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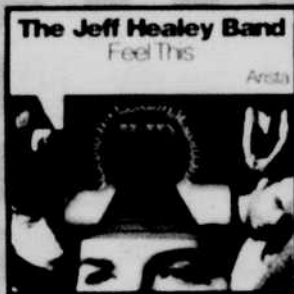
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## HEMPHILL

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Hemphill said he believes the subjects he chooses to write about are not what attracts the diverse audiences to his performances and allows his work to be appreciated by different races and genders.

"I don't know if it's the subject matter itself as determination on my part to be as honest as I can," Hemphill said, "to make disclosure, to use my life as a lesson for not only myself to learn from, but by extension, perhaps, that life is a useful lesson for others."

"If I just deal with what I know — that little piece of what I know — and deal with that as best I can," Hemphill said, "then that will draw to the work those who understand or feel in some sort of sympathy, or might just be curious and find that, 'Oh, I'm learning something new at this moment.'"

Hemphill said his work on the PBS documentary *Tongues Untied* may have helped to introduce people to his art.

The 55-minute documentary was about the experiences of black gay men and was primarily an autobiographical account of one man's life interspersed with the work of black gay poets, including Hemphill.

Hemphill's appearances at local schools are uncommon for him, as he finds his work is best presented to adults. And although he speaks at schools if invited, "I don't feel like that's really the thrust of the work I'm trying to do."

Although Hemphill does not have children, he is involved with his nieces and nephews. "The older nieces and nephews know their uncle is gay," he said, "and that's been a deliberate part of my strategy with my family."

"I don't want to see a generation coming from my family that's perpetuating the kind of ignorance I'm having to face as an adult," he said.

"When they hear 'faggot' flying through the air and certain language used pejoratively to disempower people, at least they will not accept it," he said.

Hemphill's current projects include a novel and an anthology of short fiction about black gay men.



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