

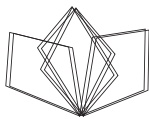
**EXIT  
THRU  
THE  
AFRO**



**EXIT  
THRU  
THE  
AFRO**

**POEMS**

**JALYNN HARRIS**



SoftSavagePress

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for all lesbians  
in all dimensions

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I am not in love, but I'm open to persuasion. East or West, where's the best for romancing? With a friend I can smile, but with a lover, I could hold my head back. I could really laugh, really laugh.

—Joan Armatrading, “Love & Affection”







## Origin story

I was born with my eyes wide open in between afro-tangle and afro-twist  
sliding out of afro-vulva I gave the biggest afro-holler  
oooohweee it echoed 'cross 5 scalps so they called me afro-kiki  
& I was hungry I couldn't stop eating afro-turf  
the other kids thought I was as odd as an afro but I didn't care 'cause  
I knew what I liked to do sitting between the afro-reeds reading  
I could be anywhere I wanted to be when I was 12 I started  
growing an afro-beard it made me shy like mosquitos in autumn  
so my mommas decided it was time for me to travel up the mountain  
gathering my afro-hurt in my big afro-heart I followed  
at the top there was a tree slouched like a back a sleeping shack the exact  
length of my legs and a pair of afro-clippers one of my mommas rolled  
the blunt the other explained that soon I'd be bald I cried  
as she cut big fat afro-tears tumbled from my scalp it looked like it  
was snowing in Africa when she was done my mommas told me I'd have to  
spend some time alone on my first afro-less night I parted my  
thighs so I could breathe deeply on the second night  
I started writing poems 'cause I had nothing else to play with.



modern  
art

## The original L-Word pilot:

### Joan Armatrading corners Tracy Chapman at a juke joint

Listen, I'm the man in the fast car  
going 88 on an open road with your girl

Meshell, the First Lady, speeding Black  
to the past. Bessie Smith swings blues

buffet. Ma Rainey is strapped  
with gold coins and ostrich plumes,

moaning for my proof. Every night  
a tent show whooping gold guitar

percussing we come electric  
on the stage. Tracy, lock me in

your chord cruising high-  
way. Win me a bloody nomination

Love, you're the golden gramophone  
so close to me, baby—can I hold you?

**The original L-Word s 2 ep 11:  
Ida B. Wells writes Frances E. W. Harper**

They're so close to me. Baby, can I hold you  
like suffrage while the ink dries?

Heard you that shriek? Another Stewart swinging  
from dogwood. Is noose the looking glass

of our inheritance? We are broken. Milk- crocks,  
washtubs strained with pinned names.

Come, let's jump the claim! Let's steal away  
the trolley car. I'll be the conductor blazing

toward violet dawns. You'll be the grip  
woman cruising over cables. Casting

lure like law. Let 'em try tie us, set fire the faggots  
'neath us. But we'll be phantoms of the wind

all bound up together. Let me be your first  
excuse to quit lifting while you climb

## Phillis Wheatley questions the quarter

Who head of the quarter?  
Who 25 pennies add 'em up  
Who spangle the liberty of in god we founded  
Who tie till the black hand

Who wrote founding?  
Who indivisible the divisible by 4  
Who chew red u.s. of a who chew blue  
Who chew white

Who creek the colony?  
Who half time times two  
Who ridges on the side of the circle  
Who meter the black thumb like land

Who fit the coin in the bubblegum slot?  
Who white Jesus gather the 13  
Who white head white wig white tongue  
Who little white lie

Who mount Martha?  
Who wrote Latin on the back  
Who lying like it can be read  
Who changes state like a lake

Who live free or die?  
Who pop the coke can with a  $\frac{1}{4}$   
Who sketch the shack with the mountains in the back  
Who vend the womb for a coin

Who set the Old Line and road the island?  
Who quartersawn the black road with white ticks  
Who made it circle like a too perfect eye  
Who slung it like a round wrung rope

Who out of many one?  
Who quintet the nickel 5 times 5  
Who sixpence the land for tails. Now turn it  
over, who on who back?



## The Watermelon Woman

Don't look now, I'm carrying  
lips that get stuck like dreams in a coma

When you don't look at me my heart breaks like commas  
or Baltimore, a city of potholes we lie and call a city

Baltimore constructed my body, a city made of  
Ebonics. Call it genetic stuttering, flowers catching the flu

Genetically, I will never be a flower or something worth a stutter  
in this dream. No one will remember me unless I touch them.

In this dream, touch me. No one else will.  
My mother only ever had my father.

My father only ever had my mother.  
Loneliness echoes like a loon on a lake

Like a loon on a lake I echo  
look, now I'm carrying.

## Moms Mabley at the Apollo 3022

I'm so old my teeth divorced me for the fork  
So old like when cotton used to pick slaves  
& the zodiac asked me to be the 13<sup>th</sup> sign.

I'm older than my birthday. So old like  
columbus did my first tattoo  
& Sacagawea asked me what was just around the riverbend

I'm old like when rocks used to play marbles.  
& I'm. So. Old. gravity asked me how to hang

(starts tap dancing)

I'm so old  
my knees divorced me for them even older women arth & ritis. I'm  
so old the leaves on my skirt change colors in autumn

I'm soooooooooooooo Oooooold

the grim reaper begs me not to knock & old like my first stage was an auction  
old like I'm the reason Shakespeare likes Black girls

I'msoold  
this dance looks like I've fallen and I can't get up.

I'msoold  
When I was young, a democrat was an elephant & an elephant wasn't in the room

I'm sold when I was growin' up gay was straight & Old

I'm sold/  
I'm sold/  
I'm sold  
/I'm sold

I'm older than my momma and my grandmama  
& you so old you forgot you gave me this name,  
laughing dollars at this auction.





contemporary  
art



## Things I didn't know I loved

*after Nazim Hikmet*

December 3rd he rolls the diesel. we smoke in the empty lot,  
swapping spit with each hit, it hits: I didn't know I loved boys  
smoking was taboo too, everyday I do it momma must know  
how much I love her & all mamas I love them I'd  
grow them an island the color of forests and 'exit' signs  
I didn't know I loved the color green. I want it in my hair dark  
at the scalp curling like sheep. I didn't know my hair is jade  
a gem how it sticks the perfect landing on my chin  
the beard—Aunt Dot's gift giving me the green light to be  
a man I make cussing combinations: bitch ass cats make me sneeze  
but Stokley Catmichael he listens & he talks, strange cat. I didn't know I loved  
my skateboard the deck dark green waves like swords my land  
yacht gives the lessons: stay on the board. you are your own balance  
I didn't know I loved to float down the hill. you only fall off when you  
make a choice. I didn't know I loved the blue light at 5 am I am a girl  
androgynous at the window begrudging the light to reach it's blue  
before the day is green a globe, a projection of scribbled borders  
like hula hoops I didn't know I loved to twirl my hips  
rotating planets and you are in my orbit and we are talking  
on phone about home and girls. In December, everyone is coming home  
it's hot, it's Joburg, it's Zanzibar, it's anywhere but the captive  
music is sweltering heavy on the bass. the drum is a planet rotating on my hips dancing  
til 5 am smoking bidis and blue light on my beard, my fro, my Mother  
the land a forests of exits, allowing me to love myself.

## Mo's ghazal

*for James Harris*

You are curled into your mother's womb, suspending gender  
tied to a chord like a buoy. we wait for you. you set our agenda.

ninth to the wonder of pregnancy, is the mystery of gender.  
long after the ultrasound images your anatomy as gender,

you must learn that Black is beautiful in every genre  
but who is going to tell you of history's degendering

mixed as you are in this race, who is going to admit long engendered  
choreography of marionette to neck? and what's next, if you are agender?

*Auntie Jay, I don't even have a name yet.* that's the point. this world's genre  
is to name you before you can name yourself. so whatever your gender, be.



## The moon

as a child, I knew nothing of phases  
only that a day could turn her sweet  
onion mouth into a fist.

and that darkness loved the moon like feathers  
all over a peacock. sun eater. blood ranger.  
way back before I knew about tides

she'd seen this before. way up her quiet  
mystery didn't always require darkness  
'cause sometimes in the middle of the day

I'd look up from my book and find her following  
me home. cartoon pizza slice. zodiac messenger.  
peeking like a lisp between clouds of teeth

at night, the city cut out her image and dotted  
her on tall dull sticks. why? it was the wrong orange.  
as a child, I knew the moon would never leave me

so, I stuck out my hand,  
convinced if I found a tall enough ladder  
I'd climb the chain hanging her heavy fruit  
  
yank it, drag her down, and tie  
her cowries around my neck.

## Like everybody else who misses a vagina

smile away the eye crud, you have landed. Sniff bobotie once  
and know the recipe. You are home in Jo'burg so feel free  
to mingle the entire crate of paw paws.  
Remember your saliva is a listerine strip. Lean in for the kiss.  
When she leans back, don't assume she is a mime  
accept her invitation to stay the month. Tell her you love  
the way she smells like land. Suck Durbanville wine through her pinky  
finger. Open passion fruit with your toes.  
When she asks you to stay an extra week, Earhart her. But when you  
get off the plane, Whatsapp her emoji flower bouquets.

you're scared you're too deep in diaspora blues to also allow love's blues.  
Remember you're not always right about color.  
Remember she's patient like a woman catching fish from the bathroom sink.  
Ask her to send gooseberries thru the mail.  
And if you taste them & realize you really really really  
aren't sure you can love land so far away, then go 'head, try again.  
Frida Kahlo your eyebrows, build them a bridge across  
the Atlantic, Garvey your way back to her.

yea, you're like everybody else who misses a vagina.  
Reach forward to meet her through the phone.  
When she picks up, let her recite  
the entire history of Zulu backwards.  
By knowing her history, she's not bragging  
but it still aches you. When it does, try not calling her for a night.  
It won't help the facts: the country you were born in is not your country  
but you still continue to wake up there.  
Dress up. Rehearse the wig maker's talents  
twist your hair. Shake your left butt cheek. Disappear.

**[my bearded & bleeding uterus]**

takes a heating pad lover. again, this journey of shedding  
gnarls me. I take my bed as comfort food.

of having carried the possibility  
I lie on his lip lit like a cigarette  
convinced he loves me too.

how would I know the difference?

## [how would i know the difference?]

the white line looks like a string to untampen the damp tamped thing.  
But it's only simple division of the black Carolina  
road. Only a white mark for which side to rub rubber.

& Megabus isn't a double-decker ship  
bleeding students South for the semester.  
Only a chamber people cough in.

night turns like bud rolled in the already steamy room.  
*I can climb out if I need to.* No blood comes when the white  
lines are released for the station's parking lot.

*but who's going to pick me up?*

**[but who's going to pick me up]**

In this whale  
father calls church. I feel a new wet  
spread like the red of the pew.  
rising like a boat

for the closing song,  
Momma sees the spot  
blending like war vespers. I look to Father  
but it's Momma who takes my hand

& sludges me through the belly of the middle aisle.  
Wiping red, I wonder why Momma ain't tell me 'bout  
lady's leaky and conspicuous potlucks.

## [lady's leaky and conspicuous potlucks]

As in the anatomy of my chin: a cartoon  
of matrilineal stubble. Shut back in the back  
room, trigger paper pulls black

roots gloating in wax. Girlbeard, splinters like two  
women sharing the same man. Biweekly  
this perennial mowing uproots

daydreams of other inventions for hiding  
hairy. And who lied that girls don't sprout  
up undesired? Hair heirs an error. Me

Dug out on my back. lily ripped  
& red at the root, protecting stupid beauty.

## A brief history of my beard

I woke up like this

in my momma's arms. Immediately she gave me to her momma, Patricia Ann Gibson

Granny touched my chin & like bees her hands began pollinatin'

Legend has it my great great granny went out to the Eastern Shore to catch fish

with her bare hands. she was pulled in and almost drowned. when she came up

she had gills. I don't know her name.

I woke up in stubble

having no desire to choose either boy or girl. I made it up.

in my family instead of batmitzvahs or quinceaneras we have chin crowning ceremonies

it happened cuz my momma, Gina, drank ginger beer while she carried me. it happened cuz

Gina collected too many dandelions and didn't have nowhere else to put 'em

Legend has it my great great great granny was bent over picking cotton when she cut herself

on the chin. Instead of blood runnin', hair bloomed.

it makes me sad to think the standards of beauty are against thick girl beards. it's not a face of  
flies. and how the church lies about the first lady being both Black and bearded.

I like to let my jungle grow out my jaw. I like to electrolyze it 'til it's red onion raw.

I like my chin how I like my chin

I set my own gender agenda

it happened cuz a little white kid looked at me and asked his mom, is it a boy or a girl?

Turns out, I am bruise and groove. blues and gimlet. banjee and ghost.

I am banana and goon. bingo and ginkgo. The origin of the word gruff, girl rough.

Legend has it, Honey, my granddaddy's momma, was inside her house minding her own damn  
business when 3 little pigs came up tryin' to blow her house down. She drew a beard on her

face and yelled so loud the whole block could hear: *not by the hairs on my chinny chin!*







sculpture  
garden

## ***Simone Manuel, tell us about your relationship to water?***

Let's not talk about w\*\*\*\*/ how it stings the nose with history/ and keeps swimming toward the scalp/ don't you know that two swim caps can't keep chlorine out/ here you have it w\*\*\*\* scientists and w\*\*\*\* signs/ and everyone using w\*\*\*\* to get out feelings/ don't you know your teachers were wrong/ working harder is not working smarter/ be a vessel that is not built well won't run even with the biggest engine/ you see, floating is simple/ it's the science of letting go/ and saying yes, I can deal in density and still be held/ so no, it's not a miracle that I can float bc just like you I too contain a w\*\*\*\* body/ in fact, I have crossed entire bodies of w\*\*\*\* not knowing if I would make it/ and I am still here/ and every morning I wake up and I'm thankful for w\*\*\*\*/ the miracle to cleanse my body/ Listen, I've shared a lane all my life and I am tired/ so let's not talk about w\*\*\*\*/ puddles or sneezes and definitely not w\*\*\*\* melons/ those little mothers red with insides that crack/ open and stain lessons of how hydrants hydra/ cut one open and see for yourself/ I mean who hasn't swallowed w\*\*\*\*/ and wanted to quit treading history's arena/ instead let's talk about hands/ how they clapped and did not kill/ the fairy or the fish/ or whatever myth you need to believe that yes/ I can breathe and carry gold under all this w\*\*\*\*.

## Wildflower

*for Marsha P. Johnson*

The perfect floral arrangement pays no mind  
to crooked sticks or cheap glass

how could she? She's a centerpiece too busy  
rioting with beauty. because of her everyone wants

to plant an entire meadow of wildflowers  
just to see how much light it soaks in.

marigolds yellow, daisies teacup. plumes open  
like hugs, their jewels tributaries for gathering water.

she gives good face and doesn't intend  
to stay long, so make sure you save the seeds.

try putting her in an ordinary wooden box,  
she'll turn it into a bell-shaped perfume bottle

'cuz there's something about the combination  
of wild and flower that wraps everyone up

in a bouquet of sun and holds them.

## Gladys Bentley leaves Gladys Bentley on read

YESTERDAY 23:59

I get it. Our life is a grand piano  
played to get the job  
but why in the hell are you burning  
my cummerbund?  
call me back.

READ 23:59

YESTERDAY 01:10

I can't sleep. I saw the headlines  
tangled in your wedding dress.  
those silk hydrangeas dead in your veil.  
Tell me, has he smelt you  
fry domestic? Does he ask you to tie  
his tie? Doesn't he know you are a top  
hat talent fat with buffet flats?

READ 01:10

TODAY 13:55

(1/2) I get tight at the stuck

\*title.

bc I was never a woman so how can  
you return us to one? marriage is nothing  
but another form of tucking.

Did Ebony take you

(2/2) \*your pen? Make you swallow

The Miracle, a lavender marriage  
dead like those hydrangeas.

READ 13:55

TODAY 16:56

(1/2)

Blame fame, Glad. or our mother, or  
someone else who never loved us.

Let her kiss you, if you like.

Then wake up drinking jungle  
again. Grow your fingernails a cane,  
walk your feet into 'gators, gather the  
garden's gravel.

(2/2) Swallow. Then sing until he comes in  
fresh brogans to explain the word "dance."

READ 16:56

## Sunday School at Sister Rosetta Tharpe Church of the Redeemed

Children, did you see Rosetta walk across  
those railroad tracks? wear a fox around her neck  
and still be a woman black as the inside of its belly?

She plucks the broken-down station into operation  
Look up, children 'cuz this train is Rosetta  
raining. Not an invitation to pull no

extras to the altar. This train is rocking  
other worlds at the waists. See how she  
strokes her guitar like a woman

holding another woman. Hear her out:  
gap-toothed. electric growl. The gospel  
of her wig staying on. Look up, children

God's got the whole rose in her hands.



## Harmony

*for Beverly Glenn Copeland*

Let us dance in	these ghost bodies
old melodies, ever new	talk a little of blues' rags
her sharp swords	opening veiled eyes
of yesterday and tomorrow	let her go. It's okay
sing as prayer	live in song

## Cheryl Dunye & I match on HER

she asks to film the sculpture of my hairy bleeding box, i say, sure if you can focus the camera & stop insisting each re-take deserves a spot in the video & don't do that thing where you break the fifth wall, the wood a crumbling cake each dyke tastes at leisure as if the documentation of love is three parts party & two parts potluck i am not purely here to be put on display not just a thigh in your parade Dunye, she rubs the screen where my breast perks says, this is the tip i want my mouth to take this is the hair loom that lures me zoom out Cheryl, i can't figure out if this is a date or not? or if i should argue for a better angle to film my blood cup filling? are you getting this? my eggs, cowries flowing out my shell like tiny hearts rushing down a river. this is the best part, look. cheryl zooms in again, says, i would say, this is a date, to roll you in like a film so I can sit in your shell someday but, Reader, wouldn't you agree, she keeps her heart as tight as her box, sealed with several locks?

## Peach

“We know that more than seventy to eighty percent of women masturbate, and ninety percent of men masturbate, and the rest lie.” -Joycelyn Elders

Joycelyn Elders likes getting fired.

Joycelyn Elders likes getting fired for free speech. Joycelyn Elders likes getting fired up about masturbation.

Joycelyn Elders likes sex with her peach.

Says her peach enjoys being peached.

Joycelyn Elders says sex with the self should be taught like racism is taut.

See Joycelyn Elders likes

Education. Luckily Education likes sex with itself and Joycelyn Elders agrees.

Bill Clinton doesn't agree.

Bill Clinton makes the decision to fire her.

Bill Clinton likes peaches and sex

but Bill Clinton doesn't like masturbation education. Turns out, Bill Clinton also likes getting impeached.

Who can deny the usefulness of his concern?

## Menu

*after June Jordan*

We got slow cooked Black girl  
We got notebook Black girl  
We got Black girl 5 subject & spiral

But we ain't got no fried black girl

We got 2 legs and a breast Black girl  
We got bone in & bone out Black girl  
We got Black girl gravy & Black girl wavy

But we aint got no fried Black girl

We got home ownin' Black girl  
We got name not on the lease Black girl  
We got paroled Black girl just got released

But we ain't got no fried Black girl

We got 2 girls 1 cup Black girl  
We got Black girl homestay  
hotel, motel, and Holiday Inn

But we ain't got no fried black girl

We got on the slopes Black girl  
We got Black girl on the ropes  
We got Black girl with the jokes

We got breaststrokin' Black girl  
We got Black girl butterflyin'  
We got Black girl freestylin'

But we ain't got no fried Black girl

We got mixed with rice & beans Black girl  
We got Black girl heavy creamed  
We got Black girl with a dream

But we ain't got no fried black girl

We got big bad bunions Black girl  
We got Black girl onions  
We got Black girl Funyuns

We got runnin' Black girl  
We got Black girl summonin'  
We got Black girl bummin'

But we ain't got no fried Black girl

We got whisperin Black girl  
We got Black girl whipped  
We got Black girl chipped

But we ain't got no fried black girl

We got honey glazed Black girl  
We got Black girl orange chicken  
We got Black girl finger lickin'

We got snickerin' Black girl  
We got Black girl gigglin'  
We got Black girl skinny dipin'

But we ain't got no fried Black girl

We got toes out in my city Black girl  
We got be back in a bitty Black girl  
We got Black girl blue tooth  
We got Black girl tellin' the truth

But we ain't got no fried Black girl

We got who run the world Black girl  
We got throw dat ass in a circle Black girl  
We got Black girl Adderall  
We got Black girl albuterol

But we ain't got no fried Black girl

We got Guggenheim Black girl  
We got Black girl Heimlich  
We got Black girl hymen in Black girl

But we ain't got no fried Black girl







library  
&  
archives



## Shipped

consider the black girl  
strangled in sage  
leaf laughter

consider laughter  
coughing like  
good smoke

consider good  
cornbread dipped  
in the city of the tongue

consider the tongue  
locked in the knit  
sweater of a secret

consider secrets  
raised in the harbors  
of black girls

consider black girls  
dreaming of water  
jumping off the boat

of consideration.

## Diphthong of the year dies in tragic accident or Ode to the letter “I”

survive does not survive  
the absence of “I,” neither does time  
nor premonition not even figurative tradition

republican surely dies. Bologna remains, I mean remains.  
there is no “I” in team.  
but it might help that both must be

dealt with. kind of like spectacles  
an eye to see two  
ways. a tunnel to tuck a light  
deeper in the back  
of your throat  
open up say ahhh

e ends the dip. the thong  
a thin marriage  
of pirates agreeing  
not to sneeze which is strange  
because why “aye aye” when you  
could “achoo”

nothing couldn’t  
everything can’t  
work lives on

consonants kiss like cousins  
moist becomes most  
noise becomes a nose  
that can’t sniff  
and sugar honey tea sticks like shit  
on a tongue without ice

There is no high. or legalization.  
or motion to move forward  
and nothing at the end of why

## Captain's log stardate 2955: parallel universes

Burnham Blackwoman's the bridge.  
It burns. The Borg, like bitches, burr.  
Collective cogs byte. Kirk is captain.

Burred in the cogs, Burhnam  
bites the Borg. The bitch  
collective burns the bridge.

Uhura enters. Urges  
Burnham to the bridge. Both  
climb cool into the cockpit.

Kirk enters. Urges Burnham to the back.  
Uhura coordinates the quadrant.  
Klingons cling for control.

Klingons control the cockpit.  
Kirk urges Uhura to hug him. Burnham beams  
to the bridge to coordinate the quadrant.

The Borg boards. Kirk combats his urges  
for Uhura. Burnham is bitten by the Borg.  
Borg Burnham behaves like a bitch.

Uhura unites. Burnham barely behaves.  
both, like bitches, never bestowed captain.

## Maud Martha reads me

“was, perhaps, the whole life of man a dedication to this search for something to lean upon, and was, to a great degree, his ‘happiness’ or ‘unhappiness’ written up for him by the demands or limitations of what he chose for that work? for work it was. leaning was a work.”  
—Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha*

Jalynn, you can't keep sitting here holding me  
like a mirror. I'm not your lover. and sure, my author is dead  
but that doesn't make me the Bible. under all these systems

of change, we all want something to hold  
that will hold us back. so, let go of this fiction  
that you're original for needing to be held

and as much as you think you know, you have no idea  
what it's like to live in a book. every day is like listening to other people  
fuck on the other side of a thin wall. focus on your own

words. arrange this blank white space. your black mark is magic.  
because across from this couch there will always be a couch  
wrapped in plastic that you won't be allowed to sit on

get up. didn't you write this poem?  
don't you choose how it ends?





## Museum Map

**Joan Armatrading**— The English singer-songwriter (and lesbian), who came to me in a dream and told me to let her talk to **Tracy Chapman**. 3 times **Armatrading** was nominated for a Grammy, but did not win for her iconic sound. Conversely, **Chapman**, whose music is, in my opinion, an obvious study of **Armatrading**'s bluesy folk pop fusion sound, was awarded 4 Grammy's. It's incredible the foundations that those who come before us lay.

**Gladys “Bobbie” Bentley**— The top hat talent of the Harlem Renaissance's Jungle Alley. Jungle Alley was the party-poppin' block in which **Bentley** notoriously brought down the queer speakeasy, Clam House, with covers of popular songs. In 1952, **Bentley** published an article in *Ebony Magazine* called, “I am a Woman Again” in which he details his maternally neglectful childhood, denounces his trans-manhood, and announces that the combo of hormone therapy & marriage has made him “a woman again”.

**Michael Burnham**— Played by actress Sonequa Martin-Green on the T.V. series, *Star Trek: Discovery*, **Burnham** is Starfleet's first ever mutineer. Martin-Green makes history by being the first Black womxn lead in a Star Trek series. The carpet of her lead role is laid by icon, Nichelle Nichols, the actress who played the series' first ever Black womxn character, **Uhura**, in *Star Trek: Original Series*. While both womxn's genius save their respective ships from danger over and over, no, they are not the captains.

**Beverly Glenn-Copeland**— Canadian émigré born in Philly, **Glenn-Copeland** is a trans-man known for his electronic jazzy folk sound in the album *Beverly Glenn Copeland*, and later, *Keyboard Fantasies*. The poem, “Harmony” is a contrapuntal of some of his song titles, as his music is a meditation in integrating transitions, which is harmony, which is love.

**Cheryl Dunye**— Iconic short and feature length filmmaker, most popularly known for the film *The Watermelon Woman*, a mockumentary in which **Dunye** stars as the main character searching for information on the life of “mammy” actress, Fae Richards. **Dunye**'s films break barriers of 5<sup>th</sup> wall intimacy and illuminate the complexity of lesbian relationships. She is also fine as hell.

**Joycelyn Elders**— Surgeon General under Bill Clinton, **Elders** was forced to resign for advocating that masturbation education must be a part of sexual education curriculum. This poem is modelled after June Jordan's “Addenda to the Papal Bull” of which I borrow the last line.



**Frances E. W. Harper**—Born- free in Baltimore, she later co-founded the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). **Harper** was an author, poet, and abolitionist. She is the older womxn lovingly tilted above one of the NACW co-founders, and in my imaginary, her one true love, **Ida B. Wells**, on the cover of this book. “Lifting as we climb” is the motto of the NACW.

**Simone Manuel**—In the 2016 Rio Olympics, she became the first Black womxn to win gold at an Olympic swimming competition. As a Black swimmer, I couldn’t be more proud and thankful for the path she is laying and for those who laid her path to gold.

**Maud Martha**—In poet Gwendolyn Brooks’ only book of fiction, *Maud Martha*, **Martha** exemplifies Black girlhood raged into womxnhood, wife-hood, and motherhood.

**Jackie “Moms” Mabley**—A veteran of the Chitlin’ Circuit (performance circuit for Black entertainers in the early 20th cent.), **Moms’** stand-up albums & performances disrupt the traditional “mammy” role. She was also one of the first openly lesbian comedians.

**Marsha “Pay it no mind” Johnson**—is one of the trans-womxn credited for standing up against the batons of police brutality at the Stonewall Inn in 1969, which sparked what’s known as The Stonewall Riots. In 1992, **Johnson** was found dead in the Hudson river. Police claimed her death a suicide, but no one who knew her believes this. In portraiture, she is iconically seen wearing a flower crown.

**Sister Rosetta Tharpe**—In 1964, The Mother of Rock n’ Roll, at the ripe age of 49, performed the most jaw-dropping performance on an abandoned railraod track in Manchester, England. If you do nothing in this life, watch that video. It’ll also make you want to start a church.

**Ida B. Wells**—Another co-founder of the NACW, polemical investigative journalist, and divine writer of “Lynch Law in America,” a series of articles outlining the genocide of Black men & womxn. Because of her commitment to truth, **Wells** had to flee America to preserve her life.

**Phillis Wheatley**—Born in Senegambia, stolen to the New World via the TransAtlantic Slave Trade, **Wheatley** was a multilingual speaker, and English reader and writer. She is known as the first Black womxn whose poetry was published in America and internationally.

**The Watermelon Woman**—Me, personified through the lens of Dunye’s fictional naming, stuck between the crosshairs of my own loneliness; the feminine prequel to Herbie Hancock’s song “Watermelon Man”.



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To you reader, for purchasing, reading, sharing; for entering this museum. For exiting.

Thank you.