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Poetry Project Title:
Propelling from Oppression to Affirmation

Artist statement

Through poetry, short stories, and movies, I focus on themes and messages. I can convey that through my own interpretations while embodying the same writing style as the writer. These four poems are works done by Langston Hughes, Danez Smith, and myself. By recognizing their creative interpretation of the world around us, I incorporate my interpretation and contribute to their poems.

In my recent research, I studied Harlem by Langston Hughes and alternative names for black boys by Danez Smith. Harlem talks about a dream and describes the city itself. I found this interesting because I have lived the city life and can interpret the city life as beautiful and dream-like and as hindering and nightmarish myself. The poem, Harlem, is interesting because it talks about all of the things that signal to defer their dream, but aside from that, the question poses: Does it explode? I interpreted that regardless of anything that is trying to stop one's dream from happening, it doesn't. Forces oppose the dream and work to suppress it, but exploding means it still comes to fruition. In alternate names for black boys, the poem talks about the degradation of one's thoughts and puts them into words or phrases.

Both poems, however, display metaphors to describe oppression yet propel positive affirmations. While Harlem may pose the question of deferring a dream, we all know that Harlem is a famous neighborhood in New York City, and it is the symbol of where all dreams come true. Alternate names of black boys may display derogatory names and phrases, but the entire poem lacks the use of proper capitalization, even the title, which speaks volumes. My interpretation was that through all the degradation, black boys, and the black community do not capitalize on those names and phrases. They instead rise above.

Harlem

By Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Philadelphia

By Janelle Fuller

What happens if a nightmare is frightening?

Does it send a chill

Like the homeless man's winter?

Or is it a thrill

Like the robber's intent... sinister?

Does it linger in your mind

Like an over thinker?

Maybe it just vanishes

And disappears

Or is it actually a dream, that is just unclear?

alternate names for black boys

By Danez Smith

1. smoke above the burning bush
2. archnemesiis of summer night
3. first son of soil
4. coal awaiting spark & wind
5. guilty until proven dead
6. oil heavy starlight
7. monster until proven ghost
8. gone
9. phoenix who forgets to un-ash
10. going, going, gone
11. gods of shovels & black veils
12. what once passed for kindling
13. fireworks at dawn
14. brilliant, shadow hued coral
15. (I thought to leave this blank
but who am I to name us nothing?)
16. prayer who learned to bite & sprint
17. a mother's joy & clutched breath

BLACK BOYS TO BLACK MEN: TERMS OF ENDEARMENT

By Janelle Fuller

1. **HANDSOME** MAN, HANDSOME HANDS WHO PLANTS THE BUSH...
HER BUSH
2. **MELANIN** GOD; A SUMMER'S NIGHT COULD NEVER
3. **BRETHREN**, LIKE THE SON OF SOIL BUT WHO ROSE FROM THE
DIRT AND EQUATES WITH MAN
4. **CHOCOLATE** THAT TASTES SWEET, MELTED BY COAL AND FIRE
5. **NATIVE** MAN
6. ALL COLORS TOGETHER: **BLACK**
7. **SOILED** IN RICH, DARK SMOOTH SKIN
8. **YOU ARE A MAN**
9. HE **RISES UP FROM THE ASHES**, SPREADS HIS WINGS AND FLYS
10. **STARTER OF LIFE**; OF MAN; CREATION
11. **HARDWORKING** MAN WHO SHOVELS HIS LAND; BUILDS HIS
FOUNDATION
12. **OVERCOMING**; NOT EASILY BROKEN DOWN
13. **GOLDEN** HEART WHO IGNITES THE SPARK OF A FIREWORK
14. **HIS PRESENCE** IS A CORAL HUE, BRIGHT, PROMISING AND
DOMINANT
15. (I COULD GO ON AND ON ABOUT THIS **BRILLIANT** MAN)
16. **TRENDSETTER**; THEY MAY PREY ON HIS STYLE, BITE IT, AND
COPY HIS EFFORTS
17. BLACK IS **KING**, WHO IS BIRTHED BY A BLACK **QUEEN**