

# PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

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# PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

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**Guest Editor:**

**Brandon Stacy**  
**Fort Lewis College**

**Special Issue:**

**Social Justice Poetry**

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## Introduction—Why Poetry Matters

Author: Erik Juergensmeyer  
Title: Associate Professor of Composition and Rhetoric  
Affiliation: Fort Lewis College  
Location: Durango, Colorado, United States  
E-mail: Juergensmeyer\_e@fortlewis.edu

**Keywords:** Activism, Poetry, Peace

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## 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 us 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

Scott-Heron, G. (1990). *So far, so good*. Chicago, IL: Third World Press.

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## Todadile Repair Man

Author: Morgan Campbell  
Title: Fort Lewis College  
Affiliation: Fort Lewis College  
Location: Durango, Colorado, United States  
E-mail: [cjmorgan1@fortlewis.edu](mailto:cjmorgan1@fortlewis.edu)

**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**

Author: Morgan Campbell  
Title: Fort Lewis College  
Affiliation: Fort Lewis College  
Location: Durango, Colorado, United States  
E-mail: [cjmorgan1@fortlewis.edu](mailto:cjmorgan1@fortlewis.edu)

**Keywords:** Analysis, Reflection, Introspection

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## **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

Author: Margaret Chamblee  
Title: Sociology student  
Affiliation: Fort Lewis College  
Location: Durango, Colorado, United States  
E-mail: mechamblee@fortlewis.edu

**Keywords:** Inequality, Discrimination, Classism

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## 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

Author: Aama Harwood  
Title: Student  
Affiliation: Fort Lewis College  
Location: Durango, Colorado, United States  
E-mail: [aama.harwood@hotmail.com](mailto:aama.harwood@hotmail.com)

Keywords: What matters, Bigotry, All lives matter

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## 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 our 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

Author: Arianna Osmar  
Title: Environmental Student  
Affiliation: Fort Lewis College  
Location: Durango, Colorado, United States  
E-mail: [ariannaosmar1234@gmail.com](mailto:ariannaosmar1234@gmail.com)

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

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## 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

Author: Elan Price  
Title: Student  
Affiliation: Fort Lewis College  
Location: Durango, Colorado, United States  
E-mail: emprice@fortlewis.edu

**Keywords:** Life, Existence, Metamorphosis

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## 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

Author: Elan Price  
Title: Student  
Affiliation: Fort Lewis College  
Location: Durango, Colorado, United States  
E-mail: emprice@fortlewis.edu

**Keywords:** Life, Existence, Metamorphosis

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## 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,

Foxy 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,  
Deeeep,  
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

Author: Elan Price  
Title: Student  
Affiliation: Fort Lewis College  
Location: Durango, Colorado, United States  
E-mail: emprice@fortlewis.edu

**Keywords:** Life, Existence, Metamorphosis

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## 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

Author: Brandon Stacy  
Title: Environmental Student  
Affiliation: Fort Lewis College  
Location: Durango, Colorado, United States  
E-mail: [Brstacy@fortlewis.edu](mailto:Brstacy@fortlewis.edu)

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

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## 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