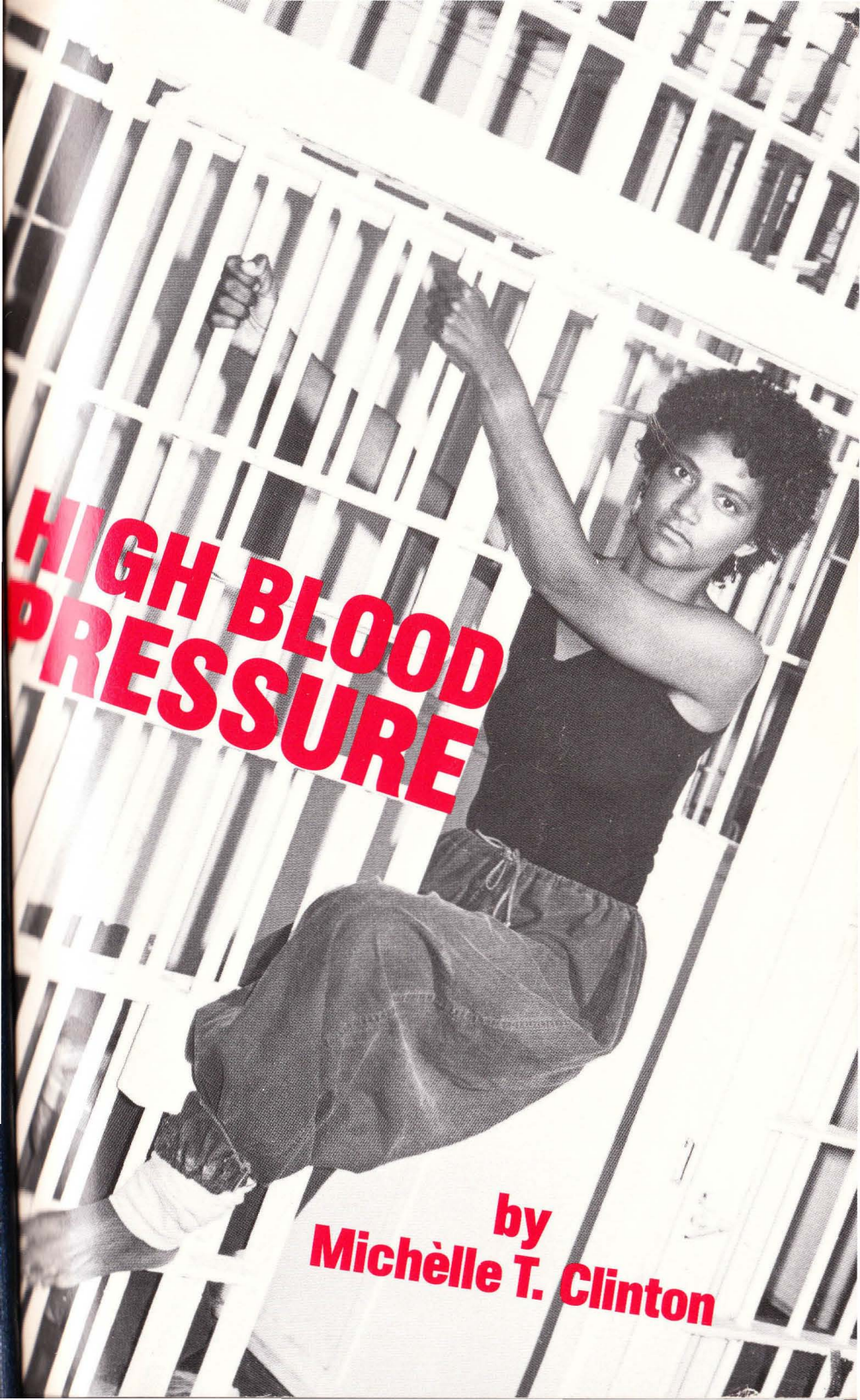




# **HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE**

**by  
Michèle T. Clinton**

## **HIGH BLOOD/PRESSURE**

# **HIGH BLOOD/PRESSURE**

by  
**Michèle T. Clinton**

**West End Press**

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the publications and recordings where some of these poems have previously appeared: *Alcatraz*, *Barney*, *Electrum*, *Insurgence*, *Issue One*, *Juke Box Terrorists with Typewriters*, *Southern California Anthology*, *Poetry Loves Poetry*, *Los Angeles Weekly*, *Magazine*, *Roh wedder*, *Sing Heavenly Muse!* and *Freeways Records English As A Second Language* and *Neighborhood Rhythms*.

Copyright © 1986 by Michèle Clinton. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be performed, recorded or otherwise transmitted without the written consent of the author and the permission of the publisher.

First edition - September, 1986  
ISBN 0-931122-41-4

This project is partially supported by a grant from the California Arts Council, a State Agency.

West End Press, P.O. Box 291477, Los Angeles, CA 90029.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                              |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| I Wanna Be Black .....                                       | 1  |
| Did She Bleed? .....                                         | 3  |
| Eviction .....                                               | 5  |
| Ain't 'bout Nuthin' but Some Toast .....                     | 6  |
| Migration of the Rats .....                                  | 8  |
| 'I Can Make You Feel Good' .....                             | 10 |
| Ghetto Disease .....                                         | 12 |
| Warning to Young Bright Sisters/White Am. Culture 101A ..... | 13 |
| Mixed Hostility .....                                        | 14 |
| International Coloreds: Say What? .....                      | 16 |
| On Sex in July .....                                         | 18 |
| For Women Who Hate a Man .....                               | 20 |
| Star Dust .....                                              | 22 |
| Black Rape .....                                             | 24 |
| Feminist Manifesto .....                                     | 25 |
| Executioner .....                                            | 26 |
| Manifesting the Rush/How to Hang .....                       | 28 |
| Trying to Draw a Square Poet .....                           | 30 |
| For the Kid .....                                            | 32 |
| Good People Know How to Greez .....                          | 34 |
| Anti Apart Hate Art .....                                    | 36 |
| Country Ethics & Donna .....                                 | 38 |
| Leaving Janet .....                                          | 40 |
| Spiritual Women's Resistance .....                           | 42 |
| God Promised Us Water that Was Wet .....                     | 43 |
| Bombs Away/Poem for the Church in Ocean Park .....           | 44 |



With deep appreciation for the criticism & encouragement  
I found at the Beyond Baroque Literary Foundation poetry  
workshop, I wanna thank 'specially:  
Jack Skelley (& all members of the international  
thrill-seeking hang),  
Bob Flanagan,  
Kyle Norwood,  
& Nancy Hall.

And Matthew.

## A FOREWORD: *On Brothers & Nigguhs*

"To admit suffering is to begin the creation of freedom."  
—Robin Morgan, *Monster*

I hope you'll be moved by these poems. Though I mean to make my work challenging, there are two areas in which I hope I will not be misunderstood. In exposing the violence of black men towards black women, I do not mean to contribute to the racist myth that black men are predisposed to violence. In fact, black men are the victims & carriers of the diseases of patriarchy & it is patriarchy which creates violence against women. Instead, I try to facilitate the healing generated by the expression of experience. I work to expose the sensitivity of the psyche & the pathology that follows abuse. We can heal our pain, but only if we first give voice to the depth of our suffering.

I write about black people with two contrasting words: nigger & nigguh; nigger being that ugly insult used by hateful bigots & nigguh being the word that black people use to talk with & about ourselves with humor & an ironic sense of our history. With beauty & rhythm black people have reclaimed & recreated our language: with it we love ourselves. To our language, our survival & our future, I offer you my work.

Michèle T. Clinton  
June 5, 1986

## I WANNA BE BLACK

It was a time, that summer '66  
when it always be some brother on the corner  
in a beret, a leather jacket, green army pants,  
wantin' to know what was a young child like me  
doin' out in the night,  
didn't I know it was dangerous,  
why, what would your momma say?

Before the red devils & bennies  
I got ten for a dollar, before  
I turned to Smokey Robinson & ripple wine,  
or gettin' finger fucked in some garage  
by some body with a dick,

all that summer, at night time walkin',  
I got schooled by miscellaneous black niggus  
gone caring & literate  
breakin' down the community party line:

Niggus need to pick themselves up out the drug scum,  
the numb come, up out the sphere of the white man's  
life plan & history & logic & systematic self hate  
for black & funk & nap & snap & pop & fuck & fun  
& just 'bout most the best thangs folks love to do.

And these brothers,  
these big brothers would walk me home  
no matter how far, how late,  
& wouldn't put they hands on me  
& wasn't disrespectful no kinda way.

Then my titties started growin' & I realized  
I could leave my glasses home: just squint.  
& then it be just 'bout guaranteed  
some fool would take me by the wrist  
& lead me through the shifting dance floor  
at fremont high saturday night sock hop,  
& grind all 'tween my thighs a full three minutes  
'cause I was starting to get cute.

For a while I got so preoccupied  
I guess I didn't read no books,  
& after the Hampton thang  
I guess other black folks  
didn't wanna read no more books neither  
'cause all that politicizin'  
was turning out to be dangerous  
to the conscientious individuals of the race  
(niggahs gettin' shot up by the FBI & carryin' on).

Or maybe we just came to a time in history  
when pussy was just plain better  
or maybe wine was not sour  
or the devils in dope smoother  
I don't know  
but seemed like everybody flaked at once.

Now folks don't know who's Ron Karenga  
Fonya Davis, & if you say black panther  
they think you mean animal  
& all the negros in dreads & greens & reds,  
all the socialistic lesbian colored girls,  
they so far away from this gerry curl,  
this wild dancing pussy,  
LA's Prince obsession & South African gold  
strung 'round black necks,

it don't seem like it ever was  
a functioning community,  
don't seem like it coulda been more than a myth,  
a wish, a desperate hallucination,  
that black people could love each other  
in the cool & dark of Watts America  
1966.

## DID SHE BLEED?

Cercie was a man built like an ape, and despite all my  
consciousness about comparing a black man to an ape, my  
mind still says ape when I think of him. Ape. Or bull.  
Big ugly black bull, his barrel chest, and shining black  
arms, the strong dead fat thick across his stomach.

There was food then. Always meat & regular meals.  
Instead of the ice box light shining unimpeded & mustard  
sandwiches & water & potatoes & potatoes & potatoes, I washed dishes,  
opened the refrigerator door over & over & stared at the  
neck bones, the leftover greens & yellow corn bread.

At first the nights were quiet. The breaths of my  
mother's bed. They whispered. But then she talked  
faster, and Cercie commanded, she talked faster in  
short jabs, then loud, loud through the night came  
her groan, all raspy, like she was throwing up.  
Then silence. The bed creaked.

All was terror in our house, with meals  
& cleanliness, that terror. That she could not tell him  
to go, because of meat & bottles & pleasure, he could  
be here & do whatever he wanted & she could not tell him  
just go  
leave  
leave me & my children, go  
or he would kick her. In the ribs, I saw his foot, it  
went in her side & blood came from her mouth. Get out  
my muther fuckin' house, she had yelled & in one stroke  
of his thick black hand, she was on the floor & his  
foot was in her ribs.

Fridays were the days, Payday. The men & women would  
come over & watch us dance & give us quarters & then  
go get a bottle. Beer was usual, she could afford  
beer on her own, but Cercie bought a bottle every  
Friday & then kicked her ass. Thursdays were numb days,  
the day after her bruises were gone, the day before



the Terror, & Saturdays were the days when the sun shone the sharpest in the projects & folks watched cartoons & Shirley Temple movies to keep their eyes off the sun. I stayed in bed as long as I could, repelled by the broken glass, the blood & swelling of my mother's face. He'd be gone & she, up earliest, would finish off the bottles, empty the warm beer cans, the saliva dripping from her mouth. 'Look what you let him do to me. Look what he did.'

Negros in the Pueblos were used to it. 'OOOO, Pooki's daddy just beat Pooki's momma's butt.' 'The police was at Dwight's house last night. I wonder if his momma got a whuppin.' Everybody was used to it, & the purple faced women went shopping so you saw them in the stores, & they did their laundry so they were in the washhouse too, everywhere swollen women & children talking fast:

Did yo' momma get whupped last night, is she missing teeth? Did you rush up his back, your brothers & sisters, were you flung across the room when he stood up & flexed his muscles? Did you see him turn, again, to her? Did you hold scissors as Tarzan flashed on teevee, & twist the blade over & over in the sun, did you cook, wash dishes, glad for the grits to fill the hole in your stomach?

Did your momma get beat last night?  
Did she bleed?

Do you remember?

## EVICTION

White men handed papers to my mother through a cracked door. We had to get boxes from the liquor store & watch her get drunk.

Before, just yesterday, my mother brought home purple heart doilies & gave us large silver coins we held tight in our hands running to catch ice cream bells.

Yesterday she baked macaroons, she talked to her plants & scrubbed even the air with her sure, careful movements. Now she sits. She stares; she drinks.

And after our disassembled home, rum, gin, & vodka boxes are carried on the backs of large & small men swarming about my mother's drunken laughter,

After the doilies have been gathered, the plants limp with root shock are placed on the orange U-Haul,

We will jump on beds & throw kung fu kicks at the walls,  
We will break windows & shriek as they shatter, for the unyielding blue eyes, the unknown, untouchable Authority that disrupted this, the peace of my mother's home.



## AIN'T 'BOUT NOTHIN' BUT SOME TOAST

How you like yo toast be a very important thang  
'cause you the only one can get toast right.

You take like eggs, 'n you say I like my eggs fluffy,  
I like my eggs wit pepper, 'n if you could fry them in margarine  
'stead of oil, I would like that.  
'N somebody brang you eggs 'sactly like that.

But toast, no matter how good you 'splain it,  
somebody brang you toast it be half way cold  
or the wrong kinda bread or soggy or too brown  
or sumthin' 'n it jess don' be right.

Yo momma cain't do it. Yo runnin' partner  
on mushrooms & motorcycle cain't do it,  
yo second best lover wit serious head  
cain't do it like you needs to get it done

when you come home, last unemployment check in hand,  
nobody at the pad, bird sleepin', kitchen cold & black,  
tight money funk fillin' yo mind, when caught 'tween  
the rush & crash of hellacious party in the streets,  
yo main squeeze don' get it up regular no more  
'n you cain't stop puttin' things in yo mouth:

Time for toast, however you like it  
'cause you the only one know the ins & outs  
of yo tastebuds & fingertips.

Eatin' toast remind me a' flyin' a flag you don' wanna spit on,  
eatin' toast remind me a' basketball, African bonding,  
& dialectic materialism. Eatin' toast say Keep hangin'  
girl, the wicked system out in the streets  
can fuck wit yo pocket, you niggus  
but who got yo self  
when the kitchen all cold & black,  
cat snorin', roommate out chasin' pussy somewhere,  
jess gimme me some Wonder bread 'n I'll be cool,

gimme three cigarettes, jet fuel coffee finna perk,  
& steam risin' offa my hot buttered toast.

## MIGRATION OF THE RATS

I remember getting dog bit,  
books & teachers had said 24 hours would do it,  
I'd be foaming at the mouth  
& dying mad, so I tole my momma  
& she said 'Let's wait & see what happens'  
& I brooded how stupid that bitch was,  
I could be dying  
not that she was tired,  
or didn't have no money for the doctors,  
no ride to the hospital  
'cause medical don't pay for false teeth or glasses  
or dog bit treatment so we did without those things.

I read in books about the rats in Harlem,  
they bit babies not 'cause rats was mean,  
which they is, but 'cause rats was hungry.  
In the Pueblos we didn't have no hungry rats,  
just a rabid mutt without a chain  
got my leg, in the projects  
I never even seen a rat,  
'cept when Dwight, nappy headed lil' boy  
lived by the wood yard, tole me a bigger rat tale  
everyday, in the units closer to the lumber yard,  
he said, the rats was comin' one & two at a time,  
Dwight wit his big lumpy head  
got him a dead wood rat, tied it to our door knob  
so I seen my first & last dead rat,  
a swinging hairy thing hung by the tail on the door.  
The rats was comin',  
I was the smallest person in the house  
& if they was gonna chew on a baby,  
they'd probably chew on me  
& my momma wouldn't get me to the hospital,  
too tired from nuthin' or too drunk,  
we'd watch the bubonic plague turn me ashy  
waiting to see.

So when I do the weekend chill out  
with white middle management,  
if I say I'm from Watts  
even the men get quiet,  
'cause they know what I am then,  
refuge nigger, possibly brutalized,  
now quieted & relieved for the view their company affords.

But when kind women trap me with soft voices  
swirling crystal glasses of juice & champagne  
one on one they say  
how did you make it out  
like I was a university or est graduate  
with cause & effect explanations for everything  
& I wisht I had that rat,  
wanna slap it on the ice sculpture,  
wisht I had a knife of political metaphysics  
to cut their vision outta me,  
I wanna be a black niggah, the dirty kind,  
a skin head punk into anal sex & hard drugs,  
gimme the spirit of a tired black mammy,  
sour as their porcelain toilets  
filled with their carnivorous farts,  
lemme spit rat poison on their clean faces

'cause I didn't get outta nuthin'  
'cept fear of dying  
which I'm still scared of,  
which the wine & pate & wit can't stop me  
dreaming rat dreams,  
the nightmares come even in suburbia  
after rows of peaches & sliced shrimp quiche  
neat in prettily arranged kitchens  
of the rising, resting middle class.

## "I CAN MAKE YOU FEEL GOOD"

LOVE, like LOVE, like the LOVE of a story,  
the LOVE in a book  
I could trust more  
than a buncha niggahs,  
LOVE like a 45, Smokey Robinson crooning  
his stomped heart out, I learned to cry  
watching my momma listen to am radio.  
In the streets, at the parties we fled  
the home front to those black  
cold adolescent nights, those LA  
clear winters biting your neck,  
I learned to grind, I reached into Temptations  
of the music & the sway & the hard  
eyes of a boy I did not know.  
For LOVE, for LOVE in the flesh,  
for grown hands around a tender beard,  
a pussy that bleeds, inside & fully  
a woman, open to swallow  
this living LOVE.

We would open like a hole, to do a boy  
& be a girl & flexible & rough tough &  
ready for how they change, each a bum  
hallucinating, sometimes a king & glowing  
in a funky castle you will tidy,  
his crown his queen will polish, his royal lady,  
his poke-ee, his one to fuck & spew out  
his anger on her face  
if he wants, if we want & consent & give it up  
to LOVE, if the solo in the song makes you hot,  
up for drama, the ups & downs in a plot  
implanted at adolescences in every body's brain.

That LOVE, LOVE clear & wanting  
a body prone  
to receive & give it up & make  
that LOVE hold him, take  
in the shape,

allow filling,  
ready to receive  
those dumb songs.



## GHETTO DISEASE

I spent 4 & one half hours looking at the smeared walls & heavy brown faces of County General, hussling the first pap smear for a 19 year old rape victim: my best friend. I used up half a tank of low lead driving to East LA to pick up my 6 year old nephew, so now there are 5 people here on these 2 couches & 2 beds in this 1 room, & wit 5 folks eatin' the corn meal canister is half empty, & ain't but 3 hot dogs left.

Somebody broke the metal hinges off the mail box & stepped wit my disability check. My brother came in drunk 5 times & tole me he was gonna roll a punk, or beat the shit out of a mesican, & while I kin usually talk him outta snatchin' purses or knockin' over liquor stores, about fightin' he tole me 'Don't chu worry none about me, I never get into sumthin' I cain't handle, that's why I ain't got no scars on my face. 'N I ain't gonna do no time behind no punks. The man don't care about faggots & mesicans. They's free game in this neighborhood.'

So when I asked my calm faced doctor what I got to do to get well, so I kin work, buy groceries & move, he said 'Stress. Eliminate stress from your life & you'll be fine.'

And just today I decided I won't go outside during the day anymore 'cause my best partner got snatched & pushed to her knees in broad day light, some funkey nigguh tipped off with 97 dollars of my uncashed money, & my brother ain't got but 2 joints left.

'Fire it up man,' I tole him. 'What dat doctor want me to do? Quit smokin'? Eat vegetables & lean beef? Take walks in the afternoon? Relax?

Shit, brother man, pass me dah joint.  
I think I'm gonna be healin' for a good while.'

## WARNING TO YOUNG BRIGHT SISTERS/ WHITE AM. CULTURE 101A

Once, a pre-med white boy laced his fingers into mine & introduced me to foreign films, espresso in cafes, & existentialism. As far away from niggerism as I could get, I ran to him, relieved to be caught by his thighs & fucked, dry, for hours & hours & hours.

Hardened black faces filled the ceramic cups & picked up the tips he left. I brooded, & after Camus had been exhausted I suggested Ntozake, Jean Toomer, Baraka.

"Why are you so angry?" he told me, & dropped my hand when black men passed us on the street;  
"Where do these moods come from?"

His childhood of piano lessons & little league, an occasional bloody nose & a fat idle mother was a calm crack in the black rat faces that haunted me at night. The fissure grew & grew by white magic, white power I wanted to be swallowed & cleansed.

I told him about mine: 2 and one half rapes, niggus cutting up my younger brother, cardboard in the bottom of shoes when it rained, & poetry books I stole from the library. Fatigued, he poured French coffee, lit a cigarette & picked up Sartre. "Strive to be positive," he told me, looking up from his book, "or at least impartial."

Impartiality scalds the tips of tongues into silence: I said nothing. The crude dry lessons of hot white men can make you numb. Or spin in anger exponential to street abuse, or thrash in dizzy shame of black innocence. Impartiality burns blind in young white men who feel the hope of Nietzsche, the power of privilege & the servitude of women who want only to escape.

## MIXED HOSTILITY

My grandmomma is a white woman,  
my momma mulatto,  
so what does that make me?

I have smooth brown skin, & good hair,  
all the women in my family have good hair,  
& all the women in my family gray around 30,  
& eventually bald, so good hair is a trick bag  
on many levels.

My momma is mulatto. Vanilla fudge, vanilla fudge  
we say when we see the golden brown babies,  
carried by them drug beaten white girls  
in the Haight, wit no man at they side.  
We say Vanilla fudge, vanilla fudge,  
Nigguhs 'n they white girls,  
nigguhs 'n they white girls.

Must confuse a nigguh pretty bad to wake up  
& find they momma is white.  
Yeah, they momma is a white girl, who used to be into brothers.  
"Brothers." That means yo own self Daddy,  
who ain't nowhere on the set.  
Must confuse a nigguh to wake up to sumthin' like that.

Then you see them same kids years later talkin' 'bout  
"I just can't seem to relate to black people"  
'n "Black women aren't anything particularly special to me."  
So we shake our heads.  
That vanilla fudge gots a hard way to go.

Momms didn't know who she was,  
& still for me the enemy blurs & escapes  
into brothers with blue eyes & sisters with creamy skin.

& I confuse other people:  
"You mixed wit sumthin'?"  
"Naw, I ain't mixed with nuthin' "

"You look like you could be mixed with Indian or sumthin' "  
"Naw, I ain't mixed with shit.  
It's all the way negro here."

What I'm 'posed to say now:  
My grandmomma is a white girl.  
I love black people  
& spite white.  
I have good hair  
destined to thin & chalken  
& my grandma, grandma is white.

## INTERNATIONAL COLOREDS: SAY WHAT?

We nigros wit white kin  
close as a generation away  
a momma or daddy with  
some bizarre social circumstance  
Here we is honey colored or brown  
introducing a lighter brother:  
a white boy!? We mocha mixes  
got lots to say to the other  
cross breeds: Mix a new york jew  
wit a puerto rican from the east  
bronx, & what do you got, a  
people stew & cross prosperity  
contradictory alliances  
with the story of the color line  
the racially ambiguous  
who slip into other cultures  
can dance salsa or reggae  
will speak with a british  
accent 4 minutes into London  
tan in a week deep brown  
& catch hell in Greece  
just like regular niggus so.

I don't wanna be no cutie pie  
fox 'cause of white feathers  
& curly hairs, don't wanna get favors  
special allowances  
jobs in the media 'cause we ain't  
as scarey as the real spooks  
burly & thick tongued  
the trust of the white man  
manifests as money & mobility  
I don't wanna feel the historic hate  
well up in the eyes of black people  
aimed at the white man, but it's  
hitting my neck, my vagina

Don't wanna buy into it, feel into it  
fall into the cross fire of homelessness  
In innocent fucking lust  
I got here - my people  
want a silent blending  
of my life into theirs &  
I wanna dialogue.



## ON SEX IN JULY

for Matthew

Mostly I think about protecting the slit,  
about mace classes from the police  
& my spiked brass knuckles  
I keep by my keys,

& I think about a window that might be cracked  
& the wicked men who carry the mail or bag my food  
& the women who suffer sex in war  
who have holes to brutalize  
babies to butcher,  
that special female vulnerability.

Once a month my blood is brown & thick  
instead of thin & bright  
'cause the best freedom from abortion is chemical  
pills that swell breasts for men to suckle.

Then he that fills me with his life  
comes near & spreads my lips with his fingers,  
he that whimpers like a child for a tit,  
for some sympathy against this harsh world,  
he stiff & hard, groping for something round & soft,  
while from inside  
my vagina grips & sours  
against its openness,  
against its need  
I can't feel anymore  
& it's summer  
so hot  
the maniacs might get lonelier,  
hornier, might telepathically sense my open patio,  
might think to bring a screwdriver,  
a loaded gun for my mouth,  
an ice pick for my anus.

While he that comes to me in the night  
when the blue fan hums,

worn sheets from his mother  
strewn across the floor, he  
my lover, my baby, my boy  
comes with lemon & ice in sweating glasses  
to cool me with electric winds  
& cups of cold water,  
comes to find a fleshy space of undrying promises,  
& warm unspoiled giving brown soil.

## FOR WOMEN WHO HATE A MAN

David has a penis he calls the Dong,  
an LA Dodgers visor cap & infectious herpes.  
David liked me to say 'big black dick,'  
& liked me to suck it while he watched  
the Disneyland Rams kick ass.

"I got some shit you ain't ready for,  
I wanna do sumthin' to you you can't deal wit,"  
& before that I tole him I wanted sex vanilla,  
no role playin' & no extraneous equipment.  
"This here's a love relationship, babe,"  
I said. Today I tell him, laughing,  
"Rose chokes her man when he comes.  
She chokes him, gives him red wine enemas,  
& watches him stagger from the bathtub."

I wasn't strapped down but had needles taped in my arms,  
& non menstrual blood on pads 'tween my legs.  
Nigguh couldn't understand why I didn't wanna fuck  
afterwards, besides doctor's orders & a bruised uterus.

I make him mean because of inside, that  
hollow space lined with creams & blood clots,  
he needs his Dong, his big black dick there, everyday,  
exactly there, moving, because I have a hole  
I can make him weak:

"I couldn't go with you," he tole me, "I just couldn't face it,"  
so I thought I could penetrate with a broom handle.  
Take a seed, a shiny black watermelon seed,  
push it up his asshole & make him grow something  
wretched & inappropriate  
needing a good clean scrape, clinical & without sympathy.  
"I got yo big black dick lover,  
I got some of just what you need,  
a good hard dickin' down.  
This here's a love relationship,

so I want you to spread 'em,  
& get ready tonight."

## STAR DUST

At ten o'clock, the women come out their rooms,  
their hands rubbing their thighs & backs. They  
drop coins in the pay phone & lean against the  
gray wall, listening to the rings.

In my room is a color teevee, chained down,  
a broken mirror, & a white lamp with a bulb  
that works only when it is screwed in.  
Behind yellow curtains limp & uneven,  
I smoke hashish & cigarettes & wait  
for the women to go away from the phone.

Though I have been known to fuck more than one man  
at a time, get slapped around, free base,  
& steal shiny things from middle class bathrooms,  
I am a decent woman:  
I don't shoot dope, never had to take a righteous  
ass whuppin', & ain't never sold no pussy,  
so I don't have to look at them. I prefer  
to sit behind the haze of limp curtains  
& wonder at the center of the white flowers  
on my broken lamp painted with red nail polish.

"Bitch. Where my money," I hear men cursing,  
"You better act right. I ain't playin'.  
Bitch, I'll stick my dick up yo ass,  
I'll fuck you with my dick up yo ass hole,  
I ain't playin' wit you."

My old man returns to me, his shoulders hunched  
over the Times, his arms carrying white bags & brown bags.  
"Look at her red pants! I can tell she's a whore!"  
"Shut up boy. That's that scotch talking.  
Can't you be polite?"  
"You god damn whore!"  
"Shut up man! I got to get along wit these hoes"  
"OOOO, I'm gonna fuck you tonight, baby,

I'm gonna do it to you tonight,"  
as I push him through the door remembering

I am a decent woman. I listen through  
the rain to their curses, I hallucinate  
unwound hangers, my man brings me wounds  
wound in a taut penis, the newspaper  
folded & creased, with red circles around  
want ads. We eat chicken McNuggets  
with our fingers, drink Jack Daniels  
from the bottle.

I am a decent woman: My old man  
never has no money, so I fuck him  
for free.



## BLACK RAPE

I got fucked & it wasn't no thang,  
just a trip 'tween a boy 'n a girl,  
some pussy & cock disease  
colonized our bodies,  
made him take me down in an alley,  
the knife still in his hand.

Just some man-woman thang,  
take it like a woman,  
take it like a white woman  
raped by a white man,  
not racially related, not culturally relevant,  
take it like a woman,  
bitch.

'Sides, black men are under  
a lotta pressure I'm told,  
got good cause to act it out.  
'Sides, black boys got decent  
reason to explode so

I got humped by a brother  
& the sickness sucked up my cunt:  
I wished for a demented caucasian,  
Give me a clean hate,  
I wasted a wish to make the cock white,  
make the swallowing a smoother acceptable  
kind of political pain.

## FEMINIST MANIFESTO

No man will ever spray paint me a heart,  
ask me to get hitched, meet they momma  
& be that special sweet one.

Nope! For me they get the vaseline,  
they buy lingerie, they make me  
say over loud speakers:

I want it. I want the drugs  
between your legs. Inject me baby.  
Fuck me like I'm trash.  
If you lookin' for a princess,  
look someplace else.

Yes honey, I am white trash, a hungry Negress  
t-totally hip to that be bop  
men usually be runnin' with them  
close talks, that jewelry, them family barbecues,  
have you thinkin' twice as much as you regular do  
just to deal with they aunties, they potato pie,  
they new songs, them fast talkin' cock slingin' boys  
wanna be with you all the time  
long as you goin' with them where they goin'!

I'd rather be trash! I'd rather dig deep  
in a publisher's anus  
wearing my rose & black G-string  
hopped up on some peanut butter crank!  
I'd rather watch pastel Venus star  
rise alone. I'd rather the feminist call me heifer  
& my momma shake her head  
than to suck the mythic bwana dick  
of respectability from men.

## EXECUTIONER

A broken wishbone is on our table,  
& handcuffs (the police kind), old roses,  
walnuts, & the usual medicinal things: cold coffee,  
half a bloody mary, weed, pipe & razor.  
The man comes in & yells at me:  
'Where are all the chains? We don't have  
enough chains in this house!' Then  
he hands me black lipstick & black  
nail polish: presents. 'You can use them  
anytime,' I say.

'How about tonight, they'd be perfect  
with these black tights, this hood.'  
'You got good legs, mister man,' I say,  
'You look pretty cool.' He points his toes.  
'That corn flakes mirror, will you get it  
for me & help me with my face? Lemme  
fix you a line first.'

We always have fresh flowers: roses  
that look like pussy & gardenias  
that smell up the house. He rapes  
the neighbor's garden for me &  
always leaves at least one thorn  
on each bud.

'You alright? You moving pretty slow  
these days. Maybe it's your period.  
You know how you get sometimes.'  
'I dunno. Those counselors—'  
'You called suicide prevention again?  
Damn you girl, I told you you don't  
have no drug problem, why you let  
those people make you crazy? Here.  
Take this mirror. Help me with my  
toe nails. I need the black smooth.'

When he leaves, the apartment goes  
blank. When he returns he shows me  
a ball separator. 'For penis torture.  
I won it at the party for best dressed  
executioner.' I get him a cigarette,  
a drink, & begin to fill up the pipe.  
He stands up, to get matches I think,  
but then he takes the cape off to show  
the red welts,

the narrow swollen lines below the  
nipples & across his back. Underneath  
the tights, the skin is broken: purple  
spots where the blood has begun to clot.

'I played a game called Gladiator.  
Three rounds against another male.'  
He lifts his white head, his light  
blue eyes at me & grins. 'I won,' he says,  
& his hands, though not small  
or scarred, are shaking.

## MANIFESTING THE RUSH/HOW TO HANG

If somebody tries to give you something, let them. This applies to everything, especially cigarettes, sex & drugs.

Tell time to take a hike.

Laugh at everything you can.

Find people who are hanging & hang with them. Screen them with drugs: weed alla time, cocaine too hard on the pocket, beer'll make you fat & gin'll make you drunk a lot quicker. Slamming is hard on the nerves, green pills white pills & black ones from somebody's doctor play real well, & nobody crazy with good sense does acid.

Tell everybody everything. No masks, no mysteries & tell every body you won't tell anybody, & tell anyway.

Figure out who is hanging with who. Go to people you don't hang with but know they hang with people you hang with, 'n say HOW'S DAH HANG?

Establish an in clique code word for those not hanging: ya gotcha basic square, ya gotcha pasty faced 'merican geek, bendin' over, goin' for the okey doke. Ya gotcha LA strangelo, ain't nan' one of 'em know how to hang.

Open your home as a hang center. Keep tidbits in your freezer, stock up on ultra-stress formula vitamin B complex. Do a lotta dishes. At least once a week, plan on giving over an evening to somebody's bad trip, somebody's peel, some trim together sculptor will do the break down & then you got to hang tough.

How to hang tough: Imagine yourself very cool, very sharp, & altogether together. Remember, it's fine to be crazy, it's like really okay to be crazy, like what the fuck else we gon' do, we got so much heart, so much insight, we livin' in a hellacious world, man, folks like us, if we wasn't crazy,

we'd be dead or crazy, ONE! Then tell your partner. Let him know who's boss. Listen. Hold his hand. Hold him. Tell him his momma loves him. Confess something evil. Hold him. Tell him again, his momma wasn't jiving, she does love you man, she just didn't know how & it ain't nuthin' wrong wit being crazy, & you ain't crazy no way. Be prepared to knock his ass out if he gets too wild.

Regarding sexual activity, consider filthy language and lingerie. Never sleep with anybody crazier than you. Unless you go up for a wild ride. Keep your hands cupped over your heart. Do not fall in love.



## TRYING TO DRAW A SQUARE POET

The hoes  
call any woman  
who will not turn a date  
a square,  
& the women  
who will not turn a date  
call the women  
who will not shoot dope  
a square,  
& the women  
who will not shoot dope  
call the women  
who will not fuck a man  
they don't know just for fun  
a square.  
& the women who will not  
fuck a man they don't know real well  
just for fun, well,  
who knows about them anyways. (They squares.)

My momma is definitely  
a square. Yo momma is  
definitely a square.

Nat King Cole,  
suicide poems,  
eating in cars,  
K-Mart, handcuffs  
& loud noise  
could go either way,  
but violence is always  
cool. (People love to  
hear about violence.)

If not drugs,  
weed. If not weed,  
gin. If not gin,

Millers Light.  
& if not coffee &  
cigarettes,  
you dealin' wit  
a square.

I have a little stamp  
I pass out to white folks  
who show me their art work.  
I say, "You cool wit me, man.  
You ain't no square."  
Instantly, they are relieved.

But being a square  
is cool. Some of the  
coolest cool I know  
is a square.  
I pretend to be a square.  
You pretend to be cool.  
I am pretty cool about  
pretending to be a square.  
You are pretty god damn cool  
about pretending to the square  
in relation to the cool  
where I am  
in reality  
a square.  
Making all this up.  
Which is: what it be like.

And definitely  
pretty cool.

## FOR THE KID

I am a nigger.  
I am a mad nigger.  
I am a mad nigguh  
in love with everythang  
& you are a white boy.  
Just like yr bald headed faggot daddy  
filled with anti-fact & anti-feeling  
from yr murmuring heart & gnarly feet.

You ride a motorcycle. You chew mushrooms.  
You spit poison at the sweet women  
& dare them to come near. You hide,  
you twitch, yr stomach knots.

On the other hand,  
I am wild.  
I ain't got no sense.  
I am a wild nigguh in love with everythang  
impossible, or tarnished, or dying

I put moves on short honkies with acne  
& little dicks just to see them dance.  
I laugh like a hanna barbera cartoon,  
smile as hot & spicy as the steam  
coming off a pot of Louisiana gumbo.  
I know herbal remedies for hemorrhoids,  
incantations for manic nightmares,  
mojo, hoodoo, & little known to the  
Western world nigese magic. I raise  
red angles from white ash;  
I remind you to take vitamins, say grace,  
& toast whenever we got alcohol.

I am a mad  
crazy  
nigguh-woman. You are a  
wicked

white  
boy.

And you will  
come  
around.

## GOOD PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO GREEZ

3943 Western is Red's, Redbone's,  
sistah with skin as light & fresh  
as lilacs & curved broad butter,  
lady you know just as soon  
take a sharp tongue  
as a butcher knife  
to anybody's behind  
who step out of pocket,  
girl will fix you up wit  
steamin' biscuits & jelly,  
brown sugar & grits,  
fried eggs & porkchops  
or hot links, &  
jet fuel mornin' coffee  
have you righteously buzzed.

So, for \$3 you can  
wake it up on Sunday mornings  
sitting next to the  
toffee stockings & powdered  
faces of decent black women  
coming from the A.M.E.

After eatin' like that  
you got to take a shit  
but see Red don't like no  
white folks in her kitchen,  
don't want no  
stringy hairs  
falling in the pancake batter,  
& seein' as the bathroom  
is just past the sink & grill,

If on Sunday mornin's  
you white poets  
grog yourself out of bed,  
stretch through the hangover

& find yourself seeking  
smooth coffee & ethnic  
atmosphere & you got \$3  
& can make it over to  
39th & Western,

Remember  
Redbone'll fix you up good,  
welcome you any place  
but the toilet

so you'll have to  
hold your shit  
til you get back across town.



## ANTI APART HATE ART

American blacks are known  
for black magic & music &  
humor, not black at all  
but deep husky hearted  
laughter that empties us  
of hate.

Anti-hate we partay, we play,  
make soul food easy  
for white folks to swallow,  
cut back on spice & the nasty  
grease of history, niggahs  
be shame to be grouped  
wit the jiga boos of the jungle,  
beatin' drums, barefoot & ignorant.  
Africa don't got the style  
of new wave slick purple  
pompadors, liberated negros  
set the pace  
in athletics, we the fastest,  
hippest thang goin', doing the  
well paid work of soothin' honkies  
& stayin' high, hittin' the joint  
to hide a shit colored memory of being  
scum in this country, in this  
world, being hung & strung out  
in South Africa.

Happy negro. The news betrays your  
joyous finger pop. (The white man ain't  
done wit your ass yet.) The radio  
reveals honkies' consistent cruelty  
& america's indifference to lost  
black blood. In Soweto, 32 killed,  
twenty something wounded, in Sharpsville  
69 black pacifists made the streets red.  
The media conjures a hurting

that never touched my body  
I grow out raged dread locks,  
feed my babies greens,  
sing 'em old blues & gospel,  
I grow dread full black rage,  
a tradition make me wish  
for prison or guns but  
america sweet assimilate,  
off-white black culture  
gotta make it soft  
for whittie to comprehend  
this evil possessing me,  
gotta rise above  
their stink like a saint,  
be a Tutu, be a King,  
anti apart hate  
and spit out  
an american black poem:  
anti apart  
hate  
art.

## COUNTRY ETHICS & DONNA

When I lived in the country, I was friends with this white girl who was real round & real dirty. Like her hair was kinda greasy & she didn't wear shoes & the edges of her feet were dark & thick. And she wore long greasy skirts, spattered from the soup kitchen where she sometimes worked.

And she talked about this trip she was gonna take with her old man, going off to his mountain or sumthin'.

And I said

'Well, how long you been with him?'

& she said

'Two weeks.'

And then she talked about her ex-old man.

And then she talked about the guy she was getting ready to leave her new old man for.

One day I made two lasagna casseroles & chocolate chip cookies for people who had been kind to me: some musicians who played latin jazz & got me loaded on red hair humboldt home grown. And Janet who bakes bread & is a christian. And Donna who gave me a feather roach clip when she found out I like to get high. I was gonna give all nice people cookies, celebrating my food stamps I got in the mail.

Food stamps was one of the hippest things about Humboldt county. It only takes fifteen minutes to sign up, & they put them in the mail, so you get them the next day, & you don't have to go traipsing all across town, trying to cash them, looking at hard faced people looking at you like you ain't got no sense just 'cause you ain't got no money. Humboldt county puts they food stamps in the mail, so you can go straight from the mail box to the grocery store.

Most folks were poor there, the students & the working people. The bums were poor too but that meant not eating in restaurants & not having savings. Most folks was warm, everybody was well fed, & mostly everybody was happy.

I was so happy I took my food stamps presents, wrote out a note that said:

Donna,

whatever you do, you cool wit me.

And left it with cookies & casseroles.

Then one time me & her was soppin' in the country rain, gettin' very loaded, tryin' to decipher The Grand Sadness That's Always With Us, & she said

'Ya know, ya gotta have faith, & read the signs,

like that time you brung me that casserole,

I had wished for a sign I wasn't gonna go hungry,

& Tom had just run off on me, & you brung me that casserole.

I knew it was a sign.'

I saw her one more time & she had a blond unshaven man in dark boots & thick jacket. She took me in the kitchen tole me this was her new boyfriend & she was goin' off to his mountain with him & she loved him very much. I tole her 'Alright,' gave her my last five dollar food stamp & got on.

Then steady money started coming in, ya know, I must have been working, or not spending money or had a good boyfriend, or some sumthin', 'cause money kept coming in & I decided that to tithe would be an excellent thing to do, so I send a check to her address. The letter was returned to me. No such place, no such mountain, they tole me. And I have not heard from her since.



## LEAVING JANET

She baked bread. Hanging in my mind is the odor of warm raisin bread, baking. She had thick arms, paste colored, and long, not-thick brown hair, always clean & always braided. She baked, once a week she baked: hand-picked berry pie, french vanilla cookies, and she cooked too, fried chicken & eggplant parmesan, I could go into a trance over the food she fed me.

She talked of her husband Jim, who was albino-looking and skinny. She told me stories with the moral being: And that's how he tricked me into marrying him. Stories that had stuff like: 'N seeing as he tricked me into marrying him, well naturally, takin' into account the fact I got tricked into it, well, the way I see it is, Yep, good ole Janet was not into that man.

She was a christian. She kept her hands crossed, but never her fingers. She said to me, "All the ex-junkies in town go to our church. You should go sometime. You'd like it."

She grew pink budding flowers, 'n white ones, 'n blue ones. Her fingers traced hummingbird patterns for me in the sky. She grew vegetables from a place that was not distinguishable as a garden, but vegetables came out of it nonetheless, 'n they were sweet, 'n we ate them. The house was always dirty, so dirty that friends said "How can you live like this?" Once a week picked flowers, daffodils, magnolias, 'n spread them, thick as honey, everywhere in the house.

It was all her idea.

But then, the green on the way down the path home darkened 'n thickened over my head, I dreamt of flying, no evening walk was long or cool enough, the bottoms of my feet began to itch, 'n all that, all together, happening at the same time said Go.

Janet helped me pack. Janet brought me string, 'n boxes, 'n showed me how to fix my plants so they would not spill on the road. Janet baked me cookies, 'n put them in a bag marked 'Good Luck Michelle.' Good ole Janet. She sure would be fun if she got loaded. That good ole Janet, always a helping hand, always a hot meal, 'n it was true, 'n I ate my cookies 'n left.



## SPIRITUAL WOMEN'S RESISTANCE

for Carolyn Fershtman

The sisters of my coven do mushrooms  
right after magenta robes are hung.  
We oil our breasts, the circle of witches  
& priestess, nude, ready  
to prepare pray & perform  
ritual to receive the spells,  
the triple hex, to trip the toes of men  
on an evil walk, the zap for brutal police  
& a start for the women's army  
to combat rape.

On the quarter moon we meditate  
on Venus's rise  
to channel a knowing  
back into our hands,  
we must steady  
tomorrow, we gather to gather  
healing lights  
charged  
with a dead  
serious  
plan to fight.

## GOD PROMISED US WATER THAT WAS WET

In the Eureka zoo, there is an ocelot who lives in a box about the size of a working class living room, who sits on a papier-mache tree, with no branches or leaves, just a trunk. Her fingers clutch the trunk of the papier-mache tree, & she stares out at the people who live in the city, all the pasty faced families & children with sticky hands, holding balloons, all the mothers & fathers who just let their children out of Sunday school, point & say, look, johnny, there is a wild animal. Look see. The ocelot's living room is painted with sky on the ceiling, clouds & puffs of plastic blue. On the floor someone painted a babbling brook, with stones & water, using the same color blue as the sky. On the three walls are painted trees, the same color as the papier-mache trunk & plants without flowers & more flat sky.

The ocelot's fingers clutch the trunk, but there is no other visible tension in her body. Her eyes are dazed & open towards the crowd. She does not blink or respond to the peanuts that are thrown at her. This bores the children, who run on to see cages of captured birds.

I laughed out loud when I first saw her, "That cat must feel like she's on acid or something. Look at her. Staring at the walls like that, thinking that this is life." I stared at her a long time, watching my thoughts, until there were no thoughts but streams of tears on my face. And sounds came, & the children began to stare at me harder than they were staring at the cat, & I was sobbing then, for all, for everything, for the three dimensions they made into two for cats, so Sunday afternoon will not be boring. And for me, alive in the cat, with three dimensions around me that made me sense a fourth, & how love is not thick enough, water not wet enough, children too old, too callous, too quickly.

They carried me out of the zoo that day. I missed certification by the skin of my teeth.

## BOMBS AWAY /

Poem for the Church in Ocean Park

Once it was a place in time  
way 'fore our thinkin' got rancid  
w/ machine lust & logic  
& logic got big on no heart & materialism  
when regular folks could worked  
these problems out  
(by race mixing)  
& the miracle of children born w/ out bitterness

but we done soured the home land  
& our bright ocean:

when I go for a dip of calm  
nature's water, my skin come out  
skummy, a rash on my ass get me to  
itchin' & thinkin' 'bout them  
hard war-infested men  
who didn't feel our planet's vulnerability  
& like hot polished metal  
better than clean beaches & peace.

So when the fizzle come,  
when the final red burns  
a slow mass suffer,  
I want those military men & their women  
to eat the toxic waste, get enough  
sizzlin' in their pores  
to bottom the fuck out

like pain could crack 'em up & out  
of evil into nicety,  
as if hurt could make a bad person good,  
as if right wingers could say uncle  
& make it alright, say, hey, I take it  
all back, I been mean, I'm sorry,  
I been greedy, I could be nice

now, let's build a nice world,  
black & blue, pussy & dicks together.

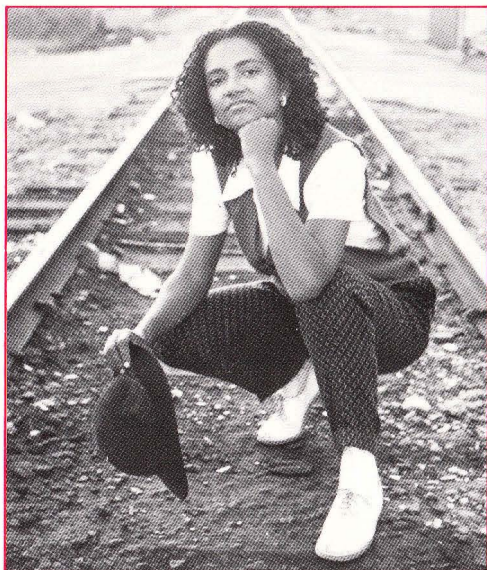
And the hands of racially mixed  
unborn children would be held  
in a ritual by our mother  
our water the sea  
& send a hope back into the past,  
our dirtied & anger filled now,  
to greet & warm & lift us.

Michèle T. Clinton is a poet/performance artist living in Los Angeles. She is a director of the Beyond Baroque poetry workshop. She has read & published extensively throughout Southern California. She is a featured artist on two Freeways Records spoken-words compilations, *English As A Second Language* & *Neighborhood Rhythms*, & is awaiting the release of an album of her work. She is a 1985 Alice Jackson Poetry Award winner.

This is her first volume of poetry.



## Michèle T. Clinton



# HIGH BLOOD/PRESSURE

"Stunning in exuberance and linguistic authenticity, *High Blood/Pressure* is a welcome and refreshing addition to literature shaped from the black experience. These caustic, satirical, and deeply moving poems illuminate an intelligence striving to obliterate the monstrous, dehumanizing insanity of American apartheid. Clinton's youthful 80's tongue echoes the proud black voice that dominated the media during the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the 60s and early 70s. These poems are more than declarations of war, of love, of suffering; they are exorcisms—the rootings out of racism and sexism. They are the anxious and determined cries of a talent that explodes on the page like machine gun fire; unafraid of controversy and more than willing to challenge elitist complacency."

—Wanda Coleman

**West End Press**  
Box 291477  
Los Angeles, CA 90029

Front cover photo by Fred Fisher  
Back cover photo by Susan Carpendale  
Cover design by John Pilcher

ISBN 0-931112