

## TWO POEMS BY GILL SOTU

### PEOPLE OF COLOR

People of color/  
People of color are often put in prison for not believing in themselves.  
(Ironically) people of color are also placed in prison for believing a bit too much in themselves/

On top my bucket list: to stand in the cramped confines of the cells that held those who believed in *us*—  
Martin Luther, Nelson Mandela, Caesar Chavez, Desmond Tutu, Jesus of Nazareth,  
I drop these names cause they are heavy,  
not for the followers they gained, but for the freedoms they gave up/  
in what cause do you believe so strongly you would willingly risk jail and sacrifice your family's safety?  
I am a new father. I am not that brave.  
Our 1st world struggle to find zero-calorie peanut butter and their all-world struggle to save all our people... they are not equated.  
So I wish to listen to the walls and hear the songs they sang throughout history while incarcerated,  
vibrating quietly back to me,  
I want to feel the time when these great leaders were unsure of the future, but positive that the stench surrounding them would not handcuff their spirit/

People of Color/  
They sold us a suit called freedom but it still does not fit right and it is much too loud/  
We often mask our insecurities by being much too loud/  
They pit us against each other like the giant hands of small children manipulating ant hills  
We work their dirt but do not own it/

People of Color  
When was the last time you took a moment to tell an elder she is beautiful/  
not beautiful from a fading picture, but right now/ (I'll wait)  
When was the last time you really took the time to recognize the glow of experience and pray that one day you will look that fierce (I'll wait)

People of Color/  
We wait/  
For Jesus, to return, to balance the scales, but the heavy part of that is that he already gave us the skills to make a difference now

People of Color/

You know how beautiful it is when we are caught laughing together/  
One of your cousins wearing an outfit they know don't match, or match too much/  
Your nephew dancing to a song way too grown for him to be listening to in the  
first place/

People of Color/

Do you know how beautiful it is when we are caught listening/  
When the griots, ghetto philosophers, the storytellers, spoken word artists grind  
the truth into a powder that gets you high enough to elevate you above your  
current bullshit, we are so beautiful when we listen...

People of...whips and strength/

People of ...borders and unbreakable skin  
People of dysfunction, distinction, and perseverance,  
It doesn't matter how the media perceives our people  
All you have to worry about right now is the story you tell your reflection in the  
morning  
and the pride you feed your children at night  
Do not let them go to sleep hungry...angry, confused, wanting...  
People of color/

People of color, I love you

Our lives matter,  
Our dignity matters  
Our respect matters....

People of Color, I love you

Our acceptance matters  
Our understanding matters  
Our empathy matters

But most important,

Our progress matters  
Become a better version you  
So that future history books will call our people "The Survivors"  
We will shock the world...  
For when our haters attempt to hold us under water  
They will soon realize...  
We DO know how to swim.

## **SUPERMAN COMES TO OXNARD**

If Superman's space-pod landed in my city  
He'd be found by Mexicans...  
Grow up liking black music,  
And would most most likely fall in love with an Asian girl.

If Superman's space-pod landed in my city...  
I suppose he'd be another alien in line for government services  
A white guy vulturing for culture...  
Like most of us, his mismatched tattoos would mark his search for identity

I'm thoroughly convinced Clark Kent would be on anti-depressants,  
When complaining to his teenage friends about how hard it was being so  
powerful and unable to show it,  
The homies that knew his secret would all give him a resounding "Get over  
yourself!"  
Then take him to the side of the road where a makeshift cross,  
flowers, and stuffed animals marked the spot of another child, taken too soon.

He would be tempted daily, to misuse his powers to feed his family,  
Be stopped on street with literature...  
English on the front, Spanish on the back  
Beckoning him to Jesus (HAY-ZEUS) or Jesus, depending on what side he read  
first...  
Either way, he would only see another God as competition...

On hard days, Superman would eat lunch alone in the field away from the other  
kids...  
I'd probably find him first, cause I often did the same  
Under gray skies he'd spread his bright red cape upon the grass and we'd sit and  
discuss hip-hop, video games and the complexities of women...  
He'd ask, now that we were friends, did he have a pass to use the word "nigga"  
affectionately...  
"No, Superman, you may not."

Clark would wince as the bell rung calling us back to class  
Not being able to play sports, and his clothes and shoes being second hand,  
He'd often be the target of ridicules and spitballs,  
Of course the man of steel is fast enough to dodge one...  
But not the other...

After school he would fly to the roof of his apartment, and imagine what his life  
would be if he landed somewhere safe like... Canada or Kansas.  
California expects us to be stars, or nothing...at all

At night, the sirens in the city are merely ambient noise  
So he doesn't move a muscle.  
Although he survived hurling through space as a baby, not even the last  
Kryptonian  
has the power to fight oppression & gentrification

It's almost time for dinner, Superman...  
Make sure your brothers and sisters wash up  
We have tamales left over from Christmas  
We are celebrating because your father finally got his raise  
I can get you the shoes you wanted  
No... not the Jordans,  
but the Nike Cortez are on sale at the outlet  
it's still Nike, so it's just as good, right?...  
Maybe then you won't get teased so much, *mijo*.  
They just don't realize how special, really special you are...  
Shhh, keep your chin up, don't cry, Clark, don't cry...  
It doesn't matter if you save the world  
Right now, baby, I JUST NEED YOU TO BE STRONG ENOUGH,  
TO LOVE YOURSELF...



## ABOUT GILL SOTU

A 2006 Grand Slam Poetry Champion of Ventura County and three-time winner of the Borders Poetry Slam, performance poet, artist, dj, and musician **GILL SOTU** has been featured on NBC 7's Art Pulse TV and was named San Diego Raw Performing Artist of the Year in, both, 2012 and 2013. Sotu is program director of the non-profit arts/music venue Free the Marquee, and facilitates weekly poetry workshops within San Diego County's juvenile detention center

He is a featured guest of Grossmont College's 21st Annual Literary Arts Festival, appearing Wednesday, April 26, 7PM.

Learn more about Gill Sotu on his website: [gillsotu.com](http://gillsotu.com), or visit the official LAF 21 website at [www.grossmont.edu/laf](http://www.grossmont.edu/laf).