

## Yusef Komunyakaa 1947-

On April 29, 1947, Yusef Komunyakaa was born in Bogalusa, Louisiana, where he was raised during the beginning of the Civil Rights movement. He served in the United States Army from 1969 to 1970 as a correspondent, and as managing editor of the *Southern Cross*, which was a military magazine, during the Vietnam war (poets.org).

Born the son of a carpenter, he was raised in a house of few books. He wrote in "My Father's Letters," "My father could only sign/ His name, but he'd look at blueprints/ & say how many bricks/ Formed each wall" (Yusef Komunyakaa). He began writing poetry in 1973. His first book of poems, *Dedications & Other Darkhorses* was published in 1977. Komunyakaa first received wide recognition following the 1984 publication of *Copacetic* (Wesleyan University Press), a collection of poems built from colloquial speech which demonstrated his incorporation of jazz influences (poets.org). His grandparents were church people and he said in an interview "the Old Testament informed the cadences of their speech. It was my first introduction to poetry" (Yusef Komunyakaa). During his youth, he read the bible all the way through, twice, and also borrowed James Baldwin's *Nobody Knows My Name*, from Bogalusa's black library a total of 25 times " (Yusef Komunyakaa). His collection *Dien Cai Dau* has been cited by poets such as William Matthews and Robert Hass as being among the best writing on the war in Vietnam. Komunyakaa's prose is collected in *Blues Notes: Essays, Interviews & Commentaries*. He also co-edited *The Jazz Poetry Anthology* with J. A. Sascha Feinstein, 1991 (poets.org).

About his work, the poet Toi Derricotte wrote for the *Kenyon Review*, "He takes on the most complex moral issues, the most harrowing ugly subjects of our American life. His voice, whether it embodies the specific experiences of a black man, a soldier in Vietnam, or a child in Bogalusa, Louisiana, is universal. It shows us in ever deeper ways what it is to be human" (poets.org)

He was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 1999. He has taught at University of New Orleans, Indiana University, as a professor in the Council of Humanities and Creative Writing Program at Princeton University. He lives in New York City where he is currently Distinguished Senior Poet in New York University's graduate creative writing program (poets.org).

Poets.org. Academy of American Poets, n.d. Web. 27 Dec. 2016.

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/yusef-komunyakaa>

"Yusef Komunyakaa." *Poetry Archive*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Dec. 2016.

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