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AMERICAN

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THE

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VOGUE

UNTIL

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WHAT'S

A

LONG

TIME

BEAUTIFUL

No, Dear

Issue 17
DOCUMENT

No, Dear
Issue Seventeen
Document
2016, Brooklyn
Limited Edition: 71/150

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Cover Art: Joseph Cuillier

Covers printed by letterpress at The Arm, Williamsburg

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Candace Williams

MEMO:

Due to unforeseen circumstances
I am forced to lay off 20% of my friends
effective immediately.

A climate of deteriorating privilege
means I must tighten the alignment between emotional labor
and future growth opportunities.

Change is difficult;
these decisions are not made lightly.

Those affected will receive
severance tied
to years of kinship.

I appreciate the civility and support of the team
as I secure our long-term competitive advantage.

More Than One But Less Than Any

There's this idea that monsters don't have reflections. - Junot Diaz

1.

I'm a motherfucking monster - ft. Nicki Minaj

2.

There is a version of the story where you deserve to be forgiven.

3.

There are more where you are not.

4.

You, a brown man, drive your child to school. A white teacher leans over you to speak to your child (white).

"Tell this to your father,"

you can no longer remember how you got here, this car, this street, this teacher leaning over you to speak with your child (white). You are not forgiven for what happens next.

3.

The first time you hear someone read your name (not white) or repeat it back to you without first pausing, thinking deciding it

It sounds different. But you are too far away (American) to ever ever, ever.

2.

Your child (girl) sits by herself in the waiting room while you experience dilation and something else.

The worst part, you (white) will tell her, is they will all know what happened.

These people talk.

You are forgiven

(it's not your fault), but that is not the worst part, not ever.

1.

When you look at other people all you see is worse versions of yourself.

To define my remaining self-transcendence is so brutal. To be called upon at all. What is indispensable to becoming human? Animals' lives perceive a remarkable species role. My advice is to contain a silent sucking sound. Integrities exist early and often outside of embodiment. The woman I chase is everything in between and passing. The horror of placating an image back into its signal. My advice is to burrow into the lab-bound strain and write down what you see there.

untitled. *for them. for us.*

Picture a city. Envision wooden boards for windows, rotten sour. See aged brick. Houses, weathered yet still holding hands. Open a door. Push past its fallen debris. Place your feet inside and bring your hands across the wall. Graze past the mouth of the gaping holes. Touch the lifted paint. Beware of the lead. Try not to inhale. When lead peels it exposes death to the air that surrounds it. If you live here you will always be scraping to catch up to your classmates. If you live here, your relationship with time and reality will become a shifting thing. The people that live here have been dead for a while now. See environmental injustice. See ground zero. This paint ruled hazardous 37² years ago but this house was still rented to the poor and black. Trying to breathe every day.

April 12th. Freddie. I am trying to read the news reports through this haze of tears. There were 6 of them on you. You should see your city now. See the part white collars had forgotten about. Some would say it is unrecognizable. Many would say this is how it's always been. A battlefield of muzzled cry and opened hands gone passed like a child seeking too much attention until something beloved is torched. See CVS. See The Avenue burning.³ A smoke signal they can not overlook this time.

¹ "A child who was poisoned with lead is seven times more likely to drop out of school and six times more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system," Norton said. She called lead poisoning Baltimore's "toxic legacy" — a still-unfolding tragedy with which she says the city has yet to come to terms. Those kids who were poisoned decades ago are now adults. And the trauma associated with lead poisoning "creates too much of a burden on a community. (Ruth Ann Norton, *Washington Post*)

² Lead is a poisonous metal that was used in the making of household paints prior to 1978. Even though its use was banned, lead still remains a hazard in many houses built before 1978.

³ Police formed a barrier around The Avenue, the neighborhood where the CVS was burned and looted, and allowed people to only destroy the black area of the town.

There are photos of you on the internet, Freddie. 8:39 you are running. 8:39 your face is kissing the ground. 8:40 they are telling you not to resist. 8:40 your lungs are fighting back collapse. After this you are a dragging body lifted away to the paddy wagon that has arrived just for you. Your limp body ruled undeserving of a chance. Your limp body thrown into the back. Your limp body's back gone already. 9:24 more sirens are coming. They say they have called someone for help. They're going to check your spine now. Have you caught your breath?

April 19th. **Step 1. Discredit the witness:** *Freddie Gray was nothing more than a drug dealing thug who had 20 pending charges on his record carrying a switchblade running from the police.* Nevermind that he was afraid. A bloodstream full of lead learned early to run from it. See cycle of oppression. See caste system. When black sees blue, black should lay the fuck down and take what is coming to him. **Step 2. Find another suspect and make it plausible that he may be the real perpetrator of the crime:** *Freddie Gray made us chase him and then he shoved his own body to the ground and then this animal hurled himself all around that paddy wagon until he broke his own back. Don't believe him. There was no bike pressed against his spine. No fists came down upon it. No feet. He could breath. He just didn't value his own life. None of them do.* See legal discrimination. Here we have one other prisoner who could not see his fellow paddy wagon passenger, but says Freddie injured himself. Says Freddie was not seatbelted. Says Freddie was thrashing himself around the paddy wagon. Shifts eyes. Holds own trembling hands. What would they do to a prison-bound man who tells the truth. Saw nothing but knows the story that is best for him to tell.

Step 3. Bury the evidence: Freddie Gray is not here for questioning. April 27th. See tombstone. See Woodlawn Cemetery. May he rest in peace.

Infinity

for Amiri Baraka

Fog swept through my marrow
bones sagged
where did he go?

silver air got sliced
sky fell revealed
its glistening innards

we inched our way
through a Newark mo(u)rning
laced with memory & salt.

Balm of our togetherness
bomb of his stillness
This is a stick up... Amiri,

get out of the coffin

passed around a flask
of loss everyone sipped.

There is no end

*italicized words from Saul Williams' remarks at Amiri Baraka's funeral

diary of ida b. wells

with a line borrowed from bob kanfman

guilt lines the black mouth
though it is a lie inscribed
to preserve life over dignity:
i did it but rarely and *i'd do it*
again looking you in the eye.
are there telescopes in those nooses
or just black holes?
are there telescopes in those nooses
again? looking you in the eye—
i did it, but rarely, and i would do it
to preserve life over dignity.
though it is a lie inscribed
guilt lines the black mouth.

*

a question of guilt
is not inscribed on his tongue!
his life as son, as anything filled with light:
the rare thing they loathe completely.
an eye pops out towards twilight,
never to see the stars via telescope.
(boy fished out of a well, a black hole)
never! to see the stars via telescope
an eye pops out towards twilight.
the rare thing they loathed completely.
his life as son, as anything filled with light
was not inscribed on his tongue.
a question of guilt...

*

to question your killer
risks your very tongue.
body filled with fire, contempt:
emotion rare and true
popping the rope;
cinched to the point of stars—
well, i saw a boy make the gamble
cinched to the point of stars
popping the rope
emotion rare and true
body filled with fire, contempt
risked his very tongue
to question his killer.

NO ORNAMENT

hung the body
 asymmetrical
 with my hands
 (which I'd been saving)
 shaking like the check
 in the mail in the trees that
 weep plastic bags slowly

 what came
 up in me was a damp slow
 dew and I said to you, unduly, *makes*
nothing happen and took the space
 beside myself which I'd
 been saving

 savings the whitest of ideas
 savings or *makes*
nothing happen, no totally
 a contranym
 an erasure of Something
 as if the page
 were the blizzard were end times
 an aesthetics of stuckness of status quo
 an aesthetics clapping
 itself on the back
 it's taking credit, checking the score
 of the Skins vs. the Cowboys
 vs. the Giants vs. the Titans

 and all the while *hung the body*
from her hair *by which he dragged her out*

BLACK BOXERS: a brief history

Jack Johnson (1878-1946)

Born to two former slaves, triggered race riots after defeating the "Great White Hope" James Jeffries to maintain his title as first black heavyweight champion of the world, a fight for which he won 1.6 million dollars adjusted for inflation. Convicted under the Mann Act in 1912 for marrying Lucille Clifton, a white woman, he fled the country until his money ran out in 1920 after which he returned to serve time in a federal penitentiary.

He died in a car accident at age 68 after speeding away from a North Carolina diner that refused to serve him.

Sam Langford (1883-1956), aka the Boston Tar Baby

A renowned heavyweight. Langford never held the world championship title. Jack Johnson, the titleholder, refused to fight him. He was afraid to lose to Langford and forgo the extra money he made fighting white boxers on the other side of the color line. When asked, Johnson said: "I'm the first black champion and I'll be the last."

Langford went blind and broke in Harlem, but after a *New York Herald Tribune* article raised money for his care, he spent his remaining days in a nursing home in Massachusetts.

Asked about his life shortly before his death, he remarked: "Don't nobody need to feel sorry for old Sam. I had plenty of good times, I've been all over the world. I fought maybe 600 fights and every one was a pleasure."

Reggie Gross (1962 -).

Raised by a single mother after his father was stabbed to death in a West Baltimore street fight when he was three days old. Learned to fight at thirteen after spending time in a juvenile detention facility for purse snatching.

After a brief light heavyweight career which culminated in a two-and-a-half minute Madison Square Garden loss to Mike Tyson in 1986, Gross is now serving a life sentence for allegedly executing two drug dealers near a housing project in Baltimore that no longer exists.

Asked about his sentence, the prosecutor responded: "If it all shakes out, he'll die in prison."

Clifford Etienne (1970 -), aka the Black Rhino

Learned to fight while serving a forty-year prison sentence for attempted armed robbery and became a professional boxer upon his parole in 1998. Etienne had a 28-1-2 record, but is best known for losing in 48 seconds to Mike Tyson in 2003 at the Pyramid in Memphis, Tennessee.

After his career declined, he was incarcerated again in 2006 for robbing a check cashing business, carjacking and kidnapping a family, and attempting to shoot two police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

He recently had his sentence reduced from 160 years to 105 due to a procedural error.

Najai Turpin (1981 - 2005)

Best known for his time as a contestant on NBC boxing reality show, *The Contender*, which followed amateur boxers competing against one another to win one million dollars.

Turpin grew up in a North Philadelphia housing project where he lost his mother at 18, after which, relatives say, he retreated emotionally. After her death, he supported his younger siblings by working as a line cook before moving briefly to Los Angeles to take part in the show.

At 23 years old, soon after *The Contender* ended, Turpin shot himself in the head while sitting with the mother of his daughter in a car outside the gym in West Philadelphia where he trained.

In a press conference shortly after his death, *Contender* producer Mark Burnett emphasized: "These were not fish out of water, people placed in an unusually stressful situation. This is a bunch of...highly trained young men doing what they normally do, which is fight each other with the goal to feed their families and try to achieve greatness."

breaking: dashcam footage

has arms
but they are
a shallow pond

dark flesh:
the city's
fatal

an intact heart,
named prey
to a foamed

still mouth at
dawn; a long
heavy rain.

wound
undressing
itself

pistol, a warm
adrenal gland,
a quick cold case.

In-flight instructions

Send me packets of the medicine that erupts my ribs from the center
carried through
fertile & blistered middle
ground security

Can I keep my naked in your armpit
no longer checked baggage
while a hand licks with a secret tongue that smells
like a belt on a bed

When the urethral throat of it stings with buds
& bulbs
it can only be fully resolved
in a cardboard mailer sealing itself
to its outsides

Take a spoon scoop
out the meat of
pornographic dreams
where women stretch time & ask to talk
to me but I am cut up –
worked up enough
blood to join
some tears up
together

Toast my skin & listen to it
I didn't think it was possible to eat
the craters off
my ribs

I knew an impure thing when I was called

a lump of curved snake flesh appeared next to the performer's feet
or a triangular head poked out from under the sheet where his knees appeared

I am licking the triangles clean &
pouring them into
ice cubes

I will not wear gloves inside of this ten-year-old
luggage
its ferrous soil lumped into an oven heated
by a five-hour sun flight hurtled west
into sandstone
blasting jet fuel out of both tear ducts

Now you can see that there is just a carpet
that won't lay flat
a channel for pulling sounds through
a strap-on a shoulder
drudgery
soothing a lozenge



Seven Eight Nine

7am Triangle between doze, ring, and nurse.
 8am Passing field of color, after medicine.
 9am Quiet is a trapdoor.

7am Worse than.
 8am Passing field of color, after medicine.
 9am "Will be" once was.

7am Only the most skilled can conjure snow.
 8am Bring it to the mirror.
 9am "Will be" once was.

7am This is a measurement of waking.
 8am Passing field of color, after medicine.
 9am And I.

7am As a zone in tremor-space.
 8am And muddy silver underwire.
 9am Take my business elsewhere.

Radioactive Zombie Marie Curie

You slept, shining out your bones
 —from *Radioactive Zombie Marie Curie*, a text-based game

The first thing you see is a woman, head
 in hand, surrounded by the idea
 of all the men she's left like countries,

their constitutions irrelevant and
 desk drawers overflowing with saltpeter
 and musk. *Dear receding empire,*

she thinks, *it was a mistake to be*
from anywhere. The danger here
 is great—her unspoken

eyes and childless machines—you
 will need all the bars you've acquired
 to defeat her. *This is where*

the organism stops, you think,
 but she's already thought it. Ditto
shadows growing like teeth

in sunlit mouths. This is before
 her city abdicates its promise
 of homecoming like a dying

body, but don't think chronology
 tempers her resolve. You are a room
 in the house she walks through

to be somewhere else. She's programmed
 to be undefeatable. If it seems unfair,
 forget the program and go

about domesticity. Your windowsill
 heaped with lamb's quarter
 and lovage, your bloodlust

in its tooled sheath a souvenir
 from the quest. Meanwhile she solves
 the problem everyone said was unsolvable,

the way sand moves through the sea.

Another Exposure

Judging by the highlights & high ponytail
 it is 1995 & all your decisions sound good,
 all of them—that smile, that denim jacket,
 that lanky whoever you are standing next to,
 dimly beaming in this grainy 3x5. Remember when
 you had to wait for your life to develop? You'd be
 on the porch, watching the rain, sharing a cigarette,
 thinking how good he looked in ripped jeans. Old,
 worn, falling apart: that was style. Somewhere, a kind of god
 was shaking the polaroid, blowing on it, trying to advance you
 another exposure. For your part, you always dropped
 your rolls off at the 1-hour photo, dashing in
 with the engine still running. *Be back in 40*, the teen
 behind the counter would say. That was nothing, then.

what / the last page
 did / to the novel:
 get / the sisters
 knocked flat / turned into
 casts / the mother but
 a shadow / they don't have
 the future / to like it

Igwe J. Williams

Marduk

in the morning
he is a shape
dull led
what are the children
embers
or the spark
that runs through
the body when
mortality nears
whimper
of holding

lets the light come
into the kitchen
our minds
frying in this
pale moon

what he hears are
the calls
of forty-thousand
dogs sharp
with hunger running
through
the alleyway
the neighbors
tv
so loud she must
be a government

he has clothes
a knife
under the pillow
shoes
bills
all which are
pulled
from the belly
of his rotting corpse

screams hunger
he hears her
his stolen
letting out
into the world
like spider eggs
a quarter
of a century

He shadows her this
is her home this
is how she washed
the dishes this
is where she cut
off his head this
is where she kept
the money
under the garbage these
are her breaths used
to stain his teeth her
dying apron
it was us
who stepped
out of
the darkness

the silence is
his footsteps
if
he stops now
everything
fades
there are
haunted
houses
less hollow
then this headspace-
moment secrets
he could swim through
like dimensions
of existence his
heart (the night) like
an anchor pulls him
down tomorrow
is always
a victory

Jason Baker

the book of campfires. The grownups use architecture to flirt, to build a lasting relationship between life and the smell of burnt flesh. Even infants paw toward firelight. That's using your noodle—for tomorrow shall be today's receipt. Just look at this spread, nothing spared. Every face rests over a bone necklace, and somewhere in the deep dark, Rome remains Rome. You wait for the signal to change. You wait for pleasure or relapse. Let's get our best sales force on it. No more fooling around, no stones unturned. To be alive, others must suffer. But to live like this. You're trying to get out of your costume while hailstones tumble in unannounced. Whose party is this anyway? Whose confetti?

Chris Slaughter

How Music is Made

The first time I heard my mother having sex, there was a Cadillac backfiring next to a church full of empty pews. No walls separated our rooms, and I was too young to understand the music a bed makes when a floor is uneven—It sounded like a tap dancer on fire with one shoe. How can you hide in sound with no pattern? I wish I could have held my ear's breath. Maybe this was some new form of holy ghost breaking woman from mother. She must have forgotten I was there, her boyfriend was trying to show me what a man was made of. It was as if he heard me listening with my loud mind. I didn't move, I didn't want them to think I was dancing. Only grown folks are supposed to know that song—

brooklyn on my mind

brooklyn on my mind. migrations give home meaning, feeling, a tethering, sing-song of what is lost. when i am gone. brooklyn, now my home and she stay on my mind.

my daddy's daddy's daddy was a sharecropper. soon as he was grown enough at 16 my granddaddy hopped a train to get the hell out of the hell of a place—that so called shared land. found a wife and made a life for himself deeper in texas, dixieland. my folks cashing in on promises, the providence of the so called movements of civil rights: a new confidence didn't want to live in no black neighborhood. in a new wild west of the sprawling suburban, sub-urban land stood the only house on the corner of longshadow lane. 436 casting longshadows of my youth that remain; as shit aint quite add up just right in that place. a black girl ought to know better her place, know better her dis-placement when the girl up the street ask if her skin taste like chocolate. i couldn't of been more than 6 at my first encounter of the white psychosis.¹ mesquite always in the back of my mind.

but home ain't what it used to be. ain't what it was two years before, won't ever be the same no more, and that's fine. a black girl ought to know better her place, know better her dis-placement. at a white school, with a white coach and a white trainer and a white doctor who say that the surgery wont be that invasive so that i can continue to play on a losing team, in a losing season: 21st century plantation seasoning. i used to hum slave songs on the way to the stadium, where we would run and run and run. my white coach had her ways, like a re-run of high school hoop days. she say we can't wear no durags, no scarfs while we run and run and run while it rains. she say this team ain't no gang. closet dyke coach ought to know her place. i aint been back since my degree been done, tho columbia wont leave my mind.

i shutter at the utter terror my mama must have known, when her uncle got him a new wife and told her she had to leave his home. "go on," i doubt he looked her in her eye, "take that there trunk, and follow you the line dotting west on interstate 10, if you find yoself tired sit on that trunk, catch yo' wind—then get going again." sweet pumela, 17 then—11 years without her mother, going into her final high school semester, sequestering secrets, shames, sin. her voyage on my mind. that firebrand wombman, where my world begin.

¹ i no whit bigger had no need to wonder or wander over to ask her if she taste of vanilla.

i run and run and run so far from her, away from her only wanting to know the heat of the sun for myself. only thinking of my health. we cashed in much of our precious time together fighting—each other. for our lives. a black girl ought to know her place. a black wombman know better.

my voyage stay on my mind. i've traveled through time, time and again.

i single, handedly strive to over compensate for the conditioning of the southern american negro as i stride through the apocalypse, the final hours of my first black neighborhood.

and when i'm away i miss the gaze of my brothers and sisters finding my eyes. brothers be talking crazy a lot of the time, but i find that the simple gesture, the tithing of gifting them a smile remains. it's a current of a wave in the now. that brother ain't been smiled at in a while and i can go on my way. as i am far and away, brooklyn stay on my mind.

there is no way to convey the sweet taste of that savings cup, when the gaze finds my eye. for much of the time i have wandered here, i've been blind. in these inevitable last days, moments, hours of my first black neighborhood, vapid ghost walking hipster humans who know not the meaning of what they beings be doing in between the redlines marked for black beauties, they be looking—averting my eyes.

i feel the bloodshed of my long bloodline, every time i rise and thus cannot understand the distance they surmise and ask that we forgive them for the hundreds of generations that live in the births, the hundreds of incarnations on this earth: all of these of this so called new world.

ironclad sankofas protecting brownstone windows and doors remind me to return. to the ancient, the original. a time—a way—before this world they call new. ask me to re-member the goldest and darkest hues. my people innovated the blues off of the strength of the encounter with the melanin-less few. white folks ought to know better they place, the diss placement of the space they taking up. endeavor to give a fuck. it stay on my mind.

You have nice boots.
I like your ideas.
I think you're brave.
Cool bangs.
Great words.
I don't like my own, even these ones.
Fuck, sorry, I'm making it about me
again.

YES

NO

Ya seem like someone
i'd wanna grab a
beer with, ya know?

Contributors

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VOGUE

MAGAZINE

1

8

THE

FIRST

AFRICA

DID

NOT

APPEAR

OF

AMERICAN

1

9

TO

NOT

BE

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No, Dear