

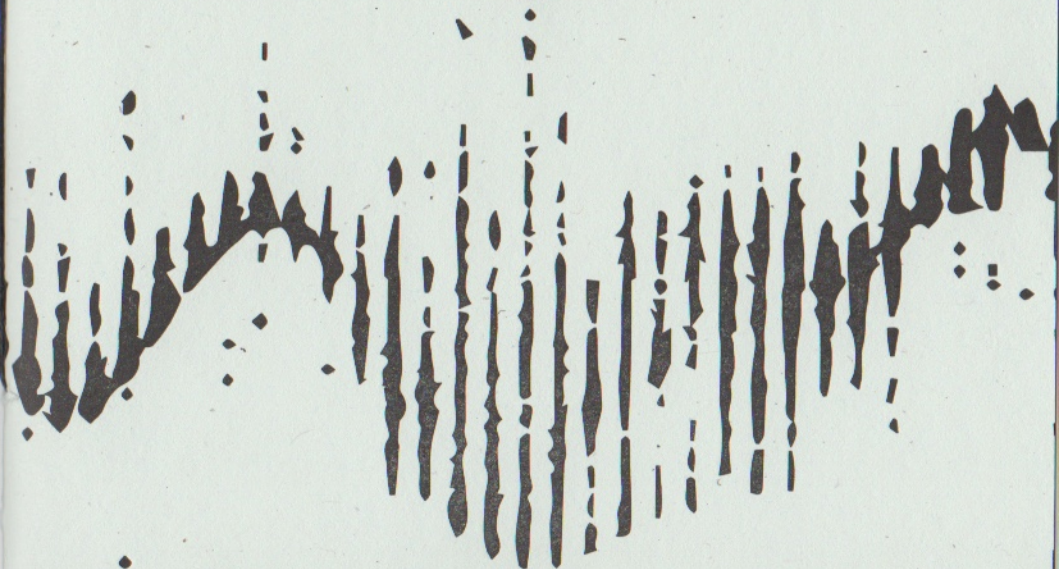
THE
PEOPLE'S
VIGIL

X

no, dear
presents



ON DEMOCRACY



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ON DEMOCRACY

No, Dear
Issue Twenty Six
On Democracy
2021, Brooklyn
Limited Edition: 153/250

Issue Editor: Mahogany L. Browne
Production: emily brandt, alex cuff, t'ai freedom ford
Photography: Robert Britton
IG: Brenaissancephotog
Cover Art/Layout Design: Rico Frederick
www.ricofdk.com

Covers printed by letterpress at The Arm, Williamsburg

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PROOFREADER
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Mahogany L. Browne A Way Forward

This project showcases dialogue between **artists** and **community members** impacted by *mass incarceration*.

This is a collection of *interviews, poems* during the 2020 election season.

The **amplification** of voices, typically silenced by the current legal system, highlight the conditions that prevent equitable access to **polling stations**, in what might be the most crucial election of *our lifetimes*.

Acknowledgement & Statement for Support by Mahogany L. Browne

Collection of photos: Rumors Of War, 2020
Credit: Roger Britton for B. Renaissance photography, IG: Renaissancephoto

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Epidemiology

by Antwanne Rocco Mingo

Coronavirus does not exist... it was created in a lab. The scientific consensus is that it was not. It was not created in a lab. It was not created in a lab. It was not created in a lab.



Acknowledgement & Statement
for Support by **Mahogany L. Browne**

Collection of photos: *Rumors Of War, 2020*
Credit: **Roger Britton for B. Renaissance photography.**
IG: Brenaissancephotog

Seeking to end "mass" incarceration
isn't just about the number of people
we incarcerate/decarcerate.

Caging just one person is a human rights violation.
So, though reducing the prison/jail population is crucial,
we cannot end what people call "mass" incarceration
that way. They'll just fill the prisons and jails back up.

This is a systemic problem. Which means, ending
incarceration is about community, about quality
education for all, about access to quality healthcare
for all, about housing, food, disability justice,
LGBTQIA+ rights, employment, recovery services,
environment, climate...all of that is connected.

- Adnan Khan

Epidemiology

by Anacaona Rocio Milagro

Correlation does not equal causation—I wish
this scientific law was applied across the board.
It would produce proper results in court instead
of the guilty until proven innocent backwards
judicial fallacy afflicting brown & black folks.

Make no mistake, the USA unleashed this racial pandemic
not Covid but police forces and ICE detention centers, this
rampant violent man-made health crisis has claimed the lives
of millions. Is there a doctor in the house For us? By us?
that dares to represent us? See us? Treat us? Heal us?

In the mid 1800's, cholera was thought to be airborne
the fault of the dirty lazy and poor that brought it upon
themselves until the true source was identified: the water.
The London town's feces seeped into the well on Broad
Street, became poisonous, deadly. So many lost, and time
wasted blaming the wrong source—correlation doesn't
equal causation, this lesson saved thousands and fathered
a new field of science: epidemiology.

Today, we can't trust the wells my people we
cannot trust the wells. Do not drink this water
polluted by socio-pathogenic-murderous-parasites
who sleep with white hoods under their pillows and
dream to be supreme just to terrorize and end us. We
must reconstruct the wells. We must clean the water.

Maybe try our luck with science. Have epidemiologist
instead of shit judges and feculent presidents and maybe
black lives would matter. Maybe the Breonna Taylors and
George Floyds wouldn't have been murdered. We'd still
have Jose Garcias & Sandra Blands. Maybe Kalief Browder
wouldn't have hung himself and little Jakelin Maquin would
still be living despite crossing the border. With logic governing
laws the outcomes would make sense because it's supposed to
add up.

Today, we perish, another decade in the same racial pandemic
as our great grand parents. Covid ain't got nothing on this ICE
contaminated, new strains of jim-crow poisons being pumped
into our broad streets

will no one treat the water



♥

Documenting our movement is very important. The perspective we each have to offer is unique and therefore cannot be duplicated. I think about this on a personal level with the eyes on the future. For example, just thinking about the history of my wife and I, how we met and how I got out of prison. Then the birth of our son, in the year 2020, in the middle of a pandemic. Two weeks after his birth George Floyd was murdered. There was an uprising in the country which reverberated across the globe. Insert a president with authoritarian aspirations and a strong base of white supremacy. Yet, organizers generated hope. There was a fire inside us all that organizers kept lit. And that fire wasn't of hatred, but of love. So, when my son looks back at this time, which is his own history, in 20-30 plus years, I want to be able to provide him documentation for him to have as a part of his identity.

- Adnan Khan

P.R.I.S.O.N

by Kalvien Chunkks Harmon

My thoughts rock
Blow trail
And 10 to 20 u will rot.

Reality kicks
The system holds no justice
For Black men
Black boys
And GOD forbid
You're a Black woman

They'll strip u of everything great that made you.

P.R.I.S.O.N
Pressure
Ripping
Individual
Souls
Obliterating
Nations

Prison
Destroying all forms
Of your humanity.

First ya clothes
Strip

Then ya name
Strip

Then assigned a number
Segregated beyond color

This is modern day free labor

The correctional association
Is a stock traded on Wall Street

The wolf has been caged
Declawed
And no longer a threat
Now his hide is used for dollars and cents

What you know about prison lyfe?
What you know about hard times?
60days in
Is nothing on the pain the system inflicts

Families destroyed
Innocence snatched

What you know about
Trying to talk someone out of suicide?
Only three months later
To find yourself fighting that same demon

Yet there's no one there to talk you out of it
Your locked down in the box
Where don't no one give a shit

What you know about waking up in a cell
In the middle of the night
Crying tears for your regrets over the years?

What you know about hard times
And the pain of searching for a better way?

Tryin to escape this place
That put this scar on my face
Tryin to escape this place
The cause of my father's demise

Why I cry?
Inside I wanna die
Because it feels like our prayers
Always go unanswered

PRISON

by Kalvin Chung/la Haman

My thoughts rock
Blow that
And 20 to 20 u will rot.



I got out last in January, 2019. After spending 16 years inside, I was sentenced to life 25 to life at the age of 18. And so, I've never voted. I never thought voting mattered.

It wasn't even a concept in my mind that my voice had any type of value, or importance because I felt like

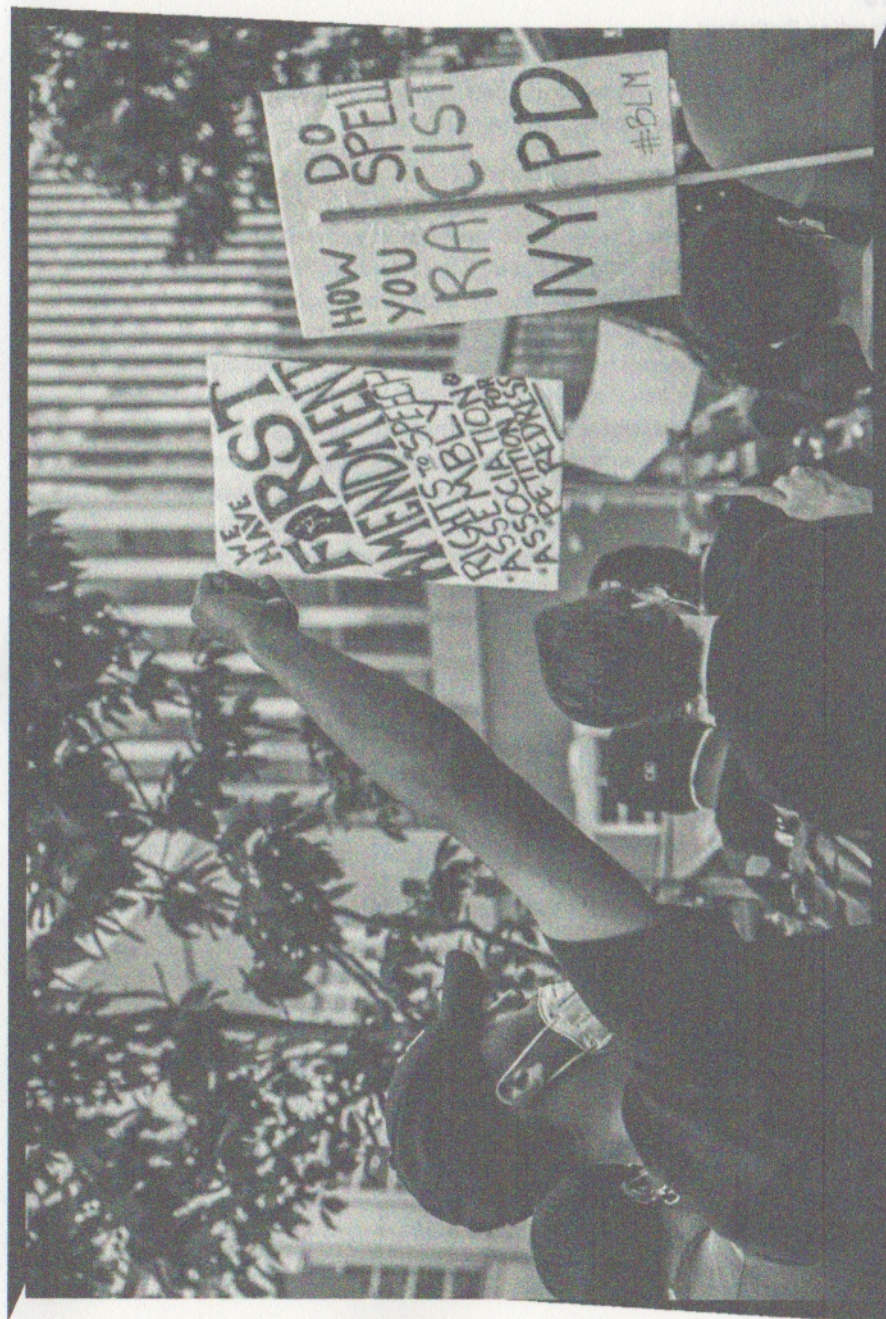
I was so disenfranchised from society that

I didn't belong in that world of democracy.

Nothing in society around me offered acceptance or belonging. Anyways 16 years later, we ended up passing a law here in California, and the same judge that sentenced me to 25 to life resentenced me and released me that day. Furthermore, she didn't put me on parole or probation. And so, literally, I got out, not just free from prison but free from the traps of parole and probation, which meant

I can vote.

- Adnan Khan



Mars

by Caroline Rothstein

*"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation,
and that is an act of political warfare."*

- Audre Lorde

1. I tell my therapist I've written a letter to Mars, the planet of battle and thrust. I've placed it on my altar, like Chani said on the podcast in her app, for the new moon. Mars is in my Tenth House of career and public life. Right next to my Gemini sun. Three days ago, I was lying in bed, teetering on a depression flare up edge, when I realized what it all meant. I mean, it's obvious what I am to the outside—a poet, a writer, a performer with a sharp and piercing tongue. Aggression. Passion. That is how I command a room, a page, a stage. But then it hits, that which I seem to have missed—the way I fling that passion back. The reason I was under those covers. The reason I could not get out of bed. On a Monday. A week after an insurrection. I had been working for a month—nonstop deadlines, barely a break—as if waging a war upon myself.

A. While writing this poem, I stop to wash a plate. I hold it with my fist. I drop it through the rack. A piece chips off and upwards, nicks my cheek. This morning, I hit my head on the edge of the bathroom sink while leaning down to grab a ball of hair. I already got a concussion in June. I'm either moving too quickly or trying too hard to clean up in a moment that might be messy.

2. In my letter, I tell Mars that I understand, my platform and tenacity helps keep them safe. But the force back inwards, it's making me unwell. I wager that if Mars will maybe ease up on me—slow down this unrelenting pace—we might both get what we want. We might both get to win.

B. While writing this poem, I take a break to join the conversation on Clubhouse for which Cortney pinged me. "Self-care or Selfish?" it is called. Everyone is speaking to my day. People are speaking to my truths. A therapist talks about white supremacy culture. A person shares what they inherited from their parents about work. Another talks about self-care as a revolutionary act.

Now it's my turn, I had been planning to bring up Audre Lorde, so I do. I say I took a break from writing a poem about white supremacy culture—and patriarchy and capitalism—and the ways it all shows up. In my body. In the ways that I push myself to overwork. That I am both enabling oppression and experiencing it too. That I balance both my privilege, and the traumas that I carry, from which I seek to heal. That maybe all the magic—all the timing—is more powerful than the false systems we have made to break and tear us down, to keep us all apart.

3. How much more can a body be asked to give. To take. Take on. To take on what isn't theirs. To hold. To hold in the things for which it never had a choice. And how Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said to march, is to pray with our feet. How the revelatory act of a body traversing a street, standing on the steps, crossing over a bridge, how it too is self-care. How the more we unravel from these systems of perfection, the more imperfectly perfect this planet can become.

C. While writing this poem, I think about fists. What it means to thrust it upwards. What it means to march it forwards. What it means to hold it, right there next to the sun. What it means to win.

Voting is a right, but I'm sad to say that I felt privileged to vote. It should not be a privilege but it felt like that to me. It also felt like a responsibility. I'm not on parole but hundreds of my personal friends are. In November 2020, Prop 17 in California was such an important item on the ballot. It would restore voting rights for everyone who is formerly incarcerated in California. It was weird. I was voting, as someone formerly incarcerated, to restore the voting rights for other formerly incarcerated people who could not vote. It was extremely personal to vote yes on prop 17. So were many other items on the ballot but something about prop 17 was different. Afterwards, so many of my formerly incarcerated friends were texting me and just thanking me. That meant the world to me.

- Adnan Khan



Tamara Blue

Part 1

Me, I am not a marcher
I do not hold or own a picket sign
I will not sing a song for freedom
I cannot sign a petition
 wishing something will change
Do not call me
 for the rally
Call me for the revolution
Call me when it is time
 To take back our power

Part 2

A black man was found hanging in the city I live in,
No one believed that a black man could ever hang themselves.
So we protested. We gathered in groups, in silence,
in rage and in tears.
We demanded answers from someone anyone.
Where are the cameras? Why would he do this?
They say he was a ward of the state as a child,
they say that he had been in and out of jail.
They say he had a criminal history.
He felt hopeless,
they say he did it himself.
I still say you did it!!
This system did it.
This county didn't care about him.
I was driving home but couldn't resist but to pull over
and scream his name

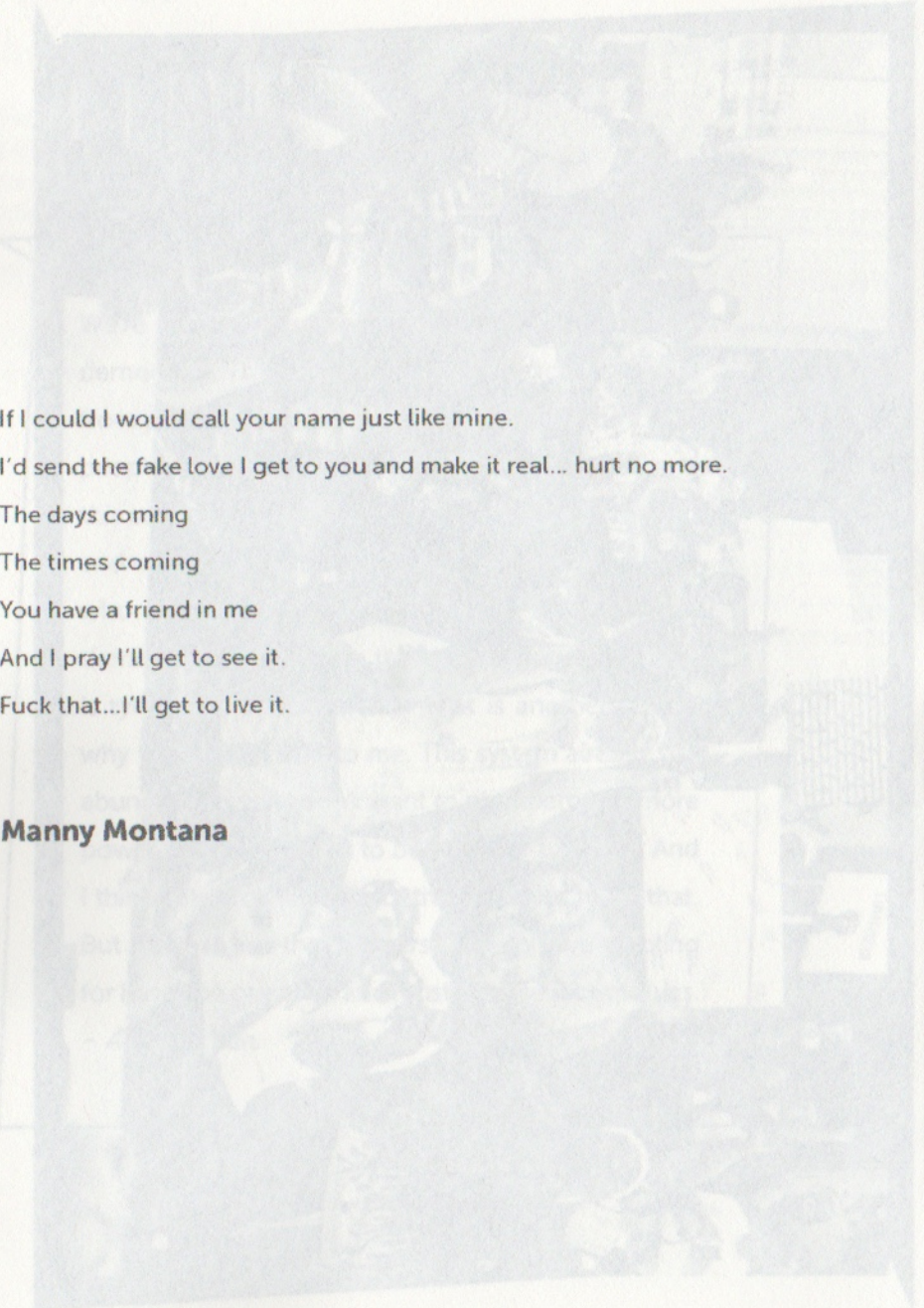
Robert Fuller!!



We're talking about reintegrating people back into democracy. There are more ways to exclude people from participating in society than there are to include people. And it really tells the story of this country and this country's priorities. It's pretty clear evidence who and what stakeholders they want in democracy and who they don't want in democracy. But that's not democracy. That's quite literally the opposite which is tyranny and dictatorship. That is another reason why voting mattered to me. This system already has abundant power. I don't want to give them any more power and I want us all to build power together. And I think voting can be one of the strategies to do that. But I have to add that the person/people we're voting for has to be one of us and must represent our values.

- Adnan Khan





If I could I would call your name just like mine.

I'd send the fake love I get to you and make it real... hurt no more.

The days coming


The times coming

You have a friend in me

And I pray I'll get to see it.

Fuck that...I'll get to live it.

Manny Montana



17 years prior to George Floyd's murder, zero federal executions took place. 17 years. Since, there have been 13 federal executions by Trump and Bill Barr. It was an authoritarian move to sustain power and put fear into people's heart, and a reminder of who can own your mortality. It was a message to the people, not about right or wrong because the death penalty can never be morally justified. I fought the death penalty for approximately 18 months. The district attorney fought hard to seek my execution. That was the first 18 months of my incarceration in county jail as I fought my case. I was a teenager (18-19 years old). It wasn't until a year and a half later at a hearing when the judge took off the "special circumstances" which meant the max sentence I could receive was 25 to life. Which I ended up getting. After 16 years, I'm free and I feel like I escaped death, literally. But I mention this because my life came down to a bureaucratic decision, not about safety or morality. One judge. One human being decided that.

- *Adnan Khan*

Jive Poetic

The White Custodian from the school where I teach
does the following:

- goes home
- kills his wife
- wounds his daughter while his son watches
- leads police on a highspeed car chase from Long Island to Brooklyn
- crashes into a gas station
- causes the gas pump to catch fire
- causes fire to catch his car

the security camera catches everything:

- The police officer jumping out of his cruiser
- The police officer drawing his weapon
- The police officer walking towards the burning car

We see the bullet points; imagine them
loaded into a semi-automatic judge's gavel.

The White Custodian from the school that is
only minutes away from where Akai Gurley was
murdered continues:

- to jump out of his car
- to waves his arm in a threatening manor
- to chase and tackle the officer

and you know what the officer does
not shoot him.

You know what, the officer does not shoot him.

You know what: the officer does not shoot him.

You know what the officer does: not shoot him.

You know what the officer does not shoot: him; on the internet
he is not choked; in the middle of the street
no knee on his neck, he is taken alive while we get left
with the exit wounds.



I keep thinking about our future and about my son.
The prior four years have already done so much
damage to an already damaging 400 years. We don't
have time to waste. The earth is giving us all the signs
we need if we're still looking for any to act urgently.
Right now, we are handing the next generation an
even more broken society. We've placed the burden of
fixing and saving our world on them. But we still can
do so much now. We can hand them a world in a much
better condition for them to work with. And it starts
with organizing and building power with each other.

- Adnan Khan

A Way Forward

by Mahogany L. Browne

(Founder of The People's Vigil, Curator of On Democracy)

A poem is only one form of working towards justice. Not for everyone. But for me. Absolutely. It lights the path. It is both bullhorn and healer's hands. It is a magnifying glass. It is snapshot of the scorched earth. It is still allowed to be when so many of our people are lost to the mass incarceration industry. It is still allowed to be when so many of our people are lost to police brutality and state sanctioned violence. It. Is. Still. Here. For now. Until the purse strings of injustice or sloppy journalism come for the pen wielder.

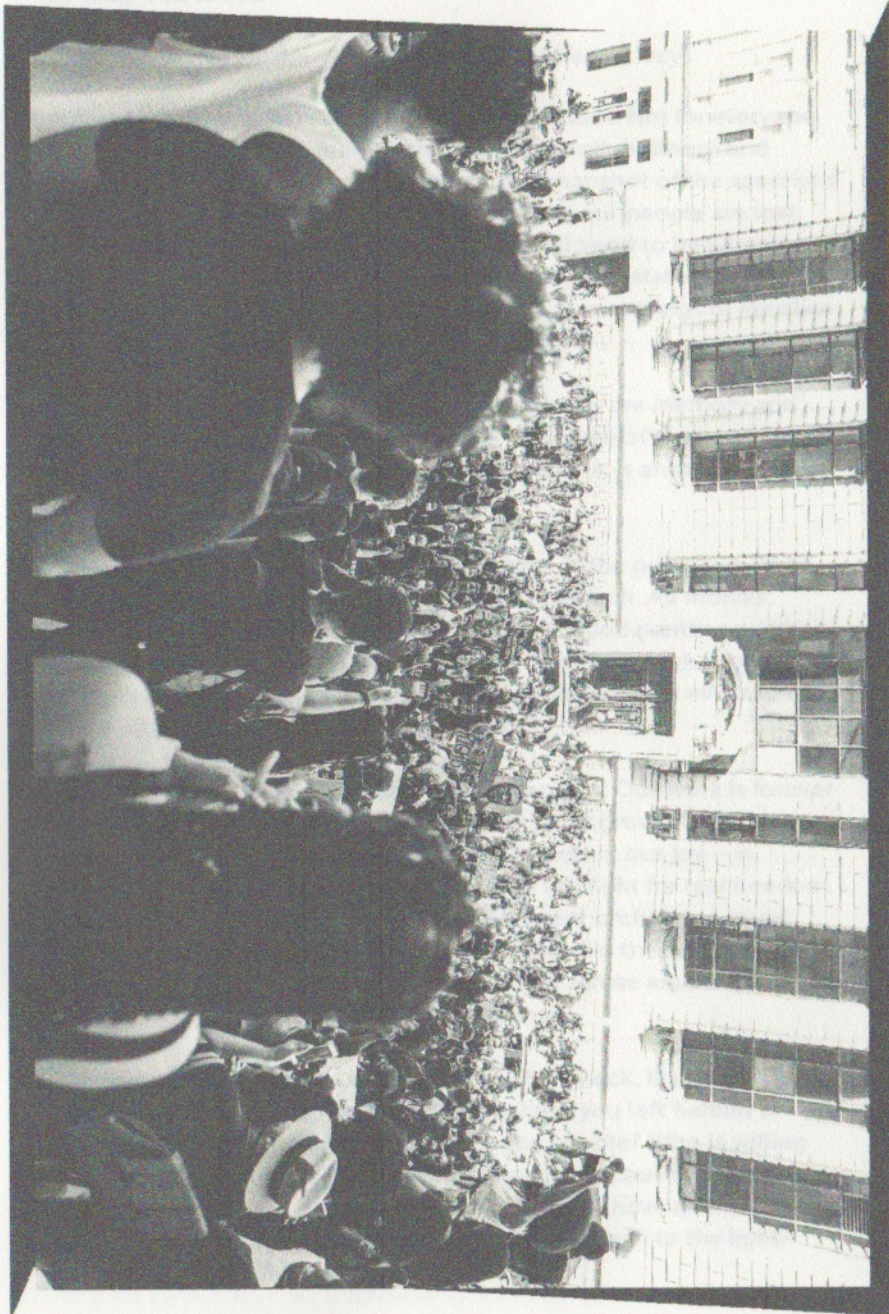
Yo, poems are only one form of memory. Poems are memory and rememory. It is the insistence of breath in a space of void and absence. In a city of barbed wire and cold bills. It is an articulation of blood.

The People's Vigil began as a simple archive of the names we don't necessarily hear chanted during a protest or march. All monies donated went to organizations in the streets. Food pantries and bail out funds. The People's Vigil has an opportunity to think about democracy. What does policy change look like? Who is affected by our ineffectiveness? And who got next?

Our children are moving breathing living poems. Our work is forever in support of their continued health, safety and growth. Anything designed to obliterate our wellness, our freedom, our joy – is unwelcome and will be treated as such. We will fight for real freedom. One that looks like home and smells like sweet orchids, or sweet potatoes, or laughter. Our freedom is wrapped in the success and soar of our neighbors. We refuse silence. We refuse assimilation. We encourage uncomfortable conversations.

The questions are poems waiting for a pulse check. If you are writing, who is living because of it? Who have you left behind in your apparatus wielding? Who died for you to vote? Who is willing to kill you for your vote? Who remains hungry because of a stimulus check? Who remains despite the hunger? Where have all the ghosts gone? How can we praise them and lift them to the light? How do we heal? What is the way forward?







Contributors

Tamara Blue writes from Lancaster, CA

Roger Britton of Britton Renaissance creates from Brooklyn, NY

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