

Deeper Than Skin

Negro—word I sipped and steeped in my
blood one quarter of a century. African American
is smoother, like whip cream on the tongue,
sure as red digits of a radio clock,
powerful—water spurting from a showerhead
because African American fits like an ao dai,
just shimmers against my bones, admonishes
one to displace words that sour breath. I
drop lies like scraps and horde suitcases
of facts for my nieces and nephews. What
black slave hands planted remains in the
blood of a man whose hand grasps babies,
makes babies fly out of wombs with forceps,
a hand that snips umbilical cords of babies,
colored or white. Ellison wrote of an invisible
man. I write the world colorless as ether.