

Judges' Commentary on "Kings Fallen: A Story of Lost Boys"

by

Megan Brannum

**"Kings Fallen" received an Honorable Mention in the University of Pittsburgh's
2006-07 Composition Program Writing Contest**

In "Kings Fallen: A Story of Lost Boys," Megan Brannum composes an essay that works both autobiographically and historically to provide an account of a time and place, the post-millennium urban South. One of the challenges of this assignment was to write the piece as a reader cognizant of two landmark essays, James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son" and Joan Didion's "Notes from a Native Daughter," and to demonstrate a sense of their approach to a complex subject. The assignment invited students to craft "a story that attempts to answer the riddle of who you have become, a story about what it is like to be alive now."

Brannum's essay dexterously combines narrative, reflective, and intertextual modes to explore the tragic story of two high school friends charged with murder. Her portrayal evokes the landscape and culture of a community crossed by prosperity and ambition as well as by drugs and frustration. Brannum, with disarming insight, puts it this way:

The ghettos of the south are unlike the unforgiving concrete of the city ghettos. They are surrounded by the green lawns of the suburban middle class, the military men, the tire plant workers, the truck drivers. We come from this mundane and well-provided-for landscape. We don't do hard drugs to escape the painful circumstances of our lives; we do not sell drugs because we need to make money. We hustle and use to boost our egos and alleviate boredom. Cocaine use is an unnatural rebellion against authority. It is played out by the boys I know in response to repression by the people who are terrified of our culture. This is a terror that is rightly felt and expressed, I must note. But when Rick Ross says he'd kill a nigga for a dime, and that most of his "niggas still deal

cocaine,” and Field Mob screams, “I’m the man...got no white but the white be my girlfriend,” the idea of hustling and using becomes glamorous and the evil fades into background, lost in the beat.

Given the extremity of the events at the center of her essay, it would have been relatively easy for Brannum to get lost in personal feeling, in moralizing retrospective, or in stereotypes of urban black youth as she tells her particular story. Instead, she shows her readers around the ordinary-but-extraordinary scenes in which she and her “band of brothers” came of age, and came to grief, with a lucid gaze and in a voice that evokes both tenderness and incredulity: “Presently, Tim and Sean are both sitting on death row. They are behind bars, dead in most ways with the exception of their beating hearts.”

To read the full text of Megan Brannum’s essay [click here](#)