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ALLEN MENDENHALL INTERVIEWS PATRICK A. HOWELL, AUTHOR OF "YES, WE BE"

NOVEMBER 14, 2019 BY [ALLEN MENDENHALL](#) [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

AM: Patrick, I'm so glad we've finally found the occasion to discuss *Yes, We Be*. Let's start broadly: what's the book about?

PH: Allen, *Yes, We Be* is different parts clarion call, first book of poetry and personal *manifesto* (the art and artifice to oneself of manifesting). I've been writing much, much longer than the 25 years I've been a banker and the 10 years I've been a successful entrepreneur. I've been writing poems, essays and short stories much, much longer than I have known how to arrive at the bottom line of a balance sheet or income statement. So, through fits and starts and continually asking myself, "what the heck am I doing with my life in this money racket?", my first book came to be. But as the poem titled "The Discipline of Self-Actual/ Self-Real-I-nation" suggests, it is about coming into one's purpose and putting the past to bed as "an old dead man." But there is also the element of rallying cry for an idea I co-founded nearly a decade ago, "The Global International African Arts Movement" or "*Global I Aam*," which is about the spirit of creation in arts coursing through spirits and hearts, brimming over the top as humanity is minimized to its lowest possible frequency in these curious times.



Patrick A. Howell

That book of poetry is about giving a "voice to the voiceless" in periods of authoritarian control. When politics and the social contracts that govern society lack total art and are, in fact, solely a means of state control, then the painters, entrepreneurs, healers, futurists, poets, storytellers, sculptors, academics, graphic designers, auteurs and publishers become leaders who harness spiritual, intellectual, and metaphysical expression, giving a voice to the marginalized. Creative faculty is the spirit by which resistance to authoritarian control manifests itself. That is really the dominant theme of *Yes, We Be*. My hope or wish or secret ambition would be that my book is something that Toni Morrison or Langston Hughes could look at and be proud of or even get a goose bump from.

AM: The proceeds for this book benefit several community programs, correct?

PH: Yes, specifically, Christ Our Redeemer African Methodist Episcopal Church out of Orange County. Before I moved to San Diego over a decade ago, Pastor Mark E. Whitlock, the founder and pastor at the time, had been a spiritual father. I believe in their mission and devotion to the community. They uplift, inspire and heal.

Also, my poetry godmother is North Carolina's poet laureate, Jaki Shelton Green, a mentor. She says, "I write because I love to write. It's my yoga. It's my zen. There've been times in my life when it's the only

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thing I had to hold on to." She has a mentoring program, SistaWRITE, which is about giving women a space to really work with the crafts of their souls. So, yeah, that's a good program too. They do a retreat in Morocco every summer and Godmother Jaki does the work of poetry for the right reasons.

Richard Krawiec, the publisher of the independent Jacar Books, selected that charity.

AM: Something that made the Harlem Renaissance so unique was its concentration in a particular place, namely Harlem. Is there anything today that serves as a cultural center the way Harlem did?

PH: Yes, Africa. All 54 nations. A couple spots specifically though. I had to opportunity to travel to the Middle East and Africa for the very first time this summer and it was an eye opener. That world is alive. That place, that specific location is a hot bed of creative juice percolating. It is a location that gave birth to every other civilization in history. Language, story, business, culture, universities, music—all the touchstones that connect civilizations to its spirit. Specifically, I was in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia where Dr. Abiy Ahmed Ali was elected Prime Minister at the approximately same time Donald J. Trump stole a U.S. presidential election and ceded American sovereignty to Russian premiere Vladimir Putin. Recently Dr. Abiy Ahmed was celebrated and honored internationally for his efforts with the 2019 Nobel Prize for Peace. I know there are other nations outside of Ethiopia – as Ghana, Liberia and Nigeria in which calls for the diaspora mirror Dr. Abiy Ahmed's clarion call to the pan African diaspora to come home. Come home to our tribes! So, short answer is yes, there are geographic locations as Accra, Ghana, Lagos, Nigeria and Addis Ababa, but there are also places as pockets of spaces with the advent of the higher frequency world wide web and within our spirits and hearts where Yogis and Meditators frequently congregate. There are other higher frequency pockets of space. Africa is upon the cusps of a renaissance and Addis and Accra are couple of the volcanic hotbeds.

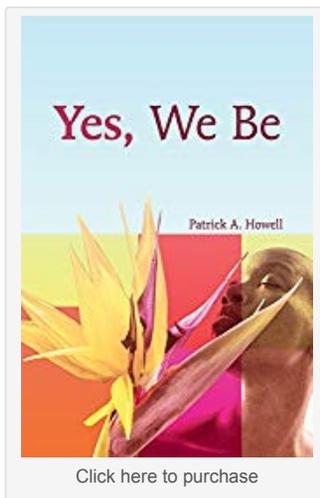
AM: What audiences do you hope to reach with *Yes, We Be*?

PH: I really hope to reach the diaspora. But the diaspora is not relegated to skin pigment. It is a "content of their character" MLK type of thing. It's about free souls and dreamcatchers. It's about movement forward. So, it's about the diaspora of humanity that fit within this vein, this spiritual force. It's directed at dreamers with feet firmly planted in reality.

AM: Is there a question you'd like to answer that no interviewer has ever asked you?

PH: I've interviewed dozens and dozens of creatives – poets, authors, painters – but I've only been interviewed a handful of times. So, I guess I would ask me, "How does it all end?" And I would say, "Love wins." It always does. Love will always win.

AM: What piece of wisdom was imparted to you that you'd like to impart to others?



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PH: My dad passed away earlier this year. He was a professor of political science who taught at Cosumnes River College in Sacramento and Rodger Williams University in Rhode Island. He was also the co-founder of the Alternative to Western Civilization Program at Stanford University. He wrote the *Ideology of Racism*, published by Simon and Schuster in 1999, and also had an incredible dissertation dealing with the contribution of Africans to the Panama Canal where my mother is from. He said "never give up because that is the only way you really lose." I believe that. I know that. I practice that. That's religion.

Also, as I am a banker and reading great literature since elementary school at Pony Express, I have been a fan of T.S. Elliot – it's been an inspiration to know that one of the arguably greatest poets of the 20th century was also a financier and found his way to poetry and literary greatness. "The Hollow Men" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufock" are some of my favorite all

time works. So, I guess I was inspired or instructed by his figure as well.

AM: Aren't you working on another novel now? Would you like to say a few words about that?

PH: I have a few projects, Allen. My novel, *Quarter 'til Judgment Day*, is a coming-of-age, experimental novel for its protagonist Bishop Kingston, a black Wall Street mogul millennial coming of age during Tea Bagging, the Obama Administration and all of that energy in the first decade of the new millennium. I have a couple of publishers looking at it, but nobody's taken it yet. So, I'm beginning to work on its follow up – which is, in part, about the period of time we are inhabiting now. Also, the next epoch

already upon us. Also, finishing up work on a book of short stories – *Black, Brown and Blue*. Hopefully, I can work with a small independent publisher on that one. I have an anthology, *Dispatches from the Vanguard: The Global International African Arts Movement versus Donald J. Trump*, which is a collection of interviews with the Ishmael Reeds, Tamara Pizzollis, Tori Reids, Nikki Giovannis, Jaki Shelton Greens, Nnedi Okorafor and their work: our newest epoch, our new time. It will be distributed by Penguin/Random House and published by the incredible London-based press, Repeater Books.

AM: Are you working on anything else literary?

Yes, we have formed a storytelling company, Victory & Noble. March 6th we will debut at the Four Seasons in Beverly Hills with a Book to Film Symposium and Gala event. We will be working with Nikki Giovanni, Tyehimba Jess, the 2017 Pulitzer Prize winner for poetry, Hollywood film and television production companies, independent publishers as Red Dirt Press and Amy Susan Wilson's authors. It should be a very, very interesting day and wonderful evening. We are talking with George RR Martin's offices – he is the creator of *Game of Thrones*. Will be reaching out to Michael Chabon and Nnedi Okorafor. Also, Quincy Troupe, who is the biographer of Miles Davis and co-author of *Pursuit of Happiness*, which was later made into a film with Will Smith. We are also giving a lifetime legacy achievement award to Tim Reid, the iconic sitcom actor formerly of WKRP, *Tim's Place* and nearly 20 syndicated shows over 50 decades of work.

AM: What caused you to embrace the experimental style? I'm guessing you didn't just wake up one morning and think, "From henceforth, I shall write using unusual techniques."

PH: Just keeping myself entertained. I mean poetry is for the people. But it is also for one's self. So, I wanted to work on something that not only engaged me spiritually, and all of the myriad streams that flow into that repository, but also engaged my mind and all of its avenues, to and from, my heart and the hearts of those with whom I workshop. So, that book had pieces that were written going back 25 years, but it is a single expression. I remember the publisher telling me I had to organize the pieces in such a way that they were like the Beatle's "Sgt Pepper's Lonely Heart Band" or Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On." And then, I am always, always, always aspiring to the genius that is, in my humble opinion, the greatest album in the history of albums, Prince's *Sign of the Times* or even any Joni Mitchell song. So, pretty sure that had something to do with it. Actually, not sure where any of it came from anymore. That was a different period in my life. My head space was different.

AM: Thanks so much for the interview, Patrick. And best of luck with your next project.

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About Allen Mendenhall



Allen Mendenhall is associate dean at Thomas Goode Jones School of Law and executive director of the Blackstone & Burke Center. His books include *Literature and Liberty* (2014), *Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Pragmatism, and the Jurisprudence of Agon* (2017), *The Southern Philosopher: Collected Essays of John William Corrington* (2017) (editor), and *Lines from a Southern Lawyer* (2017). Visit his website at AllenMendenhall.com.

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