



Colorado Poets

Poems by Toluwanimi Obiwole,
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and Bobby LeFebre

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Denver

Toluwanimi Obiwole

Theres still a 7-eleven on almost every corner
 The parking lot of Chubby's is still a popular hang out for angry pigeons
 And at night under the beam of the full moon and the crackling buzz of the street signs
 along federal
 The tumbleweeds rustle unbothered, and Denver is still the Wild West

My blood has known the easy wave of palm leaves and Lagos beaches from the
 womb I didn't know what a cowboy was until the age of eleven
 This rocky desert doesn't quite know what to do with my skin
 my hair breaks in protest
 But my spirit
 recognizes these mountains like kin
 Before Kerouac lost his mind walking the length of colfax
 Before the KKK march on larimer
 Before larimer
 Before marajuana legalization
 Before baby doe and wyatt earp
 Before the sand creek massacre
 and capitol hill
 Chief ouray did not want the white man to build on his land
 Fought to keep the sweetgrass wild beneath his people's feet
 Held the hand of the devil only when the bodies started piling up

Construction cranes and New York glass cast shadows on neighborhoods whose
 histories are
 being churned into currency
 There's no difference between gentrification and the gold rush
 Whoever said Denver had no ghettos
 Never realized interment is synonymous with erasure

Denver can play the part of adoptive mother so well
 That we forget who she first gave birth to
 For every "native" bumper sticker slapped on the back of a prius
 There's an Apache grandmother who had to lose her language to bend that word into
 existence

under the chipping paint of our historic homes
 There are names that were deemed too poor or too brown for remembrance
 Development
 gets too expensive
 when home
 turns into a house with "character"

And safety
 Is delighting in Spanish street names
 While driving out the paletta carts to keep property value

Boasting
 About a 'hood with trendy ethnic restaurants
 And trimmed lawns
 Cannot connect you to a land you don't know
 You have to dig your fingers in the earth for that
 Get comfortable with the skeletons buried next to the flower roots in your backyard

In the last five years my city has swallowed up anyone with enough money for a ski
 pass, dispensary membership and the dream
 And spat out the ones who couldn't afford to keep up with progress
 Tell me the difference between displacement and disappearing

When did we let community become optional in the face of the American Dream?
 Does anyone remember when property tax didn't cost a whole spirit?
 Does your tia still live in her old house?
 Is there a bike path where your ancestors used to pray?
 Do you remember seeing faces like yours in your neighborhood?
 Do you have hope that you will again?

As long as there are those who will always remember the highlands
 As the North side
 Montbello doesn't stop fighting for its food rights
 And the front range peaks are never afraid that the skyscrapers will eclipse them

In Denver we gather together like devotees under the saving glow of candle vigils and
 poetry readings
 Here,
 In the knowing of each other
 And the sharing of soul
 We make a home

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Toluwanimi Obiwole is a Nigerian-born, Colorado-raised poet, performer, and workshop facilitator based in Denver. She is a Brave New Voices international slam champion, a city slam champion, and author of an upcoming chapbook. She has been a member of the Denver Minor Disturbance youth poetry team. In 2015, she was announced as Denver's first Youth Poet Laureate, and in 2016, she became co-executive director of Slam Nuba.

The Money is the Medicine

Adrian H Molina aka Molina Speaks

Whose land do we stand on, legacies erased?

Aho, can we heal this reality
as philanthropy claims new legacies?

A sleepwalking sector—
moving at a glacier pace
while the planet melts
black and brown lives.

Decisions made from above
plummet the human spirit below

but philanthropy is “love.”

Love is honesty.
Honesty is pride.
Pride is not ego.
Pride is medicine. And money
is the medicine here.

Why are we hiding the medicine from the people?
(while calling “the root” evil...)

The root is radical. Radical is the healing here
where the Titanic's norms are upside down.

Is the economy broken? It is certainly not
right-side up, for we know this inequality is wrongwalking into the
Black library on Welton Street

in old Five Points in “New Denver”
in our clean white clothes
heckled by the homeless, clutching our wallets,
double-click locking our car doors,
walking into the grand conference room
to learn how to “decolonize” wealth.

To decolonize the colonizer virus, follow these steps:

1. Grieve.

And face inward your healing—
your positionality. Only you know your truth.

Reconcile your truth, America.

2. Apologize.

And face outward your healing.

3. Listen.

With your heart, not your mouth. Feel in.

4. Relate.

Meaning be human, meaning be vulnerable
with all our relations.

5. Represent. Authentically.

6. Invest. Authentically.

7. Repair.

Is there any doubt why the words
“repair” and “reparations” share the same root?

HEAL.

Has white supremacy blown its final Trumpet?

Have we arrived? In the era of gross?

The era of shame? The era of blame?

Playing a final game now of thrones?

Why are we (philanthropy) holding on to \$800 billion
on a 15-year timeline for survival?

Can we own up to how we are harming
our communities, creating schisms, fueling isms?
Holding onto 95% of the wealth, stowed away
in the coffers? We need to move it ALL.

GIVE IT ALL AWAY...10 years...
While we can still talk about our fears.

We are all looking into the great mirror of fear,
paid for the silence
in our eyes, in our hearts,
in our minds, facing the spirit
as the body depends (seemingly)
on the very structures that feed us.

Is the answer within your position
to take the reins/reigns?
Or to resign in protest?
There is a way. We need to innovate
to shift the culture forward in vision
with indigenous wisdom.

Everyone here has the knowledge
to go back far enough into the future
to know
how to choose joy,
to choose laughter,
to choose love,
to choose passion

AS WE DECLARE—our lines, our stands, our circles:

our commitments to racial justice, gender justice,
economic justice: our visions of flipping billions
in wealth and overcrowded prisons
into centers of future living
for formerly incarcerated women
of color.

...That is just one idea...What are yours?

Why do you stay (in the field)?

Because white supremacy is everywhere. This is somewhere.

Where we have access and power

to move access and power.

There is a time to stay.

There is a time to do the work, then walk away.

Either way...

Hold on to your culture.

Hold on to your spirit.

Hold your line.

Cast the net wide

and extend that line

every single day

in ways that only you know how.

The prescriptions:

Teach the youth about money

and how to move it.

Advocate for people of color,

especially if you are people of color.

(Don't hide).

White men, engage

and push the Boards of white men forward.

Gatekeepers—open the gates of imagination

and engage the subjects of our work.

Treat them as experts, not subjects.

(Show them respect.)

If you are in power, stop trying to teach.
Start trying to learn. This is an act
of healing.

Treat each dollar like an investment
(personally and professionally).
Spend your values. Share your bounty
in alignment with your truths and rites.

Meet the people where they are at
where you are at,
seeking and offering
the grace you wish for yourself.
Check yourself before you wreck your...mirrors.
Heal your self care. This is love work
and there is no way out.

This (philanthropy) is not magic, but it is medicine.

Follow seven steps to heaven:

1. Decolonize.
2. Decolonize.
3. Decolonize.
4. Decolonize.
5. Decolonize.
6. Decolonize.
7. Decolonize.

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A live scribe poem by Adrian H Molina, aka Molina Speaks, created at a
Decolonizing Wealth book talk by Edgar Villanueva reflecting the experience and
sentiments of community hosted by Voqal and COFIE Blair-Caldwell Library, Denver,
March 11, 2019. Molina is a master of ceremonies, artist, poet, adjunct college
professor, facilitator, and creative consultant for a better world. While living in
Denver, he has continued his work in rural areas in Wyoming, Colorado, and New
Mexico. His multicultural upbringing and pan-indigenous philosophy inform his
understanding of intersectionality at a root level.

An Exercise in Ritual

Bobby LeFebre

We gather here together in this sacred circle like we always have
Here, around this fire that has always burned
The same fire that lives in our bellies and makes an inferno of our hearts

This spirit we summon
This beauty we conjure
This inventiveness we invoke

What is a vessel but a carrier of the coveted?
A transmitter of quintessence
A conduit of culture

Come and meet us at the place where ritual is given a body
Where ceremony is given a face
Where our existence transfigures into a song we warble in unison

For he who sharpens his imagination is a visionary
She who gives shape to intuition is a prophet
They who hone mortality beseech the immortal

Look at what we are building together
We, the masons of reimagining
The architects of metamorphosis
The repositories of our collective consciousness

Blessed be the makers!
The ones who set themselves ablaze to warm the masses
The ones who traverse the unknown giving life to the unseen

Join us as we turn ourselves inside out
Watch as we illuminate what kindles inside our bones
Marvel as we paint with colors that do not yet exist

These places where we find and lose ourselves at the same time
These messages we devise with purpose
These aesthetics we mold from the supple clay of our minds

Join us at these holy places of abandon
These playgrounds of ingeniousness
These geneses of more-inspired tomorrows

For who does not admire a flower unfolding?
Who does not feel the warmth of the sun shining boldly upon their face?
Whose feet do not move at the coaxing of the drum's sound?

Here, where we live, boundaries and the impossible do not have a name
Here, fear and failure suffocate under the weight of creation
Here, convention is an earth-covered tombstone rotting in the wind

Blessed be the creatives!
The ones predisposed to questioning
The ones with an immoderate hunger for understanding

Come and meet us at a new juncture where expression devoid of
consciousness is merely decoration
Where art is an insistent incubator for justice
Where equity and access are an altar we decorate with the flowers of
promise and purpose

For what is it to highlight the margins but to attempt to balance the scales?
What is a raised fist, but a war cry in the language of the purposely
silenced?
What is dissent, but an innate aversion to the confines of the status quo?

Blessed be the disruptors!
Those who shape-shift paradigms—and dwell in the fourth dimension
Those who pull their roots from the ground and wrap them around the
hearts and minds of an audience
Those who open doors not built for all to pass through

Art and culture are a communal land that do not know borders
A common language we are all born speaking fluently
A right that has been paraded around as a privilege for far too long

Come and help us rip the esoteric from the sky
Let our hands reach for the stars
grasp them
and share their tangible glow with anyone drawn to their light

Come and explore with us our insatiable thirst for wonder
May untamed bewilderment be our guide

And here, we will all shine and wander together
Here we will eradicate all of the man-made barriers we impose upon one another

This beautiful burden we carry
This responsibility tethered to our pens, pirouettes, paint, percussion, and
performance

This work
This digging
These hands unearthing the truth

This joy
This beauty
This struggle
These songs
These testaments
These heirlooms

These markers of humanity that remind us that we are here;
that we are alive
that we always have been,
and that we will always will be

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Bobby LeFebre is an award-winning writer, performer, and cultural and social worker fusing a non-traditional multi-hyphenated professional identity to imagine new realities, empower communities, advance arts and culture, and serve as an agent of provocation and social transformation, equity and change.
LeFebre currently serves as Colorado's Poet Laureate.