

El JONES

Harriet (Harriet Tubman)

"Harriet Tubman's life is a live weapon placed in our minds... Harriet wasn't repping Mother Teresa. She wasn't even any kind of civilian at all. She was a combatant, a guerrilla, a warrior carrying pistol and rifle, fighting in her people's long war for freedom. A war that rocked the foundations of Amerikkkan society and that has never gone away." – Butch Lee, Underground to Freedom.

When I perform this poem I feel the spirit of Harriet rising within me.

My sisters,
We do not need the media to decide we're not bitches to define our existence.
Please check the mission of Harriet Tubman
And understand how ridiculous it is that Black women ever allowed ourselves to get it twisted.
I'm sure the slave masters cursed her
As she spirited slaves away from their plantations
Marching them in formation
She was woman enough to place shotgun to temple when the men got too afraid
And threaten them to go forward with "dead men tell no tales."
And what they called those underground rails meant military resistance
In those days no snitching
Meant preventing the plans from getting back to massa and ending in lynching.
Picture Harriet
Inching her way on her stomach right under massa's nose!
They called her Moses.
Also known as The General
Walked thousands of miles in bare toes without flinching.
Her communications on the terrain gained from decades of raids on Southern enemy territory
Were used by Abraham Lincoln in the war they called his victory.
But Harriet was too impatient to wait for the army to free her.
My sisters, check this situation.
You see, Harriet was property
But the man she called her husband was free.
When he wouldn't escape with her
She left him behind without hesitation
Saying she'd be back later
Teaching us the information that Black women need to save ourselves first
Before we can be in the position to give others attention.
On Harriet's first venture she entered back into danger to collect him
Expecting him to run with her she brought a new suit of clothes she saved her money to buy
She sent a message to tell him she was hiding outside
Ready to take him with her do or die until he sent back the info
That he had married another woman, goodbye!
But Harriet didn't carry on or cry
She walked over to the next plantation
Found a man of the same size and used the suit as his disguise
As she escaped with her brothers beside her.

She wouldn't let herself be compromised or held back from her destination
And when her family wouldn't release her favourite niece,
She brought her out too without waiting for permission
She would let no-one she loved remain in that position
And I wish more women could listen
And be inspired to do the same for our children.
She dedicated herself to her decision to uplift her people
She never learned to read or write
But she could guide thousands by the light of the North Star.
Meanwhile, my sisters with law degrees and PhDs
Believing we have come so far
Are brainwashed into thinking our life has no dignity
And so we do not seek for quality
My sisters, we should ask ourselves seriously
Why so many of us have our own house or bank account and car
But still do not value ourselves one half a percent as much as Harriet did.
We need to ask ourselves why it is that we continue to accept being less than three fifths.
Not like Harriet, taking care of business.
Sisters, please consider what I am telling you about her life
And refuse to participate any longer in your own degradation.
When so many of us ride out bad relationships hoping to be a wife
Or just too scared to be alone.
Harriet took care of herself and her own
Even before she was grown she was making life and death decisions.
At seven years old she escaped for the first time.
She would rather live in a pig sty than be her mistresses' bitch
And my sisters, we must insist
On respecting ourselves and protecting our daughters before too many of them are neglected.
We must resist this vicious culture that tells them their only worth is to be bootylicious
We have them believing in fictitious images of celebrities as the pinnacle of success
Please picture all that Harriet accomplished and refuse to be an accomplice to selling yourself
It was not so long ago that Black women like her were actually known as property
But we so willingly let it be
It's like where we used to be is gone from our memory
So let me tell you some more about what Harriet represents.
She had a dent in her skull where her mistress threw an iron at her head
She was almost dead with her skull broken to bits lying in a coma
And when she awoke she still had the presence of mind to fake epileptic fits
To avoid being sold.
And as she lay there knocked out cold
The whole time she was plotting her escape.
She believed God sent her visions
Only intensified by her condition
So she placed herself on a collision course with freedom.
I wish I could explain to you the force contained in this woman
How she freed a man from prison by starting a riot
Driven by the conviction that we will have freedom or we will die.
And now we believe our destiny is fulfilled in these leaders
Who never saved one Black person yet.
Not like Harriet who risked her life for people she never even met

And I bet you didn't know that she was a nurse too
This legend washed the shit from black troops when no one else would do it
Because Black women do what we need to do to get our people through.
And my sisters,
You can do it too.
Please do not be confused by every news item and beauty magazine
That tries to bruise your self-esteem while burying your history
Until you forget your true value.
Harriet literally had half a brain and she could see
That we cannot continue to remain in negative situations.
My sisters, save yourselves.
Eliminate everything from your life that doesn't contribute to your health
Refuse to have anything more to do with influences that teach you to betray yourself
Take the books of Black women down from the shelf and educate yourself
And please reject being called by any names that don't elevate yourself
And recognize that you are already as strong as you need to be to change yourself
Don't get caught up in the wealth of lifestyles that lead you to degrade yourself
And remove yourself by stealth, if necessary
Step by step until you are where you need to be.
You can be Harriet too and be free.
Please don't walk yourself back into slavery.

Sisters in Spirit

Written for a Sisters in Spirit vigil.

This is for the women they call drug addicts
The women they call prostitutes
The strippers, the tricks
The ones the cops say was just looking for a fix
The ones whose murder is seen as a fix
Because these are the women society thinks are a sickness
The ones who go missing and no one listens to the witness
Or their mothers and sisters
Because they said they smelled liquor on her breath
These are the ones who are fed to the pigs
Or dropped outside of city precincts to freeze to death
The women with convictions on their records
Second class citizens in a first world settler state
Where the government keeps reservations in third world conditions
One of four countries refusing to sign the UN petitions
Admitting the genocide of these peoples because of their race
Where over 700 First Nations women can disappear without a trace
Last seen leaving the police station
The women who are terrorized with no charges faced

The ones whose deaths are ruled a suicide or overdose
These are the women they label Jane Doe.
These are the women they call the lowest on the totem pole
When the totem was stolen from their culture in the first place
These are the ones whose pictures never blaze from the front pages
The women with scars on their faces from a pimp's fist
Whose blood is wiped away as quick as lipstick traces
But even lipstick is made with 24 hour protection to stick
Longer than the names of Indigenous victims last in the news cycle
The ones they titled "squaws" and "Red Indians" as though they were lipstick shades
But there is no 24 hour protection for women forced outside the law
So these are the women who carry razors for protection between their lips
The women victimized by child protective services
Removed from reserves to be molested by those who preached church services
The nerve of this perverted justice system
That prosecutes elders for hunting out of season
While Robert Pickton hunted the streets unobserved
And there was no investigation just closed cases
Believing they got what they deserved
And then there are the girls who disappear on highways
Last seen hitchhiking. The ones who vanish in broad daylight
Last seen in the headlights.
But there will be no headlines
She's assumed to be somewhere in the red light district
So there will be no flashing cop lights
Or helicopter searchlights combing the ground
Because all young girls who disappear from reserves are labeled runaways
So there are no Amber alerts posted for them to be found
But when children deserted the residential schools
Well then the government had the resources to track them down
These are the girls not labeled as persons
The ones assumed to be not virgins
The ones who get filed as unsolved murders
These are the women who are already written off
Who are found with their body parts bitten off
Or those who make their living getting men off
Who are victims of the same court system that lets those men off.
These are the women who are our sisters
Whose families miss them, women with children who kissed them
Who are more than statistics, more than unlisted
These are women of powerful spirit.

Kings and Queens

This is for all my queens in Queens and all my kings in Kingston
raising a baby in Babylon.

If all of the sisters could fight for the brothers instead of fighting
over the brothers,
And all of the brothers could try to love their own instead of trying
to own love,
Then maybe we could fight like X did instead of fighting our exes.
And maybe if for a minute we stopped hating each other
We could do like Haiti and free each other.
And ladies—ask Harriet Tubman what it should mean to railroad each other
Instead of selling each other out we saw the soul in each other.
And brothers, we need to stop pimping Black women like we learned from massa
And be more like Selassie instead of selling asses.

We used to go broke to go to school
Now we'd rather go broke than go to school
We were out in the hot fields dying to be cool
Now we're out in the streets dying to be cool
So we spend our last cent on those sweatshop shoes.
We take our government cheque but we don't check our government
We'll vote for American Idol but not the president
So while our brothers sit idle in Sing Sing
We don't care if our idols can sing sing.
And because we were sold to make sugar in Barbados and Bahamas
Now we talk about getting those sugar daddies and sugar mamas
And when we talk about dead presidents we mean cash and not Obama.

We're all up in each other's business but we can't get up in each
other's businesses
And then we wonder why we still don't own shit?
Instead of building like Egypt we try to gyp each other
And we'll rip each other off before we tip each other
And then we say, don't trip brother!
So we give each other props for still being property
And we fill our heads with hip hop but never with philosophy
While we buy anything unnecessary instead of by any means necessary.

Black men call their home their crib
Like they're so busy being children they can't raise their kids
And they'll call their woman their babymama but never give her that ring.
We used to have to run away from the dogs so we could get married
Now we run away to be dogs instead of being called daddy.
And because we used to feel the crack of the whip
Now we sell crack to buy new whips
And instead of getting that diploma we'd rather dip.
So instead of working in that office and wearing a white collar
We get collared by white officers just to make that dollar

We want to play above the rim so we can buy new rims
Instead of taking engineering and building that pyramid.

We know everything about judge Mathis
And nothing about what math is
We're so used to being money we've forgotten what cash is
And we can make that bank shot but we don't know where the bank is.
Because we're told we can play in the NBA but we can't be an MBA
And we can be an MC but not an MD or MA
And we don't talk about racism we just talk about playa hatin.
We dream about going to Liberia but we can't go to the library
So we're read our rights when we're sentenced instead of writing that sentence
We come from people who wrote the Book of the Dead!
Now we either end up booked or dead.

And maybe if we hung by our necks like our grandparents did
We wouldn't talk so hard about choking a bitch
And if we ever had to cut a lynching victim down we'd think twice
before we cut each other down to size
And maybe that's why we call each other shorty.

We talk about shooting each other with 9s and 45s
But we don't talk about working that 9 to 5
I guess we spent so long on the auction block
Now we'd rather die than get off the block.
So we end up on a chain gang in that jail
Cuz when we join that gang we can buy that chain
So we kill each other over shorting that weight
Just like massa did when he put cotton on the scale.

Ask a slave to show you a ho'.
Do you think he'd point at his sister in the next cotton row,
Or the tool in his hand used to make the cotton grow?
And when he sees the overseer coming ask him what it means to get low.
Ask him to point out free Black people I bet he'd never say BET
And brother, I don't think he'd say you
And sister, I don't think he'd say me.

Boxes

A poor woman evicted is on the sidewalk with her home stacked high in cardboard boxes.
See how they got her out in the cold with her kids beside her?
Surrounded by everything from the jewelry box
Her mother's diamond box cut engagement ring came in until she pawned it off
To her box spring mattress
And her landlord got her locked out.
I tell ya, she's beside herself because once homeless

How can she check the boxes on a welfare form when a P.O. box don't cut it as a permanent address?

And down at the shelter, they're saying they don't got space

Like this woman's life is a gift box that can be returned if you don't like what's inside

This poverty cycle, it's like being sent to the penalty box

Except it's for life

And so she's looking at her cardboard boxes wondering what it might be like to raise a family inside.

And there are so many ways that poor women get behind.

Like maybe she got cancer of the voice box

From all the chemicals in those bottles and boxes of products

Used for scrubbing toilet boxes

Or mopping floors of luxury boxes

Until they laid her off from her job cleaning office boxes

And in this box office the only block busters are the cops

Who took her baby daddy off the block to put him in a prison box

So ever since the auction block we all end up with lives in boxes.

So this poor woman has got to box her feelings in

She's locked up tight like a strong box

With no time to cry into Kleenex boxes

She's got to keep on keeping on to send her kids to those public school boxes

With no food in their lunch boxes

And no computers to do homework on and type in the search boxes

And they come home and beg her for X boxes and Reebok shoe boxes

That they see on the TV box.

She feeds them chemicals that come in boxes labeled Kraft Dinner

And sugared juice boxes because this is the only food dropped off in food bank boxes

It's toxic, and it makes them sick

It messes with their heart boxes

Like breathing without oxygen

And it stops them from doing so well on the tests where they fill in the boxes

So they can be labeled and put in the right boxes

And evicted from the classrooms to resource room boxes that prepare them for getting locked up.

This Black life, it's like shadow boxing

And problems keep popping up like a jack in the box

So too many men faced with disappointment end up boxing with their girlfriend's faces

And there are not enough boxes in the rat race to fill the limited positions they fit us in

Like jocks, who can box their way out of poverty

Or by hitting home runs from the batting box

Or beatboxing to get a record deal to release a box set to play on those speaker boxes

And the deal is, the schools don't lay the building blocks

For us to build with each other on the block

And there is no political soap box

Or our faces in the press box

And most of those who are voted in the ballot box shake their heads and say Those are the breaks.

So go to work on that loading dock stacking boxes.

Or in that drive thru box

Or stand at that supermarket cash box

Or clean some big box store where they lock you in after hours and clock your bathroom breaks

And with that wage you can't make payment so you end up on the pavement

With your home stacked high in cardboard boxes.
 They say that in a fiery crash the only thing left intact is the black box from the cockpit
 But our families are not so indestructible
 And our hearts break when our lives collapse
 Like in this stock market crash where our jobs are the first hit
 Like how most of our jobs have been lost to boxes
 Like ATM boxes and robots with brains made of wired boxes
 And you even get a voice recorded into a box when you call emergency.
 And some box shaped man behind a box shaped computer monitor
 Ticks off the boxes to monitor our taxes and when there's an absence
 It sends a man with a tool box to cut off the fuse box
 These economic shocks, they're obvious on the sidewalks of our urban projects
 Littered with cigarette boxes
 Where even the buses don't stop
 In neighbourhoods with no sandboxes to play in
 They even cut off the public phone boxes
 The cab drivers sit behind bullet proof boxes
 With gun in their glove boxes and refuse to drop you off
 Unless you live in that house with a picket fence and mailbox
 Where life is not like a box of chocolates
 It's more like Pandora's box
 Except there is no hope within for victims of a criminal justice and education system
 Designed to stop us from thinking outside the box
 Because one by one they are putting us into boxes
 They are boxing us up,
 Boxing us out,
 And boxing us in.

The Miseducation of the Black Child

(Written for conference of Africentric educators)

In Kindergarten the report cards say they don't sit still
 Can't follow instructions
 Curiosity is treated like a disruption
 And so begins the destruction of the Black child in the education system.
 In Grade One we continue the reduction of the Black child to a statistic
 As the teachers say it's just a mystery why Black kids can't master something as simplistic as reading
 And so they begin the seeding of the Black child into special needs and resource room teaching.
 Throughout elementary school we see this abduction of the Black child by the white system intensify
 As they learn only corrupted versions of their history
 While standardized testing encourages schools to keep ejecting Black kids from the mainstream
 So their scores don't reflect badly on the ranking

And so Individualized Program Planning causes our kids to keep tanking
And sets them up for a lifetime of mechanical labour that the system is banking on
To keep them trapped in thankless positions and prisons.
In junior high the buses come to take the Black child far from their neighbourhoods
And so we see the introduction of a system of segregation
Where Black kids struggle with alienation
Yet no-one sees the connection of Black kids behaviour to the interruption of cultural development
And when zero tolerance discipline policies result in higher suspensions
Setting up the low rates of retention
Principals deny and say that wasn't the intention and so we see the invention
Of the Black child as criminal.
In high school we continue this production of subliminal messages
Leading to the construction of urban schools as prisons
Where money is spent on metal detectors and not computers
Recruiting children for lifetime residency in correctional facilities
Of which the number one predictor is illiteracy
Which report cards in grade one already anticipated
But now the low graduation rates are explained away by family dysfunction
And hip hop culture never admitting that the malfunction of the white education system is the
culprit.
For those that survive the 12 years of miseducation instruction
University and college should seem like a vacation
But too many are forced to major in assimilation as racism is sustained at the level of the institution
So while education is supposed to be the solution
Students spend their time suffering the microaggressions from classmates and professors
That lead to increased stress and depression causing them to choose between their degree and
their mental health
And if they find a sense of self it is labeled as militancy
And so too many are denied a Black epiphany.
In the workplace they are subjected to the tyranny of phrases like professional dress
Used to degrade their cultural expressions
While the way they talk is considered ghetto and these stereotypes
Are used to justify the lack of promotions
And label Black employees as having bad attitude
And while coworkers' unexamined emotions about Black people are never disputed
Black people are told they are just not suited for business
So only the whitewashed or uprooted are able to find success.
This is what leads to the production and reproduction of a racist society
Based on a hierarchy with white people at the pinnacle
And the Black child is at the mercy of a cynical conspiracy designed
To keep them from fulfilling their potential
The education of the Black child is about instilling anxiety and silently infiltrating their sense of
mental privacy
And so they miss out on the fundamentals when they are in a battle to protect themselves from
cultural piracy.
And since the only variety in the curriculum comes in February
Black kids have no knowledge of the legendary Africans in mathematics or science or invention
And so they believe their destiny lies in finding notoriety.
The self-destruction of the Black community is fueled by governmental indifference
To centuries of educational policy that acts as mental genocide.

Black pride is the antidote that leads to the reduction of the effects of white supremacy
And when Black people combine their energy we can recognize the mental treachery
We have been subjected to since the 15th century.
And we can call the solution Afrocentricity or just being as Black as we wanna be
And personally I just call it a policy of No Black person left behind.
Because my education begins with a Black mind.
And so it's time to stop subjecting our children to instruction
Intended for their destruction
And if you can't deduct why then consider this your introduction.

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