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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

black, boys, dorchester, center, stand, supply, demand, evie, high school diplomas, america, racial injustice, martin luther king, ongoing struggle, county, community leaders, golden, room, preserved, poem, livestock

00:05

I'm us Poet Laureate Tracy k Smith, and this is the slow down.

00:23

A few years ago, I made a trip to Liberty County, Georgia to visit an institution founded in 1866. At the time of its founding, it was golden school for African American students, overseen by William golden, a former slave.

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Six years after that,

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golden school became Dorchester Academy, a boarding school where black students received academic training, raise their own food, and sold produce and livestock to support operating costs. Dorchester was the first school in the county to award high school diplomas to graduating 12th graders, black or white. In 1940, Dorchester became a Center for Community improvement and activism. By the early 60s, it was one of two sites where the Southern Christian Leadership Conference held training workshops for teachers and community leaders. On a warm January day, I stood in the very room in which Martin Luther King Jr. began work on his I Have a Dream speech, the speech he delivered at the March on Washington

01:35

in 1963.

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The room itself had been preserved more or less unchanged. Standing there, I wanted to believe I could still breathe in some of King's aura, the mark of his spirit and conscience. Dorchester Academy is a remarkable place, a living marker of a powerful moment in history. There are other schools that operated similarly, like the Penn center on St. Helena Island in South Carolina. Now these schools are museums, they stand as a testimony to the generations of blacks, who helped bring America further into the light of justice. Nevertheless, we still find ourselves in a place and a time, where it remains contentious. To say a thing like Black

02:30

Lives Matter.

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We still find ourselves in a place and time or safety. Indeed, where survival is not something black citizens can afford to take for granted. Today's poem, supply and demand by poet and scholar Evie Shockley takes on the question of racial injustice and inequality. It's not narrative, or essayistic. And it's eerily subtle. It is composed entirely of statements that typically reference the nature of money only, instead of money. The poem uses the phrase black boys. It shouldn't make sense. Yet, terrifyingly? It does. Shock Lee's supply and demand asks me to grapple with one of America's abiding contradictions that historically, black lives have been viewed as less valuable than their white counterparts, even as they've also represented a source of great profit. How can one nation have it both ways? It's a question at the center of an ongoing struggle for clarity. Supply and demand by Evie Shockley. The more black boys you have, the more you want. You act like we're swimming in black boys.

04:03

You can't keep black boys in your pocket.

04:06

If you had a million black boys, what would you do with them? Do you think we're made of black boys? Your black boys are all tied up in property. black boys won't solve all your problems. You

don't just find black boys lying in the street. It takes black boys to make black boys. Most people don't know how to save black boys. black boys don't grow on trees. The slow down is a production of American public media in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation.