

In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr.

By June Jordan

/

honey people murder mercy U.S.A.
 the milkland turn to monsters teach
 to kill to violate pull down destroy
 the weakly freedom growing fruit
 from being born

America

tomorrow yesterday rip rape
 exacerbate despoil disfigure
 crazy running threat the
 deadly thrall
 appall belief dispel
 the wildlife burn the breast
 the onward tongue
 the outward hand
 deform the normal rainy
 riot sunshine shelter wreck
 of darkness derogate
 delimit blank
 explode deprive
 assassinate and batten up
 like bullets fatten up
 the raving greed
 reactivate a springtime
 terrorizing

death by men by more
 than you or I can

STOP

//

They sleep who know a regulated place
 or pulse or tide or changing sky
 according to some universal
 stage direction obvious
 like shorewashed shells

we share an afternoon of mourning
 in between no next predictable
 except for wild reversal hearse rehearsal
 bleach the blacklong lunging
 ritual of fright insanity and more
 deplorable abortion

more and
more

June Jordan, "In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr." from *Directed By Desire: The Collected Poems of June Jordan* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2005). Copyright © 2005 by The June M. Jordan Literary Trust. Reprinted with the permission of The June M. Jordan Literary Trust, www.junejordan.com.

Source: The Norton Anthology of African American Literature (1997)



Born to Jamaican immigrants in Harlem, New York, June Jordan later attended Barnard College and the University of Chicago. Her experiences as the only black student at a prep school and her taboo marriage to a white man fueled the sense of discrimination in her activist writing—throughout her work, she was tireless in her commitment to civil rights and political liberty. Jordan also had a distinguished academic career, teaching at Sarah Lawrence College, Yale University, and the University of California at Berkeley. In her poem "In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr." she describes problems in American culture using a rhythmically aggressive yet free-flowing verse form.

[See More By This Poet](#)