

**Volume 9, Issue 2
August 2016**

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**Guest Editor:**

**Brandon Stacy
Fort Lewis College**

**Special Issue:**

**Social Justice Poetry**

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**Introduction—Why Poetry Matters**

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**Keywords:** Activism, Poetry, Peace

**INTRODUCTION—WHY POETRY MATTERS**

Poetry matters. As one of the world’s oldest literary genre, poetry has a long tradition of contributing to public communication and changing the way people think. As an art form, poetry is a melodic means of expression that can resonate with nearly any audience and carry a variety of messages. Ranging from poetic music to elegies to slam events at community halls and coffee shops, poetry is currently part of our collective psyche. It gives voice to the voiceless and contributes to our transformation and experiences with conflict through projects like Jimmy Santiago Baca’s *Poetry Behind Bars* and publications from *Poetry Behind the Walls*. It is part of our social fabric. It is a vehicle for change.

The poems collected in this special issue are all by undergraduate students from two sociology courses during Spring 2016 semester at Fort Lewis College in Durango, CO: Introduction to Sociology taught by Anthony J. Nocella II and Social Poetry taught by Janine Fitzgerald. This special issue was edited by Brandon Stacy, an undergraduate student in Environmental Studies at Fort Lewis College. These authors demonstrate keen eyes for critiquing the world around them and better understanding different systems of oppression. Morgan Campbell demonstrates the personal growth that accompanies newly established skills of analysis and deconstruction. Margaret Chamblee questions the social practices that repress different peoples, especially those living on the margins, and questions the ideologies at play in the repression. Aama Harwood examines the role of poetry and writing as it connects to race and the myriad problems that exist around socially constructed concepts of race. Also examining race and social systems, Arianna Osmar gazes inward to question the role education plays with inequality and oppression. Elan Price draws on the physical being to question one’s agency and comes full circle with a transformation of self. Finally, Brandon Stacy reverses the traditional “I am” structure to locate himself within the context of race and appropriately ends this issue with a call to action.

Let Gil Scott-Heron’s words from his memorable “A poem for Jose Campos Torres” remind us of the power of poetry to help as grapple with the challenges we face:

I had said I wasn’t gonna’ write no more poems like this.

I had confessed to myself all along, tracer of life/poetry trends,

that awareness/consciousness poems that screamed of pain

and the origins of pain and death had blanketed my tablets and therefore

my friends/brothers/sisters /outlaws/in-laws

and besides, they already knew.

But brother Torres,

common, ancient bloodline brother Torres,

is dead.

 I had said I wasn’t gonna write no more poems like this.

 I had said I wasn’t gonna write no more words

down

about people kicking us when we’re down

about racist dogs that attack us

and drive us down, drag us down and beat us down.

But the dogs are in the street!

The dogs are alive and the terror in our hearts

Has scarcely diminished. […]

I had said I wasn’t gonna’ write no more poems

like this.

I made a mistake.

Poetry for many students is something that is never introduced to them or required in college courses. At Fort Lewis College in Department of Sociology, writing social poetry is assigned in courses and even exists as a course. The Fort Lewis College Department of Sociology is unique among sociology departments nationally because all our teachers strategically and deliberately foster a liberatory educational experience grounded in social justice/social activism. This empowering, active, reflective approach nurtures the mind, body, soul, and collective.

**References**

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**Todadile Repair Man**

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**Keywords**: Analysis, Reflection, Introspection

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**TODADILE REPAIR MAN**

Analysis
means deconstruction
followed
by reconstruction
into a new structure.

What a time of life this is!
With my head sometimes high
watching the sky,
and sometimes low
as I stare at the ground in front of me
as if I was unsure of where to step.

My mind is wracked
with anxiety
and fear.
But also joy
and serenity.
The wilds are abundant
in challenges
and blessings.

Worship has begun to creep
into my awareness
as I deconstruct faith
and what all this
God nonsense is about.

Sex is never far
from the picture.
I am beginning
to pick it apart
as well as society
and how I fit in.

Once, when I was young,
I took apart a computer.
I looked at all of the plastic
and metal
strewn across the ground
and didn't know
how to put it all back together
or what it meant
in the first place.

This time feels different.
I am aware of everything
that I am doing.
It is funny
how we grow
and our awareness
grows with us,
like water taking
the shape of a pot.

For the first time,
I feel I am becoming whole
through this chaotic
yet methodical
deconstruction,
categorization,
and reconstruction.

I am armed with a screwdriver
and pliers
and my long,
aimless walks through town
bear many parts
to take home and label
like a bug collector.

Look at all the pieces!
Think of all
I can construct
with all of this.
I rub my hands together
and get back to work.

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**I Remember**

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**Keywords**: Analysis, Reflection, Introspection

**I REMEMBER**

I remember when I was young
and always looking into the future
like a seer peering into their skrying stone.
Now I am older
and I'm looking back
peering into the rear view
as I drive forward.

Love is always incomprehensible.
It sits in my past like a mother goose
on a nest of eggs.
With each mental return
another hatches.
Look at the seeds planted by the past!

They explode into great trees
until a forest overcomes
my little shack in the mountains.
I am a hermit
in my garden
looking up to see the sun
and the rain clouds rolling in.

It's still fresh and I miss you.
But you were right.
It is time.
As the evolution rolls in
and we drift apart in the world
to seize ourselves
to truly master our inner life.

I look into my soul
and see an infinite land
of fertility and plenty.
It is never ending.
This is God's land
and his words whisper to me
as my hand writes fast to keep up.

With a shake of the head
I return to the earth
Which I ignored for so long.
As I cloud watched
and spied planets in the night sky.
I go to bed early and eat right.
I do my work.
I strive to live right.
I am like the monk of my life
and discipline is the catalyst
for stability.

Ah, what a life I live!
The air is like spiced wine
and you can see me
stumbling drunk through the streets.
The children follow me
with wonder in their hearts.
They sometimes whisper
and sometimes throw stones.
What a gift this curiosity!

Let it burn forever in my chest
As I let the child play
and frolic in the forest of my heart
On and on and on,
Like a pearl
lying at the bottom of the ocean
hidden from the harshness of the world.

My focus is on my breath
and the moment,
as I garden
and till the land
and plant new seeds.

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**Can You Hear Us**

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**Keywords**: Inequality, Discrimination, Classism

**CAN YOU HEAR US**

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

We are the black and the brown

The poor and the deprived

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

We are women, transgender and gay

Do you know that you reap the benefits from our deprivation?

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

We reside within your borders

Your land of the free and your home of the brave

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

Land of the free yet your barriers prohibit

Materialist visions of success with no opportunity to benefit

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

We reached for the American dream

Life, liberty, equal protection, instead, we got unequal distribution

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

You preach equality exclaiming this is why America cannot be beat

Yet you make your own people compete just so our children can eat

Can you hear me? Can you see me?

I am a single mother of three

Who turned to selling drugs just stay on my feet

Can you hear me? Can you see me?

I am a transgender woman turned prostitute and sex worker

Because your cultural construction said “Don’t hire her! She’s not human!”

Can you hear me? Can you see me?

You shot my son in the back just because he was black

Alcohol and drugs were the only things that helped heal me

I could not afford the “real” therapy

Can you hear me? Can you see me?

I am the woman whose husband beat her

But he was a cop, so nobody would listen

Can you hear me? Can you see me?

I am a Woman of Color who makes less than her and her and him

All because the color of my skin

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

We are the people of your country, the ones you swore to protect

Yet you classify us by class, gender and race instead of… human

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

We are poverty. We are deviants. We are everything you label us

But did you ever stop to think that you created us?

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

We carry the burden of the strain between the classes, the sexes, the races

You claim that our poorness, our femaleness, our blackness harms you?

Yet you remain rich and untouched, so how can that be true?

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

You tell us that our parents should pass on social values

But no matter what they do, you will still call us thugs and criminals

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

You create policies around “fixing” us

Yet it is you creating us

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

You are killing our children

We hear you. We see you.

Can you hear us? Can you see us?

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**What Matters**

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Keywords: What matters, Bigotry, All lives matter

**WHAT MATTERS**

I used to write poetry

Words would fall out of my mouth onto a canvas of flattery, imagery, divinity, and immortality

Now all I can think about, talk about, write about, is the latest

African-American brutality

The bigotry.

Of an armed race, consumed by corporate America

Breast-feeding off of social media, influenced by a factor threatening to Trump whatever is left of our so called freedom.

I am in shock. I grew up in a white neighborhood, I went to a white school, lived in a white town, and never knew….

Never knew race was a factor

Actually, that’s all I have been looking for after the knowledge that there were more mass shootings than there were days last year.

I have been searching myself to ask the question:

What do I think about race?

First thought: I’m not a racist. I don’t even see color. I recognize that out social orientation goes deeper than skin pigmentation. And when I look into the eyes of another, all I see is me.

Until I don’t speak your language,

understand your political vision,

your neighborhood,

your background,

your culture,

But I would like to.

Second Thought: But wait, I never really grew up with people of other race. Well, I did. But they aren’t the people being broadcasted, shot dead, on national television. No, they are the ones that are silently baring bloodshed, the ones that live on reservations, consumed by back luck and foreign occupation. The ones screaming for redemption while they waste away in a waste land that was once their promise land and their promised land. They are the ones I was told I was different from growing up. They are the ones that I was told it is whom I should rise above. Unknowing that I was engendering discrimination, for our divided nation of hatred.

Someone told me I should write a letter, since I am too far away to march for progress, but perhaps my skin color is what would allow this content to make it to Congress.

The irony of being a third generation American, coming from a family forced into immigration to speak on the behalf of the millions of abandoned Syrians, facing mass genocide of which my heritage can relate, but we won’t let them inside our borders or our states, because we are afraid their crisis.

Afraid that one of them is ISIS,

That if you have a bowl of M&Ms and 10% are poisoned, we wouldn’t take a chance at eating them.

The news flash is they pose a threat to national security

When really it is merely the propagation of many nationalities

being represented by one

And I happen to be a part of a one

The one that says this is time to stop

The one that will no longer stand for the discrimination,

the unkindly conduct of police forces

Instead, I am forcing a new era

Where Black Lives Matter

Muslim Lives Matter

Native American, Hispanic, Syrian, Israeli, Caucasian and all lives matter.

And when I walk down the street

I fear to hear the thoughts of another

Wondering do they hate *me* because of *my* color?

The segregation,

Elimination

civil war of our nation

is not a fight to keep terrorists out

but to propagate terror within

And when I hear the shout of another

I hear it in me

If you can’t breathe

Then I won’t

If your life doesn’t matter

than mine sure don’t

and I know I am not the first to say it

but we are not a nation of the free

So when someone asks me what truly matters I know, we are not that nation until we are we

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**Oppression of the People**

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**Keywords:** Oppression, Separate but equal, Social Justice

**OPPRESSION OF THE PEOPLE**

We call it separate but equal

But when will we realize this is just a sequel.

Families everywhere trying to stay afloat

But the government is sinking their boat.

Here on earth there are two separate meanings for wealth

Some who see it as lucky enough to attain their health,

Those seeking out their next dollar

Who can’t even afford that button up shirt with the fancy collar.

But what about those who abuse the system

Who lie and cheat, mirroring the food prism.

There by the sidewalk sits a black man

People walking vigorously past his empty beer can. While the man sits peacefully trying to rest,

The women rush by assuming he wants them undressed.

The blacks will be black and the whites will be white

But the problem is only one race can get the first bite.

And as for the uneducated

Well they are contrived to other ways of getting elevated.

But who’s to say college is the “right” life

Because so far it’s been a trife.

Paying for a brain

But where’s the lesson to sustain?

We aren’t all able, in fact 1.3 million of us are disabled.

Which turns into a graduate working under the table.

This world revolves around the social norms

So do they just expect us to transform?

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**Pulse**

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**Keywords:** Life,Existence,Metamorphosis

**PULSE**

Pulse

Fingers to throat

Fingers to fragile wrist

Pulse

Trees to roots

Subterranean aquatic breastmilk,

Thirst quenching bloodline

Pulse

Two legs lending life

Lifting loquacious lemmings

Pulse

Hands intertwined

Lightning down my spine,

One palm open to receive thunder

Roaring tiger of all my humanity

Pulse

Every birth is mine

Womb filled heartbeat

Shaking me free

Of illusion

Of solitude

Take me in your arms

Wet blue green brown

And lead me back to reality,

Enter me

As I enter you

Pulse.

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**Treadmill Ego**

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**Keywords:** Life,Existence,Metamorphosis

**TREADMILL EGO**

My heart

Pumping

Flexing

Rendering

Thick viscous blood

Through my veins,

Arteries,

With succulent oxygen,

My ego

Mine,

Drives each pounding step,

For a compliment,

That wink to my worth

A stranger’s gaze

Feeding my illusion,

Foxxy news,

The screen flashes,

Agony,

The visual stops at my eyes,

The hate,

I don’t let penetrate,

They run,

Bombs bursting in air,

*C’est la vie*

That’s not me,

They not I,

They cry not I,

Shattered families

Blown through,

Bodies broken,

They not I

This screen of separation, is parchment thin,

I push on,

Feet thundering

On a plastic runway,

That leads to nowhere,

I go.

For that sexual advance,

That’s sure to come

After I run

One more mile,

A disconnect,

With a sea,

Between me,

And they.

I feel nothing.

Not yet

*C’est la vie.*

Sit, wait, dive,

Breath into my body,

Deeeeep,

Into the subconscious,

Where light,

Where darkness…waits.

To splinter open my heart, one membrane at a time.

I feel it.

Every tear,

A baptism to reality,

Every fiery scream,

Reaching from the desperate spirit,

From another life,

I run no more to nowhere,

I am here,

They are me,

Family,

Skin raising, hair pimpled flesh,

It is my body,

Being torn,

Bit by bit,

My child,

My mother,

My father,

Grasping for one breath of recognition,

They are me,

Unity,

I lay my ego to rest,

Until the monster growls from its slumber,

Once more,

I am one,

You have one heart, I have one heart.

We have one heart.

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**The Woman**

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**Keywords:** Life,Existence,Metamorphosis

**THE WOMAN**

They told me I was smelly,

a child who wears tie dye,

whose parents have stickers,

on their bumpers,

"Support Organic Growers"

"Practice Random Acts of Kindness"

You are not the same,

Your scent is too strong,

I took that in,

a wound I would care for,

and cut open again,

when it began to heal,

Pizza face you are not good enough,

to come over,

to the multi-million dollar mansions,

that house our egos,

and are bursting at the seams,

but we will buy your weed,

if you teach us,

how to inhale,

as long as you are gone,

with the exhale.

I took that in,

a wound I would care for,

and cut open again,

when it began to heal.

He said he loved the way I kissed,

the best he had ever had,

it was my fault,

he said,

he couldn't resist,

why did I have to be so young?

he will meet me in the dark,

when the shops close down like eyelids on a drunk,

I am a secret.

I took that in,

a wound I would care for,

and cut open again,

when it began to heal.

Life begins to get infected,

festers and scars,

from trauma kept fresh,

a salve is needed,

a killer of pain,

the prick of a needle,

a liquid sedative,

like fire down your throat

burning the pain.

I see the goddess women in my life,

shining, sparkling, glowing,

I long to be like them,

radiating peace and beauty,

purity,

illuminating the path,

I want in,

I am jailed by my fears and lacerations of life,

that I keep fresh,

to drive my pain,

until I break,

into a thousand shattered pieces,

there is no skin left to puncture,

it is all scars, now the light has cracks to penetrate,

to brighten and clarify,

to wash,

with a baptism of tears.

The salty water cleanses my fractures,

as I begin to heal,

to transform,

to see truth,

to repair,

the damage,

inflicted on me,

by me.

My metamorphosis has begun,

I had to die,

to live,

I am the woman I wanted to be when I grew up.​

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**Who Am I**

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**Keywords:** Who am I, Whiteness, Social Justice

**WHO AM I**

Who am I? A spoiled little white guy?

Who denies? Definitely not I

Still I tried, but never had to fly

Across country, to say that I’m alive

The U.S… is stress to my demise

But gave me life, with a suite and a tie

Still I ride, while the women do the time

Their getting paid less, while I commit the crime

Forget the grind, make it right, for yours and mine

But still I’m blind, to the whiteness that gives me shine

Or maybe my green eyes

That gave me money, food, and no limit but the sky

Spit it wise, for the hypocrites that live the lie

Jobs I applied… never got denied

A lucrative step, in the come up of cries

Social justice, I advocate the high

People, People, listen to them sigh

I start the march, and ignite the pride

Set it off, cause the bellow is dry

Don’t judge me, I live and let die