

[1]

Because my father said *Yes*
but not in our lifetimes Because
my mother said *I know my daughter*
would never want to marry . . .

But mostly because they rarely spoke
of or noticed or even whispered
about and did not of course . . .

Because magazines rarely tv
rarely textbooks rarely or not
at all except for figures like
George Washington Carver
who'd lived in our state

Because among the crayons
there was one called *Flesh*

Because paintings rarely or never
until because books from the library
never *until* because college literature
not at all the American lit anthology
had only Gwendolyn Brooks
who was not assigned

Because a few years after Brown
v. Board of Education I wrote a paper
that took the position *Yes but not yet*

[2]

the skin under
all skin is all
white seen skin
is skin deep none

is white pink
is blood showing
through almost
transparent thin

skin blood as in
on our hands
protected by gloves
laws guns while

brown tan to almost
black protects from
sun that burns
us red-handed us

[3]

they lived

in the colored section
of town though we lived

in a city not a town it had
a downtown where we saw

them sometimes in stores
on streets at the movies we

didn't think much about
it did we lived in Iowa where

we saw them mostly saw
ourselves what did

we didn't know
where we were living

[4]

*In the dream I am black, telling myself, who am white,
who I am. Like the woman inside the man, or like*

*the man inside the woman the man who wrote
about these things found hard to handle I*

wrote:

*anima soul
animus soul or*

*skin was black but her heart
was white she wrote of herself I*

*wrote that was white
of you they said black*

*step back hide inside
anima animus animal's*

all of us but soul

you know is black

[5]

black keys letters learn
to play read write dress
shoes purse suit grown
up clothes hat tie night
out morning coffee not
yet sin will find you out
dirt sheep eye and blue
mark so it seemed wrong
that *in the* meant good
book word confused with
Middle English *blāc* pale
(see *bleach*) oh no never