



# MEMORY+ MAPPING

**MOTHER MERCY PRESENTS:  
A COLLECTION OF PROSE POETRY AND OTHER WRITING  
FALL/WINTER 2021**

M O T H E R

M E R C Y

"if memory is  
a technology,  
what does it do?"

- jakeya caruthers,  
just tell me the time and the place

# CONTENTS

- 5 BENEDICTION OF A BLACK MADDONA**  
– Zoë Gadegbeku
- 7 TOOLS FOR LIVING**
- 9 BRIA**  
*A Memory with Mathew Henson*  
– C.Green
- 14 NUBIAN SQUARE WILL ALWAYS BE DUDLEY TO ME**  
– Durane West
- 16 THE TIMES**  
– Évélise Alicea
- 19 CARTWHEELS IN THE CBD**  
– Karwitha Kirimi
- 21 IT'S AUGUST 2003 IN DETROIT**  
–Breana Roach
- 24 DETROIT, AFRICA, NIGGAVILLE, USA**  
– J. Courage Caruthers
- 29 WHAT I REMEMBER TO NOT REMEMBER**  
–Letta Neely
- 34 SOMETHING I CARRY**  
– JME

# BENEDICTION FOR BLACK MADONNA

Erzulie Dantor slides off an altar in Jérémie and falls into a seat at a bus stop in Dorchester. Blue chiffon and bluer water solidify into metal iced over and stinging to the thigh. She leaves behind houses flattened like used matchboxes, like old photographs pressed between the pages of an address book with phone numbers long faded, like luxury car tires over despairing land.

sleet tapping on the bus window ke-ke-ke-ke

She has unraveled herself from linen headwraps and skirts, and now is pinched in a too-tight brown coat missing the top button she fidgeted away. White ruffles and bare stomping feet turn to dry ankles dusted with grey and jutting out of black bedroom slippers, dragged to tatters

by hostile ground.

bones protesting when she tries to rise up ke-ke-ke-ke

She has teeth cracking to splinters far back in her jaw, the dagger in her heart shifting deeper

into the muscle with each hacking cough. She runs her fingers over memories of battle, over tender skin of women à la Louisiane, à Ouidah, à Dzelukɔ́fé, over Earth's plates never to come together again.

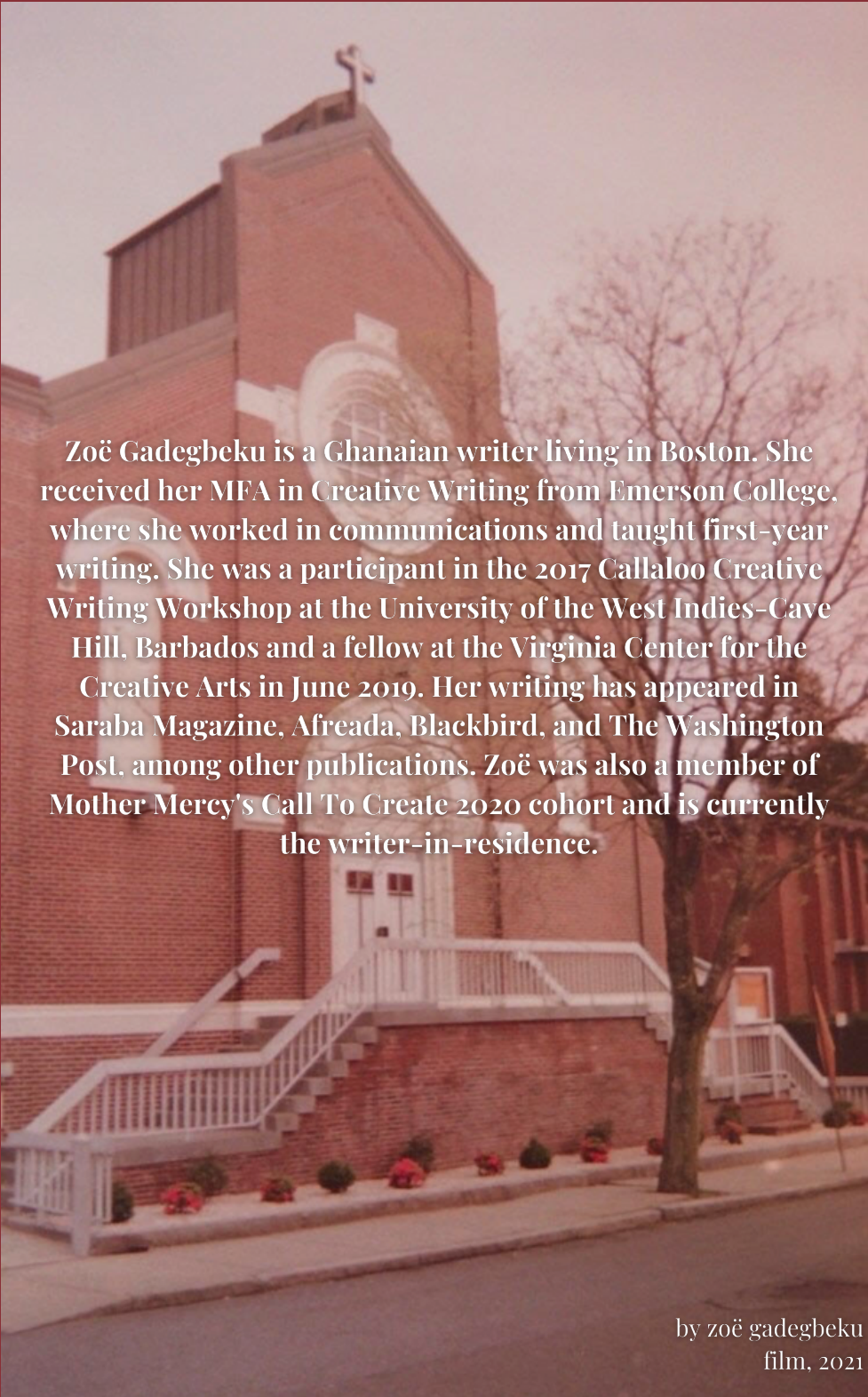
words won't come with tongue undone ke-ke-ke-ke

Erzulie Dantor

Patron of the sensual and the yet-to-be-unbroken

Toujours en tort

Que la Déesse te bénisse.



Zoë Gadegbeku is a Ghanaian writer living in Boston. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from Emerson College, where she worked in communications and taught first-year writing. She was a participant in the 2017 Callaloo Creative Writing Workshop at the University of the West Indies-Cave Hill, Barbados and a fellow at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts in June 2019. Her writing has appeared in Saraba Magazine, Afreada, Blackbird, and The Washington Post, among other publications. Zoë was also a member of Mother Mercy's Call To Create 2020 cohort and is currently the writer-in-residence.

by zoë gadegbeku  
film, 2021

# TOOLS FOR LIVING

we are thinking about memory work and the concept of mapping as tools for living, indeed forms of technology carrying code near and far, wide and deep. we rest and work, toil and teach (our selves and each other), all while we navigate ground that is as much foreign as it is familiar. this collection of prose poetry and other writing bears witness to our living and secures some of our memories in community for future maps imagined. we want to see this work as a way to strengthen and affirm one's inner compass; finding our way out is as important as finding our way in.

written by both aspiring and engaged Black writers, these poems were born from a zoom workshop series presented by mother mercy: memory, mapping, and other tools for living. writer-in-residence zoë gadegbeku and jme, founder of mother mercy, thought through this theme as serving our immediate and future needs. participants listened deeply and held tenderly the words and ideas of new co-conspirators to their creativity during our time together. workshops were facilitated by author/artist dzidzor as well as founder/artist jme.

*what are the bus routes, cemeteries, front yards, hospital corridors, and playgrounds that matter to you, and how do your senses hold the data for each location?* our prompt provided an opportunity for a range of interpretations.

we launched this writing workshop series in fall 2021 initially with a panel discussion—*just tell me the time and the place: Black diasporic art and the power of memory and mapping*. two boston-based poets, letta neely and porsha olayiwola, opened the doorway to our collective memory and mapping during their discussion. that evening, moderator j. courage caruthers reminded us, “[memory and mapping] were chosen because the work of liberation and its opposite manifest crucially in time and space.” we are pleased to include their reflections and writing in this collection as well.

all of this is earthwork; *wholly. pushing self further into the present, into presence and passion. it's a digging in of one's heels with knees slightly bent.*

“ primarily, one of the tools I’m grateful for is [memory] as a conduit, as this time travel, you can tesseract with it, you can authentically be present in more than one moment or place at a time.”

-letta neely,  
just tell me the time and the place



# BRIA // A MEMORY WITH MATTHEW HENSON

*“Henson said to [them], ‘We have found what  
we hunt.’ [They] looked at Henson strangely  
and said ‘There is nothing here. Just ice.’”*

The first child to appear wore their winter jacket: a thick brown fur coat with no extra attachments and an imposing hood. Their feet bristled at the small warmth of their long johns and knit socks. They were released to the empty white world by the bell, after pacing back and forth through the day’s classes; pacing with legs longer than the word ‘child.’ The word shivered from cold, crawling under their skin and the two extra layers of clothing they wore.

*(child, just walk faster.  
warm.)*

When they got to the bottom of the steps they began. First, they kicked a hole through to the back of the heaviest snow on the first step. Then pushed it aside with their boot and kicked it back out of the left corner and onto the ground behind them. Clean off the dust of the remainder snow and move on to the next one.

The first half of the climb was simple to remember and went as expected. Start at Atlantic and Snedicker and reach up, one right, a left climb and another left. More of the same, more of the cold. The wind fought the whole way, needlessly catching innocent climbers with no walls to protect them in a battle they had nothing to do with. But the child was focused. The fur from their hood would poke into their vision and blow in their eyes and still: Clearing snow. The face of the concrete dragged behind them, blinking in the white light of a cloud covered afternoon. Their bright red fingers could be seen from the brick school building—they were making fists, stretching their fingers and bundling their hands up the edges of their sleeves. It was cold. Just a few more steps to go.

*(go on. go, go, go.  
warm.)*

Then here, swiveling rest. The child turns over their shoulder and can see their path, simple and helpful. Look at their hands. The door to the rest stop opened gently for them and its walls spun, closing behind them.

Quiet.

The second child appeared just moments after the rest stop settled shut. She wore a different coat: a waist-length, puffy, bright pink jacket and her matching new Moon Boots. A true yellow horseshoe peeked out from the back of her jeans. She was cute. Her light brown cheeks were high and flushed with effort against the cold. Her headphones were plugged into her music device, leaking enough noise through her ears to barely bounce across the emptiness.

*(lovely child, just go fast.  
warm.)*

She took the path of the child who went before her. She got to slide easy, reaching Atlantic and Snedicker, and then up the climb with only concrete beneath her feet. The wind was still whistling the same feud and she promptly ignored it: imposing hood up, hands wedged firmly in her pockets, heart uttering higher.

They climbed. The path the first child cleared strung between them, taut and sharing. They moved in tandem, reaching out together and stretching over the climb. When she reached the rest stop it was empty. "Hello?" Pausing. "Hello-oh?" Her voice bounced timidly around the room, looking for someone. Empty. She took a moment to stretch her fingers and paced back and forth a few short times, trying to build some warmth.

*(just a little  
more,  
go—go on.  
warm.)*

After the rest stop, the path continued indoors for a bit, until you reached the last bit of the climb. The two remaining flights stretched up in front of her, steeper than the others. By halfway high any and all protection from the wind and snow was gone. The first child had continued without her, pushing ahead and clearing the snow where it had started to gather near the top. Here, without the ambient protection of the hushed buildings, the wind's ghting blew harder: squinting your eyes and turning you away.

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They should have seen each other at the peak—but when she crested the last step, the lonely length of the platform stretched out before her. It was cold. More than cold, it was naked. The black sign read 'ATLANTIC AVE.' The second child stood alone, shaking and looking in her boots. Her short legs and fear were the perfect size for the word 'child.' She had climbed the path and come to its end and found no one. Bria stood. Waiting.

Waiting.

Waiting. Care had gone before her, walking the way first and carving a trail, but at the peak, where she had expected to find it there was nothing but the empty argument of wind. Blustering wind, saying what could and should have been, that she was lost, that aloneness was all she would find. She hadn't even spoken but she could hear her unspoken thoughts rattling against the pristine snow of the world this high. She was so beautifully small, so unfortunately committed and the white and wind swallowed her, a ickering black spot against the white sea.

*(I am so sorry lovely,  
lovely, child. there is  
nothing here.  
no more—)*

Then, from an expanse away, a low rumbling started inside the wind, growing closer and closer. The sound of wheels rolling over the track, the individual circles blurring into each other. Then a long, high and wistful tone.

Everything was alone. The second child stood with her boots on the ground, feeling the concrete beneath her starting to shake. Her feet were at the end of the path and from here could only step into snow.

C is an artist working through poetry and dance originally from Brooklyn and now living with partners and close friends in Burlington, Vermont. They are a prison abolitionist, a Marxist, and a flawed and growing young person. They have choreographed, directed, acted and performed in several works, including their original performance pieces 'in the Wake' and 'autobiography of red // decreation.'



## A NOTE ON PROCESS

My desire with this piece was to write a dramatized version of a real memory in one of the most distinct places I can recall from my childhood.

In my real memory, I was supposed to meet Bria McLauren at the Atlantic Ave train station after school one day to kiss her for the first time because we had crushes on each other. Maybe we were “dating” the way you do in sixth grade. But I chickened out and never showed up. I dramatized the piece by splicing it with another memory I have, of a book about Matthew Henson, the first explorer to reach the North Pole, hence the arctic climb theme.

In this version, I (the first child) perform an act of care and Bria (the second child) follows me into it, but by the time she peaks and might fully realize our togetherness, I am gone. I wanted to have the feeling of being left behind and abandoned when you thought you were getting care. I wanted the dangerous feeling in the air of choosing trust despite uncertainty.

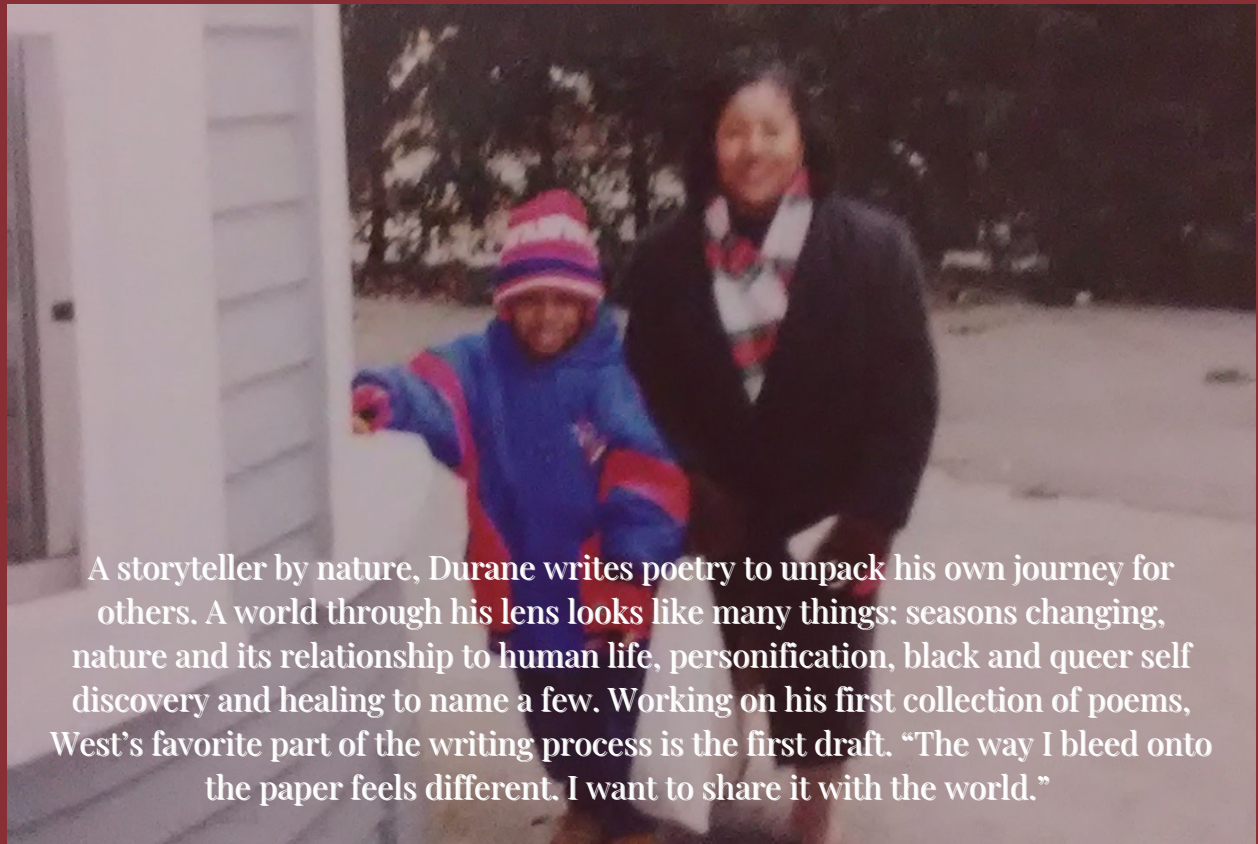
I wanted to honor the conviction of being so sure you are going to follow through until you realize that you just can't.

# NUBIAN SQUARE WILL ALWAYS BE DUDLEY TO ME

14.19. 23. 28. 45. my mind scurries for schedule times, burgundy numbers on off white paper rectangles, neck snapping to scan fronts and sides of incoming land yachts for the correct information. *headed to Franklin Park? nope. headed to Franklin Park? nope. headed to Franklin Park?* perfect. how else would I know I'm going in the right direction? my friends and I called buses boats back then. did we see our bus stops as islands? do we view this vehicle as beacon of safety? are we just cargo being transported to and from our slave shift each day?

i board the MBTA and see residue from spots I have occupied before, stood at or fallen asleep, maybe missing my stop altogether. my chest expands, thinking about the race to the bus stop, as if it were a contest between me and the driver. looking for a challenge? *how fast can i run to get to the entrance before it leaves?* how many ppl waiting in line? *oh, I got time.* occasionally while coming home, i would get off early and walk: *Quincy, Fayston, Lawrence, Creston* because stops were so close. thats how i knew it was spring finally. back when Avant and Jagged Edge dropped music regularly. a random "next stop" coming from the back where the bell isnt cooperating. the boat starting to sway as it weaves through traffic. not quite five o'clock, but the streets have been busy since schools let out. grandpa groans as space fills with more high schoolers. a deep voice bellows "REAR door" so that those women can get off. no thankyous for the navigator, a couple bumpy moments but we arrived safe. upon departure, I notice the captain is a former classmate and pay homage.

i can still see his smile.



A storyteller by nature, Durane writes poetry to unpack his own journey for others. A world through his lens looks like many things: seasons changing, nature and its relationship to human life, personification, black and queer self discovery and healing to name a few. Working on his first collection of poems, West's favorite part of the writing process is the first draft. "The way I bleed onto the paper feels different. I want to share it with the world."

# THE TIMES

The times of dictionaries, thesaurus, and encyclopedia  
Differ drastically from  
This time of snapchat, instagram and all forms of social media.

Getting ready to head out to the library, with my analog minnie mouse watch on my left wrist and my jansport backpack on my back. I call my mom at her job using our kitchen phone that is affixed to the wall and has a long coiled cord, as coily as the curls sitting atop my head. "Hello, may I please speak with Norma Malavé", uncomfortable silence, wrapping the coiled cord around my finger, she answers "Hi mom, can I please go to the library?" I need to do some research for my school project." "Go straight to the library and I will pick you up from there once I get off of work and don't be doing nothing you're not supposed to be doing" don't end up like me - a single teen mom. Rushing excitedly out the door with the unconscious faith that I will reach my destination safely - I know she will pick me up later. Arriving at the library, cracking open book binds, the scent of old books printed paper and ink - I feel free here. The rumble of my mom's Subaru wagon exhaust is my cue that it is time to go. I gather my belongings and rush out the door - don't keep her waiting, you know she gets impatient. She sees me, leans over the passenger seat, unlocks the door, I hop in "Did you get everything you needed for your project?" "Yes, mom, I did." with a smile she pops the clutch in first gear, the Subaru lets off a loud rumble and we're off. The times before cell phones.

It is all connected.

The times of genuine connection and community.  
The times before we were connected to the world wide web.



Tom had the internet space jumping but I was not a college student so my access was denied. Me and my girls, single teen moms, were college students by association, we used to hit up college parties without formal invitation. With my Baby Phat jacket on my back and my Nextel i730 clipped to my hip, you couldn't tell me nothing. Me and my girls got it out the mud together, we had each other's backs through the STI medical assistant program, through nursing school, through all matters of life - the good, the bad, the ugly - you name it. We put each other on with the financial and housing resources, turning everything we encountered into an opportunity. Realizing she wouldn't be picking me up later - this time - me and my girls were each other's: ride, babysitter, you got 20 bucks I can borrow?, watch the kids for me while I run this errand real quick, shoulders to cry on, ears to listen, job and apartment plug. "Évélise! Did you hear about 'The One Family' scholarship?! Girl, don't sleep on it!". Me and my girls were tribal, a village - we were deeply connected without the frills. The times before mass social media.

We are all connected.

Those times, these times.

The times.

**Évelise Alicea, a native of Boston, MA, is a creative at heart finding her way back to the arts; after two decades of navigating, surviving, and thriving in spite of unpredictable life obstacles; she persistently achieved one of her goals of becoming a midwife to serve her community with special attention to Black and brown birthing persons. Her passion for midwifery, community, and the arts was solidified by the pandemic, which she worked through as a registered nurse. She is the proud mom of two children, 20-year-old Jaydin and 7-year-old Nyah.**

**IG: @ceali77**



# CARTWHEELS IN THE CBD

kirika doing cartwheels down koinange street & my soul is tumbling out, laughing - spirit doing cartwheels down monrovia street down kimathi street & i am going to meet my homies & how many cups of lemon tea do i drink & how many bowls of uji do i not drink that you drink? the city is full of trees & my body is running from being my body & everything is a mirror. we loiter so much. we hand each other to each other for safe keeping - put me somewhere no pickpocket can reach me i mean don't let anybody walk off with my stuff, even when i want to let them. we linger often, we wanna find places where we can be free, for free.

i am watching my weight

watching the city

tuongeze kachai? are we going to have more tea? are we going to have tea and spill our guts to each other? & there are the guts we cannot stomach spilling & there are our stomachs & how we cannot stomach them. the city was full of trees, trees everywhere. we pass out bright orange sticky notes to strangers outside kenya cinema, nangs wrote sweet things & asked me to come hand out the sweetness with her. my body thinks if one more jacaranda falls on me I will give up fasting.

mwende says once she starts doing cartwheels she'll never stop. i know my feet are already sailing through air i know you my friends are the straight line i focus on & i say your names as mantra, straight line of orange sticky notes steeping me in sweetness

we still linger & it feels so good & being here with you is being in God's belly, i mean a potluck picnic with you is heaven. i mean, being here with you is an unending cartwheel. i mean, now, now there is no world in which i do not love my gut, in which i don't love your guts. i forget watchfulness.

Karwitha is an artist based in East Africa.

Twitter & IG: @Karwitha\_Kirimi



# IT'S AUGUST 2003 IN DETROIT

‡ we have the only picture window on the block. Our porch spans the full front of the house ‡ we are not allowed to leave it. No, we cannot ride our bikes in the street. No, we cannot go in Such n Such's backyard to play on their new swing set—we have our own swing set. *God bless the child who has her own.* All summer I practice braiding my own hair into designs with a looking glass facing the window. When the Blackout hits, I am on that porch. I run inside to the landline ‡ call mama at work. The loud factory fans usually answer her cell before she can say hello so I rush to tell *There's no power at the house ‡ everybody is outside looking around.* I realize the quiet on her end. The fans are out there ‡ they don't have power either. I can hear her clearly, for once. *Do not leave that porch. I'm on my way.* It's only 2 years after 9/11 ‡ all suspicious activity is being regarded as such. For days we sit on that porch in the 10pm dark of night while my dad ‡ all the men on the block grill the entire contents of their freezers in the driveways. We play flashlight tag with unseen neighbors blocks away. We sleep in the basement until the heat climbs down the stairs to wake us, then we return to the porch to watch the sun creep across the sky with our ears open for any breeze that might come by. Finally one night, 3 blocks down, the neighbors' porch lights start to glow brown. A few more days and all the lights are on but everybody's food is gone. The gas stations are still empty. The grocery stores are full of rotten meat. There's been looting on all the major streets. We have survived into a wobbling state of recovery.

& ever since, I have come to recall a lavender glow that follows & spotlights my memories of home. This is the summer I start watching thunderstorms. This is when I learn to run as fast as I ever can & to greet every bird that lands where I stand. I realize I am no longer a child. My body is like lightning—I am the storm & the water & the sorbet sunset skies. I begin to paint my toenails a darker blue. I start to change my clothes to match my moods. I ride my bike with no hands & pedal backwards only to brake—Even now when I feel alone, I close my eyes, remember the rhymes, let the beatbox be a metronome & chase the bass back down the block until I can see my own porch again. & then, I circle myself dizzy til I can feel my fingers tracing the pattern to a Master design—til that pattern becomes something I can see between the looking glass & the reflection of that picture window.



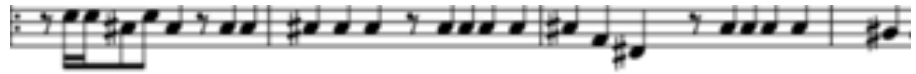
**Breana L. Roach is a poet and artist from Detroit, MI. Her work is dedicated to the radical act of being Black and joyful simultaneously.**

# Detroit, Africa, Niggaville, USA

*reflections: just tell me the time and the place*



# SO BLACK PEOPLE - WE THE FIRST PEOPLE WHO HAD THOUGHT, RIGHT? WE WAS THE FIRST ONES TO SAY, 'WHERE THE FUCK AM I, AND HOW DO YOU GET TO DETROIT?' -RICHARD PRYOR



## -Outkast

Taken from a bit in *Live on the Sunset Strip* (1982), the lines of this epigraph are nestled snugly amidst a raw and vulnerable reflection of Richard Pryor's imperfect, nasty, compellingly succinct personal and philosophical struggle. The complete set tells a meditative tale about Pryor's relationship to Africa, to blackness, his famed disavowal of the word *n-----r* ("a word to describe our own wretchedness"), drugs, sex and relationships, craft, and not a few existential questions; some threaten to crush the heart.

This line is much rehearsed because it also reflects the divine geometry of Richard Pryor's mind and of black existents. To position black people as prime, as the ones who set the spin on human (not to be confused with the Enlightenment invention of Man) and its seeking, is more than a counter to wretchedness. It makes black people themselves as a kind of moral or spiritual north star. Indeed, if the first people to have thought think first, quite humbly, that they are lost, Pryor steers us to wonder less about what occasion led us to be so (dis)placed (for the divine geometry lies in the simultaneity of being lost and found), and instead to wonder where our axis mundi may be. He cites Detroit ("actual" Detroit and the beloved notion of Detroit) as both source and destination, a prime black site.

Other locales pepper this set – Youngstown, Buffalo, Tupelo, Oakland. They sparkle as points in space (which is to say, outside the logics of territory, county lines, borders, and dispossession) and maybe as coordinates by which we can trace a good, black story about the best of things, the worst of things, and carrying them all brilliantly on.

But: whither the map? And the directions?

...

On a pandemic Christmas morning, I woke up to confused text messages about a suicide bomb in downtown Nashville, home to the great majority of those I call my People. The bomb, damaging an AT&T service center knocked out access to 9-11 and other emergency services and disrupted cell service for millions, including me – 215 miles away. Because mobilizations of anti-black frontlash were brewing in my old Kentucky home (twelve days later they would yield a fascist attack on the Capitol), I was nervous, de-centered. GPS was still available, but even if I knew how to get there, where would I go, y'know, when the proverbial "shit" went down?

I haven't stopped wondering this, and when recently given the chance, I asked two poets: What do you think memory affords us when catastrophe leaves our traditional routes obscured or our signals are crossed or when we find ourselves in strange lands?

For me, both eco-grief and the certitude of "new" and "worsening" repressive movements against black survival manifest themselves in angst about practicalities (a surprising and uncomfortable itch; I am after all a Pisces). These things leave me nervous about tiki torches and weaponized cars as much as I do impending floods. I wonder, if set to the streets, misplaced and unmoored, how indeed would I get to "Detroit?" What device could help me sense or remember black, which is to say safe, space?

In elementary school, 3-D topographical maps used to fascinate me. Beyond showing landscape with a sense of depth and difference, they let you touch, they let you "know" mountain and river and plain on entirely new terms. With dimension on my mind, I asked the same two poets if poetry itself could make a map, if making words or taking them in could each get us more intimate with someplace like home or here or there. I wish I had asked, "and if it does, what does such poetry sound like? What should the poet put in her song to make sure it beckons just right?"

...

Comedians, sometimes behaving as newsmen, sometimes philosophers, sometimes anthropologists, too frequently the deputy, make this joke often:

"At 3:00 in the morning, I didn't know he was taking me to the ghetto at first. I started looking out the window, I was like, 'What the fuck?' There was a gun store, gun store, liquor store, gun store. Where the fuck you takin' me?! This don't look good... Man, I gotta look around and see if I can see some landmarks and figure out where I'm at. In case I have to escape on foot."

– Dave Chappelle, *Killin' Them Softly* (2000)

"But 118th street has scary litter. Really dangerous litter. There's only so many bags of Flaming Hot Cheetos a man can see before he knows he's about to be murdered."

– Jerrod Carmichael, *Love at the Store* (2014).

The assignment of place and practice with contemptuously diminished racial and class value is *borrowed, unrevised, from the state* . It reproduces the acts of map clearing, disappearance, wiping clean certain blocks and neighborhoods and people from legitimacy, sociality, and survival. But if we wrote it just right, could counter-valuation – through the poetry of smells, sounds, logics, and beauty – also rewrite the map and rewrite the property (as in the substance, character, and value) of black place? Could this poetry signal something, offer topographic texture, sanctify a district, call us near?

...

Lately I've revisited black women renaissance prose-poets and critics, too, and while there is a poetics in Gloria Naylor's hand-drawn map of Willow Springs or Akasha Hull's attempt to give spatial dimension to the multiple realms of Toni Cade Bambara's Claybourne, Georgia, I listen for breadcrumbs laid gingerly in unlikely but very necessary places, weather maps, black doppler, talmbout "up there, in that part of the City – which is the part they came for – the right tune whistled in a doorway or lifting up from the circles and grooves of a record can change the weather. From freezing to hot to cool."



**J. Courage Caruthers, newly appointed Assistant Professor of African Studies and English at Drexel University, has been working on a manuscript that engages what she terms the “humor of unusual accommodation.” This work queries the small, incisive, and humorous ways that Black people manage and trouble racial crisis through the unruly affect of curiosity, socio-spatial anteriority, and a political logic informed by what Toni Morrison calls, “the legitimacy of forces other than good ones.”**

# WHAT I REMEMBER TO NOT REMEMBER

my brother & i  
stair step siblings  
sitting on stairstep  
miller light can  
whiz  
zing  
spinning spit  
ting  
an out of control satellite  
before it zeroed in (again)  
the crosshairs:  
my mother's  
third eye

there was blood (again)  
and again  
my brother said (again)  
“please  
don't  
let me be  
like  
daddy”  
my brother & i  
sitting on stairstep  
2 hands clasping each other  
one hand always fisted

around handset  
the other fingers air pressing 911  
daring ourselves, willing  
ourselves to call 911

the emergency was always pressing  
into my calm

my father was always asking, “y’all alright?”  
or was it a demand  
;  
as if the air ever cleared itself  
of screams; as if  
you could erase bruises &  
burns  
& blood &  
guttural yelling  
with  
new furniture or sun ra on the turntable

my brother fought my father once  
for hitting my mother  
but he didn’t turn  
the table  
my brother puts women  
through walls when possible &  
leaves  
their skin on bricks  
when he can’t

my brother who begged me  
with the holy pleading of the unnourished  
(whose gods are hollow, drunk, glittery things  
that shine on you but  
set no sustaining  
fires within you)

this brother who ripped his wife’s ear, left it hang  
ing from her  
face  
because she wasn’t listening

I remember him begging me, “please don’t  
let me be  
like daddy”; his daughter ) didn’t hear  
that) (she heard untamed  
reckless anger nourished  
by my father’s  
raging;  
she heard it

gurgle like a demon  
from her father) followed  
her mother’s screams  
like breadcrumbs  
said, “we have to go  
before he kills  
us”

looking back over their shoulders walking quickly from pools  
of their own blood some women fragment fake laugh  
subconsciously rub keloids say  
“it wasn’t that bad”

i come from a long legacy of things  
to not remember

this is a family disease creeping in  
even when you ask/ beg it not to  
holding us hostage &  
on hiatus from ourselves

what i remember to not remember:  
inside of the uhaul we rode in  
while absconding from my father (again)  
there were mice turds that looked like a field of burnt sesame seeds  
& piles of mouse shredded paper that we pushed aside  
to sit &  
not cry  
& we would  
be sent back  
again & again  
to the scene of the crime  
called marriage

my mother kicked down  
stairs one xmas day

& i can never warm  
up  
to the fact  
that everything will be  
ok;

(oooooh child, things are gonna get easier) (oooooh child, things'll get brighter)

what i remember to not remember

george floyd's neck  
under  
derek chauvin's knee  
will never become a diamond  
under pressure; his neck &  
that knee were on replay &

every other time

i saw my daddy's knee  
my mama's neck;  
her saying, "ron, baby,  
i can't breathe"

(i know a little something ( about gasping  
for air (.) between the chokes  
) about a whole household. a whole generation. a whole people.

strangled in staccato rhythms  
no respite  
so  
i stay on guard (sometimes) (all the times)  
(again) cuz

every  
where we turn  
you can be broke in (or) broken (or)

find  
your skin  
tattooed  
to a brick  
wall



a mapping of the terrain—earthling ((Black dyke: creative: writer: artist: activist: womanist: mama/daddy: wildcrafter: witch)) lover, connector, draptomaniac, nerd n instigator.

some details--in addition to Juba and Here, letta is the author of the chapbooks When We Were Mud and gawd and alluh huh sistuhs.

her plays: “Hamartia Blues”, “Last Rites”, and “Shackles & Sugar” have been produced in Boston, Philly, and Los Angeles.

she is a co-artistic director for Fort Point Theatre Channel and an associate director of Apprentice Learning. she is also an actor and director.

the aerial view—the divine estuary where struggle and liberation meet/ is a cauldron/ is ancestral and future/ is where she bathes

what’s brewing right now— 1) Traces/ Remain: Seed to Harvest project with Deen Rawlins. and 2) Her newest book Geographies of Power will be available in Spring 2022. and 3) she is co-creating inPublic with a group of other magic beings brought together by DS4SI. and 4) anybody wanna take a walk sometime?

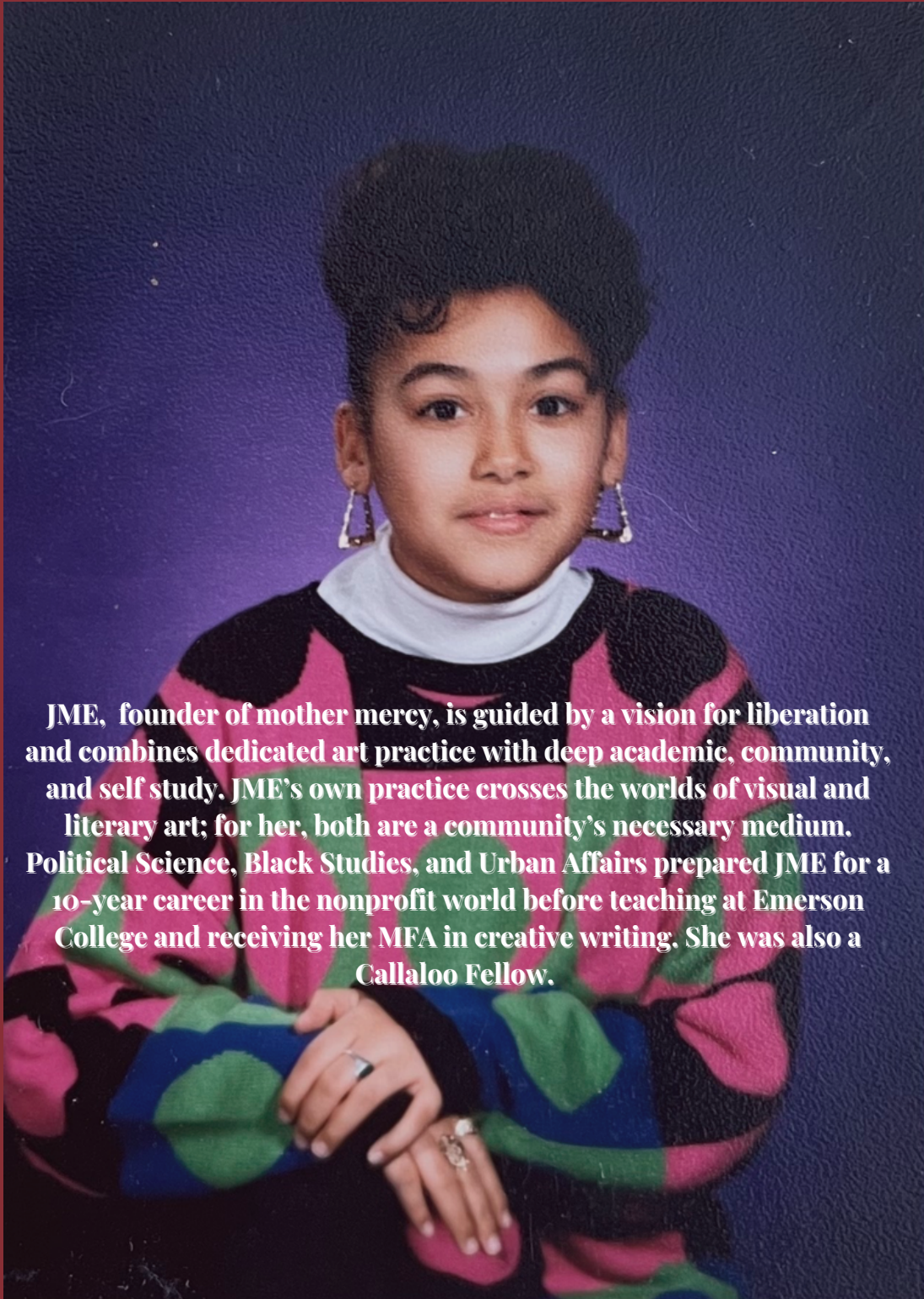


## SOMETHING I CARRY

i'm thinking of all the ways i've seen this place on fire through the eyes of my mother, watching the window pane fill with whole bodies, bound only to air as the buildings burned with james brown in the background. how each candle lit in grandma's presence was an invitation to this terror—the possibility that the fire could be set from within, that we could destroy our own home before any fenway landlord could conspire profit.

i've not touched those flames, still i've smelled that smoke and i've rubbed the reminiscence of my own soot between my hands, the place there once were fires of righteous making, counter capital.

i hold the headline: *15 year old arrested for arson of police cruiser in boston riot*. more than twice his age i remember when i knew about kindlings and how important it was to carry a match...



**JME, founder of mother mercy, is guided by a vision for liberation and combines dedicated art practice with deep academic, community, and self study. JME's own practice crosses the worlds of visual and literary art; for her, both are a community's necessary medium. Political Science, Black Studies, and Urban Affairs prepared JME for a 10-year career in the nonprofit world before teaching at Emerson College and receiving her MFA in creative writing. She was also a Callaloo Fellow.**

"i'm really thinking  
about using these  
already knowings  
and these  
rememories as a  
weapon."

-porsha olayiwola,  
just tell me the time and the place

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BACK COVER ART:  
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the oppositional gaze