

The Names Are Many

—dedicated to my ancestors

I wish to thank them,
the kings and queens,
hunters, warriors, leather tanners,
basket weavers, farmers, poets,
craftsmen and griots...

Those who lived through indignity
of capture, enslavement, violation,
and brutality, those taken from their
homeland, to Goree island, the land of
no return, transported from
a home they would never see again.

I want them to be proud,
and know their struggle
not in vain.

I thank the survivors
of the Middle Passage.
If they had not survived,
Where would my history be?

I honor their presence,
when wind rustles morning leaves,
brightened by the sun,
I hear them in my dreams
and listen to sages bearing news
inspiration only a poet can use.

Think of my existence,
What I was born to be
a fighter for equality.
Think of all those people
who died so I could
taste freedom.

Think of the blood-stained banner
of heritage left to me.

I am more than one people.
Their names are African,
Scottish, Spanish, Mexican,
Choctaw, Seminole, and
New Iberian Creole.

Think of my people on the banks
of the Nile,
and my great-great grandmother's rape,
bearing the slave master's child.

My granny said,
"There were no happy slaves
on those dusty plantations,
and my family wanted the best for me."

She spoke of, "Loving God,
the of family, a need for education,
and living righteously."

Think about my purpose
in the scheme of things...
about the blood-stained banner of courage
given to me.

—Antoinette Franklin

manifest destiny remix

you would have us quiet under your little hands
handcuffed and hooded in your armored vans
cornered and compliant before your eminent demands
corralled and deported back to whatever gutter or ghetto
you think we crawled out of.

you would wash your little hands of us
after you have hog tied and tarred us
you would stuff your mouth with cake
savor our wine and swallow our moans
you would whistle while you waltzed.

you would open the steeple doors with your little hands
gaze at the glass ceiling rapturously
babble incoherently and think you speak in tongues
and though you prepare the altar fastidiously
you do not see our hands holding god so steadily.

—Yon Hui Bell

The Aztec glyph for noble speech -
'flower and song' (*flor y canto*),
detail from Codex Borbonicus

