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EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

TRUTH IN LOVE

Black Woman (Inspired by Nikki Giovanni and Maya Angelou)[1]

By Parris J. Baker
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Editor's note: In recognition of National Poetry Month, following is a special article by Jefferson Scholar-in-Resident Parris Baker.

Slaps on the drumhead, syncopated rhythms produced ... silence. Some brothers say you play so good that it sounds like the drum is talking ... I am. You beat me hard with pain-produced passions. Double beats, triple beats. Hand movements so fast that everything, my sight, and sound becomes a blur. Sweat and swelling, searing well into the night. Now unconscious, you now perform instinctively, on cue. Reacting impulsively, you drive crowds, audiences, and innocent bystanders into mysterious, mesmerized, and insalubrious motion ... less ... ness.

And it appears only I can hear the crescendo of my execrable screams.

Don't beat the rhythms out of me. "I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs,"[2] if you would let my rhythms flow from me. The switch and the sway of hips compose a symphony for two. Rhythms that come from me, born in me. Rhythms that have produced nations of drummers.

People have proclaimed, "That brother is bad!" They're right. You are.

Cause it's the way I feel I sing a rhapsody of blackness. The sad, solemn song with no words so black you can't breathe for fear of movement. An emotional

abyss, I am amazed at the level on which you allowed me to debase myself. Tore off my armor of pride and convinced myself that you were the prima donna of life and that all that I did, I did for you. To risk emotional extinction was worth the effort, because then you might appreciate me. Stole my own heart and give it to you, cause my mind knew I was a fool, and it would not allow nor could it tolerate such an act of insidious carelessness.

And you always smiled at me with the assurance that you were someone. And oh, how I loved to make you smile. My world revolved around you. You were the clock face, and I was the second hand, “Spinning around, spinning around, spinning around. I must be falling in love. I’m spinning around (I can’t stop), I’ve lost my self-control. I’m spinning around (till I drop). I’m hooked down to the soul.”^[3]

My Sweet Inspiration, Swing low, sweet chariot. Sing You a Lullaby, Ode to Billy Joe. Anything to win you. Well, if God were not God, then surely you would be. My quest for myself became so subdivided that trails headed east met trails headed west and I just traveled in incessant circles always wondering why you could not help me.

But amid all my chaotic confusion, searching the ceiling, each night, for a new, more clever way to say, “I love you” found that I don’t need Klein, Cardin, or Cadillac for me to be me. Now I sing a rhapsody in blackness ... the sweet song of success, with words of joy, I can reach out and touch me and I feel good. So good that I can fly like a bird in the sky.

I am who I am and questionably I am me, a Black Woman. I am the sunrise that met the sunset and birthed hope. I have witnessed two dark, gray-black rain clouds make love and create a beautiful river Nile. Life flows forever on. I have ridden on the wings of eagles high, high in the sky, towards the crack in the sky that divides heaven and earth and offered peace to a troubled world. I am the star that led them. I am the good thang!

Strong enough to endure a white man’s oppression and a black man’s pain. Sensitive enough to feel the injustices thrust upon my people and persistent enough to still find a way to love a nation. Determined enough to fight for freedom and always remain who I am ... The alpha and the omega of this world’s history ... a Black Woman.

[1] Parris Baker (1979). Excerpt from “Cause It’s the Way I Feel. Unpublished manuscript. Used with permission from the author.

[2] Isaiah 41: 18 (NIV)

[3] Donald McPherson, Tony Silvester, & Luther Simmons. Spinning Around (I Must Be Falling in Love). Performed The Main Ingredient (1970).

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