

BE's Fall/Winter 2023-2024 Issue

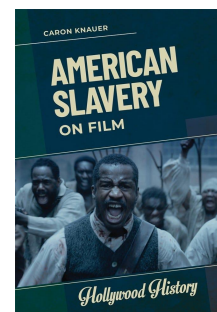
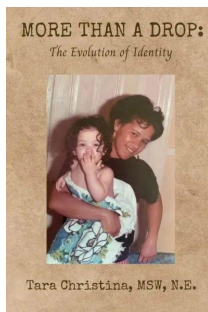
We've never been so cold. Our fall/winter issue explores, with a cool and objective eye, memory and history; it may give you some necessary de ja vu, as we think of family, books, and films we want to preserve. This is our interview/review issue, and we've spoken to people or reviewed work that seems necessary for building better futures. Our interview with Amos White argues for the preservation of life-giving and life-affirming trees. We've also included reviews of heart-opening books—Tara Christina's "More than a Drop" and Caron Knauer's "American Slavery on Film"—that reinforce the significance of familial and collective memory. And Kim Brandon's work always serves as a reminder to fight, to resist, to not give in.

—The Editors: Tara, Ahmad, and Rochelle

[The Poetic Flights of Kim Brandon: Exploring Brandon's Dec. 21 CAP Reading](#)



[Interview with Amos White](#)



[Reviews of Tara Christina's "More than a Drop" and Caron Knauer's "American Slavery on Film"](#)

On Dec. 21, Kim Brandon read at Calling all Poets (CAP). Host Greg Corell described Brandon as “a poet, activist, and storyteller who will publish *Red Honey* in 2023.” The reading overwhelmed us. Kim’s words gleam with a brassy, joyous light. And with honesty. Kim tells us that “Some of the poems I’ve picked tonight are written from the ‘I’ point of view. But they’re fiction. You don’t have to feel sorry for me.”

Kim read “**Time for Another Love**” and argued for “getting my big love out of the pawn shop.” In a line reminiscent of another poet we love, Patricia Spears Jones, Kim argues for locating pleasure in everyday objects, in the specific materials that make up our lives. We have to get love out of the pawnshop before “they repurpose my joy...before they strip off the patina/mistaking it for dirt.”

In “**May I Laugh Too**,” Kim urges women to “laugh/laugh loud”; she wants our bellies to shake “like blueberry jam.”

“**Reflective Glass**” inspires laughter and encourages an outward perspective, but with caution. “Reflective Glass” tells us that windows can be as dangerous as mirrors; both can lead to collisions. “Reflective Glass” reads, “I want that kind of love that mating birds have. You crash hard into yourself. Bam. You crash hard into yourself. Bam. Until I know my own face. That’s the kind of love I want.”

“**If My Mind Should Go**” includes a clever admonishment: “Know that I love the animal prints but do not let me wear them all at once.” The poem will split your sides open. The full text of this poem is below.

“**If My Mind Continues To Go**”

By

Kim Brandon

Don’t you worry about a thing
Know that I love animal prints
Especially cheetah and zebra
Don’t let me wear them all at once from head to toe
And I will try to pull it off
You must be strong on these days
Know that any song by Stevie –
I shouldn’t have to say “Wonder”
But I will to ensure that you don’t get it wrong
And I’m listening to the wrong Stevie in a mind that is twisting
Which will only speed the destruction of said mind
Put “Master Blaster,” “As,” “Don’t You Worry About A Thing,”
“All Is Fair In Love,” and “Knock Me Off My Feet”
on a loop and let it play
let it wash out the childhood I never had

the same way it did when I wasn't having a childhood
while I was a child – if that makes sense to anyone but me.

This is important!!

Don't let me drool – drool freaks me out

As a matter of fact

Don't put me in a room with a drooler

Keep babywipes in your pockets

If you want me to do anything

Tempt me with a piece of penny candy

a sugar daddy lollypop or some Mary Janes

or Banana Now and Later's,

or Whoopers or long boys

Say who named this candy for children

Give me one piece

and if that proves to be a mistake

and I won't stop begging for more

I'm sorry about that –

Wait a day or so and hopefully

I will have forgotten the sweet treat

Know that if you find me cursing

That is a sign of health

As I love to pontificate the irrelevant unnecessary use of words

to prove my point and knock me off my feet

So if I'm saying shit like this

Celebrate that I am coming back to myself

And coming back to you

If you find me with ashy legs

Sitting up proper and doing sun salutations with my finger tips

I have back slid

Make me laugh

Please, know that I love to laugh

I will need to hear

Richard Pryor – tell me how he first met God

Said he was walking down the street eating a tuna fish sandwich

And Mom's Mable – how to tell if you are in love vs indigestion

Saturday Night's lives Two Wild and Crazy Guys

and remember Gumby Damn it

Don't let me wear hot pants

I will hunt down a pair even in here

I never had the legs for them

Or mini skirts

As I may just forget underwear

I love oatmeal –
but only with raisins and cinnamon and some nondairy milk
Wow – I may not survive a nursing home
So please come often with supplies
If I catch a bad case of COVID
Don't count me out
I have survived some shit
I'm still here
Don't count me out – even if I repeat it
I have survived some shit
While being big round, brown and female in America

The BE Mini-Interview with Amos White

On Sept. 26, students from LaGuardia Community College interviewed Amos White, the founder and “chief planting officer” of 100K trees for Humanity, via Zoom. This interview is based on their questions.

BE: We’ve been reading articles about your environmental activism. Can you tell us more?

Amos White: We want to support the planet. We work in every urban community in the city—Oakland, Berkeley, Hayward, all across the Bay area.

BE: Why focus on cities, these particular areas?

White: Cities need trees. We know wealthier communities tend to have more trees. Tree canopies cool communities, and trees bring up property values and have health benefits. We see environmental justice as part of race and social justice.

BE: What are some of those benefits?

White: People are natural bio-philes; the word’s origins from bio and phile reveal our love for nature. Our bodies have a neurological response to nature. Greenery brings down anxiety attacks; blue skies suggest clean air; and tree-lined streets create less road rage. We plant trees to give people greater access to nature.

BE: What are your thoughts about trees and diversity?

White: Trees use carbon dioxide during photosynthesis. Other plants do too of course. Moss and green walls have many benefits that have yet to be explored. Still, we know that trees can lessen erosion and harbor water from storms and floods. Trees such as redwoods and maples grow well in specific environments. We’re mindful of which trees grow best.

BE: We know construction in America relies on wood, which comes from trees to build homes and buildings; should we change that?"

Yes, construction in America relies heavily on trees for lumber wood that our forests provide. There are billions of federal dollars now being poured into our forest, and timber industries to restock our nation's forests for greater biodiversity and habitat support, to provide the ecological services to restore the climate, and to provide the future renewable timber that will be milled and turned into lumber for mass timber construction to build homes and buildings in the now future. So, on all three fronts, we must plant more trees for a renewable source of low carbon construction material that replaces concrete (the highest carbon polluting source in the world), restocking our

nation's forests for climate and wildlife restoration and to drawdown the existing atmospheric greenhouse gases (GHG), and planting our cities up to 30% minimum to cool our communities as the planet continues to heat, to restore micro climates that regulate local weather and precipitation patterns and contribute to the large water cycle for increased atmospheric water for climate regulation.

BE: Is this work sustainable? Do you believe what you're doing will last and expand?

White: We hire teams to plant forty-two trees a day, and we'd like to expand. We've incorporated hands-on school programs so that we can continue planting trees for health and climate.

Amos White's Recommendations for Further Reading:

Federal funding for trees, forests and cities urban forests

USDA invests \$1 billion for nearly 400 projects to expand access to trees and green spaces in communities and neighborhoods nationwide through Investing in America agenda **USDA**. Press Release, WASHINGTON, September 14, 2023

www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/newsroom/releases/usda-invests-1-billion-nearly-400-projects-expand-access-trees-and

USDA Forest Service invests \$20M to restore forests, reduce wildfire risk, and create jobs in 18 states. Press Office, WASHINGTON, July 13, 2023

www.fs.usda.gov/news/releases/usda-forest-service-invests-20m-restore-forests-reduce-wildfire-risk-create-jobs

Unprecedented urban forest funding made law through historic climate bill. American Forests, August, 2023.

www.americanforests.org/article/unprecedented-urban-forest-funding-made-law-through-historic-climate-bill/

Plans to plant billions of trees threatened by massive undersupply of seedlings by University of Vermont. JULY 31, 2023

<https://phys.org/news/2023-07-billions-trees-threatened-massive-undersupply.html>

Biden-Harris Administration Invests Nearly \$10 Million for Reforestation through Forest Nursery and Native Seed Partnerships: Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds will support

partners in growing forest nurseries, seed orchards and seed collection efforts to meet historic needs. USDA, WASHINGTON, February 24, 2023

www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2023/02/24/biden-harris-administration-invests-nearly-10-million-reforestation

Mass timber

Mass Timber Changes in modern building codes are creating even more opportunities to make mass timber structures a bigger part of the urban skyline. American Wood Council.

<https://awc.org/issues/mass-timber/>

Fact Sheet: Mass Timber Construction. American University.

www.american.edu/sis/centers/carbon-removal/fact-sheet-mass-timber.cfm

As Mass Timber Takes Off, How Green Is This New Building Material? Mass timber construction is on the rise, with advocates saying it could revolutionize the building industry and be part of a climate change solution. But some are questioning whether the logging and manufacturing required to produce the new material outweigh any benefits. Yale Environment 360 Published at the Yale School of the Environment BY JIM ROBBINS • APRIL 9, 2019.

<https://e360.yale.edu/features/as-mass-timber-takes-off-how-green-is-this-new-building-material>

Fact Sheet | Building Sustainably: Mass Timber (September 2023). Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI) By Molly Brind'Amour and Savannah Bertrand September 29, 2023.

www.eesi.org/papers/view/fact-sheet-building-sustainably-mass-timber-september-2023

Carbon Credits for Mass Timber Construction. Scientific Journal, 2023. By, Adam Taylor, Hongmei Gu, Prakash Nepal, Richard Bergman.

www.fs.usda.gov/research/treesearch/66069

Reviews: Tara Christina’s “More than a Drop” and Caron Knauer’s “American Slavery on Film”

Dazzling. Necessary. And long overdue. If you’re still looking for holiday gifts, please get copies of Tara Christina’s “More than a Drop” and Caron Knauer’s “American Slavery on Film.” Get them now. (No one needs another bottle of wine or fruit basket.)

We don’t have enough autobiographies from people of color, and that’s a problem. And we don’t have discussions about how race-based slavery left us with entrenched power dynamics that we’re trying to change and psyches we’re working to heal.

If you’re looking to investigate, then look to “More than a Drop” and “American Slavery on Film.”

When it comes to family history or broader history of a people, we don’t know names or language or so many traditions. “More than a Drop” reminds us of what’s been lost. We see Tara Christina’s efforts to preserve family knowledge and cultural memories. Aunt Jackie doesn’t have a peach cobbler recipe, so “you’re just going to have to come over and watch.” Tara Christina is wise but young in years; her short autobiography provides a brief (fifty-five pages) but needed perspective.

A complexity infiltrates Tara Christina’s narrative. Racism can embroider the deepest love. Tara Christina describes her family’s efforts to conquer the racism surrounding them. A White grandmother cherishes her Tara Christina, her Black granddaughter; her grandfather teaches that granddaughter how to waltz. The “rise of social media coverage of police brutality and US sanctioned murders of Black people” means Tara Christina has difficult conversations with her son, a “Black boy in a white family” (12–39). As a light-skinned, biracial woman, Tara Christina describes the importance of uplifting Black and Brown people of all shades, who have been defined, surveilled, and brutalized by mainstream culture. “More than a Drop” asks us to heal the divisions that exist and to work towards “a higher level of greatness and unity” (29).

Caron Knauer’s powerful “American Slavery on Film” compares past explorations of slavery with contemporary ones. Knauer’s book includes a chronology of slavery and a discussion of revolts, from the well known (Denmark Vesey or Denmark Vessey¹, Nat Turner) to the less discussed (Greenup, and Cato’s Rebellion, “the largest slave revolt in the South”). Knauer’s book serves as a reminder of resistance: enslaved people weren’t passive; people didn’t accept oppression and often resisted any way they could. Equally important, Knauer describes how we discuss slavery in an archival era. With so many lives undocumented, our attempts to comprehend, integrate, and uncover less examined narratives matters. How we discuss history shapes future generations.

When Knauer and I met for coffee earlier this month, I was impressed by her knowledge. She explained the ways films and books intertwine. Books root and provide source material for many

¹ It seems both spellings are correct. The [International African American Museum](#) spells the name Vesey; the ADW reader includes the Vessey spelling.

of the films discussed in "American Slavery on Film." For example, Solomon Northup's memoir brought about "Twelve Years a Slave"; "Nightjohn" was based on "Gary Paulsen's award-winning seventh- to twelfth grade young adult novel" (65). Alex Haley's best-selling novel, "what he eventually called *faction*, a combination of fact and fiction" that "took him twelve years fraught with financial struggles to research and write" inspired the miniseries "Roots" (29). To understand these films is to understand literacy, history, and the translation and transmission of ideas.

At Spelman College, during the late 1990s, students viewed Haile Gerima's "Sankofa" and Julie Dash's "Daughters of the Dust" as part of Spelman College's African Diaspora in the World course. Those films motivated students to think of ourselves differently, to see ourselves as part of a larger community, to read and write our stories. Knauer tells us of literacy's connections to freedom, how the ability to write a pass allowed enslaved people to have greater movement (71). Literacy combatted "surveillance and identification systems," allowed for telling the "horrors of and truths," and by describing the quest for freedom, kept resistance alive (71-74). In modern times, layered with racialized violence, Knauer's book suggests that today's films and novels reduce antipathy: they spread awareness and keep us focused.