns pointed back and yelling, “drop it!” for a long time no one moved, the cops still screaming. The burglar moved forward, and a shot ripped through the night.

The next day Bob and I continued on towards Los Angeles. He hadn’t talked with the press, and as if confessing, began to recount the sequence of events to me. Kneeling there on the pavement, he said he wished he could have told the burglar about Maria and his father; explain that this wasn’t about his possessions, somehow undo everything. He began to sob softly and I put my hand on his shoulder and began to cry with him. And as we drove towards the setting sun, I stared out at the approaching hills of west Texas and began to recall the events that had played out in front of me. Each time I saw the burglar fall in my mind’s eye, I knew I would never be young again, and could feel our family being polarized further, drifting deeper into a coma of prejudice and fear.
Fiction. Second Place. Carnegie Mellon University
Jaime Johnson

Ole Sammy’s Ride

Samuel was sick and tired of funky people on his bus. Samuel took pride in his bus. Everyone at the station knew that no. 6339 was “Ole Sammy’s” ride. He made rounds of the bus everyday he worked before and after his shift, to make sure there was no litter on the floor or graffiti on the blue vinyl seats. He’d been driving the same bus for close to ten years now, ever since they re-vamped the buses and brought in those sleeker more streamlined models. Samuel was one of the first drivers to see the new buses and when he saw no. 6339, he knew that he and that bus were gonna spend some quality time together. For Samuel was a superstitious man, and June 3, 1939 was his wife Linda’s, day of birth.

Ever since Linda died Samuel worked a double shift Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. He didn’t mind the work; it helped him take his mind off Linda’s passing and the empty apartment to two of them had shared. One thing he hated, though, were the kids who rode the bus to St. Matthias each morning and afternoon. They liked to joke with him and they always stayed at the very front of the bus, jammed in the first half of the bus as though a fresh batch of AIDS had been sprayed onto all the vinyls seats past the double doors.

Samuel grabbed the microphone and shouted to the masses clustered behind him, “Move to the back of the bus people! It’s too hot for y’all to be crowed up behind me. Now git to the back!”

The large group of uniformed teenagers pushed and moaned their way down the aisle to the empty space at the back of the bus. Samuel muttered to himself, “Damn Catholic school kids. They think they own the damn world. You’d think with all that money they mammas and daddies spent on their education, they’d be able to read or sumthin’. Can’t read that simple sign that says ‘Please move to the back of the bus.’ Shoot, I was smarter than that when I was their age. I…”

“Hey Sammy, stop ridin’ our asses! We moved to the back of the bus old man,” one of the particularly rambunctious teenagers shouted. Samuel forgot to turn off the microphone and had broadcast his diatribe to the entire bus. He didn’t care. He was glad they heard just how stupid he thought they were. He was tired of feeling like he was driving Miss Daisy. Tired of feeling like he was a personal chauffeur to a bunch of spoiled white kids. Samuel shook his head and gritted his teeth at the informal way the youth had addressed him.

“Young man, I would appreciate it if you would not speak to me so casually. I’m old enough to be your grandfather, and you best treat me with some respect.” Samuel met the gaze of the teen while he made his declaration.

“Yeah Sammy, whatever.”

The kid went back to talking with his friends. Samuel looked at the child. He was a little one; one of those kids whose mouth was bigger than their body. He was about the height of the girls and at least three inches shorter than most of the boys. Samuel saw the tallest boy shake the little smart ass and say, “Sure Jason. Yea I’m sure you can get Rebecca Waters to go to prom with you. Just tell her that both men and women look stylish in platforms.”

“Shut the fuck up Tony. Yeah, that must be why Sheila went to movies with me the day after she dumped you. Yeah, it must have been the platforms.”

“Sheila is a ho. Everyone knows that. That little slut would date your grandmother. Hell, she’d even fuck the bus driver.”

All the kids laughed and looked up at the front of the bus with expectant looks on their faces to see if Samuel heard. He called out the next stop and pretended like he hadn’t heard the comment. They did the same shit everyday; basically the same joke too.

“Next stop, Penn and Negley. Penn and Negley, the next stop.”

Samuel sat back in his seat and rested at the red light, anxious for the St. Matthias stop to hurry up and come. He closed his eyes and started to count. Usually by the time he reached twenty-one he would open his eyes and the light would have just turned green. His eyes were still closed when he heard horns blasting. He opened his eyes and pushed his foot down on the accelerator. The teens lurched forward and fell into each other. Some were still laughing and some were cursing Samuel. They hit a pothole and Jason fell on the floor. Samuel tried to stifle laughter. He grabbed microphone and said, “Sorry for the turbulence back there. You can get off the floor now young man.”

Tony helped his friend up. “Ha ha. You got clowned by the bus driver!”
Jason’s sullen face was miles away from smiling. “I don’t know why the hell you all are laughing, that damn bus driver almost got us killed! Didn’t you see his face? He was sleeping at the light! What if he would have fallen asleep in the middle of an intersection? He would have gotten us all killed.” Jason turned to face the bus driver. “You almost got us killed and then you try to joke about it?! I’m so gonna have your job. Wait until I tell my father what happened, he’s gonna...”

“I was just resting my eyes young man. Calm down, you weren’t going to die, you just fell.” Samuel rolled his eyes and cursed the traffic ahead of them. It was going to take at least another twenty minutes to get to St. Matthias and he was getting damn tired of hearing the punk rant.

“Where did you get your license? Was it just one of those mail away certificates? I can’t believe they let old people drive buses. Don’t they know how dangerous they are?”

One of the girls said, “Chill Jason. We don’t want to get kicked off the bus.”

The kid just continued, blissfully oblivious to the girl’s plea. “Why don’t you just gt a job flipping burgers or shining shoes? That way no one can get hurt.”

The rest of the students were nodding and chuckling, agreeing with Jason.

Samuel stopped the bus with a jerk that sent all the kids flying to the floor the second time that day. The short skirts of the fast-tailed girls flew up to their waists and boy’s ties were flipped over their shoulders or turned askew.

“Young lady you had an excellent idea. All of you get the hell off my got’ damned bus.” Samuel spoke in a rumble. He kept his voice level and clear. He opened the door, stoop up, and tossed their book-bags onto the paper cup littered sidewalk. He had stopped about ten blocks from St. Matthias and knew that the kids were gonna despise walking those eight blocks in the depressed Black area before they reached the lush green shrubs of St. Matthias. The city was segregated into very distinct districts. There was a good area, then a bad area, good neighborhood, bad neighborhood, St. Matthias was on the border of good and bad neighborhoods. Samuel relished the thought of the dejected teenagers cautiously walking through East Liberty, divesting their gaze and clutching their bags, praying no mean Black person would come up and talk to them.

The few riders who weren’t going to St. Matthias were rolling their eyes and huffing at the unexpected stop. One old White woman spoke up, “Hey Sammy, don’t you think you’re being a little hard on those kids. You can get in a lot of trouble for doing this.”

Samuel, turned around, “Stay out of it Mable. I’m not going to be second guessed on my own bus.”

“But that’s a really bad neighborhood Sam. Last week there was a drug bust just around the corner from here.”

“Yeah, and last month there was a drug bust at St. Matthias. They’ll survive.”

Mable shut up and pulled her cane closer to her body, eager for her stop to come.

Samuel sat back down in his seat and closed the doors.

“Next stop Centre Avenue, Giant Eagle, and Shadyside.”

Three days later, Samuel was at home on a Wednesday. He got the news earlier that day that he had been “let go for the rude manner in which he handled a remediable situation.” He was sitting in his cramped living room, in his undershirt and boxers, feet propped up on the coffee table watching The Price is Right. Samuel yelled at the screen, “There’s no way Uncle Ben’s Wild Rice is five dollars you idiot! See this is why I don’t like White people. They act like some damn fools. Every Black person in the world knows that Uncle Ben’s Rice ain’t no more than $3.99. Shoot, even the bums on the street know that Uncle Ben’s Rice ain’t no damn five dollars! Wasteful White people. They wouldn’t know a bargain if it bit them on the ass.”

After his outburst Samuel realized that he had finally become a crotchety old man. He knew he wasn’t always like this, and he damn sure wasn’t like this when Linda was still alive. He used to laugh when his grandfather would swing his cane at one of his cousins or when he would yell about his cornbread not being warm enough. His grandmother would always mutter on her way to the stove, “Grumpy old man. Doesn’t he know that if you wait until the end of the meal to eat the corn bread, it’s going to be cold? He does this every night.” Samuel stretched out his arms and propped them up behind his head. He was going to enjoy this new phase of his life. He always envied old people in that they could always say and do whatever they wanted. He lived his life. He put up with the brown nosing and the “yessir’s” and “no ma’am’s” for over sixty years. The time for ass kissing was over. Samuel was a liberated man.

Samuel was in the middle of Judge Judy when he heard a knock on the door. He was still in his underwear and was about to grab his robe when he remembered that he was old now and could do whatever the hell he felt like doing. So he walked on over to the door and yelled, “If it ain’t Dorothy Dandridge come back from the grave, you’d be best to leave me alone!”
“Mr. Samuel Jones? Is that you?”
Samuel peeked out the window and saw a White man in an expensive suit. The man was about 20 years younger than Samuel and right at his side was the smart ass from the bus. “What in the...?”
Samuel ran back to his room and grabbed his robe and walked slowly back to the front door as he dressed himself. He opened and asked “How did you get my address?”
The kid blushed and looked down at the floor seemingly eager to get this encounter over with. The older man spoke up. “I’m sorry sir, to bother you sir. My name is Daniel Collins. I’m Jason’s father.” The man motioned toward his son and continued, “I got your address from your place of err, employment.” Now the older man looked embarrased.

“So they told you that they gave me the pink slip, eh?”
“Ah, yes, Mr. Jones and I am incredibly sorry about that. I came here to apologize for what my son here said.
It was truly inexcusable. He should have known better than to have disrespected you like that.”
Samuel smiled at that last comment. “I see.” Samuel turned to Jason. “Looks like you father had a different view of the situation than you did.”
Jason looked down at his shoes.

“Mr. Jones, I’d like to help you somehow. They told me at the station that you’d driven that bus for almost thirty years.”

“Would have been thirty in December.”
The man looked down, “Ah yes, well I wanted to come in person and tell you that I asked them to reinstate you.
It’s truly ridiculous for you to have lost your job over such a matter. My son was in the wrong sir. Please let me right that wrong.”

Samuel sighed and looked down at Jason. He was watching the street with an anxious expression on his face.
Samuel looked out into the street and saw two young men around Jason’s age waking to the corner store. The had on baggy jeans, Timberland boots and big bubble jackets. One had on a blue jacket and the other had on red.

Samuel shouted, “Hey Michael! Get over here.”
The boy in the red jacket put up his index finger to the other boy and jogged over to Samuel’s stoop.

“What’s up Mr. Jones? You got company?”

Jason was shrinking away from Michael and Mr. Collins stood with his hands behind his back. Samuel introduced them.

“Michael, this is Jason Collins and his father Mr. Collins. But enough about that. You need to stay out of
grown folks business! I called you over here to go to the store for me, not to snoop in my personal business.”

Samuel went back into his house and grabbed some change off the end table. “Get me some Black and Milds. And you better
bring back my change.”

“Alright Mr. Jones. You many wanna close that robe you wearin’. You showin’ the whole neighborhood your
business.”

“Shut the hell up, son and get my damn cigarettes.” Samuel swung his arm at the boy and shoed him off the
stoop. Michael laughed and jogged down the steps and over to his friend. They both waved and walked on to the store.

Samuel turned back to Mr. Collins and shook his head. Mr. Collins looked surprised and Jason looked terrified.

“You know, I don’t reckon I need any help Mr. Collins. Thank you for the consideration and thank you for trying to help
me but I really don’t want to work that job anymore. It was a good thing they fired me. I just didn’t know when to get
out myself.”

“See dad, I told you this was a waste of time,” the boy finally said. “Can we leave now.”

Samuel raised his eyebrow at the boy. “Excuse me young man, but when I was growing up children were to
speak when spoken to.”

“That’s impressive,” the little snot murmured under his breath.

Mr. Collins shook his head and started to say, “Jason! What is the matter with you? I know...”

“Look Mr. Collins, I really need to get back to Judge Judy sir, so if you please.”

Mr. Collins flushed. “I’m sorry to hold you up sir. I’m still going to talk to the bus company and try to get
them to change your dismissal to a resignation. I don’t want this to affect your pension.”

“Well, thank you so much Mr. Collins. Goodbye now.”

Samuel slammed the door and decided to purchase a cane tomorrow.