

## TWO BADASSES

*“We have no trouble with correspondence,” says Ishmael Reed, the popular African-American author, essayist, and founder of the online “Konch” and “Vine” magazines (www.ishmaelreedpub.com). Reed says his site's visitors query mostly with technical advice.*

*“Our reader recommendations are usually from those who want to redesign our site. We want to avoid bells and whistles, and the kind of dizzying busyness that characterizes.” CNN Headline News.*

*“‘Konch’ is a continuation of a print version which I lugged around the country for about nine years, selling them at colleges and book fairs” Reed continues.*

*“With the website Konch, we've been able to reach thousands of readers and publish writers from all over the world. example, while visiting Ghana, I promised some Nigerian writers whom I met there that I would publish them on the site. Two years later, when I visited Nigeria, they asked whether I had published them. We went into the computer room and I was able to download their contributions [instantly]. It was like magic.” By Timothy Davis Special to The Christian Science Monitor October 11, 2001*

By 2001, I'd been publishing “Konch” magazine in a print format. I went online in 2005. My youngest daughter Tennessee came on board in 2008. We were at the mercy of hard-to-get Web managers until Tennessee became proficient in Web design and management. She'd received her MFA from Mills after graduating from U.C. Berkeley with no help from academic feminists who used her to settle scores with me, people who hadn't read my books. She Started working on “Konch” in 2008. She enrolled in City College in order to free us from arrogant Web designers. For one we had to provide her with transportation, feed her, babysit her child. Tennessee writes:

*“I had started taking courses there during the Spring 2010 semester as I was in between book tours, and travel had slowed down for a couple of years. The first course I took was digital illustration using Adobe Illustrator. I also took courses on using Mac computers, Adobe Photoshop, digital photography, web design using Adobe Dreamweaver, digital printmaking, video production, video editing using Adobe Premiere, storyboard and scriptwriting, and sound design.” Tennessee has the ability to publish a book from scratch. We both agree with Jessica Hagedorn that technology can be the writers' “boon,” the word I used to describe the coming books available to writers in Publisher's Weekly, 1967. Ms. Hagedorn writes:*

*“But I also think these tools can be very creative and useful. So, it's not about the tool being a bad thing. It's about how it takes over and how we let it. Certain people use it for maybe nefarious things, to distract us or to spread misinformation, but it can also be used to spread information. I think you always need to weigh it. It's never one or the other. That's something I've learned.” Jessica Hagedorn, and Jimmy Santiago Baca are members of a resistance against the demagogues who insist upon a Christian and Anglicized America. They are two bad-asses.*

*So I begin to wonder why they would demonize such wonderful people. Why would they demonize the culture here? Why would they try to destroy the dreams of people, when dreams are the most powerful thing our people have? Why do they go after the dream? Why can't young Latinas, young Chicanas especially, why can't they dream of being really powerful great poets, and why do they have to try to destroy it in institutions that are so-called places of learning? My kids ask, "Papi, how did you put us all through college as a poet?" And I just tell them, because I'm bad-ass. You can be a badass when you love yourself.*

This issue of "Konch" features two bad-ass writers. While it would have been easier to assimilate and audition for token status like the Indian writer who assured the **Anglo New York Times Book Review** that she'd abandoned her identity and was free to write about universal people: white ethnics. (Darryl Pinckney exposed the preoccupation of members of The New York Lit. Establishment: Working on their British accents).

Jimmy Santiago and Jessica Hagedorn dare to include Spanish and Tagalog in their work. Tagalog is now being taught at Harvard. These writers believe that Filipinos and Hispanics are just as universal as white ethnics.

The path to literary fame has not been easy for either Santiago, or Hagedorn.

Santiago began writing in prison following the pattern of some of our best known writers like Chester Himes and Eldridge Cleaver who began writing while incarcerated which has got to be a blow to the American education system modeled after the old Carlisle Indian school, where Native American kids were forced to adopt the stingy curriculum of the invaders. Where they were forced to abandon their cultures and their religion or be punished. Santiago knows the deal. He attended Indian school. He writes:

"When it comes to illiteracy, New Mexico is at the bottom of the list. So [teachers] go along with the school board selections of books, and unfortunately, those books are selected on their power to *tame* students, not free their minds. You'll hear of teachers, every now and then, that will go out of the parameters of what's considered acceptable and go ahead and order my books. Somebody's doing something out there. It could be in New Mexico. I don't think I'm acceptable to school boards. I think they're petrified of me."

They're petrified of him and others because when students become aware of where they come from, they become dangerous to the status quo. They discover that they've been lied to. They become armed with the knowledge of their ancestors and no longer consider their grandmothers to be dumb. He mentions Amanda Gorman a victim of white nationalist propaganda like Phyllis Wheatley, who saluted George Washington, a man who sold slave children to pay his debts and wanted Native Americans exterminated. Phyllis Wheatley could be excused. She was a slave and like Zora Neale Hurston, died broke. Gorman said that she was crazy about "Hamilton," and had it on the CD while writing her inaugural poem and "Hamilton" even influenced the poem. She told Vogue magazine that I was "intense" for criticizing "Hamilton." Well I may be "intense" but this intense person knows that what Amanda Gorman apparently doesn't know. "Hamilton" was a slave trader and sold a Black woman and her child for a little over 200.

What is Santiago's solution to the campaign to eliminate Black and Brown studies, by eurocentrics (small “e” so as not to confuse them with Eurocentric professors who teach Black and Brown studies at universities that were founded before the first white man set foot in America).

Baca has a solution to a rotten and spirit-collapsing situation that leads to our brightest students dropping out—students who know that the invader always wants you to say mass the way he does. This why Russians want to strip away the Ukraineness of Ukrainians. They want the kids they force into Russia to become Russian. Santiago writes:

“Get rid of all the public school administrators. Get rid of all of them. Go over here to Louisiana and San Pedro in that little Albuquerque public school area and just empty out their offices all the way at the top. No more stealing our money. No more vacations where you take the money that you should have been spending on textbooks. Get out. Everybody go and start putting some serious people in them that can start to really educate our kids.”

Jessica Hagedorn of Dangerous Music and The West Coast Gangster Choir is also a Bad-ass. Like Baca, nobody gave her squat. She recalls growing up in a Philippines under American Occupation, in a city that had been bombed. She knew that she'd become a writer. Her fascination with film since childhood has influenced her work. She was writing well at a young age. I remember reading a poem at Glide Church in 1974. This kid came up to me. It was Jessica. Since then, she has distinguished herself as a novelist, poet and playwright, the author of the classic, *Dogeaters*.

*Also The Gangster of Love, Dream Jungle, Toxology, and the breakthrough anthology Charlie Chan Is Dead.* She has been commissioned to by Two River Theater in Red Bank, NJ *Play Like A Girl: The Amazing Life And Times Of A Band Named Fanny.* Her theater work is extensive.

*Thulani Davis, Ntozake Shange, and Jessica began working in small clubs and venues in San Francisco. This was summer camp before they graduated into the big leagues.*

[Felix Starro](#)

(2019)

*Ma-Yi Theater Company, NYC*

*Book & Lyrics by Jessica Hagedorn*

*Music by Fabian Obispo*

*Directed by Ralph B. Peña*

*The Gangster of Love*

(2018)

*The Magic Theatre, San Francisco*

*Directed by Loretta Greco*

*Most Wanted*

*(2007)*

*La Jolla Playhouse, CA*

*Book & Lyrics by Jessica Hagedorn*

*Music & Lyrics by Mark Bennett*

*Directed by Michael Greif*

*Fe In The Desert*

*(2007)*

*Campo Santo, San Francisco*

*Directed by Danny Scheie*

*Stairway to Heaven*

*(2006)*

*Campo Santo, San Francisco*

*Directed by Nancy Benjamin*

*Dogeaters*

*(1998 & 2001)*

*World Premiere, La Jolla Playhouse*

*New York Premiere, The Public Theater*

*Directed by Michael Greif*

*Silent Movie*

*(from The Square, 1997)*

*The Public Theater NYC*

*Directed by Lisa Petersen*

*Airport Music*

(1994,

*Tenement Lover: No Palm Trees in New York City*

(1981)

*The Kitchen, NYC*

*Directed by Thulani Davis*

*Teenytown*

(1988, with Laurie Carlos & Robbie McCauley)

*Franklin Furnace, NYC*

*Danspace Project, NYC*

*The Art Of War/Nine Situations*

(1984)

*Dance Theater Workshop, NYC*

*Choreographed by Blondell Cummings*

*Mango Tango*

(1978)

*The Public Theater, NYC*

*Directed by Reggie Life*

*Where The Mississippi Meets The Amazon*

(1977, with Ntozake Shange & Thulani Davis)

*The Public Theater, NYC*

*Directed by Oz Scott*

Among Jimmy Santiago Baca's books are

*A Place to Stand, Words No Bars Can Hold,*

*When I Walk Through That Door, I Am: An Immigrant Mother's Quest,*

*No Enemies: Poems, A Place to Stand, A Glass of Water, Singing at the Gates and Poems Along the Rio Grande*

Also in this issue is the sagacious presidential race analysis by the distinguished attorney Howard Moore, Jr...A new "Virus Watch" by Dr. Michael LeNoir, pediatrician and syndicated columnist ( [provide link](#))... Whenever Emil Guillermo appeared as a right-wing commentator in my play, "The Conductor," he received applause. He writes about the significance of the play and its final performances... And regular contributor Vitin A. Cruz continues his original writings...Poetry by Chris Stroffolino and Ernie Brill...My friend Sandra Cisneros could keep her fame to herself. Instead, she promotes the works of others. She got me a job running The Macondo Writers Workshop in San Antonio. Instead of my instructing them, they taught me. Valeka Cruz and Lorena Ortiz were among the writers who participated in the workshop...Barbara Lowenstein graces our pages with some of her beautiful pictures, this time taken in Rio De Janeiro. Carla Blank and Rishi Nath comment on the current Middle East crisis.

Ishmael Reed