The Book of Melba

Melba Joyce Boyd
2023 Kresge Eminent Artist

Cover photo by Clyde Stringer

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THE KRESGE FOUNDATION
I’m doing what you’re supposed to do as an artist; I didn’t come up with it. Since the beginning of time, poets, writers, even songwriters, have been documenting what has happened, trying to connect it to something that carries deeper meaning than necessarily the moments or incidents. You’re trying to help people reconcile. It’s an ongoing story. I’m just a part of it.

Melba Joyce Boyd, 2023
The annual Kresge Eminent Artist Award salutes an exceptional artist in the visual, performing, or literary arts for lifelong professional achievements to metropolitan Detroit’s cultural community.

Melba Joyce Boyd is the 2023 Kresge Eminent Artist. This monograph salutes her life and her art making.
The Book of Melba

Melba Joyce Boyd
2023 Kresge Eminent Artist

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THE KRESGE FOUNDATION
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Rip Rapson
President and CEO, The Kresge Foundation
Consider for a moment the honor roll of Kresge Eminent Artists since the first in 2008: Charles McGee, Marcus Belgrave, Bill Harris, Naomi Long Madgett, David DiChiera... Bill Rauhauser, Ruth Adler Schnee, Leni Sinclair, Patricia Terry-Ross... Wende dell Harrison, Gloria House, Marie Woo, Shirley Woodson and Olayami Dabls.

Painters and poets, a playwright, an impresario, two photographers, three consummate musicians, a ceramicist and a textile artist, cultural activists, placemakers and educators... most of whom check more than a single box in their careers. They all have made outsized contributions to our community and made their vision felt beyond the community of metropolitan Detroit. They have been hometown heroes and ambassadors for their city and their art forms.

To this esteemed group, we are proud to add Dr. Melba Joyce Boyd. She is yet another of these fulcrums of creativity. She is a scholar of her forerunners in the African American literary tradition, and an artist who very much draws inspirations from those forerunners. She stands on the shoulders of giants and is now a giant in her own right on whose shoulders she invites others to stand. Her story, she tells us, is “absolutely a Detroit story.” And as she has written about her Detroit contemporaries, she herself has been “nurtured in the vitality and complexity of a city bound to the grit and bravado of urban struggle.”

In these pages, we strive to tell her story – often bringing to the fore her own words on the page and in audio recordings. And we share her artistry, highlighting often-out-of-print poems and hard-to-find essays.

We do this in the spirit that has guided our Eminent Artist monographs since the beginning. We seek to elevate artists and artistry in our community, to reaffirm our belief in the ability of arts and culture to root us in the past (painful as it might be), to give cohesiveness to our lives today... to inspire our own creativity, to hopefully see anew the possibilities for tomorrow.
Artist’s Statement

Melba Joyce Boyd
2023
I’m doing what you’re supposed to do as an artist; I didn’t come up with it. Since the beginning of time, poets, writers, even songwriters, have been documenting what has happened, trying to connect it to something that carries deeper meaning than necessarily the moments or incidents. You’re trying to help people reconcile. It’s an ongoing story. I’m just a part of it.

i write as a reason to be
i write poetry that bleeds
i write to stop the pain

From *yari yari: writing for the future*
Dr. Melba Joyce Boyd. Dr. Boyd. Oma. Melba. She goes by many names and navigates multiple labels. Each human life defies easy summation, some more so than others. Melba Joyce Boyd is one of those.

Her layered journey as a poet, essayist, biographer, editor, professor and filmmaker epitomizes the notion of multi-dimensionality. Melba’s life and creative achievements deserve full immersion and in ways that simultaneously celebrate her contributions and offer an overdue primer for those yet to know the name and the legacy it represents. May the facts of Melba’s life – as she’s dared to live and to share them – illuminate her story anew.
FACT 1:
Melba Joyce Boyd believes in the power of poetry.

She has devoted more than five decades of her life amplifying poetry as an art form and mentoring new voices in Detroit, the place of her birth, April 2, 1950.
FACT 2: The “M” in Melba is an emblem of one of her greatest truths: She is many things at once, by choice.

She is, somewhat famously, a wearer of many hats – stylish and bold. The hats tell you that Melba is present. She is someone to know.

Of course, it’s Melba Joyce Boyd’s multiplicity that makes her name most memorable. She is: Melba the award-winning poet, Melba the distinguished professor, Melba the essayist, Melba the biographer, Melba the editor, Melba the documentary filmmaker, the historian, the community connector, the mentor, the sister, the mother, the cherished Oma (grandmother to Kyler, 18, John IV, 13, Lukas, 6, Zoe, 4, and Maverick, 6).

“Melba-the-marvel” is how her longtime publisher Dennis Teichman sums up the poet and the woman. Four of Melba’s nine poetry books were published by Teichman’s Past Tents Press. “She’s sort of the epitome of what Whitman means when he says, ‘I contain multitudes.’ She has an amazing track record even now of putting out work, not just poetry, everywhere, and it’s usually work that, over time, still means something.”

Melba’s husband, James Kenyon, says her many facets are fused by a single fact. “Melba has a big brain,” he explains, “but she has an even bigger heart for people. That’s what she loves. She understands that the human race is not perfect, that there’s violence, police brutality, discrimination all around the world, and it bothers her deeply. It’s why she doesn’t really write about herself so much. She wants you to see the people, not her.”

Kenyon, a retired corporate communications writer, is often awestruck by how much Melba remains in motion. Her career spans more than five decades and stretches across five different disciplines. This is why many call her “a force.”
Prolific since her college days at Western Michigan University, Melba has published 13 books, including her nine poetry collections. She has written biographies and created films about Black literary giants including 2012 Kresge Eminent Artist Naomi Long Madgett and Dudley Randall, founder of Broadside Press, the pioneering Detroit-based Black-owned publishing imprint. Melba has authored two award-winning surveys of Randall’s legacy: *Roses and Revolutions: The Selected Writings of Dudley Randall* (2009), and his official biography, *Wrestling with the Muse: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press* (2003).

Prior to his death in 2000, Randall surprised Melba, his former protégée and assistant editor, by naming her in his will as his official biographer. Broadside was the literary home of notable African American poets including Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, Etheridge Knight, Audre Lorde, Haki Madhubuti, Naomi Long Madgett, the 2012 Kresge Eminent Artist, and Dr. Gloria House, the 2019 Kresge Eminent Artist.

“Probably one of the reasons that Dudley picked her,” says Gregory J. Reed, a friend, longtime prominent Detroit attorney and the founding chairman of the city’s Entertainment Commission, “is that he knew she would be a person that would be on guard for his legacy.”

Reed met Melba when she was in the fourth grade. “She was raised to be a person of intellect and impact. I’ve always admired that about her, that she’s fearless and mouthy but in a way that moves your thinking,” Reed explains as he laughs. “With Melba, it’s always been, ‘What in the hell is she saying now?’”

Melba has written more than 100 essays about poets, the Black Arts and Civil Rights movements, Detroit, and various cultural legends for an array of anthologies, academic journals, and newspapers in the United States and Europe. German and French translators have brought out her works in translation with more on the way.
Her resume overflows with local, state and national honors including multiple Library of Michigan Notable Book awards and a 2010 Independent Publishers Award; in 2010, she was a finalist for the NAACP Image Award for Poetry. *Roses and Revolutions: The Selected Writings of Dudley Randall* (2009), won the 2010 Independent Publishers Award, the 2010 Library of Michigan Notable Book award, and was a finalist for the NAACP Image Award and the Foreword Book Award for Poetry. *Wrestling with the Muse: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press* received a 2004 Honor Award from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association.
Melba the scholar shines too. She was a visiting professor at Fudan University in Shanghai, China, in 2009. Melba was also a Fulbright scholar at the University of Bremen in what was then West Germany, an experience she describes as formative to her work as a scholar and as a poet. She traveled throughout West and East Germany and went on to publish a special collection of poems in German, largely reflections on and tributes to the unexpected kinship and connection she found with Germans in a time of political turmoil and protest.

The Left gun
and the Right gun
Face the Line.
tanks wait
by train tracks
under the trees.
leaves listen
To throbbing hills
tell legends
about men
with double vision –
wingless Spiders
who will sacrifice
ancient
and injured
cities.

i hold hands
with the women.
we make a ring
around the children.
The men plant
flowers forever
to never forget.
In our throats,
The trigger
is cocked.

In addition to Wayne State University in Detroit, where she continues to teach, Boyd was a professor at the University of Iowa and Ohio State University and a past director of African American Studies at the University of Michigan-Flint. For 16 years, she was chair of WSU’s Department of African American Studies. She earned her doctorate in English from the University of Michigan and her master’s and bachelor’s degrees from Western Michigan University.

To John Percy Boyd III, Melba’s oldest child, the most impressive fact of her life remains what he witnessed growing up.

“We traveled the world with her, to Germany and France; we were always going somewhere for some award,” he explains.

“But the amazing part to me is that she did so much while also being this confident, calm and cool mom.”

John and his sister, Maya, were born during Melba’s first marriage. “I grew up without a father, but I had a mother who made sure I always had everything I needed to compete and excel in life. I played a lot of sports and she was always there. She would play catch with me. I didn’t know that she was big in the world too. I still think of her that way, more as my mom, my rock, than the poet that she is.”
FACT 3: Melba the poet does not write pretty poems.

Her essays probe and punch. Even the elegies she creates by request upon the deaths of leaders, legends and loved ones, do not pacify. They roar in remembrance. Melba means to make you hear the lessons of injustice and the work-a-day heroes who in their resistance, their survival, keep culture moving.

there is a sickness in our time, a sour toxic virus infecting our senses, an evil more ravenous than our need to be sane. where will it lead us? will the strong overcome or succumb to the sacrilege of Ethnic cleansing, or Anti-semitism, or christian racism or muslim fanaticism, or fanatic patriotism?

Everyone wants The right to Hate, To be the biggest voice Of indignation On the front Page of freedom of speech, the united press of belligerent Ignorance Feeding our fear In the turmoil Of the millennium. Will these two-legged Beasts riding skeletons Into the maelstrom, Perish in blue blazers Ignited by their Own vengeance?

Those who see mastery in Melba's poems laud her for confronting uncomfortable truths and wrapping them in words that are accessible but rhythmic too.
“I hesitate to use the words ‘populist poet,’ but that’s Melba’s mystique, I think,” explains the award-winning poet M.L. Liebler, who has published Melba’s work and co-edited notable anthologies with her including *Abandon Automobile: Detroit City Poetry 2001*. In the book’s preface, Melba makes plain the difference she sees in Detroit poets: “Detroit poets cling to the craziness of resistance in the face of literary traditions, and they scoff at the rules of conventional politics.”

Those words fit Melba too. “Her poems speak directly to the people because she’s grounded in people, the people of Detroit, and around the world too when you consider she’s someone who has taught and read work globally,” Liebler continues. “You can hear Melba even if you’re not comfortable hearing what she’s saying.”

```
...they will never hear
our words
...gently raving
...in a book.
...scientists don’t visit
poets.
...capitalists don’t understand
esoteric words
...studded with hot ice.
...they live inside fortresses
...hiding under false
...moonscrape umbrellas

but our choir
is not big enough.
...we need an explosion!
...running up steps
...climbing throats
...occupying eyes
...talking
talking
...exposing lies
```

```
today,
we read
in the shelter
of artists;
a collection of poets,
a few musicians,
a quartet of painters —
a menagerie of
image makers.
```
FACT 4:
Detroit is Melba’s omnipresent muse.

Award-winning jazz bassist Marion Hayden has known Melba for more than two decades. She often accompanies Melba on stage for select poetry readings. Beyond their friendship, Hayden regards Melba as one of Detroit’s most devoted arts ambassadors.

“You see Melba around town with all these hats,” explains Hayden, a 2016 Kresge Artist Fellow. “To me she really just wears one big one that encompasses this multiverse. You’ve got poetry in there, cultural writing, film, live performance, a love and understanding of music, and an amazing willingness to be a conduit especially for Detroit. She regales in the people that live here and the kinds of cultural gifts we give, humbly, to the world. We mentor people; we send them out and they remind the world, just as Melba does, what Detroit is about.”

Melba explains her love this way: “I think I was really blessed to grow up Black in Detroit,” she says. “I’ve always wanted the broader public to understand how different an experience it was to be surrounded by people, all kinds of people, making culture. And you know, we’ve been doing it a long time without a lot of major support until recently.”

But do not mistake Melba for a myopic or nostalgic civic booster. “As a poet and as a person, she’s this wonderful mix of kind and generous,” explains fellow writer and long-time friend Nancy Falconer. “But she’s also fiercely political and passionate, a passion which came from tragedy.” The two met as 15-year-olds in Tobermory, Canada, where their families owned adjacent cottages. “The fire in Melba has never gone out. It’s what draws people to her.”

Melba’s most memorable poems cry out in defiance of oppressive systems and ring with demands of justice, honesty and change.
In signature poems such as *we want our city back, burial of a building* and *this museum was once a dream*, Melba travels through Detroit’s history, serenades its heroes and sounds alarms about long-standing horrors. You hear the dismay of the city, across racial lines, when she questions, for instance, the implosion of the famed J.L. Hudson’s department store.

when they bring
a building down,
when they make
history absent,
when they implode
a cistern of memories
into a basement grave,
where do the
ghosts go?⁶

In poem after poem, Melba questions the social costs of perennial struggles against blight, disenfranchisement and broken promises of prosperity.

the corporate state
measured and
maneuvered
the real estate.
they purchased
collusion on
the eve
of elections
in private rooms
where lawyers
convene with
judges,
the lords
of the discourse
of dismemberment.

they protected
the power
of wealth
and the right
of Americans
to shop for
that dream house
by the river
with the “Trail
of Tears” running
through it⁶
FACT 5:
Melba Joyce Boyd merits applause.

She was chosen as the 2023 Kresge Eminent Artist due, in part, to facts 1–4 and the many other details of her life that fill the pages you’re about to explore.

Established in 2008 by The Kresge Foundation, the award is now regarded as a coveted mark of lifelong artistic excellence and cultural contribution. The panel of select metro Detroit artists and arts professionals that made the 2023 selection was unanimous. The relevance of Melba’s work, they said, continues to withstand time.

“From her work as a poet and a writer to her work as a historian, as an educator, as just so many things, you see the impact, the love she has for the craft and for Detroit and you see why she’s deserving,” explains panelist, poet and interdisciplinary artist Scheherazade Washington Parrish. “She’s exactly an eminent artist.”

Grace Serra, Art Collection Curator for Wayne State University, said, “The quality of the work she’s done and the continued relevance is important. It’s about social justice and honesty. And she’s fierce. She hasn’t mellowed with age. You can tell there’s still more to be said.”

At 73, Melba is making plans for more, not less. In 2024, she’ll return to the University of Bremen as an Artist-In-Residence. She dreams of bringing the life of abolitionist poet Frances E. W. Harper to film. Her biography of Harper, Discarded Legacy: Politics and Poetics in the Life of Frances E. W. Harper, 1825–1911 (1994), is widely acclaimed as the first comprehensive study of this major literary figure of the abolitionist and women’s rights movements.

But the documentary is just the tip of Melba’s creative to-do-one-day list. She talks of venturing into children’s literature with her daughter, Maya, an artist and illustrator: a new family legacy to share with her four grandchildren. And there’s still much to do to help Detroit and America connect to Randall’s legacy too. She envisions finding full financial support to display his library including a public reading room. The collection was donated to
Wayne State University in 2004 but has yet to be unveiled. Also, there’s the ongoing question of a Melba memoir: Will she or won’t she? Friends, fellow poets, and former students are forever prodding.

“I’m not sitting around thinking a lot about my legacy,” she explains, “because, you know, I’m Presbyterian, and the Presbyterians believe this s--- is all predestined anyway. All I know is, the older I get, the more I believe you don’t really plan it; you just keep doing the things you love, stay on the path, and things work out.”

Nichole M. Christian is a writer and veteran journalist. She is creative director, editor and lead writer of four Kresge Foundation Eminent Artist monographs: The Culture Keeper (2022), honoring Olayami Dabls; A Palette for The People (2021), honoring painter and educator Shirley Woodson; Wonder and Flow (2020), honoring ceramicist Marie Woo; and A Life Speaks (2019), honoring poet and activist Gloria House. Nichole is also coauthor of Canvas Detroit, and frequent essayist for M Contemporary Art, a gallery in Ferndale, Michigan. She has written for the PBS American Masters Series.

Her writing also appears in the poetry chapbook Cypher, summer 2021; Portraits 9/11/01: The Collected “Portraits of Grief” from The New York Times; the online arts journal Essay’d; A Detroit Anthology, and Dear Dad: Reflections on Fatherhood.

Reflections from Melba Joyce Boyd’s literary peers, family and friends on her creative and cultural legacy.
When the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, died in 2018, Melba Joyce Boyd picked up her pen to lend her voice to the legacy of the legendary daughter of Detroit.

The poem titled *Rock Steady for The Queen of Soul* is pure Melba: on beat and Detroit proud. Yet more lurks in its opening lines, an unintended window into some of the city’s reverence for the poet’s voice too.

In the third stanza, Melba writes,

“Your songs soar with angels, strengthen our resolve, demand RESPECT like a natural woman to THINK, to Do Right despite racial strife”

Clearly, it’s Aretha that Melba is conjuring. But reread the stanza. Imagine the words “poems” and “Detroit” in place of “songs” and “natural.” To reimagine, even playfully, is to tap into what many describe as Melba’s singularity, her poetry and her persona. “There are poets who have a gift of cadence, a gift of making people come to their feet. Melba is that type of poet. She connects to the people,” says Charles Ferrell, co-director of the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center in Detroit, who worked with Melba while he was vice president for public programs and community engagement at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. “She has an absolute fire and connection to Detroit, to history. It’s important that we honor her service and dedication.”
Like many close to Melba, Maya Boyd was thrilled to learn that her mother now joins a select group of 15 creatives — painters, poets, photographers, musicians and others — prized with the Kresge Eminent Artist title and its accompanying acclaim.

Maya, a frequent illustrator of Melba’s books and poetry tribute projects, was by her mother’s side in Los Angeles in 2010 for the NAACP Image Awards. Melba’s book *Roses and Revolution: The Selected Writings of Dudley Randall* had been named a finalist. Though she did not win, she reveled in the national attention and delighted especially in being “styled” for the event by her daughter. “She’s always getting some award or some honor for that part of her life,” Maya says.

The moment, Maya recalls, was star studded. Yet she believes that the Kresge Eminent Artist Award looms larger.

“People around the world know how much she loves Detroit,” says Maya. “She takes the city wherever she goes. But to be recognized at this level, at this time in her life, it’s like Detroit saying, ‘We see you. We love you back.’”

Maya and her young son, Maverick, are now next-door neighbors to Oma, the German word for grandmother. When John IV was born on March 25, 2009, Melba was in Bremen, Germany, celebrating a friend, Ursula Bauer’s birthday. When she got the phone call from her son, everyone shouted in German: “Melba ist eine Oma.”

For two decades Maya lived and worked in New York City, despite her mother’s insistence that she try life as an artist in Detroit. “My mother has always had more hope than sadness about Detroit,” she said. “It’s the main reason I came back, for my son to be developed in this community, close to her love and the culture.”
Living next door has also deepened her understanding of Melba’s impact as a Detroit-based poet, editor and biographer. “She never stopped believing and being part of what people are now coming to see about the city. She could’ve been an artist and a teacher anywhere,” Maya explains. “But she chose to stay here through a huge span of change, to be a part of it. She’s still committed.”

Poet Sonya Pouncy can recite verse by verse what she loves about “Melba poems.” But poetry alone paints an incomplete picture of Melba’s impact, she says. “When you think about the number of books that she’s published but also the number of poets, like me, whose work she’s introduced as an editor or all that’s she done as a professor, you’re talking about tremendous, and really layered unsung impact on the art and in individuals’ lives.”

Pouncy points to her writing life as an example. “I’ve been published in at least two or three anthologies, and I’ve been able to perform the work of Frances Harper, all because of Melba’s encouragement and her endorsements. She’s truly taken a cue from her mentor, Dudley, in that way,” says Pouncy. “The next generation of poets is always top of mind for her: Who will be our voices next? Let’s see what they have to say now and how I can help? That’s Melba for you, and it’s what makes her legacy so much bigger than if she were only making and sharing her poems.”

Melba’s poems and essays mix biting social critique with an insider’s reverence for Detroit history and cultural traditions. At her core, Melba is a writer energized by the art of remembrance even when it’s personally painful.
Petals Like Blades

A twin love of family and words is what pulled Melba through “a tragedy in my personal life that I could not have imagined in my worst nightmare.”

In December of 1972, one of Melba’s brothers, 23-year-old Vietnam veteran John Percy Boyd Jr., an 18-year-old cousin Hayward Brown, and their friend Mark Bethune, 22, were in a shootout with police. That incident eventually led to the end of the most violent chapters of policy harassment and brutality in Detroit’s history.

The three young Black men engaged in a shootout with four white Detroit police officers outside a reputed drug house. The officers were assigned to the city’s controversial undercover Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets (STRESS) unit. Melba’s brother and the two others were members of an underground “vigilante” group determined to force drug dealers out of Black neighborhoods. The four officers were all seriously wounded. A second shootout between police and the trio later that month left one officer dead and another critically wounded.

The manhunt for Boyd, Brown, and Bethune — as recounted in an online University of Michigan HistoryLab project — led to “extraordinary abuses of the civil and constitutional rights of hundreds of Black citizens and the killing of an innocent man during one of many warrantless home invasions.” Large-scale protests from across the Black community followed.

Two months later, after Brown had been apprehended in Detroit, Melba’s brother John and Bethune were tracked to Atlanta. They were with Melba’s half-brother Owen Darnell Winfield, who lived in the city. Both brothers were killed by police in the manhunt she writes about in “In Hot Pursuit: The Deadly Consequences of Detroit Police Oppression,” an essay published in The Journal of Law in Society and in Wrestling with the Muse. The deaths of Melba’s brothers and Bethune — who reportedly took his own life after being wounded by police — made national headlines.
“I got the news of my brothers’ deaths after returning to Detroit from a poetry festival at Central Michigan University,” Melba recalled. She had been in the company of a coterie of rising Black literary stars, including Quincy Troupe and Alice Walker, who would go on to become the first Black woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for Literature. She immediately sent Melba a copy of her famous Broadside publication, “Revolutionary Petunias.” Walker wrote: “Melba, May your petals grow like blades of steel to protect you.”

When Melba returned to work at Broadside Press, she shared the poem she had written for her brothers’ funeral with Dudley Randall. He insisted that it be published in the iconic Broadside series.
Detroit police during the manhunt. Detroit Free Press archives.
TO DARNELL AND JOHNNY
(February 23, 1973)

Owen Darnell Winfield, born May 22, 1945 and
John Percy Boyd, Jr., born January 2, 1949,
were assassinated by an agent of the State while
struggling for Black Liberation—
"Africa will rise."

I will always remember
how much life
is you.
your smiles
could cure with bright
stars of laughter.

I will always remember
how much life
is you.
your strength
could hug and protect
with peace giving arms.

I will always remember
how much love
is your life.
giving them for
tomorrow's children
of the universe.

I will always remember.
and you will always live
in the Spirit of the New World,
you helped to build.

Love,
your sister
Melba
The reverberations of the incidents played a key role in the 1973 Detroit mayoral election when the anti-STRESS Michigan State Sen. Coleman A. Young prevailed against the Detroit Police Commissioner John Nichols who had presided over the hunt for the men he labeled as “Mad Dog Killers.”

While the tragedy is now looked upon as painful history, Sandra Boyd, Melba’s sister, awaits the day that Melba will have the final say on the deaths of their older brothers. “There’s been some writing here and there, but I’ve been waiting for Melba to tell the whole story,” says Sandra, a retired math and computer science teacher. “I used to bug her about when. Then I stopped. I said, well, she’s an artist, it has to come when she’s ready.”

But unlike others, Sandra, who is two years younger than Melba, is certain Melba’s memoir will happen and be a “correct” retelling of family tragedy and truth. “It doesn’t consume us anymore, and Melba’s writing has certainly grown, but we still talk about our brothers. That tight legacy, and what we went through is what I think people will appreciate when her memoir comes. It’s just a matter of time.”

Legacy and Lore

Semaj Brown is Flint, Michigan’s, first poet laureate. But she was born in Detroit, a native of Conant Gardens, the same historic neighborhood where Melba and her brothers grew up. “I was a little girl, but I heard my mother always talking about her, talking about what happened to her brother and how horrible it was. Even though they weren’t still living in Conant Gardens by that time, there was this lore about her and her family,” Brown said.

Brown met Melba years later while she was a student at Wayne State University and Melba was a visiting writer. “I heard the name Boyd, and said, Oh, my God! That’s the lady they had been talking about all along,” says Brown.

When Melba published the biography of Dudley Randall, Brown celebrated by buying copies for elders in Conant Garden, who, like her mother, remembered Melba. “Everybody was so proud of how she stood up and what she became,” says Brown. “She has this legacy, and it’s just beautiful to see how she’s lived it and shared it.”

For Brown, Melba epitomizes the role of the poet in society. “Poetry is not supposed to be about celebrities. Poetry is about having a voice for the voiceless; it’s about speaking truth to power, speaking truth to yourself, saying things in a way that people hear it different for the first time,” she says.
MAD DOG KILLERS??

Before the Black community goes off half-cocked as to the reasons why these STRESS Storm-Troopers along with the rest of the Detroit Police Department are kicking down doors, threatening and killing anyone who comes between them and their prey Mark Bethune, John Percy Boyd, and Hayward Brown, we should first understand some things.

First we should not assume as police commissioner John Nichols seems to have done that the men Mark Bethune, John Percy Boyd, and Hayward Brown committed these crimes or for that matter, are anyway connected with them. THIS MUST BE PROVEN IN A COURT OF LAW, NOT A T.V. PRESS CONFERENCE.

Secondly, we should not assume that the information we receive from the news media is correct, especially since we have only heard one side. STRESS's side.

We do not really know if the men who are accused of killing these STRESS officers were fired on first or not. Therefore, we do not know if they were acting in self defense or not. This can only be brought out in a court of law.

As of now, since their guilt has not been proven in a court of law "we of the Black community demand an immediate apology from Commissioner John Nichols for calling our sons, brothers, and husbands MAD DOG KILLERS. We will accept nothing less than a televised apology NOW!"

Who's calling whom "Mad Dog Killers"
We know who the real Mad Dogs are!!

It's a matter of life...STOP STRESS
SAVE THE CHILDREN!!! STOP STRESS
SAVE FOUR INNOCENT LIVES...SAVE FOUR INNOCENT LIVES...STOP STRESS
"People from Melba's generation, particularly her, understand that on a very innate level, I think, because of the struggles they had to go through to become recognized writers, to become professors, just to survive."

**Literary Kin**

Don’t ask acclaimed poet, editor, and biographer Quincy Troupe how long he’s known Melba or exactly how they first met. Those details pale in relevance to the facts that have made Troupe a champion of Melba’s work and cemented a lasting literary kinship.

“I’ve known Melba for so many years I cannot remember. I think I met her when she was working with Dudley at Broadside Press,” recalls Troupe, who lives in New York and is most celebrated as the biographer of jazz giant Miles Davis. “She’s always invited me to participate in all kinds of readings and artist residency programs in Detroit. She’s always treated me with the utmost kindness and respect, which I have tried my best to return in equal measure. My wife Margaret and I consider her one of our very best friends.”

Troupe, who is also a professor emeritus at the University of California, San Diego, in La Jolla, traces his high regard for Melba to her deep commitment to cultural preservation.

“Melba is the consummate scholar, the keeper of traditions and the legacy of African American literature, arts and culture. Her poetry is steeped in the blues and classical African American sentiment and expression.”

He adds: “She has been the driving force behind everything literary in Detroit for more than half a century. She is absolutely respected for her own writing, for her views on racial or social justice issues, women’s issues, the African American aesthetic, or the political landscape in these still yet-to-be-United States. Melba is a formidable, committed academic, professor, and artist.”

**Force in Her Voice**

Frank Rashid, a former professor emeritus of English at Detroit’s Marygrove College, has never forgotten his first encounter with Melba Joyce Boyd. She was young. He was too. The year was 1974.

“I didn’t know anything about her then,” he recalls. Rashid was working as a volunteer for WDET, Detroit’s public radio station, helping to capture the public hearing surrounding the city’s controversial STRESS police unit. “There were so many
people who needed to be at that hearing that they moved it from the City County Building to Ford Auditorium, which held several thousand people. We were broadcasting because it was such an important moment in the life of the city."

When Melba took the mic, Rashid was riveted. "I saw this young woman get up and passionately speak about her brother, his friend, and her cousin, and what was going on and the injustice to them and so many. She had a fire and a force in her voice that you never forget. You could hear her anger and this brilliance."

Years later, through a shared connection to Dudley Randall, they became collaborators, friends and co-creators of a series of literary events celebrating the friendship and legacies of Randall and legendary Detroit poet Robert Hayden. Hayden was the first African American to be appointed as Consultant in Poetry to the U.S. Library of Congress.

Working closely with Melba, Rashid was often reminded of that first encounter. "I began to put it all together, to understand the source of the strength that you experience in so many of her poems. She expresses such a knowledge and appreciation of Detroit, and the legacy of loss. The reason that she's such a force is because she's lived the city's history. She's someone you want to listen to and learn from."

**She Was Black Like Me**

Opal Moore didn't know much about Melba Joyce Boyd when they met in the 1980s except that she was a poet from Detroit, a published author and a woman bold enough to bring her brand of Blackness to the predominantly white University of Iowa. For Moore, a Black graduate student in the English department, those few details were reasons enough to rejoice about the new faculty candidate.

"In those days, there were not very many Black people applying into these universities, and here she was walking in with, as far as I was concerned, an archive of history that the University of Iowa's English department needed desperately to acquire."

As Moore remembers, rumors of Melba's application were running wild with excitement among grad students, partly because she was Black and well published, compared to the buzz about another applicant, someone "straight out of graduate school, who didn't have any book publications."

Moore recalls Melba bringing a distinctly confident and unapologetically Black persona to the largely white campus. She stood out. "What I learned watching her had to do with how she entered." To Moore, Melba's commitment to full
cultural representation is an important embodiment of the main lesson from author Anna Julia Cooper’s seminal ‘When and Where I enter... race enters with me.’³

Years later as an associate professor of English at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, Moore regularly exposed her students to Melba’s writing, often inviting her to campus and publishing her poetry in Aunt Chloe, the college’s literary journal. Today, Moore, who is retired, also counts Melba as a friend.

“Melba is a cultural treasure. She has immersed her creative energy in ways that link to the community rather than objectifying it as a point of study. The clarity of that vision about why it is you’re doing the work that you do and what compels you is critical. She could be anywhere, but she’s at Wayne State University for a very clear set of articulable reasons.”

In fact, Moore says Melba’s real cultural impact is beyond her work with words. “The way to regard Melba Joyce Boyd is to regard the whole of her practice. She embodies something that we don’t want to lose in the way that we think about Black artists and women artists, and scholar artists. Sometimes they go into the academy and parts of who they are disappear. It’s not the case with Melba. She has made her art useful in the African tradition where your art is an expression of spirit and connection.”

Wholly Melba

In Melba’s life, Sandra Ware wears the best friend badge. They met at Pershing High School in the 1960s, well before Melba had any interest or inkling of a life lived as an award-winning writer and future distinguished professor. In those days, she was Melba the cheerleader, the athlete and doting younger sister to “Johnny.”

The signs of who Melba would become were always present, says Ware, a retired psychiatric therapist.

“She’s always been the high-achiever, gifted with words, sensitive, highly intuitive to the rhythms of cultures, ethnicities, and their beginnings. She’s a born leader, compassionate and strong in her convictions in life and in writing.”

While Ware, who is also the godmother to Melba’s two children, has “loved” watching Melba’s long record of academic and artistic achievements, what she prizes most about her friend is a telling personal quality.

“It’s hard to explain, but if you look in Melba’s eyes, she has this glimmering soulfulness that tells you she’s a thinker, always studying but there’s calmness in her strength. I think that’s what draws people to her in life and to her work. She
came out of chaos and she honestly wants you to believe you will also come out of whatever chaos you face, and also standing on your feet.”

In September of 2019, Ware faced the toughest moment of her life. An ailing sister died suddenly. Within 24 hours, Ware’s mother, who had seemed to accept the news of her daughter’s death, sat down in her chair and she died.

“I went into a fog, just this total zombie. Nothing seemed real. I have this vague memory of my mother’s body being removed and looking across the room, and somehow Melba was there. From then on, she remained at my side, and she calmly and serenely helped to bring a surreal, horrendous nightmare to a sacred memory.”

To Ware, Melba Joyce Boyd is best measured by her constancy of care and commitment to community. “This is her foundation; this is her innards; this is what she bred up for. She has never stopped showing up. This is what one should respect about Melba. Her life, not the books; that’s her art.”

1. Excerpt, Rock Steady for The Queen of Soul, 2019 broadside, Past Tents Press.


Sound Stories
Listen along to Melba as she reflects on her roots, family, and rise in the literary world.

In Own
We invite you to listen along as Melba shares personal stories about some of her life’s major influences, contained as audio stories and accessible via QR codes throughout the book. Audio produced by Zak Rosen.
In Her Own Words:

Roots
Melba Joyce Boyd reflects on her parents’ defining choice to leave behind multigenerational roots in Alabama for the promise of prosperity in Detroit.

To preserve the organic nature of the conversation we have chosen to omit the traditional question-and-answer format.
ABOVE  Melba as a young child.

RIGHT  Melba shares a photo of her father during his time in the military.

PREVIOUS  Melba as a girl; a family portrait; a young Melba with her mother Dorothy and younger sister Sandra.
I grew up in south southwest Detroit, like way southwest, almost out of the city. You say southwest and most people think you’re talking about Mexicantown. No, no, no. I mean so far out there you could walk across the city line by passing three streets from River Rouge into Ecorse.

That neighborhood was developed during that Second Great Migration and, during and after World War II, a place for Black workers to live so they wouldn’t try to move into Dearborn. Any children of white people still living in our neighborhood went to St. Andrew and Benedict Catholic schools. When you study housing discrimination in Detroit, restrictive covenants were also applied against Catholics and Jews.

We lived at 2433 Deacon St. It was just a little two bedroom bungalow, but my father maximized the space. He finished the attic so my two older brothers could have the big bedroom up there.

Later, when my oldest brother Darnell moved out and was in the Marines, my sister and I got the big bedroom. My brother John had to take the smaller room where we were. My father finished the basement too. It wasn’t big but it was nice.

My dad had been in the Army. He bought the house with the GI Bill. A lot of the young men on that street had been in the service like my dad. After he got out, he went back to Alabama to finish college. In fact, if he had not gone to the war, and then gone back to school, he and my mom probably would have missed each other because my mom was still finishing high school when he got drafted. They met at Tuskegee University. If not for the draft, he would have graduated in ’45, before she ever went to college. She didn’t enter Tuskegee until 1946. They definitely would’ve missed each other, and I probably wouldn’t be here.

—Melba Joyce Boyd
I’m not a hundred percent sure which side of my family came to Detroit first. The Boyds came at the beginning of WWII like a lot of Black families from the South. On the Wynn side, my Aunt Odessa and her husband, Peter Brown, came during that time as well. Uncle Pete came about that time. Her husband worked at the Ford Rouge Plant, building tanks. My father’s mother, Bernice Boyd, had been a school teacher in Selma. In Detroit, she worked for the U.S. government at the U.S. Armory. It paid better than teaching elementary school in Alabama.

My grandmother had three sisters, who all came to Detroit during WWII. Both sides of my family were chasing the same dream, same promise.

My father graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering in 1948 from Tuskegee University. After the war, there was a lot of talk about new opportunities, so he expected to work as an engineer.

But he would never get to pursue this career. When he interviewed, a personnel manager at Ford told him, “You’re more than qualified, but we don’t hire colored engineers.” What they meant by “colored” was anyone Black, Brown or Asian; they were only hiring White engineers.

So, my dad ended up working at the main post office downtown, which used to be called the Black graduate school because the discrimination prevented most educated Black people from practicing their degrees. Daddy started as a clerk and eventually became a supervisor. It was a good paying job like working in the factory, but not brutal or as dangerous. I’ll never forget what that did to my dad.

My son, John Boyd III, has the same degree, from the University of Michigan, just in a different era and he works as an engineering consultant for NASCAR companies.
Melba shares family photos in her home in Detroit.
For both of my parents, education was a strong family value, especially on my dad’s side, going back several generations. I’m third generation; maybe even the fourth to graduate from college. The further you go back though, it gets really interesting. It’s something that I still need to research. My grandfather’s oldest sister, Inez Boyd Fosten, she was a professor at Tennessee State. My grandfather Richard Boyd attended Alabama State University, and that’s where he met Bernice — my grandmother. That’s partly why education was so important to my dad. It’s a deep legacy.

My mom’s family, on the other hand, was different. They were from Bessemer, Alabama. Her parents, Sarah and Owen Wynn, probably only had an eighth grade education. During the early nineteenth century, high school was not readily available for most Black children. But, they believed in education and sending their children to college, so they would acquire a professional degree and become economically independent.

I do know that Granddaddy Wynn was a big labor advocate, and he was a supervisor of Black workers in the ore mines in Bessemer. He made a good living, and invested in property and education for his children. My grandmother grew crops for sale and maintained a family garden. They both agreed that the children — 13 girls and one boy — should go to college, especially the girls so that they’d be able to take care of themselves instead of depending on a man. They invested in that belief, which was very progressive at the time.

Growing up, one of the funniest stories I heard about my granddaddy was his response to some man who said to him one day at church, “Why you sending those girls to college? They ain’t gonna do nothing but get married.” My grandfather, who was a deacon in the church, said to him: “Mind your own damn business.”

I think the story also explains much about their family values and about misperceptions a lot of people had, and still have, about Black people in the South during the 19th and 20th centuries.
They weren’t just walking around with their heads down. The truth is you had a lot of Black folks in those times who were progressive. It’s the same kind of thinking that Frances Harper was advocating with her writing and speaking to groups after slavery: this idea that they had to learn to read and write in order to become self-sufficient. Even with 14 children, my grandparents were forward thinking, serious about it, too. They knew they had to be for their children.

My dad was rather quiet and reserved. He taught me how to read and do math at age four. My mom was very assertive and expressive. I think it was necessary for a Black woman of her generation. She loved swimming, and when she was a senior in high school, she went to the Recreation Department for the City of Bessemer and asked: “When do the colored kids get to swim in the pool at the recreation center?” It’s 1945.

He responded with: “When you get a colored life guard.”

Next year, my mom goes to Tuskegee University, majors in physical education, gets her lifeguard certification, returns to the Recreation Department the following summer, and tells the man: “We got a colored life guard now.” For my mom, this was about fairness. When her father and her older brother taught her how to swim, they had to go to a nearby creek and beat snakes out of the water, so it would be safe to get in the water. So, she thought, why are we swimming in the creek? We should be swimming in the city pool.

I think it speaks to this very strong sense of integrity and identity. She told me once that her father taught his children at an early age that nobody is better than you; but also, you’re no better than anyone else. That stuck with her. In a lot of Black families you see these patterns, these values, that get instilled early and they get passed down.
ABOVE  Family photo of Melba’s mother Dorothy, top right, her maternal grandmother Sarah Wynn and 11 of the 14 Wynn siblings.

RIGHT  Melba’s great-grandmother Taylor.

LEFT  Melba’s great-grandfather Percy Smith.
I am the oldest daughter of six children and the oldest of the four still living.

My older brothers, Darnell and John, are deceased. I’ve written about their deaths and will write more extensively about them in my memoirs. I don’t think I’ll ever stop processing that trauma and tragedy. I miss them every day.

But I also remember just growing up with normal moments of being a kid, feeling very peaceful in the yard, playing ball with my brothers, Johnny and Darnell, and with my sister, Sandy. I remember the trees. There were many in the neighborhood, lining the streets, proving shade and oxygen. My dad planted a peach tree that actually bore fruit, and one of my brother’s friends, Ron Watters, who lived down the street, had several fruit trees in his yard. For the most part, our parents were southern immigrants, who knew how to grow trees and to tend gardens with flowers and food. They continued these practices when they settled in Detroit.

In retrospect, as a child, I was not affected by historical events impacting the nation or the world. I grew up with a secure sense of a community that was solid and stable. For the most part, families were financially secure. You knew your neighbors and they knew you. I felt safe.

My parents divorced when I was about 15. They sold the house and my mother remarried. My father was still a father in my life. He paid child support and we visited him often; he and my step-father, Siegel Clore II, were very similar in temperament and had real respect for each other because they were men both WWII veterans, college-educated, and who had dealt with all kinds of ridiculous discrimination because of their race. Often, we were in the same spaces, as a family. It never really felt odd because the values we all shared, what their parents gave them and what they gave us: a real strong belief in family.
Melba sorts through generations of family photos with grandson Maverick.

Melba and brother John Percy Boyd Jr., approximately 1951.

Sound Story No. 3
Travel with Melba as she revisits how a little known slice of Canada on the Georgian Bay became both a creative muse and a source of rejuvenation for generations of her family.
LEFT Melba’s family cottage in Tobermory, ON; Melba (far left) in the water in Tobermory with her youngest sisters Dorothy Donise Davis, center, Sandra Boyd, right, longtime friend Nancy Falconer, and son John Percy Boyd III.

BELOW Siegel Clore II, Melba’s stepfather. He began the family’s tradition of owning property and vacationing in Tobermory, ON.


2. Southwest Detroit’s Mexicantown neighborhood has been home to Mexican and Latino immigrants since the 1920s due to the area’s proximity to industrial jobs including work at Ford Motor Company.

3. During the Second Great Migration (1940–1970) an estimated 4.3 million Black people migrated north from southern U.S. states such as Alabama.
In Her Own Words:

Rise
Melba Joyce Boyd reflects on finding her voice, a trailblazing mentor and an unexpected place amid the Black Arts Movement and Detroit’s simultaneous racial justice protests.

To preserve the organic nature of the conversation we have chosen to omit the traditional question-and-answer format.

I held poetry in such reverence that I never thought I could publish any of my own

—Melba Joyce Boyd
Melba with her mother Dorothy Clore during a moment at the family cottage Tobermory, Canada.

Abolitionist poet Frances E. W. Harper, as pictured in Melba’s home.

A 1968 map of Detroit shows Conant Gardens and surrounding areas, including Pershing High School, where Boyd graduated in 1967.

Melba poses with her Pershing High School cheerleading squad (5th from left).
After my parents divorced, and my mother remarried, we moved to Conant Gardens, a neighborhood that was essentially developed on land that was granted to Black people to develop housing by Conant, the abolitionist.

At the time we moved, it was a pretty close-knit community, the kind of Black neighborhood in Detroit where your neighbors literally become your extended family, especially when the kids get fused together as friends. We also acquired another brother, John Clore, who was between me and my brother, John Boyd, in age. One of our really good friends to this day is Alex Luvall. We met him the minute we moved. He became friends with me and my brothers. We lived two streets away from each other, and he would be at our house all the time because he only had a much older sister, but no other siblings.

We hung out together, and we got in trouble together, which you never wanted to do because my mom would yell at you, condemn you, and leave you trembling. She would also scold Alex, but not as harshly, saying: “I’m talking to you too, Alex.”

I preferred my stepfather’s style of parenting; everybody did because he never raised his voice. He would give you this philosophical, global perspective of the consequences to certain actions. I remember one time we’d done something, and Alex was trying to slip out the side door. My stepfather told him to sit down. Certain communities in Detroit are like an extended family. We have deep sense of responsibility for one another, and you feel it.
Black vs. University
In 8 Hour Stand-off

by David McKay

Black students have settled the University Student Center, Friday, April 5, and held its Services for eight hours.

The demonstrators, claiming to be in support of the demonstrators of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was gunned down the night before, entered the center and closed the main doors. Signs were carried or attached bearing such slogans as "The King is Dead; Peace is Also Dead." "We must move from resistance to aggression," they said. "In Vietnam," they continued. "Hooray, are you human?" and "We will never be the same, Honorours!"

Dr. James W. Miller, president of the university, saw some of the Black students enter the center at 6:30 a.m. while walking his dog.

It was learned that many of the students in the demonstration had taken the bus to the University from their residence halls, and the center had been effectively taken over by 6:30 a.m. It was not long before White students formed a crowd in front of the center, some opposing the Black students, others supporting them.

Shortly after 8:30, the crowd was sizable enough to be seen from the lower campus. Some students were in sympathy with the Black students, also lamenting the death of Dr. King. One White woman in the crowd was overheard as saying, "Dr. King was a real man. He was a real man. He was a real man. He was a real man. It's all over now."

"We have come to support the students," said a Black student. "This is the only thing we want to do.

Shortly after 10 a.m., President Miller walked from his office in the Administration Building to the front steps of the Student Center and delivered a prepared statement to the demonstrators and the mediators. In the first, he described the scene with which he viewed the death of "this distinguished theologian, gentleman of thought, and leader for non-violent action."

The second statement came as a result of the Black occupation of the Student Center. In it he described the scene as "a certain kind of uncivilized crowd which has now been discovered by the memory of Dr. King."

He added that classes would be held as usual and the hope that the Black students would "refuse the Center to its moral and absolutely immediately."

He then passed copies of the statements through the doors held tightly open by the students inside.

Dr. Miller, aside from his prepared statement, sympathized with the demonstrators as a memorial for Dr. King. "You are understandable in your anger, understandable in your desire to do something," he told the crowd, as he offered his support for the media in trying to resolve the situation.

In an attempt to retain control and order, Dr. Miller told the White crowd, "You can do the right thing, you can do the wrong thing."

A significant side to the entire situation is the fact that the campus is absolutely free of any racial strife or tension, and there was no evidence of any such occurrence.

The students, while some were in favor of the center, others were opposed. "I have faith in our system," said a student. "We must pull together until there's something to fight for.""  

Students hear Dr. Miller's concessions to the Black students' demands

English, the faculty members were starred, each student being asked to see the President about the cancellation of classes. They were directed to the front of the center to wait until they were able to meet with the President and discuss their concerns.

The group waited until they were able to have a reasonable amount of time before they were able to meet with the President. They talked with Dr. Miller, who fully explained the situation to them, asking them to wait until they were able to meet with the faculty and members of the administration.

Dr. Miller told the students that they were "very sensitive to the needs of the administration and the faculty," and that he would do his best to help them.

The students were provided with a list of demands, which included their rights to be heard and to have their voices heard. They were also informed that the University would do its best to help them.

In the end, the students were satisfied with the concessions made by Dr. Miller and the University. They were assured that their voices would be heard and that the University would do its best to help them.
Alex’s mother, Mrs. Luvall, was actually the first person to introduce me to the poetry of Robert Hayden² and Dudley Randall. My mother was a phys-ed teacher so the books in our library at home were history and politics and whatever but not literature. Mrs. Luvall was an elementary teacher. She had literature in their home and she shared it with me. She was offering me something that I would not get at home and I really didn’t realize how much of an influence it would later have. Dudley and Hayden were part of the labor movement in the ‘30s. They were writing poetry with impact. I just didn’t know it yet.

I graduated June of 1967 from Pershing High School. The Detroit Rebellion erupted in July. In the fall, I went to Western (Michigan University) and the following spring, King is assassinated, two days after my 18th birthday. Then, that same year, Bobby Kennedy was killed. I actually shook his hand when he was campaigning in Kalamazoo and spoke near campus.

So, I was so confounded, thinking that this is what adult life is gonna be like, just nonstop intensity. Everything felt like it was connected to the Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-War Movement, and all of it was happening at the same time and in front of our eyes, even at Western. People always think about Ann Arbor as being progressive during the ‘60s, but things were happening in Kalamazoo too.

After Martin Luther King was assassinated we had a student protest. We called ourselves BAM, the Black Students Action Movement. We occupied the Student Center Building. I was pledging Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and it was “Hell Week,” the last week of pledging. But Hell Week was disrupted because it was a real hell week with the death of King. When progressive professors and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) heard that we were protesting, they formed a barrier outside the building entrance, between us and the state police.

It was really tripped out, something you’d expect to see in Detroit, not in Kalamazoo. We did it because it was necessary.
The funny part is I wasn’t supposed to go to Western. My mom wanted me to go to Spelman in Atlanta, and my step-dad offered to buy me a car if I stayed home and went to Wayne State. The basic condition was that I could pick either an HBCU or a state school because, even though we were technically middle class, they couldn’t afford to send me as well as the rest of my siblings to some elite institution. I knew I didn’t want to go down South. I probably would’ve been in jail with all that was happening there; I mean we’re talking about Atlanta in the ’60s. I also didn’t want to go to University of Michigan or Michigan State because they were both so big. Western was perfect because I wanted to feel like I was really going away and I convinced my best friends at the time, Alex and Sandra, to go with me. They were preparing to go to Wayne State, but I talked them into Western. Sandra’s mother, Mrs. Overstreet, drove us to orientation that summer; we were three amigos on our college adventure.

When I started at Western for undergrad, I was a Physical Education major with a dance emphasis. I had studied the arts growing up, including dance and music before college. I played the clarinet in elementary and high school.

But then, I took the freshman composition course, and I just really opened up. I was introduced to James Baldwin, and his words exhilarated my writing. Professor Fritscher suggested I change my major. I wondered if I should do this. I had encouragement from English teachers in high school, especially Ms. Leona Brodsky. I was a good writer, but I didn’t think I could become one. But he thought that I had talent. His encouragement and James Baldwin’s literature changed my life. I still credit them for this.

Baldwin freed me from the idea that I had to write short sentences because I used to write long ones, and only one or two of my teachers in high school didn’t have a problem with that. But the way Baldwin wrote these extended and elegant sentences blew me away. He was also writing about our circumstances. So, that was freedom too, the freedom to write about injustice, and real issues. My parents were cool with me changing majors. They didn’t care what I majored in, as long as I studied.
James Baldwin in 1965. Photo by Maria Austria, the Joods Historisch Museum.
I was awarded a MLK Graduate Scholarship to Western, and pursued a master’s degree in English. That’s when I ran into resistance for the first time. When we had our student demonstration after King was killed, one of our demands was for a Center for Black Studies. During the course, I encountered hostility with Professor Mueller. I found out through the Black grapevine that as the chair of the English Department, he was totally opposed to the notion of Black literature.

For the first time, I was receiving “Cs” on my essays. I’d go to office hours to find out why, and he wouldn’t even talk to me. He’d sit behind his desk and with an arrogant smile on his face. His only comment on my papers was “This is not the work befitting a graduate student.”

I was only 21 years old and had not encountered this evil from any of my professors before this. He’s dead now, but it’s something you don’t forget. Most of my professors were super cool, very supportive, especially Professor Robert Stallman and Professor Herbert Scott. They encouraged me as a developing scholar and poet. They included Black writers in their American Literature courses, and encouraged my interests to pursue it. Subsequently, I found out that Stallman had been a “beat poet.” They created poetry and were also very socially progressive.

Actually, the pushback I got from Mueller was countered by a suggestion from another professor that I should seek publication for an essay I had written on Chester Himes’ novel, *Blind Man with a Pistol*. One of my sorority sisters, Hazel Carlos, said she would send it to her cousin, who was an editor at *Ebony* magazine. Her cousin read it, and he passed it on to Hoyt Fuller, who just so happened to be working on a special issue about Chester Himes. Hoyt Fuller contacted me, and it was right on time, because Mueller could not fail a published graduate student.

Well, Hoyt Fuller, who was a graduate of Wayne State University and was a fellow student of Dudley Randall, gave me my first publication, which became the basis of my master’s thesis. Subsequently, he published many of my essays and my poetry. I’ve been publishing consistently, ever since.
A lot of folks don't know it, but I almost went to law school. I thought I wanted to work in civil rights law, that kind of stuff. I was taking a class to prepare for the LSAT. About a month into the class, I said, I don’t want to become a lawyer because it means that this is the kind of literature I'll have to read for the rest of my life. So, even though I'd paid for it and everything, I stopped. You know, there are all of these alternate realities and possibilities, but if I'd done one thing different I probably wouldn’t have had the benefit of meeting and being influenced by Dudley Randall.

I had been reading his books. I even did an independent study on Black poetry because you could get all of the Broadside Press books in the bookstore and even the library at Western. Right after I finished my master's at Western, Dudley hired me.

All of this comes together as I’m studying poetry, even quietly aspiring, but I’m really not thinking that I’m good enough to be a poet. I held poetry in such reverence; I figured I could write about poetry and then, in that way, be promoting the literature. Then, when I started working for Dudley it was really a front row seat. It essentially put me in the middle of the Black Arts Movement, which jumped off in 1965. I came into it in 1972, and through Dudley and Broadside I started meeting all of these people and then he asked me if I wrote poetry. I said, well, I try. I never thought when I showed him, he would publish me. But he did, and as part of the famous Broadside series too.
When you consider the timing, it was a blessing in disguise. The expansion of Black literature as a genre, and the rapid growth of poetry publishing during that time were occurring in Detroit. New York was still the center of mainstream publishing, and a few, select writers were making it into print with those houses. Most of the Black poetry presses at that time would maybe put out one or two books a year. Dudley Randall’s Broadside Press started out with a four-books-per-year plan, but by the time I became his assistant editor, he was releasing ten to twelve books a year; it was definitely a production line. He published 90 titles in less than 10 years, with over 500,000 books in multiple printings.

One of the reasons Dudley Randall was the most successful was because he was a poet and a librarian, which meant he knew all poets and any poetry that had been published in the English language. He was also fluent in Russian and German. He also knew how books should look, how they should be printed and bound, so Broadside books were attractive and professional. They were carefully edited and not made with a mimeograph machine. Randall also knew how to network the libraries, where and when to send press releases when the books were published. Hoyt Fuller listed the books in *Black World* magazine. Detroit was a working class town with access to talented printers. Black bookstores had also started opening up in the major cities across the country, and they were ordering his books. One of my responsibilities was to write a press release when a new book came out.

Dudley was also a genius about connecting poetry to the stage. He was the first one to push me out there. In fact, my first reading was with him and Naomi Long Madgett at the Highland Park Library. They were invited to read together, and he introduced me and said, I’m going to give some of my time to Melba so you can hear her poetry. What I remember most about that day is, afterwards Naomi told me how much she liked my work. I still call them “my poetry parents.”

Dudley appointed me as his official biographer and he put that in his will. I think that was a really, really smart thing to do, not because it was me, but because he took care of his legacy. I’ve seen too many poets, artists and entertainers whose estates are just a total mess after they’re gone. I was hugely flattered, but to a large extent, intimidated by the responsibility; the preservation of a significant part of the Black artistic heritage of the city of Detroit. It’s a tradition that’s firmly rooted in change and progress. We see it in the writing, in the art, the music, the creativity. It’s always been rooted in challenging the oppression of working people,
smashing the whole idea of race and class. These lies about humanity have been imposed on us, reeking hatred and justifying injustice! Having Dudley as my mentor, someone who was part of the Labor Movement in the ’30s and the Civil Rights Movement of the ‘50s and ‘60s, taught me about commitment and carrying the torch forward.
I’ve traveled over much of the world. While living and visiting foreign places, I find myself comparing them to home. And when I reflect on this, I am able to see Detroit within a much bigger context and in relationship to the planet. Things happened in Detroit. Major movements. When I went to Bremen, Germany, as a Fulbright Scholar, I immediately bonded with many people there because of their struggle for freedom since the Middle Ages. I didn’t know much about its radical history until I arrived there, but I realized parallels with Detroit, as well as the social and cultural movements of the 1960s.

Bremen was founded in the Middle Ages as a free city state. It was a trade city on the Weser, a river, which runs to the North Sea, which reminded me of the Detroit River and the Great Lakes. When Germany became a country in 1848, Bremen literally fought a war to remain independent. Later, Hitler had to send the army to occupy Bremen because when he was elected the citizens voted to secede from Germany. They were like, f--- your Third Reich. Oh man, the history is so intriguing, and such a significant part of its cultural identity, like Detroit. The Bremen connection is still important to me. I was only there for a year, but I keep returning because of the people and the culture.

You don’t really think about this legacy stuff until you have to, though I’ve been dropping bread crumbs along the way in different essays. I suppose I’ve got to really sit down and finally start my memoirs. It’s a joke with my family, but I do see myself retiring from academia. I’ve also got a lot of ideas in the wings waiting for me. I have a screenplay about Frances Harper. I really would like to see that come to fruition. But I don’t know that industry, and you have to have connections. I need to find someone who can help me navigate that terrain.

Once I have more time, I’ll probably just go to the cabin in Canada to start figuring things out. I’ve done so much of my writing up there because when we’re on the Georgian Bay, there is no fear, no constant consideration of all of those problematic issues of being Black in America. It’s a gift to be with nature like that.

The biggest thing for me personally, is the hope that the poetry, you know, will live on and people will find some value in it regardless of what age you come to it.

I think that’s the way most poets and artists feel. But my other theory, though, is that we’ll never know until we die, and we may not know s--- when we die. We may just be dead.
Melba's portrait is featured alongside Dudley Randall (far left) and Naomi Long Madgett as part of Detroit artist Nicole Macdonald’s Detroit-based poets and publishers series. The mural is located on Trumbull Avenue next to Wayne State University’s athletic fields.
1. Conant Gardens is an historic northeast Detroit neighborhood bounded by Nevada and Conant streets, and Seven Mile and Ryan roads. Shubael Conant, an abolitionist and the founder and first president of the Detroit Anti-Slavery Society, was the land’s original owner. In the 1920s, scores of Black middle class families bought and in some cases built homes in certain neighborhoods due to a lack of deed restrictions against Black ownership.

2. Robert Hayden, a Detroit native, was the first Black writer to be appointed Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, a role more widely known today as US Poet Laureate. Hayden served from 1976 to 1978.

3. There are 107 colleges or universities identified by the U.S. Department of Education as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The designation is a result of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

4. Hoyt W. Fuller was a preeminent literary critic and editor of several black intellectual publications including Black World, which like Ebony was put out by Johnson Publications.

5. Chester Himes was an African American writer celebrated for fiction, autobiographical works and a series of Harlem detective novels.

6. The Black Arts Movement was a Black nationalist movement (1965–1975) focused on music, literature, drama, and the visual arts by Black artists and intellectuals.

7. Naomi Long Madgett was an American poet and publisher. Originally a teacher, she later found fame with her award-winning poems and was also the founder and senior editor of Lotus Press, established in 1972.

8. Bremen is the largest port city on Germany's North Sea coast. It lost its autonomy under the Hitler regime.

9. During World War II, the Battle of Bremen was one of the last battles during the Allied conquest of Germany.
Outro
Melba’s Garden

Poems
1965

(dedicated to all my Brothers and Sisters of southwest Detroit, who did and did not survive)

“Jerry Johnson! Haven’t seen you since ’65.”
quick flashes
of friday nights...
basketball, 99c wine,
motown jams, and partyin’ strong.

“Yeah, haven’t seen you since ’65.”
’65, when we were all
talking jive, laughing loud,
learning little, and losing all.

when all that mattered was
the game — “the Big House”
where Black boys bought manhood
through short lived fame...
found on the page of the Free Press...

“In Print, Man,” they would say
And we would beam about always beating the white boys.

“What happened happened to...
he dead too?”
wine, war, scag, whatever
for only one superstar rode a basketball out of our ford factory fate.
the rest, “in print” in the o-bitch-uary.
But in ’65 our world was
basketball, 99c wine
and talking jive to the motown sound not knowing that our friday nights were sponsored by ford as our heroes dribbled themselves to death.
We Want our City Back

We want our city back. We want our streetlights on. We want our garbage gone. We want our children playing on playgrounds, but not with loaded guns. We want to retire by the river and raise collard greens in abandoned fields. We want our ancestors to rest in peace. We want our city back.

We don't want law and order. We want justice and jobs. We don't want small business. We mean serious business. No more Mom and Pop wig shops. No more Mickey D's rappin' with the homies. No more Dixie Colonels serving Kente cloth cuisine. No more taco supreme. No more indigestion or quick-fix politics. We want our city back.

We don't want police harassing the homeless for being without a lease. We don't want video cops busting crackheads with flashlights at night. We want peacekeepers to capture real dope men reclining in respectable privilege. We want our taxes to track down real assassins. We want our city back.

We don't want Euro-centric or Afro-eccentric edu-macations. We want a freedom curriculum. We want a liberated vision in history remembered. We don't want our children crunched like computer chips to fit in the old world order, worshiping slave holding societies in Egypt and Greece. We want the board of education to take a lie detector test for neglect of the intellect, for assault on our children's senses. We don't want them to be GM execs, or rejects in labor camps. We want dignity, not cupidity. We want our city back.
We want the river dragged
for distraught souls.
We want our homes rebuilt.
We want the guilty
to pay a greed tax
for the living they stole.
We want our city back.

Hey! We ain’t going away
like fugitives escaping
to Canaday!
Our backs are up
against the wall.
This is our clarion call.
Feed the hungry.
Clothe the ragged.
Heal the sick.
Enlighten the ignorant.
Punish the wicked.
And raise the dead!

We want our street lights on.
We want our garbage gone.
We want to be rid
of smack and crack.
We want to retire
by the river.
We want our ancestors
to rest in peace.
We are claiming our history
seizing the hour.
Cause, we mean to take
our city back.
my father did not rape me.
my mother does not hate me.
and I’m at peace with my god.
but, i write to stop the pain.

i write to clean the rain.
i write to incite ocean waves.
i communicate with
the eyes of tornadoes,
and sift through the ash
of volcanoes.
i tell trees to reclaim
their rightful terrain.
i write to stop the pain.

i write apologies to blind fish
swimming with injured fins.
i send get well cards
to crippled, three-legged frogs
who want to hop again.
i write editorials to applaud
dolphins who inspired
an environmental conference.
i write prayers for the noble elk
slain, beheaded and displayed.
i write to stop the pain.

i write pleas for human beings.
i write so white folks
can take off their skin.
i write for black teens
pulling up baggy jeans,
singing syncopated rhythms
in discordant rhyme schemes.
i write for young women
with spiraling, sculptured hair,
reaching for pastel sunsets
painted on false fingernails
i write to stop the pain.

i speak in tongues and
swear in ancient languages
i encode with signs and
transcribe tragic images
i write as a reason to be
i write poetry that bleeds
i write to stop the pain.
this museum was once a dream

Dedication poem for the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History

this museum was once a dream
inscribed inside
the walls of
slave quarters
the gates were guarded
by ghosts in colored bottles
of glass swinging from string
between bleeding trees
they held secrets
of millions severed
from their stories.

brick by brick
memories rebuilt
the amber flare
of ancient Abyssinian splendor.
the ancestors insisted
like the swelling
of the mighty Mississippi
like escaping fugitives
tracing moss from
limb to limb,
from Alabama
through Tennessee,
from Africa through Tuskegee.

swollen fingers molded
like mortar along
the angles of pyramids
following lost rivers
and vanishing borders
recollecting cotton blossoms
strewn beside a
narrow stream
of blue light
splitting the distance

the entrance
to this museum
was hidden within
memories rediscovered.
the dream restored
on the frozen path
of freedom
was the imprint of
God's great reach
and the immortal human story
when they bring
a building down,
when they make
history absent,
when they implode
a cistern of memories
into a basement grave,
where do the
ghosts go?

are they given
an eviction notice?
do they read
the headlines
of runaway newspapers
rumbling down
the street?
or do they
pass on
a posting
caught on a
jagged nail or
transfixed to
crumbling concrete?

did the ghost
of the “light-skinned
colored girl”
who ran elevator
number 5
call a meeting
between floors
to discuss
the demise?
or did the last
of the charmed,
posed mannequins
hiding in the
bridal suite
of dressing rooms,
send out the
fatal alarm?

burial of a building

upon the 1998 implosion of the J.L. Hudson’s
department store in Detroit
did the ghosts follow
our footprints
to sit atop our houses?
or did they hover
next to high rise towers
and likewise, point
translucent fingers
and clink champagne glasses
filled with misty laughter?
or did the blast
call their skeletons
to attention,
disrupt such earth
bound musings
and with the wind
scatter them
with dust, ashes
and disoriented pigeons?

another landmark gone—
another space left behind,
another hole in a story,
another burial
to collect bones,
another place
from where ghosts
are gone.

perhaps, one of the
under-employed,
excavating the remains
for bronze fixtures and
copper veins,
left an echo
so disturbing
it alerted
returning spirits —
disrupted their
eternal shopping
for imported,
after dinner mints,
for that exquisite dress
with the perfect fit,
for that pin-striped suit
for the anniversary
occasion, or for
another matching set
of muffins and scarves
for Xmas past
celebrations.

The Book of Melba
A Mingus Among Us and a Walden Within Us

for Donald Walden (1938–2008)

Dexter Gordon glanced back, saw Donald Walden taking Giant Steps.

So, Dexter held the gate, makin’ the jazz greats wait—Monk, Bird, Coltrane the contentious Miles the tumultuous Lateef and the sultry Billie — makin’ a wake for the sax man from Detroit by way of St. Louie, representin’ bebop breaking fixed notes, traversing linear scales, and all repressive constrictions impaled on the music sheets, resisting the inconvenience of mortal skin when spirit enchants song and rules of Earth bound dominions diminish.

In the “D” he was called “the bebop police,” who styled in razor sharp GQ slacks as distinctive as his tenor sax, articulating transformative sets marking planets.

Yeah, there is a Mingus among us but there is a Donald Walden within us.
Blow Marcus Blow

for Marcus Belgrave (1936–2015) *

There's jazz around the corner / just beyond the gold gate, / Hallelujah jazz.
—Art Paul Schlosser

Marcus blows away
Our Detroit blues,
I said,
Marcus Belgrave
blows away our
never-ending blues
he breaks off
circuitous sounds
inside the city's
contentious womb.

Motown lyrics swing,
as bebop registers
iconic scales
that make
spirits roar
even when

Winter comes
and locks
in the cold.

we shiver with
uncertainty within
shifting winds—
this end of an era
we mourn with the
passing of a true
Renaissance man,
and then celebrate
his reunion with
Dizzy, Miles
and Satchmo
kicking it with
Cox,
McKinney
and Walden
inside timelessness —
the freedom zone
of eternal jazz.

So, blow Gabriel.
Go blow your horn
Cause jazz is
Round the corner,
"Hallelujah jazz,"
and Marcus Belgrave
is joinin' your band
in the Promise Land.

Blow Marcus Blow!
Blow Marcus Blow!

*Marcus Belgrave (1936–2015) was the 2009 Kresge Eminent Artist
The Bass Is Woman

for Marion Hayden*

At a left-angled tilt, adjacent to her throat
Marion mind melds with this magnificent instrument.

Lithe, swift fingers restringing eighth notes in cut time against bare-knuckle restraints releasing stress from neck past breasts through a navel leading into a womb gifting violet riffs like sweet rose water brimming inside uninhibited thick hips that swing and sway, dancing on ripples of unreachable prayers.

Her brown curves ground earth tones at the base of rhythm—the backbone of song.

The bass is woman.

*Marion Hayden was a 2016 Kresge Artist Fellow
we did not grow
between concrete
cracks like weeds in
an asphalt jungle.
we were planted
by parents
in discrete cottages
underneath protective
tree branches in
a mythical garden.

like her name,
she was a rose
delicate and tender
with a voice
as sweet as
the lilt of a child’s.
she nurtured
kindness as intelligence,
trimmed jagged
edges with literature,
and groomed us
into refined,
complex citizens
sent to challenge
a city waiting
to trap us in
classic betrayal
or to cast us
into riddles
crueler than the
confluence of our
own errors.

even when we
wept in the dark,
she never locked
the gate
or turned out
the light
above the
kitchen
window.
the death of a time

you receive
these letters
on a curl
of smoke
rising from
your cigar.
it is the
earliest moment
of morning
when light
is a quiet pink
stretched across
the reflection between
the Detroit River
and the Canadian clouds.

i write you
reluctantly,
because I have
few words of
encouragement
only faith
and an ongoing
devotion for
a world
we keep
in the deepest
focus of
our dreams.

when you peer
through these words
i pray they
will not dissuade
your belief in us Ché.
for it is not
the retreat
or the disparity
of our numbers
that concerns me,
but rather
the madness
that passes for
militancy in these
lost years.

blackness used
to be a declaration
of defiance,
of self defense.
now,
Africa in America
is a desire
for respectability,
a dance with republican
governors on
inaugural ballroom floors—
overtures that muffle
a numbness
more frightening
than the burgeoning
fascism and the
inaction accompanying
the craving for money
and the quest
for acceptance.
identity is a departure from the land, a retrenchment of our indigenous ancestry, a narrowness that inhibits memory breathing in the Americas, thought molded without clay or stone.
and in these empty air pockets our children are born like filters where innocence has no value or bearing on the future, where everything is a corporation or a government and they police our poetry and jail our imaginations banished to the middle of the corn fields to mourn the death of a time, while the reaper ravages those still wandering the cities.

we could not shout loud enough to discompose them, to disconcert their ears sewn shut, or their eyes crusted closed. they did not want to find the lamps aligning history or the difficult path leading us to the disturbance.

maybe, this is an end point, where we ascend with the decline of butterflies, where we disembowel after a respite in the cocoon.

The Book of Melba
C’est Une Histoire Extraordinaire

for Michele and Genieve Fabre

We escape to Paris to liberate the American dictionary, to write ourselves out of metaphors cursing the color of expatriate authors estranged from our native tongue.

And you are ambassadors on journeys to foreign literature, harboring inscriptions of black aesthetics condemned for angry cadence yearning to speak as freely as bebop transcending grief making love by le Seine when the Spring of ´68 merged centuries of revolutions convening with Negritude to celebrate Josephine's magnificent derriere and Ellington's luminous suites.
You contradict 
snide dismissals 
of Wright’s Bigger, 
you explicate 
reasoning for 
violent imagery 
distilled into 
poetic beauty 
and theorize 
that masking 
is coded magic 
in plays like 
Sidney Bechet’s 
vertical schematics 
romancing your 
affection into 
marriage, 
while you reveal 
mystery within 
our subversive 
imaginary of 
nouveau noire 
protest art.

We escape 
to Paris, 
and you are 
our embassy. 
c’est une histoire 
extraordinaire.
It is science fiction.

most citizens
oscillate
between
obscurity
and insignificance,
giving and scraping
the walls
of the tomb.

their signatures
cringing there,
confused
and ordinary.

the accumulation
of pain and
the ambiguity
of guilt
can no longer
be forgotten
in withered weekends
by the fireplace
with dry wine
an another
mistaken identity,
ignorant of
the humiliation
of the phone
screaming
at 3 a.m.
about a bullet
in a chest
and a wife
with a knife.

Believe
what we feel.

too much death
is buried
between
our eyes
to listen
to the limits
of the living.

We are the unknown,
invisible Indians
planting corn.
meridians
who walk
in sidewalk seams,
spinning the spiral
in between,
blending clouds
above
midnight trees.

waiting...
for fresh breath
of Mayans
spreading tears
on the dawn.
s

It's 1984
and they're knocking
at your door.
WAKE UP!
Your house
Is on fire,
Your lover is a liar,
And somebody stole
Your shoes.

He was hanging
Off the chair,
Then sitting on the sink,
Waiting by the mailbox
Smoking cigarettes.

Quick!

You got
15 seconds left

To scrap this
TV script.

Don't smile
at plastic flowers
or wish for a
black Corvette,
or believe imitation cheese
grows on supermarket shelves.
while drinking bottled water,
they painted your fingernails,
while staring at the TV set,
they clipped your ears,
parted your brain,
and told you
eternal bliss
is endless,
mindless
sex.
It's 1984,
And they're knocking
At your door.
Your house
Is on fire,
Your lover
is a liar and
they're sending you
to a polluted garden.

WAKE UP!
Somebody stole
Your orange & purple,
Psychedelic,
Made in Taiwan,
High top,
Tennis shoes.

Bremen, December 19, 1983
Detroit, Feb. 2006
Beyond her career as a poet, Melba Joyce Boyd is also a prolific essayist and biographer. Known for making blunt arguments about key cultural moments and historic figures, she has published writings in more than 100 literary and scholarly journals.
The Black Arts Movement (1965–1977) was an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement, and the impetus of this cultural revolution was the consequence of an artist/activist consciousness that embraced the notion of race pride, self determination and the need to engage in institution building. In the Midwest, Chicago and Detroit were key cities during this era because they contained large and industrious African American populations and housed major cultural institutions. The Du Sable Museum of African American History and Art, The Kuumba Workshop, the Organization of Black Art and Culture and The Negro Digest operated in Chicago; while the Broadside Press, Rappa House, Concept East and the Shrine of the Black Madonna were the loci of much activity in Detroit. Sustained through collective interests and burgeoning activities, interaction between the two cultural communities was largely the result of proximity and personal histories.

The Black Arts Movement is usually associated with those artists whose careers became most visible. The younger writers, such as LeRoi Jones (Imamu Baraka), Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti) and Nikki Giovanni are often the focus of discussion and their militant styles delineate what is regarded as characteristic of the literature. However, no era stands independent of previous time periods. Even though the vocabulary of the Black Arts Movement was influenced by the Black Liberation Movement, the leadership responsible for the institutions that provided the forums for literary militancy stood on the shoulders of writers whose expertise and experience were grounded in the preceding decades.

For some undetermined reason, prominent cultural leaders were often poets. Perhaps, as prophets and visionaries they were particularly suited for the role of institutional directors. At any rate, women poets were as critical to the era as their male counterparts and counterpoints. The poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, Margaret Danner, who died in 1984, and to a lesser extent, Margaret Burroughs, greatly influenced the aesthetic development of the younger poets. Although these women writers embraced the goal of African American freedom and their aesthetic expressions articulated race pride in imagery configured to counter the inhumane stereotypes of black people, there was also a class consciousness that permeated their poetry because their historical development during the Great Depression (1930s) and the Labor Movement (1930–40s) encouraged a deeper understanding of the economics of discrimination.

All of these women poets at one time or another lived in Chicago, and for a very brief period, Margaret Danner lived in Detroit; however, they all frequented Detroit throughout their careers. Their poetry was published by Broadside Press during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and they gave readings to enthusiastic crowds in Detroit and Chicago during the Black Arts Movement. But in as much as a romantic recollection would be more satisfactory for the reconstruction of a noble history, a closer examination of relationships revealed the differences and difficulties within the camp. The politics of personalities sometimes strained friendships and created conflicts. Hence, it was a challenging and colorful period when the pretense of race solidarity was the reigning rhetoric, but not necessarily the practice.

From: “Prophets for a New Day”: The Cultural Activism of Margaret Danner, Margaret Burroughs, Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker During the Black Arts Movement, Wayne State University.

One afternoon when my car was in the shop and Dudley drove me home so I would not have to wait on the bus, we talked about writing, American literature, racial discrimination — a collage of topics. When he asked me, “What do you think about whites teaching Black literature?” I paused because I suspected he was trying to figure out my cultural
politics. I told him, “I went to university when the subject wasn’t even offered until we, the students, protested and demonstrated to get courses in Black studies. There wasn’t a single Black professor in the English department, and if it hadn’t been for Professor Murphy, a white man who studied Black literature on his own, the course wouldn’t have happened, at least not while I was a student. I’d been reading Black literature on my own, but when he offered to teach the course, I got the chance to study it in the classroom as an English major, and I was thankful for the opportunity.

“I agree, but you know a lot of Blacks don’t feel that way,” Dudley said quietly.

“I know, but I also wanted to know how the literature worked, and that meant more than just talking about the problem of racism. I wanted to figure out how the words worked, which most of the Black students in the class weren’t interested in. They took the course because they mistakenly thought it would be easy, and the lectures on symbolism, metaphors, literary style and vocabulary were not that interesting to them.”

A few weeks later, Dudley asked me, “Do you write poetry?” I admitted that I did, but I said it reluctantly because I kept my poems in notebooks, only to be read by the uncritical eyes of family and close friends. My poetry professor, Robert Stillman, at Western Michigan University encouraged me to write poetry, but as a student of literature, I held poetry in such reverence that I never thought that I could ever publish any of my own. But I was complimented by Dudley’s inquiry and both curious and anxious to get his appraisal. I showed him the poem “1965,” and he made one comment about developing parallelism to enhance its form. I realized at once that the key to his editorial judgment was that he could read a poem and determine how to strengthen it without infringing on its originality or thematic intentions.

After I reworked the poem and showed it to him, he said, “I’m going to publish this in the Broadside Series.” I shared more poems with him, and he further encouraged me by inviting me to read poetry with him and Naomi Long Madgett at the Highland Park Public Library.


Detroit poets cling to the craziness of resistance in the face of literary traditions, and they scoff at the rules of conventional politics. Despite the conservative shift of society, Detroit poets are melded and embellished by diversity. They delve into the unknown depths and garner creative energy as ideology.

The poets of this time and place recover the dead streets of a once vital Paradise Valley. They remember and give voice to ghosts living underneath newly paved streets, deadened by hollow corridors and dreams deprived of passion. From the vanquished magic of Spanish accents that linger in the aftermath of confrontations with American English, poets save and savor the grace of ancient, indigenous sensibility. From the unseen strength of Slavic undertones, poets inhabit corners of vigilant neighborhoods. Contesting the onslaught of natural and unnatural storms, they invent new visions and open an old life to an earth renewed.

Detroit poets write about the city as a living entity. ... These poets listen to the hum of history and the clash of metal. They reveal life still striving in the refuge civilization forgets, but never forgives. ... They write under the shade of weathered trees, bathe their words in a river that withstands the undertow of the Great Lakes, and with each new poem rebuild meaning for the city.


The subterfuge of America’s sexual psyche is so deep-seated that women who have been victimized are victims even before the assault.
The woman is not to be believed at any cost, especially the Black woman, whose sexual legacy in this country has been the Jezebel — the loose woman, who instigates her own rape. The periphery of comments made by many women and men, even when they believed Anita Hill was harassed, is reflexive of a cultural code that dictates: “As a Black woman, she should have checked him and got him straight from the get-go, but she should have never exposed him in front of white America.” In addition to being accorded so little respect and consideration, Black women are still expected to eradicate the onslaught of male madness and to endure indignities simply because to reveal the truth about the devils in the camp would be an embarrassment for the “race.” Conversely, if Black Americans exhibited stronger political and moral positions on such issues, we would not continue to be consumed by the deluge of contradictions that, historically, have blamed the victim instead of the perpetrator. And in our case, what could be more evident than the fact that slavery is still used by bigots as a reference to demean and degrade us instead of American democracy.

Why is it that women are denied full humanity and must shoulder the weight of everybody else’s weaknesses, especially when the character in question is perfectly prepared to sell us, and even his own mother and sister, down the river in order to achieve fame and prestige by cavorting with the anti-Civil Rights president and his New World Order?

The incapacity of human beings to evolve beyond the superficial, beyond the arbitrary categories of race (which, in our case, were contrived by the slaveholding class to perpetuate our enslavement and subsequent second-class citizenship) and deal with the truth is directly related to the confusion and conflict revealed in responses to the Thomas-Hill hearings. The stratification of race, gender, and class can no longer be assessed by token representation. The New World Order is the Old World Order constructed to the benefit of global corporations. Representation in the hierarchy by people of color, women, even homosexuals, too often reflects a careful selection of well trained, articulate functionaries who facilitate the expectations and directives of that ruling order.


I knew my brother John was intensely involved with a group of frustrated young men angered by the havoc, death, and destruction that the heroin dope trade caused in Black communities throughout Detroit. I thought the meetings he attended were like many gatherings, infused with youthful zeal and enthusiastic political rhetoric. What I did not know was that these meetings were strategic, and that he was part of an underground cadre that harassed and threatened dope dealers until they shut down their predatory businesses and moved out of neighborhoods. This inevitably led to a clash with an undercover Stop Robberies Enjoy Safe Streets (STRESS) unit.

On the night of December 4, 1972, three young Black men retaliated when a STRESS unit blasted a hole in the rear window of their Volkswagen. All four policemen were seriously wounded. A second shootout on December 27 left one officer dead and a second one critically injured. The three men involved in the shootouts were John Percy Boyd Jr. (my brother), Hayward Brown (my first cousin), and Mark Bethune. In retaliation, the Detroit Police Department lashed out at the Black community and targeted the families and friends of Boyd, Brown, and Bethune. The evening following the first shootout, a battalion of police (at least twenty) broke down the front door of my parents’ house with a battering ram and held me, my mother, my stepbrother, and my two-year-old baby brother at gunpoint.
As they ransacked the house, I tried to calm my screaming baby brother and a nervous policeman with a carbine rifle aimed at us yelling, “Freeze! Or I’ll shoot!” In a direct and deliberate tone, I kept repeating, “Can’t you see, I’m holding a baby? Can’t you see, I’m holding a baby?”

I was ordered to sit on the sofa in the living room next to my mother, but I became so angry I defied them and followed the police, who were ransacking our home. I don’t anger easily, and in lieu of the circumstances, I even surprised myself as I began to challenge the police, demanding that they produce a search warrant — swearing at them, and reprimanding them for violating our constitutional rights. To wit, they seemed surprised and annoyed, because I refused to stop my rant despite their threatening weapons.


PRELUDE

If all the wealthy and influential honored were men as the Bible teaches, would they ever throw their lives between God’s sunshine and the shivering poor, and fence in leagues of land by bonds and chains and title deeds, when land and water and air and light are God’s own gifts and heritage to man? Should they not remember that the humblest and poorest human being who enters the threshold of life comes as the child of a King, and at the feast of life be received as the guest of a living God? Would not the vision of Christian grow clearer to see, beneath the darkened skin and shaded countenance, poverty of condition, or the dust and grime of labor, the human soul all written over with the hand marks of Divinity, and the common chains of humanity?

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Philadelphia, 1898

Like the crocuses, we awaken every spring, the sun still calling our color, the rain refilling the rivers. The Afro-American spiral of history has no clear opening or closing. It should not be flattened by innocuous memory or inflated by postured revisions. Superimposing the resiliency of Frances Harper’s path, I encountered the ongoing conflicts of human despair and defiant resistance. The shouting sidewalks tell us what is too obvious — we are running out of time. The people fill their shrinking space with blasting music. Their faces, hung-heavy, lifted by liquor and the death crack of cocaine, contour a known fact nearly nobody notices. The quagmire of hopelessness steals more grandchildren in a week than Harriet “Moses” Tubman ever delivered. This retrieval of Harper’s inscription is a resonance of resistance, confronting the cryptic irony of human history.

Melba Joyce Boyd, Detroit, 1994


My interest in poetry occurred just prior to my entry into American activism on April 4, 1968, when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. It was two days after my eighteenth birthday. I joined a student protest at Western Michigan University to acknowledge the tragedy of King’s death and illuminate American hypocrisy. While occupying the Student Union Building, the Michigan National Guard threatened to forcibly remove us. Fortunately, the Board of Regents of the University intervened and accommodated our demands for a Center for Black Studies and the establishment of a Martin Luther King Scholarship Fund for students of color.
[Gil] Scott-Heron’s poetry inspired my aspirations to become a poet, and his cultural presence informed my poetics and my politics, which was still the case during a historical moment in Germany. In the spring of 1984, Gil Scott-Heron appeared in concert at the University of Bremen in West Germany. The audience was largely peace protesters who identified themselves as “'68ers,” a term rooted in European activism that developed in tandem with the Civil Rights and Peace Movements in the United States. At the time, I was a Fulbright professor, teaching American literature, protesting the war, and writing poetry. And, like Gil Scott-Heron, I was collaborating with a jazz musician, Michael Sievert, for performances.

Green poems are written
In blue violet striping amber.
Skeletons signature
The sidewalks of Bremen:
“Wir waren dafür.
Jetzt sind wir tot.
Was wird der nächste
Krieg bringen?”

Shortly after I arrived in Germany in the summer of 1983, I attended a concert featuring Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels in Frankfurt. The venue was overflowing, and people went wild when Mitch Ryder announced: “Ich bin aus Amerika, aber er ist nicht mein Präsident;” (“I am from America, but he is not my President.”) This public dismissal of Reagan was a declaration of the band’s political stance against what was happening in Germany. Mitch Ryder was voicing the anti-war sentiments of our generation in the U.S. and connecting with a cross-continental peace movement that was vital and thriving in this historical context. I was invigorated and excited that members of this rock ‘n’ roll band from Detroit contained members who had attended Pershing High School, which was also my alma mater. Another irony was that the short-range, nuclear missiles were called Pershing II’s, a reference in my poem, “Intro: the fourteenth flamingo.”

Like Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels, the same radical sentiments of the 1960s–70s ushered Gil Scott-Heron's political discourse and poetics onto the global stage. The momentum continued, and progressive popular music was still relevant in the 1980s during the Cold War. In particular, the face-off on the border between East and West Germany persisted, and the United States deployed Pershing II Missiles while the Soviet Union matched the threat with similar weapons of nuclear destruction. My poem, “Wingless Spiders,” is a description of this duel in a country that had no political power to stop this threat by the two world powers occupying and controlling their divided space:

The Left gun
and the Right gum
face the Line.
Tanks wait
by train tracks
under the trees.
Leaves listen
to throbbing hills
tell legends
about men
with double vision—
wingless Spiders
who will sacrifice
ancient
and injured
cities.

I hold hands
with the women.
We make a ring
around the children.
The men plant
flowers forever
to never forget,
in our throats
the trigger
is cocked.

Wie ein amerikanisches Drama,
with black and brown
Soldiers drinking coca cola
escorting General Black
Jack Pershing
reincarnated as a Missile
through the Black Forest
under “saurer Regen”
to wait for Rotkäppchen
mit Kermit Kohl.

The Book of Melba
Meanwhile, the Anti-War Movement escalated its nonviolent resistance efforts to dissuade the superpowers from igniting their “limited nuclear war”[iv] in Germany.

Scott-Heron's poem, “B Movie” (1981) was very popular with this German audience because it criticizes Ronald Reagan’s reactionary, Republican politics in world affairs that advocated an aggressive, pro-nuclear strategy against the Soviet Union. Scott-Heron recounts Reagan’s progressive politics during the 1950s when he was president of the Screen Actors Guild and gallantly stood up to Senator Joseph McCarthy’s harassment of actors and directors in the movie industry for their liberal politics or affiliations with socialists or communists. But then the song mocks Reagan for abandoning and inverting his activist politics by calling him Rea-gon and metaphorically projecting America’s national identity as a “B” movie.

You go give them liberals hell Ronnie. That was the mandate to the new Captain Bligh on the new ship of fools It was doubtlessly based on his chameleon performance of the past: as a Liberal Democrat As the head of the Studio Actors Guild, when other celluloid savors were cringing in terror from McCarthy, Ron stood tall It goes all the way back from Hollywood to hillbilly From Liberal to libelous, from “Bonzo” to Birch idol, born again Civil rights, women’s rights, gay rights: ...it’s all wrong Call in the cavalry to disrupt this perception of freedom gone wild God damn it, first one wants freedom, then the whole damn world wants freedom

And we almost lost Detroit This time How will we ever get over Losing our minds

Just thirty miles from Detroit Lies a giant power station It ticks each night as the city sleeps Seconds from annihilation But no one stopped to think about the people or How they will survive

From: “Fred Was Feelin’ It”: Echoes of Frederick Douglass in the Voices of Gil Scott-Heron and Donald Glover/Childish Gambino, 2023, Melba Joyce Boyd.

[i] Translation from German to English:
“Wir waren dafür. “We were before, Jetzt sind wir tot. Yet, now we are dead Was wird der nächste What will the next Krieg bringen?” War bring?”

[ii] In these lines of the poem, I describe the German experience as an American Drama with the military presence and the threat of nuclear destruction. “General Blackjack Pershing” is a name General Pershing acquired because during World War I, he commanded the Black troops in the segregated U.S. Army, and “sauer Regen” is German for “sour rain,” which in English sounds like “sour Reagan,” “Rotkäppchen” is Little Red Ridinghood” from the fairy tale, and “Kermit Kohl” refers to Prime Minister Kohl as Reagan’s puppet, like Kermit the frog.

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From *Broadside No. 66 Broadside Series*, December 1972, First and only Broadside printing of 500 copies, Broadside Press, Detroit.

1965 by Melba Joyce Boyd


Blow Marcus Blow for Marcus Belgrave (1936–2015)
A Mingus Among Us and a Walden Within Us for Donald Walden (1938–2008)
The Bass Is Woman for Marion Hayden


the death of a time


this museum was once a dream

Dedication poem for the Charles H. Wright Museum

yari yari: writing for the future


C’est une Historie Extraordinaire


somebody stole your tennis shoes


In Hot Pursuit The Deadly Consequences of Detroit Police Oppression


Prelude


Introduction

From *Songs for Maya*, Melba Joyce Boyd, Broadside Press, Detroit, 1982 2001
Select Works, Citations and Awards

Dr. Melba Joyce Boyd, 2023 Kresge Eminent Artist

Distinguished Professor
Wayne State University
Department of African American Studies
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences


### Education and Academic Career

**EDUCATION**

- **University of Michigan**, Doctor of Arts, English, 1979
- **Western Michigan University**, MA, English, 1972
- **Western Michigan University**, Major: English; Minor: Communications, 1971
- **State of Michigan**, Secondary Education Teaching Certificate, 1971

**ACADEMIC APPOINTMENT HISTORY**

- Promoted to WSU Distinguished Professor, 2005
- Appointed to Department Chair, 2005–2016, 1996–2002
- Promoted to Full Professor, 2001
- Appointed to Associate Professor and Awarded Tenure, Wayne State University, 1993
- Awarded Tenure, University of Michigan, 1990

- Appointed to Assistant Professor, University of Iowa, 1983
- Promoted to Associate Professor, Ohio State University, 1988

**FACULTY APPOINTMENTS AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS**

- **University of Michigan**, Center for Afro-American and African Studies, Adjunct Professor, 1992–present
- **Fudan University**, Shanghai, China, Visiting Professor, 2009
- **University of Michigan-Flint**, African-American Studies Program, Director and Associate Professor, 1989–93, Tenured 1990
- **Ohio State University**, Department of Black Studies and Center for Women’s Studies, Associate Professor, 1988–89
- **University of Iowa**, Department of English and Black World Studies, Assistant Professor, 1983–88
- **Colgate University**, Department of English and Black and Latino Studies Program, Visiting Professor, 1986
University of Bremen  
West Germany  
Department of English and American Studies  
Senior Fulbright Lecturer  
1983–84

University of Iowa  
Visiting Professor of Afro-American Literature,  
1982–83

Wayne County Community College  
Instructor  
1972–82

Shaw College of Detroit  
Humanities Department  
Instructor  
1974–76

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIPS

Academy of Scholars  
Collegium for African American Research  
Association for the Study of African American  
Life and History  
American Studies Association

Awards and Honors

2019  
Elected to the Academy of Scholars  
Wayne State University

2015  
Service Award  
Association for the Study of African American  
Life and History

Service Award  
International Institute of Detroit

2013  
Michigan Notable Book Award for Poetry,  
Death Dance of a Butterfly

2012  
Sojourner Truth Meritorious Award  
National Association of Negro Business and  
Professional Women’s Association

2010  
Independent Publishers Book of the Year,  
Gold Award in Poetry,  
Roses and Revolutions: The Selected Writings  
of Dudley Randall

Finalist for ForeWord Book of the Year Award,  
Roses and Revolutions: The Selected Writings  
of Dudley Randall

Finalist for NAACP Image Award in Poetry,  
Roses and Revolutions: The Selected Writings  
of Dudley Randall

Library of Michigan, Top 20 Books on  
Michigan History and Culture,  
Roses and Revolutions: The Selected Writings  
of Dudley Randall

The Women’s Committee Award  
Charles H. Wright Museum of African  
American History

2009  
50 Women of Excellence Award  
The Michigan Chronicle

2007  
Heritage Award  
Anthony Wayne Society

2004  
Black Caucus Honor Award in Nonfiction,  
American Library Association  
for Wrestling with the Muse: Dudley Randall  
and the Broadside Press

1996  
Award for Outstanding Achievements in the  
Literary Arts  
Frances E. W. Harper Literary Society
1995  
Award for Literary Contributions to African American Culture  
Links Incorporated, Ann Arbor Chapter

President’s Affirmative Action Award  
Wayne State University

1991  
Faculty Research Grant Award,  
University of Michigan  
Rackham Graduate College

1990  
Recognition for Major Contributions to African American Culture  
Society of the Culturally Concerned

1989  
Research and Publication Award  
Ohio State University, College of the Humanities

Old Gold Summer Research Fellowship  
The University of Iowa

1981  
Individual Artist Award, Poetry,  
Michigan Council for the Arts

1978  
Literature Award  
National Conference of Artists,  
Michigan Chapter

Poetry

BOOKS AUTHORED

Death Dance of a Butterfly.  

blues music sky of mourning: the German poems.  

the province of literary cats.  

Letters to Ché.  

The Inventory of Black Roses.  

Lied fur Maya/Song for Maya.  

Thirteen Frozen Flamingoes.  

Song for Maya.  

Cat Eyes and Dead Wood.  
Commissioned Work

ALSO PUBLISHED


Lines from “We Want Our City Back,” in the sculpture, Transcending: Michigan’s Tribute to Labor, installed in downtown Detroit, 2003.

_This museum was once a dream_, poem for The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit, engraved in bronze on dedication plaque, 1997.

**Scholarly Writing**

**BOOKS AUTHORED**


**BOOKS EDITED**


**FILM AND VIDEO**

_A Poet’s Poet: The Legacy of Naomi Long Madgett_, Writer and Director, Virgil Carr Center (Revised 2022)


_Star by Star: Naomi Long Madgett, Poet and Publisher_, Co-Producer, penUltimate, Ltd. 2012.


**CHAPTERS WRITTEN**


“People Who Have Done Bad Things: Police Detroit," in _Why We Can’t Sing America_, Joyce Ann Joyce, Ed. (forthcoming, 2023)


EDITORSHIPS OF SERIES


JOURNAL ARTICLES PUBLISHED


“Prophets for a New Day: The Cultural Activism of Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Danner, Margaret Burroughs and Margaret Walker During the Black Arts Movement,” Revista Cantera de Estudios Ingeles 37, Universidad de la Laguna, Spain, 1998.


INVITED REVIEW ARTICLES


Review of The Last Holiday by Gil Scott-Heron, Detroit Metro Times, August 11, 2012.


EDITORIAL

Freelance writer, Detroit Metro Times, 1980–82.

Freelance writer, Detroit Sun, 1975–76.
Influential. Distinguished. Renowned.

Expansive as they are, these words do not capture the prolific literary achievements, cultural contributions, and artistic impact of 2023 Kresge Eminent Artist Dr. Melba Joyce Boyd.

Dr. Boyd is a native Detroiter, poet, scholar, editor, essayist and filmmaker. Her prose honors local and global icons, chronicles historic events, explores the lives and experiences of Black Detroiters, and calls clearly for justice and accountability that are long overdue.

She is the award-winning author with 13 books to her name plus over 100 published essays; her work has appeared in anthologies, academic journals, cultural periodicals, and newspapers in the United States and Europe.

Dr. Boyd’s life and work are intertwined with the history of Detroit and its legacy of groundbreaking, game-changing artists. She was assistant editor to Dudley Randall, (who founded Broadside Press) and refers to Randall and Naomi Long Madgett — 2012 Kresge Eminent Artist, founder of Lotus Press, and like Randall, a Detroit Poet Laureate — as her “literary parents.”

Many of Dr. Boyd’s works open with piercing cadence and content that set the table for the story she has prepared for readers and listeners to receive. Her pointed poetry is an amalgamation of history and art, a mingling of fact and feeling — and the space where the two are indistinguishable.

It is an honor to celebrate Dr. Melba Joyce Boyd’s lifetime of achievements — and add the 15th Kresge Eminent Artist Award to an extensive list of well-deserved awards and accolades.

Christina deRoos
Director, Kresge Arts in Detroit
Dr. Melba Joyce Boyd was named the 2023 Kresge Eminent Artist by a distinguished peer group of metro Detroit artists and arts professionals:

**Gil Ashby**  
Artist;  
Associate Professor,  
Illustration Chair (2000–10),  
College for Creative Studies;  
2011 NY Society of Illustration  
Distinguished Educator

**Wendell Harrison**  
Artistic Director, Rebirth Inc.;  
Member/Awardee,  
Chamber Music America;  
2018 Kresge Eminent Artist

**Kahn Santori Davison**  
Writer/Photographer,  
Detroit Metro Times and Model D Media;  
2015 Kresge Artist Fellow

**Scheherazade Washington Parrish**  
Interdisciplinary Artist;  
Co-Director, Detroit Lit

**Grace Serra**  
Art Curator, Wayne State University and University of Michigan

### The Eminent Artist Award

Since 2008 the Kresge Eminent Artist Award has been presented annually to honor one exceptional literary, visual, film or performing artist whose influential body of work, lifelong professional achievements and proven, continued commitment to the Detroit cultural community are evident.

The Kresge Eminent Artist Award celebrates artistic innovation and rewards integrity and depth of vision with the financial support of $50,000. The Kresge Eminent Artist Award is unrestricted and is given annually to an artist who has lived and worked in Wayne, Oakland or Macomb counties for a significant number of years. The annual Kresge Eminent Artist Award, Kresge Artist Fellowships and Gilda Awards – administered by the Kresge Arts in Detroit office of the College for Creative Studies – reflect The Kresge Foundation’s belief that supports for artists themselves are integral to a robust arts and culture ecosystem across metropolitan Detroit.
Kresge Eminent Artists
2008–2022

2022
Olayami Dabls

2019
Gloria House

2021
Shirley Woodson

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Wendell Harrison

2020
Marie Woo

2017
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The Kresge Foundation was founded in 1924 to promote human progress. Today, Kresge fulfills that mission by building and strengthening pathways to opportunity for low-income people in America’s cities, seeking to dismantle structural and systemic barriers to equality and justice. Using a full array of grant, loan and other investment tools, Kresge invests more than $160 million annually to foster economic and social change.

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Unless otherwise noted, photos used throughout this monograph are from the personal collection of Dr. Melba Joyce Boyd. Every effort has been made to locate and credit the holders of copyrighted materials.

Acknowledgements

The creative team extends its sincerest gratitude to Dr. Melba Joyce Boyd for opening the doors of her home and the pages of an inspiring life.

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