

no diving

ON TWENTY TWENTY AND THE TWO PANDEMICS



jGirls Magazine

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Our Mission

jGirls Magazine provides a platform for self-identifying Jewish young women and non-binary creatives to share our voices with the world and each other. Our ideas hold weight, our opinions have value, and we are responsible for our own editorial choices. In providing this forum for expression and exploration, jGirls contributes to lasting change in the Jewish community and beyond.

This Moment

As we enter the new year, 5781, we hope these pages fill some of the liminal space between sweetness and bitterness. Through creating this issue, we felt the gravity of this particular moment. Yet, we also found comfort in the fact that our ancestors have shouldered immense weight. While they asked questions, while they took to the streets, while they grieved, they too created art.

Onwards,

 & 

Annie Poole and Emanuelle Sippy, lead issue editors



a note on *no diving*



This special issue of jGirls Magazine explores our relationship to systemic oppression—through our zip codes, still-segregated classrooms, reliance on the police, access to healthcare, ability to quarantine, and participation in capitalist greed—and calls upon us to transform the stratified, unjust world in which we live.

In “Behind Bars,” artist Tali Feen and editor Maya Savin Miller depict the intersection of the two pandemics and ask how institutionalized inequity has been created, challenged, and fortified.

In “I Want George Floyd on the \$20 Bill,” a collaborative group of writers and artists wonders about the paradox of a person’s value.

And throughout the issue, we ask what it would take for us to abandon and completely transform our “justice” system.

“No Diving” asserts that none of us are free until all of us are free, that the only true liberation is collective liberation. That we must not be content staying afloat while our neighbors drown. That, as Jewish tradition teaches, it is not our obligation to complete the work, yet we are not free to desist from it.

Until we can all swim freely, we need to close the pool. Maybe it will never again open. Maybe we’ll invest elsewhere. Maybe we’ll build anew.

Because what’s a diving board anyway?

Access to the swimming lessons.

Permission to enter the pool.

Knowing how to swim well enough that you can take the risk.

The security to feel free-enough to fall.

When some haven’t taken the steps up the ladder, felt the prickliness against their soles, the second of suspense in the air—that feeling way deep down in the stomach,

When many haven’t laughed at themselves after a belly-flop,

When we don’t all hit the water and see it as a thrill to hold our breath until we can no longer,

When, instead, some are pushed under, held down until they can’t breathe,

When not all get to choose when or if they can come up to the surface,

When, instead of chlorine, eyes are flooded with tear gas,

When one kid’s fear of the deep end might be another’s fear of hunger, incarceration, poverty, and death at the hands of police, then there can be “No Diving.”

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Behind Bars

by Tali Feen



COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on those behind bars. Nationwide, prison inmates are commonly denied healthy food, sufficient rest, basic hygiene products, and physical space. These deprivations are exacerbated during a pandemic when prisoners are additionally denied access to masks, gloves, and adequate soap. The prison population, living in such extremely close quarters, becomes a petri dish for infection. Further, decades of extreme sentencing have resulted in a national prison population overwhelmingly composed of older inmates, the demographic that is most at risk of serious complications from the coronavirus. The pandemic has essentially been weaponized to further punish one of the already most marginalized groups in America: inmates condemned to wade through the morass of the American Injustice System, the bones of which are steeped in systemic racism and capitalist greed. The deeply flawed United States carceral policies and a long-term national embrace of mass incarceration has left a large segment of the population without even the right to self-advocacy or political agency. As people all over the world take to the streets and the polling booths demanding a just and merciful justice system, it is important that we remember to speak up for those without the freedom to march or vote.

editor's note: Maya Savin Miller

Unfinished

by Miriam Hope

I was awoken last night with a pit in my stomach. An unavoidable feeling of emptiness. As I lie curled up in my twin bed I realize I am stuck at home like a tightly fitted shirt I've outgrown. A month from now I will turn 18 which will mark the end of my childhood. It's as if this has all only been the practice round and now I get a chance to really live rather than, just exist. So here I am at the starting line, holding my position, anticipating the journey, but no one is pulling the trigger, so I'm stuck. The same day continues on a loop and all the strings that keep me grounded and attached have untethered. As I look the other way days and weeks are made up of these fleeting moments I can't seem pin down. I had this plan to go out with a bang, like a song that swells at the end of a movie or a last line of a book that just stays with you. I know it's cheesy but I like that shit, it's nice to gaze into the future as though it's where you're meant to be. The problem is now I am no longer consumed by this ending but rather the space where it should be. There's no final bow or cap to throw just a book with torn out pages and a puzzle with missing pieces.

It's not the ending that scares me,
it's all the things that didn't
e n d



Glitch by Alex Berman



M e n d i n g the Broken

a photo series
on the day after

by Zoe Oppenheimer

If you follow any Jewish Instagram account or receive emails from any Jewish organizations, you’ve probably noticed the use of the phrase “Tikkun Olam” as a prevailing response to social justice issues. While I find meaning in turning to spiritual ideas in moments of sadness and anger, I take issue with this rhetoric of “repairing the world” when many, including myself, find difficulty in expressing why it needs repairing in the first place. While arranging the photos for “Mending the Broken,” I found myself wondering about the broken, unjust matters beyond the series’ shattered glass, peaceful protester, and graffitied messages, police brutality and systemic racism only two among them. I question “Tikkun Olam” when I remind myself that the world was not “broken” by some mystical force. Instead, Lurianic Kabbalah teaches that we have only ourselves, humanity, to blame for our reality. Because of Adam’s sins in the Garden of Eden, God’s light and power intermingled with humanity, creating a world of good and evil. Since the moment of creation, we’ve taken Adam’s bruised apple, just as it was beginning to blossom, and continued to bash it into the ground.

I believe that white Jews, as well as primarily white Jewish institutions, must take stronger stances and recognize our complicity in “Shover Olam,” breaking the world, before making promises to “mend” it.

editor’s note: Elena Eisenstadt





I question “Tikkun Olam” when I remind myself that the world was not “broken” by some mystical force.



We're
in this
together

We're here to help

BANK OF AMERICA 

DAVID
LAWRENCE

There's a
little in
the way

*Where was
the peace
400 years
ago?*

by Makeda Zabot-Hall

Black Lives Matter by Annie Poole



My father is the most peaceful man I know.

A few years ago, he came home from the watch store, and told us that the owner had said to him, “What would people think if they walked in and saw a nigger working here?” after my father had casually said something about becoming his apprentice and learning how to fix watches. In that very moment, I wish my dad hadn’t been the peaceful man that he is.

“... a nigger working here...”

I think about this story frequently. I was so angry at my father for not screaming in the owner’s face, or arguing with him until he had lost his voice. My father had let me down. I wanted him to fight, but I never told him this.

A few weeks ago in an argument, I brought this story up again, and in an instant I finally revealed to my father how I truly felt; how I felt about him walking out the door before an argument could even begin. About how his actions made me lose faith in his ability to defend the color of my skin. As he listened to my concerns, with his legs crossed and his eyes calm but focused, he soaked up the emotion that poured out of his 18-year-old daughter. That day, my father told me that if he had gotten into an argument, he would have been risking his daughters having a future without a father or his sons having to lock the door at night, because they would now be the oldest men in the house. He wanted to fight, but he had to choose.

I thought my father hadn’t fought that day because he gave in. I thought he had let them win, when in reality, he had decided that his life, vows, and the promises that he had made to his wife and children trumped everything. His family was more important than defending the color of his skin, in that rundown watch shop. My father decided to swallow his anger in the

face of a man who only saw his Black skin, a man who perceived my father’s brown eyes as more threatening than the small pocket knife dangling from his own jeans.

My father chose us. He chose to come home instead of lying on a rug in a pool of blood, alone, and unable to defend the skin that would be soaked in the very red that is printed on the flag of a country that promised to protect him.

There will be more racist shop owners, there will be more blood, there will be more sons and daughters waiting on the stoop for their fathers who are never coming home.

Who’s gonna raise the kids of the parents who were murdered screaming “George Floyd?” Who’s gonna carry the body of a young Black man who has not even graduated high school yet?

My father is the most peaceful man I know, and I love him for that. But I won’t wait for my brothers to be the next young Black men that “fit the description.” I want to see my 13-year-old brother graduate from middle school.

I want to be peaceful, but where was the peace when my people hung from trees, naked and stripped of their lives?

Where was the peace when Emmett Till was mutilated and murdered at the age of 14?

Where was the peace when unarmed Breonna Taylor was shot eight times in the comfort of her own home? Where was the peace when two men in a pickup truck chased Ahmaud Arbery, an innocent man, and fired a shotgun into his stomach?

We need more peaceful people like my father, but I won’t wait for his blood to be spilled.

So let me ask you again,

*Where was
the peace
400 years
ago?*



I want George Floyd on the \$20 bill.

I want Toni Morrison on the \$20 bill.
I want Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on the \$20 bill.
I want Breonna Taylor on the \$20 bill.
I want Angela Davis on the \$20 bill.
I want Jacob Blake on the \$20 bill.
I want bell hooks on the \$20 bill.
I want Chadwick Boseman on the \$20 bill.
I want John Lewis on the \$20 bill.
I want Shirley Chisholm on the \$20 bill.
I want Serena Williams on the \$20 bill.
I want Marsha P. Johnson on the \$20 bill.
I want Claudia Rankine on the \$20 bill.
I want AOC on the \$20 bill.
I want Tarana Burke on the \$20 bill.
I want Patrisse Cullors,
Opal Tometi, and Alicia
Garza on the \$20 bill.

George Floyd by Gertie Angel

What did we talk about

by Molly Voit



before corona?

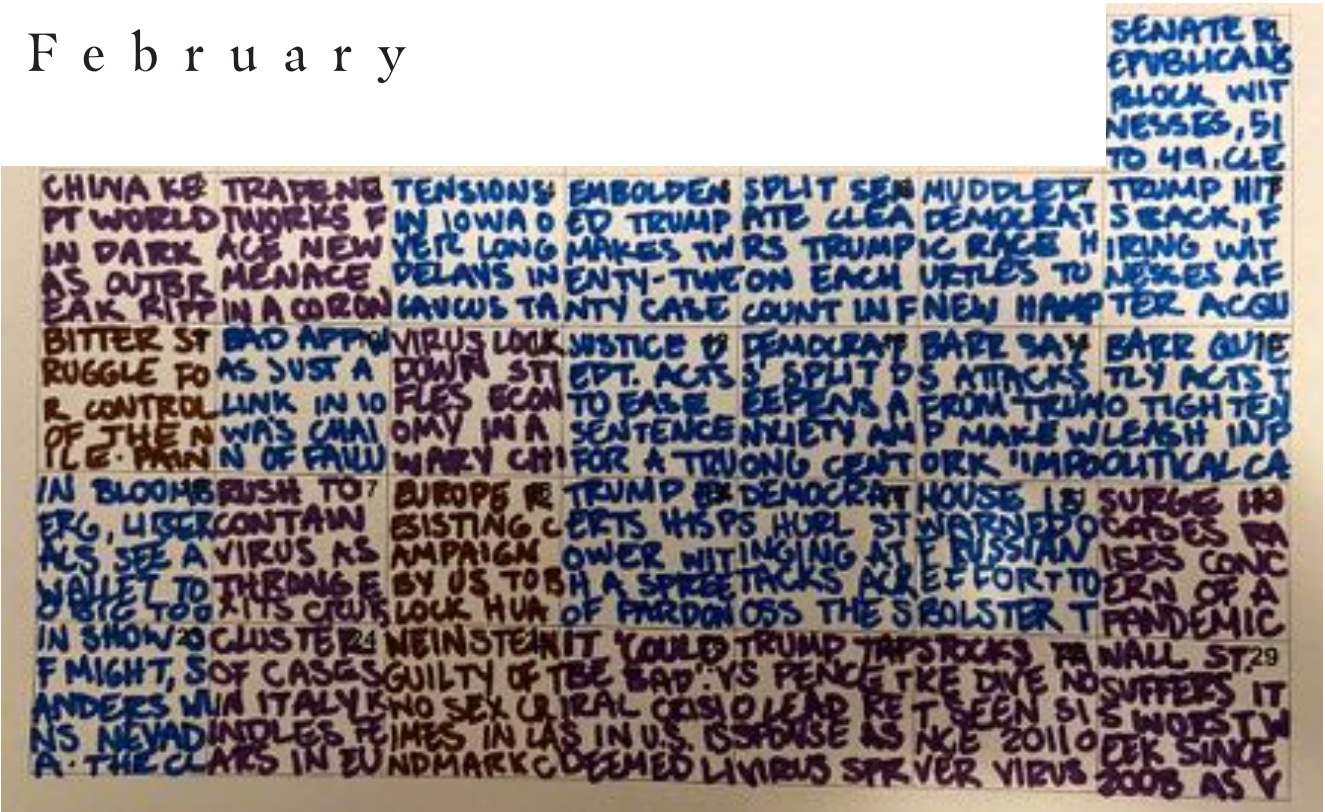
My mom won't let me take the subway. This is crazy. I can't believe this is happening. We're living in historic times. Did you wash your hands? It's just a cold, I don't have corona. *Harvey Weinstein Sentenced to 23 Years in Prison*. I started wearing a mask on the train. I can't even. This is unreal. Ugh, Key Food is out of Häagen Dazs. Did you watch the debates? *Major Sports Leagues in the U.S. Halt Play*. Wash your hands before you sit down. No more school? No prom? NO GRADUATION? Fuck that. LOL, look at this meme. *Join Zoom meeting*. I can't believe my grandparents are still leaving their house. I learned how to play guitar today. Both of my grandparents have pneumonia. *President Trump Declares a National Emergency*. My mom won't let me have visitors anymore. Stop blaming China. WASH YOUR FUCKING HANDS. What did we talk about before corona? *Restaurants, Nightclubs, Movie Theaters Closed*. If the subways are running tomorrow, I'll bring you a pot brownie. I'm going for a walk. Don't touch your face. My friends are home from college, but I can't even see them. The trip I was looking forward to my whole life was canceled because of a fucking virus. *U.S. Federal Reserve Cuts Its Target Interest Rate to Zero*. I miss you. It's been three days. These are historic times. The season is suspended, not canceled, keep training. I have no motivation. *Here Are the Main Coronavirus Myths We're Seeing that You Should Watch Out For*. This is the worst possible way for high school to end. This is a good time for you to repair your relationship with your brother, you know. *This is a War*. How am I supposed to work from home and help my kid attend online classes? I love you. I can't be stuck in here with you anymore. What did we talk about before corona?

The
Headline.

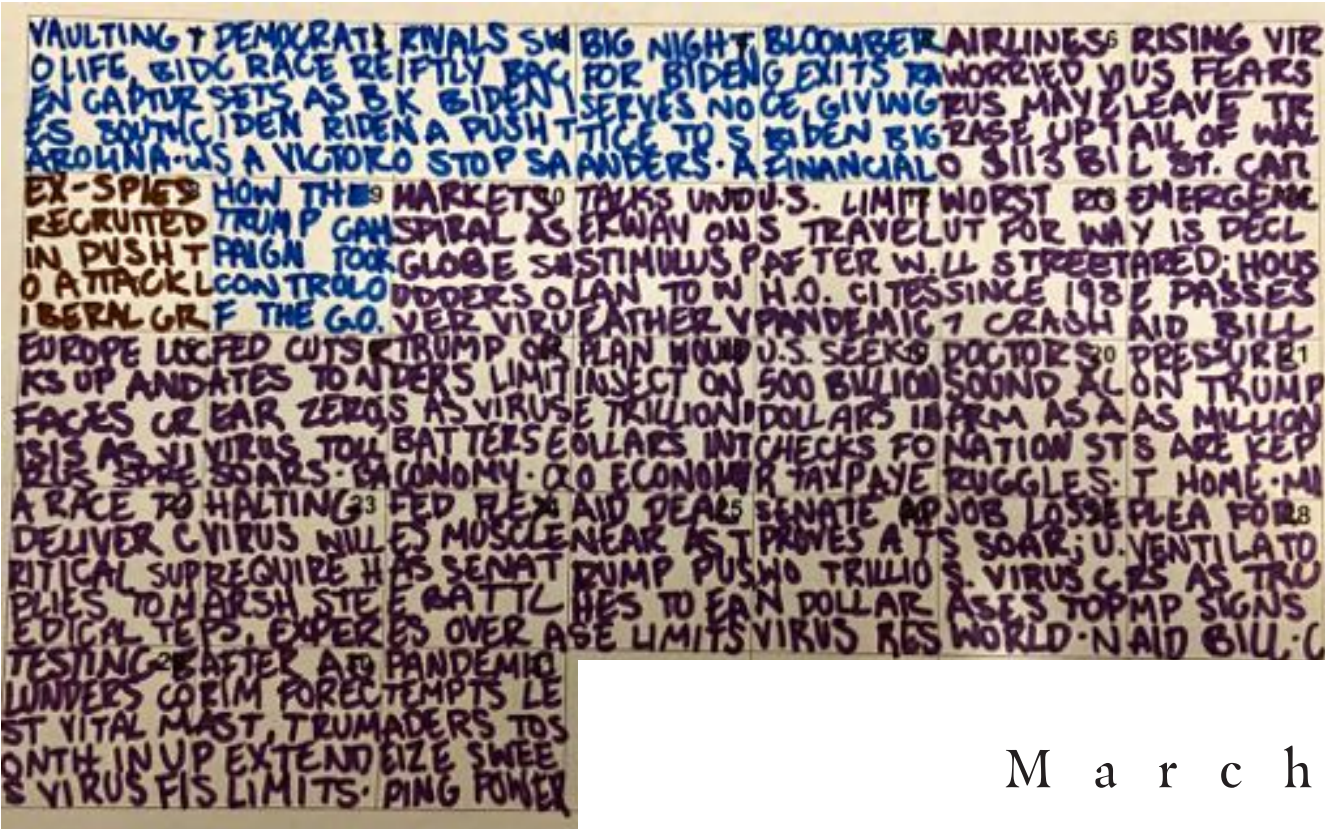
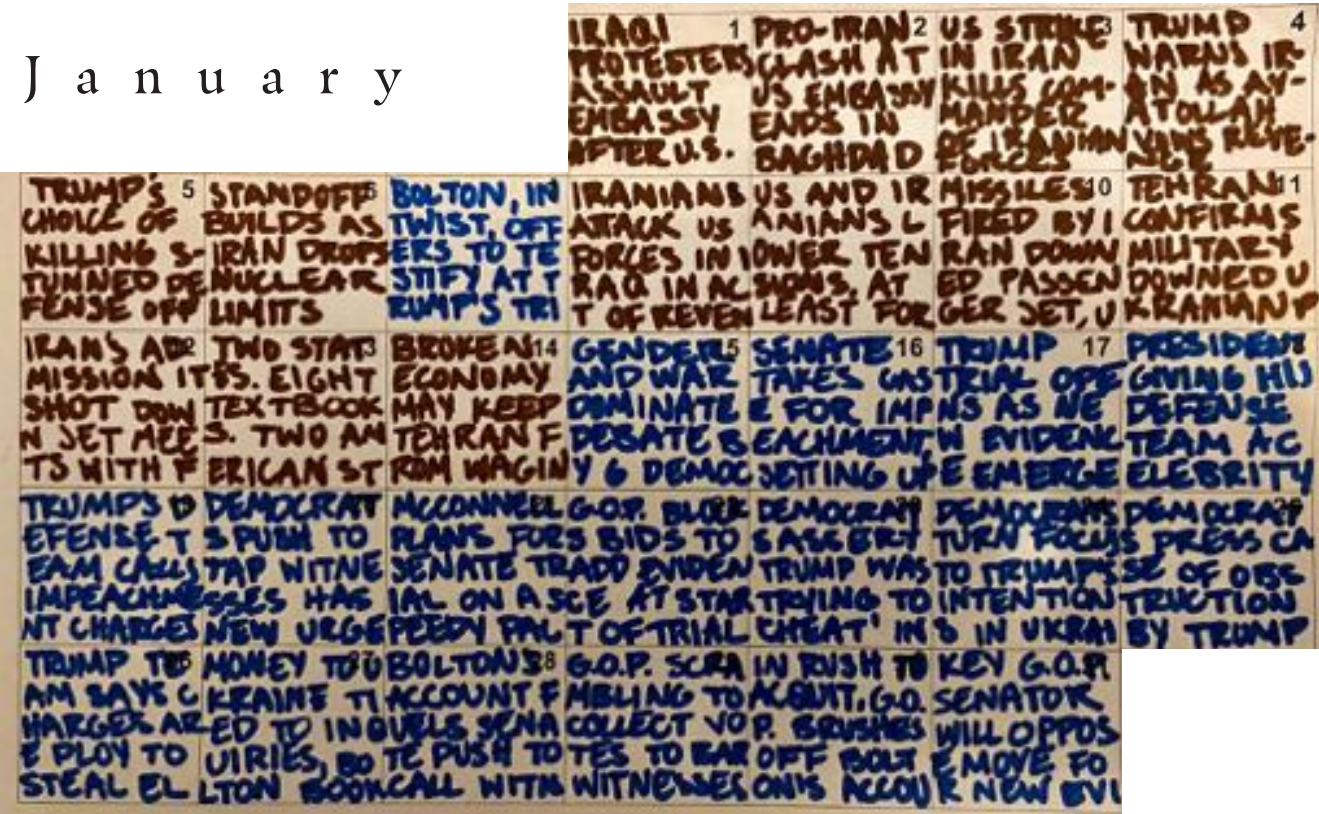
by Aidyn Levin

At the turn of the year, a pandemic began to creep across the world. As we in the United States worried about World War Three with Iran, the impeachment process of President Trump, and the race for the Democratic party’s nomination, COVID-19 was spreading in China. On February 2nd, coronavirus made the New York Times headlines for the first time. From March 10th through May 17th, with a single exception, every single daily headline was related to COVID-19 and the related shutdowns and economic fallout. But on May 30th, a different pandemic made front-page news: the pandemic of racism in the United States. Unlike the novel coronavirus, this disease was not a new one. And yet, for many Americans, the fight for Black lives seemed to just be beginning. Protests and marches, spurred by the violent murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police, spread like wildfire across the United States. This disease would not be cured by locking ourselves in our houses and practicing social distancing. The fight for Black lives required action. But the Black Lives Matter movement didn’t capture headlines to the same extent the coronavirus did. Between May 30th, with the first headline, and July 31st, 18 front-page New York Times headlines dealt with the fight for Black lives. In the same period, 30 were related to COVID-19, seven dealt with US politics and the forthcoming election, and eight were categorized as “other.” This project began in April as an attempt to capture how COVID-19 took over the world, eclipsing all other news topics that would have headlined in normal years. But now, these calendars tell a story of two pandemics, and the media coverage they have received.

February



January



March

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A State of Uncertainty

by anonymous

The days bleed into one another. Everything feels uncertain, I don't know how to react. People make jokes, stay home, stay safe, but don't. I miss my friends. I miss the normalcy of life. I miss knowing that everything was going to be okay, life was going to continue. Stay strong, they say on TV. Stay home. Do it for others. Do it for yourself.

If I don't get abs quick, learn a new language, will I have lost this hidden opportunity? Does my productivity become the measure of who I am?

My mom's friend Colette died last week. She was an asthmatic Black woman. I know that she will soon become a statistic, evidence of the overwhelming inequality which I unwittingly benefit from.

How do I remember a woman I have few memories of? How do I mourn the thousands lost each day, while I know that I am one of the lucky ones? I feel a loss, but I cannot feel it rightly. Or do I just feel lost? Does my boredom become constant, will it last years?

My great-grandmother, my father's

grandmother, turned 101 yesterday. She wore jewelry and makeup, and we talked to her over the phone. She couldn't understand what we were saying and did not remember who we were.

How do you make someone feel your love? How do you celebrate someone who will soon be dead without making everything seem futile?

My mother's father is more at risk than her, though he is many years younger. I feel worried all the time about him. I see how his words pierce the thick skin of my mother, and I see how his pain becomes hers. I am so uncertain about his true intentions. He has been in pain for 16 years, as long as I have been alive. Pain in the body leads to pain in the mind, which he forces onto others. He has lost everyone in his life except for my mother. I wrote an article that got published, and he shared it with everyone he knew. When I was thirteen, I found a letter saved from my mother to him along with a restraining order. She doesn't know what I know, that he told her she should die. That I would be better off without her.

I am his greatest pride, but what is he to me?

My mother has let go of her pain and anger

toward my grandfather. He still came to my bat mitzvah. We visit him often. We still have the kind of conversations that make me think, that take me out of the bubble of false liberal activism in which I live.

Do I have that kind of forgiveness inside? Is my heart big enough to love those who cause me pain?

My maternal grandmother died when I was seven.

How is it that I still feel her loss more tangibly than I feel this loss, of life as I know it? Is it because I was allowed to mourn? If someone's death isn't properly mourned, can we ever really let them go?

My mother does not have any siblings. My grandfather refuses to talk to one of his brothers. I love my younger sisters with everything in me, and I see how my mom struggles to care for her father alone.

Do my sisters have the courage to love the family they haven't known? Can I teach that love to them?

My two halves are split. My mothers have known only suffering, all the way back to Europe. They have known death, pain, and joy. This country, which holds the hopes and dreams of my ancestors, holds so much

suffering. I live a good life. I have not known the pain that plagues those with different skin, hair, customs, history. Though the American streets may not have been paved with gold, my great-great-grandfather made enough money to send for his entire family in Czechoslovakia. They refused to come. He bought a plot in the cemetery for each one of his children and their partners. When they die, they leave a place for their partner's name on the grave.

How does one live their life knowing that their existence will be brought to a close on a three-by-five plaque?

Beloved daughter, sister, and friend.

If I die today, will my life have meant something? Am I too young to change the world, or am I too old to start? How does my voice mean something when there are others whose voices need to be heard? Will the books about my generation be the last?

We are Generation Z.

But are we going to do what needs to be done?

Humanity is a collage of pain and joy.

What if this uncertainty is the new normal?

38th

&

Chicago

a photo series
by Ruby Stillman



Minneapolis, MN



I took these photographs at the very first protest in Minneapolis following the murder of George Floyd. Hundreds of community members gathered—angry and exhausted—to mourn his death and in protest of systemic racism and police brutality.

When I captured these moments, I had no idea of the ripple effect this protest would have or of the revolution that would ensue.



Just

by Emi Cooper

“Just,” an original narrative, is a set of pieces meant to be read together to tell the story of Charlie Cooper. The story is set in Illinois, where Charlie grew up in a poor and primarily Black area of Chicago. Due to the disadvantages that he had from growing up in this area, Charlie did not have access to an adequate education, which is the case for many Black people in this country. Because of the lack of an adequate education, he dropped out of high school before graduating to begin working as a janitor and make money for his family as best as he could. Years into his adult life, after getting married and having a child, he buys a necklace for his wife for their eighth anniversary. Little did he know, this would initiate a struggle through the injustice woven into our criminal justice system.

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The DAILY NEWS

Someone has finally been arrested for the tragic murder of Sally Hemings.

by Emilia Cooper

June 19, 1985

On Monday, May 8, 1985, Sally Hemings, a 5 foot tall, blonde schoolteacher was brutally raped and murdered during her daily run before work. As her family continues to grieve, an arrest has been made for this horrific offense. Charlie Cooper, a 6 foot 5 inch tall African American man, was pulled over by law enforcement for a minor traffic violation and for unclear reasons, his car was searched. When the police officer discovered a necklace that matched the piece of jewelry missing from Mrs. Hemings' body, Mr. Cooper was immediately arrested. Although the necklace seemed to be recently purchased as opposed to stolen, law enforcement is convinced that Charlie Cooper removed the necklace from Sally's dead body. Because Charlie's family was unable to afford bail, he is being detained at a jail which we are unable to provide the name of at this time. According to Alexander Huff, the son of the officer who arrested Charlie Cooper, he witnessed Charlie Cooper yank Sally behind a bush in Grant Park and Charlie exiting the premises alone, covered in lacerations. This witness testimony was submitted approximately 36 hours after the arrest was made. None of the marks that Mr. Huff described have been detected on Charlie Cooper's body. Sally Hemings' autopsy report concludes that traces of blood and skin were found under her fingernails, most likely due to her attempts to injure her attacker and escape. These DNA traces found under Sally's nails did not match Charlie Cooper's DNA. Mr. Cooper claims to have been stuck in traffic on his way to work during the attack of Sally Hemings but no one was able to confirm this alibi.

Beaten
to the ground.
Over and over again.
Beaten by abrasive guards
for reasons that I fail to grasp.
Beaten by broken men for reasons
that they cannot make sense of but I
forgive them because I know they have
endured pain far worse than what they inflict.
Pain in their faces and in their hearts because their
lives never mattered to anyone, not even the women
who birthed them or the men who pledged to protect them.
Why do I choose to tolerate the black and blue on my skin?
Why do I allow this place to eat away at my sanity cell by cell?
Because I am far from apathetic towards these people, I am them.
I am the men who grew up in the area that wealthy folks are afraid of.
I am the men who have never felt what it's like to be taken care of so they
beat others down to make themselves feel the security they never received.
I don't understand why we are fighting each other when really we should be
fighting the systemic racism that put us into this horrid jail and is going to
send us to a prison that will ruin our chance for pursuing a career ever again.
The pigs that call themselves protectors, the ones that walk all over our
humanity don't understand what it's like to be oppressed for life
based on something we were born with and cannot control.
People like us have two options, we don't live to 18
or we don't live as free human beings.

How-to Falsely Incarcerate a Man of Color

Essential Materials and Tools:

A primarily white jury

Inadequate legal representation for the defendant

A racist judge

A false testimony

STEP 1

This step is pretty straightforward. You must pull over a Black man for a minor traffic violation.

STEP 2

After this, make sure to search their car of any possible evidence that could make them look guilty for the crime, you may even have to plant evidence. In order to do so, you may need to use great force on the person so that they don't resist arrest. It is essential in this part of the process that you assert yourself and abuse the little bit of power that you have as a police officer. To prevent the feeling of guilt for being corrupt, remind yourself that you are doing this in order to make civilians feel safer because you have gotten another "criminal" off the streets.

STEP 3

Once you have detained this person, they are most likely not going to be bailed out, forcing them into jail. Once their humanity begins to wither away while they suffer in jail, it is time to move on.

STEP 4

This step is slightly flexible. You have the option of either paying someone to submit a fake witness testimony or you can convince someone that you trust that they would be doing the right thing by lying to the police. We recommend that you choose to ask someone that you're close to. If you do so, you must tell them that the person that you've arrested is guilty and that you need their witness testimony to put a criminal into prison. Once you have this testimony, incarcerating this person will become very feasible.

STEP 5

Fast forward to the day of the trial, after the indictment and the assignment of a corrupt public defender to the "criminal." The public defender won't work their hardest unless they are paid thousands of dollars, which the defendant certainly won't be able to afford. In order to ensure the incarceration of the defendant, it is important that the jury be primarily white because then they are less likely to have sympathy towards the Black man. The prosecutor will most likely find a way to exclude people of color from the jury so you don't have to worry about that at all. Also, the judge must be racist. In order to practice systemic racism, the people in power in our criminal justice system such as legislators, judges, law enforcement officials, etc. are required to discriminate against people of color.

Additional tips:

It is helpful to read propaganda written by white supremacists to make you feel like you are a doing a heroic thing by oppressing Black people.

If things are not going your way, throw money at the situation. It should resolve any issues you are having.

Do your best to prevent education of the defendant that could give him the ability to stop his incarceration.

Do whatever is necessary to remain apathetic towards the defendant.



photos by Maya Savin Miller and Emanuelle Sippy

BLANK SCREEN

MAIN TITLES

FADE IN:
INSIDE AN OVERCROWDED PRISON CELL. THE LIGHTS ARE FLUORESCENT AND THE ROOM IS BOILING HOT. INMATES ARE SWEATING. A SMALL GROUP OF BLACK MEN ARE DISCUSSING THEIR UNFORTUNATE CURRENT STATE OF BEING.

CHARLIE
I truly didn't murder that white girl. Them damn police officers was just trying to throw another Black man into prison.

PRISONER 1
I've been here for 18 years, half the Black men that walk in here are innocent.

PRISONER 2
I was only fourteen when I got put into this hellhole. For 20 years I've worked tirelessly in a Victoria's Secret factory, hardly receiving a remuneration for my hard work each day. I was planning on going to medical school to become a doctor before I got here. I was going to pull my family out of poverty, but I never got the chance.

CHARLIE
A doctor? Geez. Where I come from, a Black boy don't even think about going to school. I didn't even think that I had the power to make money when I got to be an adult.

PRISONER 1
Yeah. My biggest aspiration at fourteen years old was to become a store manager at Best Buy.

PRISONER 2
I can't blame you guys. People like us don't even have the opportunities to become half as successful as a white man. Not only do we experience social discrimination because of our race, but the systemic racism in the U.S. is ridiculous. Our criminal justice system—

CHARLIE

Let me stop you right there. I can't even understand what you trying to say. There's no point in talking about this anyway. This our life now, we don't really got a choice.

GUARD
Attention all inmates. Make your way to the cafeteria in five minutes!

PRISONER 2
That's not true. Have you ever heard of that college program in this prison? I heard that you can get a complete education here. You should apply, it may be worthwhile, Charlie.

CHARLIE
Yeah, okay man. I'll think about it, but I doubt they'll accept a guy who dropped out of high school to be a janitor.

PRISONERS 1 AND 2 MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE CAFETERIA FOR LUNCH. CHARLIE STAYS BACK FOR A COUPLE OF MINUTES AND CONTEMPLATES APPLYING TO THE COLLEGE PROGRAM WITHIN THE PRISON. HE IS CLEARLY DEEP IN THOUGHT. THIS IS ABRUPTLY INTERRUPTED BY A GUARD WHO AGGRESSIVELY INFORMS CHARLIE THAT HE MUST GO TO THE CAFETERIA FOR HIS MEAL. CHARLIE WALKS TOWARDS THE CAFETERIA BUT ON HIS WAY, HE PICKS UP A BROCHURE FOR THE PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAM. IT IS CLEAR THAT HE IS SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING APPLYING TO THE PROGRAM AND THAT HE MOST LIKELY WILL DO SO.

FADE OUT TO BLACK SCREEN.

THREE MONTHS LATER IS DISPLAYED ON BLACK SCREEN.

FADE IN:
INSIDE A PRISON HALLWAY. CHARLIE AND PRISONER 2 ARE LEAVING CLASS TOGETHER.

PRISONER 2
I'm getting pretty tired of these college classes. I feel like there's no point in me taking them. It's not like I'm getting out of here anytime soon and I doubt any law school will want to take in a felon.

CHARLIE

No. You saved my life by convincing me to apply to this program in the first place. I feel like I have purpose once again. Now I am not going to let you quit or give up hope. I at least owe you that much.

PRISONER 2

That’s really nice of you, man. I just don’t know if I should be doing all this work for nothing.

CHARLIE

I mean, I guess you’re right. Why should we work our butts off for an opportunity we are never going to get? An opportunity for a better life that no one is willing to give us.

BOTH MEN SOLEMNLY LOOK DOWN AT THE GROUND IN SILENCE. CHARLIE FROWNS IN THOUGHT AND THEN LOOKS UP.

CHARLIE

Instead of working towards something we won’t ever get, let’s work hard take what we deserve.

PRISONER 2

I’m not sure where you’re going with this.

CHARLIE

I am not going to let this system ruin my life. I am going to use it to get another shot at a career. This is how I’m going to do it. First, I’ll finish my college education in prison. Then, once I appeal and I am released from prison, I will pursue a real career and pull my family out of poverty.

PRISONER 2 CHUCKLES AND WAVES CHARLIE GOODBYE. THE MEN PART WAYS AND WALK IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS. THE SMILE ON CHARLIE’S FACE DOESN’T DISAPPEAR.

FADE TO BLACK SCREEN.



March 18, 1996

To:

Mr. Brendanawicz
55 West Elm Street
Chicago, IL 42890

My name is Charlie Cooper. I have been a janitor at St. Rogers High School for nine years and never have I harmed another human being in my entire life. I certainly did not commit the heinous crime against Ms. Hemings. Growing up, I always tried my best to reflect kindness towards others through my actions. I am a thoughtful person who wouldn't dare to intentionally hurt someone else.

Not only does the extensive evidence involving this case indicate that I was not guilty of committing this crime, but my record illustrates my kind behavior throughout life and should inform one that I am not capable of committing a crime like this. I have never had a single legal infraction nor have I been accused of wrongdoing during my life as a young adult. I have spent years being punished for something that I did not do. It is time that I am given another chance at life; a career, being an active member of society, using my experiences to fight against oppression and for social justice. I will only be able to fulfill these aspirations if I am released from prison.

You may reach me at the Metropolitan Center, Chicago, IL. Thank you very much for considering my appeal letter. I appreciate your time and consideration for my wellbeing.

Charlie Cooper

JUDGE: We will now hear from the defendant, Charlie Cooper. Will you be representing yourself?

CHARLIE: Yes, ma'am.

(Nervously bites nails)

JUDGE: You may begin.

(Nods slightly at Charlie)

CHARLIE: Good morning your honor and thank you for being here today. I understand that you are an incredibly busy person and I appreciate your generosity for re-opening my case. I am here to convince you of one fact and one fact only. I did not rape and murder Sally Hemings. The true cause for my incarceration is the darkness of my skin.

(Uncomfortably fidgets with his hands)

My entire life, I have been crippled by racial discrimination that has been built into our society. The society forcibly built by the very hands of my enslaved ancestors. For hundreds of years we have been oppressed beginning with slavery and currently with systemic racism. Not only are we socially looked down upon for being Black, but we are targeted by the criminal justice system in this country. Growing up I didn't have access to the same quality education as my white counterparts because I lived in a poor Black neighborhood that no one cared about and couldn't afford to attend private school. Because of this inequality, my life goal was to simply get a job, which was why I spent my life as a janitor in a high school. This unfortunate lifestyle was all due to the blackness of my skin and the blackness of my culture.

The reason I was detained initially was because I was targeted by a racist police officer. Because I didn't have a proper education and because I did not have the courage to fight law enforcement discrimination, I wasn't aware that I had the constitutional right to refuse search. Furthermore, I allowed the cop to search my car. When he found the necklace that I bought for my wife for our anniversary, he assumed I had stolen it from the dead body of Sally Hemings, despite the fact that the necklace was in a gift box placed inside of a shopping bag. I would like to submit the receipt from the purchase of this necklace as Exhibit A. Not only did I have this evidence to indicate that I did not commit the crime, but the DNA that was found under the fingernails of Sally Hemings did not match my DNA. I would like to submit her autopsy report as Exhibit B. I presented both of these artifacts to my public defender, but he refused to submit them in court unless I paid him five thousand dollars. I obviously could not afford this, maybe if there weren't so many mitigating factors that prevented me from having a sustainable career I could have even had enough money to afford adequate legal representation.

I would also like to point out that the testimony that was submitted by someone who claimed to have seen me walk away from the crime scene covered in lacerations was put into law enforcement’s custody after I was arrested. I would like to submit the medical examination report that concluded that I did not have any of the lacerations that the testimony described as Exhibit C.

If this evidence is not enough to convince you that I did not commit this crime, I don’t know what will. I have spent over a decade in prison, endeavoring to get a college education at a weak prison education program all the while being abused like a dog that no one wants. I have suffered for all these years as a punishment for a crime that I did not commit. It is time that I am released from this oppressed way of living. I have already wrongly had my life swept from the tips of my fingers for this false accusation, I only want to be free. I am sick and tired of being sick and tired only because of the color of my skin.

(Shakes with rage and passion as he gets deeper into his statement)



photo by Maya Savin Miller

Charlie Cooper
279 Jefferson Street
Chicago, IL 42897
charliecooper@gmail.com
786-254-8260

School Objective: NYU Law School

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

- Passionate
- Completed many community service hours
- Has a personal connection to criminal justice
- Interned for criminal justice organization

EDUCATION

University of Illinois - college graduate 1991

GED - 1987

Ella Baker School – middle school graduate 1965

LEADERSHIP/JOB EXPERIENCE

Intern 1999-2001 – Justice League Chicago, Chicago, IL

- Ran errands and took notes for Justice League employees
- Completed research for the organization about police reform

Employee 1967-1985 - St. Rogers High School, Chicago, IL

- Served as a janitor
- Made minor repairs on the school building

VOLUNTEER/COMMUNITY SERVICE EXPERIENCE

Tutored young men in the Metropolitan Center 1995-1998 - Educational Alliance, Chi-
cago, IL

- Volunteered at a program for prisoners between the ages of 18 and 21
- Helped them apply to the prison educational programs

Senior Center Volunteer 2001-2002 – Educational Alliance, New York, NY

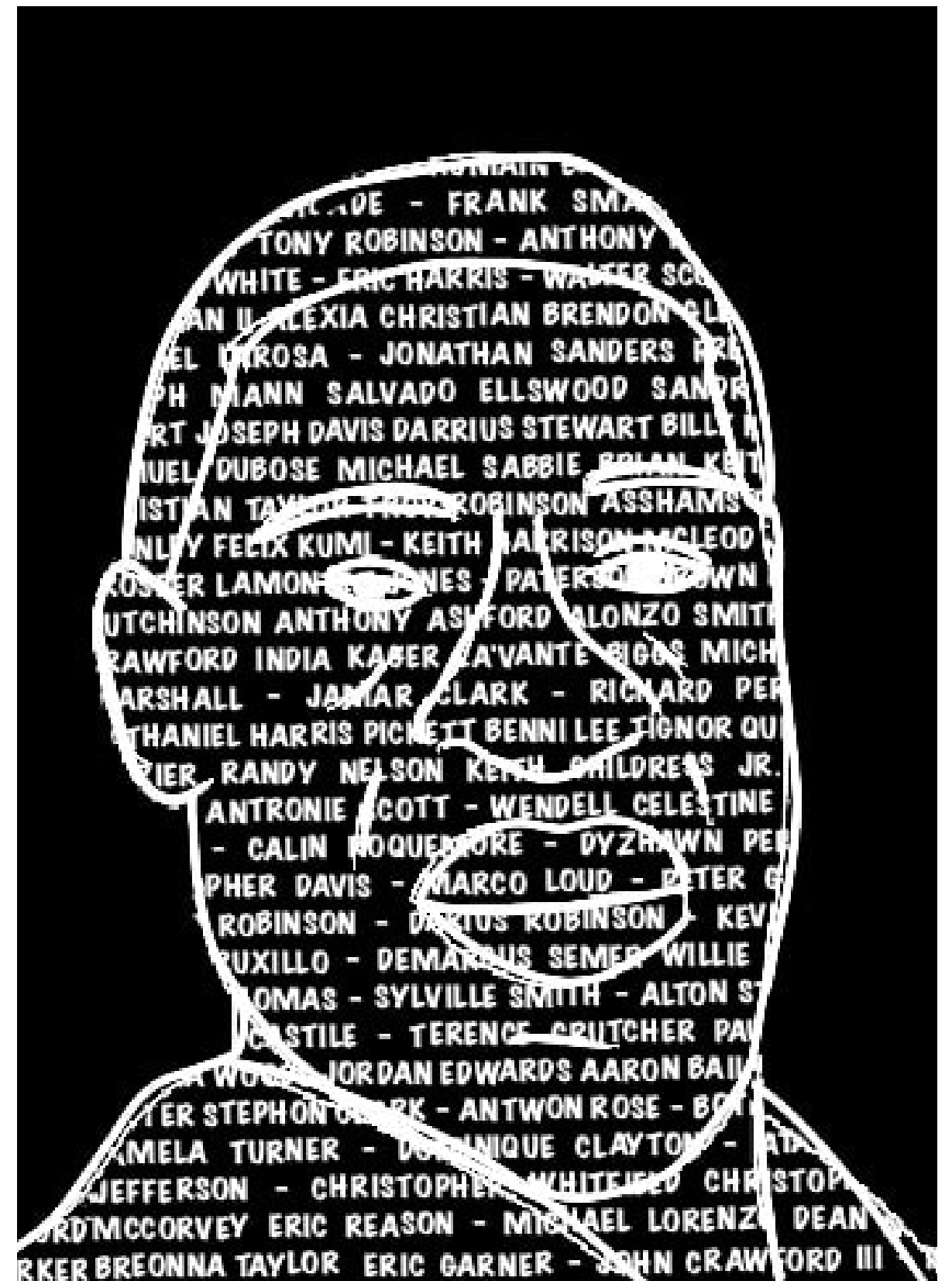
- Assisted in serving meals to chronically mentally ill, homeless senior citizens in
congregate setting

SAY HIS NAME, SAY THEIR NAMES.

by Gertie Angel

The United States has continued to fail to offer any semblance of refuge for Black people in a land that they were taken to by force and then forced to build. There was no sanctuary for George Floyd nor Breonna Taylor—they were murdered by the very people assigned to “protect” the people. Indeed, the perpetual American attack on Black lives and the continual exploitation of Black bodies reflects that there has never been any true sanctuary for Black Americans.

editor's *note:* *Maya* *Savin* *Miller*



The Tide that Doesn't Come In



The Woods by Eliana Shapere

by Ilana Drake

As Kenny Chesney's voice sings "Cause the boat's in the bay and it's calling my name, so I'm heading on out the door," we look underneath our pale feet. The clear crystal color of the water allows us to look down at the orange fish swimming, swiveling through the water, taking gulps of air in at a time. Their puffy eyes look at the ocean floor like it's this large world that they have never seen before.

Our toes dip into the cold water and we look around the cotton candy sky. Our eyes grow as we realize that this is a moment that counts. We are living in a world that we have not seen enough of. While the trees a few feet away stand together, our people are split on the seven continents, each person celebrating the day differently.

The ladder leading off the raft creaks as we each try to get into the water. Our heads go under, and just for this second, we are like the orange fish that are so small. Our goggles stay over us and we try to go under, but we can't. There's a force that sets us apart and that doesn't allow us to sink. It's been ingrained in our hearts and heads since we were born. We can't explore the green seaweed that takes up room on the bottom of the floor. We can't look around without turning around and seeing the "other side" of the ocean.

The raft above our heads sways back and forth as we try to descend into the blue. Our feet paddle quickly and we look both ways, just as we would with cars rushing. We slowly float back up for air, feeling our bodies rising like the sun in the morning. We bobble up and the bubblegum sky is over us.

On the other side of the ocean, there may be people running around on the sand, trying to escape their realities. There could be children on the shore building sandcastles with their bare hands and adults trying to pick up the trash around the ocean. We have heard about the thousands of water bottles along the soft, silk sand. Stories have circulated about the dolphins being brought with the tide onto the sand.

We hoist ourselves up using the edges of the raft and push our legs over the top of the structure. Our legs dangle as we use our chests to climb, yet we are almost there. We are on the edge of the raft, in the middle of the ocean. And as the pink sun sets right above us, just for a second,

we realize that we are living in a different time.

what's a
diving
by Emanuelle Sippy
board?



i've
never gone swimming
in the city fountain.
the honorary streams of firefighters and
horses don't cool me down.
but when i look at the mothers and children wading in
the drip-drop down man o' war's neck,
i don't think of too-cool-for-school-spontaneity.
they aren't drawn to waters as lawbreakers.
their demeanor doesn't recall teenage-risk-flaunting.
they're not swimming in a city fountain because there is a thrill to
shallow water

where you
can't
dive
or jump
or cannonball,

though no sign postage says so, a doctor might.
not to say firefighters live a cushy life, just
the moms swimming aren't commemorated for risking their lives,
are at the door wading, while a loved one dies,
aren't owning the horse jockey's ride.
they swim
in the water,
and i wonder how long, not why.



author's note

Living on a main street of a former border state, I'm only minutes away from what used to be a slave auction. The juxtaposition of firefighters, rightfully honored by a fountain, and the unrecognized work of the women & children who swim in it strikes me, especially in this moment when only some are deemed essential workers.



Until we can all swim freely,
we need to close the pool.

*no
diving*
THE J GIRLS TEAM