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Cento for Black Boys

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“Cento for Black Boys” by Jaylin Jones (he/him)

ABSTRACT. *The following is a cento poem/spoken word poem created by Jones, titled “Cento for Black Boys”. If you’re unfamiliar, the cento (or collage poem) is a poetic form composed entirely of lines from poems by other poets. Specifically, Jones chose poems and written pieces that were from a range of POC authors to form this piece, with the express intention of challenging myself to combine these more disparate voices telling similar stories into one voice and message. The focus of the poem is the vilification and perceived criminality of black males in society, even when they’re often the victims of crimes and brutality. It is also about the trivialization of the black experience, where people who are considerably more privileged often downplay our struggles and suffering. Within the document, there is also a link to a video of him performing the piece, as the spoken word component is vital to its message.*



STUDENT BIO. Jaylin Jones is a freshman English major from Clarksdale, Mississippi. He is the Secretary of the Southern Miss. Association of Black Journalists and is also involved in organizations such as USM's Genders and Sexualities Alliance, Creative Writing Club, and Students for Human Rights group. He submitted his cento poem titled "Cento for Black Boys" in the Healing and Empowerment category on Monday, February 7th, 2022.

Cento for Black Boys

Cruelty.

Don't talk to black boys about cruelty.

The children of slaves
& immigrants & addicts & exiles
know cruelty like we know our sound
and our irony, like we know we black,
like we know extinction and *you don't belong here*
and white people in America.

White people in America say
these black boys toy with their own lives,
with the guns they hid in walls and under mattresses.
White people in America will still kill the black boy
armed with the most peaceful weapons he can find:
a black fist afro pick and the brutal truth.

The brutal truth is that,
in a country with standards so untrustworthy,
a country that makes us outwit death,
when no one kills the black boy
just being alive and not bothering anyone,
they call it mercy.

Mercy.

Don't talk to black boys about mercy.

[See link for video performance.](#)

Purple - Dinosaurs In The Hood - Danez Smith

Red - cruelty. don't talk to me about cruelty - Lucille Clifton

Pink - Mercy - Nikki Giovanni

Blue - And Blue - Kiese Laymon

Orange - Knockout- an essay by Victoria Gong

Green - If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is? - James Baldwin