

Yusef Komunyakaa

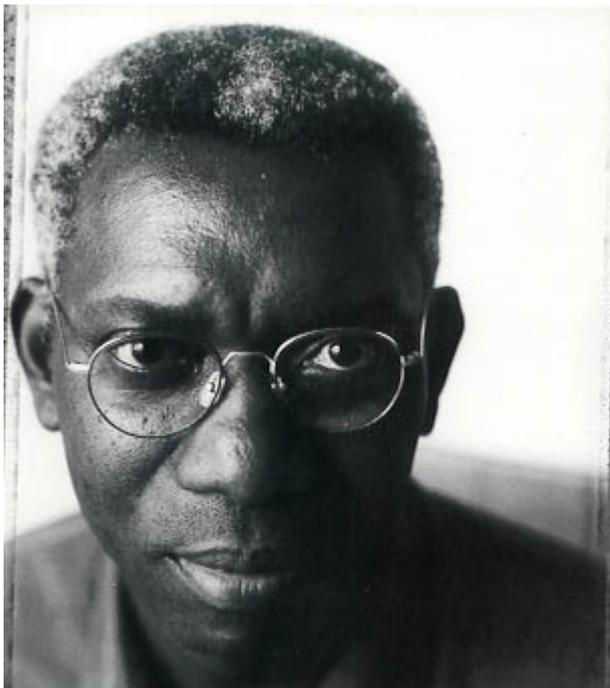
Poet Description:

yusef Komunyakaa is an African American poet who was born in Bogalusa, Louisiana, the son of a carpenter. He grew up in Louisiana and was educated at the University of Colorado, Colorado State University, and the University of California at Irvine. Long interested in the relationship between jazz and poetry, he has coedited two volumes on the subject. From 1965-1967, he served a tour of duty in South Vietnam, where he was an information specialist and editor of the military newspaper *Southern Cross*; he won a bronze star, but it was not until more than a decade after returning from the war that he would begin writing poems about the experience. This would lead to *Dien Cai Dau* (1988), almost certainly the best Vietnam poems by an American veteran of the war. This book-length sequence, from which "Tu Do Street," "Prisoners," and "Communiqué" are reprinted, continually returns to the war's racial tensions and its racial constitution. White and black troops from America's working class and its underclass were drafted to kill a racialized enemy indistinguishable from Vietnam's civilian population. The only redemption we can now ask, Komunyakaa's poems demonstrate, grows out of admitting the racial structures we have previously repressed. Both in poems like "Tu Do Street" and in "Work," Komunyakaa becomes especially eloquent when he takes on unpopular or awkward topics. He often manages to combine violent subject matter and strong narrative conflicts with notably rich imagery. The poems as a result can be both harsh and musical. His selected poems, *Neon Vernacular*, won the Pulitzer prize in 1994. Komunyakaa has taught at several universities, including Indiana, Washington, Harvard, and Princeton.

Race/Ethnicity:

African ^[1]

Picture:



Gender:

Male ^[2]

Sexuality:

Straight ^[3]

First Name:

Yusef

Last Name:

Komunyakaa

Birth & Death Dates:

Tuesday, April 29, 1947

School of Poetry:

Other ^[4]

Birth Place:

Bogalusa , Louisiana

United States

See map: Google Maps ^[5]

Louisiana US

Group visibility:

Private - accessible only to group members

Source URL: <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/yusef-komunyakaa>

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[5] <http://maps.google.com?q=46.880607+-87.363281+%28%2C+Bogalusa%2C+LA%2C+%2C+us%29>