

## Jaminnia R. States

I am Jaminnia R. States: a deeply intuitive and curious woman, a writer, an educator, and a former children's librarian, currently pursuing my MFA in Creative Writing at Converse College in South Carolina and serving as managing editor for A Gathering Together. Most of my projects ponder and try to capture the interior experiences of Black women. In my writing, I seek to make the profound mundane, and to make the mundane profound by capturing life as I know it, or how I imagine it was known by my subjects. In my non-fiction especially, I write to figure out answers to questions, and in sharing, I invite readers to ponder long with me in pursuit of our personal Truths. You can find me online at [www.kionispeaks.com](http://www.kionispeaks.com).



## Afternoon Remembrances

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*"Afternoon Remembrances" is an attempt to answer a question that many of us are afraid to ask ourselves, or to even contemplate when asked by wise elders to consider the meaning of our condition. To do this, I told the story of my contemplating in story format, condensing several months of pondering and Soul-Listening down to a few pages, and setting this "mind conversation" in a place familiar to many of us via some experience or another. The "characters" are representatives, archetypes really, of very real people. Like all good questions, it has led to more questions than answers.*

**Sitting in a light-filled room with lush velvety curtains pulled back to let the afternoon sun stream in, the Iya-Mamas suggest that 400 years of enslavement might be Black people's karma.** They ask me to consider it, and I can't help but snap: "What could we have done to deserve this? There is no record of us ever being so horrible as to deserve America! We were Kings and Queens. We invented math, astronomy, gave birth to spiritualities many times over—we were the first people on Earth. We had many chances to mess up, and in all that time we didn't do anything so bad as to warrant this nightmare!" I wail. I exclaim. I huff and puff. I steam and stew. I twist around in my mental seat and run my toes over the plush carpet, trying my best to calm down and do what they tell me: to consider.

I can't see it.

But the Iyas are knowing, and I am missing something that my anger keeps veiled from me.

I won't see it.

Mama Zora switches into the room in her flowing green and gold dress; the cobbler in her hands is still warm, perfect for serving with ice cream. She puts it in the center of the ornate wooden table, pulls out a high back chair with plush pink cushions, and plops herself down triumphantly. Hearing my protests, she sits back in her chair, with That Look, you know the one, in her eye. My auntie smiles knowingly and says, "But, if the African princes had been as pure and as innocent as I would like to think, it could not have happened...Lack of power and opportunity passes off too often for virtue."(1)

Digging into the freshly opened ice cream, she tells us that Cudjo Lewis told her that Dahomeans sold the people from the lands they conquered into slavery and the kings and queens and chiefs were killed in those raids as a point of honor both for the chief and the Dahomeans who killed him. It was custom. "They were killed. There are no descendants of royal African blood among the Negroes for that reason."

My Sister wanders in, reading her book on the Akash. Seeing the cobbler, she happily abandons her reading and fixes herself a plate. Laying on the floor and taking in the room, she sees me scowling in contemplation. She smiles encouragingly. To distract myself, I pick up her book, flip to a random page, and I am reminded that karma is not about eye-for-an-eye actions and reactions across lifetimes. Karma is about the soul's lessons—lessons that we choose to learn by playing very specific roles (slave, master, teacher, student, mother, prostitute, child, wanderer, thief, etc.) across many lifetimes until we master our path. This divine curriculum is based on what the soul needs to grow and expand, and we choose it every time.

Our Ancestors didn't know where the boat was going, but some part of them had to take a breath and pause to remember who was the actual Captain and what was the actual Ship. As spiritual beings having a human experience, our work is exactly the same.

Closing the book with a sigh, I look back at the Mamas, feeling ashamed at my outburst. They smiling lovingly, and nudge each other, their eyes twinkling with mischief and knowing. And now I can't help but to wonder.

What would Our Beloved Creator, in collusion with our Souls, want us to gain from this generations-long ordeal?

What I know is that Africans in the Americas have endured mental and physical horrors and centuries of planned and effected disempowerment.

What I know is that despite those efforts, we have survived and prevailed. If only by virtue of our breathing and living right now, we have on some level succeeded, and we are being given an opportunity to thrive with each breath, each step, each day of our lives in this realm.

What prayers were our grandmothers in Africa praying that required their children's children to leave home, to be cut off from home, to live in bondage, to encounter all of the forces of good and evil in some unknown land? To have to remember as much as we can and to endeavor to create something new when memory fails us? What purposes are served by the co-mingling of our indigenous blood and customs with the blood and customs of the people indigenous to these lands?

What is the point of forgetting? Who are we meant to remember we can be? Who must we be?

For in the reaching to remember, we will surely go beyond what can be known through facts and figures, and we might be inspired to connect with our Knowing beyond the physical and material constructs of identity—we will have to want to eventually, because the call to Something Real will ultimately be answered by the only thing that is real: the Divine, the Creator, the Source of All Things.

It—the forgetting and the pull to remember—must be bigger than us.

Our lives have gone from feeding and supplying the entire planet, to fueling the culture of the entire planet, to now rattling the souls of every human breathing today. Capitalism, colonialism, and globalization aside, what does this mean? As important as it is for us to understand the systems at play in our physical reality, it is equally if not more important that we pave the way forward by asking soul questions, questions to the reality beyond that which we can “see.”

It—loss, surviving, prevailing, thriving, remembering—can not be just about us.

What prayers for our expansion and glory did those grandfathers and grandmothers pray over our souls? What karmic contracts did we sign when we agreed to be descendants? What lessons must we learn, and what lessons must we teach about what it means to be human? What awakening did humanity require of our Creator that set these forces in motion to bring us to this now time and this here place?

We are not worms; we are not the scum of the Earth. If we are indeed 20 feet tall, as Mama Badu(2) reminds us, and the meek shall inherit the Earth as the Bible instructs us to contemplate, then what must we learn to be among the righteous beneficiaries? To err is human, and we are in the humanly way, Kings, Queens, Gods, and Earths. What facts of humanity must we reconcile in ourselves now that we’ve been on many sides of this experience?

The Iya-Mamas ask us to ask Soul questions and sometimes we fight them. Sometimes we run away. The path of remembering has never been easy, and this one is no more difficult than the last. It’s just different. We must ask tough questions to get tough answers, or we be doomed to play out our karmic contracts on an endless loop. If we have played these roles over many lifetimes to many ends, then what is going to be our new beginning?

Unless we choose to remember, we may never know.

And so, I sit with the Iya-Mamas, with Auntie Zora and her cobbler, with my Sisters and their wise womanhood, and I remember.

## REFERENCES

- (1) These quotes are from Mama Zora's Dust Tracks on a Road. The "restored" text, published in 1995 by Library of America. This version is unabridged, including many passages that were left out versions of the book published in previous years.
- (2) Mama Badu reminds us to recall our memory of being taller than all that aspires to keep us from remembering in the opening track of her 5th studio album, *New Amerykah Part Two (Return of the Ankh)*, released through Universal Motown in 2010. The track, "20 Feet Tall" and its live performances are great accompaniment to the spirit of this piece.