Two beautiful colours combined
are said to make another beautiful colour.
Red and blue makes purple,
yellow and blue makes green.
My skin was dark.
Being dark in Trinidad
was a symbol of beauty.
As the hot, tropical sun beat over my head,
I was not teased nor was I being insulted.
“What a beautiful personality your skin texture shows,”
my mother always said.
My brother was as dark as me.
With our wild-long nappy hair,
skinny legs, and knobby knees,
we would have forever
lost the confidence of being beautiful.
Our mother and father were set to leave us
for a place that we did not understand.
America.
My brother and I left a year after.
Leaving our six brothers and sisters,
our culture of Trinidad and Tobago
was lost only for a short-long while.
When we arrived,
the city of New York brightened above our heads.
It was cold.
From the first time I’ve seen it,
I’ve hated it.
Snow.
My skin tone dropped.
I was no longer the dark Trinidadian girl that I knew to be.
I was almost as white as the snow.
A pale Trinidadian complexion,
that was not a sign of beauty.
I loved New York, though;
it had so much multiplicity of people,
until we moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
A place where our culture was nonexistent.
A place where our own people
were just as illiterate as the white people.
I hated school so much.
My brother and I went to separate schools.
I remember my brother got into a fight.
He said somebody called him a black African nigger.
Our accents were very strong.
We would get remarks such as,
“Are you from Jamaica,” or
“How you get here? Did you come off a slave ship from Africa?”
The bad part about it was that the blacks
were saying it along with the whites.
I went home crying.
I told my mom what I wanted to be when I grow up.
I told her I wanted to teach Americans the word colour.
My mother looked at me and said,
“Child, if want to teach these Americans colour,
you have to learn how to spell colour first.”
My mother was right.
Here in America colour was spelled c-o-l-o-r.
My brother and I spelled colour c-o-l-o-u-r.
I’ve realized that I would not be able to teach Americans colour.
They wouldn’t understand,
not would they want to learn.
My mother had her ninth and final child.
Oh how beautiful my baby sister was.
With skin that read beauty,
with skin of poetry that spoke of beauty.
She was never teased through life about herself,
only embarrassed that her parents were Trinidadians
and not Americans.
My sister did not understand.
She was being brainwashed by these children
who did not respect our culture
or what we are.
I sat down and told her,
“What we are, true people,
what we are, true colour.”
My accent began to fade.
My brother and I began to talk like these Americans.
We finally became accepted.
Not really for what we are,
but now for what they’ve been hearing coming out of our mouths.
“You sound like us now.
You don’t sound like them filthy Africans any more.”
My brother became a U.S. citizen.
I never did.