

How Do You RAISE A SON??

A POEM BY LOUIS L. JENKINS

How do you raise a son?
Especially when he's Black?
Especially when you live in a city like DC?
Where the wrong word
The wrong look
A bump
A slight
And sometimes absolutely nothing at all,
Something silly
Something misunderstood
Something not meant
Something not well thought out
And sometimes absolutely nothing at all
Can lead to a fight?



When I was young
When I was a Black son
A fight would only beget
At best
Another fight.
Both with fists
At some point the weaker pugilist got the point
The matter was settled,
Resolved.
Both could walk away
With their backs turned
Until the next challenge with another opponent.

Even if a friend or relative sought revenge
It was through a fight – a fist fight.
Even if two or three joined to seek revenge
It was through a fight – a fist fight.
Usually the loser stayed beat.
He (seldom she) remained the loser.

How do you raise a son?
Especially a Black son
Especially in a city like DC
When losers don't stay beat?
When punks and wimps – when Losers
Feel it honorable to settle the score
From behind a gun?
When punks and wimps – Losers
Think it honorable to kill the victor?
When their friends think it honorable to help them in the kill?

How Do You Raise A Son??

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How do you raise a son?
Especially a Black son
Especially in a place like DC
When he is damned if he does
And more damned if he doesn't?
If he backs down and walks away
He's labeled a punk or a wimp
If he wins, he is likely to be killed
By the punk or the wimp



How do you raise a son
Especially when he is Black
Especially in a place like DC
When he is killed if he does
And sometimes pressured
To kill if he doesn't



What do you tell your son?
To walk away?
To take the punch?
To take the humiliation?
To go and tell the school official?
Who is more afraid than your son?

What do you tell your son?
To stand his ground?
Not to start anything?
But to finish it if someone else starts it?
To fight like a man?

How do you raise a son?
Especially when he is Black?
Especially in a place like DC?
When he is damned if he does
And he is damned if he doesn't
Do you teach him that discretion
Is the better part of valor?
That it is better to run
And be able to fight another day
Than to stand and be killed today?

How do you raise a son?
Especially a Black son
Especially in a place like DC?

Poem By

Louis L. Jenkins

Father of three black teenage sons in Wash. DC
February 10, 2000

Re: The Murder of Two Wilson High School Seniors

*Dedicated to the Memory of
Andre Wallace, Killed at age 17
February 8, 2000*