

MEDIA KIT



SHONDA BUCHANAN

WRITER • EDUCATOR • SPEAKER • CONSULTANT • TRAVELER

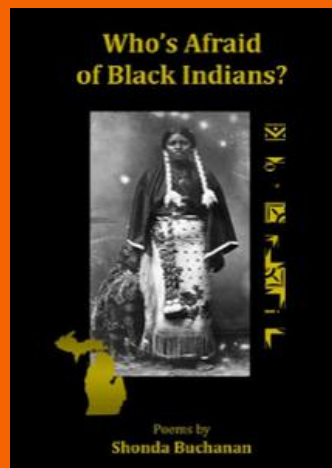
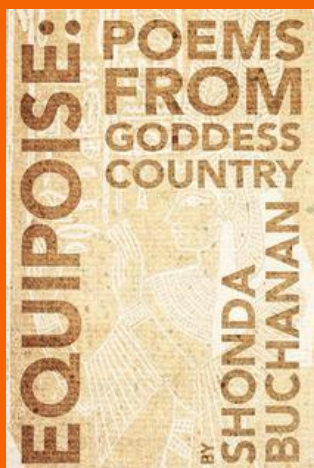
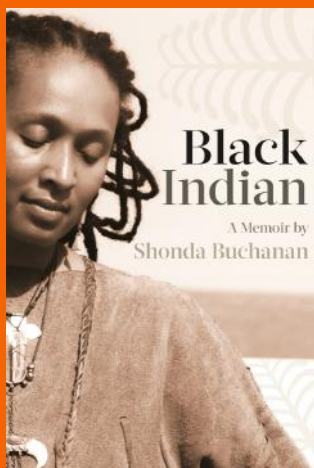



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SHORT BIO



Author of the memoir, *Black Indian*, and editor of Harriet Tubman Press, Shonda is an award-winning author whose poetry and essays have been featured in numerous anthologies including *The Seventh Wave*, *Urban Voices: 51 Poems from 51 American Poets*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Art Meets Literature: An Undying Love Affair*, *A Def Poetry Jam*, *Step into a World: A Global Anthology of the New Black Literature*, *Geography of Rage: Remember the Los Angeles Riots of 1992*, and *Catch the Fire!!! A Cross-Generational Anthology of Contemporary African-American Poetry*, *Rivendale*, *WhatFreshWitchIsThis?*, and *LongStoryShort*.


Having received several Virginia Foundation for the Arts and Arts Midwest/National Endowment for the Arts grants, she is a Sundance Institute Fellow, a PEN Center Emerging Voices Fellow, a California Community Foundation Fellow and a Jentel Artist Residency Fellow.

Shonda freelances for the *Los Angeles Times*, the *LA Weekly*, *AWP's The Writer's Chronicle*, *Michigan History Magazine* and *Indian Country Today*. Shonda completed a third collection of poetry about Nina Simone and is working on a book of poetry about Phillis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon, two screenplays, and a collection of essays about the first migration of Free People of Color from the Southeast to the Midwest. Shonda's book, *Equipoise: Poems from Goddess Country*, was published by San Francisco Bay Press and her collection of poetry, *Who's Afraid of Black Indians?*, was nominated for the Library of Virginia Literary Awards and the Black Caucus of the American Library Association Awards.

An Eloise Klein-Healy Scholarship recipient, a Sundance Institute Writing Arts fellow, a Jentel Artist Residency fellow and a PEN Center Emerging Voice fellow, Shonda has received a grant from the Arts Midwest/National Endowment for the Arts and several grants from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities.

Born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Shonda holds an MFA from Antioch University, an MA and BA in English from Loyola Marymount University. Follow her on Instagram, Twitter, [@shondabuchanan](https://www.instagram.com/shondabuchanan) or visit www.shondabuchanan.com.


LONG BIO



Award-winning poet and educator Shonda Buchanan (1968) was born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, a daughter of Mixed Bloods, tri-racial and tri-ethnic African American, American Indian and European-descendant families who migrated from North Carolina and Virginia in the mid-1700 to 1800s to Southwestern Michigan. *Black Indian*, her memoir, begins the saga of these migration stories of Free People of Color communities exploring identity, ethnicity, landscape and loss.

For the last 18 years, Shonda has taught Creative Writing, Composition and Critical Theory at Loyola Marymount University, Hampton University and William & Mary College. An Eloise Klein-Healy Scholarship recipient, a Sundance Institute Writing Arts fellow, a Jentel Artist Residency fellow and a PEN Center Emerging Voices fellow, Shonda has received grants from the California Community Foundation, Arts Midwest/National Endowment for the Arts Big Read Program and several grants from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities.

Her first book of poetry, *Who's Afraid of Black Indians?*, was nominated for the Black Caucus of the American Library Association and the Library of Virginia Book Awards. Literary Editor of Harriet Tubman Press, her second collection of poetry, *Equipoise: Poems from Goddess Country* was published by San Francisco Bay Press. Shonda's poetry and essays have been featured in numerous anthologies. Freelance writer for the *LA Weekly* since 1991, and *Indian Country Today*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Writer's Chronicle*, Shonda is completing a novel and a collection of poetry about the iconic singer, concert pianist and Civil Rights activist, Nina Simone. For more information visit [Wayne State University Press](#). Follow Shonda [@shondabuchanan](#).



BLACK INDIAN

A Memoir by **Shonda Buchanan**

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Wayne State University Press

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August 26, 2019

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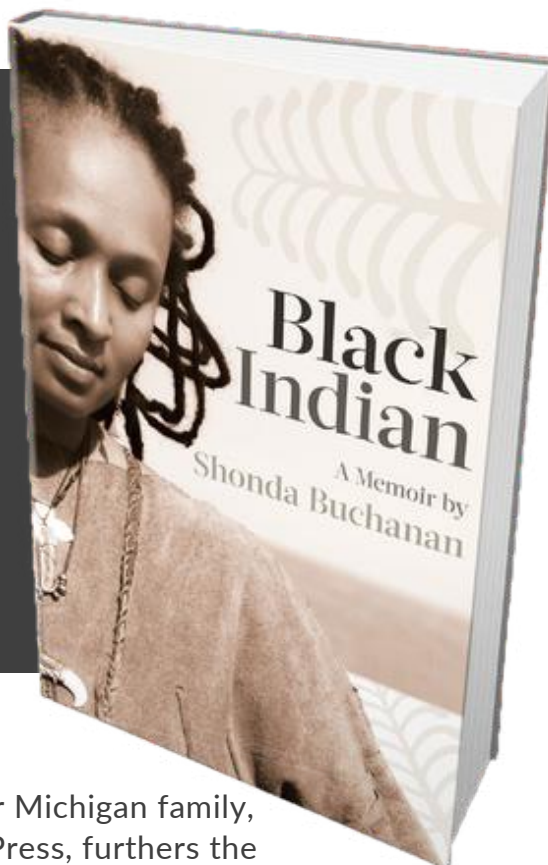
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Praise for *Black Indian*

“With interwoven stories about the women in her Michigan family, Buchanan, the literary editor of Harriet Tubman Press, furthers the important work she has done in her poetry, uncovering the hidden histories of families struggling to define their mixed black and Native American bloodlines to their own satisfaction.” —Kirkus Reviews

“*Black Indian* is an emotionally draining memoir that is also resonant in its discussions of poverty's destructive forces.” —Foreword Reviews

Black Indian, searing and raw, is Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* meets Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*—only, this isn’t fiction. Beautifully rendered and rippling with family dysfunction, secrets, deaths, drunks, and old resentments, Shonda Buchanan’s memoir is an inspiring story that explores her family’s legacy of being African Americans with American Indian roots and how they dealt with not just society’s ostracization but the consequences of this dual inheritance.

A Q&A ABOUT BLACK INDIAN

Q: Why did you write your book?

A: I wrote this book because this story is a universal one that hasn't been told in a memoir before. It's the real story of America. One that's been hidden. It's also the story of my women, and how the drug epidemic of the 80s impacted my family in the worst way, and our will to survive. It's my *Joy Luck Club* meets *The Color Purple* meets *The Help* and *Ceremony*. We're not tragic mulattos. We're Mixed Blood in America.

Q: What parts of history are you examining in *Black Indian*?

A: In order to understand the intersections of African Americans and American Indians in this country we have to look at the trifecta for people of color and how these overlapped, 1) we have to look at slavery, 2) we have to look at the American Indian experience, i.e., the Trail of Tears (removal or the multiple removals) and the Five Civilized Tribes, 3) and we have to look at the formation of race as it evolved and manifested in the U.S. Census.

In each instance, with the now debunked "discovery" myth of Columbus, with the landing of the first Africans, Angolans, in 1619 in Jamestown, with Andrew Jackson's Manifest Destiny, at every juncture, the Powhatan Confederacy interact with Africans; some Africans who escaped slavery married into American Indian tribes and had babies; the Five Civilized tribes who assimilated to Western ways to save their culture owned slaves. There are so many moments when this happened. That's my family.

My book is the first time you see the residuals of these particular crossroads. The narratives of how the loss of language, land, traditions and culture, and a way of life manifested due to that loss, and then had to be recreated. And this is the story of Black America. Really it's not just my story it is my mom's story but it's not just her story it's very much my sister's story but it's not just her story. This is the story of displacement and erasure and reclassification. This is the story of racial divide. It's the story of subjugation and Jim Crow, particularly of women of color who worked in the homes of white people under duress and for very little money. My grandmother and great grandmother were those women in *The Help*.

Q: What do you mean?

A: We're descendants of migrants. My people were Free People of Color settlers, farmers and landowners. My grandmother and her mother were domestic workers. Their lives as young women were hard. Their worth was based solely on procreation. My eldest known female ancestor, Anny Sophia Milum, b. in 1824, had 15 children. She was pregnant for nearly 15 years of her life. Can you imagine that? Back then, this was a woman's worth.

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Q: What's a Black Indian? Where do they hang out?

A: I'm right here. When I was growing up my mother never used the term Black Indian. She always said "You've got some Indian in you, some French and German, and a little bit of Black. So I lived my life according to what she said, but I also lived in the role society prescribed to me by my race and gender: a Black Woman in America. And I still do. I'm both. Because I never saw any white relatives that I was blood-related to at family reunions, and none of my "light-skinned" aunts claimed white to my knowledge, I was mostly Black and American Indian. Until I did my DNA I had constructed my identity through an oral history of my ethnicity, then when I traced my ancestors to specific tribes, I had historical documentation on my matrilineal side that said, "Indian," but then I did my DNA and boy, what a surprise.

Q: How many Black Indians are there in America?

A: By now, anyone who has taken a DNA test knows that the concept "race" is a social construct in America. For African Americans and American Indians at the formation of the Americas in the 1500s, race was used to classify and divide peoples who were traditionally subjugated. But the idea of a race (which replaced ethnicity) was also used, very subtly, legally and imaginatively, to delegate and prescribe one's status. That's the fulcrum moment. That's also the point of erasure of specific tribes and tribal affiliations. With that, no one really knows how many Black Indians there are for a multitude of reasons. However, the U.S. Census listed that 7.2 percent of Americans, roughly 50,000, labeled themselves Black Indian.

Q: How does your family deal with the Black Indian, dual race and tri-racial heritage?

A: For me, and in my book, I show a family, past and present, through the story of my mom, my aunts and my sister, in particular, engaged in multiple identity struggles, cycles of abuse and a constant state of recovery based on this historical act of race formation. My grandfather was the fruit of this self-hatred, this division which put Blacks in perpetually inferior status. For my grandfather who couldn't keep his lies straight once told my aunt he was born in Oklahoma; he told my mother they were Blackfoot. But he didn't know. He was suffering and tried to quiet his demons in a bottle. For him, and so many other Black men, Mixed Blood men and women, it's been such a hard, dangerous yet consistent message that your one drop of white blood did not make you a part of the white race; yet your one drop of American Indian blood did not make you American Indian, but Black blood, now there was the proof. You were inferior. And don't you forget it. You could be both, or all three, except on the U.S. Census. This stems from purists trying to re-whiten the white race. Or keep it from being diluted any further but it was too late. Mixed bloods were passing in droves.

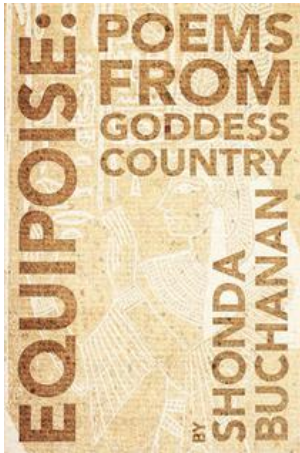
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Look at Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson's last 4 children. They disappeared into white society. In contrast look at Mildred Loving. She was Black and Rappahannock but she was relegated to, and subsumed by Black in America, without the right to marry the man she loved because he was white. Color prescribes status.

Q: How are Black Indians seen today?

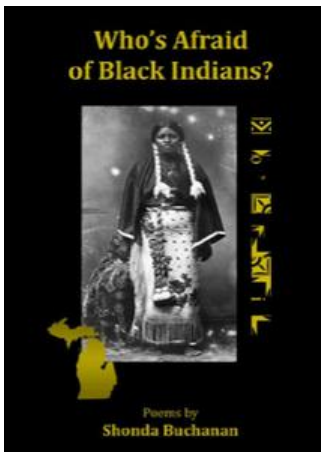
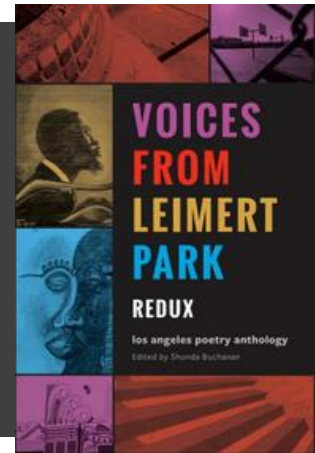
A: Black Indians as a community are mostly embraced by full-blood or federally recognized Indigenous Peoples, First Peoples, American Indians. We dance at pow wows and participate in ceremonies. We practice both our African and American Indian culture. I'm a women's traditional dancer, and there are some places where I've danced, or sang with a drum, where we weren't embraced. I've had an altercation at a pow wow in Virginia. I heard a comment on a PBS special one time looking at the lives of American Indians and one man said, "And what about those Mixed Bloods, eh? Confused isn't it?" As a community, or even a sub-community, Black Indians haunt the shadows. Unless you see us at pow wows, or unless we speak up, it's like we don't exist. We're just Black in mainstream America. Until we sing a song, or tell you where we've done ceremony or who our people are. Then folks sit up and say, "Oh, you're real." Yes, we're Mixed Blood. We're real.

PUBLISHED WORKS



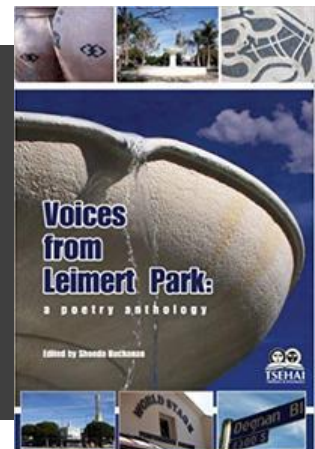
AUTHOR NAME: Shonda Buchanan
BOOK TITLE: Equipoise: Poems from Goddess Country
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BOOK TITLE: Voices from Leimert Park REDUX: A Poetry Anthology
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AUTHOR NAME: Shonda Buchanan
BOOK TITLE: Who's Afraid of Black Indians?
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PUBLICATION DATE: 2012
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CONTACT



CONSULTING / EDUCATION / PUBLISHING

To request Shonda as a Keynote Speaker, Workshop Leader, Presenter, Lecturer, or as a Consultant, Curriculum Development Coordinator/Consultant, Grant Writer or Program Coordinator/Manager, [click here](#).

Note: In your email, please include the occasion/theme, date, time, location, number of participants or estimated audience and honorarium/speaker fee/or anticipated consulting budget.



123-456-789



contact@email.com

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@shondabuchanan



@ShondaBuchanan



@ShondaBuchananAuthor