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Muhammad I. Kenyatta (1944-1992)

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MUHAMMAD I. KENYATTA
1944-1992

MUHAMMAD I. KENYATTA (1944-1992)

On January 3, 1992, the Buffalo Law School lost an esteemed member of its community when, after a long struggle with diabetes, Professor Muhammad Isaiah Kenyatta passed away. He was an asset to the law school, not only because he brought to the classroom his experience as a minister, civil rights activist, community organizer, and humanities professor, but also because he expressed deep caring and concern for his students.

Professor Kenyatta taught through conversation, rather than by lecture. He encouraged students to draw on their own experiences in order to support their convictions, and to consider law in its greater social context, not as if it occurred in a vacuum. In his last classroom discussion, a few short weeks before his death, Professor Kenyatta reminded the members of his class that the civil rights struggle is far from over. He urged them to recognize racism and bigotry in its many invidious forms and to strive to create a world where all people, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, are truly equal. Without his vision and guidance, those continuing his life's mission will feel his absence profoundly.

To honor Professor Kenyatta, the Buffalo Law Review is proud to publish three poems written by him. The poems that follow exemplify Professor Kenyatta's multi-faceted life, describing his concern for today's youth, his struggle with illness, and his passionate love of life.

BOARD OF EDITORS

TO AFROAMERICAN YOUTH

Because you are flesh of my flesh
and your blood pulses through my veins,
because our mothers are sisters
and your clear eyes are carved
from the same brown jewels
my fathers brought from Home,
I cannot help but love you
fiercely and with boundless expectation.

UNTITLED (A LETTER TO A FRIEND)

Dear Lord,

Forgive me for I forgot
 Your
 Promise
 Of Love
 And
 Peace
 And
 Happiness.

Afraid of being soft-headed and silly,
 I forgot the joy of being
 tender hearted
 and
 happy.

Mistaking cynicism for sophistication,
 and hunkering close to the lowground
 of defensively dampered expectations,
 I forgot the glorious highground
 of daring
 and caring
 and exuberantly expecting the very best
 of myself
 and those who you have brought
 into my life to bless and be blessed
 by sharing and loving and joy.

Dear Lord,
 This night,
 this precious unique irrevocable moment
 I declare for HAPPINESS.
 And, because I am Yours,
 your gift of joy is mine.

Help me, Lord,
 I pray,
 to keep and celebrate the faith.
 Help me to cultivate the habits of happiness.
 Amen.

MYSELF AFTER THIRTY-FOUR
(HAVING LIVED LONGER THAN JESUS THE NAZARENE)

Please read me
like music.
Please sing me
like song.

Although I am a history
text replete with dangling feet—
notes cross-indexed to resurrect
terms eternally obscured in time,
please read me
please me, carefully,
sharefully like music.

Oh, though I am cacophony
like a crowd
of crows on a telephone wire,
crazy in an electric storm,
please sing me
into synchrony,
harmony like song.