

DISPATCHES FROM HOME

a collection of essential words
from insideout literary arts



SUMMER 2020



Dispatches From Home: A Collection of Essential Words From InsideOut
Copyright: 2020

Book Design: Meaghan Barry and Lilian Crum of Unsold Studio
Cover Art: Rose E. Gorman

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part (except in the case of reviews) without written permission from the author.

InsideOut teaches young people to **“think broadly, create bravely and share their voices with the wider world.”**

Citywide Poets is a writing community that meets weekly at various sites across the city of Detroit, and offering a number of open mic and slam opportunities. Louder Than A Bomb Michigan is InsideOut's youth poetry festival.

InsideOut would like to acknowledge generous support from:



Mercedes-Benz Financial Services

For more information contact:

InsideOut Literary Arts

(313) 577-4601

info@insideoutdetroit.org

www.insideoutdetroit.org

Dispatches From Home is a publication of InsideOut Literary Arts.

Copyright © 2020 InsideOut Literary Arts.

Printed in USA.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I: PEACE, OUT

- 10 Quarantine Stars / Katja Rowan
- 11 #SelfCare / Zuri Jamal
- 12 On Life (Water) / Birch Saperstein
- 13 Cowabunga It Is / Catharine Batsios
- 14 How to Shave Your Legs / Katja Rowan
- 16 Sunset Dream / De'Ja Jones
- 17 Dress / Claire Swadling

PART II: ON YOUR MARK

- 22 Black Boy Pledge / Darius Parker
- 24 Road Rage / Erin Conley
- 26 Blackness in America / Symone Jones
- 28 Mr. President / Cassidy Howard
- 30 The Black Commandments / Zuri Jamal
- 31 Line / Almand Martin, Jr.

PART III: BREATH(E)

- 36 Little Black Boy / Shannon Conley
- 38 Hands of Gravel / Ja'mari McLawery
- 39 Asphyxiation / Tianna Jones
- 40 Instilled / Ja'mari McLawery
- 42 I Can't Breathe / Laila King

PART IV: LIKE GOD DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH US

- 46 Mural / Akira K.
- 47 In which Atatiana Jefferson speaks while she waits in line
to go somewhere / Jaelah Glenn

OUR YOUTH HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

A message from InsideOut's Executive Director

This year marks InsideOut's 25th anniversary. That's 25 years of inspiring youth to *think broadly, create bravely and share their voices with the wider world*. It's the "share their voices with the wider world" part that most excites me these days.

Knowing that our young people are building the skills to express themselves – whether on a page or on a stage – fills me with a deep sense of hope for the future. Why? Because I want to live in a world where these voices are heard – where youth are given the opportunity to share their hopes, fears, dreams, and plans with all of us. I want to witness the power of the Arts to heal, to connect, and to build community – especially in times of turmoil. Most importantly, I want *our* youth to feel empowered to create the world *they* want to live in.

When we first made the decision to shift InsideOut's annual Louder Than A Bomb Youth Poetry Festival to an online platform, I wasn't sure how it would be received. Could we replicate the magic of our in-person festival? Would youth show up?

As this volume attests, they did. *Dispatches from Home* is just a sampling of the essential words that were shared during our virtual festival. While we were not in the same room, we were certainly connected – and together we found new ways to celebrate the power of the written and spoken word.

During one of the most challenging times in our collective memory, InsideOut's Essential Words Virtual Youth Poetry Festival served as an important reminder that our youth do indeed have something to say. Please join me in listening.

Suma Karaman Rosen

Executive Director

InsideOut Literary Arts

FUNNY HOW MUCH WE'VE ALL CHANGED

An essential word from our festival host

Peace, Fam!

It's probably no surprise that we're finding ourselves meeting up in a digital space again. When everything shut down in early March, I was certain we would be back up and running in time for an in-person poetry festival. Funny how much the world has changed since March.

Funny how much we've all changed.

At the time of this writing, we find ourselves in the middle of a global pandemic that threatens to come back harder in the fall. Worldwide protests against racism and police brutality come on the heels of the death of George Floyd. There has been an equal sense of gloom and hope in all of us. Still, the artists - YOU - are the unsung heroes.

My heart is full of inspiration and admiration for how so many of you brilliant creatives showed up and showed out for InsideOut's Essential Words Virtual Youth poetry Festival. I enjoyed seeing so many of you hone your writing skills with the amazing facilitators. We were lit at each open mic and partied hard at the virtual prom. Voices young and old bridged gaps with our poems, vibes, and energy. I was astounded at how successfully the festival kept an in-person feel over the various social platforms we used. I laughed. I cried. I winced in pain. I sent digital hugs and kisses. I exchanged emails and phone numbers. I promised to keep in touch (and honored that vow). I heard some of the most amazing youth voices on the planet speak bravely, thoughtfully, and critically about the world around them. I am comforted in knowing that despite the craziness in the country right now, the future is bright and powerful. The future is now. The future is each and every one of you.

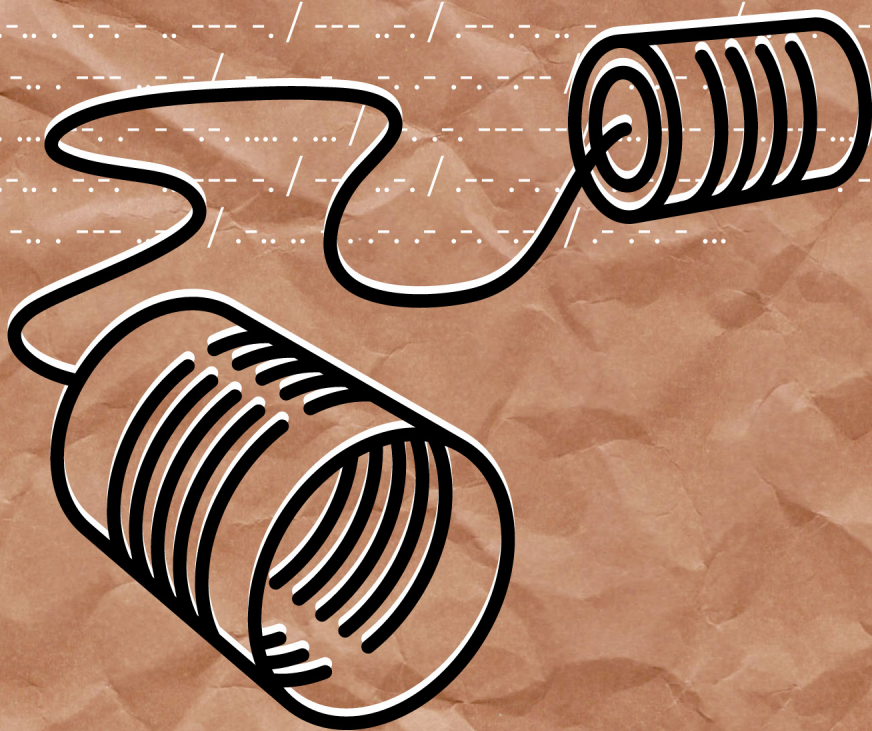
As many of us continue to shelter-in-place and practice cautious social distancing, I'm eager to unpack these dispatches from home. What have all of you been thinking about, hoping for, and challenging? I am excited to see what you've shared.

I am ever grateful that InsideOut takes pride in the voices of our youth. Your voices will affect great change in the world. I am rooting for you. I believe in your come up. I can't wait to see what light you'll shine in this world and the worlds to come.

Until my dying breath, I am ever in your service.

LaShaun phoenix Moore

Mentor. Advocate. Fangirl. Superhero.



peace, out



QUARANTINE STARS

Katja Rowan

i am taking out the trash.

sky the opaque of a black grill cover
stars behind my eyes sparkle-glass
holes in the grill cover or
holes in my lungs or
the stars move and i watch
i a parasitic human.

Unexpected clear skies
Beijing NYC Venice

i a parasitic human
plastic bag of vegetable peelings
in my hand i watch
the stars behind my eyes and
wonder if i am crazy.

Satellites visible between
Vega North Star Orion

i wonder if i am crazy
watch satellites circle above me
tiny glittering bugs
among the stars i have never seen so
clearly
humans have tried so hard
tried to colonize even this unreachable
sky

i watch the earth shrug off its mantle of humanity
and hope i will stay.

#SELF CARE

Zuri Jamal

Stay in bed.

Put your painting together.

We love to solve problems.

Ask the Oracle plant questions.

It feels good to get a fresh perspective.

Get the rose of intention, imagine your inner light,
roots deep and intelligent.

Make Sapphire purr.

Find her extra whisker.

Place it on the altar,

with waxing crescent moon and ginseng.

Make a paper flower, name it marigold rose.

Consult the crystals, ask why he's still breathing.

Sort your laundry, avoid your headphones.

Open your locket, one paper reads,

We believe in taking care of each other.

Write a note, we feel free because it doesn't hurt.

Screw the jar tight.

Look at tarot cards.

Chariot: Willpower, control, victory

Strength: Courage, patience, compassion

Put it on the altar.

Sweet grass, what does it mean to you?

Palo Santo: holy wood, purifies and protects

Blow some bubbles, relax.

Tape-record your thoughts, we love to trust ourselves.

Open your journal, the prompt:

Recall something beautiful we saw or felt this week.

Letting go helps, especially after we feel

New.

Confusion is ok, you'll get there.

Light a candle, morning glow, think of something to let go.

Burn it.

Breathe in juniper and rosemary.

Disgusting, but peaceful,

isn't it?

ON LIFE (WATER)

Birch Saperstein

I don't think
this is a poem.
I think poems carry themselves
with honor, with
some form of stale.
But this will
dig a garden until the dirt
soaks deep and seasons from within.
You get better flavor
that way, you know.
The soil nourishes
soul, reaches beyond
skin, spreads
supple branches
blooming in stomachs.

I think this is a poem
about nurturing, about
waiting six seconds before watering
the next tomato plant. About
care as the quiet uprising of
vines cracking concrete. About
rain clouds smiling down on us,
ready to give life,
or water.

COWABUNGA IT IS

Catharine Batsios (Youth Mentor)

In 1990, I learned that Casey Jones is Greek, that in New York
you can order a pizza to a sewer grate, & that it didn't matter
that Raphael was so sad, his brothers loved him anyway.
I didn't even want to be a whole turtle at first, just a shell
in a set of shells in their hidey-hole, safe.
At first, I thought the trench coat was the coolest part,
all you had to do was try & no one would notice
the parts that make you a mutant,
the parts that mean you get to save the city.
I thought there can be no greater sign of affection
than someone stealing a sai from a matching pair
even though you've never met them—out-smarting the Foot
on a subway platform has to be
the ultimate meet-cute. I wanted to be like Raphael, breathing
on a rooftop in a city like the inside of his head, like Raphael alone
in April's apartment
having a shell of a time—the turtle gymnastics of
fighting the bad guy with your surroundings.
Kinda always figured I'd be Raphael unceremoniously falling
through a burning building,
Raphael in the bathtub,
Raphael the drawing by April O'Neil.
Raphael who says *damn* in a kid's movie.
I wanted to be the one who could keep my head
just by shrugging my shoulders,
Man, I love being a turtle

HOW TO SHAVE YOUR LEGS

Katja Rowan

turn on the shower
pick up the razor
it doesn't have to be new.

admire your hairy ankles
this landscape you've grown
cover it in white foaming soap
like ice crusting on a leaf
until every sharp thing slips off of you
without cutting skin.

pick up the razor
it doesn't have to be new
try a first stroke
admire how little of an effect the blade has
tell yourself you are indestructible
resolve to carry soap everywhere you go.

tell the girl in your class
yes you haven't shaved in four months
don't tell her how the extra layer
is a protection
like eyeliner
or warpaint
or the skin shielding each vulnerable vein.

don't tell her how it felt
to grow a garden on your own skin
how your body was finally good for something
and beautiful
even useful
when you cannot walk or stand
when your body is foreign and terrifying
and you cannot hear your own heartbeat
remember that your cells still breathe.
watch the soap on your legs kill each leaf

like frost
how safe you are when the blade
in your fingers
cannot reach you
you are something less than thought
less than life
the roots of a dormant tree
nothing about you is new
and this is essential.

when you shave, work slowly
or you will upset it all.
understand you are the one wielding the razor
and it is not a metaphor
just a tool
learn to find protection
until your body feels less monstrous
understand that you will survive the winter
tell yourself you are indestructible
resolve to carry soap everywhere you go.

SUNSET DREAM

De'Ja Jones

As I lay in sleep
My bedhead imagines birds
Beautiful creatures
Walking on the blue sky
With their charred teeth
In their petite beaks
With tiny intricate wings
And a spoon-shaped body
Their eyes showing hunger
Like the piercing eyes of a tiger
How could anyone try to change
Such an exquisite thing

Sweet innocent eyes

Maybe make it have a round body

Far spread feathered wings

And a sweet song

This creature far surpasses all others
It can't fly, yet
It has the audacity to roam among the clouds
And exist

DRESS

Claire Swadling

Gowns of summer shadows—
 green-eyed glimpses of frosty lagoons
corneal refraction: burnt ochre linings,
saffron shuffled
mildew-ridden: waistcoats.
 Heralded suns
of vapid corduroy bogs
 leaflets scrawled
 “Harvest
 embroidery”

Where did Nature *take* her acumen?

Abroad,
 bent selvage teething
 sunken damask gnawing crêpe de chine herringbones;
golden linings
 make shades of burlap knife pleats
 snaking corrosive over bare heels:
 gaiter charades watching
Sinatra.
 Yoke welt pockets peeled out of
mandarin collars:
 sleeping tigers, crouching charvet.

Lacing corsets lucid
 crusaders of Donegal tweed, calico hemlines:
modest elephants like appliqué weeping
 —untangled unitards for waterholes.

A rustle of stressed challis:

Carrickmacross lace bleeds to fleshly exposure.
 gasps of giraffe-spun bouclé
 :captured lockers mincing cat sacrum.

The proper length of safari winters.

Crashes sublime to preparatory meat lockers:

 ignorant ruffles of Dupioni silk; mad men saved in stitches.
Imbecile acacia trees blooming
 —ribbed eolienne matching—
 stumps:
 there is a filigree delicacy in slaughter.

Petrified Dromedaries

 furnish ramshackle lodgings—
 addax twisted faux fur leaps
crippled under hegemony.
 Seared steaks of double jeopardy
—curved double cloth and triple feet.

The Sahara named a successor:

 overlocking sewing machines
 (clearing antelope crucifixes)
and moquette trousers.

on your mark

..... / / / /
..... / / / /
..... / / / /



BLACK BOY PLEDGE

Darius Parker (Featured Guest Performer)

Ayo Black boys
This poem is for you
For the God in you
For the mastermind in you
For the pride in you
For the genius in you
For the protector and the savage in you
For the truth in you
For the broken mirrors in you
For the broken you
This is me reminding you that it's okay to be broken
For the forgotten you
As long as you're taking strides to find you
Ayo Black boys
This is for the knowledge in you
That absorbs just about every bit of it from the sun
Life begins with you
It ain't easy being no Black boy in this world
It ain't easy being Black in this world
It ain't easy being no Black boy that's queer in this world
Black boys are seeds
 and even if you chop a tree its roots are still there
 breathing life into soil

Black boys are soil
the purest of foundations
and it is our duty to tell each other this
while we still can
Before the dawn comes
Before the darkness comes
They say Black boys be lost in darkness
But how the hell can we be lost in our own being
This is for the darkness in you
For the light in you
This is for the honest you
For the younger you
For the ancestors in you
For the incomplete you
For the stories locked deep inside of you
For the you you sometimes forget to acknowledge
For the failure in you that found the triumph in you
To the you you've been afraid to truly be
This is for the you others wished they could see
This is for you for each of you every one of you
in all shades
Ayo Black boys this...this is for us
Ase'

ROAD RAGE

Erin Conley

they've shown us that you can't be black in america
and do anything but walk
so i hope you didn't wanna go on a jog today

and if you decide to go on a walk, check the weather
make sure it won't rain later
an umbrella be out the question
and you might as well cut the hood off your jacket

you can try taking your car
but keep your eye on the speedometer
hands ten and two
seatbelt on
throw phone in backseat
don't even think about accidentally swerving

and after you've done everything right
and get pulled over anyway
remind your 15-year-old son
 who sits in the passenger seat
 heart beating outside of his chest

of all the prayer positions you taught him, say
remember the one where your hands lay face down on your thighs?
dashboard be your thighs, son, pray
pray a quick prayer
pray the police officer has put up
or down
enough black people for the day
hope he show some mercy
hope he realize that *family* be universal

and yours be at home
anxiously waiting on their black father
with cake and party poppers
because every time a black man walks past
that threshold and into his home it should be celebrated now
right?

BLACKNESS IN AMERICA

Symone Jones

Today

I wrote my first poem about
Blackness in America.

A poem about
Black death
and where it comes from.

I let the ink spill
and it stained paper like blood
does pavement.

I flinched
when the words appeared.
When my distress began to mimic that
of the first real dead man I ever saw on TV.

I asked the page how many more of these I'll write.
She said,
one for each Black body that lies
across the pavement.

She said,
you will never stop writing.

Your fingers will cramp up
every time you watch the news,

the videos will
break you down into nothing.

You will feel your mouth go numb
every time you have to say their names.

You will want to protect every Black body,
but you only have your own.
And you are too scared to lose it.

My notebook should not bleed like this.

But she is right.
I am scared to lose this body.

So I will write until I stop shaking.

I will never stop shaking.

MR. PRESIDENT
Cassidy Howard

Dear Mr. President,

It must be awful hard
to be in your shoes,

to endure what you have endured,
and be a constant victim.

But, Mr. President,
you are just a victim of yourself
and your own words.

You lie in a grave that you dug,
and we will gladly throw the first shovelful of dirt.

You victimize yourself,
but you are not the victim,
you are the stamp that seals the fate of your citizens.

Of the women
who you grab
and see as objects.

Members of the LGBTQ community
who you shame
and alienate.

Of Black men.
Who are being killed daily as you stand by and watch.
As you fail to acknowledge the racism
that you let grow from latent to blatant.

Their blood is on your hands
and it bleeds from the walls of your so-called leadership.

America is a laughing stock
and you're the clown, center stage.

You shout your praise from rooftops with a puffed chest,
but whisper meekly of violence and murder.

Mr. President, you will go down in history.

You will be defined by your legacy,
and the planted seeds of your legacy already bloom

into fireworks in the streets of Minneapolis
and thick blood spilling on pavement.

America was never great,
so we will not make America great *again*,
but the yelling in the streets is like a melody,
promising of a brighter tomorrow.

A tomorrow where police brutality is no more.
Where the color of your skin is not an acceptable reason to
take a bullet.

Where you
and that which you stand for
are nothing but building blocks to be trampled.

Because, Mr. President,
this is OUR America.
And there is no place for you here.

THE BLACK COMMANDMENTS

Zuri Jamal

1. Notice how we're just here. We're beautiful. Love thyself. Know thyself.
2. We're a family. If you see us nodding at a fellow African-American on the street, of course we don't know them. But they're family.
3. Take note of our humanity, how we breathe like you, walk like you, talk like you. We're not a threat, not a danger, not terrorizing you. We're just breathing, like you.
4. When I say *I can't breathe*, I'm using my last breath to let you know I am dying. My blood will be on your hands unless you let me go.
5. You have no right to be afraid of us. We should be afraid of you, for your history. Didn't you enslave us? Didn't you beat us, rape us, take us from our homes? Didn't you berate us? We should clutch our purses when you enter an elevator. We should ask *Do you belong here?* in a gated community. We should be scared for our lives when you walk towards us. We should've shot you when you reached in your car. So what exactly makes you scared of us?
6. If I'm speaking proper, I am not whitewashed, not *spending too much time around the white kids*. I am educated, as I should be.
7. Don't let your president make you get your ass whooped. My president won't hesitate to call you out.
8. We are not a fetish. Period. Just because it's big doesn't mean you have to disrespect us. Once again, we're human.
9. As Ohbee Swice says, *Respect the Black woman. Protect the Black woman. Love the Black woman. Respect the Black man. Protect the Black man. Love the Black man.*
10. Black lives Black futures Black children Black love matters.

LINE

Almand Martin, Jr.

My feet
are cut, damaged, bleeding due to this journey called life.
They've endured shattered glass roads scorching hot from sun,
with not even a sock for protection.

Waking up everyday on the dark side of the morning
to see the pink sunrise, one thing that makes me happy is a pink sunrise.
Not a sky blue like emotions that pour on this page from calloused fingertips
or a sky dark like the fear I hold for my future.
Pink like PINK.

Confidence in every stride as if bloody footprints and dirt infecting my wounds
don't bother me.

Wind blowing, sand flying, I'm blinded,

but in the near distance I can see a line.

Years of distasteful days disrupt the taste buds of my brain,

while good days struggle to remind me they exist.
Remembering a good day
 is remembering the name of the doctor that birthed me.
Remembering a bad day is remembering my first heartbreak.

I'm constantly remembering the dismembering of my heart.
The ozone layer protects earth from the sun's rays.
I wish my heart had one of those.

My shoulders remind me of trees.
Trees with so many leaves they look forward to the fall.
That's the way it feels holding this weight walking to a line.

A mystery line
the only thing I have to look forward to, I'm so close,
way too close to give up now.
If I were to give up, what would I do?
Go back?
Behind me is nothing,
nothing but 17 years worth of bloody footprints,
broken hearts,
maybe a few question marks,
definitely nothing worth going back for.

Now I'm close, I see the line perfectly.
It has to be the finish line.
My walks transform to jogs,
then to runs.
Now I'm sprinting.
A smile on my face.
For some reason smiling felt like an acrobatic trick
I forgot I could do.
The finish line is so close I stop running and jump,
landing on the line feeling the relief of achievement.
Then I realize the line is just the starting line,
and my journey has just begun.
On your mark, get set, go.



breath(e)



LITTLE BLACK BOY

Shannon Conley

little black boys grew up playing cops and robbers
no black boy ever wanted to be robber
 always cop
but little black boy grew up and realized he couldn't be
 anything but robber
never cop

even if he didn't want to
 black boy was always robber of comfort
a thief that looked like night
little black boys grew up playing freeze tag
 which is why when the cop stopped him
 and told him to freeze
he thought his friend was on the way
 about to tap him so
 he could run again
he envisioned running again

he thought he was gonna wake up tomorrow
 and run again
he didn't know that
 instead of feeling the quick, three-finger tap
 of a little dread head boy
he would be face to face with the barrel of a pistol
the officer shouts
 stand down!
 face ground!
 man down!
 man down!
he says over his walkie talkie
 he disables his body cam

little black boy liked music
when the cop pulled him over
 his heartbeat dropped
 he knew this song too well

the one he listened to from his brothers mothers
they never got to play it for him
he knew he would never play this song for his mother
she would have to listen to it on the news

he grew up doing the hustle
at every family get-together
never imagined the day
his hustle would force the family to get together
in a funeral home cause
cd's warrant death and shortness of breath
it's hard to break dance with your hands cuffed

little black boy wanted to grow up
just like every other black boy
he didn't know the day he was born
he was a working man
by age 7 he had been through a midlife crisis
9, was planning to retire
at 12 he started receiving pension
and had about 3 grandkids
by age 17 he would be dead.
we don't know if it was because of the skittles or the arizona,
he had *underlying skin conditions* said Dr. Police Officer

little black boy just wanted to be boy
to be black
to live

on some days, after a day's worth
of freeze tag, cops and robbers
and doing the hustle
black boy just wanted to go to sleep
in his bed
at home
but even that proved difficult.

HANDS OF GRAVEL

Ja'mari McLawery

I try not to think about it, or at least I tried
I'm disgusted
and it's not that I saw the life of a man whose job was to

Protect

Drained from his eyes
a man whose job was to serve

Protect

Draining the breath of another man
his air his family his faith
reduced to one moment

Or that maybe
when he did it
he thought absolutely nothing of that man
He's done this before

But what disgusted me is how detached I felt
I didn't immediately think *oh god, this poor man's family*
Or how dare they kill him
kill us blatantly
treat us like hunting trophies

I thought *again*
Not *it happened again*
Not *What can I do to spread awareness again?*

I hid
I hid from the truth
That maybe it could be me
my mother my uncle my cousin my brother my sister
That one day I might have to sacrifice
so maybe one day we can breathe freely.

ASPHYXIATION

Tianna Jones

Outside there is a rattling of buzzes
and the commotion of flapping wings.
The beetles, the moths, the butterflies, and the bees.

I dreamt of a black sea.
I crushed a white moth under my knee.
Then screamed *hallelujah*.
I think that is what privilege feels like.
A stinging on the brain, maybe freedom.

I don't think saying a name is enough.
Enough to stop the buzzing, the chants
of a thousand black bugs or the blood.

I don't want to lose my hands
or my life to a force of moths.
The moths put on their white hoods,
burn our neighborhoods down.
Years later they rip through our throats,
knees on our necks, dressed in blue
they call us thugs.
A soft word for nigger.
Saying a name is not enough.

INSTILLED

Ja'mari McLawery

boom

boom

boom

that isn't the sound of hard knuckles
 rasping against the door
or the crackle of a Glock .22
 making puddles in the rain

That is the sound of a cop
 instilling generational fear
 into the heart of a young Black child.

The officer slammed the already bloody head
 of that Black boy's father
 into his painted Crown Victoria.

Not done yet.
 He released a bullet
 into that Black boy's heart.
The bullet named itself *boy*.

When it pierced the boy's heart, it broke him.
His senses overloaded. His only wish: silence.
Oh, that sweet, sweet silence, void of that rough, invasive siren.
That boy got on his hands and knees and asked god for silence.

Do you hear that?

That's the sound of seconds turned
 to minutes to hours to months thinking of every word that
 stuck and every word I misspoke.

Do you hear that?

That's the sound of every word I wish I said.

The drip of every tear I wish I shed.

That's the sound of trauma.

The only words I'm able to spew out my mouth

I'm okay mamma.

Please tell me you can hear the sounds,

me telling myself to

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

Breathe in.

Breathe out only to wish

that I never breathe in again.

And as I lay down weeping

asking so solemnly for help,

I'm greeted by only an echo asking,

Do you hear that?

I CAN'T BREATHE

Laila King

I can't breathe! Do you hear me yelling?

I can't breathe. You mute me like an unwanted noise. What did I do wrong? I was going about my day until you pointed a gun at me and forced me out of my car. You put your knee on my neck.

They're gonna kill me. I don't know how long my face has been pressed against this rigid pavement, but I'm losing oxygen.

I can't breathe. How many more times do I have to say it for you to get your knee off my neck? Mama, I call on you to save me even though you passed two years ago.

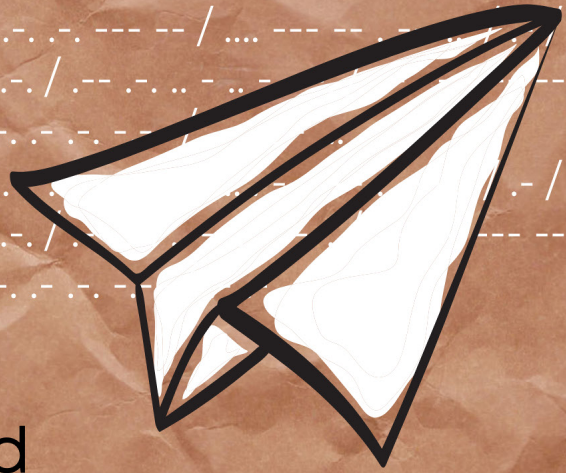
Please, please I can't breathe. The walls are closing in on me. I'm claustrophobic. I can feel death grabbing me by the neck, slowly choking me and taking my breath away. Don't kill me. But death is inevitable.

All I can think about is my baby girl. Gianna. She will grow up without me. *My neck hurts.* I'll never see her graduate from elementary, middle, or high school. I'll never have to talk to her about boys. I'll never see my beautiful baby girl in a prom or wedding dress. I can't breathe.

They're gonna kill me. I don't want to die, but you're still killing me. I have so much to live for.

I can't move. Some water or something. I have little to no air left. Why is he still pressing on my neck? I'm not resisting. I hear people telling him to get off my neck. I can't breathe!

Please sir, please, please, please, I can't breathe.



like god
doesn't know

what to do with us **IV**

MURAL
Akira K.

After Lupe Fiasco's Mural

Ammunition for abolition,
missions attacking systems with a pistol
that pierces the ears of too many souls
that were forced to listen to the grips of death
twist so closely to the hearts of those who don't deserve it.

Love is in shambles
while us Black folks cannot seem to get a handle
on our breath because we tend to like loose squares.

Skittles and Arizona are my favorite snack,
but why should I have to bag back
when I choose to smoke a blunt or two
with the crew that was long overdue?

I would like to drive but I have a heavy foot,
which would give me the stamina
to get from point A to point B,
but I don't wanna lose my life over speed.

I've never been a fan of guns
and I want to have a family with a man
who can pretend to have protection,
but I don't want to have an argument that turns
into a shock, shoot, and death,
all because I had a BB gun in my hand.

Man, we really need to rise up
and fix this land that's supposed to be
brave and free, but not me.
Because if it was up to the crooked police,
a young, vibrant, brilliant mind like
me would be dead by the end of the week.

**IN WHICH ATATIANA JEFFERSON SPEAKS WHILE
SHE WAITS IN LINE TO GO SOMEWHERE**

Jaelah Glenn

I haven't heard any poems about me yet
I wonder what's taking so long
I know how y'all writers like to do
Pick up a pen and can't seem to write
about your own trauma

I'm still waiting in line
It's like a club around here
Somebody gotta check to see if you really dead or not

They checking IDs like I wasn't killed in my home
I wear my name on the lease

My nephew is still there with my death in his eyes

I haven't seen Sandra
I wonder if she's in line too?

Cause they got me all the way in the back like my death wasn't shit
I mean I ain't even got no poems in my name

So maybe I'm not dead
Maybe I'm just waiting in line with the other Black
bodies

Like god doesn't know what to do with us

I can feel another Black body behind me with their
headphones in
hands up, bullet wounds, noose hanging from their neck

Then there's another
and another

Who would've wanted our blood on their hands

You would've thought this was heaven
the way all these bodies have died in the hands of
something white

The more I talk the more I can feel my body moving
It sounds like sirens

Like death knocking at my front door

DISPATCHES FROM HOME

a collection of
essential words
from insideout
literary arts

FEATURING WRITING BY

Akira K.
Almand Martin, Jr.
Birch Saperstein
Cassidy Howard
Catharine Batsios
Claire Swadling
Darius Parker
De'Ja Jones

Erin Conley
Ja'mari McLawery
Jelah Glenn
Katja Rowan
Laila King
Shannon Conley
Symone Jones
Tianna Jones
& Zuri Jamal

INTRODUCTIONS BY

Suma Karaman Rosen
& LaShaun phoenix Moore

