



Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory Convention

Trafford Rape Crisis launch their
Black and Minority Ethnic
Women's Service

~ Still I Rise ~

***A Selection of Poetry and Quotes
by Black Women Writers***

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I Don't Care If Your Nanny Was Black

~ Afua Cooper

I don't care if your nanny was Black
that you ate grits for breakfast every morning
that you knew a Black girl in high school
and she was nice
I don't care
because Howard Beach is dead
killed by white youths
who got off free even though witnesses
testified to their crime
I don't care if your nanny was Black because
six Black youths are in jail
charged with raping a white woman
and Donald Trump takes out a three-page-ad
in the New York Times calling for their deaths
calling for the lynching of six Black youths
while the four white cops who raped Black woman
Tawana Brawley
are still on the street

so when you hear Black rage
feel Black anger
you raise your hands in exasperation and
white guilt pours from your mouth
and you start to tell the audience
that you are not a racist
because your nanny was Black
and you ate grits for breakfast every morning
and you knew a Black girl in high school
and she was nice
I don't care
you hear me I don't care
because for too long
we have held our pain in our very flesh
for too long we have held our wounded hearts
in our chests
for too long our eyes have seen
what we cannot bear to see
Our anger will rise like a red flood
and spread across this land
tear down monuments built on our blood
cast away false idols
and like Joshua, tear down the walls of this Jericho

How to Hold Your Man

~ Afua Cooper

Some of us were told when we were young girls
(directly and through osmosis), that if we did everything
right when we became women; that is
smile coyly

keep our legs sealed
never let men feel that we were smarter than they
learn how to cook
smile when we feel like crying
then maybe (if we were lucky) we could get a man
and be able to keep him.

But some of us were thinking beings and we thought
“surely we know women who did all these things and they
never got or kept their men and we saw within even our
own families, women who never adhered to the above bad
advice and they got men, were able to keep them and sometimes
threw them out.” And we kept on thinking and believing
that the pulse of our souls and the beat of our hearts
would guide us through the land of danger and hypocrisy.
Because the advice given insulted us to our very core. It
was meant to stultify the spirit, kill the heart, shrivel the
body and destroy the soul. We rejected it. And became
women who did not know our place. Became women with
ringing laughter. Became women who knew that our ultimate
aim was to seek our truth and live it.

More Bad Advice

~ Afua Cooper

We were also told that a sore foot man is better
than having no man at all
that a one-foot-man is better than no man at all
that the worse kind of man is better than no man at all
so young girls and women put up
with dangerous men
abusive men who beat the hell out of them
stupid men
sickening men
because we were told that every woman needs a man
and that we are nothing without one
so some of us sold our pride, our self-worth
in order to get this dubious treasure
we were not taught to see the shining beauty of
our souls.

A Litany for Survival

~ Audre Lorde

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours;

For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.

And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid
of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid.

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.

Coping
~ *Audre Lorde*

It has rained for five days
running
the world is
a round puddle
of sunless water
where small islands
are only beginning
to cope
a young boy
in my garden
is bailing out water
from his flower patch
when I ask him why
he tells me
young seeds that have not seen sun
forget
and drown easily.

Ambulatory
~ Becky Birtha

Six weeks later
the cast is cut off
then one by one
the crutches laid aside.
My life seems possible again,
my left leg encased
in a heavy steel brace
that feels like freedom.

I can pick the kale in my garden
I can carry it in my hands.
I can go out alone
I can take the bus
I can be on my own.
I can walk.
I can walk
I can walk away.

Cast of Many Colors

~ Becky Birtha

I flaunt my colors
bright in my face
intone them in
traces my
tongue retains
my features full
of my brownskin self
these closecropped
kinky curls
all of me
raw

I wear the labyris
and little finger ring
the double sign of venus
dress in lavender
the black the red the green
wrap my head in fecund prints
carry
the kente cloth

I came by the strength of
survivors,
of west African, shanty Irish
Catawba and Cherokee nations
my given name a taken name
 rebirth
 birthroot
taken for freedom times

I go by all my names
third world
black
woman of color
sister/hermana
afroamericana la
negra la
lesbiana

I fasten the words across my heart
raise placards
carry banners
I raise
my voice and my
clenched fist lift
my eyes and I see
visions

I am the chosen one:
I have chosen to be myself.

Poem for Flight
~ Becky Birtha

There will come a day –
it is not far off now –
when you wake up in the morning and know
you were meant to be happy
and that you want it
more than you want
things, or memories
any concrete place called home
all the strings of the past that fasten you,
more than you want
justice or pride:
your old clay image of yourself
or the faint chance
that all that has gone wrong
may still change.

It is you who hold
the power to change.

And whatever it is that holds you
whatever it is you think you cannot live without
the time has come to open your hands and
let it go.

Run
flee
disappear
break loose
take wing
fly by night
move like a meteor
be gone.

If you fear it will never be possible
think of Harriet
who traveled alone
the first time
who finally freed three hundred people
but first
had to free
herself.

Vocabulary ~ *Becky Birtha*

Sat in English class and Mrs.
Edith Osborne said
“There’s a word for this what is it
doesn’t anybody know?”
I looked around
the room full of
pale blank blinking faces
and nobody did.

So I raised my hand and said
“Poet’s license.”
Mrs. Edith Osborne said
“What?”
I said
“Poet’s license?”
Mrs. Edith Osborne
looked hard at me
and said real slow
“No.
That’s wrong.
It’s called
Poetic license.”

Too bad I didn’t know then
to tell her what I know now:
Mrs. Edith Osborne,
there’s a word for this.
It’s called
Racism.

The Healing Poem

~ Becky Birtha

There is a healing power in the sky.
For times when you cannot weep –
travel on foot
a morning's measure; find
a vast unbounded field of sky
then, spend the whole of a day
beneath it.
In your house
keep one window free
panes shining full with blue or gray –
you must never stray far
from the sky.

There is a healing power in the land.
When what you would change
you cannot change,
take tool to hand and
work the earth:
spade deep and turn it over,
let it crumble, sift out every stone.
Near your home,
set off a stretch of ground;
feed it, keep it
growing.
If you must leave the land,
do not leave for long.

There is a healing power in you
when reason fails –
you cannot overcome the problem
with your mind.
It is in your fingers
that lace and mend
in the bend of your back when you
swing the axe,
shovel coal or snow.
It is in your voice
singing, released
when your feet pick up
the pound of a beat, leap and whirl –
turn full around:
return to yourself.
Do not forget to
keep your powers alive.

The healing is in these words –
When you want very much
something you cannot have
you must begin again.

A Deeper Healing
~ Becky Birtha

This is a healing poem
for when you cannot dance
and cannot work
and cannot walk.
Concentrate on
the things you still can do.

Breathe.

Dream.

Love.

Change.

Names

~ Jackie Kay

Today my best pal, *my number one*,
called me a *dirty darkie*,
when I wouldn't give her a sweetie.
I said, softly, 'I would never believe
you of all people, Char Hardy,
would say that word to me.
Others, yes, the ones
that are stupid and ignorant,
and don't know better, but
not you, Char Hardy, not you.
I thought I could trust you.
I thought you were different.
But I must have been mistaken.'

Char went a very strange colour.
Said a most peculiar, 'Sorry,'
as if she was swallowing her voice.
Grabbed me, hugged me, begged me
to forgive her. She was crying.
I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it.
I felt the playground sink. *Sorry. Sorry.*
A see-saw rocked, crazy, all by itself.
An orange swing swung high on its own.
My voice was hard as a steel frame:
'Well then, what exactly did you mean?'

The Right Mix ***~ Kanta Walker***

We must have the mix right, she said
With a twinkle in her eye.
3 Whites, 1.5 West Indians and 1.4 Asians
That's what our requirements are
To make our Project viable
And to give it credibility.

Furthermore, we must promote the cause
The ethnic minorities – I mean the Blacks.
That's why we must have 1.5 West Indians,
1.4 Asians to 3 White workers –
To get the mix right,
And fight for the Cause!
After all Britain is a multi-racial society
And we are here to see justice done!

That's why I am prepared to work for no wages
Because I believe in the CAUSE.
My expenses do help me to run the car
And pay for my telephone
But compared to what others get
They are peanuts!

Do come and work for us, Sister
For you will help us greatly
And get our ratio right

After she had left
I reflected – I recognise
The face of the New Ruling Class
The one that wants the mix right
For a multi-racial Britain –
Is prepared to make sacrifices
To work only for expenses
For a *Good Cause*.

When Did You Cry Last? ***~ Kanta Walker***

When did you cry last? – he asked me,
Gentle, kind man with golden hair
And cornflower blue eyes uplifted waits
For the answer to merge his pain with mine!

‘I don’t know...I never cry – not much!’

Should I have told him that I dare not cry
For my cries will, if unleashed
Render oceans apart, become hurricanes,
Seething earthquakes, violent volcanoes,
And turn this world upside down in utter agony!

What should I cry for?
Should I cry for Palestine, Lebanon, Eritrea,
Nicaragua, South Africa, Ethiopia, Ireland,
Chile, El Salvador, Iraq, Iran or my own land?

Should I cry for autocrats, bureaucrats, plutocrats,
Aristocrats, Socialists, Communists,
Anarchists, Thatcherite Capitalists,
Or for Barbarians, Military Dictators or
For the oppressive nature of greed, power and domination?

Should I cry for my rape? – rape within marriage
Rape without marriage? Rape of my country?
By the British, by Americans, by others
Who rule by the bomb and the gun,
Who violate my brothers and my sisters?

Should I weep for the lack of love in my life?
Should I weep for centuries of subjugation?
For slavery, exploitation and the pain
Of hunger, starvation and humiliation?

Should I weep for my Love who abandoned me?
And is now in chains in his land – my homeland?
Don’t ask me when I cried last – Brother!
My tears will be a fearful sight to see
They may tear you apart and smash your sensitive
Heart to SMITHEREENS.

Still I Rise **~ Maya Angelou**

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

Innocent Victim

~ ***Pauline Omoboye***

The disfigured body of a sister was found
She was brutally battered and tossed to the ground
she was left to die...
no-one heard her cries...
and somewhere sits an animal
who calls himself a *man*
cunning in his disappearance
blood-stained hands
I just can't understand

It's almost unbelievable although it's clear to see
something drastic needs to happen in this society

Once again an innocent woman
was the victim of a murderer
someone...
somewhere...
someone must have heard her
her sisters sit and quiver
for this killer we must deliver
he's degrading
we must erase him
from our society

All the conferences and meetings
have still not found this criminal
people *move to action*
to allow justice her will
find the killer...
find the killer...
let us walk with our heads high
not sit waiting for another one of our sisters to die

We're too lenient to these maniacs
we need justice for these thugs
we're not playthings, we are *women*
not just here to be raped or mugged
Just because we feel like dancing
and we go out all alone
It doesn't mean we're looking for a man to take us home
It doesn't mean we're crazy
and it sure don't mean we're mad
we are women...and we're human
not just here for men to have.

Find the killer

Look At Me
~ ***Pauline Omoboye***

Look at me –
Go on look at me
I dare you to look at me, what can you see?
A woman who's lost her virginity?
Someone footloose, fancy and free?
Well –
Look at me
I'm asking you nicely
Just analyse my structure and poise
I'm not just a Black woman who's hurting
Or shouting creating a noise
I-am-woman.
And I'm aching all over
From the outside right to through to my bones
I'm crying
I'm shaking
I'm angry
I'm emotionally torn deep inside
No longer can I hide my feelings
And think only of my pride

Look at me.
I dare you to look straight into my eyes
There's no surprise
No hatred
No shame
Just pity, pity
Pity for those who remain ignorant purely by choice
Whom because they're happy and secure they ask for no more

I do –
I'm asking you.
Keep up the good fight
Help us all to unite
Keep up the struggle for emancipation so all women can be free

I'm liberated
And it's clear to see
Because I am me.

Go on look at me.

You
~ *Sua Huab*

You live
In a white-walled city
And have
White-washed opinions
And feel nothing.

You have
Clear cut conceptions
Of the situation
And you feel nothing.

You use
Diseased definition
To describe discrimination
You feel nothing.

You guide
Glib generalisations
Towards painful operations
And feel nothing.

But

You live
In a white-walled city
So have white-washed opinions
We know
Your misguided conceptions
Lead to misinterpretations
And diseased definition
Aids disaster.

Although you feel
Nothing
We feel
Despite your indifference

We feel
We feel
We feel.

Ode to a Bigot (Make Way for Our Liberation)

~ Sua Huab

i

I don't want you to look at me
I'll hide myself away.
I don't want you to harass me
So I'll go my own way.
I promise you I'll be so quiet
And I'll never show
My feelings of anxiety and resentment, no
I'll never bother you
I promise I'll be good
I'll never ever ask of you
More than I should

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But why should I behave like this?
Why can't I be free?
This face that I am seeing is different,
But it's me!
Why can't I just have my say,
And tell you how I pain?
Why can't I shout out aloud
And tell you all again?
I won't be silenced anymore –
My patience has run out!
You make me feel so sick inside
Because you never doubt
Your absolute authority

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(and now this starts to show)
Your views are going to ruin you,
But with them I will grow.
The only consolation of the way
You feel for me,
Is the fact that I have freedom
and free you'll never be.
Your bigotry is your lifeline,
Prejudice is your source,
Such blindness is so trying
and leaves no time for remorse.
I'll even offer pity
Because you feel this way
But make way for my liberation
In this state I won't stay.
Make way for our liberation,
We'll free you if we may.

Alice Walker

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.”

“No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow.”

“Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.”

“Writing saved me from the sin and inconvenience of violence.”

Audre Lorde

“The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.”

“And when we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard nor welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak.”

“I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own. And I am not free as long as one person of Color remains chained. Nor is any one of you.”

“When I dare to be powerful - to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.”

“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.”

“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.”

“My Black woman's anger is a molten pond at the core of me, my most fiercely guarded secret.”

“We cannot continue to evade each other on the deepest levels because we fear each other's angers, nor continue to believe that respect means never looking directly nor with openness into another Black woman's eyes.”

"If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive."

“Much of western european history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior. In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systemized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior. Within this society, that group is made up of Black and Third World people, working-class people, older people, and women.”

“Racism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance. Sexism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance. Ageism. Heterosexism. Elitism. Classism.”

“I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self.”

“Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion.”

“The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.”

“I am a Black Feminist. I mean, I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my blackness as well as my womanness, and therefore my struggles on both of these fronts are inseparable.”

“I write for those women who do not speak, for those who do not have a voice because they were so terrified, because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't.”

“What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable.”

Barbara Smith

“Black women as a group have never been fools. We couldn't afford to be.”

“Black women, whose experience is unique, are seldom recognized as a particular social-cultural entity and are seldom thought to be important enough for serious scholarly consideration.”

“One of the greatest gifts of Black feminism to ourselves has been to make it a little easier simply to be Black and female.”

bell hooks

"I want there to be a place in the world where people can engage in one another's differences in a way that is redemptive, full of hope and possibility. Not this "In order to love you, I must make you something else." That's what domination is all about, that in order to be close to you, I must possess you, remake and recast you."

"If any female feels she needs anything beyond herself to legitimate and validate her existence, she is already giving away her power to be self-defining, her agency."

"I am grateful that I can be a witness, testifying that we can create a feminist theory, a feminist practice, a revolutionary feminist movement that can speak directly to the pain that is within folks, and offer them healing words, healing strategies, healing theory."

Kimberlé Crenshaw

“It’s not about supplication, it’s about power. It’s not about asking, it’s about demanding. It’s not about convincing those who are currently in power, it’s about changing the very face of power itself.”

“...not all black women have silently acquiesced in sexism and misogyny within the African-American community. Indeed, many writers, activists, and other women have voiced their opposition and paid the price: they have been ostracized and branded as either man-haters or pawns of white feminists, two of the more predictable modes of disciplining and discrediting black feminists.”

“Women come from a whole range of backgrounds. If our visions of peace don’t include these differences, then our peace will be partial.”

“As long as we are imagining and fantasizing about a female President, why not fantasize about a truly intersectional feminist politics?”

Maya Angelou

“I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it.”

“We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.”

“You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.”

“If one is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform a million realities.”

“We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.”

“Segregation shaped me; education liberated me.”

“When you do nothing you feel overwhelmed and powerless. But when you get involved you feel the sense of hope and accomplishment that comes from knowing you are working to make things better.”

Nawal El Saadawi

“Danger has been a part of my life ever since I picked up a pen and wrote. Nothing is more perilous than truth in a world that lies.”

“I am going to carry on this fight for ever.”

“The most dangerous shackles are the invisible ones, because they deceive people into believing they are free. This delusion is the new prison that people inhabit today, north and south, east and west...”

“Men impose deception on women and punish them for being deceived, force them down to the lowest level and punish them for falling so low, bind them in marriage and then chastise them with menial service for life, or insults, or blows.”

“Now, although I am out of prison, I continue to live inside a prison of another sort, one without steel bars. For the technology of oppression and might without justice has become more advanced, and the fetters imposed on mind and body have become invisible.”

“True democracy obtains only when the people - women, men, young people, children - have the ability to change the system of industrial capitalism that has oppressed them since the earliest days of slavery: a system based on class division, patriarchy, and military might, a hierarchical system that subjugates people merely because they are born poor, or female, or dark-skinned.”

Toni Cade Bambara

“Revolution begins with the self, in the self.”

“Writing is one of the ways I participate in transformation.”

TRC
Trafford Rape Crisis