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Disassembly

A pantoum written by DePaul students on the fight for racial equality

Insights asked Chris Green, senior professional lecturer in the English Department, and LAS students Caley Koch and Jada Ward to share their thoughts on the poem “Disassembly.”

Chris Green

It’s an honor to have inspired Caley Koch and the powerful poem “Disassembly.” Caley was a student of mine, as were some of the other exceptional student-poets in the pantoum. What impresses me is their honesty and great moral concern. Our country needs more truth, more collaboration—something like this poem where diverse people sing together in sanity and beauty. When politics fails us, poetry tells us we are not alone in our outrage and hope.

With this in mind, I edited a book-length pantoum, “American Gun: A Poem by 100 Chicagoans,” which is a collective response to the individual suffering behind Chicago’s gun violence and the model for Caley’s poems. I asked 100 poets from across the city to take turns writing a communal poem. The book was published this year by Big Shoulders Books, the press housed within DePaul’s Department of English. The press’s mission is to

give voice to communities in the city that don’t normally have one. Then we give the books away for free.

Chris Green a senior professional lecturer in English.

Visit bigshouldersbooks.com to order free copies of “American Gun.”

Caley Koch

Inspired by Chris Green’s “American Gun: A Poem by 100 Chicagoans,” “Disassembly” advocates for the Black Lives Matter movement and chooses to celebrate difference by collaborative means. “Disassembly” is written as a traditional pantoum, yet is unique with the inclusion of nine different writers, some of whom are DePaul students and alumni. The repetition of lines weaves each individual voice together and is reliant on the diversity of writers’ segments. Each stanza, though taken from the previous, is shaped into a new perspective on the fight for racial equality in America.

**"ONE VOICE IS NOT
LOUD ENOUGH TO LEAD
CHANGE; BY ITS PURE
NATURE, PROGRESS IS
CHORAL."**

—Caley Koch

The killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and countless others awakened white Americans to the historic and systemic violence that still plagues Black Americans today. True to its name, "Disassembly" breaks apart and examines these injustices. One voice is not loud enough to lead change; by its pure nature, progress is choral. In addition to the variety of voices, "Disassembly" is in black and white to limit all immediate judgment—the subconscious assumptions that root racial divisions—and portray the writers as one.

The idea of writing a collaborative poem about racial inequality was largely inspired by my relationship with one of my closest friends, who is African American. Until I encountered the Black Lives Matter movement, the racial differences in our upbringing never crossed my mind. I wanted to honor how unbreakable and supportive our friendship has always been by featuring her and other influential friends in "Disassembly." To me, this poem exudes what is essential now: strength and understanding.

In writing the poem, it was important to me that everyone had a chance to say exactly what they wanted without limitations or judgment. I think the best part of the whole process was watching the poem grow longer day by day and seeing the vast spectrum of ideas flow from one writer to the next. I was overwhelmed with how eager everyone was to share their ideas and how respectful and empathetic they were of what we all had to say. That compassionate attitude, to me, is what I wish everyone would exemplify in such a divided time.

Caley Koch is a senior majoring in creative writing and cello performance, with a minor in Spanish.

Jada Ward

It started with a text message that I got from Caley Koch saying, "With everything that's happening [with Black Lives Matter], do you guys want to do a poem to express your thoughts?" Everybody thought that was a great idea.

We worked together on a Google doc. Caley wrote the first four lines, and the next person kept the second and the fourth line of her first stanza and then added their two lines, etc.

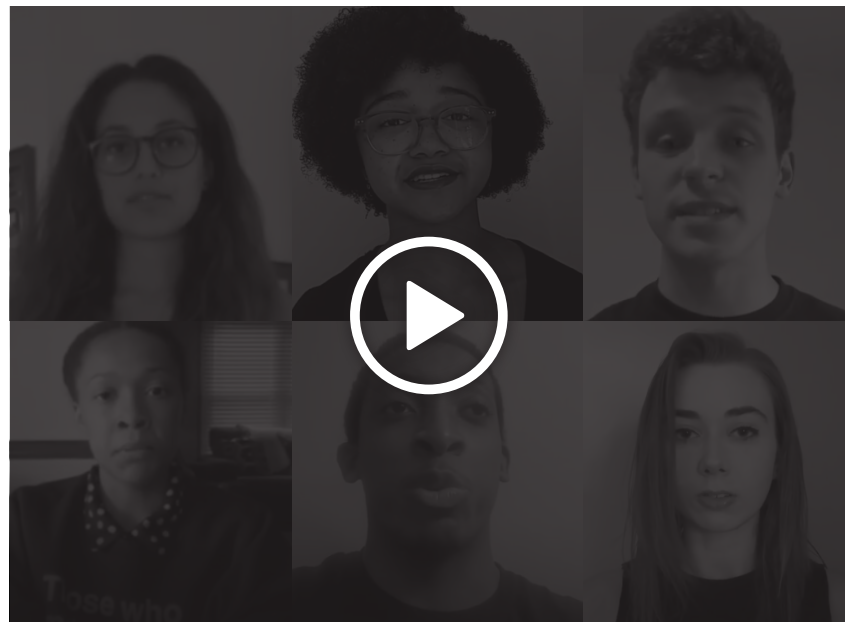
There were moments where it was challenging, but we all kind of had the same general idea of what we wanted to talk about. And I think it was just really beautiful to watch it expand into something bigger. There were a lot of people talking about their feelings, and then there were a lot of people talking about change and what change would look like and how we could get there.

If you can't think about freedom, or if you don't have any ideas of what freedom looks like, then how can you achieve it? If you want a better world, you first have to envision a better world and what it looks like. And I think writing really helps me do that, because I don't know if the work that I create or if the work that somebody else creates can influence somebody who does something amazing later on in their life.

Sometimes the power of words, sometimes just hearing somebody voice something that you've always felt but never been able to explain—it's just really amazing because you know that you're not alone out there.

When we think about revolution, we often think about physical things. We often think about demonstrations and protests and all of these other things. But it's not a short race; it's a marathon. And you need many different people doing many different things in order to make a revolution work.

Jada Ward (Creative Writing '20) is pursuing a Master of Public Health degree from DePaul's College of Science and Health.



Students, many of whom are from LAS, came together to write and perform the pantoum "Disassembly."