

Marshall toasts "Poets in the Kitchen"

by Nathaniel Scott

*Tell me 'bout dem Blacks
Dem sons and daughters of slaves
Dem precious souls struggling in a
hostile land
Tell me 'bout dem toters of de heavy
load
Dem "weavers of jagged words"*

Paule Marshall, writer/lecturer, came to Portland last month, singing praises to "Poets in the Kitchen: ordinary Black women who didn't know what poets were supposed to do." The "Poets in the Kitchen" were women who gathered in Marshall's home: her mother's friends (during the 20's, 30's and 40's) and talked over world events.

Coming and going to and from a day of work as a "domestic, they would stop at our house and talk, passionately and endlessly," Marshall said. "It was their way of getting the bad taste of the work day out of their mouth."

Thus, the stage was set, a Black woman, African and Barbadian by ancestry, began to talk about the shaping of her career as a novelist.

Marshall said the "Mother Poets" were her first teachers. They taught her how to "make characters come alive on the page; how stories had to have a statement underneath."

According to Marshall, the "Mother Poets" talked about everything: "Economics, the Depression, war and 'the rumor of war,' islands in the West Indies, Italy's invasion of Ethiopia (in the 1930's), Roosevelt (FDR), and their political god, Marcus Garvey," adding, "they were responsible for what I see as the political aspects of my work."

Drawing heavily upon the "Mother Poets" concept, Marshall said characters can "act effectively; politically." She said the "Mother Poets" used a kind of Afro-centric way of looking at the world: "The sea ain't got no back door, beautiful ugly," and "God don't like ugly and he ain't stuck on pretty."

Everyday, she said, the women faced racism, sexism, and classism, but "they were aware of that larger world of Black people and owed allegiance to it."

"Black writers have something important to say," Marshall continued, declaring the need "to see ourselves as we are. To deal with all the 'Aunt Jemima's' to be ourselves. Ultimately," she added, "all liberation is about rescuing the Black community."

Speaking in a vibrant voice, spiced with a Barbadian twang, composed and matronly, Marshall answered questions and offered advice to Portland's Black community.

After the public school day, she said, there needs to be a kind of system that will teach the wealth and experience of Black culture; women need their own society; their own community, and there needs to be pride instilled in the dialectic speech

of Black people.

"One thing that turns off young people, especially Black people," she said, "is they feel inferior by the way they talk."

Another point she touched upon, in answer to a question, had to do with formulating book groups. "When authors (like myself) are in town, invite them into your community. All the Black women writers, I think, are trying to write about the Black experience as we see it," she said, adding, "it's not a single thing."

Marshall said, "I learned a long

time ago that I was no less by being female." And the women characters in her novels are always "going back in search of their racial past."

She reminded the audience that Ralph Ellison (a Black novelist) once said, "The Black American experience is not only important, it's sacred."

Marshall's conversation and lecture included writing techniques and a desire to see teachers become more creative in their teaching methods so learning will become more exciting.

"I hope that my work will have

something to say (an appeal) to Black people," said the lady whose writing accomplishments include, *Brown Girl, Brownstones, Soul Clap Hands and Sing, The Chosen Place, The Timeless People, and Reena and other Stories.*

Marshall has taught at Yale and Columbia universities and this spring is a visiting professor at the University of California at Berkeley in the Afro-American Studies program.

Marshall was guest speaker at PSU's 20th Annual Nina Mae Kellogg Foundation Award.



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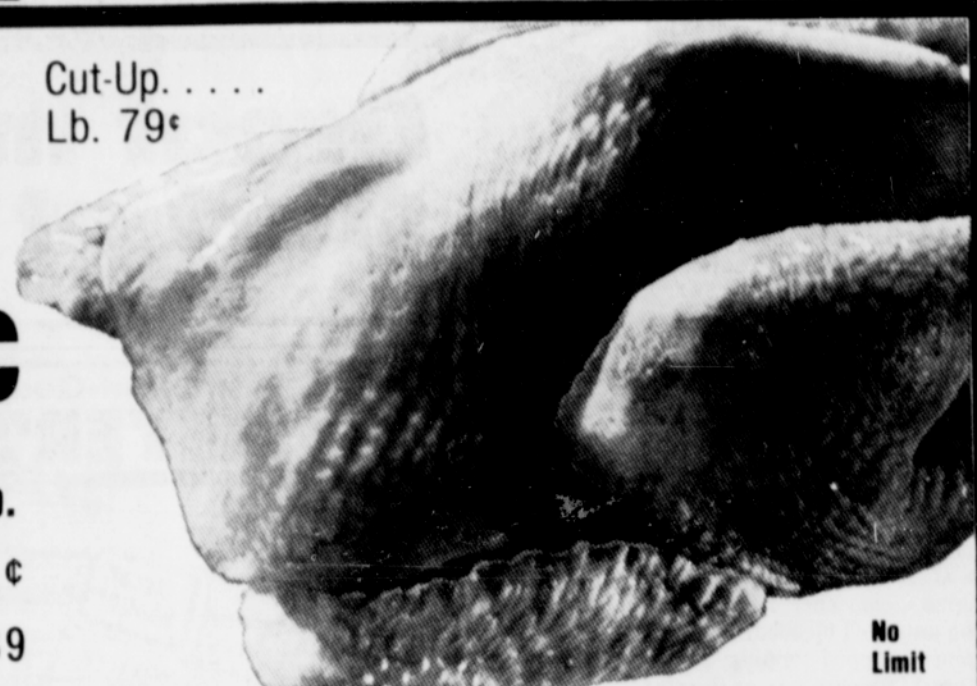
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Cinnamon Roll with Maple Glaze
Pineapple Chunks
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- May 8**
Macaroni and Cheese
Tossed Salad with French Dressing
Apple Wedges
Chocolate Chip Cookie
Milk
- May 9**
Corn Dog with Mustard
French Fries with Catsup
Celery Chunks with Peanut Butter Dip
Spicy Applesauce
Milk
- May 10**
*Schubert (Cheeseburger)
Bob's Green Beans
Redhead Pumpkin Bread
Bowtie Banana Half
Capitol Moo Juice (Milk)
(*Dedicated to Principal Bob Schubert by Mrs. Flaubert's class at Capitol Hill School)
- May 11**
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