

shot away

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Advice from the Statue on my Mother's Bookshelf

Best keep your head down
Best do more studying
and less studying of me
Yes my right arm becomes the horse's
bridle and my left becomes the tail
I am both mount and rider
goddess and beast
just like everyone else.
Best race ahead of everyone
else. Best stop considering
whether I was carved
on the sands of Senegal or shipped
from an off-shore American assembly line.
I'm doing fine. How's that history book?
Best read it like it's your story.
Now it is.
Best not think I'm a keepsake
bought for \$48 at whatever
exchange rate wrapped in an
old scarf to keep safe by an
ex-boyfriend before he knew
he was an ex. Best keep to the text:
How the spice roads were all closed
And the mess the Moors made of Spain.
Don't even try to explain slavery
or Manifest Destiny
or 1807 men and women bound and sold
at whatever exchange rate
for horses and gold
who at St. George d'Elmina, the Gate
Of No Return,
would cup their hands
and swallow sand
until their stomachs burned
so they could always carry the motherland.
They're the least of your concerns.
Best buy what the schools selling you.
And best keep your head down
cause one look up – just one more look up –
and I'll bring this book shelf down upon you.
Turn my rope arms to whips, make a man of letters out of you.
Raise the scars of your skin into lines of an epic.
Have your teachers read your body like brail.

Bullet Catch

*for Jesus Huerta, Chavis Carter, Victor White III
& counting¹*

Step right up! Step right up! Ladies and Gentlemen! Boys and Girls!
Feast your eyes on the brown-tan-black man-boy and the wonder of a life-
time!

Come see the patrol car. Come see the back seat. Come see the folded boy the folded
body, the hands folded behind the back. Come see the boy patted down for weapons.
Come feel for weapons. Feel arms that can't move. Feel the chest: nothing but breath.
Feel the groin: nothing but meat. Feel legs that can't run, even check the teeth.
Check the cuffs: taunt, tight, metal chewing into the writs.

Check the numbers: .45 caliber, .38 caliber, 22, 21, 17-years-old.

Watch the patrol door open. Watch the boy get jammed in. Watch the hands. Watch the
head. Watch the body fold. The handcuffs hold. Watch the chains chew the wrist.

Watch the boy catch the bullet in his teeth. in his jaw. through his eye. in his skull.

You'll never see the gun blast. You'll never see the pistol pulled.
You'll never see the bullet switch or the last phone called made.

Step right up. Step right up. Step out of your house. Step onto the street. Step out of the
car, put your hands up, hold your hands out, place them behind your back. You have a
right to be shocked into silence. You have a right to tell everyone; they won't believe a
thing.

5

The hands are empty

4

The chain is taunt

3

The chamber's loaded

2

The hammer's cocked

1

Want to see it again?

Her Name was Renisha McBride²
*in response to the editor of Re-News It,
a blog dedicated to "Rewinding the Rhetoric" seemingly by criticizing black people who died
tragically*

1.

Heard you had a fight with your parents
Heard you stormed out the front door
vowing never to speak to them again

Heard you had a little to drink that day
smoked a little weed
listened to a little hip-hop

Heard you liked the ladies
liked ladies that were with other ladies
like the hip-hop song goes
Your chick chose me

Heard you took the wrong turn
missed the stop sign
hit the other lady's car

Heard you knocked on his door

2.

Heard his 911 call
I have a woman here and she's been in acci-
-No
There's someone outside trying to break-
-No
"I just shot someone on my front porch."
Yeah that's the one

Maybe he didn't hear you say "help"?
Maybe you didn't say it right?
Needed to enunciate extend your vowels
end in a question a tilted neck a tennis skirt
and a twirl of your blonde hair:
Yeah that's how it's done

Maybe he didn't hear you through the rain

3.

Was it raining?

Was it soaking through the clothes?

beating down on you

like black skin?

Leaving streaks in your eyes

like women left bleeding on the curb?

Did it curse you? Crush you?

Keep you captive like a photograph

with your hat on backwards

and the words in the caption misspelled

for every concerned blogger

or cable channel reporter

to shine it like a porch light saying

This is why we can kill you

and this is why we can kill you again?

Trayvon Triptych

I. George Zimmer Presses the Mute Button

They say I was angry
The same country that promotes
drunks and pot heads to President

The same eleven o'clock
news that shows sobering
views of Trayvon in his hoodie

next to sketches of the same height
weight race under the crawl of "Still at Large"
They talk about the bar fights

remind me of domestic charges and police exams
So what if I am angry?
Or thought I was

cause I never saw anger till
I saw that kid's fists
and I don't know how you get so much at so young

but he could have punched a sink hole the size of Florida
with enough chains he could have dragged the entire nation into the sea

II. Conversion of a Bullet

I weigh the same as seven Skittles
a hundredth of an Arizona tall ice tea
In a fraction of a second

I am faster than cable news commentary
can outrun any child's cry
but most of my life is spent

confined in a chamber
jammed metal to metal with my brothers
shivering in the same nightmare

Will it hurt when the hammer falls?
What happens when the trigger's released?
Imagine my relief after the fire

when I felt the warmth of human flesh
nestled in the boy's chest
found rest in a ready-made womb

What should I care whose life I devour?
In the flash I was greater than God

III. The Phone Call Trayvon Never Made

Hello? Police?
There's a white man following me
and I think he's got a gun

trying to do me like Malcolm
like Medgar Evers in my own driveway
Drive me away like Assata Shakur

I think she's Tupac's mom
Hello Mom?
I'm not sure but I think I have been sentenced to thug life

Hello Dad?
Did you not have the words to warn me of this much fear?
My phone is dying

My text messages will be used against me in a court of law
My attorney will be appointed to me by a state
That had a slave code before it was a state

No I don't understand the rights you have given to me
No I don't understand why I must remain silent

How to Build a Prison
for Philadelphia, USA

1.

Always hated that building and never knew why
The one right before the on ramp for 95
Cross-corner from the statue of Tamanend
Riding the world-turtle stretching out his hand

*William Penn got along with Indian
That's why it's not Fort Philly
That's why there's no wall
But there's this building*

Five stories tall all boarded-up
windows and blackened red brick
A corner where Philadelphia starts to unfold
A block where the City of Brotherly Love sold slaves

2.

MOVE³: 1 city, 2 stories

*They lived like animals
They ate garbage
They shot from the bunker*

*They wore dread locks
They grew organic fruit
There were no guns in the house*

Rebroadcast on Chanel 10
The bomb the blaze the heat
That which we all agree
MOVE: one neighborhood, 2 survivors

3.

Rebroadcast on Chanel 10
Every year the police helicopter
releases the bomb like New Year's Day
releases Mummers on Broad Street

Follow it like City Hall Scandal
Follow it like Eagles-Cowboys game
Follow it like 4th quarter Hail Mary
going... going... going...

4.

The security guard locks doors like forgotten trauma
I'm in my office late grading papers that analyze poems
that protest against policy
I'm in my office marking in red when students misspell "Sanchez"

The security stops to remind me
Every Liberal is a Conservative
that hasn't been mugged yet
He was a cop before I was born

back when Philly was a Police Force
Crack a head through a windshield
in order to protect
Light a block on fire to serve

5.

Order a cheesesteak
in South Philly
Notice the sign
ORDER IN ENGLISH ONLY

Notice a T-shirt
for sale HELP
PUT MUMIA SIX FEET
CLOSER TO HELL

Go across the street
Notice the sign
OWNER DOES NOT ACCEPT
BILLS COVERED IN BLOOD

6.

My students ask me if I
Will take a haunted tour
Of historic Eastern State Penitentiary
I tell them *As a Black man*

*I try to never set foot in a prison
I tell them
I live in Philadelphia
I already have bars on my door*

night song (summer)

and the skyscrapers have overtaken
the stars and the bars are open

half price and half ready to close
and the people are putting on

one more layer of clothes though
the air hasn't dropped a degree and the door

is looking for the key and the cars outside
are blasting news instead of bumping

base and everyone's wearing
the verdict on their face and no

one is dancing and no one's
going to bed and the man's walking

free and young brother's still dead
and the blinds are closed and the latch

is locked and the room is dark
and there's the sound of my watch

Music Appreciation

I. Old School R&B

They say before Jordan Davis
was shot and killed by a white man
who went home claimed self defense and called
for a pizza

Jordan spent
his Monday nights
outside Atlanta
at the discount roller rink

\$1 per slice
\$1 to skate
one in front and one behind
bounce left bounce right

His mother right there
watching her son glide on through
the world turning beneath his feet

II. Gangsta Rap

They say when Michael Dunn fired nine times
into the car killing Jordan Davis
Dunn saw a gun.
But Dunn saw the music

the anger in the music

saw it leak into the pavement
make the doors shake
then every widow in the neighborhood started to break
cops came out the woodwork beat everyone

resisting arrest
arrested everyone else they could find
used hair-triggers and tech nines
billy clubs and cat-o-nines

and the blood of the community
was washed with a city hose
and Dunn the felt a pulsing in his nose
a burning on his temples

his eyes started to ache
and the Monster of America
climbed out from an earthquake
black bodies in its claws

black bodies in its jaws
and though the beast gave Dunn
only a wink in its wake

that white man drew his gun
and he just shot away.

just shot away

III. Classic Rock

They say Merry Clayton lost the baby
after recording the Rolling Stones song

They needed a different sound
a sound like America

but Merry Clayton gave them a sound
that broke it's own barrier

folded time into space until
the United States became a black hole

a hologram on it's own horizon
a singularity

belting out
a sound beyond the universe

we conceive
so we only believe we hear

a crack in Merry Clayton's voice
a vacuum in the beat

a darkness so tight
there's space

for neither mother nor child
to cry

How to Dance During a Riot
for Michael Brown & Ferguson
for President Obama in Martha's Vineyard

Get up
Get on up
Get your hands up

Show 'em up
Put 'em up
Put your hands up

Shake it to the south
To the east
To the west

Put 'em up
Complyin'
Not resisting arrest

Shout demands
To the DJ
James Brown

Motown
Say it loud
Shoot 'em fo he run now

Move the crowd
Do what I say now
Left foot stomp!

Right foot stomp!
Ain't nothing going on
But a peaceful protest

Ain't nothing going on
But civil unrest
Move it

Like a pusher
A pedestrian
A president

Shake it like a stun grenade
Going off in a residence
Shake it like a shake down

Lock up in the Fed
Bounce like a bullet
Off of grandma's head

Get down
Like you doing
What the officer said

Just get back up
Before they think you're dead
Get your hands up

Get your hands up
Get your hands up
Get 'em up

What a Demon Looks Like in Ferguson, Missouri⁴

A breathing contradiction. The
backside of a
compromise. The impenitent thief on the
dogwood cross. The shadow of wolf mix thought long
extinct. A dog at the Crossroads. A witchdoctor in Mall clothes, the Mall
forced closed due to gang activity. No
gangs ever found. A hellhound. A cannibal heading off to college. A nightmare
hanging with you through the August heat. An
incubus of un-abolished lust:
jay-walking with such swagger he could
kill a thousand
ladies just by
making them remember his image at
night, imagine his taste, move their fingers below their waist and slowly trace an
O.
Patchwork of masculinity, sewn together from unwanted corpses like an American
quilt. A hognose trying to be a
rattlesnake. A trickster. A changeling sounding like your child
- so much like your child -
that you can't
understand. Six shots? Four to the head? One
veered near the heart. It must have been some
wormwood angel falling to land, a
xenomorph in the street turning into sand, anything other than a
young man. He couldn't have looked like my brother. Must be some Other: like one of
Zeus' hundred-armed monsters, holding up all one hundred hands.

Kids will be ?⁵

On November 22nd 2014 a Cleveland Police Officer shot 12 year old Tami Rice

this was a justified shooting

learn from this incident

Your children should

not be allowed

throughout the neighborhood

guns have no warning
guns do have

your child

These guns are very real

Warn them

The Police may get called to respond

it is important to know how officers are trained to respond

the Police will respond as a gun

and sirens and come to a screeching halt

The police will respond lights
where your child is

help your child respond appropriately Do not run away They
need no longer have gun in hands They need to

comply with officers instructions to lie down on the ground

the police is essential Police

is a gun I am explaining a scenario that will happen in our area

again kids will be war in the common

grounds Share this with your children tell this story

we will keep our community safe

This is How You Choke 'em
after Junot Diaz's "Alma."

You, Officer Pantaleo, have a suspect named Eric with a big neck
big broad Black shoulders that seem to shade the whole block.
Shoulders that could hold up half of Staten Island.
Shoulders that never bothered you until now.
Even when he's yelling his voice is deep, heavy
Like the Black guy in the first ten minutes
of a 1980s horror flick.

Eric is a regular, one of those "broken window"
Ta-Nehisi Coates-reading motherfuckers without whom
you'd might not make your monthly quota.
Probably grew up on this very corner
watching the garbage barges stop coming just to start up again.
Eric says he was breaking up a fight, and the fights he breaks up
are between PoCs cause "cops only help out white people" -
we can dredge up some old story about him selling loosies.
He turns his back on you.
Maybe you're wearing that I-just-got-out-of-two-prior-accusations-of-misconduct-and-
all-i-have-is-this-lousy-t-shirt look on your face.
The past couple of weeks it's been on-and-off heat wave. Eric is wearing a shirt
like a giant colored Kleenex and when the wind blows it bends around his girth.
You peep around, make eye contact with the other officers.
You know exactly what they're thinking.
Since you arrived, you've been thinking the same thing, too.

Eric's hands leave his sides, your arm reaches for his neck.
Eric starts to lose his balance, you ride him to the street.
He starts with his "I can't breathe" but he can still talk
so you just hold him tighter.
Hold his weight against yours.
Hold till all your boys can hold a piece
That's it.
Like a tie clip.
Like a riot shield.
Hold it. Hold. Hold. Hold.

Halloween Poem (2014)

Don't listen to that mess. Don't Devil that shame.
That vaccine is just running game. All hoodwink hocus pocus
All hoodoo bambooze. Ain't no such thing as the zombie flu.
Oh, but you saw it live on the news: one minute the weatherman's talking
about blue sky followed by clouds. Then he starts coughing with water in his eyes.
Next thing you know he's nibbling the anchor's elbow.
Shoot, Negro, have you seen that anchor? I'd nibble her elbow,
her ear lobe, lick her inner thigh. This flu's an excuse.

Here's some news, this zombie flu thing is media-produced.
The real is just the real flu with a sharper fever and more drool
but after a little sleep you feel just fine. Then you start to wine cause there's no food
around. Hell, that's just your immune system going to town.
That's what naturally goes down. But these media empires and drug
companies can't sell nature. They sell panic instead. Work real hard
to get into our heads. Get our brains to swell and our blood to thicken, and get us
thinking humans taste like chicken. Truth is, we taste like duck: chewy and fatty
with clumps that get stuck in the bottom of your esophagus. You never think of this?

Most people don't. Most people won't. But would you eat something
apartment caged? Starved metro-thin and toxin-glazed?
Simmering in madness and fear and chagrin?
Prime human being? Shoot, Negro, ain't no such thing.

night song (fall)

The city's starting to trade in its haze
for clearer days and bluer nights

and party-hitters don knit
armor and short skirts grow tights

as fashionable women work smarter
at the art of exposing the body

and flesh-hungry men relearn
how to repress and starve.

And all the bars roll-up
their awnings and serve extra

alcohol to keep warm.
And all the stoop councils

adjourn early and all the anger
that last season swarmed over a

a single sizzling comment now
comes to a blustery stop. And even

the cops can't fathom taking out their
hands to grab a random brother

and throw him to the ground feel
around his waist his thighs

his ass and his groin tear
open his pockets watch

whatever coin fall out figure
out they have the wrong one

kick him in the stomach and
tell him "Move along, son."

The Talk

When two people love each other
or think they love each other
or think they see love in someone
else they will try to be alone
together which is better than being alone
by yourself unless you loan your self out to others
in which you might not get your self
back so

when you find someone of interest
show interest in getting closer
while cautious not to come off too strong
or too easy so give them space
keep your eyes down in fact
just cross to the other side the street
people may see you as threat or suspect and

when they see you as a suspect
keep your eyes down put your hands
up say yes sir and no sir and I'm going
to reach into my pocket and take out
my I.D. sir and no sir I do not have a weapon
cause you are a weapon your mind and body and
breath are a weapon
and like any weapon you are a piece of art
and like any art they'll want to lock you up
behind glass and look at you and never
ever touch you and all you want to be
all we all want to be is touched so

when you find someone you want
to touch and who'll want to touch you back
make sure you hear words like honey
and sweetie and pumpkin pie and
beau but not so much
that you don't hear them from anyone
special and not so much that you don't believe them

when heard and not so much that they turn
into words like jezebel and black
bastard and fucking
faggot and goddamn
dyke because these words will come
at night when you are walking alone
on the street grab at your breath take you
from your body and rip away your mind and you are mine
my child or worse still

when you find someone willing

to have a child with you and with you
alone you will know
the cacophony of a clock ticking past
curfew you will know the cold sweat
of an insomnia sheet you will know
the world is your partner limbs over yours
lips to your ear
saying *I will be here*
tomorrow and tomorrow I will
kill everyone you love.

“post-racial” as Samuel L. Jackson

You are an usher at MLK’s funeral.
You are in a theatre in Chattanooga, Tennessee
 watching films edited for Black content.
You never see Sidney Poitier slap Yvonne De Carlo
 in *Band of Angels*.

You are a student at Morehouse
 during a protest taking hostage the Board of Trustees
You are suspended for some time.

You die in the first fifteen minutes.
You die in the second scene.
You survive but the brother behind you
 gets his head blown off.
You have bits of brain in your afro for the rest of the film.

You are eaten by a velociraptor.
You are eaten by a shark.
You are eaten by the smoke
 of Gator’s crack pipe.

 Inhale once.
You’re losing Isaiah.
 Inhale twice.
You’re showing Hallie how to hold it.
 Inhale a third time
You’re Cannes Film Festival’s Best Supporting Actor
 Nobody has won the award since.

You are trying to get a white reporter to say “nigger.”
 He’s got a great question about the “n-word”
 but doesn’t feel comfortable with “nigger.”
You dare him to say it.
You double dare him motherfucker.

 Cause they think
You look like Lawrence Fishburne
 Cause they call
You Mr. Glass.
 Cause
You are Jedi High Council
 Agent of S.H.E.I.L.D.
 The highest grossing actor of all time

You die at the end of the movie
watching Robert Foster make-out with Pam Grier.

You are the tyranny of evil men.

Every time you write about Marissa Alexander

you end up on vacation.

Every time you write about Marissa Alexander, you start at the same place:
Marissa Alexander's packing her clothes. Rico Gray comes in, gets in her face.
I'm going to kill you, bitch! he screams through the bathroom door.
You're on vacation.

You're on vacation with your family.
You're nine or ten or twelve-years-old staring at the same red carpet the same red walls
Same air-conditioner chilling in the window humming through it all.
Your father stands tall announcing, *Today, you're going to shoot a gun.*

You're on vacation.

Marissa Alexander is able to get to the garage, but automatic door won't engage.
Rico Gray is flying though rage. *I'm going to kill you, bitch!* The door won't open.
Marissa Alexander goes to the glove box and grabs her gun.

You're at the gun range.

You're at the gun range and you're holding a .38
police special – the weight of it holds your whole body down.
It's the lightest gun you can find.
White man comes up from behind
puts his hands over yours saying *Let me help you, son.*

Daughter.
Marissa Alexander just had a daughter.
Premie. 8 months.
She aims for the wall.

The White man who's not your father at all
says *Let me help you, son*
and wraps his hands around yours so that
it's his hands and the gun
and your hands are no more. You have White-man hands
holding a .38 special flat nose enclosed base.
Hold it steady hold it straight.
Shoot for the black face.

The tin target
the smiling face:
two dots and a curve
scorched dark from a thousand sparks
a thousand shots
a thousand vacationers that come and go
face still smiling though

still saying *C'mon brother, come take a shot
I dare you. I double dog dare you.
Come point your gun and have a nice day.*

Rico Gray
says *If I can't have you, no one will*
flies into rage and threatens to kill
has five baby-mamas and beat every last one.
Marissa Alexander cocks the gun.

You pull the trigger.

Marissa shoots the wall and Rico leaves.
Cops show up, surround the house with ease.
- *Come out, Ms. Alexander, and get on your knees.*
- *Okay, I'm unarmed. Don't shoot, please.*

This poem would like to start with “Thank you.”

This poem appreciates your patience and acceptance even though at this point you have no idea what this poem is about.

This poem would like to offer you the occasional word count for your convenience: forty-five and counting and you’re still here. (Thank you.)

This poem wants to shake your hand
wants to pat you on the shoulder
is resisting the urge to offer a full embrace
just incase you’re not comfortable with that.

This poem does not want to get too personal.
Doesn’t want to unravel you like thread
off your jacket, wants to ask “Hey
where’d you get that jacket?” not “Why you always dress
so clean?” or “What do mean America?
Where are you *really* from?” and no
“C’mon, you *have* to be mixed.” No
this poem does not want to do this.

This poem wants to be a happy poem
offer you a smile hoping you’ll offer
a smile back. (if not, that’s fine) Why attack you with words?
- one hundred seventy one and counting -
Still having fun?
Okay

this poem won’t even mention security

like the guards in front of libraries that need to see your i.d. or a new friend that hears you speak and decides your hometown must be white or the white boy that dresses like a flyboy and says to your face *i’m trying to look more jive* or the five officers looking for a suspicious character and need to see your i.d. or the roommates when something breaks and you’re the one always left holding the broom or the elevator in the conference hall where people pause even though *come in, there’s plenty of room* or the cops that can’t believe you teach here and need to see your i.d. in order to keep the neighborhood safe and just to be safe

this poem won't even mention sex
so please dismiss any reference to strangers encroaching in the dancehall
cause you're moving and smiling and alone and so tall
and so strange so exotic and something to kiss
to caress to feel to grind and play
for a night or a song then push you away.

This poem will say nothing
of any fetishes or obsessions or psychic scars
left by microaggressions you may still carry
like that time you went to visit
your fair-hair friend in a straight comb town

and barely preteens you two found
some random yard sale and while thumbing through books
and records and whatever was there
some white-shadow woman noticed your nappy
black hair and leaned in behind you
close to your ear whispering
"Need a basketball?"

This poem won't mention that at all.

no

this poem wants to convey silence
or violence

silence being the most violent word
this poem knows.

this poem will now go.

night song (winter)

No college kids cracking beer
bottles in the church courtyard

while spirits look down shaking
their heads No ambulance cutting

the ambience of the streetlamps turning
brownstones into red No sax on the corner

breathing jazz for a quarter waiting
for cops to come drum him away

No bus stop cry No siren lullaby
No skyscraper moon or celestial holes

or prayer pajamas I'm sleeping
in my clothes with my shoes

on the covers cause there's no
you in this bed Even sunrise crows

have stopped carrying departed souls
only beaks full of flesh of the dead

Rhetoric⁶

*The difference between poetry and rhetoric
is being ready to kill
yourself
instead of your children.
-Audre Lorde "Power"*

DON: I want to talk to you

ANN: Now that the Ferguson grand jury documents have been made public

BILL: The looters and arsonists sent a strong message

FOX: And so

Let's talk about race. Let's talk about black-on-black violence.

ANN: Someone's got to say it

RUDY: 93% of blacks

BILL: 99.9 percent of all police

FOX: Americans, 53 percent

ANN: a minimum of 3.3 percent

DON: everybody talking about race,

FOX: just throwing flames on a fire. it's just inappropriate.

RUDY: very disappointing

BILL: I know many African-Americans who are appalled

DON: I didn't want to discuss at length crime in the African-American community or
how to fix other ills that seem to be plaguing the community

ANN: Improving their "economic status" doesn't seem to help.

DON: Because black people, if you really want to fix the problem, here's just five things
that you should think about doing

number five. Pull up your pants.

The one with the really low pants is the submissive one.

ANN: a cop in Chicago fatally shot an unarmed civilian, LaTanya Haggerty, a 26-year-old computer programmer thought LaTanya had a gun -- but that turned out to be a cellphone.

DON: Pay attention to and think about what has been presented in recent history as acceptable behavior.

ANN: four New York City police officers shot an unarmed Amadou Diallo, after he pulled out what looked like a gun. It turned out to be a wallet.

DON: I'm not talking to you.

ANN: Michael Brown gunned down like a dog in the street by Officer Darren Wilson.

BILL: The grand jury in Missouri decided against indicting

FOX: two grand juries

DON: OK. So You can love what I said or you can hate it.

FOX: it's clear that we police people differently in America based on their economics and ethnicity.

BILL: That should be clear to everyone.

DON: You can love what I said or you can hate it.

FOX: he was saying "I can't breathe, I can't breathe," and not attended to

BILL: And Once you see crimes being committed in any situation, you must walk away or you become part of the violent mob

DON: So
we're going to take a break from the headlines

BILL: the lynch mob

DON: black folks, as I said this doesn't apply to you,
And it's not going to.

FOX: Your
humanity was forgotten

DON: So, black folks
I'm not talking to you.

FOX: because black life worth less

RUDY: insignificant.

DON: You can love what I said or you can hate it.

ANN: more black people being murdered

DON: Matters not to me.

How to be Black in an Airport with your Indian Wife

First I button up my professor vest –
my why-yes-I-am-an-African-American-Professor-vest -
even though I'm not a full professor. Technically I teach part time.
Later, in line, I unbutton my vest, place my belt in the scanner
(so now my pants are sagging), and all my paper and pens
(now I can't read or write) and take a deep breath
because this is where I worry much more about my wife.

See, this ain't a well-lit café or high-end retail store.
This ain't a cool summer breeze on white concrete.
My wife's not trying to keep from stomping her feet
fearing an open-air argument with a Black man is an open call for cops
to come throw me to the ground, cuff my throat, grind the sidewalk
into my ear – all of which hasn't actually happened yet
but if it did

I bet I'd win the argument. You know, on technicality.
What was I talking about it? Security!

The TSA rechecks my wife's I.D.
asks her to remove her sari
(It' a Ralph Lauren trench coat) and her hijab
(She's Hindu. It's a Marc Jacob scarf)
and then scoff at her saying every story of an aggressive Anglo
will have to go through the scanner
and your Hart-Celler must be placed in the tray.

Then we go through the x-ray, an extra gauntlet of white gloves -
their gentle smack and pull - pull ourselves together to get to the gate
change then the gate change then told to wait
through a diaspora of departures and double consciousness
until we are corralled into the plane squeezed into
an exhausted runway where with this traffic
ain't nobody going nowhere 'round here.

Where was I going with this?
Oh yes. I wanted to say I'm sorry,

Baby, this was suppose to be our revolution
love song, but the only real turbulence we face
is in the air with everybody else. The plane shakes
me awake, your grip tightens around my hand.
I turn to you and say (Nina, please understand
I am not three fifths of an economy class
your Punjabi needs not to be patted-down.
Those are concerns for the ground
with the Dotbusters and killer cops
the racism-doubters and the follow-me shops.
Here we are 33A and 33B.
Fly or fall we are free.
And you can trust me Baby,
because I'm your husband, I love you,

and I'm a professor.)

How to Light Your Own Poem on Fire

Eric's smoking a cigarette as the protest marches by.

Tanisha drops her groceries on the concrete.

The mounted television replays Rodney

while the speakers blast Marvin *What's Going On?*

Trayvon's looking at the candy.

Latasha's in the freezer for O.J.

Running through the aisles

John and Tamir play with their toy guns.

The cashier ask Amadou how he'd like to pay.

On the way out Emmett offers me a wink.

This is our world

burning to no conclusion

in a smolder no word can blow out.

Instructions to the Child I Won't Have

Step 1:

When gutting the fish
Slip the knife into the head
From the back of the throat

The eyes don't blink so
Neither should you. Instead
Think about your great –

Grandfather coming back
From the war. He never
Talked about cutting his

Comrades or dulling under
Jim Crow. He would just come
Home silently and gut fish.

Step 2:

When cooking the fish
Grill in a pan mixed
With peppers or fry

On a bed of onions until smoke
Becomes a cloud of unwanted
Kisses and the sizzle

Becomes a noose.
Remember your grandmother
No protest

Song can save you.
Remember you still have
The knife.

Step 3:
When devouring the fish
Do not dine like your
Father. Sip wine

Across an Atlantic
Of friends. Cherish the corner
Kisses and mixed table

Blessings. Love the
Kaleidoscope of faces
And know that one of them

Will betray you
While the rest sit back
And watch.

¹ Between 2012 and 2014, three young men have died in a similar manner: shot while handcuffed in the back of police car. Although no weapon was found during the initial pat-down, all three deaths have been ruled as suicides.

² “Her name was Renisha McBride. She is not just a girl who was murdered on a porch.” –Tina Vásquez.

³ The MOVE stand-off/bombing, May 13, 1985

⁴ “...it looks like a demon, that's how angry he looked.”
Officer Darren Wilson, in his testimony to the Grand Jury on his killing of Michael Brown.

⁵ Erasure from City of Fenton Facebook post “Kids will be Kids”
December 4, 2014 (removed the same day)
www.cbsnews.com

⁶ Found text from rush transcripts:
Ann Coulter
Megyn Kelly (FOX)
Don Lemon
Judy Miler (FOX)
Rudy Giuliani
& Bill O'Reilly