

## We Speak Your Names Poem

We **Speak** Your Names  
Because we are **free** women,  
born of **free** women ,  
who are born of **free** women,  
back as far as time begins,  
we celebrate your **freedom**.

Because we are **wise** women,  
born of **wise** women,  
who are born of **wise** women,  
we celebrate your **wisdom**.

Because we are **strong** women,  
born of **strong** women,  
who are born of **strong** women,  
we celebrate your **strength**.

Because we are **magical** women,  
born of **magical** women,  
who are born of **magical** women,  
we celebrate your **magic**.

My sisters we are **gathered** here to speak your names.

We are here because we are your **daughters**

as surely as if you had conceived us, nurtured us, carried us in your wombs, and then sent us out  
into the world to make our mark

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and see what we see, and be what we be, but *better, truer, deeper*  
because of the shining examples of your own **incandescent** lives.

We are here to speak your names because we have enough sense to know that we did not **spring**  
**full blown** from the forehead of **Zeus**,

or arrive on the scene like **Topsy**, our sister once removed, who somehow just **grewed**.

We know that we are walking in footprints made deep by the confidence strides  
of women who parted the air before them like the forces of nature that you are.

We are here to **speak** your names  
because you taught us that the **search** is  
always for the **truth** and that when people show us who they are,  
we should believe them.

We are here because you taught us that *sister speak* can continue to be our native tongue,  
no matter how many languages we learn as we  
move about as citizens of the world  
and of the **ever-evolving universe**.

We are here to speak your names  
because of the way you made for us.  
Because of the prayers you prayed for us.  
We are the ones you conjured up, hoping we would have strength enough,  
and **discipline** enough, and **talent** enough, and **nerve** enough  
to step into the light when it turned in our direction, *and just smile awhile*.

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We are the ones you hoped would make you proud  
because all of our hard work, makes all of yours part of something *better, truer, deeper*.

Something that lights the way ahead like a **lamp** unto our feet,

As **steady** as the unforgettable beat of our collective heart.

We **Speak** your names.

We **Speak** your names.

**Ruth Perry Louise Scott Larney Jackson**

**Gertrude Jackson Faye Rodgers Betty Bland**

**Octavia Scott Jannie Martin Callie Davis**

**Jeannetta Rhone Maurice Pugh Inez Harvey**

**Rosie Jordan Charmaine Newman Barbara Warmsley**

**Belinda Andrews Gertrude Taylor Pia Holmes**

**Thelma White Viola Williams Sandra Perkins Frenchie Andrews**

We **Speak** your names.

We **Speak** your names.

You could not have known how **closely** we watched your every move.  
How we **hung** on your every word, when you **prayed** a powerful prayer,  
or at the women retreat as we gathered around in a circle  
and you spoke words of *wisdom* and *prosperity* into our lives.

Or how you so gracefully shared a scripture during a *break down* or I would say a *breakthrough*.  
Proverbs 3:5 and 6. **Trust** in the **Lord** with all your heart and lean not to your own  
understanding in all your ways acknowledge **Him** and he will direct your path.

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Your gentle expression of love as you **encouraged** us to sing in the choir,  
usher on the Usher Board, act in a play, except a leadership role,  
or teach a Sunday school lesson  
and while doing these things study **God's word** and hide it in our hearts.  
We thank you because it made us *walk taller, smile wider, dream bigger,*  
*and study our Bibles more.*

We **speak** your names.

We **speak** your names.

**Lois Clemons Winona Taylor Rosa Thomas**

**Cora Mack Kathryn McDade Leatrice Singleton**

**Jackie Hudson Margaret Williams Charmaine Newman Adrian Jackson Rosie Williamson  
Lauvella Cole**

**Catherine Byrdsong Lillie Milner Claudia Newman**

**Joyce Slay Emma McCray Ethel Cloy**

**Juanita Simmons Lisa Sweeny Vonna Haynes**

We **speak** your names.

We **speak** your names.

You could not have been in each of our little black girl bedrooms,  
Watching us hold that make-pretend microphone as we lip-synched  
**Yes Jesus Love's Me** when dinner was ready downstairs,  
when we begged our parents for piano lessons,  
or curled up under the covers with a bible story when we had math homework to do.

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You could not have known that your collective example of the

**limitless** possibilities that were open to us

is what allowed us to look our mothers in the eyes and say.

**Mama**, I want to be a **singer**,

**Mama**, I want to be an **actress**,

**Mama**, I want to be a **dancer, a sculptor, a lawyer , a leader**,

or a **world -changing force** for good.

And even when she **rolled** her eyes and shook her head

and pronounced **us** more our father's child than we had been hers,

she knew you had planted those ideas in our heads, and she thanked you for letting us see that we could be a part of something **better, truer, deeper**.

We **speak** your names.

We **speak** your names.

**Ollie Rice Charmaine Newman Donna McCallum**

**Etta Rhodes JoAnn Moon Gloria Clancy**

**Mae Hawthorne Stella Bankston Ellen Senegal**

**Jeanette Johnson Mary Williams Sandra Shackelford**

**Bertha Hardyway Judith Lewis Audrey Burnett**

**Lucille Clay Rutha Lyle Sandra Perkins Kathy Newman**

**Gwendolyn Johnson Wilma Hairston Sadie Addison**

We **speak** your names.

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We **speak** your names.

Because we are **sensual** women,  
born of **sensual** woman,  
who are born of **sensual** women,  
we celebrate your **passion**.

You taught us that the **mysteries** of true love  
are sometimes harder to **unravel**  
than all the others we attempt to understand,  
but that when we are lucky enough to find the thread,  
the reward is **worth** everything because  
the time to have enough of **love is never**.

Because we have had our **hearts** broken,  
we know your tears and have **felt** the same fears  
of never finding one who can share our light  
without getting **lost in it**, or **tossed in it**,  
into a wind that always blows colder than we think it will.

We celebrate your willingness to continue to **search for love**,  
and **find it**, and **lose it**, and find it, and lose it again  
until we finally find it for real  
and learn to **hold on tight by not holding on at all**.

From you, we learned that love, like beauty, comes in **many forms**.

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You showed us what love looks like when it's perfect, and when it isn't .

You let us watch you looking, reaching, yearning,  
always moving toward the light of something *better, truer, deeper*.

We **speak** your names.

We **speak** your names.

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**Sonja Cullen Mary Adams Augusta Saunders**

**Amanda Henderson Jackie Hyatte Margie Roberts**

**Lois Radcliff Cleo Lindsey Katherine Eaton**

**Charmaine Newman Loraine Abernathy Mary Rodgers**

**Delois Newman Mattie Walker Gwen Bouffard**

**Bennie Letcher Loretta Mincy Helen Crane**

**Annett Mills Christine Mitchell Pauline Newman**

We **speak** your names.

We **speak** your names.

And you made it look so **easy**.

You changed the world around You with such **fierce** determination,  
**effortless style**, and **unshakeable grace**, that we never suspected

how hard it was to be out there in the real world,

where sisterhood sometimes seems an abstract idea

and not the **living, breathing** thing we know

and need and want it to be.

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We have sometimes **shivered** at the edges of a very cold place,  
where people do not always see our beauty  
or understand the rhythm of our song.

At those moments, we **whisper** your names  
as a **talisman** and a **touchstone**,  
so we will not forget **who** and **whata**  
and **why** we are here.

And then, sometimes, in recognition of our **superior skill**,  
or our **undeniable talent**,  
or our **absolute** refusal to bend in the face of injustice,  
sometimes, we win the prize. The **big** one.

The one they will mention forever after when they call our names,  
or write our reviews, or **compose** our obituaries.

Sometimes, at that crucial, first one ever moment,  
we are invited to come court at the **Wimbledon**,  
or up to the **Oscar podium**, or the **Oval Office** ,or the **Nobel Ceremony**,  
or the **Broadway stage**, and express our feelings and the feelings of **every** other  
African American woman watching  
at a **moment** when all we really want to do is **call your names**.

All we really want to do is **thank** all of you for being with all of us,  
whenever and wherever we find ourselves,  
standing alone in the light. At those moments, we remember those lessons you shared

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by living your lives with such integrity and honor  
That they became something *better, truer, deeper*.

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**Rebecca Brewster Lizzie Duff Eleanor Cruse**  
**Clara Banks Angela Abernathy Vienae Miller**  
**Charmaine Newman Pamela Woolfolk Marva Williams**  
**Ruth Ford Venice Bridgefort Joyce Ervin**  
**Cressie Allen Magdalene Garner Linda Davis**  
**Thelma Gabriel Terri Boysaw Janice Piegee**  
**Yolanda Darrington Etta Vernon**

We **speak** your names.

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Because we are free women,  
born of free women ,  
who are born of free women,  
back as far as time begins,  
we celebrate your freedom.

Because we are wise women,  
born of wise women,  
who are born of wise women,

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we celebrate your wisdom.

Because we are magical women,  
born of magical women,  
who are born of magical women,  
we celebrate your magic.

We **celebrate** your **courage**.

We **celebrate** your **spirit**.

We **celebrate** your **genius**.

We **celebrate** your **loving kindness**.

We **celebrate** your **Faith in God ,in yourselves, and in us**.

We **thank you** for the dues you've paid,  
and the **prayers** you've prayed.

We thank you for showing us how to *fly* by *flying*.

We **thank** you for these **wings**,  
and we stand before you now, your **living legacy**,  
the **flesh** and **blood** of our collective dreaming,  
and we realize with a knowing **deeper** than the flow  
of human blood in human veins that we are part of something *better, truer ,deeper*.

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