

1992 marks the 500th anniversary of Columbus' encounter with Natives in this part of the world.

Celebration of this event is at best problematic for how can anyone laugh and rejoice while others still bemoan the encounter. But our feelings about the fact that we have come to call this place home are ambivalent. Our blood, sweat, and tears have been shed on this soil and somehow we have managed to plant ancestors and their spirits in the earth. It is hard then to look upon our presence here with anger and resentment. No. Like children born into painful circumstances, we must acknowledge the horror of our pasts and yet rejoice in our capacity to forge a fresh and positive future out of the rubble. So we remember the horror of that encounter, and we seek to place "discovery" in a more meaningful and honest perspective.

New World Orphan

When I was born on the river Nile
They placed me in a water tight basket
This wind and sail casket
And landed me on these green isles
And they said this is your home, now.

And soon I grew to love it
My feet locked to the sand
Usurping the native bands
Amnesia driven bandit
I civilized this dark land, survival - that's how.

I am the orphan of the new world
Disowned by my parents I have unfurled
a new flag of allegiance
and bright flag of belonging

O Columbus, what a burden on me
You opened the flood gates and let us in
And then left us lost, forever drifting
With blood on our hands we claim the seas
We won the wars, we stayed

When I stare at the tropical night
The flash of red over the sea
When I sight the regal palm tree
The sweet fire of native light
I confess I call it home, friend, home.

I am the orphan of the new world
Disowned by my parents I have unfurled
a new flag of allegiance
and bright flag of belonging

Still everyday I remember
I envy them their shaman dancers
So I pour my libation
Bury each generation with solemn ritual
Till the soil begins to speak my name
Begins to speak my name
Till it is second nature
To say mother, father, ancestor
To call it home, home, home...
To dance in step with the holy mountains
And learn the rhythm of the trees' clapping
Learn the rhythm of the trees clapping...



THE COLOMBUS CHRONICLES

Poems by Kwame Dawes

I drink to dream again

Dry bones

Skeletons dry on the rockstone
Oh, Lord, Master Boa
Oh, Lord, Master Boa
Massive sea cobra, cobra, cobra,
Remember when, remember when,
Remember when the sword
the sword was god in this shocked-out land?
identify these bones
identify these bones

*These are the bones of the carib children
tossed on the rocks of desperation
when the white haired blood letters
sailed on on the horizon
sailed in over the horizon
trod on through the storm*

fourteen ninety two
history books for the fools
claiming french meat was what we liked best
british meat was second best
than spanish flesh, so on so forth
the dutch sorloin was the worst
like there was no food to eat
to flatter yourself you rob my dignity
to flatter yourself you rob my dignity.

*But I see the bones of the carib children
tossed on the rocks of desperation
when the white haired blood-letters
sailed in on the horizon
sailed in over the ocean
walk on through the storm*

Green achipelago of teeth
we've lost our bite, friends
Irvine the chief of the tribe
living on the beach where Columbus land
on tiny molar dominica of volcanoes
remembers the suffering of five hundred years
and still he says we survived till now
though thousands died on the gold-less sands
though thousands died on the gold-less sand

*Oh bones of the carib children
tossed on the rocks of desperation
when the white haired blood-letters
sailed in on the horizon
sailed in over the ocean
walk on through the night*

Them bones are not dry bones
Them bones still whispering messages
connecting up the scattered bones
fitting them with sinew and flesh
throw in some muscles and a mesh
of unity in this new world smelter
white rice, black peas, yellow pepper cook-up
where we fashion new songs from the old
where we fashion new songs from the old

Born on that piece of dirt
no man's land, don't know what I'm doing here
sign reads enter at your own risk; pure fear
there is no gun in my skirt
talking about preservation
time warp on the reservation
and the day I chose to walk out
they celebrating colombus day

He says I drink like a fish
perpetuating the stereotype of my misbegotten tribe
reinforcing the twisted lies of maturing scribes
there's no daggers in my mouth
I drink to dream again, again
tequilla is my dearest friend
and the day I chose to walk out
they celebrating colombus day

I never chose my lovers right
I am a sucker for their lostness and helpless smiles
I am home maker, gift bearer, love sharer all the while
Then they whip me through the night
And I sit there in this shock
No shaman to give me luck
and just when I chose to walk out
they celebrating colombus day

*So I drink to dream again
Lord, I dream to dream again
of a time, of a time,
of a good time before they came.*

El Dorado

What a promise in this land
searching for eldorado
follow the path of Marco Polo
when you reach
the dreams turn hollow
and your feet stinking
on this salt stink deck
and you still got to trek
through the jungle
you still got to trek
through the jungle

*O El Dorado
how you mad the conquistador
o city of gold
how you mad the brave conquistador*

this demarara mouth
full of legend and adream
asnd people finding gold
on its virgin streams
so you pack a bag
with a government and a priest
a cross like a talisman
a god like a gavel
and all you seeing is trees
mosquitoes
snake and tigers
and the legends of eldorado
is dry sand and stone

so the rum is good
it gives you dreams
and the monkeys start to look
like bejewelled natives
and you slaughter the tribes
and yank out their teeth
and you strip to your skin
and scream through the bush
and dance in their blood
with a necklace of guts
for your chain of gold
like a laurel round your neck

*O El Dorado
how you mad the conquistador
o city of gold
how you mad the brave conquistador*

History Lesson eight a.m..

History class at six a.m.
Who discover Jamaica, class? Christopher Colombus
Tell me when? Fourteen ninety two
And where? Discovery Bay/ Discovery Bay

Twisting through mount diablo
Where Juan de Bolas was hiding
Musket and fife and powder
Guerilla, revolutionary
I am travelling to discovery bay
Travelling along to discovery bay

How many ships? Three ship
What them name?
Nina.
One.
Pinta.
Two.
Santa Maria
Tell me where?

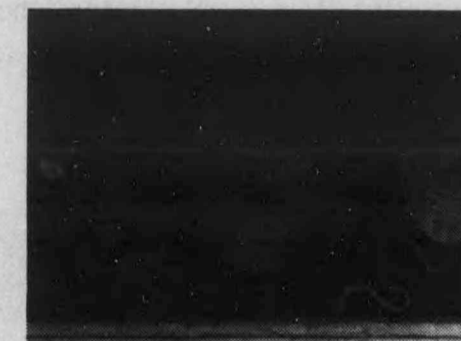
Discovery bay,
discovery bay
Twisting through fern gully
Arawak blood was shed here
Crack their brains with musket shot
History is buried here
I am travelling to discovery bay
travelling to discovery bay

Who lived here first? Arawak and Carib.
What were the Arawak? Peaceful flat head people.
What were the Caribs? Canibals.
Canibals? Canibals.
Now, tell me where?
Discovery Bay
Discovery Bay

Rush past St. Ann's Bay
Marcus was preaching from the altar
See the slave auction inna Falmouth
Cane field wild with fire
I am travelling to Discovery Bay
Travelling to Discovery Bay

You teach me all kind of madness
From Hawkins to Drake to Pizarro
From Cortez to Penn to Venables
At eight a.m. each blessed day
No wonder I can't find Discovery Bay

Was looking for the gold
and all I see is blood
all I see is blood
all I could see is blood.



We the Calibans

Man, that Miranda
could take her and love her
shape her and remake her
till that father with his wand
wouldn't know miranda
the way she would be winding
jumping up and bachanalling
and nine months later
on the back of refrigerator
a baby boy Caliban
will be born

*We the Calibans
of that lost generation
have a song to sing
have song to sing
let us sing
let us sing.*

So you teach me your language
but I give you the map
show you the path to water
show you were the berries are
and what is this language anyway
when it running on my tongue,
but a wicked hybrid from in my brain
that baffle even you?
Man it's mine, I tell you
mine alone,
to rename the spaces
you stole from me...

But when you move the wand I bawl
and the ants eat at my flesh
and the skin is screaming pain
and you working on my brain
so you say jump, I jump
you have a finger on the tap
you are the monkey on my back
and I can't shake you off
addiction of the poor
o make me less
ou give the more...

not afraid, O children
land is full of voices
ing sweetness and hurt not
etimes I hear the birdsong
ng through the air
fill up my eyes
miss my mama the witch
/ father the ape
en the song is done
ream again
I cry to dream again



New world a-coming

The roads criss-cross the landscape
the engines hiss hoarse on the icescape
In Yellow Knife the northern lights glow
We carve our flag on the red snow
We are heading for the southern tip
Where Chile curves like a spine
We are doing that historical trip
Returning to the scenes of the crime

Amerigo, thanks for the name
You don't know the crying shame
The things you never saw
The black boots and the claws
Of the eagle, and bald headed hawk
Drawing circles through the land
Silencing the natives before they could talk
Of ancestors buried in the sands

Our statues glitter in the sun
You a-ging, none of the limbs are gone
Our temples are tucked in mountains
Or else are self-conscious city stains
No order, just the chaos of frontier thinking
No museums but the empty ghost towns whistling
Broken tunes of the people who came
Then departed taking with them the names

In Tenotchtlan I see the relics
Tucked in among the sticks
Of civilizations long destroyed
The foundation on which I've bouyed
My sense of ownership and place
And I wonder whose side I am on
I who have come to love these vivid spaces
When does home become home?

I who was brought here by the search for gold
I who wept when my homeland grew old
And ancient, unhinged by time
I who have planted and reaped, what crime
Have I committed except to love
These new crevices, nooks and coves?
Why this guilt like a millstone on my neck?
I did not orchestrate this ugly shipwreck.

So we travel the open spaces
Manoeuvre through the cluttered places
Where populations of multi-hued millions
Stirred in this bubbling cauldron
O babel of voices torturing the ear
New world of songs rend the air
This chaos of poverty and stinking wealth
This torment of hunger and robust health

*Here is the new world a-coming
Here is the new world a-coming
And I call it home
I call it home*