

DAVID WOODS

AFRICVILLE: REQUIEM

David Woods (1959-) was born in Trinidad and moved to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, in 1972. He attended Dalhousie University from 1977 to 1980 and directed several plays, including Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*. In 1983 he founded the Cultural Awareness Youth Group of Nova Scotia, which sought to promote black history and culture. He left this group in 1989 to focus on his own writing, and the following year he won the Nova Scotia Poetry Award and published his first collection of poems, *Native Song* (1990). The following poem, which was published in the summer 1997 issue, focuses on the history of Africville—a community in Halifax, Nova Scotia, that mainly consisted of African Canadians who were evicted in the 1960s. CBC producer Peggy Hemsworth also commissioned a radio version, titled *Once: Africville Stories*, which was broadcast on CBC Radio's Sunday Matinee later that year. The following year it was performed by the Voices Black Theatre Ensemble—a performance company that Woods founded to showcase plays about the African-Canadian experience. The play won the George Elliot Clarke Literary Award and was shortlisted for the CBC Literary Award. In interviews, Woods explained that his goal was “to tell the human stories in this small close-knit community that was fighting for its physical survival.”

Speedy Flint

Speedy Flint
has taken to wearing a general's hat
Like Marcus Garvey's,
And he puts two flags on his old Cadillac—
And drives about Halifax
Tooting his Africville royalty.

Mrs. Howe

Mrs. Howe sees the horror of the projects,
Hears the notes of the lost children,
Sees the young girl walk in half-naked shame,
And decides to bless her people—
With a gentle, unending smile.

Mr. Emmerson

Mr. Emmerson never moved,
Choosing instead to stick like a stubborn stone,
In between the three bully factories—
Built around his house.

Dippy

Dippy went with his first white woman,
And disappeared from us—
Quickly changing colours.

Charles D.

The settlement money went to his head
He left his wife—
He deserted his children,
He danced with young prostitutes at the clubs.
But the money ran out—
And his life ran out too,
And he ended up alone in a tiny North-end room,
A glass of rum in his hand.
And he recounted when he lived back home—
And how different things were then.

Mom S.

Not like home—
 there was no large kitchen
 To hold all her children,
 And so she could not tell them stories all at once.
 One by one—
 They stayed in their rooms,
 Whispering how old and stupid she was,
 Her breads and cakes went uneaten—
 So too her hands could not hug with love,
 She trembled like an old leaf—
 Blocked from her progeny.

Grandpa Johnson

Grandpa Johnson died yesterday,
 He fell off the porch of his new house on his way to church,
 Relocation is to blame.

You see in Africville a straight line ran
 from his kitchen to the church door—
 without porch or steps,
 You see in Africville he could walk to church blind-folded if he chose.

And it was foggy yesterday
 And Grandpa's eyes were bad,
 And to tell you the truth
 He had forgotten he moved.

Mr. E.

Mr. E. cried for two years,
 Not understanding why a nation
 of 3 million square miles,
 Could not spare the 1/4 mi. x 1/4 mi.
 that was Africville.