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A Poem for Africans at Hastings Law School

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*a poem for africans at hastings law school**

by Lisa B. Thompson

this is a poem for africans at hastings law school who
endure, involve, evolve, resolve struggle after struggle
is this what its all about?
i am writing a poem about them three years
of law school at hastings for dion, kamala, valerie, clemont, charles,
veronica, dianne, sibby, patrick, sharon, rickey...and those fifteen
disqualified by intellectual apartheid
re-admits, repeats, re-examining, restructuring reality
but this is for the ten walking...
who cannot forget as the california bar looms ahead
to behead...how many will pass?
C = JD, C = JD, C = JD
for law school is only the middle passage
there are those who jumped ship to swim back home
or who drowned in the cruel waters of exams, outlines,
performance anxiety, and financial sobriety
only to surface later in life as another
u c hastings law school statistic.

“its so HARD here!”
the echo of so many voices
on the elevator heading down from the towers landing
into the filth of the tenderloin scattered with bodies without homes
passing them each day on the way from bart
whispers of their pain, “i will work for food...”
men: young weary wasted; lost: time energy hope

* The author composed and performed this piece for the 1989 Hastings College of the Law African Peoples Graduation Celebration.

Lisa B. Thompson, a native San Franciscan, is a poet and playwright living in Southern California while completing a Masters of the Arts in Afro-American Studies at UCLA. Her current projects include researching slavery in recent Afro-American fiction and writing a play examining the relationships between the sexes.

“yo! homeboy you gotta dime so i kin getta cup a coffee?”
as you pass him on the way to con law to insure your place
in the black bourgeoisie you must ignore the fact
this homeless brotha reminds you of uncle louis from texas instead
you shuffle in empty pockets retrieving the quarter
allotted for your daily cup.
you mutter something about “get a job man”
knowing your quarter likely helps pay for another type of anaesthetic
its hard to walk with blinders in a city littered with bodies
there never is an excuse for time
no time for family tragedy, no time for lover's whim,
no time
another case to prepare, another brief to write, another outline
always another outline
C = JD, C = JD, C = JD...

this is a poem for those africans who do not know
they are african having already begun to believe the lies
“you are an american first, a woman, a man, a human being”
“all you have to do is perform,” excel, exceed
the limits of normal human capacity
wear an “s” on your chest
posing for the cover of california lawyer
in blue tights, red trunks with a briefcase in hand
“super negro”
pleased to assist in all forms of litigation
public interest
privately owned
crowded in by the
approving glances of the charles houston bar and the wiley foundation's
eyes.
C = JD, C = JD, C = JD...

a poem for africans at hastings who
marching again to protest
and the truth is they detest

your unrest
after all the sixties are gone, finished, spent
the black struggle irrelevant but you know
this war never ends

not until african first year students come through hastings' doors
no longer facing racist exams
no longer confronted by belligerent flyers defacing walls
preaching ignorance and hate
no longer forced to count the number of african male students on one
hand
no longer sitting isolated in classes of two hundred where
they are the "only one"
who knows about the real public enemy
it should take more than a nation of millions to hold us back
from disposing of institutional racism, sexism, classism, fascism and
recalling our chant
C =JD, C = JD, C = JD.
it will no longer be so damn relevant.

this is a poem for ten beautiful africans
who conquered insane tasks without losing sanity
who juggled memory, fear, pain, love, passion, with energy beyond
days
who maintained by borrowing strength from God, the ancestors, their
families and through internal struggle even from each other's tears &
smiles
who now provide a rich and lasting impression
they represent a positive chapter of our people's rich history
praise to the young folk who found wisdom enough to get this far
remember to protect those who adore you
from the wicked world that tried intensely to keep this day
from you, from us
this is the first annual hastings law school
african student's graduation celebration
it's nice to write an ending to a sobering happy story

4 HASTINGS WOMEN'S L.J. [VOL. 2.1 1990]

the middle passage is over
it's time to get off the ship

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