

Negative

By Kevin Young

Wake to find everything black
what was white, all the vice
versa—white maids on TV, black

sitcoms that star white dwarfs
cute as pearl buttons. Black Presidents,
Black Houses. White horse

candidates. All bleach burns
clothes black. Drive roads
white as you are, white songs

on the radio stolen by black bands
like secret pancake recipes, white back-up
singers, ball-players & boxers all

white as tar. Feathers on chickens
dark as everything, boiling in the pot
that called the kettle honky. Even

whites of the eye turn dark, pupils
clear & changing as a cat's.
Is this what we've wanted

& waited for? to see snow
covering everything black
as Christmas, dark pages written

white upon? All our eclipses bright,
dark stars shooting across pale
sky, glowing like ash in fire, shower

every skin. Only money keeps
green, still grows & burns like grass
under dark daylight.

Kevin Young, "Negative" from *To Repel Ghosts: The Remix*. Copyright © 2005 by Kevin Young, published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Steerforth Press.

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Kevin Young was born in Lincoln, Nebraska. He studied under Seamus Heaney and Lucie Brock-Broido at Harvard University and, while a student there, became a member of the Dark Room Collective, a community of African American writers. "I feel like a poem is made up of poetic and unpoetic language, or unexpected language," Young said in a 2006 interview with Ploughshares. "I think there are many other vernaculars, whether it's the vernacular of the blues, or the vernacular of visual art, the sort of living language of the everyday." For roughly a decade, Young was the Atticus Haygood Professor of Creative Writing and English and curator of Literary Collections and the Raymond Danowski Poetry Library at Emory University. Young is the poetry editor of the *New Yorker* and the director of New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

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