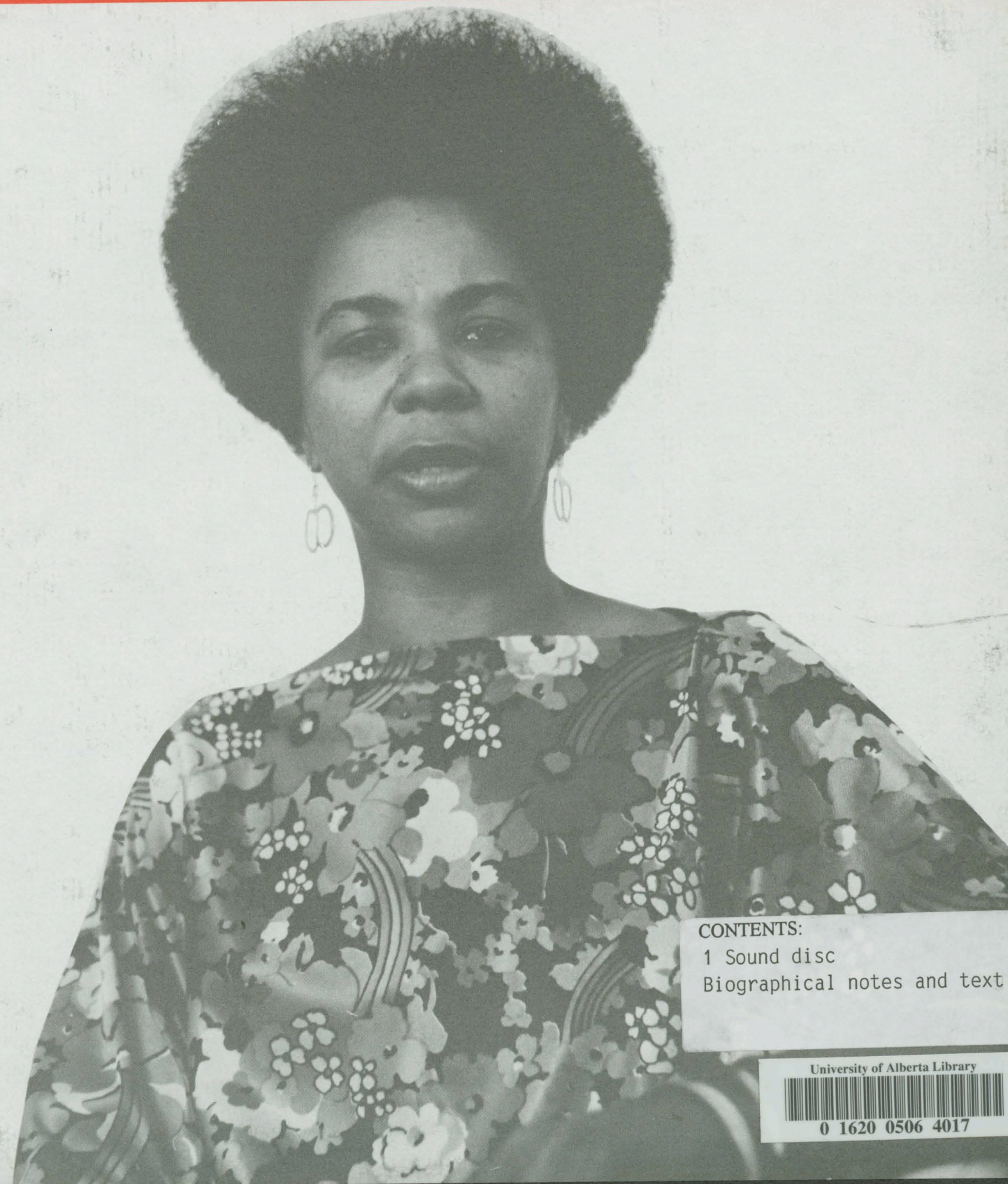


Nancy Dupree: SWEET THUNDER

poetry read by the poet



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NANCY DUPREE: SWEET THUNDER

Black poetry read by the poet

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MY PEOPLE IS

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Biography: Nancy Lorraine Dupree

She's a southerner who did her growing up in Sumter, South Carolina. She graduated three times: from Lincoln High School in Sumter, from Virginia State College in Petersburg, and from Mills College in Oakland, California.

These three graduations convinced her that she was qualified to announce to the world, "Get ready, 'cause here I come!" She came and found out that the world was truly ready. . .had been ready for a LONG time. . .and the wrestling match was on. Wrestling with money, marriage, motherhood, divorce; wrestling with reality. . .wrestling with life. She looks back and wonders how she survived because she knows now that she was not EVEN ready.

What she has to show for it all is her own personal individual sanity, a child most precious to her, a few worldly possessions, and some poems. You are invited to take the poems, fold them neatly, and tuck them away in the corner of your soul reserved for food.

Right on!!!

MY PEOPLE IS

my people is ignorant...selfish...and...cruel
just in case you think I don't mean what I say
I'm gonna repeat myself
I said
my people is ignorant...selfish...and...cruel

got ya goin. . .ain't I
bet some o' Y'all is grinnin inside and sayin
"that's right.that is RITE!"

somebody else is wonderin
"where this fool comin from?"

then there's them that's just sayin
".gee."

well. . .before somebody decides to join church
and blow my brains out
let me hip you to where I'm comin from

first of all
my people has got to be ignorant
cause
after 400 years in America
they still too dumb to know
that
they ain't supposed to survive (that's right)
America do not intend for my people to have nuttin
America do not intend for my people to do nuttin
America do not intend for my people to be nuttin

but you'd never know it from lookin at em
they be laughin LOU D
singin LOU D
wearin LOU D colors (pretty, too). . .struttin

and I mean it when I say my people is selfish
other people be askin.how Y'all do dat
if we had to live like Y'all got to live
we'd flush ourselves down the toilet
so how Y'all do dat
and my people say.....nuttin to it but to do it

cruel
my people take the cake for bein cruel
they git chopped down over here so they pop up over there
they struggle through that jail thang. . .that war thang
they wrassle with hunger and disease
but do you know that
some of em is BOLD enough to live to be senior citizens

and they just keep on keepin on
ain't supposed to be no keepin on the way America slaps
it to em
I think they do it just to be aggravatin

my people
got the nerve
to be
Magnificent!!!

BATS AND BUTTERFLIES

seems like to me there be two kinds of people in this world. . .
there be the bats
and
there be the butterflies

butterflies are like cotton candy
fluttering from flower to flower
leaving behind a trail of silent sun-filled kisses
a lovely touch of charm to God's luscious creation

bats be like stink breath
like a big pile of what you get
from
a

big dose of ExLax
like personal gases
the
kind
that
come at you from below the waist

and even tho butterflies don't bother NOBODY
bats don't like butterflies
as a matter of fact
bats HATE butterflies

why? ? ?
don't start me to lyin
just like it takes a fool
to understand
a fool
it takes a bat
to explain
a bat
only a bat can tell you how come they
lie
-n-
strain
-n-
connive
to destroy the butterflies
and
they
children
and
they
children's
children's
children

but there's one thing I do know. . . God don't like ugly
so
it is a DANGEROUS thing
to set yourself against
the servants
of
the
Almighty God

FIRST LOVE

Love makes the world go round, so they say. What keeps your world going
round when you didn't get no love way back when? Way back there when
you didn't know nothing; when you didn't know nothing about nothing ex-
cept sleeping and getting fed and crying because you was wet or because
your diaper was full?

And even though you didn't know nothing and couldn't say nothing, you
were already asking that question: Do you love me? And you knew the
answer, even then. You could tell by the eyes, by the voice by the feel
of the hands when they touched you.

And if the answer was "NO", oh, precious God. That's when death began;
the death that was to become your shadow, your heartbeat, your smell.
And you can believe me when I say that the absence of love is death. Just
as sure as the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, the absence of
love is death. And every hour of your life from then on is turned into a
war between you and death.

And you fight it. Fighting is easy in the beginning. See, you figure if
you're polite and obedient and you don't get your clothes too dirty, she
won't have any choice but to love you.

And when that doesn't work, you become what they call an over-achiever.
What that means is your report card has nothing but A's and B's; it means
you always learn the longest speech for Easter Sunday; it means you be-
come HEAD majorette; it means you win a scholarship to graduate school.

And when the answer is still "NO", you spend money. You spend money on
sewing machines and car payments and water and light bills, etc., etc.,
etc.,

And when even that doesn't work, you run: from her, yourself, and every-
body else. And you look for a hiding place. You don't know it, but that's
what you're looking for. And even when it looks like you might have found
one, you start running again, because by now you can't believe. You can't
believe in yourself and you can't believe in anybody else.

There are moments, of course, but that's just what they are: moments. And
in those moments you feel so peaceful; you feel so free; you feel like you
know how to get anything you want. But as I said, moments. You're lucky if
you get three in forty years.

So where does all this leave you? I'll tell you where it leaves you. It
leaves you up the creek without a paddle, and the waters of death take you
wherever they please. It leaves you locked in a dark room, and your eyes
forget how to deal with light. It leaves you frozen with your knees up un-
der your chin and both thumbs in your mouth. And even though you're
constantly moving, you're going nowhere.

And only God can help you.

NEW LOW

every morning when I wake up
and
find that I can still see
still think
still walk
talk
and
scratch my back

if my baby can still say. . . "I love you, Mommie"
if my house is just like I left it when I went to bed
I say
"Thank you, Master.
I promise that I will spend this day
trying to deserve my sunrise."

but ya know. ...
 seems like to me
 there be some folks who wake up and find the same thing I find
 they can scratch they own backs
 they babies is kool
 and
 they ain't been robbed
 but instead of sayin. . ."Thank you". . .
 they must be sayin something like this

"I promise that I will spend this day stoopin to a new low
 I'm known to be two-faced and sneaky
 everybody knows I don't keep my promises
 and that
 my word is as valuable as what the chicken left in the chicken yard
 I wear my brain between my thighs
 and
 I wanna be exactly like richard nixon when I grow up
 my rhetoric comes from the temple
 and
 my deeds come from the toilet

but even with all that
 I still say
I PROMISE THAT I WILL SPEND THIS DAY STOOPIN TO A NEW LOW"

THE BROTHERS

I believed it, Y'all.
 I believed it with a PASSION.
 They told me
 that
 all I had to do was be a nice girl,
 keep my dress down,
 get good grades in school
 and I'd have it made.
 And let me tell you,
 I BELIEVED IT!!!

I was a nice girl.
 Did not smoke, drink, nor cuss.

And you won't believe how long I kept my dress down.

Got them high marks in school
 and
THOUGHT I was ready.

The main thing I was gettin ready for was. . . . my MAN.
 I was gonna be good to my man.

I wasn't gonna be like the sister
 who nagged at her man;

or like the one
 who took her man's weekly pay
 and
 left him with cigarette money;

and sho nuff not like the one
 who was
 out there tippin //
 with somebody else.

NO. . . NO!!!
 Mine was gonna be different.

I was gonna LOVE him.
 All that tenderness and sweetness I was savin
 I was savin for
 HIM!!!

I was gonna kiss him all over
 with my fingertips;

my legs and arms would wrap him
 in a web of joy;

my mouth would whisper
 sweet
 words.

Let Me

I want to be a circle around you. . .

a M O I N G circle going wherever you go.

I want to be your fragrance. . .

so
 that
 when they come near you
 they will smell

the
 taste of my tongue

the
 kiss of my fingertips

the
 beat of my thighs

O

n

y

O

u.

I want to be the glow of your skin

(your tight
 sweet
 magnificent
 BLACK skin.)

I want to be the pause between your heartbeats
 the sound of your breath.

If I cannot be. . .
leave me

so I can s
m
l
e
at
death.

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HAPPY 4th of JULY, Y'ALL

ring, you bell
you bell of freedom
y'ol bell of liberty and justice for all

ring for Malcolm
for Peter Jackson
for Thomas Dupree
ring for me

sometimes I feel
well. . .
you know how I feel cause
you
and
I
feel the same thing

maybe your reaction is to curse
and
maybe my reaction is to cry
but
whether it brings on cursin
or
cryin
you and I feel the same thing

it rings different, you know
when it rings for us
it rings different

it rings jail
it rings sickness
it rings blood

African blood
Indian blood
Vietnamese blood
Australian blood
Jamaican blood
my blood

so.
ring, you bell
you bell of freedom
y'ol bell of liberty and justice for all

seem like it's gonna take God Himself to silence you 4

HERD RUNNERS

You hip to HERD RUNNERS?

You know 'bout HERD RUNNERS. . .
You may not call 'em HERD RUNNERS,

but
yeah

you hip to HERD RUNNERS.

Now. . .

I know you know 'bout herds

a herd of cows
a herd of sheep
a herd of butterflies. . . (smile)

And. . .

I know you know 'bout runnin'

runnin' from the police
runnin' to the bathroom
runnin' to catch the bus

So now that we understand each other
let's deal with the lowest form of life
on the face of this earth.

HERD RUNNERS
HERD RUNNERS

have you heard
about
the

HERD RUNNERS ?
(repeat)

You've heard
about
the. . . . number runners;

you've heard
about
the. . . . game runners;

you've heard
about
the. . . . track runners;

have you heard
about
the. . . . HERD RUNNERS?

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and those
are just a few of the one
we
HEARD about
if you put em all together single file
the line would stretch to the sun
and that's over 92 million miles, Chile

so you walk that walk
and
you talk that talk
nobody talks the king's english
like we talk it in Rochester
and down South
and Harlem
and South Philly
and wherever two or more Bloods gather together

them words be kickin
and cuttin
and dancin
and weepin
and they ought to
cause
they be made out of slav ry
and lynchin
and cops
and courts
and welfare
and unemployment
and disease

so
you look in that mirror
and
GRIN!!!

and
I want you to walk and talk so strong
that
when the NEXT bicentennial rolls around
somebody
will be lookin in a mirror
and
thankin
YOU!!!!!!

We'd share one another's burdens.
We'd laugh together.
We'd wipe away one another's tears.
Anger and frustration would be melted
just from lookin at one another.

Well. . . .if you have lived at all,
you know I had to learn the hard way.

I couldn't believe it.
I wouldn't believe it.
This wasn't happenin!

Them words weren't comin out of HIS mouth. . .
there was
no
way
he could look me in the face
and say,
"How do I know this baby is mine?"

And he didn't mean it when he told me
"When I move in with you,
I'll do the cookin and cleanin
while
YOU
work."

And that wasn't him
walkin in the club
with a

w
h
i
t
e

woman.

And he WAS tellin the truth
that payday
when he said
he only had \$12
cause
he'd sent \$100 to his mother.

And that wasn't me. . .sittin up on the side of the bed
in the middle of the night
smokin cigarettes
and
cryin
cause he wasn't home yet.

And that sho nuff wasn't me. . .o
u
t

there
with another man
(wishin it was him).

And that couldn't have been me
sayin,
"Don't call me no more."
(and meanin it).

I've said all this to say
I finally figured out my mistake.

It took all them lonely nights,
all them silent screams
all them cigarettes
to
make
me
see
where I went wrong.

6 I messed up by makin the mistake of thinkin that the Brothers was men.

LITHO IN U.S.A. 