POEMS
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Angel C. Dye is a poet and scholar of literature from Dallas-Ft. Worth, Texas. She is currently a second-year MFA in Creative Writing candidate at the University of Kentucky and an alumna of Howard University. Her poetry has appeared in *Sixfold Journal, About Place Journal, The Pierian Journal,* and *African Voices Magazine.* She writes in the tradition of Lucille Clifton, Amiri Baraka, and Sterling A. Brown hoping to discover what Audre Lorde calls “the words [she does] not yet have.”
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The Call

I think if I could call myself an artist
I would want to call myself free,
call myself wildflower and wind.
I’d want to breathe the breaths of a thousand brown children
and march to the beat of every hurting heart.
I would answer only to the names that my ancestors could not,
give them back the music that was muted into memory.

If I could create something
I’d craft a multicolored, many-faced mural—
a beautiful backdrop beyond binary bounds.

If I could really call myself an artist
I would be an earthen vessel, clay and water and sun.
I would be hallowed and hollow, sacred and open.
If I could be carved I’d want to be inscribed
with symbol and song,
a medium for the divine and mortal.

I’d be meeting ground paved in footprints
with no imaginary borders or asinine allegiance.
If I could call myself an artist, I mean really call upon something,
I’d be fist raised, sign raised, chant raised.
If I could be counted among the gamechangers,
the changemakers, the stake raisers,
I’d want to be hand clap, tambourine, organ, snare,
and there and there and there
and everywhere.

If I could call myself anything,
I’d call myself listening.

Because the call is not an appointment or accolade.
It’s an incitement and acknowledgement,
a recognition of work to be done
and an invitation to act.
The call is for forging freedom from fire
and rendering art from darkness.

The call is to empower and to lead, to feel and to be.
The call is booming, loud, and lifting us to our feet.

Can you hear it?
Why must we create?

I.

Because Starbucks
Because Waffle House
Because black bodies anywhere
Because my fear of red and blue lights
Because slurs are widely accepted
Because racist is not
Because 53%
Because marches
Because a Pepsi commercial
Because hoodies
Because cigarettes
Because tea and Skittles
Because heritage
Because statues
Because flags
Because Alt Right
Because Netflix
Because H&M
Because Dove
Because Shea Moisture
Because Urban Outfitters
Because cornrows
Because Timberlands
Because doorknocker hoops
Because baby hairs
Because Native headdresses
Because eskimo
Because gypsy
Because spirit animal
Because (bottom of the) totem pole
Because powwow
Because black-

mail

ball

sheep

list

face

out

market

(...)

p 2
Why must we create?

II.

Because “first black...” Because War on Drugs
Because Make America Great Because War on Crime
Because Angry Black Woman Because War on Poverty
Because Welfare Queen Because War on Terror
Because Mammy Because gentrification
Because Sapphire Because calling cops on neighbors
Because watermelon Because crossing the street
Because chicken Because clutching purses tight
Because Kool-Aid Because following me around a store
Because in 1492 Because how do you speak French
Because Thanksgiving Because I don’t work here
Because Presidents’ Day Because transracial
Because Juneteenth Because Ethnic Haircare aisle
Because Rosa was tired and her feet hurt Because Ethnic Foods aisle
Because MLK quotes Because exotic
Because the Black Panthers were terrorists Because cinco de drinko
Because the KKK are not Because everyone is Irish on March 17th
Because strange fruit Because Jesus is white
Because crosses burning Because Rue in Hunger Games
Because poll taxes Because The Sunken Place
Because bombings Because Oprah for President
Because four little girls Because you’re so articulate
Because The Help Because HBCUs are racist
Because The Butler Because White History Month
Because Twelve Years a Slave Because #Allgirls are magic
Because Underground Because American Airlines
Because Django Unchained Because Delta Airlines
Because Birth of a Nation Because TSA pats down my hair
Because #AllLives Because reparations
Because #BlueLives Because the Pledge of Allegiance
Because Harambe Because the National Anthem
Because Cecil Because #TakeaKnee
Because rock Because Colin Kaepernick
Because hip hop Because patriotism
Because Africa is a country
Because Africa is poor
Because get your shots before you go
Because third-world
Because developing
Because ghetto
Because oriental
Because dispensaries
Because higher sentences
Because three strikes

(...)
Why must we create?

III.

Because the American dream
Because we’re all afforded the same opportunities
Because bootstraps
Because Hottentot Venus
Because HeLa cells
Because gynecology
Because Tuskegee experiments
Because I have black friends
Because Obama’s birth certificate
Because no indictment
Because suspended with pay
Because charges dropped
Because #SayHerName
Because TERFs
Because Dakota Access Pipeline
Because four years of Flint water
Because Uber
Because the race card
Because race-baiting
Because my dad is serving 35 years
Because no means parole
Because Sandra committed suicide
Because rough rides in Baltimore
Because sundown states
Because Charlottesville
Because Cheapside
Because homelessness is illegal
Because codeswitching
Because I am not the other black girl
Because we all look the same
Because capitalism
Because classism
Because colorism
Because intersections
Because Ancestry DNA results
Because poll rigging
Because Clinton was the first black president
Because the free world
Because 3/5ths
Because Notes on the State of Virginia
Because Phillis Wheatley was not a poet
Because I am and all my poems sound like this
Artists Thrive

Artists arrive carrying stories and self, crafting and threading across Bluegrass foothills.

Small steps toward failing forward—the practice of leaning in to impact.

Better together we harness healing as praxis and power, communal artisan activism.

Momentum is magic coursing through the urban-rural coal country as lifeblood.

In truth and earnest endeavor Artists Thrive.
Spirit

We meditate in the low hum of intention, traversing rugged planes of strategy and error. We strive to thrive, turning illustration / performance / theory into interconnected energy.
The Tool

Tool becomes tale and tell,
real talk toward readiness and solutions.
Movement makes us one,
a braid of beliefs
ribboned with diversity.
Tool is self-care assessment
determination for present and future innovation.
When They Ask

When they ask who we are,
we reply in results:
needle exchange for opioid epidemic,
community theater for consciousness.
When they ask what we do,
we answer in ambition:
council, commission,
convene, create.
Civic practitioners,
homegrown craftsmen,
city representatives,
collectives—
we coalesce.
When they ask where we come from,
we pinprick the map
from Berea, Lexington,
Harlan, Corbin,
every Bluegrass / Appalachian /
Midwest / Northeast / Northwest
Southeast / Southwest corner
and beyond.
When they ask why,
we cry we are we,
strong in solidarity,
a crisscrossed network,
and we are artists
who must thrive.
The power of possibility is in our needs, the voids and voices of communities. It’s in the wilt and sway of trees, the delicate call in the breeze. The power of possibility is in our works, hands calloused from sowing and weeding, throats hoarse with edifying and singing. It’s in the hurl of our bodies into the unknown, the thrash and beat of hope. The power of possibility is the bounty of harvest, and it’s the beauty of believing and striving when the soil is its hardest.
Identity is found in purpose
and maybe vice versa,
but the call of the artist is certain.
You poet / practice / paint /
orchestrate / originate
with intent.
Turn tides and shape minds
without relent
because in your verses and visions
is a promise, a mission.
Imperfectly wrought future
where sunsets do not always
mean death and sunrise brings
even more than newness.
The work is the benefit of itself,
a beckoning deeply felt
and truths becoming widely held.
A tight circle of trust
around a bonfire of love—
vulnerability embraced
in the wake of what was
and praised for what’s to come.
There is a rain of change
cloud-bursting and ready
to pour and overtake
the drought long hardened
into the earth by hate,
the rough roots and
weed shoots strangling
the flowered buds
of our fruits.
The sky sags with
optimism, full-bellied
torrent ripe to exploding,
burdened with refreshing
the bounty made deathly
by evil and oppression.
This downpour cannot wait,
its blue the purest
and its baptism the surest
we have seen in so long.
Listen.
Incline your ears
to the rainsong.
To thrive is
to live and give,
to overturn stones
and fortify bones,
to till and plow,
question the whys
and hows,
gather up stars,
make up-close
what’s far,
part rivers,
drink deeply,
care out and inward,
serve freely,
count sand grains,
collect storm rains,
stoke and kindle,
recite and remember,
zoom in on
the details,
translate chimes
and bells,
carry truth
as knapsack,
moonlight the
darkest black,
work and plan
and execute.
To thrive is
to be
unapologetically
you.
BIOGRAPHY

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