

## *Indecency*

The South Carolina born poet Justin Phillip Reed has written a collection of poems in the book called *Indecency*. *Indecency* is a collection of poems that state the harsh realities of what it is like being an African American boy who is also gay. These poems are similar to those of Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*; in the fact that they both share raw and honest truths of being African American in today's society. However, it is clear that the speaker of these poems is tired of the constant and repetitive cycle of prejudice from previous generations and centuries.

Reed uses very high diction, explores different structures, gives harsh imagery and breaks many boundaries in this book. The structure and its purpose is something that Reed is able to do very well. There is a poem titled *Portrait with Stiff Upper Lip*. The poem looks similar to a word bubble that resembles the shape of someone's head. There appears to be a considerable size of words that resemble the eyes and big curved letters to represent lips. One phrase that appeared in the face was "probably has a parent" then drifts off and says "in prison" then drifts again "NO [in the pen]." This "portrait" is made up of words and phrases that have created as stereotypes to those who Are African American. Some of these phrases include things such as " g u u r l, you know that's my **jam**, i've never had with a really hot BLKguy." Not only is the structure unique but the authenticity of those phrases are not often found in books or poems. However, this just adds to the realness and rawness of the poems.

The impact that Reed is able to give to the readers is astonishing. There is a poem in *Indecency* that was written after Tafisha Edward's poem *Everywhere in the World They Hurt*

*Little Black Girls*'. The poem that Reed wrote, that was influenced by Edward's poem, is called *Pushing Up onto its Elbows the Fable Lifts Itself into Fact*. Here is an excerpt:

The constancy of Black girls is someone's anxiety. The soil is thick with hidden black girls, the myth that only quiet Black girls are worthwhile Black girls. The soil turns as \_\_\_\_\_ turn away from loud Black girls and their cacophonous insistence on Black girls.

With this excerpt alone, Reed is using form and repetition to his advantage. The subject is about the oppression of Black girls and that expression is being repeated throughout the poem multiple times. However, there is a blank white space which can be interpreted in different ways. Perhaps, it could be the idea that society tends to ignore these instances that happen to Black girls. Like a lot of pieces in this book, it is up for interpretation. However, there is a clear tone in the poem and a clear idea and story that is being told.

That pattern of things not being completely clear happens a lot in the poems throughout the book. It is definitely a book for a seasoned reader and even then I believe it is a challenging read. However, I think that is what the author is intending to do. The poems are meant to have the readers think. The poems do not hold your hand and guide you through everything step by step on what is happening. Although at times the specific situation is not clear, the overall tone and purpose of the poems are very clear. The tones are very dark and intense and the purpose is to really have the readers think about racism driven attacks towards African American people as well as the events of microaggressions. These are poems that need to be read multiple times because they will not be clear right away. But in a way, I think that is a good thing. These poems really make the readers sit back and think about what is happening throughout the poem. Readers

really need to take their time and be patient with the poems. However, with the subject matter that is being discussed, it is only right that the readers really take the time to absorb all that is happening. It is very clear that Justin Phillip Reed is capable of writing in different styles. Therefore, he chose to write these poems to not be completely clear because he wants the readers to take the time with this book. One poem that demonstrates that Reed is able to write in different diction styles is the poem *Take it Out of the Boy*. This poem breaks the pattern of the complex writing that Reed does in other poems.

forget the world's smallness. i'm tired  
of pretending. i've been lost. the storeroom  
of a hotel pool is approximately the size  
of our lives anyway. can't imagine a vault  
so black and left to itself. waistband slipping  
and him saying "yeah, you always acted like  
a white boy." so.so black my elbows  
stripe their char on the carpet. so black I  
throw it back. so black "you in them guts,  
"nigga" "daddy" "king." are we convinced?

This poem is powerful because it forces the readers to realize the realities that in no way is racism over. The tone is clear similar to how all of his poems are. All of his poems have this sense of urgency and a speaker who is tired of the same instances recurring. This particular poem has almost a sarcastic tone and a mocking tone of how others refer to the speaker. Although this book is for seasoned readers, it is one that people should know about. The purpose, meaning and subject matter is too important not to discuss.