

Armed with Art

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All the earth is sacred ground

*I call upon the ancestors to enter this
space*

To bear witness to the work to come

I call upon the ancestors for their blessings and for permission to move forward

In the tradition of the Dagara, I offer the gifts of water and ash

*I offer water so our journey over the next several days will be without conflict, smooth
and flowing like this liquid*

I offer ashes and ask the ancestors to make of them a shield to protect us

*In the tradition of the Yoruba I call the names of my ancestors Claudia, William, Daisy,
Elvira, Willie...I ask them to inform other ancestors for whom I have no names so they
may offer me their blessings*

*Now you must call upon your ancestors, call their names so they will know we are the
ones who remember our dead, who learn from our dead, who know we are nothing
without the ancestors.*

Ashe Ashe Ashe O

In the beginning was the word

And the word was power

And the word was protection

And with the words came the questions

Who are we? Why are we here?

Who brings the birds, the insects seen unseen

To our earthly doorstep

In the end is the word

And the word is power

And the word is protection

I want to thank Lanny Smith and everyone at Doctors for Global Health responsible for me being here today. This is both an honor and a privilege to address people who are making such profound differences across the globe.

As healers—artists, doctors, healthcare providers—there is much that unites us. We want our lives to have meaning, we want to be the best we can and we want to touch the lives of others. We are ready and willing to answer the call to service, willing to sacrifice in order to build a better world.



Today I am going to talk about my evolution as a cultural worker, the theories and people who inspire me. And I will talk about art as a means of emancipations and communication—in the beginning was the word, stories, storytelling, the oldest art form, present in every culture among all people, stories told to communicate a collective belief system based on shared values about what is important in life—lessons in integrity, morality, virtue and ethics.

I come to you armed with art and culture; *armed with art* because armor serves several purposes. It can provide a covering to protect you from damage being inflicted and it can protect you from damaged caused by a potentially dangerous environment or action.

We live in a time of multiple dangers. This is a time of unprecedented attacks on our environment from chemicals, nuclear waste and nuclear weapons. The tearing and scarring of the earth as we cut off the tops of mountains or dig deep into the earth mining for coal and diamonds. We pollute our lakes, wells, and the oceans in the

pursuit of oil. And we diminish the value of a life with an unprecedented number of wars all over the world.

We have BP in the Gulf and Shell in Nigeria, Coca Cola in Colombia, Blackwater in Iraq, Monsanto in India, Wal-Mart in China and then there are the drug companies who now conduct nearly 30 percent of their clinical test in Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe; places willing to accommodate “the drug industry's search for cheaper and faster ways to conduct clinical testing.” Places with few restrictions on testing of experimental drugs.

The pursuit of money and markets, power and territory have given rise to health epidemics around the world in places where the people have been harmed by those they thought came to help them. In other place epidemics like HIV and AIDS have been allowed to rage untreated because the population was too poor to pay for the necessary drugs and treatments.

Africa Actions reports that: "At the 18th International AIDS conference in Vienna, Austria...heads of UNICEF, UNAIDS, and the global fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria commit[ted] themselves to ending HIV/AIDS forever. Unfortunately, as the severity of HIV/AIDS crisis only advances across African nations, the international community is failing to respond to the crisis with the strong urgency that is needed. Currently, sub-Saharan Africa holds 68 percent of the world's HIV-positive people but only receives 1 percent of the global expenditure on health."

We see this even in the United States where candy, soda and cereal manufacturers and corporations like McDonalds are allowed to pimp our children with direct marketing campaigns aimed at branding them by the time they are 2 years old with the goal of creating loyal customers for life, seducing them with sugar, salt and fat while our schools cut out health classes, recess and physical education—then we bemoan the rise in childhood obesity, high cholesterol, and diabetes. These illnesses rank high among children and young people living at or below the poverty level because they have less access to healthy foods in their neighborhoods and easy access to cheaper food that translates into higher empty calories.

According to a new report by the Coalition on Human Needs without immediate action—without jobs paying a living wage there is growing evidence that the effects of the Great Recession will linger for years, causing lasting damage to a generation of children and young adults. We know that the high poverty and joblessness caused by the recession throw up multiple roadblocks to healthy productive future. (The Recession Generation: Preventing Long-Term Damage from Child Poverty and Young Adult)

Some say we live in a time of global economies, I say we live in a time of dangerous economies. Global recession is a symptom of a worldwide battle—the monarchy has been replaced by the corporation—and the rest of us are reduced to either overseers or indentured servants. What's old is new....

We live in a time of war and rumors of war. Some get rich, millions are killed and we all suffer.

For me, to be armed with art means to be fortified against the agents of war and greed feed by mass media hysteria, fear, xenophobia, jealousy, consumerism, arrogance, anger, and hate. All the emotions that cause us to take actions that are against our best interest—against the interest of our children and mothers fathers and sons and in service to the building of empires and military fiefdoms and for the enrichment of a global oligarchy.

I want to talk about being armed with art because I feel we are at war for the minds and hearts of the world's people. Peace and prosperity versus war and waste.

What good is art against empires and wealth?

You may be asking, what can you do with a poem or a story? What contribution can a cultural worker make to a world at war, overflowing with suffering, with illness and in need of peace and justice?

At the core of art and culture is creativity. A recent *Newsweek* article titled the "Creativity Crisis," defines Creativity as the "production of something original and useful...There is never one right answer. To be creative requires divergent thinking (generating many unique ideas) and then convergent thinking (combining those ideas into the best result)." I know you can identify with this definition.

As a nation we are losing our creativity, because we no longer value art in our communities and our schools, and we also fail to realize the great diversity of creativity that surrounds us. Yet, "All around us are matters of national and international importance crying out for creative solutions, from saving the Gulf of Mexico to bringing peace to Afghanistan to delivering health care. Such solutions emerge from a healthy marketplace of ideas, sustained by a populace constantly contributing original ideas and receptive to the ideas of others."

What difference could art possibly make?

In his January 17th post blogger Scott Walters theorized that the good we see in the world; those people who show up to help in a disaster, those who make heroic efforts to change the world, all do so because of the impact of art in their lives. Not just any art, but the art of telling stories. He writes:

Our society is built on stories. The idea that there is value in helping others who are in dire need...is passed on from generation to generation by the stories we tell that reinforce that value. Without that story, such admirable behavior would likely be scarce. When we teach young people to be artists, part of what we need to be teaching them is a consciousness of their responsibility to their society, their community. This is why we need to stop teaching the Myth of Fame, the Cinderella Myth, as the primary myth of the arts, or the Myth of Self, the Myth of Individual Vision, and replace it with a myth of service, of sacrifice, and of place.

The stories we tell are heavily influenced by the place we live in and the system we live with and under. In a global system of capital and free markets, we are deluged with the story of the lone risk taker who becomes a bejillionaire; the company that rakes in huge profits for its shareholders and rewards the president of the company millions of dollars as if he alone made it possible—in some cases paying one person a 1,000 times more than the hardest working throng of working poor people who design the products, operate the machines, sell the goods, or mop and clean the facilities.

Like the story of the lone hero going it alone with no input from the community they are suppose to be 'saving' walking off into the sunset with a pension leaving the mess for the people to figure out how to clean up and pay for—these are the myths that create the greatest barriers to a just.

But stories that embody the myths of service, sacrifice and place are most often found in art with a social message, political art, community based art—practices of the arts that many of us were taught should not be considered real art—art with a capital A.

Think about the types of myths that embody service, sacrifice and place. Think about your family stories passed down to you through an oral tradition from grandparents

and greatgrands. The stories they told you were stories that led you to be here today. Your life is a story and one day the story of you will inspire other young people to step out in service to others, to break down borders, to break bread with the world.

Today, in our mass media society, the importance of the oral traditions has been dismissed and defamed. Cultures that continue to value these traditions are dismissed by Western elitism as simple and naive. Most people in the United States know little about the great oral traditions that are the roots of a moral and just society.

But the oral tradition of story is alive. It lives in each of us, important stories about sacrificing something today so there can be a tomorrow, about wishing for others what we wish for our self.

As a cultural worker, my interest in the field of conflict resolution was tied to understating how systems are designed and the role conflict plays in disrupting or supporting the status quo. I am going to talk some of the ideas and artists who inspire me. So, I begin with Bertolt Brecht, born in 1896.

Working in Germany, Brecht [who died in 1956] influenced the education of socially conscious artists around the world. Brecht sought to stimulate the minds of his audience concerning the world around them, creating theater to move the audience into action, to question their status in the world and the conflicts that were playing out around them. Brecht adapted theatre for his own purpose, returning to the traditions of narrative theatre that integrated economics and politics with the human being as the object of inquiry. [He believed] the stories told in the theatre... should not move the audience to tears and an orgy of emotion, but should educate them to act to change and transform the world (Brecht, 1957/1964 see also Boal, 1974/1979 and Schoeps, 1977).

Augusto Boal was a student of Brecht. He was Brazilian political activist, Artistic Director of the Arena Theater from 1956-1971, and between 1974 and 19979, he worked in the slums of Brazil where he incorporated much of Brecht's concepts of theater along with Paulo Freire's ideas on liberation education into his work with the poor. Those works lead him to create Theatre of the Oppressed.

Theatre to help the under classes conceive of and practice for freedom, using story as the primary technique to help the poor transform their personal and social reality into political awareness and action. Boal looked to theater as an instrument of education, rejecting the popular idea of theater as only spectacular and entertainment. Theatre of the Oppressed uses story to increase each participant's capacity to confront internal and external factors of oppression by increasing their capacity to conceive of change. At the grassroots level, stories are an efficient weapon to remove all artificial barriers between those who act and those who are acted upon. (Boal, 1974/1979)

Many of these techniques were adopted into the practice of social activism, education, performance art, psychology, therapy, and now, conflict resolution. In this context, theater allows us each to tell our story through our perspective then to see those stories exhibited side by side. (Boal, 1974/1979).

*Brecht influenced socially conscious artists in the United States like the San Francisco Mime Troupe working in the Bowery district among the underclass to create a theatre that speaks to and with, and for their community of people. He even influences the work of Imamu Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones). In 1964, Baraka politicized the U.S. stage with the one-act play *The Dutchman*, which won an Obie Award. This was followed in 1965 with *The Slave and The Toilet*. These plays symbolize the confrontation, hostility, and mistrust between Blacks and Whites in America (Schoeps 1977).*

Then there is John O'Neal, an African-American writer, actor, and activist who made some major contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. O'Neal was a Field Secretary of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and worked as an organizer with the United Church of Christ Committee for Racial Justice. While Free Southern Theater drew on lessons learned from Brecht, they incorporated a reciprocal process of learning/teaching in which they engaged communities as horizontal partners—allowing both to be teachers and learners simultaneously.

[John] committed himself to make theater that spoke to the dignity and grace of his people in the face of overt Southern oppression. Using Brecht as a major reference for his writing and thinking, and the Suitcase Theater of Langston Hughes and Ted Ward as his model, O'Neal, along with Tom Dent and Gilbert Moss founded The Free Southern Theater (1963) in New Orleans. Their goal was to make theater that encouraged and supported those in the movement. Their theater would place on stage the life of poor and working class people in the south, providing critical and reflective thought among those working in the Civil Rights Movement.

Free Southern Theater created "Theater for those who have no theater "to rouse its audience and society to active ends." Free Southern Theater drew stories from the people in order to invest the people with stories of their own moral values and virtues. They called upon the "middle class and working classes to make themselves the object of their own theater. Urging people to reject the lone hero's struggle and embrace the collective struggle." (Boal 1974/1979)

Today, John continues his landmark work through Junebug Productions. John O'Neal is a leading advocate of the view that "politics" and "art" are complementary, not opposing terms. He has created the Free Southern Theater Institute and is working with Tulane, Xavier and Dillard Universities to bring the knowledge and skills of the Black Arts Movement to a new generation of young people.

This course explores issues of race, class, and gender, specific to oppressed and exploited African Americans in the Black Belt South and the role that art can play in supporting and encouraging oppressed people who are working to improve the quality of life available to themselves and others. Through case studies, readings, videos, group work and discussions students learn about community-based arts practices and how the arts are used for social change. Students...learn about the history of the Free Southern Theater and the Black Arts movement and...have hands-on experience creating performance pieces using the story circle methodology and other community-based approaches.

This is a global movement by artists who believe there has to be a global shift of resources and systems away from capital and towards the welfare of people and the environment. I invite you to visit In Motion Magazine—An online publication where I am proud to serve as co-editor, there you will find multiple stories of artists and communities working together to challenge their social and economic condition.

My training as a cultural worker and organizer was through the mentorship of writer Toni Cade Bambara. Toni was born in 1939 and died in 1995. [She] was a prolific fiction and non-fiction writer, film critic, scriptwriter and teacher whose work includes short story collections, *Gorilla My Love*, *The Seabirds are Still Alive*, the novel, *The Salteaters*, and *The Black Woman*, an anthology. (Dorothy Harris in *Toni Cade Bambara, Empowering the Community that Names Her*)

Toni spoke often about the social responsibility of the writer, something she not only preached, but practiced. In her celebrated anthology, *Black Women Writers*, 1984 she is quoted as saying, "*Writing is a legitimate way, an important way, to participate in the empowerment of the community that names me.*"

[Toni's]... writing is consistent in reflecting her intentional participation in the empowerment of her own community and it is consistent in giving the indisputable message that she received her own empowerment and education within her own community. Bambara's writing never neglects the wisdom she gained from her lifelong development and experiences in her community. (Bambara, 1996)

She is clear that her community greatly influences her work, that her community shapes her work, and that her work shapes her. She, therefore, as a writer, certainly empowers her community by giving it the authority to serve as the foundation for her work and, as she says, to name her. Bambara's relationship to the community is reciprocal - she gives name to it and it gives name to her; she empowers it by allowing it the authority to empower her; she makes it the center of her work and it, in turn, teaches her the strategies. (Dorothy Harris in Toni Cade Bambara, Empowering the Community that Names Her)

Toni helped me to put my core belief into practice—never for the community, always with the community.

As part of my studies in conflict resolution I design a practicum to train myself to listen deeply. I wanted to be present without speaking, to give myself in service using my skills to lift up the voices around me so that I might hear their collective wisdom and insight.

I developed a process I call groupspeak—for the process to work it was important that I be silent, no one could know what I was doing, I recorded everything I heard—in workshops, panels, casual conversation, then working with the text I had to find the poem hidden within—I could only use text collected from others and I had to use it in chronological order. I could subtract text, but I could not add words. I want to share a groupspeak in the words of 18 artists on the opening day of a 3-day retreat in Jackson, Mississippi.

I share it because I feel it has a connection to you and the work you will accomplish this weekend.

Pass It On

We came hoping to share better ideas for our work, we came to get some rest, to get back in the swing, 'cause the price was right. Looking for some place we might fit in, looking for opportunities.

We came to dance on the square the first

Saturday of each month to learn how to pass on what we've learned, how art can make a difference in community for all those people who wanted to dance but never did.

We came, southern natives and transplanted Yankees suffering from culture shock and in the end, "We just real glad to be here!"

We are storytellers all spreading the myth of our existence through a Blues riff; a Jazz improvisation, a quilt, some poetry, or clay fired and hung on the wall for your approval.

Doing it all, teaching the old, mentoring the young,

Singing rap songs in dirty bars, anything that will get us paid and we work hard for our money.

Take it back and share it — the culture of the Blues.

Take it back and share it — a knowledge of rare music. Take it back and share it.

'Cause art is creation, 'cause art is life, 'cause life is failure and success, two boats on the water.

A bridge. A tree in winter. A red crayola that captures the heart throb. Social commentary hidden in the common 'cause the common can draw your attention.

Life is a traffic signal – choices every second, every minute, caution, stop, go, yield, turn here—these are your rites of passage.

A generation passing on survival skills.

Look up — look beyond, you possess the power to change life by changing your mind.

The key is in the door and it's on your side.

First light — it is the children who

must contemplate the future
living through the sorrow.
Our house is on fire.
Dirt daubers in three, mimosa blossoms,
a grave in the backyard, angels in the air,
three in attendance.
Drums and guitars for friends who have died.
All the dead bearing crosses and drums.
Onions blooming.
Baskets flying in the air.
Throw in your pennies, wiggle back and forth,
go through the process, and art will let you in
Pass It On!
Art is something elemental
like water and fire, air, earth.
Pass It On!
Teach them to fish
Pass It On!
'Cause life is the original process.
Pass It On Pass It On Pass It On

Toni taught me service and sacrifice made me a faithful believer in cultural and creative expression as a means to affect deep and lasting social change. That art in the hands of those seeking emancipation and peace becomes a political act, a deliberate effort to create and to participate in social change.

Martin Luther King, Jr. influenced me as a powerful icon of the oral tradition and social activist. He knew there could be no peace without justice. In his book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* King tells us:

It is not enough to say, "We must not wage war." It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it. We must concentrate not merely on the eradication of war but on the affirmation of peace....[W]e must see that peace represents a

sweeter music, a cosmic melody that is far superior to the discords of war. Somehow we must transform the dynamics of the world power struggle from the nuclear arms race, which no one can win, to a creative contest to harness man's genius for the purpose of making peace and prosperity a reality for all the nations of the world.

The Wisdom Tree—a group speak assembled from those who attended the New WORLD Theater's fourth intersection conference, Re/Generations...

Gather round this wisdom tree, a shining path

a peaceful powerful calling; gather in ritual

to honor the ancestors—

minister to the dis-ease in our midst.

What are your values?

What is your culture?

What can our art teach you

about the journey of your people.

Hear the voices of the ancestors

they live in the treetops

each pebble, each stone

instruct us, be still, listen

hear the ancestors whisper—

What have you done with the gifts we left you?

The gifts handed down?

The hard fought freedoms won?

Imagine there is a forest before you

in that forest a path, where are you going?

This is what we ask of you:

honor earth, mind, and spirit

develop your consciousness

don't be afraid to make connections daily

show your compassion for others
use your creativity to find a way out of violence
share your vision for the world that will come after you.
Remember where you are
remember who you are
there is value in remembering
remember time is an idea that only exists in our minds
dive into your dreams
cherish and inspire each other
tell your truth so we can know even more truths
sleep undisturbed
make space for those who need more
dissolve into nature.
Change will take moons and cycles
enter through an exit
fold and refold
learn how to scream
take my hand
press
breathe
relax
the earth is shifting inside of you
gather around
talk, dream, connect soul to soul
shape reality, imagine a different world
travel, grow, rid the ego of self-importance

release the hold the world has on your heart
release your frustration to have it all right now
ask each other what are you doing?
Take it back and share it
become the change you want to see
fall weightless into the world
demand softness, color, peace, love
this is your vantage point—
kneel, speak- guide-search
survive- hurt no one- ask questions-inhale-exhale
life is where you are.
Feed those in need of fry bread and hope
water the journey between us
bear witness to the divinity of experience
remember you are not alone
get up, go tell your story
dance your liberation, dance your inspiration
grow organically in your daily interactions
your thoughts are flowers.
Make space for the world at your table
live your life in such a way so none can ask
where were you when I needed you?
and if they ask, answer
I was singing you a lullaby.

We are called to create myths that lift up and illuminate the resilience of people, their grace and kindness, their majesty and goodness, their prowess and intelligence; especially those who are treated as the least among us. That is why we must all

become artists in order to step forward and tell the stories of the world we want our children to inherit.

In the pursuit of peace and justice, art could be our greatest weapon. We have to relinquish the notion that the artist is a special person, far above the rest of us—and we must realize there is something of the artist in everyone. I believe art is a human need. I believe we all must take ownership of our voice, our vision and articulate the world we want.

"When we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us." So says The Dalai Lama. Peace and right ways spread out of us into the world, it begins inward as a struggle to understand then it communicates that understanding to others.

Nowhere in the United States are culture and resistance so intimately entwined as they are in New Orleans where the people live with death every day, but where they refuse to surrender the culture that has sustained them in that hard place of a city born and rooted in their bones—whether hurricanes, oil spills, political corruption or government/corporate collusion—they resist by living and being in the face of the whirlwind.

For a year a half I have worked in New Orleans organizing a Peace Building and Economic Justice program for AFSC. I have witnessed the resilience of culture as a tool of resistance first hand. In his new book *Floodlines*, independent journalist Jordan Flaherty captures the essence of that place.

More than anywhere else in the United States, New Orleans is a city where people often live in one neighborhood their whole lives and multiple generations can live on the same block...New Orleans has a unique and resilient set of cultures, with a history of place and a legacy of resistance...shortly after the city flooded, cornel west wrote,

New Orleans has always been a city that lived on the edge...with Elysian Fields and cemeteries and the quest for paradise. When you live so close to death, behind the levees, you live more intensely...Louis Armstrong came out of that unbelievable cultural breakthrough unprecedented in the history of American civilization. The rural blues, the urban jazz. It is the tragic -comic lyricism that gives you the courage to get through the darkest storm. (pg.9-10)

The Poet's Obligation

~ Pablo Neruda ~

To whoever is not listening to the sea
this Friday morning, to whoever is cooped up
in house or office, factory or woman
or street or mine or harsh prison cell:
to him I come, and, without speaking or looking,
I arrive and open the door of his prison,
and a vibration starts up, vague and insistent,

a great fragment of thunder sets in motion
the rumble of the planet and the foam,
the raucous rivers of the ocean flood,
the star vibrates swiftly in its corona,
and the sea is beating, dying and continuing.

So, drawn on by my destiny,
I ceaselessly must listen to and keep
the sea's lamenting in my awareness,
I must feel the crash of the hard water
and gather it up in a perpetual cup
so that, wherever those in prison may be,
wherever they suffer the autumn's castigation,
I may be there with an errant wave,
I may move, passing through windows,
and hearing me, eyes will glance upward
saying, "How can I reach the sea?"
And I shall broadcast, saying nothing,
the starry echoes of the wave,
a breaking up of foam and of quicksand,
a rustling of salt withdrawing,
the grey cry of sea-birds on the coast.

So, through me, freedom and the sea
will make their answer to the shuttered heart.

(translated by Alistair Reed, in *On The Blue Shore of Silence*)

Traditions of organizing and gathering people that use story to define the community experience survive in many forms. The tradition continues as part of a socially conscious arts movement. Socially conscious artists come from any lifestyle, or culture. What they hold in common is the use of their artistic ability to combat, correct, or confront the oppressor's version of their culture, story, and identity. Through the sharing and placing authority in their story, they challenge the dominant arts and culture. Participants address issues of motivation and passivity, create new structures of interaction, and stimulate new perspectives (Boal, 1992/1992; Sholette, 1990).

Most of these stories are told by individuals, and in the overall scheme of things, they are probably the most important. But these individual stories are reinforced and structured by myths, and these myths are transformed into main stream/gate keeping works of art as opposed to art that embraces peace and community building.

So, how do we get from chaos to community? How do we wage peace in ways that create true community among all peoples?

in the beginning

*the beginning is now
we arrived
bearing the weight of our dreams
in time to greet
ancestors
neglected
forgotten—
we wrote ourselves into the past
called it history*

*in the beginning
the beginning is now
we were the headwaters of our nations
birthed the story from dry bone
prayed our stories into existence
shared them to inspire
toiled to become
the tomorrow of our dreams
i was you
you were me
we were all we needed to survive
black was not enough
red was not enough
brown was not enough
white was not enough
we took in all*

gave back the best of ourselves
in the beginning
the beginning is now
we were
all in all & all together
in great god and great great mother
all in all & all together
all in all & all together
in the beginning
the beginning is now
in the beginning
the beginning is now
in the beginning
the beginning is now.

What can we achieve armed with art?

During the early 1980's I had the good fortune to work with some incredible people to create something called Resources for Social Change. We were all members of the artists run organization Alternate ROOTS.

We came together over several months to create a process, "that teaches ideas and techniques to create social change through art." Each of us had decades of experiences in the field, creating community partnerships built around service and social change.

Our collective knowledge led us to agreement around certain practices, but one central theme: the power of story—taking back our lives and letting go of the myths that keep us from our collective power and beauty.

Our emancipation myths must be :

- Stories that originate from a place of shared power.
- Stories that demonstrate people, communities, nations working in partnership to solve problems.

- Stories that are constructed on honest and open dialogue that rejects the notion of “American exceptionalism”—the idea that we know what is best for everyone.
- Stories that are lesson in individual and community transformation—our ability to change for the better based on what connects us, not on what separates us.
- Stories that are infused with the aesthetics of beauty and justice—because the people deserve beauty in their lives—but it must be a beauty that emanates from their lives—not based in the values or beauty of those who oppress them—justice because it is our highest calling—to be in just relationship with each other for a just world.

If we want to change the world, we must change the stories we tell our self and others, especially our children. We must make sure our stories embody and illustrate the values we want to see in the world.

Like the great Benjamin Hooks, *“You’ve got to believe that tomorrow somehow can be and will be better than today.”*

Tell your stories, share your victories, spread your vision of a world that understands how to be at peace with its own diversity; a world that is built on multiple ways of being and seeing, a world that knows and values good health, hope, and happiness.

So Much to Bless

Bless the dew that falls each night
 Bless the firefly in its flight
 Bless both eagle and its prey
 Bless sacred moon at end of day
 Bless ants in their daily labor
 Bless friends who set us in their favor
 Bless wind rain hailstorms at night
 Bless the unseen hidden from sight
 Bless sun then shadow each in turn
 Bless Keats and his Grecian urn
 Bless lovers in a last embrace
 Bless time which all hurt does erase

Bless art when it hurts or when it heals
Bless the dealer bless the deal
Bless the slickest snake in its tree
Bless sweet gifts from the bountiful seas
Bless the Dogon and their sacred star
Bless our relations near to far
Bless sorrow which gave birth to the blues
Bless we who labor to pay our dues
Bless Lake Turkana Africa's evolutionary gift
Bless the tectonic plates in their wayward drift
Bless all who know and all who demand
Bless we who challenge what we don't understand
Bless coal earth's gift that heat the hearth
Bless she who in war still gives birth
Bless we who suffer this earthly life
Bless us in love bless us in strife

This one's for You

This is for all the Dicks in charge
From Chaney to the other Dicks at large
For Bush G and this sidekick Junior
All their oil advisors and right wing crooners
Spreading lyrics of fear-doomsday tribulations
Upsetting the balance of human relations
With a bomb for tit and a bomb for tat
Cutting human programs while execs get fat
Shut down critics with a bogus flag flap

Signing gang style at their pressroom raps
Tell you to give your life for the nation
Ship their kids off on European vacations
Scientist say there will come a day
When you can't tell shit by the smell of it
When the evil mind will look good to you
When police will spy while being fed
Cause the real police is in your head
While the country burns at the hands of its own
We recruit a national military for loan
Expert in the hunt for suspicious dark faces
However, America's terrorists are avowed white racists
You got Eric Rudolph—young McVeigh
And a host of others we protect to this day
From the Ku Klux Klan to Christ Identity
The FBI gives them immunity
And to you and me they give the third degree
Racial profiling, wire tapes give the illusion
That religion is the cause of this mass confusion
Scientist say there will come a day
When you can't tell shit by the smell of it
When the evil mind will look good to you
When police will spy while being fed
Cause the real police is in your head
Playing by the rules takes a hit these days
Even coaches lie on their resume

False convictions thrown out each day
False evidence, bad lawyers, court cost to pay
Businessmen lie about corporate profits
Pensions disappear into Swiss banker's pockets
What makes a CEO worth 500 million dollars?
While a teacher is treated like a dog on a collar
Yanking education like a hambone treat
Blessed by the government ruling elite
Children don't expect a quality education
Society schools them on diminished expectations
This is the poem that never ends
Cause the craziness goes on and on my friend
You drop a bomb on my tower/I drop a bomb on your
wedding
Tears for all victims I find myself shedding
Up from the depths of my depression
Come these newsworthy items that bear confessing
Scientist say there will come a day
When you can't tell shit by the smell of it
When the evil mind will look good to you
When police will spy while being fed
Cause the real police is in your head
In your head
In your head
In your head