



DR. ARTRESS WHITE: WRITER, CREATOR, ADVOCATE

How long have you been at Albright?

White: This is my second year at Albright College as an NEH-funded Visiting Assistant Professor of American Cultural Studies.

What classes do you teach?

White: I regularly teach upper-level American literature courses for English majors and creative writing.

What are you involved in around campus?

White: I am a co-advisor for the English Honor Society Sigma Tau Delta and a member of the FYS planning committee for the campus common reader.

What is your genre of writing?

White: I am a multi-genre writer. My primary genres are poetry, personal essay and literary criticism.

What inspires your writing?

White: Inspiration has come to me in different ways. My latest collection of poetry, "My Afmerica," was inspired by the many ways that the American family has come under threat via racism, terrorism and police brutality. Yet it is also a celebration of the ways families work to bond and create good memories for future generations. I spent a lot of time thinking about what was happening around the country and examining events that were taking place in my own family.

How long have you been writing?

White: I have been publishing poetry, fiction, and criticism since the late 90s.

What are your accomplishments within writing?

White: As far as more recent publications, I have published two collections of poetry, "My Afmerica" (2019) and "Fast Fat Girls in Pink Hot Pants" (2012). I also have a collection of essays, "Survivor's Guilt: Essays on Race and American Identity," forthcoming in March 2020. Additionally, I have book chapters in two critical anthologies: "Seeking Home: Marginalization and Representation in Appalachian Letters and Song" (U of Tennessee P, 2017) and "Literary Expressions of African Spirituality" (Lexington Books, 2013). I have also published poetry, essays, short stories, book reviews, and interviews.

How do you plan to continue with your writing in the future?

White: My next two writing projects include a collection of poetry based on slavery and my family tree and a book of literary criticism.

How has your writing impacted the world around you?

White: As families continue to become more diverse through interracial marriage and transracial adoption and suffer fragmentation through domestic terrorism, people look to my work as a way of bringing these discussions into the academy and other intellectual and artistic spaces. I am regularly approached to share my work in various reading series, literary festivals, and MFA programs.

Motherland is as tangible
as the blackness of skin
and the kink of a lock
of burnished hair
under an Iberian sun.

This to a German child
visiting Spain seems to say it all;
You're African. His words stated
so emphatically after assuring him
I am American that I can
feel the annoyance
blossom in my chest
and tighten my jaw.

How to navigate this moment
when a child professes to know
more than me about who I am
as his mother stands behind
clasping small shoulders to her womb
daring me to contradict
her son's Teutonic intellect.
Her smirk saying go ahead,
deny your continent, your birthright

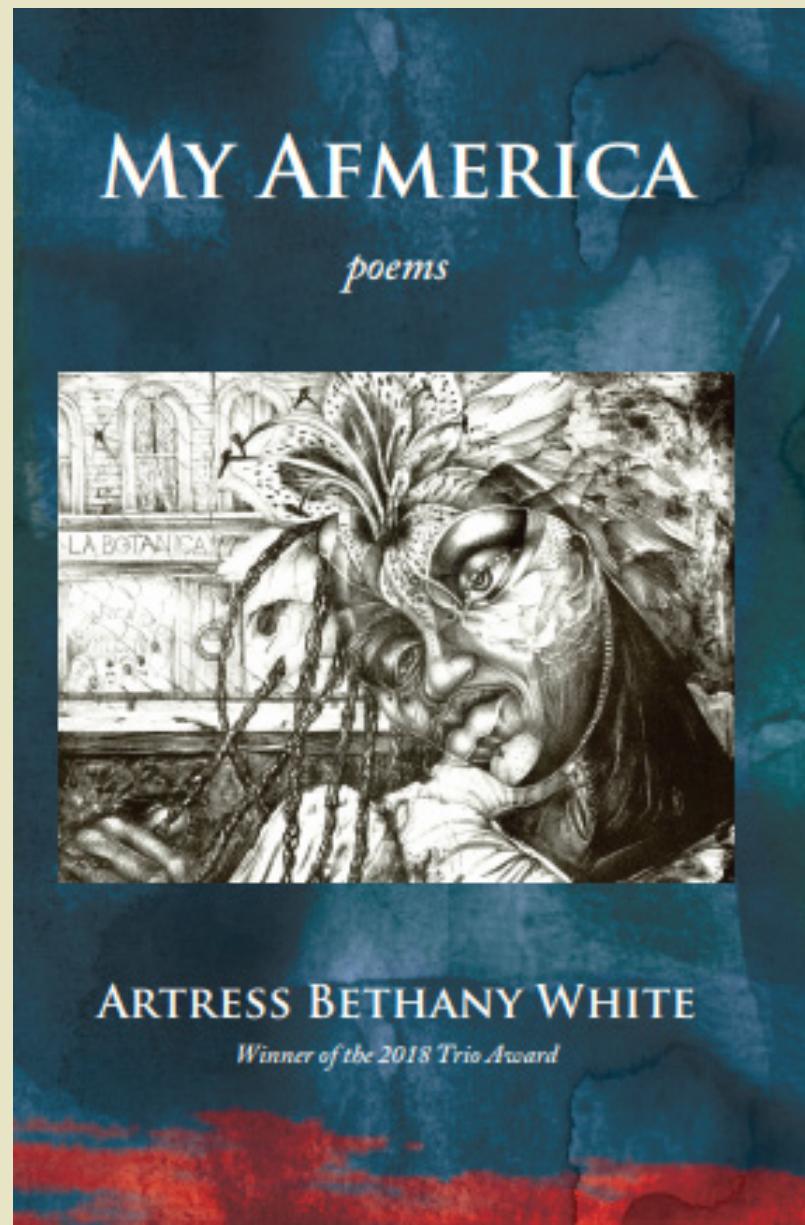
My nativity was cultivated
in the breast milk
of a native-born mother,
resting in the sinews of her progeny,
as precise an articulation as
lips to breast, hand over heart
an unshakable pledge of fealty.

This is not treason;
I am an American, though black.
I am stolen goods
but can trace my family back
three hundred years on U.S. soil,
longer than Whitman's leaves of grass
longer than this anger will last
as I walk away muttering
I am an American.

Feature



Artress Bethany White is a poet, essayist, and literary critic. She is the recipient of the 2018 Trio Award for her poetry collection, "My Afmerica" (Trio House Press, March 2019). Her prose and poetry have appeared in such journals as "Harvard Review," "Tupelo Quarterly," "The Hopkins Review," "Pleiades," "Solstice," "Poet Lore," "Ecotone," and "The Account." Her collection of essays, "Survivor's Guilt: Essays on Race and American Identity" is forthcoming from New Rivers Press/Minnesota State University in March 2020. White has received the Mary Hambidge Distinguished Fellowship from the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts for her nonfiction, The Mona Van Duyn Scholarship in Poetry from the Sewanee Writers' Conference and writing residencies at The Writer's Hotel and the Tupelo Press/MASS MoCA studios. She is visiting a professor of American cultural studies at Albright College in Pennsylvania.



"My Afmerica" is available in the Albright College Bookstore.