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First Prize, Prose (Carnegie Mellon University)  
Katy June-Friesen

### Letter from Indian Country

“These people with all this land, eh?” says my mechanic, Larry. We’re riding in his truck through the desert north of Albuquerque, N.M., along the shadow of Sandia Mountain. He drops me off at the Santa Ana Pueblo reservation and says, bueno, he’ll have my car ready by noon.

For the past year, my work has been here—on Pueblo land, where Americans for Indian Opportunity rents an office from the Santa Ana tribe. Officially, I’m an Americorps VISTA volunteer and the public information associate for AIO. More accurately, I’ve been a guest in a national Native community focused on bringing Indigenous voices to local, national and international affairs. I consider my job with AIO a privilege because I arrived as a cultural outsider and became a collaborator.

My experience in this five-person office might be compared to a non-Mennonite entering a Mennonite community. There are last names, foods, inside humor, traditions and gatherings that one must get to know.

So I’ve attended Pueblo feast days, where visitors are invited to eat in Pueblo members’ homes, and the ceremonies honor a specific Catholic saint. On these visits, I’ve watched ceremonial dances, become familiar with traditional Pueblo regalia and learned the finer points of red and green chile, beans, oven bread, bread pudding, enchiladas and potato salad.

In the AIO office, I’ve read tribal and national Native newspapers, followed tribal elections, learned about casinos, federal government policies, economic development, tribal governments and trust lands. I’ve also written press releases and edited the AIO newsletter.

When I was in grade school, I dressed up as an Indian for Thanksgiving every other year. On the off years, I was a pilgrim. In third grade, our class had an “Indians Unit.” I remember going to Sand Prairie, west of Newton, Kan., and examining the plants the Plains Indians used to survive. We studied the “artifacts” of their culture and put up teepees; we didn’t learn about the impact of colonization on Native communities.

Now, I know about the year 1598, 60 years after the Spanish first arrived in the Southwest, when expedition leader Don Juan de Oñate declared

all Pueblo people subjects of the Spanish monarch. At Acoma Pueblo, the warriors refused to submit to the declaration and killed 13 Spanish soldiers. In response, the Spanish army killed hundreds of Acoma people and amputated one foot of each of the male prisoners who were over the age of 25.

More importantly, I now understand how the histories of colonization connect to the present and how Native peoples were able to survive and move on. For example, when the Spanish didn't leave the Southwest, Pueblo peoples learned to shroud native religion in Catholicism to appease the Spanish throne and used Catholic holy days to practice traditional ways.

This kind of creative response still lives today in Native communities across the nation, as members participate in both their traditional culture and contemporary society. I've met people who are active in federal institutions and traditional tribal governments, tribes and non-native communities, urban law firms and rural economic development initiatives, language preservation projects and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, traditional drumming and singing groups and Native reggae bands. They have learned to make many worlds work as one.

In May—as the United States was bombing the land and people of Iraq with promises of liberation—sovereignty over land and culture took on another layer of meaning. I attended a celebration at Sandia Pueblo for legislation recently signed into law to protect Sandia Mountain.

The mountain is sacred to the people of Sandia Pueblo. They have lived in a community at its base, 13 miles north of Albuquerque, for the past 700 years and have maintained ownership of most of the mountain's western face.

The legislation is a result of collaboration and long negotiation with New Mexico congressional representatives, the federal government and an area homeowners' group. The new law allows Sandia Pueblo to regain control of Sandia Mountain land that was excluded from its control by a now invalid 1859 U.S. Interior Department survey.

Pueblo member J.R. Trujillo explained the importance of the new legislation: “We always face the Mountain when we pray. It is just like an altar to us ... where we greet the sun coming out. We do believe that the spirit is there that will grant us all our lives. After all, it's the spirit that any nation, any people believe in, and it's the spirit that gives life.”

In a time when the United States is engaged in the violence of empire-building abroad, I am glad to have driven under the shadow of Sandia Mountain every day on my way to work, along the Rio Grande, where Native communities still live today.

Second Prize, Prose (Carnegie Mellon University)  
Debra Halpern

### A Letter to James Baldwin

I sit here in my room reading my green book, after the black cover has come off. I do not see you on the cover anymore, with your eyes and smile that seem to cut right through me in the same way that your words do, but I have heard your voice and read your countless paragraphs. Dear Mr. Baldwin-- that is what I will call you since we have never met-- I must tell you what is happening here in the America you wanted to save by love.

Mr. Baldwin, I know you will not say you are a homosexual writer, but you cannot deny that your writings were concerned with the way homosexuals deal with their sexuality in American society. In mid-November, 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in a close 4-3 ruling, stated that it is unconstitutional for the state to deny gay couples civil marriage. I can't help but think of Eric in Another Country and his role as a bisexual character. I don't think that Eric would want to marry either of his male lovers, Yves or Vivaldo, but it seems that he would want his love to be recognized as being legitimate; after all, he does meet his European lover at the close of the novel. Eric asks Vivaldo after they have sex if he would do it again. Vivaldo responds, "Yes-- yes and no. But just the same, I love you, Eric, I always will, I hope you know that" (Another Country,<sup>1</sup> 713). Mr. Baldwin, your characters seem to be engaging in a dialogue that justifies their act of love.

Then I think of David in Giovanni's Room. I wonder if he would have proposed to Giovanni instead of Helena. If society would accept two men as a couple, under law, would this have filled David's need to follow the expectations of society? David's father serves as the character that filters societal expectations to David. When David speaks of his father's relationship with him in the beginning of the novel he says, "he wanted me to look on him as a man like myself" (Giovanni's Room,<sup>2</sup> 233). Giovanni's room is the one place that David could get away from the expectation of becoming the same type of man as his father. The room is the "closet" and the novel shows the harm being "closeted" can have on people. The purpose of the novel would be defeated if David's father accepted David's homosexuality. Written in 1956, forty-seven years before the Massachusetts ruling, the novel does show the effects of denying people the freedom that they are promised in America.

The President of the United States, George W. Bush doesn't recognize gay marriages as being a valid part of society saying, "Marriage is a sacred institution between a man and a woman...Today's decision...violates this important principle."<sup>3</sup> What happened to the separation of church and state? But I guess you knew all along. You did say, "the time has come, God knows, for us to examine ourselves, but we can only do this if we are willing to free ourselves of the myth of America and try to find out what is really happening here" ("The Discovery of What It Means To Be An American," 142). It would be fair to say that the same man, our President, who is supposed to represent a free America, is only adding to the oppression of the "other." This is what is happening in our America. The president has defined an "other" in his own country. The "other" people are those who wish to engage in same-sex marriage. These people, in America's eyes, are not considered full citizens. Perhaps this is why Eric could only commit to Yves in Europe and David could only accept Giovanni in a room. It seems that not much has really changed in forty-seven years, even if there was a significant ruling in Massachusetts.

Mr. Baldwin, the reexamination of America is not only a moral question, but a political question too. History has a way of repeating itself and we have a new type of lynching, that does not happen often, but is still in existence. A videotape captured Ohio police officers beat Nathaniel Jones, an African American male, to death. The article on CNN emphasizes Jones weight, three hundred and fifty pounds, rather than the beating.<sup>5</sup> Mr. Baldwin, you had the insight to say "Every society is really governed by hidden laws, by unspoken but profound assumptions on the part of the people, and ours is no exception" ("The Discovery of What It Means To Be An American," 142). The hidden laws have not changed. Morally, the police can justify the murder they committed under their job description, but politically, the news quietly reports the murder as something that would have happened, regardless of the beating, because the man was obese.

Does Nathaniel Jones's murder remind you of the way lynch mobs justified their actions? Your character Gabriel did not get harmed because he was considered a "good nigger" (Go Tell It On The Mountain,<sup>6</sup> 137) but he was still worried about his illegitimate son, Royal, who was walking out alone. Gabriel warned him, "be careful, son. Ain't nothing but white folks in town today. They done killed...last night" (Go Tell It On The Mountain, 137-138). Two years later Gabriel finds out Royal died. The implication is that he was lynched. Laws of fear seem to govern this country, but these laws were never written.

Mr. Baldwin, you tried to warn the American people all along to face their America, that we need to understand where it is we came from to understand where we must go. You have said this all before, “The country will not change until it re-examines itself and discovers what it really means by freedom” (“Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter From Harlem”<sup>7</sup>, 179). Mr. Baldwin I am ready to re-examine my America. I believe freedom is obtainable, just as you did, if only we all could face the demons that have made our country. You exiled to Europe to make this discovery, but even there, you realized that hate is not only the American way. You said, “people who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster” (“Stranger In The Village,”<sup>8</sup> 129). America seems to think they are still innocent of their history.

America has a long history that you spell out:

The American Negro has the great advantage of having never believed that collection of myths to which white Americans cling: that their ancestors were all freedom-loving heroes, that they were born in the greatest country the world has ever seen, or that Americans are invincible in battle and wise in peace, that Americans have always dealt honorably with Mexicans and Indians and all other neighbors or inferiors, that American men are the world’s most direct and virile, that American women are pure (“Down At The Cross,”<sup>9</sup> 344).

Mr. Baldwin, all of us who live in America must come to terms that we are a part of this country. Even if we do recognize the history of our country, we must realize that we also have allowed our leaders to continue to tell this story.

Mr. Baldwin, your words have started a dialogue about our America. You know hate does no good, “hatred, which could destroy so much, never failed to destroy the man who hated and this was an immutable law” (“Notes Of A Native Son,”<sup>10</sup> 84). You wrote characters in Another Country who searched for love, and spread love through friendship. Eric would serve as the best example. He had sex with Yves, Vivaldo, and Cass, not in spite, not to hurt anyone, and not for personal gain. Eric shared his bed with his friends because love in the world seems to be better than hate. Mr. Baldwin, your stories and essays are full of words that reexamines history. After all, history is just an interpretation of events. If this country could face its history then would gay marriage be acceptable? Would lynching stop? Could we stop justifying our hate if we recognized how long it has been with us? Mr. Baldwin, I think of what the title “Another

Country” means and I wonder where this country is. I do not believe this country exists overseas or in our America. Another country could be in the American soil. America wants freedom if it could accept the freedom it has taken away. Yes, Mr. Baldwin, America is another country as soon as Americans begin to accept that their America never existed.

**(Endnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> Another Country. Baldwin Early Novels & Stories. 1998. Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. New York, NY. 367-756.

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni’s Room. Baldwin Early Novels & Stories. 1998. Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. New York, NY. 221-360.

<sup>3</sup> “Massachusetts court rules ban on gay marriage unconstitutional” 19 Nov 2003. <http://www.cnn.com/2003/LA/11/18/samesex.marriage.ruling/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> “The Discovery of What It Means To Be An American.” Nobody Knows My Name. Baldwin Collected Essays. 1998. Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. New York, NY. 137-142.

<sup>5</sup> “Report: Man beaten by police had no internal injuries.” 3 Dec 2003. <http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/Midwest/12/02/died.in.custody/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Go Tell It On The Mountain. Baldwin Early Novels & Stories. 1998. Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. New York, NY. 9-215.

<sup>7</sup> “Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter From Harlem.” Nobody Knows My Name. Baldwin Collected Essays. 1998. Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. New York, NY. 170-179.

<sup>8</sup> “Stranger In The Village.” Nobody Knows My Name. Baldwin Collected Essays. 1998. Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. New York, NY. 117-129.

<sup>9</sup> “Down At The Cross.” The Fire Next Time. Baldwin Collected Essays. 1998. Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. New York, NY. 296-347.

<sup>10</sup> “Notes Of A Native Son.” Notes Of A Native Son. Baldwin Collected Essays. 1998. Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. New York, NY. 63-84.

First Prize, Prose (High School)  
Sierra Laventure-Voltz

### A Different Kind of Field

Racism never falters in the eyes of the young. Children grow to be as their parents would have them become, and the cycle repeats itself with every generation. This natural occurrence cannot be changed by mere hope for a better world. As a child myself, I learned that the tables could be turned; that I was not so safely hidden from the world around me.

My first year at WT was seventh grade, and while being about halfway through the soccer season, I was only just starting to become comfortable with the people around me. Soccer made me exceptionally nervous, but when I look back on it now there was no reason for me to feel so pressured. A starting player, I always worked as hard as I could. Back then, however, all I could think about was making the mistake that would cost us the game. Every game made my body shake and my stomach churn. It terrified me that not only did my starting position lie in the path of my mistakes, but that I might lose the few friends I had made, simply because of a game. Quiet and reserved, I always sat and talked with the few other girls on the team. I felt that if I said something or did something that displeased the boys, they would not play with me. I had no idea what real discrimination entailed, but I would soon learn.

After school, on a hot, late September afternoon, we changed into our gear for practice. Coach told us that we were traveling to a field we had never played on before. We did not know anything about the field except that it was a drive and that it was in the Hill District. Loading everything onto the bus, I grew excited. What an adventure this would be for me, the new girl.

On this particular ride I sat near the front with my only real friend, Ugochi, with whom I was always with. The trip to the field was about twenty minutes, but the last five minutes we drove through the heart of the Hill District. I had never been there before and was astonished at what I saw. My face glued to the window, I viewed poverty in a place I had never expected it to be, a half-hour from my house. Crumbling buildings furnished with ragged banners hanging off of them, saying things such as “Mike was killed by police officers when he was 13 years old,” and “Our suffering is not our fault.” Black men, women, and children walked through the ugly, pot-holed streets; sometimes wearing tattered clothing. My fear overrode

my senses, and I could not speak. How, I asked myself, could people live like this? The obvious hatred I saw in this society sickened me. I had grown up sheltered from the racism, hardships, and poverty that some of our country is subjected to. Perhaps we never should have come here. We pulled up to the field and as we walked up the hill towards it, I realized how poor this neighborhood really was. The trees were starting to turn to the beautiful autumn colors, yet the air was still heavy with humidity; I could smell fall. However, even this perfect day could not help brighten the atmosphere of the field. It was in shambles; a football field with no soccer goals at the ends and a chain link fence around the edge, barbed wire strung along the top of the fence. The yard-lines were barely visible and the field goals rusted to the color of the changing leaves. We brought our backpacks from the bus, and left them on the sidelines. Practice began normally, and we warmed up by running a lap around the field. Coach split us up into different teams and we started to play.

About halfway through practice, a few young boys, apparently from a football team, started to come from the entrance of the field to laze and sit behind our bags. Their interest in us led them to take a few of our soccer balls to play with. These boys were trying so hard to understand how to play, but they just could not handle the ball. Their uniforms were all black, but faded, and while scrawny and short, these boys looked tough and determined. Our team took a water break and one of the kids playing near us asked me how long our practice would last. I said that we would be gone around five-thirty and I ran off to play again.

A few minutes later, a large group of men appeared and walked onto the field. One of them, hard-faced with a cruel swagger, walked up to my father and started to bellow at him. He made it clear that he was the coach of the black kids' football team. My dad, the assistant coach of my team, did not know what to say, and while backing away, he called for our head coach. We were spread out all over the field, but when we heard the yelling, we came over quickly. Coach told us to go on the end line and wait, but while we were walking off, the whole football team gathered around our coaches. The man in charge of the football team was screaming, "Get off our field!"

My coach put himself between the black man and my father. I looked back quickly at the dark storm brewing around my coaches, before I ran over to watch intently with Ugochi. Coach spoke softly, but sternly, "There must have been a mistake. I called and I have a permit for this field at this time." There were other coaches with the black kids, or perhaps they were

parents who shared the same feelings as their coach. The men added to the commotion. The head football coach screamed, “This is our field. We always practice on this field and will always practice on this field. GET OFF!” As Coach gave up the fight, he put his hands out a little, motioning that he meant no harm. He told us to grab our bags quickly and get on the bus. We filed out, but while we were all squeezing through the gate, a man stood to the side with a hard hat on. He was one of the men with the football coach. Studying each one of us individually as we walked by, he looked interested. He asked what school we were from, and it seemed that I was the only one who could answer, “Winchester Thurston.” The man nodded his head and looked at me strangely. I knew he had no idea where our school was, but he thought it was important to act like he did. I remember having Ugochi next to me, thinking how she felt about what had just happened. Her parents were from Nigeria, and I wanted to know if she felt uncomfortable that she had been put into the racial group of the rich and the white. I would never know; I was too scared and embarrassed to ask.

At the bottom of the hill, a girl I was walking next to exclaimed that she had left her backpack on the field. She was carrying the ball bag, and since I had some extra energy, I told her that I would go retrieve it for her. I got to her backpack, but as I walked back off the field, I noticed that some of the same football kids who had been so friendly earlier were staring at me. I tried not to look at them and kept walking straight. All of a sudden, I heard some of the kids on the field start to yell, “That’s right, white girl, get off our field. This place is ours, white girl.” Their coaches stood nearby watching, saying nothing. The jeering did not end until my coach walked up to me from the entrance. It was about ten yards away from the kids and still on the field when Coach said to me, “That was the right thing to do. Just keep your head held high, and they can’t touch you. Always be proud.”

The bus ride back to school was filled with complaining about the “psycho” coach who had kicked us off “their” field. We did not see what must have been too obvious for him. The whites had come to stake claim to his field, much like what happened to his neighborhood in the past. I now see his predicament, and do not blame him for what he did, for he felt threatened. He must have grown up with the idea that white people want to take everything from him, and for him this was true. The Hill District used to thrive with black culture, and now it is fading as a neighborhood. The most heart-wrenching thing is that he was a role model for the children that he coached. They looked up to him, and I am sure they felt

proud that he had chased us from the field. Those children will grow to be as close-minded as he.

My coach, with his words, taught me not only that I could be strong in the face of fear, but also that pride can be a double-edged sword. Did not the children have pride in their coach who threw us from the field? But was he correct in his actions? Simply because you believe in what you are doing does not mean that it is your right to act upon your feelings. Sometimes my mind wanders back to that day, and I think about how irrelevant school, classes, and sports are compared to the real world events going on around me. Toleration cannot be taught by others. Only by experience and understanding can the transformation occur. I learned a great deal at a young age about what is truly important, and what stands superfluously on the outskirts of life.

Second Prize, Prose (High School)  
Brittany Boyd

### A Crime Too Dark

Many people believe that African Americans receive a great amount of descrimination from Caucasian Americans. Although this is true, there is a growing problem within the African American community itself. That problem is lighter colored vs. darker colored. This mindset that light is closest to white to it must be right and if you are darker skinned then you are held at lower standards that one of lighter skinned has make itself relevant to almost every African American. Unfortunately, I have experienced this discrimination first hand.

Fourth grade was a grade of fun and friendships, little boys chasing little girls around the room, and trying to find out more about your childhood life. There were laugh, tears, and so many emotions. I went to a predominantly African American elementary school called John Morrow, so I had more experience with different cultures, whereas most of the kids in my school had gone to St. Benedict since kindergarten. Therefore, they did not converse with many cultures outsides of the African American one.

One day while outside at recess, the boys and girls were chasing one another as ususal. There was this one little boy who I had the biggest crush on. I told my friend at the time that I like him so much and I would love to be his fourth grade girlfriend. So while everyone was running around, my friend went over to him and said, "Who do you wanna go with? Chanel or Brittany?" In response he said, "Chanel because she is light and Brittany is too black." It was then that I had my first experience with black-on-black racism.

I am not a dark-skinned girl, maybe medium. However his words affected me so much that from fourth grade to eighth grade, I thought that all light browned people were prettier than dark brown people. I would look though magazines and say, "eww...look at that dark girl! She is so ugly!" It wasn't until one day when I was conversing with my mom that I realized this feeling that I had was wrong and racist. I explained to my mother that I thought she was a lot prettier than me because of her lighter skin. My mother then made me look in the mirror and tell her what I saw. Well I said, "I see my face."

“And what is it that you like most about your face?” my mother asked.

“My smile!” I said. “I think that I have an okay smile.”

“Ok then. It doesn’t matter how dark your skin is or how light your skin is. We are all beautiful. We all have different things about ourselves that we like,” my mother said. After hearing these words from my mom, I realized that I was being silly for saying that lighter colored people were far prettier than medium or darker colored people.

I was one of the many African Americans who have been led astray to think that black-on-black racism was okay. For me, it was my peers in fourth grade that had influenced my thinking. For many now it is the media. The media plays such a big role in differentiating between the darker skinned people and the lighter skinned people. I was watching a TV show one day and the show was about being against your own race. There was an African American lady on the show and she was just going on and on about how ugly darker skinned people were and how she is so blessed to be light skinned. It sickened me to see a grown lady talking about this black-on-black racism. However, I could not blame her for later she explained that when she was younger, her mother would tell her to stay away from the darker kids because they would mess up her reputation. She was led astray just as other African Americans often are.

Many think that this feeling of discrimination between our own race goes all the way back into slavery when it was thought that those whose color was lighter than a brown paper bag had the chance of “passing” as white, if given the opportunity. Also those who were lighter were able to work in the house instead of in the field and where usually treated with more respect there. This feeling of resentment had continued to infect the African American community through generations and generations.

How can we even try to fight off discrimination from Caucasians when we are having so much discrimination between ourselves? Martin Luther King urged us to learn to respect and love ourselves before we can expect others to respect us. I believe that the African-American community must learn to fight this black-on-black racism before it diminishes the dignity of further generations.

Third Prize, Prose (High School)  
Amanda Huminski

### Phone Bank

I am the only white female in this small training room. The women around me, 45, 50, and black, talk about their children, other jobs. It is 5:00, we've just arrived, and we're all tired. In cubicles all around us there are voices rising and falling in gentle pistons of introductions and rebuttals. We learn how to make people like us for 20 minutes and forget our name as they hang up.

I have never worked like this before. I have never worked before. I imagine my first paycheck, swollen with possibilities. All of theirs, meager, barely filling their stomachs. Shredded by grocery shopping, rent, phone bills, cigarettes.

We fill out forms. My last name is longer than any of theirs and I claim the least tax exemptions. At break, a woman tells me that her son, who was about my age and a beast on the mic, was shot in the back of the head last year.

"I can only work 15 hours a week," another woman says, "or else they'll cut back my welfare."

My mother held us in this balance once and my father took us away. But today, for the second time in my life, I see the scales wavering again on a survival point. My colleagues, my peers, sit around me making phone calls. I did not fight for my job. I could not support a family from this seat.

Honorable Mention, Prose (High School)  
Ashley Roston

### Color, What is Color?

Color. What good is it? We all are *the people*. So I came from Africa; Johnny came from Europe and Amy is from Asia. People always seem to divide themselves by color. I walked into a classroom the other day and the class was literally segregated. The white people sat on the side near the window and the black students sat on the side near the wall. I never thought about color or race when I was younger. Then came the summer of the seventh grade.

That was a time I learned about how the world can operate. How some people think. And feel. My sister went away to college—George Washington University. My mother sister and I went to Washington, DC for my sister's (Wynter) orientation. I had to go with the siblings and the adults and future students took a tour. All the other kids my age found people to *hang out with*. But no one seemed to *connect* within. I couldn't figure it out; we all were the same ages, going through similar things, so what was the big deal. MY color. I was different; I'm black. I didn't understand until then I was blind, unaware of color. I tried to talk but they mostly blew me off. I talked to a counselor; he told me a lot of the students at the school (predominately white) acted that way towards people of color.

I didn't cry about it: I just wondered, and thought something was wrong with me. I talked to my sister about it. She told me that it wasn't my problem that some people are different, and if they can't see past color, then that's on them.

Color is the general appearance of the skin. I know what color is. It can define who we are, and mold us into a person. It can help us or it could be a problem in your life. Whatever the case, color shouldn't make a person think more or less of themselves or others. "All men are created equal."

Honorable Mention, Prose (High School)  
Ang Li

### Finding the Perfect American Model

Many times, I wished that I had been born here, so I didn't have to try so hard to mold myself into an American. I would be one naturally. For years, I searched for the perfect American model. I watched my classmates, spied on my neighbors, and surveyed the people on the PAT bus. But no matter how hard I searched, I never found her.

I was brought up to believe that as long as I am the best at my studies, everything else would take care of itself. In China, the kid with the perfect grades is the teachers' pride. I was that pride. As a way to indulge in their pride, the teachers granted me special privileges. That was how I became the president of the class without having any leadership abilities. Being a class officer never meant service to me, it meant being the focus of respect. Our fifth grade was a little hierarchy and I was clearly the queen. Every kid revered me in fear of me marking crosses beside their names. That was my job, to mark crosses on the name list if a kid's fingernail was dirty, or if he forgot to bring pencils to class. Hello kitty pencils and pretty erasers flooded my way. I was spoiled to think that I would always be popular. I carried my haughtiness across the ocean with me. In my ESL class of twenty people, I made a friend the first day of school. When a Taiwanese girl came up to me and introduced herself as Pauline, I thought it was just my innate charisma that attracted her attention. I didn't try to impress her. When she gave me a Picachoo key chain, I didn't feel obliged to give anything back to her. I never learned how to pay my share of friendship. I learned quickly and became the best in the ESL class. But for the first time, being the best in my class didn't get me all that I wanted. A part of me longed for compliments. When a new girl joined our class, Pauline began to gradually abandon me. When she was sure of her position in the new girl's heart, she ignored me for good. I blamed her poor judgment. I would have made many friends just to make her jealous, but I didn't know how to. Pauline took away my haughtiness for good.

When I got into a real American school, I became careful then. I became introverted, not trusting my personality. Though I didn't figure out exactly why Pauline disliked me, I began to think that I was the one at fault. I rarely spoke in school in fear of Americans thinking me mentally challenged because of my broken English. I fled from the populated lounge to a library corner to hide my Chinese ways. I went under the pretext of studying, but sometimes I just wanted a place to talk to myself. I blushed

over every mispronunciation. “Close the light please,” I would venture to say, and then realize my mistake. At such moments I wished people would see the advanced calculus I was doing in math or the full credit on my last history exam so that they would know that I was actually pretty smart. After a while, I gave up speaking. I rarely showed my teeth. I didn’t want anyone to know that my parents couldn’t afford braces. “Sorry” was one of the few words I uttered. I would say it repeatedly when I stepped on someone’s shoe, not because I was overly apologetic, but because I was afraid of others thinking me unkind.

I often cried in my room. I didn’t want to talk to my parents because they wouldn’t understand why I was so depressed when I was getting straight A’s. I couldn’t write about my frustration to friends in China because I was too proud to let them know that their perfect president was struggle over trifling matters like making new American friends. Instead, I told them about the cozy library in my American school. I told them the title of the first English book I read: “Charley and the Chocolate Factory.” I wondered why I had things to hide. Many kids would have given up everything to come to America. All those articles I’ve read in China about Chinese immigrants showed such a different experience from what I was going through. It was supposed to be a good time and I was supposed to be the happiest kid in the world.

Before I came here, I dreamed about all the American stuff I would own. But reality is always ironic. The few new clothes we bought all had tags that say made in China. Mom shuddered at the thought that every dollar spent is eight yuans lost. “That’s crazy! A backpack costs a hundred bucks!” She would frown after multiplying the price by eight. Mom kept reminding me that if we saved enough, we could go back to Ji Nan one day and be millionaires and have shopping sprees all the time. I didn’t think that day was coming soon.

Once in English class, I was called upon to make a comment. I don’t remember much about the question or what I answered. But the part I do remember stuck to me. It was the first time I spoke during class. Though I was blushing, I knew I wasn’t doing too badly. But all of a sudden, I heard giggles. I didn’t realize the kids were laughing at me until I finished my comment and thought hard about everything I’ve said. It had become my habit—to think both before and after talking. That was when I realized I’d said “sky scratchers.” I thought it made sense. The buildings are so tall that they scratch the sky. But it didn’t sound right. It sounded like the wooden hand grandpa used when his back itched. I prayed that not too

many people caught my malapropism. I was too occupied with embarrassment to ask the correct name for tall buildings.

I read books out loud at home. I spoke to myself in English before going to sleep. I marked my textbooks with Chinese translations. Eventually, my English became better. Though I only spoke when I was absolutely sure, I opened my mouth more often. But it was after an instant's revelation that I finally opened up.

I joined a summer class called Andrew's Leap for high school kids at Carnegie Mellon University. The school is a gathering of many nationalities. I watched the foreign college kids, wanting to find anybody having the same problems as I did. I was surprised to find none. Though some of them apparently weren't fluent either, they composed themselves comfortably in front of Americans. I felt sorry for myself. For a while, I was beginning to think that I would never belong. No matter how good my English was getting, I could never be free. I saw my future lying in front of me—a lifetime of hiding behind a desperate mask to please, a life of silence and a closed mouth. But the bit of pride that was left in me began to rebel. I wondered why these kids felt more comfortable with themselves than I did when my English, though not perfect, was better than theirs. There was a tiny voice in my head that shouted out for attention, "if they can do it, why can't you?" I was pressured to join conversations just to prove to that voice that I was not a coward. Then I realized that I didn't need to prove to anyone, not even that little voice in my head. Now, I know who I am and that is whom I should present. I don't need to be hypocritical to be nice to people. I don't need to hide.

I started to realize that no one, except myself, minded my mispronunciations; no one, but myself, was embarrassed my Chinese ways. In fact, when I started to pay attention to the outside world, I found out that many American kids chose to learn Chinese. I found out that Chinese food is the most popular choice for advisee lunch. I started to use chopsticks again after a girl asked me to teach her how to pick up rice using just two sticks.

I found out that it's not so deplorable to add an extra "s" on the ends of words. I began to talk. No only in English but in Chinese as well. When I'm overly excited, I let slip a "wo dee tian ah" and take pleasure in the fact that no one else knows what I mean. I say the multiplication table in Chinese and get my answer faster than using a calculator. When my classmates stare at me in amazement, I say, "It's a Chinese thing." When

some kid tries to be cool and said “Nee How,” I told him that it’s a cheap American imitation and taught him the native way to say hello. I laughed with him when even I got confused with the tricky nasal vowels.

Some Americans like to drink coffee in the morning while others prefer milk and cereal. I eat a scrambled egg. While the rest of America is split between Pepsi and Coke, I love velvet corn soup more than any soda. All my classmates are practicing their superstar signatures; I found mine being the most unique because I sign it in Chinese. I had tried so hard to be an American without knowing that there isn’t even a consistent model for me to follow. So in the end, I accepted my own differences. Now that I think about it, it was a very American choice. After all, America is a mosaic of differences where one can be whoever she wants to be.

I never had trouble academically. I was never disliked by a teacher. I rarely made people mad at me. In many ways, one can say that I have an easy life. But it was what others take for granted I lacked. I struggled for years finding a perfect model of American ways so I can mold myself into her. During these years, I’ve learned how to solve an integral of a function over an infinite interval, what terrifying things the Jacobins did during the French revolution, why a ball falls straight down even though the earth is moving, and how much linseed oil to mix with turpentine to create the perfect medium for oil painting. However, if one were to ask what’s the most important thing I’ve learned, I don’t need time to choose among all these things. I would say that the most important thing I’ve learned is to be my own model.

Honorable Mention, Prose (High School)  
Rachel Belloma

### Apologies

When I was younger, when my brother was even younger still, he would throw these horrible tantrums and scream and pound his fists onto his head and body and the walls. In an ice cream store, he flailed wildly on the floor. This was when we were really learning about what he had. A doctor suggested my mother have cards printed up to hand out to strangers that witness his tantrums. Please excuse my son for he suffers from autism, characterized by self-absorption, inability to interact socially, repetitive behavior, and language dysfunction. My mother couldn't bear to do this, she thought it was disgusting-asking people to forgive her son for something that she didn't need to be sorry for.

My brother didn't speak for years, when he did it was scrambled up like mixed wires in a telephone call: words were smashed together and broken into bits. My brother was barely a year younger than me and yet he was an infant to me, still struggling with speech. I felt like his protector. On the bus once, some kids were taking his hat and bag and I grabbed him and screamed at them and swore and sounded tougher than I ever had before. I fought and was punched in the eyebrow by an ugly kid named Brian and I bled and it swelled up. I called him horrible names, called him a piece of trash from Lawrenceville. I made him want to fight me instead of my brother. This was when I learned how to transfer that, how to protect him by taking it onto myself. While I ended up with the swollen eye, they left him alone and fought with me. But I could fight back, he couldn't.

We didn't know what to expect from him. Maybe he'd never really talk and maybe he'd never stop throwing tantrums. He saw speech doctors and went to a different school and the tantrums slowed down, became less intense each time. There were still times when he'd shout and hit himself, always somewhere public—a department store. I overheard a clerk, rubbing her forehead, saying she didn't think she should have to deal with “that fucking retard.” It still stung, because someone was always asking to be apologized to. Card or not, when my mother looked around the store, pushing her palm into my brother's hot forehead and trying to calm him—there was an apology. I'm sorry he is like this, I'm sorry.

First Prize, Poetry (Carnegie Mellon University)  
Christina Maria Acosta

### Langston Speaks of Mountains

*One of the most promising  
of young Negro poets  
said to me once,  
“I want to be a poet,  
not a Negro poet,”*

brown, I know  
the mountain you were  
brought up on—

*meaning, I believe,  
“I want to write  
like a white poet,”*

Spiral paths  
of we'll-pay-you-whites  
and middle class  
ebonies back-handing  
“don't be like niggers”  
into bronzed temples  
of those who shout  
in church.

*meaning subconsciously,  
“I would like to  
be a white poet,”*

Your mountain makes  
you free to write  
what you choose, yes,  
but afraid to write  
how you might.

*meaning behind that,  
"I would like  
to be white."*

Past your mountain,  
clear as a hip  
of gin, sure as jazz  
is your child,  
you are Negro,  
before you are poet.  
You are low-down  
Bessie blues Harlem,  
you are the so-called  
common element folk  
who dance like blaze  
against the current  
of the spiral.

*I was sorry  
he said that.*

Be pleased to be  
sable and curve.

Second Prize, Poetry (Carnegie Mellon University)  
Sarah Smith

### How to Describe Diaspora

Your hands are nations. The thumb sets sail for rum  
and sugar. Splay your fingers over the Mercator  
projection. Place nine fingers under an anvil:  
this will represent a power structure.  
The thumb stands on top.

Wiggle the fingers in solidarity when the UN  
forms. Paint a hand black for the Pan-African Congress.  
Allow one hand to dance, while the other swells  
with blood. Your Haitian hand wears its French  
uniform and the epaulets swing like daughters  
in ragged dresses. At least one hand takes the train  
into the suburbs to dust Lucite radios, glass flowers,  
and make beds bucolic. This hand wears the heaviest boots  
in the world. This finger strains from finding  
the same page of the telephone book  
every day. There are broken knuckles.  
Somehow they all live in the same part of town.

Third Prize, Poetry (Carnegie Mellon University)  
Casey Spindler

**Un-moveable**

Me and my little cousin, Desmond  
stand in the black circle burnt  
into his lawn late last night.

The above-ground swimming pool,  
drained and burned,  
now a ring of ash  
and melted plastic.

I came over from my trailer  
at the other end  
of the park, past rows  
of Confederate bumper-stickers  
and beer cases of empties.  
I saw his mother at the window  
dangling a joint from her lips.

When Desmond was old  
enough to swim, she led  
him to the creek.  
A white boy ran to the rocks.  
“Nigger water.”  
Next day, she bought  
the pool with money  
she didn’t have.

Every day, after school  
he’d float for hours -  
his own private island.

Today, Desmond looks stronger  
than anyone else in this park.  
He stands where his ocean  
used to be.  
Stone-faced.

Honorable Mention, Poetry (Carnegie Mellon University)  
Connie Amoroso

**Harriet Faid**

I.

Dear Harriet,  
I have dreamt about you recently.  
I see you standing on the front porch  
of your grandmother's house on Friendship Avenue.

There is wind in your red Irish curls  
that sweeps locks of it into your mouth.  
And you are leaning over the railing,  
looking for Salvatore to stride past  
on his way home from working at the theater.  
It makes you giggle that he is so proud of his  
ushering job that he wears the cherry red jacket  
all the time. So much so that the girls up  
and down the street and at church call him  
Sal Rex and smile at him as they affectionately  
pat his broad shoulders underneath the uniform.

But you know that he is sweet on you, Harriet.  
All the Italian mothers call out to him, fetching Sal Rex  
to court their daughters, but he only stops on your  
porch to ask you to the show. He only saves the best  
seats in the house for you and his sister Maria,  
even though Maria will not speak to you  
in her broken English. She has been taught not to speak to  
Micks, not even at Mass, let alone the movie theater.

I watch you when he finally asks you to marry him,  
Harriet; he wants to take you away from the neighborhood  
where everyone thinks that the whispers go unheard.  
He says you are Catholic, and it does not matter which kind.  
Oh, and you say yes! Yes, yes, please, let's go anywhere.  
Let's go there together!

## II.

Dear Harriet,  
I know what happened  
to your children.  
I know that the Great Depression made it impossible  
to leave Morningside.

I know what Sal Rex's mother said about you,  
and all the other Italian mothers and daughters,  
so jealous even after so many years.  
They said you drank whiskey straight from the bottle  
hidden under the kitchen table.  
Said you beat the children in fits of rage.  
Said you took up with the Irish pub owner  
on Liberty Avenue, only a block down  
from the Rex Theater.

I see your swollen red eyes, the anger.  
After four years, he started hearing them too,  
and Sal Rex took both children, Salvatore and Katherine,  
and moved in with his sister Maria and her husband Donoto.

You had no power there; they would not even curse  
at you in English when you drove over in the middle  
of the night, coming to claim your son and daughter.

Your grandmother died, Harriet, and you took everything  
she owned and moved to Turtle Creek, ten miles away.

You had no voice, no friends, no children anymore.  
I know that when Sal Rex died a few years later of the flu epidemic,  
no one told you. And Salvatore and Katherine were juggled around  
friends and family in the old neighborhood. They did not even know  
who was blood, everyone was Aunt or Uncle regardless.

There was no Mother.

No one told you when Katherine died at twenty-one  
of tuberculosis. You read it in the newspaper,  
but could not even find her grave. They wouldn't  
answer your letters.

### III.

Dear Great-Grandmother,  
I have found you after so many years.  
But all I have is Social Security records and the old stories,  
finally corrected.

You lived until 1973; you never remarried, never had any other children.  
My father told me that as far as he knew, you had been dead  
his entire life; his family was brought up to believe that  
you ran out on Sal Rex.

Do you know that you have four grandchildren?  
Do you know that you have seven great-grandchildren?

Do you know that while I am proud of my Italian heritage,  
that my mother is half Irish herself?

Do you know that I am proud of you?

Honorable Mention, Poetry (Carnegie Mellon University)  
Kristen Bernard

### **Kissed by Hip-Hop**

If the rhythm of hip-hop  
kissed her tonight,  
would she be  
black  
enough to jive?  
Suppose lyrics spilled  
from her lips,  
punching words, beats  
into your ears—  
you'd still see her  
as a rich honky  
depositing clean  
paychecks into an enlarged  
bank account.  
Color and class—  
your requirements  
for talent in a universal  
sound.  
And hip-hop,  
it says it don't stop.

It stops alright.  
Dead  
in the private-schooled,  
anti-drug pooled  
tracks of an upper  
east end home.  
Color and class—  
her rivals to jive.

Hip-hop rhythm  
so tough it kicks through  
the back of her spine;  
bass so heavy it dribbles,  
permeates her pale  
skin.

How deep is that kiss?  
Can it shatter boundaries  
of a white girl's dreams?  
Keeping the beat, keeping the beat.  
That deep.

Honorable Mention, Poetry (Carnegie Mellon University)  
Carolyn G. Elliot

### Ways to Know About Bodies

Red trees full of cold wind. Anything left lying in the drawer. West Indian fast-talkers. The green kitchen. Tortoises on islands. Primarily date Japanese girls. Blankets. House on a hill. Popcorn busting in the bag. Because they're thinner. Brown crocheted bikini. Bamboo chopsticks. The mother, tall and fat. Friends with perfume. A circle. Say stick to the Polish. For the lady on the go. Pleasures evolved. Greek epics. On lonely islands. Liquid eyeliner, stolen. Rotten pumpkin smell. Kids in tan blazers, quilted blue vests. Names of black intellectuals scribbled on tennis shoes. Of Midwest boys. Babies in the mirror stage. Masturbate to mix tapes. Milk steamed with vanilla syrup. Eerie light that makes things solid. Like lik-a-stiks. Death-panic. Diseases made up of letters. Five Christmas trees. In the hall with white statues. All freak dancing. People, like books, read wrong. Dry heat in the library. Girls in high heels, Marilyn sweaters. Cemetery like the bottom of a sea.

First Prize, Poetry (High School)  
Nathan Resnick-Day

### Picnic Poem

I walked with dubya through criss-cross fields October beneath the  
    groaning effluvious sky—heavy with economy, stewed with the  
    seams and bolts of war, condom stilts of diplomacy.  
We spread the blanket under a tree, took out our sandwiches. He got out  
    the guitar, played some fake blues.  
And I told him, “A man can take only so many outrageous twangs. The  
    blues is holy. Don’t piss on the altar.”  
But he only shunned my nose and snatched up my sandwich, unholy  
    dubya hands, greasy machine gun fingers, crawling all over the  
    thing.  
Dear sir, why the heck did you do that? Have you considered publicity?  
You’re using fuzzy math, sir.  
You’re no Mississippi John Hart.  
Dear sir please consider the rust bucket top hat delta bluesmen with  
    hellhounds on their trail, Alabama-bound, dime-for-beer, mind-  
    wandering-like-the-geese-from-the-west bluesmen  
Dear sir, let’s remember jazz, brilliant Coltrane concoctions undulating  
    from urban slop while the vagrant half-eyed seekers whistle and  
    grunt  
Dear sir please consider the staggering multitude spilling like sap from the  
    ghettos of heavenly pornography, wallowing in their own  
    excreted dreams that come bubbling up from deep vents of politics  
Dear sir please consider the momentum of the freight train boogie woogie  
    maniacs, wandering in alleyways on trains in museums sniffing  
    paint eating shoes vomiting all over grandma’s new sweater until  
    they deflate somewhere cold and dark with a hazy green light and  
    a new friend named Otto who’s missing a hand  
Please consider the human firewood, emaciated Xhosa rhythms strained  
    out from corrugated ribs in a jungle of burning tires  
beautiful Uzbek beautiful Sanchez beautiful Lipshitz beautiful Astakhov  
beautiful Morimoto beautiful Ibrahim  
Please consider the charamsala marketplace nifti hindi patchwork  
    industrial begonias that waver and climb above the choked streets  
    of chickpea sitar balloons filled with Ravi Shankar, ecclesiastical  
    psychedelic memories of southern Californian pedestrians  
Dear sir please consider love  
please consider soil please consider 1939 please consider big mama tulip

please consider Chairman Mao please consider Dumbo  
Dear sir please consider the Mexican grandmother whose arthritis is baked  
twelve hours a day on her knees picking the onions for 300 million big  
macs  
Dear sir I've hit and run  
I've left the building  
Dear sir topple the columns of incestuous wall street liturgy from the  
decomposed FDR sarcophaguses that line the vaults of democracy  
Dear sir I don't want no funny stuff, all right?  
Dear sir you were pick'd from the cream of the crop  
Thought you might know what's going on  
Dear sir does the entire human race need to be branded with classifications  
so we can be discerned when we go to slaughter?  
Please forgive me I was angry and that was uncalled for  
Dear sir please consider the solace of your cheeks  
Please consider the brothel slaves, human machines who were tossed from  
the coin's edge to the silk tent beehive woodshed house o' hump  
because the big rock candy mountain didn't shudder in their funny  
bones  
Please consider the honky tonk Sunday  
Dear sir please, please, please consider the Godfather of Soul  
Dear sir please reconsider the epithetical parenthetical hypothetical  
diplomatic static emphatic blunderbuss policy-making double-  
dipping cow-tipping buffoons  
Dear sir please consider the cherub of the east  
Dear sir please pass the ketchup  
please pass the napkins  
And give me back my damn sandwich.

Second Prize, Poetry (High School)  
Ashley Smith

### My Mother Speaks

Two beautiful colours combine,  
are said to make another beautiful colour.  
Red and blue makes purple,  
yellow and blue makes green.  
My skin was dark.  
Being dark in Trinidad  
was a symbol of beauty.  
As the hot tropical sun beat over my head,  
I was not teased nor was I being insulted.  
“What a beautiful personality your skin texture shows,”  
my mother always said.  
My brother was as dark as me.  
With our wild-long nappy hair,  
skinny legs and knobby knees,  
we would have forever  
lost the confidence of being beautiful.  
Our mother and father were set to leave us,  
for a place that we did not understand.  
America.  
My brother and I left a year after.  
Leaving our six brothers and sisters,  
our culture of Trinidad and Tobago  
was lost only for a short-long while.  
When we arrived,  
the city of New York brightened above our heads.  
It was cold.  
From the first time I’ve seen it,  
I’ve hated it.  
Snow.  
My skin tone dropped,  
I was no longer the dark Trinidadian girl that I knew to be.  
I was almost as white as the snow.  
A pale Trinidadian complexion,  
that was not a sign of beauty.  
I loved New York, though;  
it had so much multiplicity of people,  
until we moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

A place where our culture was nonexistent.  
A place where our own people  
were just as illiterate as the white people.  
I hated school so much.  
My brother and I went to separate schools.  
I remember my brother got into a fight.  
He said somebody called him a black African nigger.  
Our accents were very strong.  
We would get remarks such as,  
“Are you from Jamaica,” or  
“How you get here? Did you come off a slave ship from Africa?”  
The bad part about it was that the blacks  
were saying it along with the whites.  
I went home crying.  
I told my mom what I wanted to be when I grow up.  
I told her I wanted to teach Americans the word colour.  
My mother looked at me and said,  
“Child, if want to teach these Americans colour,  
you have to learn how to spell colour first.”  
My mother was right.  
Here in America colour was spelled c-o-l-o-r.  
My brother and I spelled colour c-o-l-o-u-r.  
I’ve realized that I would not be able to teach Americans colour.  
They wouldn’t understand,  
nor would they want to learn.  
My mother had her ninth and final child.  
Oh how beautiful my baby sister was.  
With skin that read beauty,  
with skin of poetry that spoke of beauty.  
She was never teased through life about herself,  
only embarrassed that her parents were Trinidadians  
and not Americans.  
My sister did not understand.  
She was being brain washed by these children  
who did not respect our culture,  
or for what we are.  
I sat down and told her,  
“What we are, true people,  
what we are, true colour.”  
My accent began to fade.  
My brother and I began to talk like these Americans.  
We finally became accepted.

Not really for what we are,  
but now for what they've been hearing coming out of our mouths.  
"You sound like us now.  
You don't sound like them filthy Africans any more."  
My brother became a U.S. citizen.  
I never did.  
It's already bad enough I live in an illiterate country,  
why represent them?  
I stayed who I truly was,  
a Trinidadian.  
The people, who I call my friends,  
still did not understand.  
I still had insulting comments  
which stayed underneath their tongues.  
"Do you practice voodoo" or  
"Does your whole family practice voodoo?"  
I was smart,  
being fifteen-years-old at the time I did not care anymore.  
I remember one of my friends asked me,  
"I guess you know how to spell color right, huh."  
I smiled and said,  
"Yes I do, c-o-l-o-u-r."  
And I watched as I saw my friends sulk.  
No American can teach me beauty,  
because they don't know how to spell  
my colour right.

Third Prize, Poetry (High School)  
Arica L. Hayes

### **My First Best Friend**

I was born with multiple ethnic backgrounds,  
but by looking at me one couldn't tell;  
I simply looked like a light skinned African American child.  
That's what I thought I was anyway.

My first best friend, well she was the opposite.  
She was Russian and Italian.  
Her skin was as pale as snow,  
she almost looked like Snow White. She was an adorable kid.

Whenever we were young,  
we were inseparable like Siamese twins.  
Our differences didn't matter to us.  
We were just two adventurous little girls.

We were so close that we even bathed together.  
Every night we would take turns staying at each other's houses.  
If we hadn't looked so different, you would swear we were sisters.  
I even call her mother "mom", and she did the same with mine.

When we got a little bit older, we would sneak out the house  
at night just to play games with other children.  
Sometimes our adventures would lead us to the dark dreary woods,  
where my friend and I got stuck in a patch of thorns. We were scared.

The Spice Girls came out, and we had so much fun  
pretending to be them. She was Ginger and I was Scary.  
We had on so much glitter and make-up that we looked like two disco  
balls  
walking around in "Spice Girl shoes."

Then we got older and started making new friends.  
Our friendship died as flowers do, when summer is over.  
I guess our summer had ended. We grew apart  
and straight into the world of racism.

My new friends told me that she didn't matter,  
and that she was just some white girl that thinks she's better than me.  
When our friendship came to its demise, so did my individuality  
because I believed them. It was far from summer now; winter was here.

My ex-friend must have been the brains of our long ago schemes  
because as racist as I had become, I didn't notice half my family looked  
white.

I loved them more than anything even though they were white,  
just like the friend I discarded like a bad memory.

One day at my family reunion, I was looking through a photo album.  
I always loved to see people in my family. Then I saw an old picture,  
of a young white woman. My eyes grew wide as I tried to conjure the  
reason.

I went back and forth through possibilities like the ocean tides go back  
and forth.

Finally after minutes of brain-racking thinking, I asked.  
My cousin Desiree told me that the woman was Grandma Hayes.  
She, the white lady, was my grandma. I took a closer look at her as she  
stared at me.

Yes, she was white. Yes, my facial features favored hers.

All my thoughts seemed to come crashing down, like the crashing ocean  
waves.

My whole way of thinking had been ruined by a picture.  
True, my parents had never taught me to be a racist,  
but it was my friends' opinions that mattered.

For some odd reason I remembered my sixth grade ski trip.  
Some boy spit on me, and it was my friend  
that took time out of her trip to find him, and do what any good friend  
would.

Finally I realized that it was my fault the friendship ended.

I wanted to apologize to her badly. The need was like the need  
to scratch an annoying itch. I didn't know if she would accept.  
I was tired of not doing what I wanted to do.  
All those years ago I wanted to tell my new enemies to shut up.

When I saw her, I was ready to apologize.  
I took a few deep breaths and the air felt like it was choking me;  
I was so nervous. Then without any warning, my feet worked by  
themselves.  
I started walking toward her, hesitantly. Then she threw her arms around  
me.

I'll never be sure if she felt the tear drop on her neck,  
snaking a path down her back when she called me my old nickname.  
She said, "Ri, you're so big! I've missed you."  
I hugged her tighter feeling warmth and said, "I've missed you too,  
Alyssa."

Honorable Mention, Poetry (High School)  
Raquel Khosah

**I Am**

My mother,  
Puerto Rican.  
My father,  
African.  
But what am I?

The world said to be diverse  
Yet I observe separation.  
Water and Oil.  
Black and White.

Stereotypes,  
given in the blink of an eye.  
What makes someone more important than another?  
Can it be the color God bestowed on to their hands, their feet, their arms,  
their legs?  
Who wins?  
Who loses?  
...Who decides?

One by one we shoot our equals down.  
Bitter hatred,  
An emotion flying  
North.  
South.  
East.  
West.  
Derogatory terms roll off the tongue at the same speed as,  
“I love you”

Come,  
blindfolded.  
Meet me now.  
Meet me here.  
Hold my hand.  
Hear my cry.

I will not be classified  
I am neither  
my Mother  
or  
my Father  
Nor am I black or white  
I can not always win, but in striving to be my best  
I can never lose  
You,  
Are no better than me, and I am no better than you.

Open your eyes,  
Open them wide.  
Look past my color You'll find  
me.

Honorable Mention, Poetry (High School)  
Jerí Ogden

### Isn't Music the Universal Language?

*You like who? Who's John Mayer?* You know...solo artist...guitar player I try to explain. Puzzled looks overtake their faces as we look through the CD racks. I pick up Vanessa Carlton and *A Walk to Remember* soundtrack. They pick up some mainstream rapper who is on every music television station claiming to be "the next greatest rapper hip-hop has ever seen." Every popular radio station I switch to I am sure to hear one of his four singles, which are actually all the same song just remixed and features some mainstream R&B singer.

*That new 50 Cent album is the hotness!* Excitement overtakes them now. Doesn't it seem wrong that he's only popular because he was shot nine times? *No. He's gangsta. More gangsta than John Mayer,* they tell me. I don't want to debate with these kids. They are friends of a friend so I don't say anything else.

Before we leave they buy the latest releases buy 50 Cent and Jay-Z. *Why she act so white?* They whisper, thinking I'm not listening. I pretend I'm not, wonder to myself how someone can *act white*, and pay for my CD. The cashier looks a little like John Mayer. He winks at me when he hands me my change.

Honorable Mention, Poetry (High School)  
Kathleen Dillon

### The Wrath of Hamtaro

“Faggot,” the group of kids yelled at us,  
we tried to ignore them,  
but when standing in lines,  
you feel most vulnerable.

It was true  
that our pink Hamtaro shirts matched.  
But that was no reason for such taunting.

We turned our back to them  
and continued to talk,  
“Hey Fred! I’m talking to you.”  
They knew his name.

We ignored once again,  
“How can you wear pink like that? You’re a dude.”  
Someone dressed all in black put in his part,  
“Do no insult the color pink or Hamtaro around me!”

The group was stunned.  
the line began to move slowly again,  
and took us far enough away from them  
that we didn’t hear them anymore.

I looked at him,  
concerned,  
“I get that all the time,”  
he said to me.

I didn’t know what  
I should say to him.  
“They’re just jealous,  
because they don’t get to hang out

with beautiful women.”  
I smiled,  
and the line continued to move.  
We were a step ahead of the world.

Honorable Mention, Poetry (High School)  
Corey Carrington

### Outside the Box

What do you *see* when you look at me?  
A Harvard professor with a Ph.D.?  
What do you see when you *look* at me?  
A six-time NBA champ or Woods at the tee?  
What do *you* see when you look at me?  
A felon charged in the first degree?  
What do you see when *you* look at me?  
A pants-sagging, break-dancing bling bling MC?  
What do you see when you look *at* me?  
A crack-dealing, weed-smoking, fellow man-choking person?  
Who *me*?

What do *I* want you to see when you look at me?  
An intelligent, funny, handsome kid, Cory C.  
A shining star that's about to be  
Bright enough for the world to see.

Honorable Mention, Poetry (High School)  
Brittanie Jones

### Define Me

Discrimination can be any size, color, or shape.  
So tell me now, Am I different because of my race?  
I know my hair is thicker, my voice a little loud,  
But I'm an African Queen, and that really makes me proud.  
We black people have suffered too much to truly bear.  
The beatings and the whippings, oh but so severe.  
We suffered long nights chained up for years too long.  
Look me in the eye and say that wasn't wrong.  
So why am I defined a "nigger" when Negro means black,  
I'm not black I'm brown that's an honest fact.  
Now I'm not saying blacks are better, but neither are the whites.  
Cuz we had to pick your cotton, cuz we had to win your fights.  
Black is defined gloomy, it slows down ya day,  
So why would any white man define me in that way.  
I'm not tryna be rude but I say what's on my mind.  
Putting us in slavery was a waste of your time.  
We broke our chains free, released from the devil.  
So now I'm not in slavery I can be up on ya level.  
I can accomplish anything maybe better than you.  
I can guarantee I can do everything that you say you can do.  
So when Judgment day comes I'll ask Jesus what color am I.  
And I want all the white people to stand around and listen to his reply.

A note from the director:

Thank you to all the schools that participated in this year's awards. Particular thanks goes to the teachers at the Perry Traditional Academy, Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts, Schenley High School, and Winchester Thurston School for their support of this event.

thanks--

Jim Daniels