

American Income

By Afaa Michael Weaver

The survey says all groups can make more money
if they lose weight except black men...men of other colors
and women of all colors have more gold, but black men
are the summary of weight, a lead thick thing on the scales,
meters spinning until they ring off the end of the numbering
of accumulation, how things grow heavy, fish on the
ends of lines that become whales, then prehistoric sea life
beyond all memories, the billion days of human hands
working, doing all the labor one can imagine, hands
now the population of cactus leaves on a papyrus moon
waiting for the fire, the notes from all their singing gone
up into the salt breath of tears of children that dry, rise
up to be the crystalline canopy of promises, the infinite
gone fishing days with the apologies for not being able to love
anymore, gone down inside earth somewhere where
women make no demands, have fewer dreams of forever,
these feet that marched and ran and got cut off, these hearts
torn out of chests by nameless thieves, this thrashing
until the chaff is gone out and black men know the gold
of being the dead center of things, where pain is the gateway
to Jerusalems, Bodhi trees, places for meditation and howling,
keeping the weeping heads of gods in their eyes.

Source: *Poetry* (March 2007)