

A Poet's (testifying) Introduction: #BeyondHashtags (Visionary Possibilities)

- by doris davenport, Ph.D.

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Greetings to the Exhibit Attendees and Congratulations to the 26 Exhibited Artists.

As they used to say at Shady Grove Baptist Church, at the top of the hill on Soque Street, i bring you greetings from Northeast GA. That makes me a certified (re/defined) *Affrilachian*: both African American and Appalachian. As such, i am honored to be a part of this glorious gallery of artists and i am uniquely suited to "witness" this exhibit, because our Affrilachian communities defy most stereotypical assumptions. Listen:

Soque is a Cherokee word turned Black on the hill, across
the railroad tracks, in Appalachian foothills, where madness
like morning glories took over everyone trying to be insane
and acceptable all the time and all the time, hainted ("haunted").

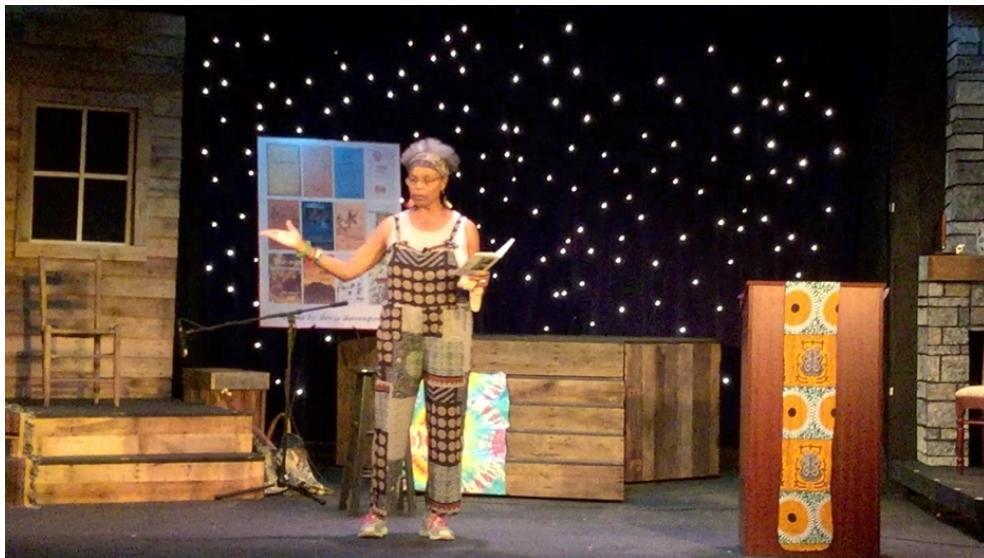
Mack, our cousin, said he saw a casket roll down Soque.

Stopped in front of 103 & rolled back up the hill again. [. . .]

Why do they stay there, you ask.

How do they live? What is there?

(from *Soque Street Poems*, 31)



Affralachian. Soque Street. And i have lived my life joyfully celebrating varieties of diasporic Black Cultural Experience(s). i have tried to “highlight positive images of black culture and to contribute to the legacy of black artistry,” as Director La Ruchala Murphy mentions.

This exhibit surely has “positive images,” exuberant interpretations of the familiar re-presented (presented newly) in diverse Visions & possibilities.

This exhibit radiates (energetic) engagement in life: liveliness, activity. It is rich in palettes, and presentations, from realistic photographs to narrative abstracts. Each canvas tells a story with dynamic rhythm and movement, inside and off the canvas. Each canvas is a “call and response” between the artist and the audience.

*A*s Zora Neale Hurston, our iconic writer-anthropologist, wrote in her classic 1934 essay, “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” there are identifiable elements to our art forms - then and now. Traits like: drama, the will to adorn, angularity, asymmetry, originality and in dance, “dynamic suggestion.” These *shared* cultural elements are *individually* expressed and

delineated by each artist - all require responses: interaction, reaction, participation. The exhibition immediately reminded me, for example, of my own book, *Soquee Street Poems* read from earlier / above, where i describe

Faces un-animated.
 Shoulders erect & stiff.
 Sunday-best, if possible;
 if not, a pose saying, "Well, this me.
 Take it or leave it."
 Every now and then
 a face, a child, still grins
 an adult caught
 about to get stiff
 characters so
 strong they defy
 attempts to make them one-dimensional, flat . . . ("Country" 29)

*T*hese artists, like my community people being photographed, also defy "projected"

flattening with interactive stories, compelled responses based in *y/our* stories.

Accordingly, i respond to this exhibit, from my perspectives, and immersion in African American culture (writer, performance poet, photographer, educator; lifelong student, dancer, singer, visual artist & dulcimer player).

i respond and *interact* as doris diosa davenport, 72 year old activist, educator / writer / literary & performance poet; born and raised in a Cherokee Homeland (colonized by Europeans as Northeast GA), a place that grounds and influences my belief in *magical* possibilities. i am a proud "black mountain - womon." An Affrilachian lesbian-feminist bi-amorous visionary (pronouns: person / per). With degrees from Paine College (B.A. English),

SUNY Buffalo (M.A.) and the University of Southern California (Ph.D. African American Literature). Publisher of twelve (12) books: most recently *rectify my soul* and *dancing in time*, available from Amazon.com). **Predominant beliefs: truth and art.**

As such, as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, i enjoy “seeing” / feeling diverse Queer Blackness or BlackQueered images in several exhibition pieces. As a lifelong student of myriad multi-ethnic and multi-cultural realities, i learn from each canvas. As an avid believer and connoisseur of speculative fictions (and facts,) i am transported by the Afro-Futurism here. And if i had the chance, alone with the hung exhibit, i would dance wordlessly, making happy non-verbal sounds. (That was my first visceral reaction.) This exhibit, as mentioned, calls for a(n original) response(s).

So - IMPROMPTU WRITING (CREATIVE) WORKSHOP: What is your response?

Which parts of you are engaged, or dis-engaged' involved or not - and why?

Write an honest response in a few words or short statements: what can you say? (Go ahead: write. :)) Maybe you feel moved to sing, or dance, or paint. Create it. Document it: My Response to this exhibit . . . (No cheating: please do not plagiarize or use any of my words / responses / adjectives! TY.)

*F*inally, i respond with gratitude. As African American artists constantly demonstrate, most attempts to limit, stereotype, suppress (our vote or our lives) us, are ultimately pointless because - still, we rise (to paraphrase Maya Angelou). We rise, converge, create. And we rise as our Spirits move us: vibrant, lively, exuberant, intensely present. So, accordingly, i am grateful to be present, a witness to this show.

CITED & SUGGESTED RE/SOURCES & NOTES

CITED:

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Characteristics of Negro Expression" in *The Sanctified Church* (Berkeley, CA: Turtle Island P, 1981), 49-68.

davenport, doris. *Soque Street Poems*. Sautee Nacoochee, GA: SNCA Community Organization, 1995.

SUGGESTED READINGS / Viewings:

- Butler, Octavia. *The Patternmaster Series* (especially the novel "Mind of My Mind")
- Cochran, Marie. Affrilachian Artist <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0pvszDKaC4>
<https://documentarystudies.duke.edu/people/marie-t-cochran>
- Levine, Laurence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom*. Oxford U P: 2007 (30th Anniversary Edition)
1978 rpt.

NOTES:

"Affrilachian" and variant spellings is a term coined by poet Frank X Walker, more than twenty-five years ago. (We are so grateful for his genius.)

In this document, and most other writings, the use of lowercase "i" (not "I") is deliberate and a part of my creative / basic identities since 1968.

In this document, i may not have followed MLA or other APA approved citations but i am aware they exist and ought to be followed (hahaha). Don't have time right now. TY. (And we will do better with * creative* formatting too, later.)

Special thanks and praises to my “homegurl,” Ms. Marie Cochran (of Toccoa, GA), for “introducing” me to Ms. Murphy, Director of this Exquisite Show and Another Unique Art Experience which reminds me: Copyright © 2021 by doris davenport & La Ruchala Murphy* All Rights Reserved* as mentioned on page 1 which means

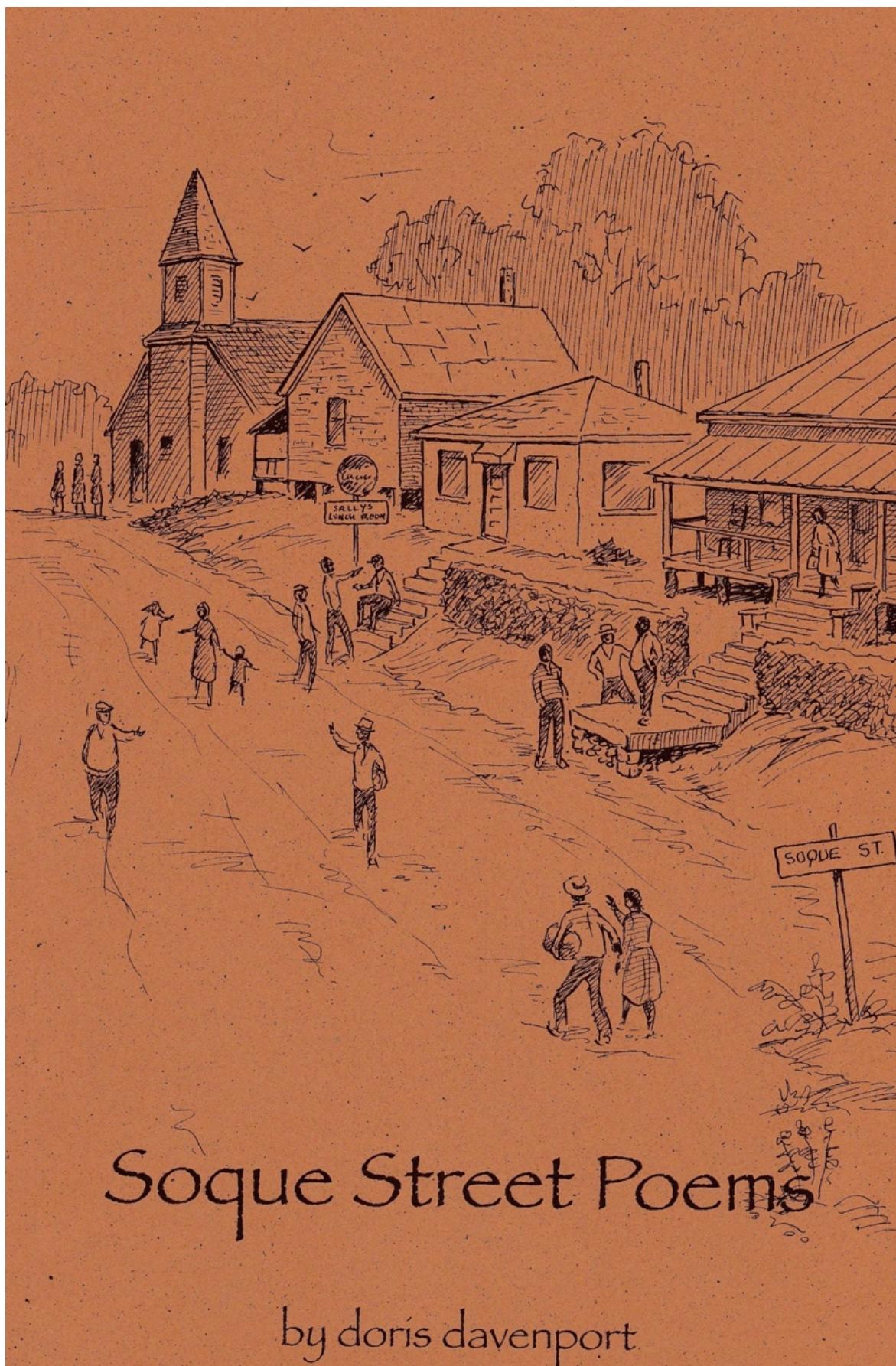
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Give credit where its due (document your sources, in other words). Thank you for the respect.

Peace & love. (as they useta say at my Momma’s Church, Spiritual Israel, down there on Elrod St.) and Truth & Art to All. Thank you again, La Ruchala!

- doris diosa davenport

(30 April 2021)



Soque Street Poems

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