

A GATHERING OF WORDS



POETRY & COMMENTARY FOR TRAYVON MARTIN

inner child press, ltd.



General Information

A Gathering of Words Poetry & Commentary for Trayvon Martin

The Poets & Writers of Consciousness

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*much Love & Gratitude
for all the Poets and Writers
from around the World
who took the time to share their
Consciousness . . .*

the World appreciates you !



Dedication

This Collection of Poetry is dedicated to
the Life and the Memory of Trayvon Martin
and all the Trayvon Martins of the world
who senselessly have lost their lives due
to Gun Violence and other acts of aggression.

May this consciousness become contagious
and effect the change that allows
our children to live with Hope and in Peace.

Trayvon Benjamin Martin

5 February 1995 ~ 26 February 2012



The Rose that Grew From Concrete

Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete?
Proving nature's law is wrong it learned to walk without having feet.
Funny it seems, but by keeping it's dreams, it learned to breathe fresh air.
Long live the rose that grew from concrete when no one else ever cared.

Tupac Shakur

Foreword . . . Loga Michelle Odom

Trayvon Martin Ignites World Healing

In 2008, 2,947 children and teens died from guns in the United States and 2,793 died in 2009 for a total of 5,740—one child or teen every three hours, eight every day, 55 every week for two years. Six times as many children and teens—34,387—suffered nonfatal gun injuries as gun deaths in 2008 and 2009. This is equal to one child or teen every 31 minutes, 47 every day, and 331 children and teens every week.” —Children’s Defense Fund

The Spark

“My role in society, or any artist's or poet's role, is to try and express what we all feel. Not to tell people how to feel. Not as a preacher, not as a leader, but as a reflection of us all.” --John Lennon, Musician, Singer and Songwriter (1940 – 1980)

A friend of mine said to me recently, “Michelle, you see things most people don’t see.” In silent response I thought, “I allow myself to look at things others don’t want to see.” I have been like that forever really, and I suppose there are complex psychological reasons that lead me to look man’s inhumanity toward man directly in the eye; just as I suppose there are a mix of complicated factors that stop others from doing so.

One of the curious things for me about the untimely death of young Trayvon Martin, is the way it has captured the attention, compassion, and activism of people the world over. What is it about the death of this young man that causes a largely blind and desensitized people to hold their gaze? We know part of the appeal of this case goes to the facts that were readily apparent: It appears Trayvon, just 17 years old at the time of his death on February 26, 2012, was returning to a home in a gated Sanford, Florida community, where he was visiting his father on a rainy evening, armed with only a bag of Skittles candy and a can of Arizona iced tea. A self-appointed neighborhood watchman, George Zimmerman, thought the young man looked suspicious, and from his vehicle, called 911 to report his concerns. Details of their encounter are unclear, but we know that Trayvon is dead, and while police arrived on the scene that evening and ascertained that Zimmerman was the shooter, he was set free.

For several weeks the case went largely unnoticed – just another dead black youth – one of the thousands who die every three hours - until this death caught the attention of Rev. Al Sharpton, who decided we all needed to take a closer look. At the point that Sharpton involved himself in this matter, Zimmerman was a free man who had not been charged with any crime. We all learned through the media that he stood his ground, as provided by law in 24 states, and it was not clear to authorities that any crime had been committed.

Trayvon Martin was African-American and his killer is a white Hispanic, and so some of the interest in this case is related to the racial dynamics it suggests. Other than black skin, what is it that made this young man appear suspect to his killer? Playing on that question, people of all racial and ethnic classifications around the world donned hooded sweatshirts, as Trayvon wore the night he was killed, suggesting, perhaps, this was not a case of pure racism. Yet try as we might to block the ugliness of the idea that this was a cold-blooded, race-based, unprovoked murder – it is difficult to escape such a conclusion.

For reasons we may never fully comprehend, the killing of Trayvon Martin has captured and held our attention for many weeks, and counting. After a great outpouring of concern and demands for justice, eventually George Zimmerman was charged with second-degree murder and presumably, he will be tried. No matter the outcome of his trial, when all is said and done, we may find that the death of Trayvon Martin was the spark that ignited a process of racial healing around the world – a process heretofore we have avoided with deafening silence, widespread blindness, and ice cold hearts, hands and bodies.

Bridging the racial divide is a huge agenda, but one we must eventually undertake if humanity is to reverse the dangerous course it is on, and find the will and the way to move forward. We must open our eyes and ears and hearts and minds and arms, to behold that which we would rather not see, to assess the damage done and ways in which the race divide keeps us trapped in fear, hate and turmoil, and to fashion a world, for once, where peace and love may flourish among all humankind.

Revolutionary Love

“The role of the revolutionary artist is to make revolution irresistible.” —Toni Cade Bambara, Writer, Documentary Filmmaker, Activist (1939 – 1995)

Recently I was engaged in a very intense, passionate, and lengthy conversation with a good friend of mine about the role I play on Facebook. Currently I am using this online space to direct attention to the issue of love through a series of posts I call the “Revolutionary Love Leadership Series,” where I build on the work of author bell hooks, who wrote a book called “Salvation: Black People and Love.” The topics reach deep into our souls and psyches, questioning our values and behaviors toward ourselves and each other, and have led to a number of highly emotional discussions.

My friend said to me that I was inciting a riot. It took several hours of discussion for me to understand that she was very upset that I had suggested to her that it would be good for everyone, black and white, to watch the 1971 film entitled “Goodbye Uncle Tom.” I only recently saw the film myself, and it is the most graphic display of the brutality of slavery I can even imagine – far more shocking than “Roots,” “Sankofa,” or “Amistad.” I said I believed if we would all watch this film, we would have a much better grasp of how we have wounded each other so deeply, why it has been so difficult for black people to move beyond the experience, and the patterns of relationship between blacks and whites that exist to this very day. Her perspective, if I captured it accurately, is that without guidance on how to handle such powerful images and memories, people will be incited to respond violently, and I am being irresponsible by sharing such information, without also providing leadership on what to do with the data.

Perhaps it goes without saying that I disagreed with her point of view. However, her comments have stayed with me, and led me to consider again the role and power of cultural workers. I was thinking, for example, about the image of the “starving artist,” and wondering why people who do such vital, moving, meaningful work for humanity are often not valued, treasured, supported, nurtured, encouraged and highly compensated by our fellow man and woman. We touch invisible chords in each other which expand our awareness of deep-seated needs and desires – spiritual needs - needs we very often do not know how to meet or satisfy – and would rather keep buried. Instead of stirring these emotions, and risking the potential failure of soothing our pain, as humans we often choose to “kill the messenger,” or leave our cultural workers to their private suffering as punishment for causing us to see things our brains have tried so hard to suppress.

Yet “man’s inhumanity toward man,” would appear to be as old as humanity itself. We duck and hide from the grotesqueness of the ways we treat each other, and go round in circles pretending as if we are moving forward on an evolutionary path – vilifying those who suggest that it might be more effective to behold the misery, senselessness, and destructiveness we bring to the world – so that we might identify means of changing the self-defeating course we are on, to one that honors all life forms.

The Western world is highly physical in the sense that we acknowledge those things we can perceive with our five senses and readily come to agreement about what we are seeing, hearing, smelling, touching or tasting. My experience, however, as a human being and cultural worker, is that there is another realm of reality that we cannot perceive with our five senses – a spiritual realm, if you will. We have a much greater challenge in coming to agreement about the existence of this realm and the validity and meaning of the insights gleaned therein. I see connections between things in the non-physical world – feelings, thoughts, words – and the ways in which these highly subjective aspects of reality connect to physical actions. My friend is correct, I believe, that exposure to provocative visual (written or verbal) stimuli, could lead some people to riotous action, especially people who have tried hard to avoid such images and bodies of knowledge, and are shocked into awareness.

Still, my goal as a cultural worker is to promote action that leads to life. My goal in promoting a vision of “revolutionary love,” is to bring more love into the world. People who respond to emotionally painful stimuli with violence, are not, generally, in my opinion, acting from a place of love. With perhaps the singular exception of self-defense, a violent reaction to truth is coming from a place of fear, hate and deep emotional woundedness – and may mean the recipient of the stimuli was not ready psychologically to receive the information, and therefore acted inappropriately or destructively.

Nevertheless, I do not believe it is the task or responsibility of cultural workers to limit human access to truth – our perception of those subjective, non-physical aspects of reality – or to attempt to control how people receive information and choose to act on it. Our responsibility is to share our truths – those visions and comprehensions we receive through our various artistic eyes, with the rest of the world. Yes, sometimes this will lead to shock and pain and unanticipated reactions, but my belief is that the more humanity confronts the reality of the ways in which we hurt each other – as well as the ways in which we can love each other – the less shocking, the less painful, and the less repeated our history will become for us – and we will be on a course that pulls us back from the very brink of destruction, and moving in a collective direction of life and love for all living things.

Cultural workers are powerful people. Let us be mindful of our power, endeavor to use it wisely, and press on. Humanity needs us – whether they know it or not, appreciate it or not, or understand or misinterpret our intent.

The Pressure

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” --Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963, U.S. Civil Rights Leader and Clergyman (1929 - 1968)

I have a particular fondness for the sexual analogy, I think because sex is something many of us have experienced and enjoy. Sex has the capacity to cause us to feel things, quite deeply, and to have an active awareness of our needs, pleasures and connections to other human beings – especially on a physical level. In some ways, the creative process is akin to a sexual experience for me – one with power to bring new life to the ways we see, connect to, and treat our fellow human beings. Like a mother’s labor, the creative process and life of an artist are often quite painful, and yet they yield such joy, pleasure, beauty and meaning in our lives and the lives of those we touch – it is a pain worth the pleasure.

One day I said to William S. Peters, Sr., whom I consider a creative mentor, that I have been reluctant to use my gift of writing because of the persistent stereotype that black people don’t read, and my desire to be in dialogue and intimate communication with a black audience and all oppressed people. Especially as a young woman, I wanted to be a part of helping to bring healing to this deeply wounded community, to help its members come to a new vision for our lives, and to assist in undressing and revealing hidden talents and abilities much needed by the world. In that all-knowing and fatherly tone of his, he said to me, “It is not your responsibility to worry about who reads your work. It is your job to create.” “Yes Bill,” I mean what could I say? :-)

The healing of humanity cannot be dissected into populations. We live on this earth together, as male and female, black and white, gay and straight, rich and poor – and we are connected in ways we cannot see or fully comprehend. For reasons that escape us, the particular tragedy and truth of Trayvon Martin’s killing, touched a chord in humanity, held our gaze, made us aware of feelings long suppressed, and led to an outpouring of compassionate love expressed through our art. Truth is often painful and ugly, and even more so when we attempt to deny all aspects of our reality; but when we allow ourselves to see it, almost inevitably we know, “I Am Trayvon Martin,” and we unleash our potential and the beauty locked inside.

To all the deeply passionate, creative and humanity loving souls Bill has gathered here to make a joyful noise unto Trayvon, I salute you. Through your poems, songs, paintings, films, speeches, sermons and other creative products, artistic endeavors, intellectual journeys and activist pursuits, you have already touched a nerve, and fanned the flames set off by the spark known as Trayvon Martin. It simply cannot be a sign of mental health for nearly 3,000 children to die by gunfire each year, as the rest of us stand by and feel nothing. Each child is precious and deserves our loving care.

While we may hope the pressure applied through our collective works will ignite and galvanize sustained momentum toward healing our world, it is not our job to concern ourselves with how far those flames will travel, what passions they will ignite, or what heartstrings will be pulled. It is our job to create. It is our job to allow Spirit to flow through us and to find its own way. I thank you for allowing yourself to feel, to see, and to reflect our greatest needs and desires, and for using your gifts seductively to entice us all into a more aware and loving existence. I thank you for having the courage to bring forth new life as we mourn the loss of our children to a desensitized world. Let's make love!

"Justice for Trayvon" and justice for all.

A luta continua,
With Revolutionary Love,

Michelle
May 1, 2012

Preface

Our deepest sympathies for Tracy Martin, Sybrina Fulton and Trayvon's entire family can never be truly articulated however we offer to each you our sincerest condolences.

Our Purpose

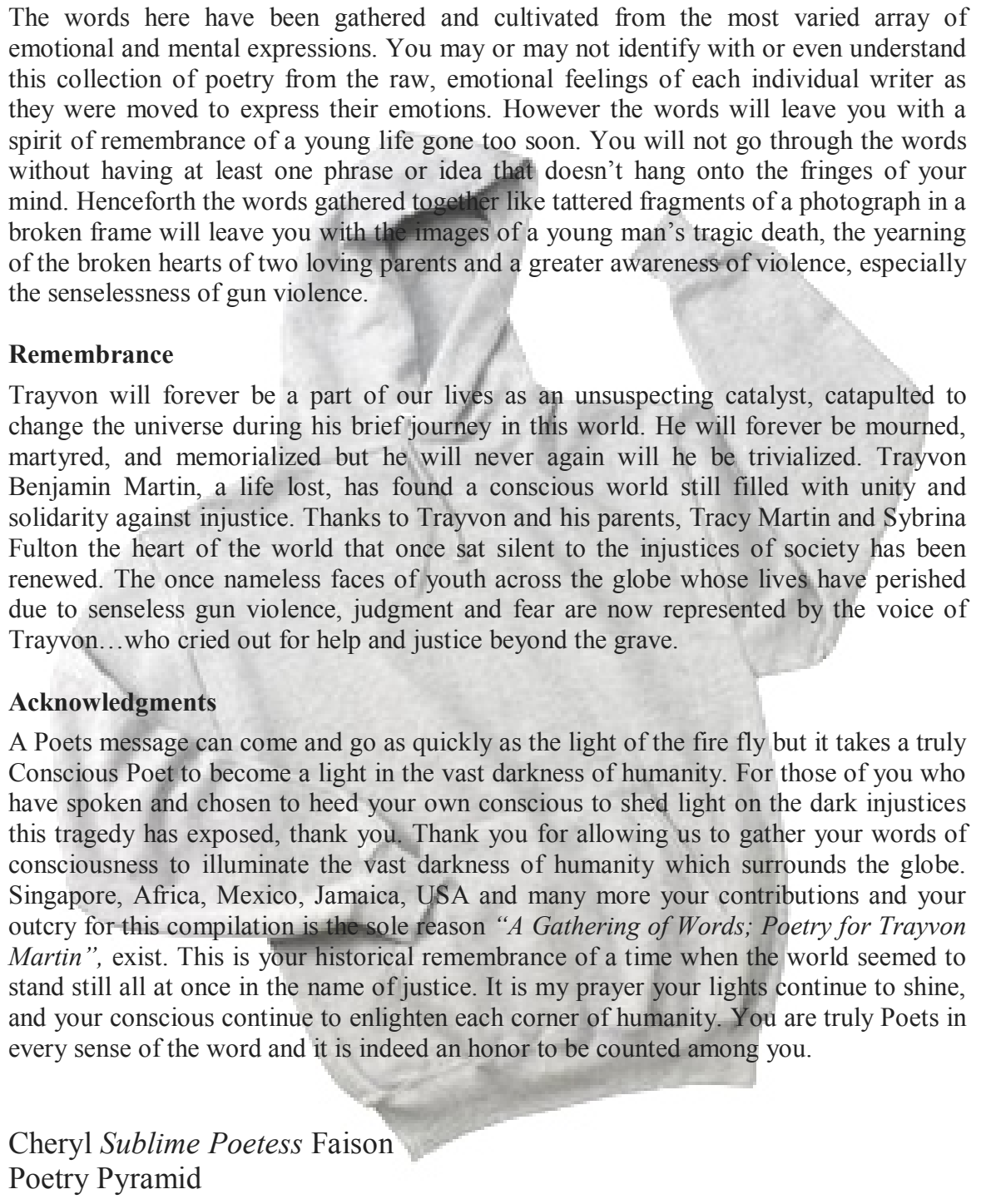
Perhaps "*A GLOBAL Gathering of Words; Poetry for Trayvon Martin*" would have been a more appropriate title for this preservation of a pivotal moment in world history. Briefly it seemed as though the world stood still so its inhabitants could gather and regroup our human relationships one to another. We have watched with great angst the despair, disillusionment, and heartache which Trayvon's parents, Tracy and Sybrina have endured over the last several months. Many of us wished we could lend an ear, a shoulder, a hug, compassion or words of comfort and understanding to them. Although in *actuality* we all can't be there for The Martin Family and do all those things, in *reality* we can. The *reality* of "*A Gathering of Words; Poetry for Trayvon Martin*" is a sincere effort to be there for his Family beyond all the superficial attention of the media and notoriety that wanes as we do what we humans do best...forget. Forget about Trayvon, forget about the senseless gun violence that took of the life of yet another innocent child on February 26, 2012 who, exactly eleven days earlier had celebrated his seventeenth birthday.

The Gathering

The Poets *demand*ed this platform and freely contributed their poetry to "*A Gathering of Words; Poetry for Trayvon*", as a creative memorial dedicated to the preservation of Trayvon Martin and the global significance of a tragedy that moved the world into action. We saw it unfold in the media over and over again; "Justice for Trayvon...Justice for Trayvon." The public demand was vocalized, often compromised, marginally realized but now is forever immortalized in these pages. The collective soul of these Poets and Writers brings the cry for justice beyond the street protests and the dialogue beyond the water cooler, extending the shelf life of remembrance past any expiration date. Trayvon's life may have been ended prematurely but his memory will now live on in history as a case study of humanity in the pages of this book.

Grief

Grief in and of itself is practically an unbearable emotion. Grief paired with the lack of understanding is even more painful. Along with his parents many of us have questioned the universe as to why Trayvon Martin, why this seventeen year old child was struck down at such a tender age. But no answer can suffice or fill the void in the hearts of his Mother and Father. All that remains are the tears of grief, the despair of heartbreak and anger tinged with frustration. We are left alone with all of those questions and thoughts which we may express through our deeds, actions or in this case words.



The words here have been gathered and cultivated from the most varied array of emotional and mental expressions. You may or may not identify with or even understand this collection of poetry from the raw, emotional feelings of each individual writer as they were moved to express their emotions. However the words will leave you with a spirit of remembrance of a young life gone too soon. You will not go through the words without having at least one phrase or idea that doesn't hang onto the fringes of your mind. Henceforth the words gathered together like tattered fragments of a photograph in a broken frame will leave you with the images of a young man's tragic death, the yearning of the broken hearts of two loving parents and a greater awareness of violence, especially the senselessness of gun violence.

Remembrance

Trayvon will forever be a part of our lives as an unsuspecting catalyst, catapulted to change the universe during his brief journey in this world. He will forever be mourned, martyred, and memorialized but he will never again will he be trivialized. Trayvon Benjamin Martin, a life lost, has found a conscious world still filled with unity and solidarity against injustice. Thanks to Trayvon and his parents, Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton the heart of the world that once sat silent to the injustices of society has been renewed. The once nameless faces of youth across the globe whose lives have perished due to senseless gun violence, judgment and fear are now represented by the voice of Trayvon...who cried out for help and justice beyond the grave.

Acknowledgments

A Poets message can come and go as quickly as the light of the fire fly but it takes a truly Conscious Poet to become a light in the vast darkness of humanity. For those of you who have spoken and chosen to heed your own conscious to shed light on the dark injustices this tragedy has exposed, thank you. Thank you for allowing us to gather your words of consciousness to illuminate the vast darkness of humanity which surrounds the globe. Singapore, Africa, Mexico, Jamaica, USA and many more your contributions and your outcry for this compilation is the sole reason "*A Gathering of Words; Poetry for Trayvon Martin*", exist. This is your historical remembrance of a time when the world seemed to stand still all at once in the name of justice. It is my prayer your lights continue to shine, and your conscious continue to enlighten each corner of humanity. You are truly Poets in every sense of the word and it is indeed an honor to be counted among you.

Cheryl *Sublime Poetess* Faison
Poetry Pyramid

Cheryl Faison is the Founder of Poetry Pyramid and a Talk Shoe Host.

Table of Contents

THE POETS

CHRISTENA ANTONIA VALAIRE WILLIAMS	1
HUNNI BLINN	2
POETRY OF MOTION AKA WYNNE HENRY	3
CHARLIE GEE	4
RENATA BROWN	5
LUNA SOOLAY	6
SHAREEF ABDUR-RASHEED	7
GABRIELLE DENIZE NEWSAM	9
KIMBERLY "D-TERMINED" MCLEAN	11
ROBERT GIBBONS	12
ALFREDA GHEE	13
KING KOBOKO	15
ANTHONY ARNOLD	16
TAMMY MARIE JONES	18
DAVE EBERHARDT	19
ROSALIND CHERRY	20
POETRY OF MOTION AKA WYNNE HENRY	21
COYOTE WILEY	22
CHARLIE GEE	23
CORA SCOTT	24
CORA SCOTT	25
NIPAPORN BALDWIN	27
RICHARD WARREN	28
SHEQUITA ANN PHILLIPS	30
ROBERT GIBBONS	32
KESHA FINESSE MURPHY	33
ALAN W. JANKOWSKI	37
ANTHONY ARNOLD	38
SHAREEF ABDUR-RASHEED	39
GARY MALONE	40
JILL DELBRIDGE	42

Table of Contents . . . continued

VICKIE ACQUAH	44
ARALIZ THEBARD RIVERA	46
WILLIAM S. PETERS SR.	47
K. MCGREGOR	51
FABIOLA SULLY	52
FABIOLA SULLY	53
JANET CALDWELL	54
LADY K-LOVE THEPOET INSPIRATIONALIST	56
ISHMAEL STREET	60
OPEYEMI JOE	62
XAIDEN / JAHDAI INK	63
DON SAVANT	64
OLADIPO KEHINDE PAUL	65
THORNNE E. XAIVANTT	66
SOUL Q ORIGINAL	67
BABY	68
K. MCGREGOR	70
ANTHONY ARNOLD	71
CLAYTON L. SANDERS	72
ROSEMARIE HOWARD	73
JAY ALEXANDER	76
MARIE LIM	77
THELYFEPOET	78
JUNE BAREFIELD AKA JUNE BUG	84
KELLI SONGBIRD GARDEN	87
QUISE "THE NOTEBOOK" WILLIAMS	89
UNSEEN POET 1229	91
ROSEMARIE HOWARD	92
CRAIG PINCKNEY REFOUR	94
MICHEALIX FORTSON AKA URBAN VODOO	95
LADY ELEGANCE	100
JON B CRENSHAW	101
LYRICAL MOVEMENTS AKA MONIQUE FORRESTER	103
PURIFY LOVE	106

Table of Contents . . . continued

ROSE PETALS AKA LYNNIE ROSE	107
REE CEE	108
URBAN VODOO AKA MICHEAUX FORSTON	111
MATTHEW WILT	114
TANTRA ZAWADI	117
CHERYL D. FAISON	118
WILLIAM S. PETERS, SR.	121

EPILOGUE

A WORD FROM JAMIE BOND OF UNMUTED INK	124
FROM THE MIND OF MONTE SMITH, STREET POET	125
A WORD FROM THE HEART OF JILL DELBRIDGE	126
A WORD FROM KELLI SONGBIRD OF P.A.I.N.	128
A WORD FROM BRUCE GEORGE	129
A WORD FROM SOLOMON COMMISSIONS	130
A WORD FROM GABE ROSALES	135
TSHOMBE SEKOU	139
FROM THE SPIRIT OF ROBERT GIBBONS	140
ROSEMARIE HOWARD A MOTHER'S PERSPECTIVE	142
PURIFY'S PERSPECTIVE	144
THE THOUGHTS OF SHAREEF ABDUR-RASHEED	145
WRITTENINPAIN AKA CARLOS LAVEZZARI	146
THOUGHTS FROM WINSTON WARRIOR	148
FROM THE MIND OF D. L. DAVIS	149
A CONVERSATION WITH CHERYL COOLEY	151
THE WORDS OF JON` B. CRENSHAW	152
MALCOM X : THE BALLOT OR THE BULLET	154
REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING : THE BIRMINGHAM JAIL LETTER	170
ANGELA DAVIS	183
STOKLEY CARMICHAEL	188
GIL SCOTT HERON : THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEVISED	202
THE POETRY OF TUPAC SHAKUR	204
MURDERS WITH FIREARMS	208



I could have
been many things...
a husband
father
lawyer
Doctor
but we'll never know...

Ivy

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The only thing that comes to a sleeping man is dreams.

Tupac Shakur

