Afro Anonymous (A.A.)

Hakim Bellamy

Abstract

A poem about a talk my mother had with me growing up...a common conversation between parents and children of color.

As the inaugural Poet Laureate of Albuquerque, NM (2012-2014), Hakim Bellamy is a national and regional Poetry Slam Champion, and holds three consecutive collegiate poetry slam titles at the University of New Mexico. His poetry has been published in on the Albuquerque Convention Center, on the outside of a library, in inner-city buses and in numerous anthologies across the globe. Bellamy was recognized as an honorable mention for the University of New Mexico Paul Bartlett Ré Peace Prize for his work as a community organizer and journalist in 2007, and was awarded the Emerging Creative Bravos Award by Creative Albuquerque in 2013. This year Bellamy was named a W. K. Kellogg Foundation Fellow and was awarded the Food Justice Residency at Santa Fe Art Institute. Recently, Bellamy was named Local iQ’s “Best Poet” for the fifth consecutive year on their annual Smart List, and he has been named “Best Poet” in the Weekly Alibi’s annual Best of Burque poll every year since 2010. He is the co-creator of the multimedia Hip Hop theater production Urban Verbs: Hip-Hop Conservatory & Theater that has been staged throughout the country. He facilitates youth writing workshops for schools, jails, churches, prisons and community organizations in New Mexico and beyond. Having recently released his first book, Swear, Hakim was conferred his Master’s Degree in Communications at the University of New Mexico in May. Currently completing multidisciplinary arts projects from his travels to Turkey and Nepal this summer, Bellamy has had his work featured on AlterNet, Truthout, CounterPunch and the nationally syndicated Tavis Smiley Radio Show. He is the proud father of a 7 year-old miracle and is the founding president of Beyond Poetry LLC.
A.A. (Afro Anonymous) aka “In Recovery” aka WARdrobe

“I am an invisible man ... I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.”

—Ralph Ellison (Invisible Man)

Son, if you came up missing
your hood would not be able to find you.
Unable to pick you out in a crowd,
or a police line up.

If you made it that far.
If they even came looking at all.

Don’t be anonymous child.
Make sure you stick out
like a pair of sore thumbs
alongside eight other fingers.
Don’t fist.
Don’t flinch,
even when their fingers
curl horizontally at your chest.

They won’t pull if you don’t push,
I pray.

Get em up, high.
As though you could actually reach
those pruned dreams above you,
rotting on each and every branch of government.

Like you’re the one being robbed of something,
and everything is suspect.

When standing up for yourself
becomes a crime,
you better stand out.

Like flannel in the summertime.
Like black combat boots and a trench coat
anytime of year.
Like Steven Fuckin’ Urkel
pants round your nipples,
or they will put shackles around your ankles.
Hoodies around your neck.
Flowers around your casket.

Because they murder more Stephons
than Steves every single year.

Don’t be anonymous, son.
Even if your comrades wear fatigues
every day in this warzone,
and call it a wardrobe,
you rock those plaid shorts
like a Tiger with no stripes
Do not enlist in Mortal Kombat
with a metropolitan military
that can’t see the fathers for the G’s,
our future for the trees.

It is open season on hoodies
and skinny jeans.
The only bulletproof vest
I can offer you is beneath
this three-piece suit.

We’ve worn these neckties for years
because we’re least threatening
at the end of a leash.

Speak jive only
as a second language,
because when in Rome
do as conquered people do.

I know…
Romans who?
Empires aren’t covered
til long after 1st grade
but it’s never too soon to grow up
in this backwards world
of men in backwards hats
getting gunned down in Walmart
for brandishing a toy pistol

While manufacturers live to brand
another day, about how lifelike
their product is…
“So authentic, 
even cops can’t tell the difference…”

So anonymous, 
even cops can’t tell the difference.

Son, 
this is not cops and robbers 
this is cowboys and Indians, 
and the only way to not get shot in the back 
is to dress like a cowboy.

This poem 
is the only arrow pointing you past 19.

When their life 
or pride 
is in danger, 
they cannot tell the difference between you 
and the criminal record 
they been bumping in their patrol car all day.

The gangsta rap videos 
they imagine on loop in your brain 
every time you open you mouth 
with no “sir.”

They can’t tell, 
just like mothers 
trying to identify the mutilated bodies 
of their babies.

Pulling Stephon’s 
personal effects 
out of a footlocker 
of Air Force Ones 
and Phoenix Suns jerseys 
like it’s a police line up.

I will donate 
your carefully creased curb costume 
to a “Pimps and Hoes” party 
at a fraternity you will never get in 
at a college I am determined to get you to 
… in one piece
This retired uniform,
designed to help you survive
these gang infested streets
is in need of a facelift.
To help you survive
a more lethal form of thuggery.

Because your tank tops
will never top their tanks.
If wearing a white flag were enough
I would drape you in that,
but it looks too much like the coroner’s blanket
and Officer PTSD might mistake you
for a frontline in Iraq.

Take off that bulls eye of conformity, son.
That bullshit dream of equality,
you can’t wear whatever you want in this country
that blames women for their own rape
because of what they didn’t have on.

You tuck your blackness into your bloodstream
like a white gold chain in the most dangerous part of town,
because the bullets pierce bubble goose parkas
leaving puddles of black boyhood flooding our sewers

And I’m sorry,
but I’d rather have you crying
than leaking
on your way home.

So you will settle
for being the preppiest kid in school.
Wear your culture
like a butt naked emperor.

Like an invisible man.

They will see you when it’s convenient,
beyond your Birkenstocks and Brooks Brothers
during the next manhunt.
When boys are fair game.

So, whatever you do
don’t be anonymous.
When you go back out to that corner
be the duck wearing a Labrador Retriever costume
in a flock of geese.

At least you know
they won’t shoot you, today.
And hey,
if you are lucky,
they might even house break you,
and take you home.

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