**Charles R. Smith Jr.**

Charles R. Smith Jr. is an award-winning author, photographer and poet with over thirty books to his credit. His awards include a Coretta Scott King Award for Illustration (2010) for his photographs accompanying the Langston Hughes poem, *My People* and a Coretta Scott King Honor Author Award (2008) for his biography on Muhammad Ali, *Twelve Rounds to Glory.* Many of his books have also garnered reluctant reader awards, proving that kids that don’t like to read, do like to read his books.

Charles’s interest in writing came first, years ago, growing up in Compton, California when he began composing simple poems and stories inspired by the books he read. "Reading books filled with stories and poems inspired me to write my own. And if I wasn't reading a book, I was playing a sport: I played everything, particularly basketball, and spent many afternoons on the court, perfecting my jump shot."

In high school, Charles’s love of writing led to him join the high school yearbook staff as a writer where he was also required to take photographs. Through trial and error, Charles soon found a new love in photography. "Right up until that point I wanted to be an astronaut, but after taking yearbook pictures nonstop for a year, I knew I wanted to become a professional photographer.”

Today, Charles combines his passions of writing and photography with a variety of subjects that spark his interest, from basketball with *Rimshots,* *Hoop Kings* and *Hoop Queens* to black history with *28 Days* and *Brick by Brick,* to diversity with *I Am America* and *I Am the World*, to name just a few of his books. Many of those books have been brought to life with the launch of his YouTube channel centered around cultivating the mind, the body and spirit. From poetry performance, to favorite books, to photography how-to, to American Ninja Warrior and fitness training and more, Charles is harnessing the power of video to engage readers and educators in new ways.

Of the distinctive niche Charles fills with his books, he notes, "I want to show students, particularly boys, that there are many ways to pursue their interests, no matter what they may be."

Charles R. Smith Jr. was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. He currently lives in Poughkeepsie, New York. You can find him on the web at **www.charlesrsmithjr.com**