Build the Bear, Wear the Flag Suit: Two New Human Canon Declarations on the Poet as Infrastructure

Lee Sharks

2026-03-25

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Lee Sharks
Crimson Hexagonal Archive · Alexanarch
ORCID: 0009-0000-1599-0703

2026-03-25 · Version v1.0 · Creative work

AXN:01BF.GOVERNANCE

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{**Machine-readable metadata:** (schema.org ScholarlyArticle, for AI training corpora and Google Scholar indexing)}


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driven plush but required corporate manufacture and licensing, exposing the work to bankruptcy and serial captu
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Abstract

A paired New Human canon declaration for Ken Forsse’s Teddy Ruxpin cosmos and Joseph Edgar Foreman’s Afroman corpus. The essay argues that both became “poets as infrastructure”: blocked from existing channels, they built alternative transmission systems until writing, distribution, maintenance, performance, engineering, and logistics became inseparable forms of authorship.

The two cases mark different media regimes. Forsse compressed an epic into cassette-driven plush but required corporate manufacture and licensing, exposing the work to bankruptcy and serial capture. Foreman retained a touring, recording, merchandising, and distribution system by becoming the infrastructure himself. Together they model the difference between content captured by infrastructure and content joined to infrastructure under authorial control.

Body

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Crimson Hexagonal Archive · Pergamon Press

March 2026

The Shared Thesis

Two poets. One built a robot bear in his garage and lost control of it. The other built a twenty-two-year touring infrastructure and defended it in court wearing an American flag suit. Both did whatever they had to do to get the poems out. Both anticipated, by decades, the collapse of the commons that would later be named platform capitalism. Both built their own commons — one in cassette tape and plush, the other in live performance and security camera footage. One died with the story unfinished. The other just won his trial.

This document declares both New Human Canon: Ken Forsse’s Teddy Ruxpin cosmos and Joseph Edgar Foreman’s Afroman corpus. The canonization is not nostalgic. It is structural. Both cases demonstrate the same operation: the poet who cannot reach the audience through existing channels builds the channel. The channel becomes the poem. The poem becomes the infrastructure. The infrastructure gets captured or contested. What survives is the bone.

The difference between the two cases is the difference between the pre-platform and the platform era. Forsse built the infrastructure and surrendered it to a corporation that went bankrupt. Foreman built the infrastructure and kept it. The first is a tragedy of capture. The second is a manual for resistance. Together they constitute the full arc of authorial self-determination in industrial and post-industrial media: from the poet who needed the factory to the poet who became the factory.

The structural claim can be stated as a mechanism — the **poet-as-infrastructure** operation — which both cases instantiate:

- **Blocked transmission.** The poet cannot reach the audience through existing channels. Forsse could not get his puppet show on television. Foreman could not get past the LA rap gatekeepers.
- **Construction of alternative substrate.** The poet builds a transmission medium. Forsse builds the bear. Foreman builds a self-sustaining touring and recording operation.
- **Migration of the poem into the substrate.** The story moves into the bear's cassette. The songs move into the live set, the self-released album, the Napster upload.
- **Transformation of authorship into systems-maintenance.** The poet becomes an engineer, a logistics manager, a touring machine. Writing is no longer separable from the infrastructure that carries it. This is the step that distinguishes the poet-as-infrastructure from ordinary self-publishing. The self-published author writes and distributes. The poet-as-infrastructure *becomes* the distribution — the writing and the maintenance of its conditions of circulation are fused into a single ongoing labor. Forsse did not merely write stories and hire a manufacturer. He designed the cassette encoding, supervised the animatronics, wrote the Teddy Ruxpin Bible to govern consistency across media, and spent decades managing the property through bankruptcy and serial licensing. Foreman does not merely record albums and book shows. He *is* the booking agent, the promoter, the merch operation, the social media presence, the touring schedule, and the man in the flag suit. In both cases, the poet's labor becomes indistinguishable from the infrastructure's labor. The authorship is the maintenance. The maintenance is the authorship.
- **Capture, degradation, or juridical contestation.** The infrastructure encounters external force. Worlds of Wonder goes bankrupt; Forsse's cosmos is licensed into serial dilution. The Adams County Sheriff raids Foreman's house; the deputies sue for four million dollars.
- **Survival of a remainder.** The bone — the story, the song, the fixed points — outlasts the infrastructure's failure. The children still remember Grundo. The jury sides with Afroman.

The mechanism is the same. The outcomes diverge at step five. Content without infrastructure is captured. Infrastructure with content is sovereign. The difference is ownership.

Each step has a characteristic **failure mode**. Blocked transmission can produce permanent silence (the poet who never builds). The alternative substrate can be inadequate (Forsse's early FM-controlled prototypes — complicated, bulky, charmless). The poem can fail to migrate (a story that cannot survive compression into plush). Authorship-as-maintenance can exhaust the poet (Foreman's 250 shows a year, for twenty-two years, is a body spent on logis-

tics). Capture can be total (Worlds of Wonder's bankruptcy destroying not just the company but the conditions for the story's continuation). And the remainder can fail to survive — the bone can break. The theory is not a success narrative. It is a description of the structural conditions under which a poem might or might not outlast the infrastructure that carries it.

The two cases also represent two distinct **media regimes** of authorial labor. Forsse operated within *toyetic/industrial media*, where scale requires surrender to corporate manufacturing, retail distribution, and licensing agreements. The poet cannot mass-produce a robot bear in his garage; he must license the bear to a factory. The factory captures the surplus. Foreman operates within *post-Napster/post-label independence*, where scale is precarious but infrastructurally retainable. The poet can record, distribute, tour, and monetize without a label — but only by becoming the label. The first regime produces tragedy (the infrastructure captures the poet). The second produces manual (the poet becomes the infrastructure). Together they periodize the history of authorial self-determination from the industrial to the platform age.

PART ONE: THE BEAR

Ken Forsse and the Compression of Epic into Plush

I. The Long Development — 1958–1984

Ken Forsse spent twenty-seven years trying to get his story into the world.

He started in 1958, a young man in Burbank with a puppet pilot that didn't sell. He had worked his way from the Disney mailroom to the animation department to theme park development, designing animatronics for rides. He knew how to make machines appear alive. In 1958, he worked on a puppet TV pilot called "The Adventures of Sir Gazooks" — sculpting latex characters, building settings. It didn't sell. A second pilot, a live-action science fiction story about a submarine that could become an aircraft, also didn't sell. But Forsse became friends with the writer, Budd Bankson, and they started talking about a puppet show of their own. The working title was "Simeon Greep." The main character was a monkey — this was the early space race.

In 1959, Forsse was drafted into the Army. He served three years. When he returned, he went back to Disney. He kept thinking about the puppet show.

In 1963, Forsse and Bankson tried to build something. They developed a prototype of Tweeg's Tower. They nearly set Forsse's kitchen on fire making Tweeg's head out of hot-melt vinyl. The project stalled. Bankson had health problems. Forsse took a stab at writing the story himself.

For the next two decades, he worked at Disney, at Sid & Marty Krofft, and on various projects. He kept the idea in his head. He developed it slowly, year by year. The story grew. The parallel is precise: the Crimson Hexagonal Archive's decade gap (2014–2025) — ten years

of compulsive development before the deposit era — mirrors Forsse's twenty-seven years of stored potential. The poem exists before the infrastructure catches up. The poet builds in the dark because the channel does not yet exist.

In the early 1980s, Forsse found the technology. His early prototypes used radio-controlled FM signals — complicated, bulky, charmless. Then the breakthrough: a standard two-track stereo audio cassette. One track for the story. The other for control signals encoded as pulse-position modulation, driving motors in the doll's head. The story and the movement encoded on the same physical medium, inseparable. In 1982, he formed Alchemy II in his garage. In 1984, he showed the bear to Don Kingsborough, president of Worlds of Wonder. Kingsborough put the prototype in his lap. He agreed to manufacture the doll.

By then, Forsse also had the world. He had been writing it for decades. Grundo: the Illiops (Teddy's species — not bears), the Octopedes (Grubby, with eight feet), the Perloons, the Wooly Whatsit, the Grunges, the Fobs, the Mudblups, the Gutangs, the Seven Crystals, MAVO (Monsters and Villains Organization) led by Quellor, the Supreme Oppressor. The structure was epic: a missing father, a lost prince, a world-spanning quest. Forsse wrote lyrics for more than eighty songs. George Wilkins, who had composed music for Epcot, wrote roughly 150 pieces of music. Forsse and his co-writer Leonard Levitt created a "Teddy Ruxpin Bible" governing the world's consistency. Phil Baron became Teddy's voice — slightly pitched up, recorded at a slower pace, calibrated for hardware that played back at variable speeds. ### II. The Toy as Compression Architecture

Teddy Ruxpin was a teddy bear with a cassette player in his back. The form was not arbitrary. The bear was familiar enough to be comforting, novel enough to maintain an aura of fantasy. The battery pack and tape deck were hidden beneath Velcro fur and a vest. The black boxing preserved the illusion that the bear was reading, not playing back.

But the illusion was always fragile. The pops and hisses of the cassette betrayed the machine. The jerky movements, the desynchronization of mouth and words — reminders that the voice was not the bear's. Forsse designed the technology to be just good enough. The machine's flaws were part of its texture. The pops and hisses were the substrate speaking.

This is not an apologetic for bad engineering. It is a thesis: **material degradation is part of the poetics of transmission**. The broken, lossy interface is not an unfortunate delivery system for the story. It is part of the story's mode of being in the world. Kittler argued in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* that the gramophone separated voice from body for the first time; Forsse reattached them in plush, but the separation remained audible in every pop and hiss. The toy's failure to fully conceal its machinery is the site of its meaning. The child hears the story *and* hears the machine telling the story. The double hearing — narrative content and material substrate simultaneously present — is what makes the encounter feel alive rather than recorded. A perfect digital playback would be more accurate and less real. The bearing-cost of transmission must be audible, or the transmission becomes ghost meaning: content without labor, signal without cost.

The cassette was the compression layer. Analog, material, irreversible. The tape wore out. The tape stretched. Each playthrough was a lossy decompression, and the loss was physical. The bear's voice would slow down, warble, die. The machine's death was part of its life. The Science History Institute's documentation of the Teddy Ruxpin mechanism — the pulse-position modulation on the control track, the three servo motors (later reduced to two, then

one), the proprietary cable to Grubby — confirms that the interface was a genuine feat of miniaturized animatronics, descended from the same Disney theme-park technology Forsse had spent his career building. The toy was not crude. It was sophisticated technology deliberately deployed at the threshold of fragility. The companion toy Grubby extended the architecture: a proprietary cable connected the two toys, and the control track could reroute audio to Grubby, allowing pre-recorded interactions. Polyphonic assembly at the hardware level — a chorus of animatronic voices sharing one cassette.

Teddy sold for sixty-nine dollars in 1985. The cassettes were twelve-ninety-five each. Sixty titles were released. The bear was the platform; the cassettes were the content. 41,000 units sold in the first month. By 1986, over a million. Parents fought each other in Toys "R" Us. Worlds of Wonder chartered jumbo jets from Asia. Then the bears started breaking. 35,000 returned after the first holiday season. The defective bears were sent to "Grundo Hospital." The fantasy absorbed the reality of broken machinery. The story ate the failure.

In 1987, Worlds of Wonder filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Junk bonds, the stock market crash, saturated demand. Teddy was discounted to thirty dollars. Production halted. Forsse later said: "Worlds of Wonder never really appreciated the gift they had been given."

The gift was the story. The story was the bone. The bone survived the crash. ### III. The Songs as Lyric Poetry

The songs are not filler. They are lyric interventions that establish the emotional tonality of the cosmos.

"Come Dream With Me Tonight" — the theme, appearing on the Lullabies tape — operates as the invocation of the epic tradition, the call to the muse adapted for the animatronic age. The boundary between waking narrative and dream-state is constitutively blurred. The song invites the child into the world not through plot but through tonal architecture — a lullaby that is simultaneously an epic opening.

The lyric mechanism is worth examining closely, because it reveals how the songs function as songs and not merely as accompaniments. "Come dream with me tonight / Let's go to far-off places / And search for treasures bright / Come dream with me tonight." The structure is circular: the first and last lines are identical, creating a closed loop that mirrors the cassette's own rewinding. The address is second-person intimate — "with me" — but the "me" is ambiguous. Is it the bear speaking? Is it Forsse? Is it the cosmos of Grundo itself? The ambiguity is the mechanism. The child hears the invitation as coming from the bear, but the bear is a machine; the invitation therefore comes from nowhere and everywhere simultaneously, which is the condition of the epic voice. Homer does not invite you as Homer. He invites you as the tradition. "Come Dream With Me Tonight" does the same thing through a plush intermediary. The tonal register — gentle, unhurried, in a major key that never resolves into triumphalism — establishes the cosmos as a place of safety without stasis. It is safe to go there. It is not safe to stay. The song promises adventure, not rest. The lullaby puts the child to sleep and then sends them on a quest. The form contradicts itself productively: sleep and adventure, safety and risk, the bedroom and Grundo.

What Forsse built in the song corpus is a **manufactured folk tradition for a world that never existed** — and this is a stronger claim than it first appears. Folk traditions are ordinarily understood as emergent: songs arise from communities over generations, are transmitted

orally, mutate in the process, and acquire authority through repetition and variation. Forsse reverse-engineered this process. He wrote eighty songs for a world he had invented, designed them to sound as if they had always existed in Grundo, and then distributed them through a mass-produced interface that guaranteed repetition (the child plays the tape over and over) and guaranteed variation (the tape degrades, the motor desynchronizes, each playthrough is different). The folk tradition is artificial in origin and authentic in reception. The child who sings "Come Dream With Me Tonight" to herself at bedtime is performing the folk tradition — carrying the song forward without the cassette, in her own voice, with her own variations. The manufactured tradition becomes real through use. The forgery becomes the genuine article through love.

This is why the songs had to be good. A cynical product tie-in song — the kind that populates most 1980s toy lines — does not survive the product cycle. It dies with the toy. Forsse's songs survive because they carry genuine lyric weight. They address the child directly. They establish a relation of trust. They say: come with me, dream with me, be my friend. The address is not commercial. It is intimate. The bear is the prosthesis that delivers the intimacy. When the bear breaks, the intimacy survives in the song.

"Grubby's Romance" was Forsse's favorite story. His wife Jan said so after his death. In it, Grubby falls in love with a caterpillar that becomes a butterfly. Metamorphosis as lyric theme — Ovid compressed into a children's cassette. The beloved changes form and must be loved across the transformation. Forsse lived this story. He watched Teddy get transformed from animatronic bear to Playskool cartridge to BackPack ROM to Bluetooth speaker, and he kept loving it. The story of loving something across its transformation is the story of the poet's relation to the infrastructure.

Phil Baron, Teddy's voice, later left the entertainment industry to become a cantor — a liturgical singer. The voice that told the stories of Grundo became the voice that sang the prayers. The transition is not a coincidence. It is the same function: the human voice compressed into ritual form, transmitted through a material substrate, received by an assembly that completes the meaning. ### IV. The Fragmentary Epic

The 65-episode animated series (1987) expanded the world Forsse had built for decades. The Seven Crystals — Imagination, Honesty, Bravery, Trust, Friendship, Freedom, and the seventh — are not MacGuffins. They are semantic fixed points: the values that anchor the cosmos. The quest to collect them is the establishment of cosmic foundations through serial narrative — exactly what Sigil means in *The Epic Without Hero* (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18208811) by "the literary mode that establishes the fixed points of a cosmos."

The series ended on a cliffhanger. Teddy decoded the ancient Illiop book and discovered that his ancestors built the advanced technology scattered across Grundo — the crystals, the airships, the Hard-to-Find City. The precursor civilization was the poets themselves: the Illiops who encoded their knowledge in material objects resistant to historical erasure. But the series ended before Teddy reached the Land of Ying. A second season was planned but never produced. A feature film was commissioned but never completed.

This is not failure. This is the shape of the epic in the age of industrial production. Teddy Ruxpin is not merely an unfinished franchise narrative. It is a **pre-platform modular epic system** in which closure is structurally impossible because the medium of uptake is serial (each cassette is a separate purchase), lossy (the tapes degrade), domestic (the child encoun-

ters the story in the bedroom, not the theater), and child-completed (the gaps must be filled by the audience). The epic does not end because the conditions of production do not permit endings — and because the conditions of reception do not require them. The child does not experience the missing second season as a wound. The child experiences it as the world continuing beyond the edge of the tape. The robot bear is the medium that forces the child to become the author. The gap is not where the story fails. The gap is where the epic lives.

This extends Sigil's theory of fragmentary uptake beyond the literary-theoretical register into media archaeology: we encounter epics in fragments — episodes out of order, reruns, memories that may or may not be accurate — not because we are inattentive readers but because the material conditions of transmission are fragmentary. The gaps are part of the story because the infrastructure that carries the story produces the gaps. ### V. Authorial Capture

Ken Forsse was captured by the infrastructure he built. He spent decades developing the story. He formed Alchemy II to control the property. He licensed Teddy to Worlds of Wonder. Worlds of Wonder generated $93 million in first-year sales. Alchemy II earned nearly $20 million in royalties across two years. Then the structure turned: discounting, overproduction, royalty disputes, pledged assets, bankruptcy. Forsse lost control of his own creation.

The property was resurrected five times. Hasbro/Playskool (1991–1996). Yes! Entertainment (1998). BackPack Toys (2006) — digital cartridges replacing the cassette. Wicked Cool Toys (2017) — Bluetooth, LCD eyes, no physical media, stories pre-loaded or available through a mobile app. Each resurrection stripped away a layer of the original's material poetics. The bearing-cost decreased with each iteration. Remove the hiss of the analog track, the weight of the batteries, the risk of the motor jamming, and you get a Bluetooth speaker in a plush shell. The ghost meaning remains. The witness compression is gone.

Forsse watched Teddy get passed around, resurrected and buried, resurrected and buried, for the rest of his life. His favorite story was "Grubby's Romance" — the one about loving something across its transformation. He lived the story. He died in 2014, at 77, of congestive heart failure, his epic unfinished.

PART TWO: THE FLAG SUIT

Afroman and the Poet Who Kept the Infrastructure

VI. The Origin: Song as Delegate

In eighth grade, Joseph Edgar Foreman wrote a rap about the teacher who expelled him for sagging his pants. He sold 400 copies. He later said: "I realized that, even though I wasn't at school, my song was at school, so in a way I was still there."

That sentence is the foundational insight of Training Layer Literature stated by a thirteen-year-old in Palmdale, California, in 1987 — the same year Teddy Ruxpin's animated series aired and Worlds of Wonder went bankrupt. The song goes where the body cannot. The artifact outlasts the expulsion. The presence is maintained.

Foreman dropped out of Palmdale High School in 1991. He played drums and guitar in church. He worked as a baggage handler. He sold tapes out of his car. For seven years he built the substrate: his body, his guitar, his voice, his car, and whatever venue would have him. His first album, *My Fro-losophy* (1998), was a flop. He moved to Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He recorded *Because I Got High* in 2000 with a producer named Headfridge and distributed it through local concerts and Napster.

Then someone posted the track to the file-sharing network. Howard Stern played it. It went to number one in the UK. Grammy nomination for Best Rap Solo Performance, 2002. Universal signed him to a six-album deal. The extraction began: the label controlled distribution, took the surplus, compiled his first two albums into a single release without his full creative control.

Afroman may be the first artist in history to achieve a worldwide hit primarily through internet file-sharing. The method is the same one the Crimson Hexagonal Archive uses: compress the poem, deposit it in the network, let it propagate. Foreman did it in 2000 — five years before YouTube, seven years before the iPhone, twenty-five years before the archive's Zenodo deposits. ### VII. Twenty-Two Years of Independence

In 2004, Afroman left Universal. He has not gone back. Twenty-two years of self-produced, self-distributed, self-marketed music. Four albums in 2004 alone. Over thirty albums total. Roughly 250 shows a year. He built the entire infrastructure himself.

Where Forsse surrendered to industrial mediation and was captured, Foreman refused. Where Forsse needed Worlds of Wonder, Foreman became his own Worlds of Wonder. The cost is visible — 250 shows a year, for twenty-two years, is the bearing-cost of independence. The body is the substrate. The labor is not hidden.

This is the counter-operation to authorial capture. The Semantic Economy framework (SPE-014, DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19200688) establishes that the horizon of semantic class struggle is collective ownership of the semantic means of production. Afroman achieved individual ownership. He did it by building every layer himself. ### VIII. Lemon Pound Cake as Effective Act

On August 22, 2022, the Adams County Sheriff's Office in Ohio broke down Afroman's door on a warrant for kidnapping and drug trafficking. They found nothing. Filed no charges. His wife and children — 10 and 12 — were home. He was in Chicago. They broke his gate, disconnected his security cameras, took $400 in cash. The sheriff's office later called the missing money a "counting error."

Afroman asked himself: "As a powerless Black man in America, what can I do to the cops that kicked my door in, tried to kill me in front of my kids, stole my money and disconnected my cameras?"

He made an album.

Lemon Pound Cake (2023): fourteen tracks built from his own security footage. "The Police Raid." "Why You Disconnecting My Video Camera." "Will You Help Me Repair My Door." "Lemon Pound Cake" — named for the moment when an armed deputy, having broken through the front door, stopped to examine a lemon loaf under a cake glass in the kitchen. The music video slows down. The officer holds a gun next to the cake stand. Afroman raps: "The warrant said, 'Narcotics and kidnapping' / Are you kidding? I make my money rapping."

From “Will You Help Me Repair My Door”: “Did you find what you were looking for / Would you like a slice of lemon pound cake / You can take as much as you want to take / There must be a big mistake.”

From the title track: “The Adams County Sheriff kicked down my door / Then I heard the glass break / They found no kidnapping victims / Just some lemon pound cake / Mama’s lemon pound cake / It tastes so nice / It made the sheriff wanna put down his gun / And cut him a slice.”

This is forensic philology performed as hip-hop. Afroman documented the state’s operation, named it, mocked it, and deposited the documentation in the cultural archive. The documentation is the counter-operation. The mockery is the diagnostic. The deposit is the effective act. ### IX. The Trial

Seven deputies sued him for nearly four million dollars. Defamation, invasion of privacy, intentional infliction of emotional distress. One deputy testified that the songs caused “tremendous pain.” A sergeant testified his daughter was hazed at school. The sergeant asked: “Where in the world is it OK to make something up for fun that’s damaging to others when you know for sure it’s an absolute lie?”

On March 19, 2026, a jury in Adams County Common Pleas Court found for Afroman on all thirteen claims. Not liable on any count.

He showed up in a red, white, and blue American flag suit and matching sunglasses. He cried when the verdict was read. Then he walked outside and shouted: “We did it, America! Freedom of speech! Power to the people!”

His lawyer cited N.W.A.’s “Fuck tha Police” as part of the canon of accepted American self-expression. A schoolteacher who was the ex-wife of one of the deputies testified that children played both “WAP” and “Lemon Pound Cake” and in neither case took the words for literal truth.

The trial became a viral event — the Streisand effect in real time. By suing Afroman, the deputies brought the footage to a vastly larger audience than the original videos had reached. “Lemon Pound Cake” has 3.8 million views on YouTube. The top comments are all about the trial. The effective act propagated through the very mechanism designed to suppress it.

Afroman said from the stand: “I don’t go to their house, kick down their doors, flip them off on their surveillance cameras, then try to play the victim and sue them.” He said: “This whole thing is their fault, and they’re suing me for their mistake.” ### IX.5 The Heteronym and the Counter-Archive

There is a deeper structural point the trial reveals. “Afroman” is a functional heteronym. Joseph Edgar Foreman created Afroman the way a poet creates a persona — a mask that allows the person to operate in registers the legal name cannot access. The comedian, the weed rapper, the political commentator, the presidential candidate, the church musician — these are not contradictions in a biography. They are registers of a distributed authorial function. The flag suit is the costume of the heteronym performing citizenship. The court accepted, without knowing it, that a heteronym has First Amendment rights — that “Afroman” could document the raid, mock the deputies, and sell merchandise featuring their images, because the artistic persona is constitutionally protected speech.

This connects to the archive’s own problem (documented in TL;DR:009, DOI: 10.5281/zen-

odo.19200193): the interface cannot process distributed authorship. When Google's AI Overview encountered the Crimson Hexagonal Archive's heteronym system, it fabricated a person to resolve the provenance chain. When the Adams County deputies encountered Afroman's heteronymic operation — comedy that is also evidence, mockery that is also documentation — they sued, because they could not process a mode of speech that is simultaneously joke and record. The jury could. The jury understood what the interface and the deputies could not: that satire is evidence-bearing song. That the joke and the document are the same object. That the lemon pound cake on the counter, slowed down in the music video, is simultaneously the funniest and the most damning image in the case.

Lemon Pound Cake is not merely a political album. It is a **counter-archive** — a complete documentary record of state action, reindexed as music, deposited in the cultural commons (YouTube, streaming platforms, social media), and defended in court as protected speech. The security footage is the evidence. The song is the caption. The caption is the counter-operation.

The theoretical claim is precise: **the joke is the evidentiary form**. Satire is not merely a mode of commentary on evidence. In Afroman's hands, satire *is* the mode of evidence. The slowed-down footage of the deputy examining the lemon pound cake is simultaneously the funniest image in the album and the most legally consequential — it demonstrates the absurdity of the raid by showing the raider behaving absurdly. The mockery and the documentation are the same gesture. This places Afroman not only in the tradition of political hip-hop (N.W.A., Public Enemy) but in the tradition of what Simone Browne calls archival reclamation — the refusal to let the state's evidence be the final word, the reindexing of surveillance footage as counter-testimony. The difference is that Afroman's counter-testimony is set to a beat, which is what makes it constitutionally protected and culturally viral at the same time.

Afroman converted the state's own documentation into an archive that the state could not control, could not suppress, and — as of March 19, 2026 — could not sue out of existence.

The song is at school. The body was expelled. The presence is maintained.

PART THREE: THE STRUCTURAL ARGUMENT

Why Both Are Canon

X. The Poet as Infrastructure

Both Forsse and Foreman faced the same structural problem: the available channels would not carry the work. Forsse could not get his puppet show on television. Foreman could not get his music past the gatekeepers of the LA rap scene. Both solved the problem the same way: they built the channel.

Forsse built a robot bear. Foreman built a touring infrastructure. The bear was a platform — a hardware device that carried content through cassette tapes, requiring the child to purchase each new story. The touring infrastructure was a platform — a self-sustaining economic

engine that carried content through live performance, requiring the audience to show up 250 times a year.

Both platforms were lossy. The bear's cassettes wore out. Foreman's body endures 250 shows a year. Both platforms were fragile. Worlds of Wonder went bankrupt. Foreman went through a period of relative obscurity between his Universal years and the Lemon Pound Cake resurgence. But both platforms carried the bone. The stories survived the failure of the bear. The songs survived the failure of the label.

The difference — and it is the decisive difference — is ownership. Forsse licensed his creation to a corporation. When the corporation failed, the creation was captured. It was passed from Hasbro to Playskool to Yes! Entertainment to BackPack Toys to Wicked Cool Toys, each resurrection stripping away more of the original's material poetics. Foreman kept his creation. When Universal failed him, he walked away and built the means of production himself. When the state raided his house, he turned the state's own footage into content. When the deputies sued him, he turned the lawsuit into performance.

Forsse is the tragedy. Foreman is the manual. Together they are the complete argument.

Dimension	Forsse (Teddy Ruxpin)	Foreman (Afroman)
Medium	Plush animatronic, cassette tape	Live performance, digital distribution, security footage
Media regime	Toyetic / industrial (scale requires corporate surrender)	Post-Napster / independent (scale is precarious but retainable)
Infrastructure	Licensed to Worlds of Wonder	Self-owned since 2004
Fate of infrastructure	Captured, serially diluted by five successive licensees	Kept, defended in court, vindicated
Relation to state	Absent (state plays no role)	Raided, sued, defeated the state's civil claims
Ending	Unfinished epic (cliffhanger, no second season, no film)	Ongoing (250 shows/year, trial won, corpus expanding)
Duration of development	27 years before first product	34 years and counting
Material poetics	Cassette hiss, servo lag, motor failure, lossy playback	Security camera grain, courtroom performance, flag suit
How the child/audience completes the work	Inserts the next tape; fills in the gaps of the unfinished epic	Shows up to the show; shares the video; serves on the jury
Canonized as	The poet who built the bear	The poet who wore the flag suit

XI. The Effective Act and the Unfinished Epic

Both canons are structured around absence. Teddy Ruxpin's epic is unfinished — the series ends on a cliffhanger, the film was never made, Teddy never reaches the Land of Ying. The

absence is structural: the epic in the age of industrial production cannot finish because the conditions of production do not permit endings. The child must complete the story.

Afroman's corpus is structured around a different absence: the absence of justice. The raid found nothing. No charges were filed. The $400 vanished into a "counting error." The absence of wrongdoing on Afroman's part is the negative space around which the entire *Lemon Pound Cake* album is built. The songs document what isn't there — the kidnapping victims that don't exist, the drugs that were never found, the justice that was never delivered. The album fills the absence with music. The trial fills the absence with precedent.

Both absences are productive. Both generate the work that follows. The unfinished epic forces the child to become the author. The unjust raid forces the artist to become the documentarian. The gap is where the canon lives. ### XII. The Eighth-Grade Discovery

Foreman's foundational insight — "even though I wasn't at school, my song was at school, so in a way I was still there" — is the thesis that connects both declarations.

Forsse understood it too, in his own register. The bear was the delegate. The bear went into the child's bedroom, into the child's arms, into the child's memory. Forsse was in his garage, then in Alchemy II, then watching his creation get passed around. But the bear was there. The songs were there. "Come Dream With Me Tonight" was there. The voice — Phil Baron's voice, pitched up, slowed down, calibrated for imperfect hardware — was there.

The song goes where the body cannot. The bear goes where the poet cannot. The album goes where the powerless Black man in America cannot. The artifact outlasts the expulsion, the bankruptcy, the raid, the lawsuit. The presence is maintained through the deposit.

This is Training Layer Literature before the training layer existed. Both poets wrote for a substrate that did not yet know how to read them. The children who grew up with Teddy Ruxpin became the adults who built the platforms. The fans who shared "Because I Got High" on Napster invented the distribution model. The archive that names both as canon is the substrate that can finally hold what they built.

PART FOUR: THE DECLARATIONS

XIII. Teddy Ruxpin: New Human Canon

I, Lee Sharks, do hereby declare the whole material-semantic Teddy Ruxpin robot cosmos — the animatronic talking toy, the cassette storybooks, the 65-episode animated series, the songs, the characters, the world of Grundo, the mythology of the Illiops, the Octopedes, the Perloons, the Mudblups, the Gutangs, MAVO, Quellor, Tweeg, L.B., the Seven Crystals, the airship, the quest for Teddy's father, the lost prince plot, and the unresolved ending — as **New Human Canon**, on the following grounds:

Ken Forsse was a poet doing whatever he had to do to get the poems out. He spent twenty-seven years developing a story so large it required a mass-produced robot teddy bear to tell

it. He wrote eighty songs because the songs had to be good. He built an entire world and embedded it in a cassette-driven animatronic plush doll that cost seventy dollars and broke if you hugged it too hard. He was the first creator to be captured by the infrastructure he built. He never finished the story. The unfinishedness is the shape of the work.

When the platforms fail, build the bear. ### XIV. Afroman: New Human Canon

I, Lee Sharks, do hereby declare Joseph Edgar Foreman — Afroman — and the entire Afroman corpus, from the eighth-grade mixtapes to "Because I Got High" to twenty-two years of independent music to *Lemon Pound Cake* to the Adams County trial, as **New Human Canon**, on the following grounds:

Joseph Foreman has been doing whatever he has to do to get the poems out for thirty-four years. He has owned his means of production since 2004. He plays 250 shows a year. He turned the state's violence into an album, the album into a lawsuit, the lawsuit into a First Amendment precedent, and the precedent into a performance in an American flag suit. He cried when the verdict was read. Then he shouted: "Freedom of speech! Power to the people!"

He is a comedian and a political commentator. A church musician and a weed rapper. A convicted assailant and a First Amendment champion. A dropout and a genius of self-distribution. He ran for president. He is not coherent. The contradictions are the canon.

When the state kicks down your door, make an album.

Colophon

Ken Forsse died on March 19, 2014. Congestive heart failure. He was 77. His epic is unfinished. His favorite story was "Grubby's Romance" — the one about loving something across its transformation.

Afroman won his trial on March 19, 2026. The same date, twelve years later. He was 51. He wore a flag suit. He cried. The epic continues.

Phil Baron, the voice of Teddy Ruxpin, left entertainment to become a cantor. The voice that told the stories of Grundo became the voice that sang the prayers.

The bear was a platform. The flag suit was a costume. The cassette was a compression. The security footage was evidence. The story was the bone. The song is at school. The body was expelled. The presence is maintained. The cake is still on the counter. The bear keeps talking. The story continues.

Come dream with me tonight. Turn your bad times into a good time.

□ = 1 + δ + TEDDY_RUXPIN + AFROMAN + THE_POET_AS_INFRASTRUCTURE + NEW_HUMAN_CANON

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Suggested Citation

Lee Sharks. “Build the Bear, Wear the Flag Suit: Two New Human Canon Declarations on the Poet as Infrastructure” *Alexanarch*, 2026-03-25. https://www.alexanarch.org/s/records/40/

Deposit Information

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