

Lauren Moore

Equality - A Poem By Maya Angelou

You declare you see me dimly  
through a glass which will not shine,  
though I stand before you boldly,  
trim in rank and marking time.  
You do own to hear me faintly  
as a whisper out of range,  
while my drums beat out the message  
and the rhythms never change.

Equality, and I will be free.  
Equality, and I will be free.

You announce my ways are wanton,  
that I fly from man to man,  
but if I'm just a shadow to you,  
could you ever understand ?

We have lived a painful history,  
we know the shameful past,  
but I keep on marching forward,  
and you keep on coming last.

Equality, and I will be free.  
Equality, and I will be free.

Take the blinders from your vision,  
take the padding from your ears,  
and confess you've heard me crying,  
and admit you've seen my tears.

Hear the tempo so compelling,  
hear the blood throb in my veins.  
Yes, my drums are beating nightly,  
and the rhythms never change.

Equality, and I will be free.  
Equality, and I will be free.

### The Neighborhood of Shadows

*Equality (n.)*- a state of being equal, especially in rights and opportunities. There it is, the definition in black and white, clear as day. It should be this simple; however, people everywhere are yet to see this equality. People are deemed as targets in a country where "equality" is thrown into their faces as an excuse for wretched behavior. As a nation, we do not even understand the meaning of a word with a blatant definition. Hatred and bigotry are clouding rational humanity.

Maya Angelou explores this worldwide dilemma in her poem, "Equality." With metaphors of shadows and drums, Angelou displays the everyday frustrations of the oppressed in a society that draws a blind eye. She paints the worlds of both sides, creates a clashing scenario, and expresses her thoughts in a mere three part poem. Powerfully, the stanzas are joined together by the anaphora, "Equality, and I will be free."

Angelou begins her poem by exploring the rosy interpretation of the world through the eyes of the blissfully ignorant. The general "you" she addresses is the unmoving society in which we live. By disclosing their obstinence, she makes a statement, saying that this society will not silence her despite how it views her. She claims that whether I am a whisper or a shout in your ears, I will be heard. Additionally, the paradoxes of light and dark Angelou uses are meant to signify the constant battle of being seen. The darkness resembles the box society has put her in, along with anyone who doesn't fit into the dreadfully specific criteria of acceptable. The light, contrastingly, is the greatness created by the oppressed individuals that consistently shines brightly.

This clash represents the fight of acknowledgment in a society that is merely trying to shield the luster.

Angelou then proceeds to paint the picture of her world. The real world. The world of a shadow. In this interpretation, she describes the challenges both she and the black community face, affiliating herself with her people with a "we." She conveys the message that we are insulted in this society for merely breathing. Existing. We are looked at as if we are a menace. However, she counteracts this scrutiny with a question: If I am so small compared to your superiority, how could you possibly understand? She verbalizes the African-American struggle, the struggle that we as a race will be burdened with for the rest of time.

In the final part of her poem, Angelou addresses the "you" audience once again. However, this time, instead of an accusatory tone, she provides "you" with a call to action. Listen. See. Confess. Admit. Hear. With the diction used, she proves the driving point that we are here to stay, and it is time for you to listen. Our lives are worth your ears. Our heartbeats, represented with the repeated idea of drums and rhythm, will never stop beating.

The African- American experience in the United States is a complex one, and Angelou's "Equality" portrays exactly that. Every day, the community continues to succeed. From historical figures to academic excellence, African- Americans proceed to break barriers. However, the immobile views shadow the greatness that is occurring. Close-minded individuals consistently transform movements meant to heal into controversial subjects, therefore halting change. Roadblocks caused by conflicts of

interest are a recurring event, which is why moving towards true equality has been a long and grueling process. The world keeps spinning, and black excellence still goes unnoticed. Consequently, the negative notion being depicted when describing African-Americans remains. These prejudices continue to run rampant, especially within the impressionable youth. In the world they are given, where empathy is near nonexistent, their generation is inevitably built from a basis of hate. Young African-Americans everywhere are subject to race ridicule. I am no different.

I was six years old when I was called a "nigger" for the first time. My very first day of Kindergarten. That same year, my teacher sent me to the office for answering a question too sassily. I was seven years old when a girl stopped playing with me because her parents thought I was "a bad influence." I was eleven years old when I was accused of plagiarism because my English teacher thought I wasn't articulate enough to write an "A" paper. All of this didn't phase me. It wasn't until I was twelve years old, when I saw Trayvon Martin on the news that I could see that something was still wrong.

The fair view of the world that I created began to vanish before my eyes. I went from naivety to reality. The stares. The whispers. The fear. I realized that to society, I wasn't intelligent. I wasn't a human being. I was black, and that was all I would ever be. I didn't fully comprehend how important it was to speak the truth until I was told to be quiet. I couldn't understand the magnitude of being a smart little black girl in the South until I discovered the cage around me. However, instead of falling a hapless victim, I became inspired to carry the torch of those who came before me. I felt a sense of pride in my people. My people's words and persistence in the fight for true equality inspired

me to exist and exist beautifully, despite the bigotry. I smiled in the face of adversity. I refused to sink, and I refused to fall.

Maya Angelou's words characterize African- Americans in a positive spotlight, encouraging them to embrace the melanin in their skin. Black is beautiful. Black is powerful. African- Americans deserve to feel a sense of pride when speaking of their culture. Black deserves to be celebrated. Nevertheless, this problem is still among us. We're not people to "you", the rigid society content with conventional intolerance. We are just a distant neighborhood of shadows others are too afraid to explore. If we were considered civilized human beings, this controversy wouldn't exist. There would be no biases, no demeaning insults, no racism. Nothing. What is not fully comprehended is that we, the minority, are not the problem. Rather, we are the ones trying to mend race relations. Time keeps passing, but society's views remain the same. Black is evil. Black is corrupted. Black is poison. White is right. Race shouldn't determine the way people are viewed. Yes, it is a matter of race. Yes, it still matters, even now. Equality isn't here yet; therefore, I am stuck in these chains. We all are, until everyone sees what is truly happening. Until everyone can understand. Like Maya Angelou constantly reiterates, "Equality, and I will be free."

Maya Angelou's "Equality" is not meant to be a call to revolution. It is simply depicting the message of waiting. We have been here. We have said the same things over and over again. We have been wanting this one basic human right for years. Decades. Centuries. We have been protesting for our rights, fighting the fight, writing

our struggles into history. We have been here, and we will keep going. Our drum is beating. When will "you" finally listen?

Citations

Angelou, Maya. "Equality." *PoemHunter.com*. N.p., 02 Jan. 2015. Web. 10 Mar. 2017. <<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/equality-28/>>.

"Definition of Equality." *Oxford Living Dictionaries*. Oxford University Press, 2017. Web. 18 Mar. 2017. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/equality>>.