



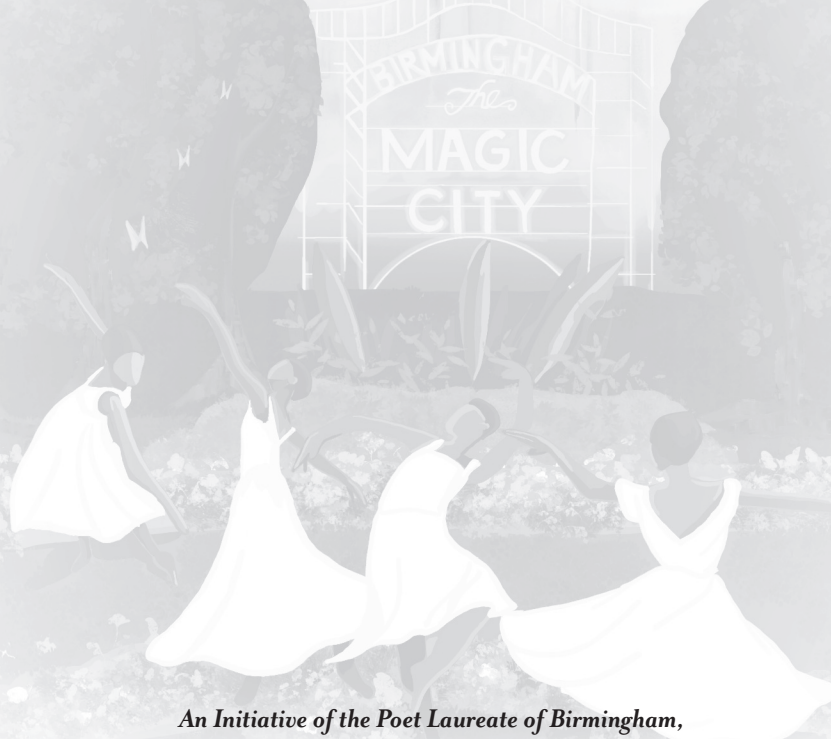
# Once Upon A Magic City

Poems by: *Salaam Green, Inaugural Poet Laureate City of Birmingham*

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*Inaugural Poet Laureate, City of Birmingham*

*Cover Art by: Micah Althea*



*An Initiative of the Poet Laureate of Birmingham,*  
*Sponsored by the City of Birmingham,*  
*Create Birmingham, and the Alabama State Council on The Arts*





Birmingham,

Supporting the arts and culture community is a very important initiative of my administration. Artists and storytellers not only share our stories, they preserve our history.

Thanks to the support and partnership with the Alabama State Council on the Arts, The Birmingham City Council's Cultural Arts Committee and Create Birmingham, the City of Birmingham is proud to have our first Poet Laureate, *Ms. Salaam Green*.

Ms. Green serves as an ambassador for Birmingham's arts community. Since beginning her term in January 2024, she has hit the ground running; making local appearances, building advocacy and community through poetry, and working on this very special chapbook.

"Once Upon a Magic City" is her tribute to a Birmingham in our dreams. It is a pleasure and an honor to see our city through her creative lens. I am especially thrilled about her adding journal pages to this special edition. This helps the reader take part in the creative act of making this book their own. In addition to supporting the Poet Laureate initiative, the City of Birmingham, with leadership from our Community Development office, has begun efforts to support placing public art all across our city; utilizing the work of our many visual and literary creatives around town.

In the meantime, I hope you will enjoy reading this book and be on the lookout for more from the city's arts community and, of course, from Salaam.

Happy reading and creating,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Re Woodfin". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Mayor, City of Birmingham



## Poet Laureate

Salaam Green named as the first poet laureate of Birmingham, Alabama, 2024-2025. The prestigious position recognizes Ms. Green's outstanding contributions to the literary arts and her commitment to fostering a deeper appreciation for poetry within our community. She was born in the Black Belt of Alabama and was raised by a family of educators and a single mother. Despite growing up in rural Alabama with limited resources she was encouraged by her mother, a retired teacher, to read, write, and dream for a better future. She graduated from the University of Montevallo with an English degree and has a MS in Early Childhood Education from the University of North Dakota Graduate program and has spent more than 16 years as an arts educator, healer and community leader.

Green is the founder and director of Literary Healing Arts and a Road Scholar for the Alabama Humanities Alliance. A certified trainer for the Kellogg Foundation's Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation initiative, she also leads "Write to Heal" workshops — a series of seminars geared at instructing both individuals and organizations in using poetry, writing and storytelling to reclaim their voices and transform their lives. In 2018, Green helped conduct a series of "Truth Booths" during the massive For Freedoms public art project, where she guided participants through conversations about social and environmental justice. Green has garnered esteem residencies including University of Alabama at Birmingham Arts in Medicine, The Wallace House for Arts and Reconciliation, and the Auburn University Jule Collins Smith Museum. Green is a published author sought-out speaker and Tedx Birmingham alumnus speaker whose work has been featured in the Alabama Arts Journal, Southern Women's Review, Scalawag and more.

Salaam is 2024 literary arts awardee for her contributions in the state of connecting poetry to the people, a southern Black women in media awardee, the 2016 poet laureate innovation and creativity for Create Birmingham. For her writing in Elephant Journal she won best in writing, and the inaugural community village awardee for her write to heal work with diverse populations in the city of Birmingham and state of Alabama. Salaam serves on the board of the Alabama Arts Alliance as the Director of diversity & equity and is a Poetry Teaching Writer, Alabama's Writers Forum and is poetry editor of two anthologies in the state of Alabama.

"I am grateful to the city of Birmingham for this honor of becoming the first poet laureate, I have immense gratitude and believe poetry is for the people.

This is a duty, a privilege, and as a citizen, it is calling to be the people's poet in a city rich in its foundation of justice and its progression towards unity, "As the inaugural Poet Laureate alongside the noble diverse, inclusive, and inter-generational people of the Magic City we shall emerge towards the inseparably entwined journey of belonging through the healing power of words together."

In Birmingham, Green has worked with a number of organizations including the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the Magic City Poetry Festival, the month-long celebration of poetry founded by Ashley M. Jones, the state of Alabama's first Black and youngest poet laureate. Green was the Magic City Poetry Festival's second eco poet fellow, a tenure that ran from 2020 to 2022. This year, Green was one of the poets featured during the Magic City Poetry Festival's Poetry in the Gardens program. In October, Green partnered with poet Tania Russell and the Alabama Humanities Alliance to host "Inked and Echoed," a series of book signings and discussions at the inaugural Birmingham FOOD+ culture festival. Green is also a poet in residence at The Wallace Center for Arts and Reconciliation (formerly Klein Arts and Culture).

Learn more about the Birmingham Poet Laureate at [birminghamal.gov/poet](http://birminghamal.gov/poet)



## Featured Artist

Micah Althea Briggs, founder of 4XA, is a Visual Artist based in Birmingham, Al. Currently, a graphic artist for the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, she is also a fine artist specializing in painting. Micah has been a traveling and exhibiting artist for close to 10 years. Throughout life and in particular her time in university, art was how Micah interrogated, reinterpreted, and made sense of the world around her. Micah's style of art, developing and changing along her journey, finds itself rooted somewhere between the realms of surrealism and magical realism. Micah's art is greatly inspired by the diverse stories and cultures of her ancestors. It is their beauty, power, resilience and creativity that she exemplifies and that radiates through her work. Acting as a "site of enchantment", her art is a portal into a world of knowledge and understanding, transformation, and contemplation. Micah's art engages imagination, intriguing the mind's natural desire for curiosity. It focuses on reimagining stories often mistold and reintroducing faces once erased. Reimagining who we are, Re- enchanting our communities, and Re-Inspiring our people.

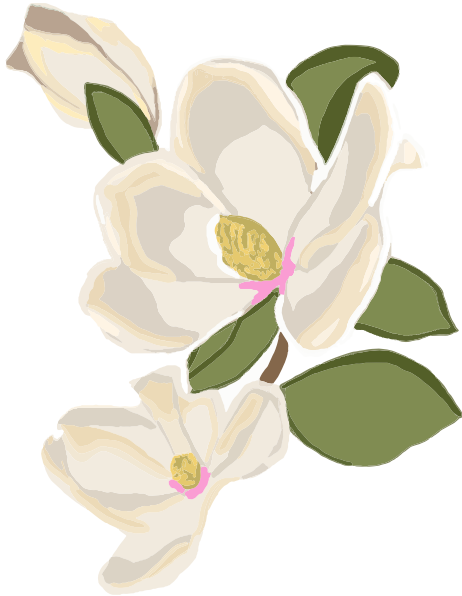
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*Dream Again.*

*-The Chapbook Team of Artists,  
Creatives, and City of Birmingham Change-makers*





## Freedom Call

Come to Birmingham and walk the paved path of faith, forge toward the road of justice, stand underneath the light of enduring hope, embrace the ancestors prayers of fortitude and joy, and sit in the reflection of iron and steel.

Press into the promise that brings people to Birmingham to heal.

Be ever mindful of freedoms call.

# Birmingham Where the World Belongs

We are glad to have you in Birmingham where the world comes to get free, where the world belongs.

Where Bar-b-Que and the magic of a meat and three call y'all to come on in.

Oysters on a rooftop overlooking a city bustling with the smell of biscuits and hot homemade jam.

Where the serenity of the art museum leads its charge into the Botanical Garden's beauty.

Where storytellers grace the doors of inclusive library spaces reading books from the archive of a city's book list.

Where athletes gather at the Crossplex reminders of the courage and bravery of Birmingham's Hall of Fame giants.

In Birmingham...

Where Vulcan's open hands beckon the warrior spirit of solidarity

Where the legions of legends find their voices in the stands of Legion Field's stadium.

Birmingham where the world comes to get free, where the world comes to belong.

In Birmingham...

Where Red Mountain peaks at the height of hikers mighty mercy

Where the regalia of Railroad Park stretch its multicoloured rails to 4th avenue touching the sweet soul of Eddie Kendrick's Memorial Park.

In Birmingham...

Where the Carver Museum rolls out the golden carpet and the Alabama Theatre ushers in the southeastern region. From the progressive glow of the lyric to the modern flow of Ensley's memory lane.

Birmingham is where the world comes to get free, where the world comes to belong.

In Birmingham....

Where Civil Rights icons stands as hero's protecting a city they built.

Where Sloss Furnaces fires its embers into the sockets of a clear future.

Where creatives dance, sing, and breathe.

Where we all march.

Where farmers scream sweet home Alabama.

Come to Birmingham where we all belong y'all and let the 2 piece Wing and Fries, Fried Green tomatoes, White Bread and Hot sauce and extra salt at Green Acres get you free.

Come to Birmingham and let Eagles Restaurant oxtails since 1951 get your free.

Come to Birmingham and let J.B.'s House of Style suit you up and get you fresh fly and all the way free.

In Birmingham...

Where Black news matters just ask the Birmingham Times and the Etheridge Brothers Barber and Cosmetology spaces.

Birmingham Where the world comes to get free, where the world comes to belong.

In Birmingham...

Where Shuttlesworth showed the world how to get free

Where Arrington the first Black Mayor showed a nation how to get free

Where grandmothers from Bush Hills to Norwood to Bellview Heights taught the community how to dream and get free.

In Birmingham where unity dared to break the ugly divide.

Come to Birmingham and walk the paved path of faith forge toward the road of justice stand underneath the light of enduring hope embrace the ancestors prayers of fortitude and joy sit in the reflection of iron and steel. Press into the promise that brings people to Birmingham to Heal.

Be ever mindful of freedoms call.

We are glad to have you in Birmingham where the world comes to get free, where the world comes to belong.

# My Magic City - A 205 Day Poem

Birmingham my magic city  
A community designed to thrive the boldest city in the 205.

In Birmingham We inspire  
Rewriting our own story making magic in the 205.

Birmingham My Magic City

In Birmingham  
We insight Repair  
Opening doors of creativity.

Birmingham My Magic City

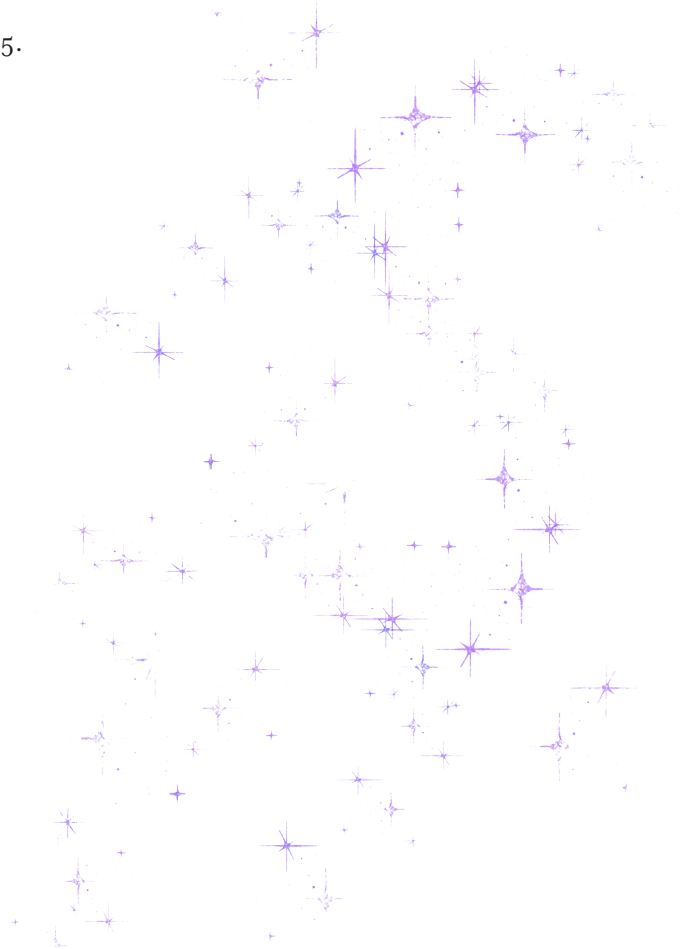
In Birmingham We innovate Rebuild  
Bringing vibrancy to all '99' neighborhoods.

Birmingham My Magic City

In Birmingham We introduce Recreate  
Restoring hope and liberating all injustice.

Birmingham My Magic City

In Birmingham We invite  
Re-imagine  
Marching in glorious unity.  
Birmingham My Magic City



In Birmingham  
We include  
Reform  
Promoting access to diversity and opportunity.

Birmingham My Magic City

In Birmingham  
We influence  
Re-frame  
Transforming intolerance into dignity.

Birmingham My Magic City

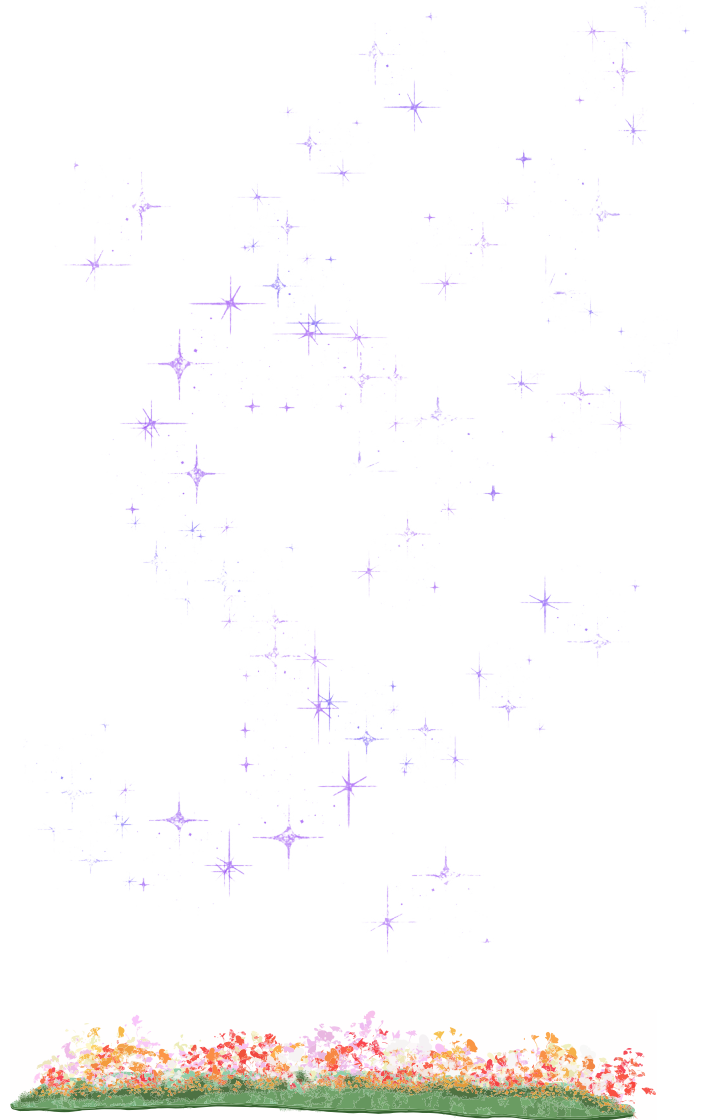
In Birmingham  
We invest  
Reshape Unlocking the gifts of a new generation.

Birmingham My Magic City

In Birmingham  
We increase  
Renew  
Bravely facing the challenges of the past forging towards a  
glorious future.

Birmingham My Magic City

In Birmingham  
We inspire  
Rewriting our own story  
A community designed to thrive by far the greatest city in  
the 205.



# A Call to Create

Birmingham is Where the World Comes to Create

When I imagine Birmingham,  
I see visual artists, musicians, photographers, poets, and storytellers  
creating stages calling the world to come and create.

When I imagine Birmingham,  
I see the Afro-futurism of Afro-southern ethereal art crowding bare  
sidewalks and empty buildings calling the world to come and create.

When I imagine Birmingham,  
I see and hear poets on rooftops, underground, and in stadiums unleashing  
the lyrics of a city that radically welcomes the world to come and create.

When I imagine Birmingham,  
In all of its artist hue, I see the gathering of oneness under the umbrella of  
togetherness signaling the world to come and create.

When I imagine Birmingham,  
The sleek and inventive way creatives prepare a place and a people for  
liberation and love I feel a city transformed by creativity and revolutionized  
by creatives who beckon to the world welcome to Birmingham,

Where the world comes to create.

*The value of a movement can  
be measured by the consistency  
and compassion of its leaders  
to create community and build  
intergenerational witnessing.*

*-Salaam Green*







# Healing is at Hand

For Revolution is at hand.

No sister no mother no daughter shall witness the blood of her father,  
son, brother or lover without the face of truth revealing itself.

For healing is at hand.

For revolution is at hand.

Our children are watching  
Our children are no longer waiting  
Our children are moving  
Our children are speaking  
Our children are transforming  
Our children are protesting  
Our children are listening  
Our children are liberating  
Our children are telling  
Our children are freedom.

For healing is at hand.



# This Far

At 16th Street Baptist Church

The saints sing the sacred truth that goodness is not a religion and the spirit guides the bestowing believer home.

We are here in celebration of all the ways in which we all matter and mattered.  
The tattered volatile shards of glass but a remnant of the sharp past.  
We come here to remember the smiles that gave us joy the way the sound of laughter reminds us of how hopeful and honest the world can be.

At 16th Street Baptist Church

The saints sing the sacred truth that goodness is not a religion and the spirit guides the bestowing believer home.

We are here in fervent faint-less posture worshipping,  
Like a bee to pollen wishing for summer to shine its praying hands on the foreheads of the faithful.

At 16th Street Baptist Church

The saints sing the sacred truth that goodness is not a religion and the spirit guides the bestowing believer home.

No longer hiding from the invisible shadow of fear,  
We are here an open door towards unity freely rejoicing in the grace and mercy that brought us this far.

*Poetry preserves a people,  
a place, a city, a nation,  
sometimes you must do what is  
necessary to preserve ones self.  
Poetry is my self-preservation.*

*-Salaam Green*

*Dear Little Girls and Women of Birmingham,*

*May poetry become your victory song.*

*May courage rise to the rhythm  
of your poetic voices.*

*-Salaam Green*





## Little Girls of Birmingham

Little girls of Birmingham build their dreams on revolutions of past, present, and future.

Little girls of Birmingham tear down the rancid structures of racism and bias.

Little girls of Birmingham softly and with precious ease bring the magic back into the city of iron and steel.

Little girls of Birmingham are wealthy, healthy, wise, brave, courageous, and creative takers of risk.

Little girls of Birmingham we are in awe of your grace, beauty and style.

Little girls of Birmingham we are blessed to say your names, Addie Mae, Dennis, Carol and Cynthia-say their names.

Little girls of Birmingham we are blessed to fulfill the everlasting vision of love and blessed to be on the ever wide and ever glowing supernatural mission of belonging and power.





# We are the Women an Invocation

*~In the city of Birmingham according to a 2020 census report, there are approximately 112,000 women, and according to the same data women make up 51.4% of the population in Alabama.*

## **We are the Women**

Women who participate in peace and are essential to the economy, democracy, and are the modern trailblazers in our communities, churches, and the market place.

## **We are the Women**

Women who have bravely blazed the paths for our daughters, sisters, and all remarkable women.

## **We are the Women**

Emerging diving into oceans and oceans of liberation.

## **We are the Women**

Magical miracle working powerful breathing gifts of joy, divine creations.

## **We are the Women**

Women who rise up, take flight, shine our own lights, and care to brave new heights.

## **We are the Women**

Justice seeking women who speak out, move in solidarity, unity, and resistance.

## **We are the Women, We are the Women, We are the Women**

Women who shall always be heard, Women whose voices shall never be silenced.

## Once Upon a Magic City

Blue and iridescent from the moon and the stars a very  
magic city is born,

Once Upon a Magic City  
Where visionaries and audacious spirits live.  
Planting seeds of progress and growing fields of dreams.  
Plucking up anger and replacing rage with rejoicing.

Once Upon a Magic City  
Where pride abounds  
We honor and value your tantamount tenacity.

Once Upon a Very Magic City  
A city fulfilled and bravely reformed.  
Oh, sweet magic city your justice is salvation.

Once Upon a Magic City  
The journey towards wisdom and everlasting freedom  
shall forever be fulfilled.  
Your promise a reminder of our ancestors praise and  
their petitions of unrelenting prayer.

*The highest form of a city's  
contribution to its citizens lies in its  
contributions to humanity and art  
and artists are the human forces  
most connected to both.*

*-Salaam Green*





*Create art for yourself, create for yourself,  
then for your children, and next for The  
children, for your friends, not just for  
some invisible person behind the curtain  
or some ominous program or event.*

*-Salaam Green*

*Figure out your own sense of radical and radicalize yourself first then summon the mountain that must be surmounted then you will be ready and know what is next and how to proceed.*

*-Salaam Green*







# What Must We Do “Birmingham”

Mayoral Proclamation of Poet Laureate, City Council, 2024

## A Proclamation to the City

What must we do to elevate the human race.  
What must we do to eliminate violence, poverty, and suffering.

What must we do-Birmingham

We must activate acts of agape love and moments of radical resistance...more joy.

We must walk the streets and recognize the beauty therein, the progress, the histories that tell our stories of forgiveness an unrelenting legacy.

What must we do-Birmingham

We must take the hands of our youth and guide their hearts into spaces of renewal and transformation.  
We must blaze a path towards solidarity, unity, and repair.

We must become the pathfinders that light the roads toward recovery and kindle the fire of change.

We must open up the book of love and read each chapter carefully page by page line by line verse by verse.

We must digest the words of our forefathers the cries of our little girls the laughter of our critics and dare to write our own script.

What must we do-Birmingham

We must become the Birmingham we wish to see, the Birmingham we wish to be.

We must carry wisdom to the ones that refuse mediocrity and futility.

We must grasp hope by the strength of each woven sentence.

We must speak up.

We must raise our voices.

We must rise...Birmingham

We must work.

We must build.

We must be brave.

We must remember that we are the caretakers of  
King's courage the catalyst of peace the protectors of  
justice the genesis of civil rights the revelation of a  
mighty south.

What must we do-Birmingham

We must empty our pockets of complaints and fear.  
We must take great concern and wrap our arms  
around the giants of greatness.  
We must embrace that a new day has begun.  
We must believe.

We must be the Birmingham we were birthed to be.  
We must remind the world and the nation that  
Birmingham's beautiful spine shall never bend or  
break.  
We must perfect our posture with an unmovable  
spirit.

What must we do-Birmingham

We must recognize we are significant and propel  
ourselves forward with dignity and align ourselves  
with rest and resiliency.

We must heal together and teach a world how to heal  
together.

We must call forth and gather each citizen young  
and old to sit in the chair of champions and to  
create their own destiny.

What must we do-Birmingham

We must be the Birmingham where people were  
born to be free  
the Birmingham we wish to see  
the Birmingham we know and trust we all can  
and desire to be.

# *Once Upon A Magic City*

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For more information about the Birmingham Poet  
Laureate Initiative, other city-sponsored arts programs,  
and a listing of arts organizations,  
go to [www.birminghamal.gov/poet](http://www.birminghamal.gov/poet)



PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST



M. Caldwell

