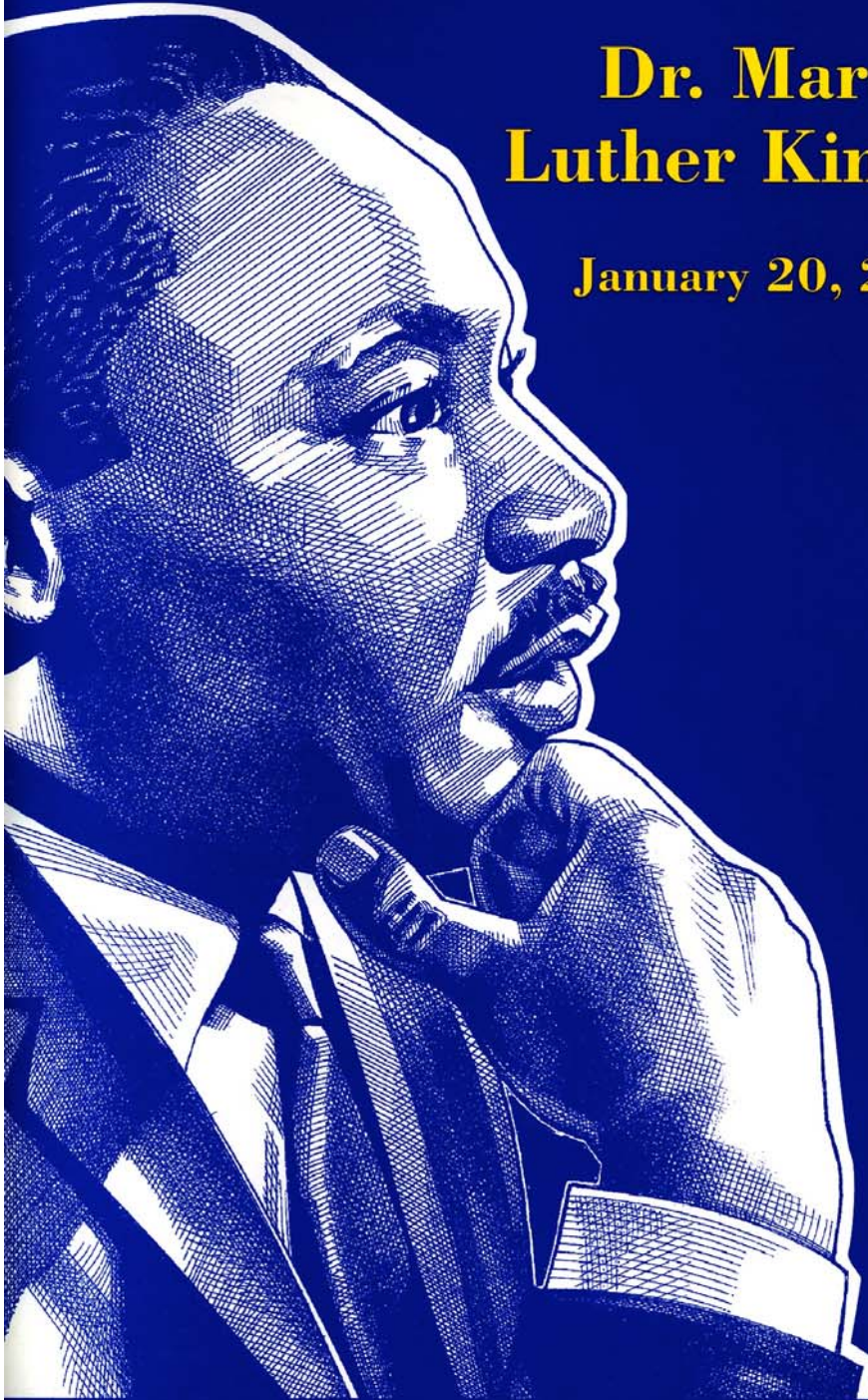


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**Dr. Martin
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January 20, 2003



Writing Awards

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First Place, Prose
Joseph Maliekel
Carnegie Mellon University

An American Struggle

My dream is to be a great American leader but there is a problem with my skin. It is much too dark. The issue carries into my features; they are far too Dravidian.

In utero, I was shuttled between two of the great American metropolises: Boston (where my immigrant father was at Harvard working towards his MBA) and Chicago (where his immigrant wife was in a Critical Care residency at Cook County Hospital). As I traveled with the latter of the pair, it should come as no surprise that I entered the world in the Midwest.

A friend of mine, a Bostonian at heart, once conceded to me that Chicago was the ideal American city: as cosmopolitan and culturally diverse as New York or Los Angeles yet built around a core of simpler, more traditional, stuff. I tend to agree with him. From the blues singers who praise the Lord as they damn their women to the faint farm-side smell of Wrigley Field, this city maintains an unforsakable connection to the values of its geographic location. The Midwest, America's Heartland. The wholesomeness remains, a dusty residue on the glass and steel of the city's skyscrapers

–
“Prairie and valley, street of the city, pour people into it
and they mingle among its twenty floors and are
poured out again back to the streets, prairies and valleys”
(Carl Sandburg, *Chicago Poems*)

That one place could cultivate so successful a cohabitation of the multiethnic and multicultural and of the basic tenets of American farmland values – freedom, hard work, strength of character, love of God, and fervent national pride, reassured me that I too would qualify as an American as I too valued those ideals. My own descent from a line of Indian farmers and my most honest and hard working mother and father only strengthened the belief that I, despite differences in culture and color, was pre-destined to be accepted as an equal member of this country.

Days, months, years in a public school system where I was “the Indian kid” to peers and teachers alike. More years as one of three colored students (one of whom was my sister) at a private school where “Appu” imitations were demanded of me to ensure token friendships. However, a tendency to be gentle-hearted, to the point of naiveté, when judging others allowed me to sustain the belief, well into my teenage years, that the idea of an American remained fully in the metaphysical. Only recently, since the 11th of September, has empirical evidence demanded a paradigm shift.

I walk up to the ticket attendant. She returns to me my stub and mentions for me to enjoy my flight. I know the airline security has twice eyed me up and down. And then, as I move towards the gate, I am approached and informed that I have been randomly selected for a security check and would I please walk over this way and open my bag. This occurred every time I flew. Every time, to and from my destination, the first 12 times I flew following the 11th.

The same treatment befalls my father and when it does, his anger flashes through his eyes. Not in his face, he is too controlled a man to allow such a thing and, at any rate, such a gesture would be superfluous. My father knows he has conveyed his disappointment when the security personnel refuse to answer his glare. He knows he has humbled their presumption. I am much different. Perhaps because I am younger, because I tend more towards my mother, but nonetheless, my reaction is different. For though I feel the same anger that accosts my father, a second, stronger emotion is always allowed to overcome the first: empathy. And from this, sorrow for the person who will stand in front of my life for the next two minutes, investigating my loafers and patting down the sides and back of my blazer, a person consumed in a judgment of who I am that is based upon the five percent of my body that clothing failed to cover.

Empathy is unattainable without love and love entails, among other things (as many late night conversations with friends have deduced), simultaneously the embrace of a person for who they are and the belief and expectation that they will constantly improve until they've attained the paragon of themselves. So, with a wide smile I step forward, believing and expecting that this time is different, that I misinterpreted her gaze, and that today's check is truly random. And so, being the change which I wish to see, I pass upon her the better judgment and believe and expect that she has passed the better judgment upon me.

Often I am asked which subject I will study in college. Occasionally, a person will make the question multiple choice - engineering or medicine? And it excites me to see their surprise and appreciation when I say, "Pre-law. I'm looking to go into Government." Medicine, engineering, maybe business; this is the short list of expected options for a 1st generation child. These are the fields into which immigrant fathers and mothers have already broken, the once less-traveled paths that their feet have already made smooth and easy. But mine is not to live a better life than my parents do by reaping a field that they cleared, plowed, and planted.

I am the farmer of my own land. I seek the greater, the same thing my parents found in business, in medicine: to change the way people think, to completely dismantle and rebuild people's vision of their world, their fellow man, and themselves. I hope I have already made some progress: being the first Indian elected president in my prep-school's 200-plus year history, living the changes which I hope and expect to see in others, and, today, sharing my views with you. Breaking into the US political arena and proving that an American is more the values and ideals one embodies and less the body holding these values would be a small but good next step. And perhaps, one day, a greater man or woman will build higher upon the foundations which I helped lay.

“For it matters not how small the beginnings may seem to be; what is once well
done is done forever”
(Thoreau, Walden)

Second Place, Prose
Elsie Lampl
Carnegie Mellon University

But I'm not a racist???

I used to believe that I was not racist. I went to a predominantly white school, and lived in an overwhelmingly rural white community. I grew up believing that skin color made no difference. I believed that what really counted was on the inside and that I, as a middle class white female, had the same opportunities and had no real differences from my peers of a different color. I realized that there were racists in this world, but I definitely wasn't one of them.

Then I entered one of the most diverse universities in the United States. I had never seen so many minorities in one place and although I experienced a bit of culture shock, I still believed that I was not a racist. I maintained my naïve convictions that we were all the same. International students came from different cultures, but Americans are Americans.

It was not until my senior year that I had a shocking revelation. I am racist. I had two different experiences that led me to this revelation. The first showed that race can cause differences between people with similar backgrounds. The other experience taught me that no matter how hard I try, I do acknowledge race. It may not be in a suppressing or superior manner, but, somewhat unconsciously, I sometimes treat black people differently from people of my own race.

Jara, one of my best friends at Carnegie Mellon, is black. She grew up in the same kind of town that I did; we have similar interests and views on life and the world. We have great conversations and, in almost every way, we can relate to each other. But one day, while having a seemingly insignificant conversation, I realized that there were major differences in our cultures that I may have known about, but I did not acknowledge.

Jara was complaining about how one of our housemates would put chunks of her hair on the shower door. I explained to her that Caucasian hair falls out easily, particularly long hair, and I used to do the same thing that our housemate does: run my hands through my hair grabbing the loose strands so they do not clog the drain. After my explanation, she turned to me with a look of disbelief:

"You think my black hair doesn't fall out? Girl, my hair is so nappy, every time I wash it I have so much fall out. That's one of the reasons I wash my hair only once a week."

I had also noticed that she wore a shower cap. I knew that she went to her salon once a month to go through the grueling process of getting a relaxer "cause it'll turn all nappy." I knew that black women endured hours of pain to get braids. But I didn't realize the huge difference between my hair and Jara's hair until this moment.

I found out that her hair wasn't even real; it was a weave. Jara taught me what a weave was: fake hair that is attached to her head by corn rolling a crown on her head and sewing the weave in - a three to five hour process. She told me that black women will almost never ever go to white hairdresser. She has to wrap her hair every night around her head and then wear a do-rag so her hair will stay straight and her weave will last longer. I learned that she goes through immense pain when they are applying the weave and it pulls on her scalp for at least the first week, giving her migraines.

Why? I asked. Why go through all of this? Let your hair grow. Let your natural beauty show. Her natural hair was made of beautiful spiral curls.

She had no straight answer. She said, "Well, partly it's just something to do. A style, just like clothing. But I guess in the back of every women's black mind, when your hair is straight and healthy, it's more white. And even though most won't outright admit it, whiter is better in most cases. Whiter is more beautiful."

She tried to relate it back to my "white" culture. It's the same as wearing shoes that give me blisters but I still walk to class in them because they add a few inches to my short stature. I still couldn't get it. Why go through pain to be more "white?" Why not just be proud of who she was? Why think of race so much?

She told me it's a culture. A black salon is something white people can't penetrate. They won't be hired and they aren't customers. I cautiously asked where she can go to get her hair done. When she lived in rural areas, was there a black salon?

"You can start a black salon anywhere and thrive," she said. "It doesn't have to be in the ghetto or the black part of town. Black people are loyal to their own race in this way, they'll support these places."

I started to notice black women's hair. The different styles: the braids and the weaves. I knew that Jara isn't considered by many of the black people on campus to be very black, she isn't well-respected by them. I couldn't understand this. Black is black, I said.

"No," she told me. "I'm too white. I dress white. I talk white. My friends are white. And my hair is white. Black people think I'm too white because I act white, but in their own ways they act white. It's tough you have to have enough blackness to be accepted with them but you have to be white enough to be accepted"

I noticed the black people I know and how their hair connects to their "blackness." My one friend has straight silky black hair and hangs out with only white girls. Another friend has long braids and hangs out with black girls. Did their hair really determine their blackness? Maybe their hair doesn't determine their "blackness," but their "blackness" helps determine their hair.

White people don't have to go through such agony when deciding a hair style. They choose their hairstyle according to what they like and what looks good on them. Their hair doesn't affect how white they are, but I suppose there are people who try to imitate other races with style.

For instance, when I was in high school a terrible slang term, "wiggers," defined those white boys who dressed in baggy pants and wore gold chains, imitating black rappers. Is this a culture similar to black hair? Do those white boys want to actually be black or are they just imitating each other as part of a fad?

What exactly is the difference between culture and race? With hair, I saw that race can determine culture. Idealistic Americans believe that our culture is truly a "melting pot" as I did, but as the differences become apparent between races, I cringe at the thought of one American Culture. I always had a cynical personality, but when it came to race I had no cynicism. I knew race would never be a factor when judging a person. But my idealistic self lost sight of the fact that race is a part of a person and, in some areas, people of different races can't completely relate.

About a month ago, Jara and I were leaving Giant Eagle, pushing a shopping cart full of groceries. At this store, a small gap exists where the curb slants so the carts can be pushed to the parking lot. A beat-up mini-van blocked this grade, so we waited a few minutes for the man behind the driver's seat to realize that he had to move up so we could get through. Finally, Jara impatiently went and tapped on the window, asking him to pull up a few feet. We walked through and Jara started to laugh at herself and exclaimed how she was so racist.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Because all I thought was that it was a stupid black man," she said nonchalantly. I laughed, but she had made me uncomfortable because of my immediate thoughts. I did not think the man was stupid because he was black, but I had immediately noted that he was black and I was annoyed about his stupidity. The entire ride home, I wondered if I would have taken notice of the man's color if he had been white.

For weeks, I found myself revisiting this situation. Why was it sticking out in my mind? I tried to analyze my reactions to black people and was shocked to observe how I reacted. I had never consciously observed my responses before, but I do notice color. In a way, I am more polite with black people. I go out of my way to be nicer, to smile sooner to a black stranger than to a white. Do I pity black people? No, but perhaps, unconsciously, I want to assure to these strangers that I do not dislike them because of their color. I smile at black children more often than at white children. When I see facilities management workers on campus, I am more polite to black workers than to white ones.

Does this mean I'm racist? Perhaps not in the traditional sense, but I looked up the definition of racism on the internet and I found two different meanings:

"Any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life."

* * *

*"Racism is essentially a conscious or unconscious **belief in the inherent superiority of one race over another** \ others and thereby the right by that race to use power to dominate."*

I don't believe that I am superior to other races because I am white. The first definition begins with "any distinction." Does my extra cautiousness and politeness mean that I fit into this manner of a racist? I treat my black friends and acquaintances the same as my white ones (and my Asian ones for that matter.) But for some reason, I don't see strangers the same way. Am I the only person who treats black strangers this way just because they are black? Is it sympathy? Is it because I am scared that someone will call me a racist?

Why do I treat black strangers differently from white people? My step-grandfather is black and I never treated him differently. I fight and make fun of Jara as much as I do my white friends. Do I want to assure black strangers that I am not a racist, so I make special efforts to be pleasant? Do I pity them? Do I feel superior?

I try to imagine my actions if a black child and white child were together. I know I would treat them differently. I would be more delicate with the black child. More encouraging, more courteous. Consciously, I would be treating the children equally. Unconsciously, I would pity the black child because I know that he will probably have a harder life than the white child. He will have to deal with more issues; he will have to fight through society. He will be a minority. People will call him names. So why not pay him a little bit of special attention?

Do they notice? A friend who worked with black children once told me that they ask why white people stare at them. Is that me? Or is it those white people who stare in disgust? Is it my special attention that is making them feel uncomfortable? Am I making their race more obvious because I am nicer? Am I making their lives that much more difficult? I can't be the only one who feels this way, but am I one of the only ones who admits to it and thinks about it.

A couple of months ago, two maintenance men, one black and one white, were fixing our toilet. I was the only one home so I had to tell them what was wrong and see if they could fix it. When explaining what had been happening, I spoke to and looked at the black man. I made sure to be extra polite and smile. I wasn't rude to the white man, but I did not make a conscious effort to be especially polite. I didn't think about it at the time, but I believe I wanted to make sure the black man knew I respected him. I wanted to assure him I wasn't racist. If he noticed, I wonder if I made him uncomfortable. I wonder if he thought I was racist.

I'm not a racist in the sense of believing my superiority of others, but I am not colorblind as I thought I was. But I realize the naiveté of my earlier attitude that I do not recognize color in a person. I am starting to realize how racial differences do make people different, even on the inside. Jara's hair culture demonstrates that despite our similarities and friendship; there are differences in our cultures and those differences are based on race.

“In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way. And in order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently.”

-Harry A. Blackmun,

Retired Justice United States Supreme Court,

Author of Roe v. Wade

Third Place, Prose
Virginia Ngai
Carnegie Mellon University

A Creative Truth

The bitter chill of the frosted air ate away at her face. She half closed her eyes and pulled her jacket closer together. Crossing her arms in an attempt to defeat the wind had proven before to be futile, yet out of habit, she did it anyway. She maneuvered herself through the empty paths. The silence of the day seemed strange to her; it wasn't everyday that you cross Forbes Avenue at rush hour and don't hear a single car or bus coming along. She passed the naked trees and the small huddle of people waiting in the bus stop for a bus, any bus to come along and take them away from this frozen hell.

She wore a dark blue knee length denim jacket and red boots peeked up from the bottom of her torn blue jeans. With a pair of turquoise glasses and short-cropped hair, she looked like a little modern Asian doll. The harsh wind blew the last leaves of autumn against her in an effort to conquer her journey and make her return.

With longing she thought of the apartment that once housed graduate students at the university. It was warm, cheerful with bright festive lights. The apartment was typically filled with the scent of grapefruit, a smell that emitted from the aromatherapy lamp. Even though it was a typical campus apartment, the little decorations made it seem like home. A lava lamp that was on at all times, yellow blobs of wax floating in blue liquid creating an eerie green that glazed across the room. In her opinion, they looked like little yellow jellyfish bobbing up and down in the vast cylindrical ocean. There were custom-made bottled lights that she created every time she was done with a bottle of liquor. An Absolut Mandarin bottle that glowed orange, a Skyy Vodka bottle that twinkled with violet lights, an empty green cider bottle that now hosted little green dots; these bottles all lined the mantel above the dining table. A multitude of Skyy Vodka posters and ads were plastered on the walls with people looking at her from all angles enjoying a drink.

Remnants from her trip to Asia over the past summer adorned her side of the room. She had traveled to the other side of the world in hopes of gaining insight to her heritage. She had been adopted at the age of three by a wonderful couple who had never held her back in finding her culture. However, growing up in a predominately white neighborhood, she had never felt the need to explore her Asian roots. Hence when she arrived at the university, where a quarter of the undergraduate population was Asian, she felt a sudden twinge of wanting to know which student organization she really belonged in; Hong Kong Student Association, Singapore Student Association, Asian American Women, Taiwanese Student Association, Korean Student Association among many others. As a result, she spent three months traveling all over Asia. There were pictures of Victoria Harbour in Hong Kong, the temples that she visited while in Tokyo, stuffed animals that were in the shape of sushi she brought back from Osaka

hung from the ceiling, a miniature shopping cart that housed two stuffed animals sat on her desk from Singapore and a puppet that was dressed in traditional Indian clothing hung from her bed.

The vicious wind attacked at her face. She hurried past the empty gas station, glancing at the few employees that were closing up and emerging to battle this storm. After a few more minutes in this callous weather, she entered the Panther Hollow Inn.

She was greeted with a warm blast of inviting air. The noisy bustle was a wonderful relief from the stilted silence of the empty world. The television was showing a football match and the few people sitting there were cheering and yelling for their team, for contrary to the name, PHI wasn't really an inn but a tavern. A vast array of liquor bottles lined the shelf above the bartender's head. Wooden bar stools were strewn around the bar top. It was only six o'clock yet there were already people lying down on the table, 'having a rest.' With a grin she surveyed the scene played out before her. She sauntered up to the stool and sat down.

"Hey Derek, gimme a shot of Jack Daniels please." She ordered with an ease born of familiarity.

"Hey Sandy. How's it going?" The bartender turned and waved at her.

"It's freaking cold outside." She replied while taking off her gray scarf, and blue jacket. She reached for the shot glass with greedy hands. With anticipation she gulped the light brown liquor down. A wonderful burning heat shot through her throat all the way down to her stomach. She smiled, savoring the warmth venturing into every part of her body.

She rummaged through her bag and took out a weather beaten journal. Using her trademark green pen, she started to go through the journal looking for something to trigger her inspiration. Flipping through pages and pages of quotes, she arrived at one that struck her deep within. She could not remember when this was copied down nor whom it was by, all she knew was that this was the quote she was to write with, this was the quote she was to live with and be inspired with.

"You are told a lot about your education, but some beautiful, sacred memory, preserved since childhood is perhaps the best education of all. If a man carries many memories into life with him, he is saved for the rest of his days. And even if only one good memory is left in our hearts, it may also be the instrument of our salvation one day."

There was a sudden clarity in the surrounding noise of people drinking and watching television. Even though this was a ritual she was accustomed to, it swiftly changed into something else. She was the observer and no longer the participant. She wondered which of these people had family to go back to, to build memories with their children. Turning the stool so that she seemed to be facing the television, she watched a man sitting alone in a booth. He seemed to be around thirty-years-old with a slight receding hairline. Even though it was extremely cold outside, he was wearing a t-shirt advertising for Yahoo.com. He was reading a glossy magazine of some sort.

She imagined him to be a newly appointed father, taking a break from the noisy cries of his newborn son. When his son had been born, both he and his wife had stared

at this little bundle of pinkness that represented an extension of themselves. They would caress him, love him, teach him about his family and heritage.

In a few minutes, he would finish his beer, fold up his magazine which would most likely be a financial magazine for he looked like a banker to her. He was bilingual in English and Chinese so the bank often assigned him the Asian customers. This man would put on the jacket that was hanging off the post of the booth, a dark gray wool jacket; sensible and mature. He would return home to the scent of freshly made dinner and kiss his wife. After washing his hands carefully with just a bit of soap, he would enter the nursery and beam at his son. His son would stare back into his dark brown eyes. He would be named after the man with a junior tagged on to the name.

His loving wife would call out from the dining room, telling him that dinner was ready and he would swoop his hands down into the bassinet and pick up his child. Bringing him into the dining room, he would kiss his wife hello and settle into a conversation about his day at the bank.

He worked in the treasury department of Citizen's Bank developing new structured products. He recently developed a foreign currency denominated fund for a hedge fund. The baby would start to wail but instead of being annoyed, he would get up and try to calm the baby down, while motioning to his wife to sit down and enjoy a moment's rest.

Their apartment would be small but decorated in a modern way. White leather sofas with a plasma television would adorn their living room. In the middle of the silver metal coffee table would be a small vase holding several twigs of lucky bamboo. The dining room adjoined with the kitchen, only separated by a counter, is lit by spotlights strategically placed around the ceiling. The dining table, made of a dark solid wood complemented the white lantern material wallpaper. With little imagination, she could smell what his wife had been cooking for dinner; steamed fish with the scent of ginger and garlic wafting into the dining room. There would be plates of dishes surrounding the neatly laid out table. Steam would rise from the bak choi and spare ribs that his wife cooked with garlic and black beans. He would place the bassinet on the chair next to his and watch his baby suck at the bottle while he picked up the bowl and a pair of chopsticks and put rice into his mouth.

There would still be a soft scent of his cologne hanging near him. When he leant over to give his wife a kiss, she would be able to sniff appreciatively at the comforting scent. He met her in college about eight years ago, when she was a freshman and he a junior. Both had been international students from Asia and it had formed a bond between them. While it wasn't love at first sight, they had a friendship which developed into something much more. After college, the two of them married immediately and settled down in Pittsburgh where she could concentrate on her glasswork while he found a job at Citizen's Bank.

She was shaken out of her reverie when he walked past her swiftly. Glancing eagerly at the magazine, she saw that it was a copy of *Playboy*. Upon closer inspection, his hair was greasy and shined a bright black. He was wearing torn jeans with holes in the knees. The "respectable coat" belonged to someone else and he wore a tattered army jacket. In the brief moment he swept past her, she saw that his fingernails were grubby

and lined with dirt. A sharp sinking feeling traveled from her mind to her stomach. As the sharp draft of bitter cold air entered the tavern, hitting her fully in the face, she awakened. She turned to Derek and asked for another shot of liquor. The hot acidic warmth spread through her body again leaving her with the memory of her imagination and a cold walk home.

Honorable Mention, Prose
Brian Martin Schenker
Carnegie Mellon University

Mistaken Words

Papier-mâché turkeys colored orange and brown sat in rows on the windowsills, and simple posters of Pilgrims and Indians decorated the walls of Miss Adams' 5th grade classroom. Thanksgiving was next week and the class was learning a children's version of Western imperialism. As Miss Adams shared a description of the "first meeting," I sat at my desk amazed that Pilgrims and Indians could get along so well at the dinner table, when my sister, my cousins, and I couldn't. Most Thanksgivings one of us ended up alone in the kitchen.

Miss Adams had arranged our desks into seven small clusters, four desks per cluster. The three classmates in my cluster shared my wonderment.

"My father and grandmother are always fighting," said Brooke Owens. She was well known for two reasons: her cheerful spirit and her sixteen-year-old brother, who was in the 7th grade and confined to a wheelchair. He had multiple sclerosis but the kids made fun of him for being retarded. Brooke suffered indirectly and privately.

"My mom and dad don't get along," said Liz Cunningham. She wore a hearing aid and usually had something to complain about. She was the type of girl who cried during field trips and went to the school nurse often.

"I can't stand my older bother, he's always taking my cornbread when I'm not looking," said Marcus Rex the only black student in Garwood Middle School. Marcus was my best friend. The advantage to a cluster was that we could whisper to each other, which we usually got away with as long as Liz didn't snap 'what' too loudly. The disadvantage was that we were all friends only because the first letter of our last names fell between 'O' and 'S.'

"Cornbread? What's cornbread?" asked Liz.

"Quiet," called out Miss Adams, a short and stout Irish woman, who was at a point in her life where she might not find that man she'd been looking for. Miss Adams finished her story and then said, "Okay class, let's line up at the door for the assembly." In honor of the holidays, the principal was showing *101 Dalmatians* in the auditorium. Because Miss Adams forgot to dismiss the class by cluster, a hoard of excited children stormed the doorway fighting to get to the front of the line for no other reason than they could.

I boxed out my position third in line, but Marcus snuck in front of me anyway. I said, "Nigger," like I would've said 'cutter.' He stepped out of line and walked away quickly.

"Marcus, what's wrong," I said, "Hey come on, what's a matter? You can cut me, I don't care. Marcus?"

He went to the back of the line.

As we walked the hallway, I looked back occasionally to try and catch his attention. Each time, I saw him looking into the distance; his expression hard and fighting back tears. What his parents had warned him about had come true and he didn't know how to deal with it. That was what Miss Adams explained to me weeks after the incident, when my best friend still wouldn't talk to me, when she moved him to the 'A' through 'F' cluster. Marcus wasn't in school on the first day of 6th grade.

The night of the incident my mother received phone calls from Mr. and Mrs. Rex, the principal, and Miss Adams. She sat me down at the kitchen table across from my father and then took a seat next to him. My mother spoke first.

"Where did you hear that word?"

"From grandma," I said.

I told my parents what had happened. Two weeks ago, my grandma was babysitting my sister and me on a Friday night. She had errands to run and so we spent most of the night hopping in and out of her silver Buick Century. My sister and I decided that we would sit together in the back seat so that we could play easier. At the end of the night, my grandma blurted out, "Why do you two like riding boogie so much?"

We looked at each other puzzled. Grandma waited for our answer. My sister nudged me. "Grandma what's a boogie?"

"A nigger – a black person," she said matter of fact, as if she had expected us to know.

"And that's why I called Marcus that," I finished. I could tell by my parents' looks I was in trouble.

My dad made his point. "That word is not a nice word. It's a mean word. We don't use that word. Got it."

I nodded my head, of course. My mother interjected, "Honey, grandma uses that word because she grew up in a different time, and back then people said that word, which doesn't make it okay, but that's just why she still says it."

"Doesn't she know she shouldn't say it mommy?"

My mother paused and looked to my father. He made a gesture that said, 'It's up to you now.' She said, "She knows it's wrong honey, but she's very old and when you get old you don't always remember to do the right thing."

Oh, so it had to do with senility!

My father jumped in, "Don't say it again. Ever. Got it."

Oh, I got it, yes sir.

They dismissed me and I made my way to the living room. I turned the corner and stopped so that I could listen and find out how much trouble I was in.

"Well, that sounds like Catherine," said my father.

My mother agreed.

"Do you remember the story about her honeymoon? In Toronto?"

"No," replied my mother.

A hand slapped the table, my father's I guessed. "Oh Jesus. I can't believe I haven't told you this. So my mom and dad are in this fancy restaurant. Really classy place, and they've had a bit to drink. At the end of the meal, the waiter comes by and asks my mother if she wants dessert. And she says, 'Yes I do. I want Wanggooy.' The waiter says, 'I don't think that's on the menu, but I'll ask the chef if he knows how to prepare it.' So he goes back to check and a few minutes later he's back at the table. 'I'm sorry ma'am but the chef isn't familiar with that dish, perhaps if you told me what it was he could make it for you.' My mom looks him in the eyes. 'Sure I'll tell ya. It's Chinese asshole stuffed with rice. Wang gooy.'"

"That's terrible," said my mother. They both laughed. I wasn't sure what the joke meant. I understood it was wrong, though; mostly because of the word 'asshole.' I left my perch at the corner and sat down on the sofa. My grandma had always been fun, just fun and cheerful and talkative. She would give my sister and me candy, like *Smarties*, and let us dangle from her walker as if it was a set of monkey bars. Now she said bad words that hurt my best friends' feelings.

The next time I was with my grandmother I decided to correct her language. I said, "That's not a nice word," and shook my finger at her. My parents and sister started doing the same. Wagging his finger, my father would say to her, "Now, now, Catherine, you know that's not nice. You're going to have to learn how to behave yourself in front of the children." My grandmother would blush and say, "I know. I know," and my father, mother, and grandma would laugh a little.

As I grew up, I decided to use my experiences with my grandma as a model. I fully embraced the ideology of sameness and equality, and continued reprimanding anyone who thought otherwise; no matter if my efforts worked or not. Accepting that everyone was the same and equal was easy for me. Only three people of race graced the classrooms of Fairview High School: Ravi, Samihita, and Sowjinia. Ravi was a friend of mine from computer programming class, and my match as a coder. Samihita and Sowjinia were identical twin sisters. I found their stories about India and Hinduism fascinating, everyone did; they were exotic.

Innocently, we turned them into teenage representatives for a nation, which was fine because they were the same and equal. All three spoke perfect English, wore the right clothes, and were beautiful in an American way. They only experienced discrimination indirectly, because of their parents, who were first generation immigrants. But everyone makes fun of your parents; that simply comes with being the same and equal. They had to understand that. What we didn't understand was that we made fun of their parents for different reasons: strange spicy smells, accented spoken English, foreign clothes, and bizarre knickknacks in their homes.

When I went to Carnegie Mellon University, I became immersed in a racially diverse community for the first time. When I met my friend Peter's roommate Carl, I tried to bring the same and equal ideology into my relationship with him. Carl was a black man with a tiny cantaloupe sized head, and I honestly looked up to him. I

wanted badly to be his friend and decided to be extra sensitive around him so that another Marcus incident wouldn't happen.

On a Friday night, Carl, Peter, and I sat three feet from the television playing video games in a haze of smoke. I turned to Carl and asked, "What's your take on rap," with a tone that implied he had an expert opinion I could never have. He laughed and then talked for a few minutes, saying he didn't know a lot.

"I play Wu-Tang every morning to get my blood moving," said Peter. He was an Italian man with a big heart and a personality no one seemed to find disagreeable.

"I hear ya, man, I hear ya," said Carl.

"You know what's up with the Clan?"

"You know it man. Shit, I grew up on the Clan," said Carl.

"Oh yeah, doin' it old school." Peter took a long drag in honor of 'old school,' and passed it to the left to me, who had been left behind in the conversation, lost and bewildered. I thought my display of ignorance combined with interest in rap was showing I wasn't a racist. I thought I found a way not to make a mistake. Peter and Carl talked and joked the entire night, while I sat close to silent, winning at video games.

The next time Carl, Peter, and I smoked together I decided to try a different approach. When the bubbling noises stopped, I said to Carl, "I saw a Biggie video on MTV yesterday. It was bad."

"Yeah," he said and passed the piece to Peter. The sound of bubbling filled the apartment again. Carl stared away blankly. I'd meant bad as in good, but I couldn't tell him that; I'd seem even more uncool than I already did. And so I said nothing. The sound stopped and there was a whistling whoosh.

"I saw it too. It was sick," said Peter through mouthfuls of smoke.

Carl coughed a little and, nodding his tiny head, replied, "His rhymes are ill."

Peter lunged forward in his chair and gave Carl a floppy high-five.

What ease, I thought miserably. I didn't know how to act around Carl, at least not like that, as I wanted to. In truth I couldn't act normally at all. I hyper-analyzed everything I might say or do for any possible racist subtexts, and so I sat with Carl and Peter socially paralyzed, like a virgin in a bar with a couple of bikers: willing, awkward, and uneasy. I'm sure Carl saw my discomfort as a clear image of a racist; I couldn't even sit in a room with him without behaving strangely and we were supposed to be friends. Then again, maybe he didn't think that at all. I didn't know.

What had happened? How did I end up here—socially paralyzed around a friend because he was different? What happened to being the opposite of grandma, to saying all the right things? What happened to being the same and equal? Listening to Peter talk to Carl about subjects he'd never spoke of with me, I realized the irony of my behavior: we are all equal but we sure as hell aren't the same. Carl was black and that was the last aspect of his life I was trying to understand. What words did I have? I spoke with uninformed words, the words of strangers, words as hurtful as ignorant ones like 'Nigger.' With nothing to say, Carl sat across from me staring off into space,

and I'm sure he saw in me a friend who didn't act like a friend. I knew I was suspect because of it, but I couldn't force a word past my lips. We sat in silence. We'll never get past this, I thought. Peter passed me the piece and I let my eyes get bigger than my lungs, so that I wouldn't remember the night.

Honorable Mention, Prose
Elizabeth Weiss
Carnegie Mellon University

A Kiss in Black and White

The first time I was kissed by a boy and it counted I was seven-years-old and it was wintertime, an old snow still covering the edges of the sidewalks. I lived three blocks from school, and wore a dress that day with tights thick enough to be leggings, except they were tights and had thick braids running down them like an exotic loaf of bread. I think they were gray, and it was cold out but I still felt warm still in a jumper. A boy named either David Michaels or Michael Davids, I can't remember for sure his name, walked me home that day. But I remember how his black eyes danced, and how he hopped around me on our way home, turning himself into a force field of affection and energy that made me feel seen and protected. I think his name was David. I remember that at some point before this walk home he had teased me in a way that didn't make me mad or sad. I think it was his attention that made me feel that beneath the pulling at my dress, the jokes about the color of my hair, which was, and always has been, as red as hair can be, it was all just teasing, for fun. I didn't mind his comments about my freckles, since all he really said was, "Ha! You have freckles!" and point a little flinger at me and smile as he said this. I would turn red, of course, but remember him smiling at me in turn with my blush, making it more a declaration of something special than anything else.

Somehow, I don't remember how exactly, he just sort of ended up walking home with me. I thought I'd be in trouble for bringing someone home unannounced. Mom did not like surprises, always liked to be asked permission on lots of things. So when we ended up in front of my house, I didn't ask him to come in or if he could play. We looked at the snow, kicking it around with our feet, my Maryjanes and his dirty, crackling white high tops. I didn't want to tell him I had to go, he was fun and making me feel like I had a dark pink jacket on the inside of me, like the puffing navy snow coat David was wearing. I knew how to make fun of him back, telling him how his hood turned his head into a dark blue cone.

In a moment I cannot place in time now, David Michaels kissed me, small and warm on my little lips; so quick I remember the pressure of his soft *boy* lips leaving more than them actually being on my own, young mouth. It was as powdery as the snow, and David Michaels was black and I remember wondering if this was right. The walk home was fine, being in school was allowed, but the kiss made me think maybe something was wrong, even though I liked it.

I think I just sort of said, "I have to go now" and ran off behind my house. I felt bad, he had looked like he wanted to come inside. It was cold, I didn't know where he lived. Something seemed not right, his walking home alone from my house. I thought briefly that if he were a like me, whiter and a girl, I would have brought her inside and

told my Mom her name. Instead I ran in the back door, into my brown TV room and into the yellow kitchen and saw my Mom stirring something on top of the stove. I imagine I was flushed with freckles backed by blood, exhilaration and snow mixed in my excited complexion.

I didn't know if I should tell her. I was seven but observant, and knew a First Kiss was something official, something a Mom should know about. You told parents the good things that happen to you, you liked them to know these things. My best friend and I had been wondering when something like a First Kiss was supposed to happen, as her thirteen-year-old sister was talking about kisses and reading about them in magazines we tried to analyze in secret, sounding out new words like *mascara* and *orgasm*. We felt it was something that happened when a boy liked you, and being liked was the best thing there was. So First Kisses were supposed to happen to likeable, and therefore probably pretty girls. But still, I didn't run in and yell out my newfound status as the recipient of a kiss, a First Kiss.

She didn't ask me why I was standing there expectantly in the kitchen; she didn't even look at me really. I remember deciding that yes, I would tell her. I'm supposed to tell her. She's my Mom, she's supposed to know about this. I thought maybe she saw us out the front window. I thought maybe I was in trouble, slightly aware I might be too young to be kissing even though in kindergarten Mikey Piastro had kissed my cheek on a dare, but that didn't count because it was on the cheek and a dare. I was always doing things I wasn't old enough to do, like reading the books on her dresser or watching shows for grown-ups when left alone with the remote. I got in trouble for those things.

And then I thought he's black, was that allowed? We didn't know anyone black, I didn't have other black friends come and play, and neither did my parents. We weren't related to anyone black. None of my teachers were black; no one on the street was black. I wasn't black. I was white and red. Not that anyone had ever said that black people weren't nice, or that I shouldn't play with them, or kiss them. I just wondered for a moment if it was alright; I'd never scene someone white kiss someone black.

"Mom, David Michaels just kissed me."

She looked down at me, back when I was small enough to be looked down on, and I remember staring back up at her, waiting.

"Oh really." That was all that was said. She didn't care, but she wasn't as happy for me as I felt she should be. I was kissed! Boys kissed pretty girls they liked. I was pretty and liked. But maybe she knew he was black. I was afraid to ask.

First Place, Prose
Jamar Thrasher
Pittsburgh High School for the
Creative and Performing Arts

An Unforgettable Journey

I remember a brown globe that was always near me. The globe that I had as a child took me to far off lands such as Iceland, Russia, Zimbabwe, Guatemala, and so many more. There were moments when I would stare at the globe for hours and wonder what it would be like to live in a place other than America.

In middle school I was faced with harsh realities that I did not know my origin. Everyone in my class basically knew where they came from - whether it was Poland, Ireland or Israel, they all knew where they came from. I knew I came from someplace, and that place was called Africa. I was in the Art room at the time, I listened to a student speak of being Jewish and speaking Hebrew. I did not know what my language was, but I knew that I had one, I also knew that somewhere in the motherland that I had family, that my ebony skin didn't shine like the warriors of a thousand tribes for nothing.

Years after my art class, I was a sophomore in The Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts. I was in English class when the student body was dismissed for an assembly. In the brown seats that filled the auditorium, I marveled at what I heard. The man standing on stage said anyone of us could take the opportunity to make a trip to a new land. It was my chance. My chance to see a link of myself other than in America.

I had chosen Ghana as a country that I wanted to explore. It seemed interesting and its culture of gold mines, tribes, and slave castles seemed rich. I was granted the opportunity to go to Ghana that summer by the Experiment in International Living. I nestled right in with my group. My group and I had been traveling and touring the country for a few weeks when we were notified that we were going to a slave castle.

Ghana has two slave castles: the Elmina Castle and the Cape Coast Castle. Both castles were fortresses of terror. They were holding places for human cargo. The Elmina Slave Castle was the one on our agenda today. The Elmina Castle was one of the first slave trading areas in Africa. In 1482 it was constructed by the Portuguese, but was then captured by the Dutch in 1673. The castle served a major role of trading with Brazil and the Caribbean. Now it is a place where tourists can come and see the harsh realities of slavery up close.

We stood outside of the castle. From the outside it looked marvelous. The architectural work was distinctive. The cannons that lined the wall and the drawbridge at the entrance of the castle let me see something real. We were at the Elmina Slave Castle. The slave castle was in Cape Coast which is a city in Ghana that is a large fishing area. We walked over top of the drawbridge and were met by the tour guide.

I wondered what I might learn that day. I was thinking over and over that I was probably standing in a spot in which my relatives stood. I reminisced about the history

of slavery that I had been taught, but this was something that had more significance than a text book. I was actually somewhere that mattered. I was face to face with the ghost of tragedy.

The guide led my group, consisting of teenage students and a few adult leaders to the dreadful dungeon. The dungeon is where they held the male slaves. I imagined it, people packed as tight as sardines in a tin. The cramped space was not fit for anyone. The musty air filtered in and out, the paint chipped walls seemed like a border separating the pain of the slaves from the others. The guide told stories of men fighting for food, air and life. The room was about the size of a city playground but hundreds of bodies, souls and lives were packed into the room. I felt sick because I could see and hear the cries of affliction. In the upper part of the dungeon was a hole. The hole let in light and air that barely helped.

The dungeon and its tears ripped my soul. The tour guide led us to a place behind the dungeon. He took us to a door where slaves could not return from: It was called the door of no return. The door was the right size for a child but it was what the captives had to pass through. The door was closed and I could see the light encompass the outside brim. The guide opened the door and I looked through its battered frame, it was the same frame the 30,000 slaves passed through by the 18th century. As a young African-American male, there is not a lot that history books teach me about my heritage, besides the occasional civil rights movement chapters, and sections on great motivators like Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. This is probably going to be the closest thing to my ancestors as I would get. I could not pinpoint the exact African country my ancestors came from or their names - I only know that it all intertwined and passed through me. I did not have any direct relatives outside of the United States, but I know they exist. I do not have a special language that I grew up speaking in my home, but it seemed that I had found something. The group, the trip and Ghana helped me realize that I also have a history.

Outside the waves of the ocean splashed together in harmony. The breeze helped calm my soul. I had experienced something that I had not experienced before and I felt free! I felt free because I had something to remember.

Second Place, Prose
Lauren Kelley-Chew
? High School

The Giving Game

A seat-less seat. A black penny. An ad for anyone who wants to be exposed to the flu virus for an experiment. A sole-less show. An orange skin (with no orange inside). It's amazing what you see on the bus. The irony is, a public bus is one of the most ordinary places on earth, yet on it you can find the most extraordinary people.

Like the smell of earth after rain, there are some things in life that never change. Me, for instance – I never change. For one, I always ride the bus, but I never, ever look out the windows. I'm always short, I'm always loud, and I'm always self-conscious. I always wear my backpack with two straps instead of one, and I don't have any key chains. I only cry inside, and I'm always left out of the whispered secrets that slither from ear to ear, like a heavy snake slowly inching its way around the rectangular 10th grade lunch table. Inside, I'm always hidden – my public outside lies and takes over. The “me” people know is always pretend, my real self wouldn't fit in. I'm always laughing – but there's never anything that's actually funny. The only funny thing about me, now that I've told you all this, is that I'm still probably not the person you imagine.

You're probably picturing me sitting alone at the end of one of the long lunch tables in the school cafeteria. My paper bag rest in front of me as I stare off into space. I watch as others rush over to their usual tables, plop down their plastic trays, and then drag over several extra chairs so that *all* their friends will have a seat – because they have so many friends. Actually, I'm the one pulling over the chairs.

Or maybe you're imagining this shy girl whose greatest passion is staying in her room and staring at the ceiling. She lies sprawled on her bed while she watches the ceiling fan slowly rotating, gently stirring the cool air. She twists the work, quilted bed spread in her fingers. A girl from her class keeps trying to call to invite her to her birthday party, but she never answers the phone. Actually, I'm the one calling.

I guess this is probably why you'll often times find me on the bus – an ordinary place for extraordinary people. It's not that anyone who is a misfit says to himself or herself, “Oh! I'm a misfit, I better go buy a bus pass and catch the next bus!” It simply seems like public transportation attracts people of this nature – and it's not just me. There's one lady who keeps her bus pass in a passport bag around her neck and flashes it twice a day on her way to and from work. In the morning the bus is full, so she clenches the metal poles as she staggers down the aisle, and the bus bumps her bones after she sits down. You'd think she would sit in the seats reserved for the elderly and disabled at the front of the bus, but they're always filled with people who are young, lazy, restless or oblivious. She carries her things around in a white Giant Eagle bag, which she lays in her lap after she sits down. A big, beat-up copy of Langston Hughes' poems, called The Dreamkeeper, pokes through the bag, stretching it till it's so thick

you can see through it. Because of this, she has to use a new bag everyday. But she brings the book anyway, though she never reads it.

At school last week, Mr. Lane handed out a work sheet to all the students in my social studies class. We all thought it was busy work, so I stuffed it into the front pocket of my backpack and figured I'd do it on the bus someday. I pull it out now, straighten out the corners, and look at it. As I glance down the page, I see we have to write down the names of three people we know in the column on the left. Then, next to each name, we are to write down something we own that we'd like to give that person - something that would change our lives, make our lives better. It says at the bottom of the sheet we are to put thought into the exercise and actually consider what we're giving. Mr. Lane said if we wrote something like "a million dollars" or "all the countries in the world" next to our name, it would mean we weren't taking the worksheet seriously. I think I'd give that lady on the bus my backpack.

On Wednesdays a certain man boards the bus. He's young, and he always sits in a front seat under the "reserved" sign. But I don't think he's ever really seen or understood the sign, because every other part about him suggests that if he did see the sign, he wouldn't sit there. He's of Indian background, and sometimes he gets strange looks, but I know skin color doesn't mean anything. He's friendly and makes a point of greeting the bus driver when he gets on. He nods a lot, and he doesn't have a bus pass but just pays with cash every day. I imagine he lives in a ground-level apartment with a kitchen, living room and bedroom. I can picture his closet - mostly empty, with maybe one row of acrylic turtleneck sweaters all the same style, but in different shades of pastel. I think I'd give him a big smile and the book Walk Two Moons. On the first page, under the part where it reads, "don't judge a person till you've walked two moons in their moccasins," I'd probably sign my name.

Another lady sits at the back of the bus, and she's usually already there when I get on. A navy blue sturdy cloth visor with a small, yellow, curvy "m" sits atop her neatly braided, thick, black hair. Her hands are an almond brown and on her lap she holds her bundled toddler. No matter what the season, he wears a black synthetic jacket made to look like leather. If she works at McDonalds - which I bet she does, considering her visor and the navy blue slacks she always wears - I wonder where she leaves her son for the day. If it's even her son. I'm sure he doesn't just sit in the back of the restaurant with his hands folded across the top of the table, because he's not the kind of kid that just stays put. With his small, pudgy fingers he feels the cool glass of the bus window and crawls over the empty seats. The lady keeps trying to hold him back, like she's never going to let him go. When she walks down the aisle to get off the bus with the boy swaying back and forth on her hip, a soft smell of coconut oil lingers in the aisle. If I had a playground, that's probably what I'd give them, but I don't, so I'd give them my ginger-haired bunny.

One man I saw only once on the bus, but every now and then I see him walking around downtown. He smells like a mix of old beer and long-accumulated sweat. In reality, I didn't know this passenger was a man until, the first time I saw him, he reached the back of the bus and sat down. It was then that I noticed a black shoelace hanging out of the bottom of his ponytail. My eyes followed the shoelace to the bottom

of his wig. I guess it was supposed to look real, but it was so fake, it looked like someone had taken an old stocking hat, pulled off the puffball on top, and covered the rest with thin, black yarn. His hat-like wig kept sliding off his head and would have fallen off if it weren't for the shoelace. His voice was low and his face newly shaven. His large, dark-skinned feet were stuffed into two maroon, narrow high heels. His thin dress was stained and fraying at the bottom. It's too bad that if I wrote "a million dollars" next to his name, Mr. Lane would think I wasn't taking it seriously, because I was. Even though I don't have it, I think a million dollars would be serious to this man-in-woman's-clothes; it would change his life in a big way. (I know a million dollars would change anybody's life, but I think it would be especially useful to him because he looked so desperate, almost like he was living in a fantasy world from which he couldn't escape.) But since I can't give him the money, I think I'd give him a new sun-yellow dress and a clean, crisp, black men's suit. This way he'd have a choice.

Even the African-American bus driver is a little bit out of the ordinary. She has short, sand-colored hair, and the collar of her tan shirt tightly circles her neck. She has decorated her little area on the bus - including steering wheel, window, dividing wall, and the driver's seat cushioned from the bumps by springs underneath. With stickers, ornaments and key chains, it looks completely remodeled. If you come on the bus and are looking for a conversation, it's a safe bet to sit in the seat closest to the right front, directly across from her. Within seconds of sitting down there, you become enmeshed in discussion with her. Sometimes the topics are light, like whether or not your kids are going trick-or-treating this year. Sometimes the topics are heavy, such as "how are we supposed to send our kids to college these days?" And sometimes the topics are just funny, like the debate about whether it's cheaper to throw away your extra dinner food every night and make new food for each meal, or to buy Handi-Wrap and Ziploc bags to store your leftovers in. I wouldn't describe her as a chatterbox, but she sure does like to talk. I'm not sure what I would give her - if I could, maybe a constant supply of people to sit in the special conversation seat. But since I can't, I think I'd give her my CD "Bill Cosby is a Very Funny Fella" for those times when there is no one on the bust to talk to.

"It's snowing," whispers the lady with the book of poems. The bus was full again this morning so she's settled down beside me. I stuff my worksheet back into my backpack, then sit up, and start twirling my pencil with my fingers. "Look," says the lady again, gesturing towards the window. Doesn't she know? I never look out the window. She tugs my sleeve. Out of politeness, I hesitantly glance out the window as the big flakes drift down and melt on the still-warm sidewalk. "Hold fast to dreams," she intones quietly as she slowly shakes her head, her fingers tightly clutching her book, her eyes fixed on the snow. I take a second look out the window as the bus pauses to let people on. The snow's white peace is settling on still-vivid fall leaves. Stuffing the edge of my worksheet completely into my backpack, and pulling up the zipper, suddenly remember that I forgot to fill in the space next to my own name. At first I reach down to retrieve the paper, but then I relax, sit back in my seat, and let my shoulders loosen and hang gently at my sides. I feel the world going by as the bus grumbles down the street. I smile as I lean back and picture Mr. Lane.

“Hopefully,” I think to myself, “he’ll get the idea.”

Third Place, Prose
Clay Pennington
Sewickley Academy

With Liberties and Justice for All?

A controversial topic in the news today is the use of the word God in the Pledge of Allegiance, yet from my family's and many other points of view, the phrase with liberty and justice for all" is definitely more controversial, at least in the case of my grandmother and father who know what it is like to be a second-class citizen. Yet I am here as the product of the mixed up equation my grandmother and father called life.

My grandmother's family moved here to Pennsylvania just before she was born in the mid-1920's. Coming from Mississippi gave them hope that they had finally left the racial heat of the South and had entered the cool, gentle breeze of the North. My grandmother grew up here in Pittsburgh accepting the black only restaurants, the black-only water fountains, the black only everything. Yet, she began to resent this denial of liberty as she went out into the real world to start her life as an adult. Something like college was an attainable goal, but many blacks could not afford to go and the only college she could possibly be accepted to was a back college in the South. Therefore, upon graduating high school, he decided to apply for a secretarial position in the Greater Pittsburgh area. When she called the office she was immediately hired, after all, she did have a great speaking voice, charm and a high school diploma. All was well until she actually went to the office to begin her first day of work. She introduced herself as the new secretary and he just laughed. She told him she was serious and then the manager replied "Oh I thought you were white. You sounded white over the phone. Oh well, you can have a job cleaning the office." And that was that, she didn't get the job. She settled down and married my grandfather, and because he worked in the mills was fortunate enough to be able to buy a house on the east side of town, in a nice neighborhood. Again she was confronted with second-class citizenship. Not one back in the town would give her a loan. Finally she went out of town and was given the loan. When my grandmother's neighbors found out that her family was moving into the house they threatened to withdraw their money from the bank which gave the loan to my grandmother. My grandparents raised four children in that house but they also did not experience complete liberty and justice. My Aunt Daphne, who grew up in the house, tried out for a lead in the school theatrical performance. When she confronted the acting coach upon not receiving the part, he said, "Although you are the best for the part of the lead actress cannot be black." And that was that; she didn't get the part - clearly, not justice for all.

My father's experience with liberty and justice was also tempered by racism. He grew up in a particularly rural part of Kentucky. He went into a one-room school, with first through eight grade with one teacher and a wood stove, and no indoor plumbing. And all the while as they walked to this one room school, they saw the same white kids

who didn't have any more money than they had, riding a bus to their well-equipped school with books, and teachers, and classrooms. Finally, my father left the one-room schoolhouse and made his way to an integrated school. The racial tension was never more evident than on April 6, 1968, when Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated and as the teacher asked each student what they thought of his assassination many students said they should give an award to the man who shot Martin Luther King, Jr. Clearly liberty and justice for all were not in that classroom. The next year he ran for freshman class president. All of the candidates had made presidential pins. Now while all of the students were allowed to wear the pins of other white students, no one was allowed to wear my father's pins. Of course not his entire world was prejudice. The students of the class elected him as their president that year and the following year as well. He was a good choice for president, yet his election was more of a statement than anything else. The change had begun. Yet there is still room for improvement. Sometime ago, my father had a conversation with a fellow colleague and the co-worker made the statement, "It's a shame how blacks kill their own kind." My father's first reaction was anger as he was confronted with the man's ignorance, but then he took it for what it was. Because ignorance is nothing to get angry over, instead he just explained to the man that there is no difference in blacks killing blacks than there is whites killing whites.

Through all of these trials and tribulations I can be what some of the members of my family never had the opportunity to be. And so here I am today with a nice home, nice neighbors who have welcomed me with open arms. The same neighbors who had protested against my family getting the house in the first place. I have parents who both have nice jobs not because of their race but because they are the most qualified for the job and who send me to a private school where I get the opportunity to go to learn and to not have to worry that I will be harassed or picked on because of my race. Someday I would like to be a lawyer something that was almost impossible for my grandmother and almost my father.

My family and my country have traveled a great distance. We have almost total liberty for almost everyone. *Almost* being the key word. Yet this still needs improvement. But the ideal of having total liberty for all is a definite possibility for the next generation, my son or my daughter's generation. Although someday I look forward to saying "with liberty and justice for all" and knowing that it is true.

Honorable Mention, Prose
Heather Crawford
? High School

"What the heck are you doing here?" the young women bellowed at me.

"You're not a member of this church. I nodded, and smiled at her.

"I know, I'm here with my friends. I'm interested in sitting in on one of your services." Her eyes lit up after I had said that.

"Oh, I see! Well come right this way young lady," and with that she ushered me to a seat in the first pew.

When I looked around the room, taking in the high ceiling and the beautiful stained glass windows. I was such a gorgeous church; I couldn't help but think that I wanted to get married there...even though I was only 14. My two friends, Sarah and Pat, sat next to me, and moments later the sermon began. After a while, the priest asked the whole congregation if there was anyone they'd like them to pray for; recently passed family, or possibly sick friends in the hospital.

I raised my hand, and the priest pointed to me and asked loudly, "Who're you? I've never seen your face around here before."

I blushed and mumbled quietly, "My name is Heather...I'm here with a few friends. But, um, could you pray for my grandparents? They died recently."

He nodded, smiled at me, and then asked everyone to say a prayer. They all bowed their heads down, and silently said a few words while I watched in awe. I'd never actually been to a church before, and it was all so new and exciting to me, even though I didn't believe in God.

After the sermon, we all went to the Sunday school room for some refreshments. A few of the adults approached me, and started asking friendly questions: "Where are you from?" and "How are you doing?", etc. Then, an older man walked up to me and tapped me on the shoulder.

"What church are you from?" he chimed cheerily.

I shrugged and answered honestly, "I don't go to church. I'm an atheist."

He gasped and clutched at his heart as if I were some sort of evil creature standing before him. "You...you don't believe in God?" he yelled at me. I nodded slowly and took a step back from him. Again, he yelled at me, "You don't believe in God? What are you doing here then?"

I looked around frantically for Sarah or Pat, but I couldn't see them. The hair on the back of my neck prickled up and I began to sweat nervously. "I...I just came with some friends sir, I wanted to see a sermon." He scowled at me, as if what I had said was the worst thing that had ever been muttered before him. His arms crossed over his chest like two pythons winding together around their prey. By then, all his hooting and howling had attracted almost everyone's attention, and they were all staring at me.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to leave," he said as matter-of-factly as he could.

It was probably one of the worst days of my life. I had to sit on the steps of the church for about half an hour before Sarah and Pat came to find me. I explained to them tearfully what had happened, and they shrugged as if it were nothing. I just couldn't seem to understand why this man had treated me so badly. Sarah then told me that a lot of the people there were like that. They just didn't like people who didn't believe in God.

Since then, I've learned to be a lot more careful about what I say and where I say it. I'm not ashamed of what I believe in, or rather what I don't, but a lot of people are. I don't mind too much either, as long as they don't try to convert me. Still though, it bothers me to this day that some people are so narrow-minded that they hate someone right off, without even getting to know them.

Honorable Mention, Prose
Katheryn (Casey) Artz
? High School

Soljah

I never liked to dance. I tried ballet and jazz when I was about six, but these were too graceful and frilly for me. I was more of a tomboy, growing up with two older brothers. My idea of dance changed, though, one winter evening at a Peabody High School basketball game. I was only in eighth grade, but I was attending with my brother, Andy, who was a senior. The Highlanders were winning, and it was halftime. Instead of cheerleaders taking the floor, a group of eight black girls appeared, wearing Timberland boots, red camouflage pants with baggy side pockets, camo hats hanging at the back of their necks, and t-shirts reading "Peabody Steppin' Soljahs." Their boots stomped on the gym floor in unison, their hands clapping and whirling in complicated formations, the spectators gyrating to the beats that apparently were from well-known songs because the whole crowd was singing along. Some were stomping their feet on the bleachers along with the eight soldiers. By the end of the performance, sweat was beading on their faces and all chests were heaving. Never once had they taken a break. As they "stepped" out of the gym, the hollering crowd applauded wildly. From that moment, I had rhythms stuck in my head and a desire to be a "Soljah."

Although I wasn't brave enough to join the step team the next fall as a freshman, I gathered my courage in tenth grade, and when step practices started in November, I went. One of my friends had promised to try out with me, but she was a dedicated swimmer and the two practice times overlapped. I was left to try out without a friend. There were six other girls at the tryouts, all black. I felt really out of place. They gave me looks, and one even asked, "Are *you* trying out for this?"

We began with "simple" drills, but they weren't simple for me. I had a lot of trouble combining the hand and foot routines. I had to be taught over and over, and it was frustrating. None of the girls talked to me. Other students, watching us practice in the cafeteria, whispered, "What's that white girl doin'? She think she can step?"

I worked on the drills at home, determined to master this challenge, be accepted, and perhaps even make a friend on the team. It was actually in the shower that it all came together for me. Some people do their best thinking in the shower; I only get clean. That night, though, soaking wet, trying not to slip, I suddenly go the rhythm of the two beats and my hands and feet were in sync.

By the Saturday of our first competition, I knew our routine perfectly. While we waited to go on stage, some of the girls talked to me for the first time.

"Your hair looks nice," Gigi said. Andi told me I "wasn't a bad stepper." Even Tasha finally said something to me.

"K-C, you know I didn't like you when you first came." I had no response. "I thought you were trying to be someone you ain't and it was funny when you couldn't get the drills." I still didn't know what to say. "You're not bad now, though, and I guess I got some respect for you. You're pretty decent." I was stunned. She had never

said anything directly to me and now, the “leader” of the team was accepting me. I felt really good and smiled to myself for not giving up.

As we took the stage, my heart was thumping, and I felt sick to my stomach. Our pounding feet echoed through the auditorium. At one point our steps got all mixed up, but we got our routine back together and had a strong finish. We won the competition!

From then on, I was accepted as part of the group. At practice, we all talked and laughed, and if any of them were going to a party or dance, they invited me. As a community service project, we all did the AIDS Walk together and had fun stepping and power-walking through the streets. In school, Gigi, Rhonda and Statia even started saying “hi” to me in the halls. They all seemed proud to have me on the team. I was proud, too.

Honorable Mention, Prose
Marshall Slayton
Pittsburgh High School for the
Creative and Performing Arts

Toy Shop

Being one of the only Jews in a completely Catholic neighborhood, I didn't have too many friends. I was the outcast of my school. Every Friday morning, I would find swastikas pasted all over my locker. The other students thought it was funny. To them, race is a joke.

There's one thing I forgot to mention about my neighborhood. I hadn't seen one single black person on our streets. None. I tell you, my neighborhood is one of the whitest cities in the world. No joke, either. When I first saw two blacks walking the streets near my school, I was ten years old.

I tell you it amazed me. I mean - I never really met a black person. And I don't get out much. Sure, I had seen them. I couldn't miss those pictures of Malcolm X (the kids at school call him "Malcolm the Tenth"), or Martin Luther King's famous speech in my overweight history textbook.

Anyway, there were two of them. One was a teenage boy, probably thirteen. He walked with his large mother, who has a mole right in the middle of her forehead. Not the prettiest people I'd ever seen, but nevertheless, unique to me.

When I first saw them, they were walking out of a toy shop. It was my local toy store, called "Toy World." I wanted to say something to them. You know, introduce myself. Shake their hands. Maybe even ask them to lunch, or something. Their reactions couldn't be that bad.

However, I decided not to say anything when I noticed that their expressions were very optimistic. Their eyes were stuck to the ground, and their lips were in a straight line.

So, I followed behind them. They were apparently talking about a Super-Soaker. You know...those plastic guns that you fill with water and shoot all over the place? They're fun, but I was still unsure as to why they would purchase one in the middle of December. In that weather, the water would freeze as soon as it hit the ground. No fun there.

I heard the boy utter few words, in disgust. "Seventy-five dollars?"

I kept my ears open when the mother answered him.

"You could buy four of them at that price in Wal-Mart," she said, licking her blistered lips.

She was right, too. "Toy World" sold everything at list price. That's the highest price you can charge. Then again, it's a small store. It's not some massive department store chain, where everything is discounted.

The boy shook his head again; his eyes still peeled to the ground. His mother carefully placed her left hand on his right shoulder.

"It's them Jews," she said to him.

“I know.”

“They ain’t gettin’ no money from me.”

When I heard this, I stopped following them. In fact, I had no desire to talk to them anymore. I bit my lower lip, and made a fist with my right hand, and stuck it into my pocket. I decided to walk to the bus stop instead.

First Place, Poetry
Emily Green
Carnegie Mellon University

proud to be

in grade school / they showed us a film strip
Proud to Be Me / each strange hair / oddly shaped
nose / even webbed feet / proud to be
and that's what I mean / with this white
thing / with the not-regretting-my-skin-so-pale-
it-gleams-translucent-thing
and not sorry / my eyes
so blue / my hair spit with blonde

shame hails from / another place
the decision to stand / on the last-run
late-night bus / instead / of sit
by / the old man / maybe he's black
and should i forgive / my fear / maybe
he's white / and ragged / homeless
too close / to a class / i might have / taken

who do you love / the song / asks / who
do you love / i ask you / who do you
hate / the white / white face
of a ghoul like me / what i'm proud
to be / is not / what i've heard myself
say / don't say homophobic things
i have gay friends / and know its bad
to label friends / bad to single out
just as / bad / not to / come out
with the truth / of desiring both / sexes

projector / with tape recorder / ding-
ed when the image / changed / teacher
never chose me / to turn it / prejudice
isn't that / easy / even if i told you
she knew / my family is catholic
if you knew / my father worked
at McDonald's / my mother
was three months / in / when she
married / not that easy

i am proud / and transparent / i am catholic
and bisexual / i am sorry / for every imperfection
that keeps me / two steps / from you / if the filmstrip
had a sound track / i'd sing / to you / if someone
set me / afire / i'd sing louder / how long
could you stay / still / how long can we / not listen /

Second Place, Poetry
Kevin Gonzalez
Carnegie Mellon University

Shelter

The Prime Minister of Israel is Downtown. A friend calls—
he will be on the news, carrying a coffin

draped in a Palestinian flag. He wants to come over,
let the mottled glow of my television coat him.

It's 10:30 PM on a Tuesday in Pittsburgh. I have not been
to a march since I left Puerto Rico. I have stopped

watching the news since Bush was *elected*?
"I'm about to go to my P.O. Box," I say

as I slide my feet into shoes, fumble my keys,
briefly hoping for a letter from home. I don't say

I'd rather freeze for 20 minutes in the broken rectangle
of a bus shelter than watch him lug around a coffin.

I don't say I'm *tired* or *bleak* or *I've lost faith in human
compassion*. The black bus driver only greets black passengers—

I sit right behind him, stain of sun faded on my skin.
I wish I could crawl into my P.O. Box

and sleep through the cold, tucked between
the soft glossy pages of a catalogue. That's all I got

today. I should have said, "It's okay, man,
you can say *you're welcome*, cause

I've been through shit too." On the return bus,
a girl's neck cradles her cell phone, "But baby, you

just broke up with *me*. Baby, you're hurting my ear.
Baby, you just can't hit me like that, you just can't."

We've all been through shit too. Walking up my street,

I wave the rolled up catalogue as if I were directing
an orchestra of wind. On the other sidewalk,
a white man walking and a black man in a bicycle
are coming toward each other.
The black man screams but the white man does not move.

“Move, move you asshole,” but he does not move.
I stop and grip the catalogue, my palm polishing it
with sweat. The white man kicks the front wheel
as the bike tries to dodge him. I flinch to the scrape of a face
on asphalt, a forehead drawing its oblong print of blood.
I am tired. I am bleak. I have lost faith in human compassion.

They have started bombing Vieques again. They have not freed
Mumia Abu Jamal. He *hit* her. Caskets draped in flags.

“Who’s the asshole now?” the white man sprints off,
the drumming of his sneakers a symphony of suspense.

The black man lifts his bike and pedals after him.
As they round the corner onto the Avenue, I think of home,
the place I started. I am so far away, a block
from my apartment in this cold and foreign city. My hand
is the only part that fits in the shelter of my P.O. Box.
“I love you too, baby,” she said, “forgive me for crying.”

Third Place, Poetry
Christina Maria Acosta
Carnegie Mellon University

You Bring Out the Dominican in Me

I would have let go my other loves for you.
Surrendering my deep blue crystalline desires
and melt into the heat of your shadow
like a brown, soggy puddle.

I'd let my vanity dissipate into these
purple vintage laced linens
maybe. Maybe.

For you.

You bring out the Juan Luis Guerra in me.
The raise Cain and dance with the rooster-footed devil in me.
!Wáchale! The raw arc and slash of the *macheté* in me.
The *!Aye Rosalia!* glint and passion in me.
The *tambores* that drum so Africa answers.

You bring out the Oscar de la Renta hopeless romantic in me
Delicate cool water glazing chest and collar bone.
Red wine in a blue-tinted glass.
Fierce curve of the hip, appetite of the eye,
itch of the arms.

You bring out the vicious black obsidian tongue in me,
erupting lava from the center of me.
The blood of *las tres mariposas* in me.
The fear of oppression,
tidal wave recession in me.
Yes, you do.

You do.

If I could breathe in deep enough
and shatter myself into pieces,
I would rain on you all the flavors of a Dominican woman.
Sweet chinola spirit.
Sour lemoncillo judgment.
Hot salchiches of spitfire madness in me.
Bitter tequila lagrimas.

And I'd have you and drink me into you.

So I could be close
and make you know me.

Honorable Mention, Poetry
Justin Ker
Carnegie Mellon University

Coloring Book

I once tried to color and Indian
blue
and discovered
that my own skin was yellow.

This was fifteen years ago in Singapore -
my art teacher shook her head
and plucked the fat blue crayon
from the smallness of my hands.

I can still smell the crushed pastels,
the sweet smear of crayon on my thumb,
staining the memory of my fingers.

She looked at my incomplete coloring
of the four smiling figures,
standing shoulder to shoulder,
our little flag of political correctness that also showed
the tension in its threads.
The slant eyes behind the bespectacled Chinese face,
the big nose, curly hair of the Indian,
the Eurasian with his hybrid features -
eyes from Austria between his Asian ears.
And the Malay, standing at the far right,
almost at the picture's edge,
marginalized in our little country,
as in a coloring book.

The artist drew in these subtle clues,
etching them onto our young brains,
fearing that six year old boys with crayons
could not decipher
the colorless outlines.

My art teacher pointed to the drawing
of the smiling turbaned man,
and handed me the brown crayon -

this is for the Indian.
My wrist moved over the paper,
shading in his arms, his face -
his life story, in which he gets drunk
every night on the cheapest beer,
and comes home at 4am to beat his wife.
She for one, is glad for her dark Indian skin -
the bruises are not *that* obvious.

And so it is with the Malay,
eventually a cleaner, a chauffeur,
a moral of the story against laziness,
for the master narrative of the Chinese.

And the Eurasian ?
"Just mix any of the colors," she said.
This, a primitive exercise in gene recombination
for a six year old god with crayons.

Fifteen years later in Pittsburgh,
I am tired of the wasted metaphors
about color and race,
in a country where the man who steals your stereo
must be black,
where the man who steals your nuclear secrets
must be yellow.
It seems only the minorities are thieves.

But the black man isn't actually black -
his skin is a deep brown coded by some one hundred genes,
one hundred out of the forty thousand human ones,
and not one is a gene for stealing stereos.

We're so hung up on race
trapped at these one hundred genes,
that it makes us incredibly stupid.

We wrap our bodies in the uncolored
double helix of ourselves,
surrounded by strands of skin color,
writing poems, flogging the p-c carriage,
when all we need to do,
is to let a six year old boy
color as he pleases.

Honorable Mention, Poetry
Eliza Bishop
Carnegie Mellon University

Light Converging in Harmons, Jamaica

Is it in some blade in my hand
I used beheading a chicken?
Is it in shiny eggplant skin
that touched my whiteness?

My tongue felt trained in a language
that had not prepared me for the loss
of syllables in my name to be replaced
with pointed fingers:
Hey whitey, whitey, over here.

Then a string of *Patwa* slang
left me clinging to the wind.
I looked into the face of a baby,
strapped in cheesecloth to his mother's hip.
I wanted it to be me as she swayed
on the red ground like she birthed its color.

A boy, Bosie, latched onto a tree trunk
and climbed it as if it were a ladder.
He chucked the fuzzy coconut of his destination
open and pearly white liquid flowed over
the brown bowl container:
Drink up white girl.

My hands scraped at one another
behind my lower back. I unrolled my fingers
as my only offering, laid them on the humid air
between Bosie and I, and prayed to hidden stars
that the sun of this town would not scorch
my opaque, sheltered, well-nourished skin.

The blue darkness brought out old men playing dice.
I lay silent on my back, avoiding bets on chance,
turning my face to the sky with other teenagers.
They touched my hair, said it was
Soft as a silver bellied fish
and couldn't hold a braid.

Kibibi predicted rain.
Pointing to Aquarius, I suggested wishing
on that handle of stars. I drew all the whiteness
of their eyes upon me, the constellations
not charted in their heads. I spent the rest of the night
describing and drawing stars I'd never touch,
but would continue to call upon in my loneliness,
the search for it would have to be my faith.

Honorable Mention, Poetry
Peter Borrebach
Carnegie Mellon University

The Lonely Process

I. At a Chinese Restaurant

The guy who sat next to me
drove a convertible and lived by himself.
He talked about the way people smell.
Leaning in toward the middle
of the table he whispered
*I mean, I'm tolerant of ethnic people,
but this is America, take a fucking shower.*

I opened my fortune cookie
with one hand, set the fortune aside,
pushed all the cookie into my mouth,
listened to the woman singing in Chinese,
I didn't know Chinese but I knew
what she was singing. It was written
on my fortune, above the lucky numbers
and the teach-yourself-Chinese:

*Joys are often the shadows,
cast by sorrow.*

II. At a Presbyterian Church

Went to a concert with my grandfather
and his new wife. My grandmother died
five years ago. Four years ago grandpa heard
the voice of God, and God told him
to be happy. The third movement
of Brahms' Horn Trio danced
around the pews and off the banners
hanging from the balcony:

(STANZA BREAK)

On one, a large black swastika rose like the sun
over a cross engulfed in flame, ignoring
the fact that someone had so delicately
crossed it out with light brown fabric.
I didn't blame myself, confirmed Methodist
(the cross burns on through the night).

One the other, an unblinking eye stared
out of a purple fabric triangle
and launched me into pseudo-
numerology, chanting myself
to sleep that night, the first thirteen
thirteenth words in the Book of Revelations
(New Revised Standard Version):

*servants, angel and blessed,
blessed for Asia
and his dead loves us; be.*

III. At a Laundromat

The dryer spun all the clothes I had,
clockwise as I watched
through the little round window.

Picked up a pamphlet on tolerance
from a rack by the change machine:
*Just as 5 + 6 doesn't equal 9, there are
many things in life that aren't true
no matter how much we want to believe them.*

Stood in line at the payphone
to order a New Testament (New
International Version) from the pamphlet.
The girl on the phone before me
had beautiful breasts. The wait for salvation
isn't long enough, the wait for salvation isn't long.
Her breasts. The wait wasn't long.

IV. At a Roman Catholic Church

A kid I knew in high school hung himself
in his parents' basement after a year of college.
A documentary on Nuremberg in the VCR,
his gentle rocking set a new clock
for his parents and sister.

I played horn at his Mass of Christian Burial.
The priest called it an accident,
the bereaved read excerpts
from Revelations (New American Bible).
The closed casket locked
a rope-burned neck from view.

V. At a Beach

Dug a hole in the sand deep enough
so water started to seep through the bottom.
Now I'm out in the ocean, waiting
for the hole to fill back in.
I watch the yellow-flag swells
cruise in towards shore.
I stopped fighting them hours ago.
I've been in the water for hours.
The waves crash into my body
but I keep my footing.

First Place, Poetry
Shade' L. Mallory
Pittsburgh High School for the
Creative and Performing Arts

A Question Finally Answered

Port Authority Transit (PAT),
that's what I use to go from here to there.
Tonya, Marquida, Kelly, and I
decided to take a long bus ride.

It was a hot summer day.
We were impatiently standing at the corner of Ross Street,
waiting on the PAT,
the one that said, *67A Monroeville Mall*.

Tonya's cocoa skin shined from the sun.
Kelly Marquida, and I are brown sugar.
If we stood in the sun any longer,
we were all likely to get a little darker.
Finally it pulled around the corner,
"Get y'all bus fare out, this is our bus."

We paid our fare and moved straight
to the back of the empty bus.
"See my days are cold without you..." Tonya started singing.
We all joined.
"But I'm hurting while I'm with you..."

Then I noticed an elderly white lady.
After paying her fare,
she stumbled to find a seat.
She was loaded with shopping bags,
she kept walking until she was sitting across from me.

This lady kept staring,
her eyes were filled with,
"I have a question."
Then finally she unlocked her jaws and said,
"Excuse me, if you don't mind my asking,
why do you chose to sit in the back of th ebus,
when your people fought so hard to
sit in the front?"

We were in shock,
as if we had run into an electric eel.
I don't think she knew how she made us feel.
So I leaned toward her,
to make sure she heard.
I said in a nice, but firm voice,
"Because now we have a choice."

Second Place, Poetry
Gillian Goldberg
Pittsburgh High School for the
Creative and Performing Arts

Hip Hop Workshop, November 28, 2002

The girls at the back don't even bother to whisper. *How's two white boys gonna teach us about hip-hop?* And something in it reminds me of the limp in Kelsey's face when they tell her black boys don't play hockey, and they make their eyes wide when she tells them her brother is a forward and he scored three goals yesterday but her face is still limp. Or maybe it's the scars on her brother's face that he covered with cocoa butter for a year. I never knew you could use cocoa butter to cure cuts, but I knew people got beat up for walking late in parks. Mostly, it reminds me of the music Kelsey gave me, sitting at my feet in my coat pocket, and my coat is warm in winter, and the music is burning a hole, pounding, like a heart, like a fist, giving me away.

Third Place, Poetry
Amanda Burk
? High School

Guilty Pleasure

Salty waves strike the shore
like plummeting tears.

Sand hugs the crevices of our bodies.
my head blissfully lounging
in the pillow of your thigh
admires with content as
trembling moon beams dance
down the open stage
of your face

dark and reflective
rich as an oriental rug
hung by small vender
in the Egyptian market place.
I can see the intricacies of a hundred
Magnificent generations in the lines
Of your skin.

A ship bobs across
a history of
Deep lamenting waters.

Wanting to absorb your existence
Into the imprint of my identity
I place my padded fingertip
on the broad plain of your forehead
my curled palm lingers
above the tranquil exterior
of your face

Subtly I glide my finger down
tracing the outline of your profile.
With each silken inch
your essence permeates my veins.
Nothing could be softer
than the flawless chocolate
Of your skin.

In narrow tunnels of filth and misery
Ankles blister and chafe
From the rub of steel chains
As a boat rocks in the ocean.

Your supple, luxurious lips
Engulf mine in their embrace.
I wish I could cradle myself
In the pit below your nose
With a blanket of warm breathes I
Would forever melt in to the pores
Of your face.

My eyes voraciously devour your image.
Desperate to satiate
my addiction for the
deliciousness your touch.
I ache for the power and intensity
Radiating from the exquisite color
Of your skin.

The vessel lurches violently
In the break of the wave.
A man winces with the crack of leather.
Scalding blood swells in the gape.
Men jump overboard fleeing a monster's world.

Honorable Mention, Poetry
Zachary Harris
The Pittsburgh High School for the
Creative and Performing Arts

The Stain

East New York, Brooklyn.
Mid-November bone cold can't
stop my body from skidding down
a red plastic slide. I hold a cup
of grape juice in my hand. As
my body torpedoed, the juice
paints a stripe down my shirt.
I don't realize it's happened.
My playmate, a black girl
in thick braids, whose playset I am using,
shows me with her fingers. Her mother,
hair also black, but gray
at the roots, take me inside and cleans
the grape juice. When she is finished,
she returns me next door
to my grandmother, who makes a face.

Memory can hide in any terrain, bury itself,
unnoticed, until grass grows again by immense
yellow light. Now, I want to gather this,
reassemble the painted metal swing set,
find an old shoe or next of construction paper,
but all I can grasp are her barrettes with yellow
sunflowers, clacking together in music
I still don't recognize.

I pass the mirror outside my room,
and remember that stain growing,
fed by the warm air. I remember
an empty room, a chill in my chest.
I remember that darkness: deep,
possibly permanent.

Honorable Mention, Poetry
Claire Schoyer
The Pittsburgh High School for the
Creative and Performing Arts

Radius

In first I broke my arm,
and everyone signed the cast
and the markers melted together.
It was pink because it was my favorite color,
and the plaster wore thin around the thumb.
I used to climb the jungle gym with one arm
and I could feel the muscle get larger.
Ashley was the only black girl in the class,
and on Martin Luther King Day
she called the rest of us racists,
told the rest of the class that we hated her,
had had killed him.
I did not know how to hate yet.
I started to cry and blurred Ashley's face
into solid shapes.
She said that all us white kids hated black people,
I told my mom that I was pink
and she was brown,
and if I hated her, why did I hate?
The next day she apologized and cried
a little into her hands,
and I wondered if she could hold the tears, or if they would
leak through her fingers.
I wondered if she knew that I did not understand hate.
I prayed, I did not pray often for unselfish things.
I could feel the wood of the floor against my knees,
and the flesh turned red.
When you apply pressure does all skin turn red?
When they took the cast off
my arm was thin and so white I did not recognize it,
and even if I tried
I could not raise it.

Honorable Mention, Poetry
Amanda Huminski
The Pittsburgh High School for the
Creative and Performing Arts

Things I Know About Rhinoceros

Rhinoceros have bad eye-sight.
Rhinoceros are easily angered.
Rhinoceros come in two varieties, white and black.

Maybe this next fact is true,
and maybe it's not so true,
but I've heard that the real difference
isn't their color at all.
I remember hearing somewhere
that the difference was in their mouths.
Not their hides,
or even their temper or eyes.
The white rhino has a flat upper lip.
The black rhino has a pointed one.
My source says that in the early days
of Safaris and khaki shorts
somebody misheard the word white instead of wide.
The wide-lipped rhino became the white rhino
and because everybody knows
that the opposite of white is black,
the other became the black rhino.
Or at least that's what I've heard.

Rhinoceros are a lot like humans.
Not because they lumber around
barely seeing their surroundings
and charging at things that rustle in the bushes,
but because they're separated,
labels based on faulty names
given by mistake.

The last thing I know about Rhinoceros,
you can get a better look at them,
in a museum, stuffed and dead.