

**black  
has  
every  
right  
to be  
angry**

# black has every right to be angry

POEMS

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Alternating Current Press  
Boulder, Colorado

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Published by Alternating Current Press  
Boulder, Colorado 80302  
altcurrentpress.com  
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Library of Congress Control Number: 2023947740  
ISBN-13 (paperback): 978-1-946580-44-3  
ISBN-10 (paperback): 1-946580-44-9  
ISBN-13 (ebook): 978-1-946580-45-0

Interior and cover design: Leah Angstman  
Author photo: Ashley Elizabeth © 2023

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Printed in the United States of America

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“To be a Negro in this country  
and to be relatively conscious  
is to be in a rage almost all the time.”  
—James Baldwin

## savage servant

hottentot venus  
parades naked in paris  
shown for two shillings,  
poked and prodded by stick and finger  
for three, before her syphilitic death.  
le muséum d'histoire naturelle  
retains her corpse where  
her skeleton and body cast  
face away from the audience,  
allowing her ass more attention.

her organs, dissected  
like pre-med-school cadaver,  
display in glass jars, parts  
only properly returned  
and buried in 2002  
after eight years  
of being dragged place to place  
for unwarranted hands to roam  
the edges of her curves.

this is what she knows:  
to be touched  
to entertain  
to be consumed  
over and over and over again  
  
a woman's body never rests.

# HeLa

black body is whittling board  
scraped without permission  
no compensation  
just profit by science  
like a color-by-numbers book  
piecing things together until they fit  
for poor, uneducated workers  
who don't understand "cell"  
or "research" or "alive" or "dead"

hopkins took from black woman  
lied to black woman  
relied on black ignorance  
ran tests on black woman  
took black woman to space  
sold black woman  
cloned black woman  
used black woman for vaccines  
used black woman for more than 25 years

black woman reigns  
only in death

## bad blood

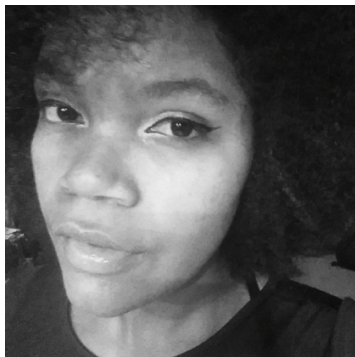
instead of  
*free healthcare and hot meals*  
*and free burial*  
black men of tuskegee  
got 40 years of lies  
from intentionally placed  
black woman Rivers  
who seemed so trustworthy  
so black  
black men  
got placebo  
got turned away from a cure  
got no penicillin  
got infected wives  
got infected children  
got pathetic apology  
from president clinton



# how to be black in amerikkka

1. don't;  
melanin will always be a weapon  
used against you.
2. if you must be black  
be light skint  
with pretty eyes  
and hair that acts white  
enough beauty to take  
and repackage into tik tok trends
3. if you must be black  
learn to code switch  
say yessir no ma'am  
(though that's just polite)  
talk white  
    learn big words  
    change your accent  
be respectful  
announce yourself
4. do not give them a reason;  
they will take it and run.  
they will claim that you were running.
5. see no. 1

# about the author



Ashley Elizabeth (she/her) is a Pushcart-nominated writer and teacher whose work has appeared in *SWWIM*, *Voicemail Poems*, *Rigorous*, and *Sage Cigarettes*, among other outlets. Ashley's debut full-length collection, *A Family Thing*, is forthcoming from Redacted Books/ELJ Editions (August 2024). She is also the author of the chapbook *you were supposed to be a friend* (Nightingale & Sparrow, 2020). As co-founder of the Estuary Collective, Ashley strives to provide free to low-cost programming for femme-identifying BIPOC. When Ashley isn't teaching or working as the chapbook editor with Sundress Publications, she habitually posts on Twitter and Instagram (@ae\_thepoet). She lives in Baltimore, Maryland, with her partner and their cats. Ashley is Black before she is anything else.

# acknowledgments

Thank you to the following presses that gave earlier homes to several poems in this collection:

“savage servant” and “refusal to pledge” were previously published in *yell/shout/scream*

“how to be black in amerikkka” was previously published in *Passages North*

“growing up black girl” was previously published in *For the Sonorous*

“we was things in this country before we was people,” “Ongoing,” and “fill in the bla( )ks” were previously published in *Kahini Quarterly* as one poem

“White Lies” was previously published in *Red Paint Hill Journal*

“things that scare ytpipo and/or police” was previously published by Zoetic Press

“It is no surprise that I am articulate” was previously published in *Bitchin’ Kitsch*

“ain’t y’all tired?” “welfare check,” and “Not what we expected” were previously published in *Rigorous*

“black hands still picking cotton in 2019” was previously published in *SWWIM*

“Because we know it’s going to happen” was previously published in *Versification* and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize

“Dear Black Mothers / whose children die by white hand” was previously published in *What Rough Beast* by Indolent Books

“And the cycle continues.” was previously published in *Drunk Monkeys*

“& do it with a smile” was previously published in *Sledgehammer Lit*

“Am I racist?” was previously published in *West Trestle Review*





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