

Semaj Brown Biography

Flint, Michigan's First Poet Laureate, Semaj Brown is a 21st century Thought Leader who synthesizes ideas and philosophies, inventing pathways of being. She moves with fluidity as a university lecturer, and K-12 curriculum builder/facilitator. Semaj Brown's creations: poetry installations, theatrical verse productions, academic essays, and workshops are an amalgam of the arts and the sciences, a marriage between poetry and analysis.

The Poetry Pod Project (P3) has been Semaj Brown's civic focus since her open term appointment, September 27, 2019. P3 unfolds with ambition. To understand the structural and systemic, seemingly insurmountable scourge of illiteracy, and yet despite barriers organize and implement sustainable poetry programming throughout the City of Flint, is the goal. To ignite, to foment a culture of poetry, and thus literacy is the mission. To impart programming designed to increase reading and writing skills while integrating arts and sciences is the innovation. Semaj Brown: "Poetry advances the quality of life of citizenry when organized as a precious power tool." The history of community service feels innate to Semaj. As Community Outreach Director for the private medical practice of her husband, James Brown, MD PLC, over a 15 year span, Semaj created and facilitated, as the practice sponsored over 50 workshops, 3 health Fair/Conferences, 2 Broadcast Radio Shows, always integrating art and science, utilizing poetry as a transformational force.

Bleeding Fire! Tap the Eternal Spring of Regenerative Light, (Broadside Lotus Press and Health Collectors™ LLC), 2019, a poetry/prose memoir described as an odyssey of African American history and culture, part social commentary, part magical realism is the most recent publication of Flint's Poet Laureate. Ms. Brown also authored: chapbooks, *Mother Ocean (Making of a New Tribe)*, 2017 and CD and *Dancing Shoes of Fire Book of Poetry*, 1997. Reading her poetry, Semaj Brown has traveled nationally. In 2002, she was invited by Social Services Life Skills Division of Contra Costa County, California to perform and bring her noted techniques applied in her *Everything is Word Poetry Workshop* to young adults transitioning out of the foster care system.

Ms. Brown's numerous published poems, and performances have been documented in print, on compact discs, videos, and in the media, and can be viewed online via her official website, [www.https://semajbrown.com](https://semajbrown.com). A few highlights include: The acclaimed *Tongue, Tongued concert and album*, 2001, musical director, the late great Faruq Z. Bey, *The Womb Tongue Play* sponsored by the Arts League of Michigan, produced by the late Ron Allen, 2003. The poetic stage play, *Onion Revolt: A Healthy Comedy* written, directed by Semaj Brown based on her lyrical vegetarian story cookbook and CD, *Feasts and Fables from the Planted Kingdom*, where Semaj played 14 different characters, James Brown, MD, Musical Director/Composer, debuted at the Flint Youth Theater, 2014. In 2017, 2018, and 2019 Semaj Brown performed on the stages of The Flint Institute of Arts, and Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History with Afro-futuristic Theatrical Poetry Productions: *COMMUNITY*, *By Ocean*, *By Fire*, *Bleeding Fire*, respectively. Ms. Brown's work is archived at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, and her commissioned poems remain a permanent part of the collection: *COMMUNITY* at the Flint Institute of Arts.

Semaj is science driven, operating in both left and right brain modalities, holding a bachelor's degree in biological science from Wayne State University. She taught science in the Detroit Public Schools for over fifteen years, and has worked as a school administrator in the private sector, also as a curriculum and professional developer. Her integrated, interdisciplinary pedagogy was instrumental in assisting Timbuktu Academy of Science and Technology raise statistically negligible standardized MEAP test scores-Detroit, 2002. As a result, the academy received the Michigan Governor's Golden Apple Award.

The Confluence of social justice issues, women's equity, racialized stratification, ecological reform, health science, and love expressed through the imaginative Planted Kingdom™ world cofounded with her collaborating spouse is the sphere that swirls Semaj's work into poetry and prose. In response to the 2020 invitation from Indiana University Director of the Department of Social work, Professor Otrude Moyo, PhD, and in collaboration with Center for Civil Rights and Heritage, Semaj Brown presented her epic poem, *Mother Ocean (Making of a New Tribe)*. The odyssey poem was analyzed via the online seminar: Power, Oppression, and Complicity. Dr. Moyo stated, "You are a gift in generating philosophies and systems that embrace our wholeness." Professor, Susan M. Kornfield, J.D. incorporated Ms. Brown's poetry infused essay, *The Buying, Frying, Making, Baking of African American Domestic Stereotypes* into the syllabus of her University of Michigan Senior Trademark Law class; Semaj was then invited to present as a guest lecturer. Professor Kornfield: "A riveting presentation, she brought history, science, psychology, anthropology, and economics to bear on the issue of what we see when we see product logos. We will never look at them the same way again."

A graduate of Cass Technical High School in Detroit, Semaj evolved playing the violin in the esteemed school symphony as well as in the Highland Park Chamber Orchestra, under the direction of Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO), violinist, Mr. Joseph Striplin who has the distinction of being the first African American member of the DSO. As a girl, Semaj enjoyed summers in Stratford Ontario studying Shakespeare. Dissecting Broadside Press poetry of the 1960s and 70s with her mother, the late Mrs. Bessie L James, a classically trained pianist who taught a socio-political appreciation for world cultures through a Pan-African lens was the crucible that would inform Semaj's trajectory. In her home basement science laboratory, explorations grew colorful crystal gardens as well as the imagination of the young Semaj. By college, Semaj was comparing patterns in seemingly disparate disciplines—the potter's wheel she spun during summer enrichment at the Center for Creative Studies had successfully molded math, science, literature, art, and music into an amalgam that would inform Semaj's poetic esthetic.