

# Understanding & Dismantling Privilege

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## 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 your 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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