

Warrior Writers Black Veteran artists speak:

Haiku for Ms. Taylor:
Do not say my name
Force it out my murderers
Like cries for mercy

Haiku for Mr. Floyd:
Do not film my death
Knuck if you buck my niggas
Cuz BLACK LIFE MATTERS!

Dear Service Members,

Don't let Orange Voldemort get you sent to Leavenworth. The attorney general is NOT in your chain of command, and therefore can not issue lawful orders. It's time to drop that pack...before it's full up with the blood and bones of innocent people. Need options? @vetsaboutface and the GI Rights Hotline can help!

Resistance is growing and the narrative is changing. And the people are winning. So deeply grateful to be alive and to be witness and to be a worker. Let's keep pushing fam.

- Chantelle Bateman, Iraq veteran, U.S. Marine Corps ~ Chantelligent1 (Instagram)

I can't wait for the day when all my friends regardless of color speak out noticeably against hate.
I can't wait for the day I don't worry about being black and just being.
I can't wait for skin color not to matter when pursuing life, liberty and justice.
But here I am ... waiting.

If you're worried about people dying because of the riots, you're late.
The riots are because of the protest.
The protests are because poc are dying.
Everyone catch up so we can stop people from dying.

To all my white friends who have spoken out over the last few days I want to say thank you. Your reach ears that we can't. It helps more than you know.

To all of my poc who find themselves sad, angry, and exhausted. Hang in there. You shouldn't have to, but I know you can. With every success we get closer to our goal of equality. So please never stop.

To those who stay silent. Well, it's being noticed. Silence and the evil of complicity walk hand in hand on the path to violence. Violence committed to poc. Violence committed to people who don't have a choice but to deal with the horrific world where no place is safe.

Again I can't wait till the day this type of hate is behind us. It will only happen when we unite to make it happen.

- Jason Mays, Iraq veteran, U.S. Army

"FML"

Ancient Babylon, modern day inferno,
this living, wheezing hellhole has inhabitants.

Their peering EYES serve as portals, transporting me to a profound space deep inside of my own mind.

Here the air is heavy, I FIND IT HARD TO BREATHE... Brainwashed to see evil, but instead what I saw was people. JUST LIKE ME...

& what terrified me most, what terrorized me most, was the realization; I've become the savage. A glimpse into my cracked perception...

Combat geared-up, sweat & teared-up, time to rock & rock so embrace the suck. The ultimate definition of adrenaline, Kevlar vested, hate morphed, transformed by how much they feared us; fuck...

Somewhere amongst the flying shards of razor sharp shrapnel, while floating down the rivers of dried up blood, I've become the very thing I swore an oath to fight!

While under the justification of following orders, I've strayed away from my conscience. In order to remain loyal to THIS country, I've committed treason against myself.

The shadow cast from old glory isn't shady enough to hide dismembered bodies or disguise pre-meditated murder. Documented facts being the furthest thing from the truth. Scars & gripes...

RED soaked cammies, ripped apart by AK rounds, 7.62 caliber.

WHITE smoke grenades used to mark the landing zone for medevac helos.

BLUE skies, hypnotize my sense of time, trapped in an infinite minute.

The vibrations from my heartbeat pump out of my ears like mosque speakers, as I watch the aircraft disappear past the horizon.

The subtle sounds of propellers faint in the distance awaken to the nitemare I presently reside in this grim reality.

"WHAT THE FUCK ARE WE DOIN HERE?!"

Mind hazy, filling with the rolling clouds which bring on the fog of war. No time to let the storm fester, this is where INSTINCTS TURN ON & EMOTIONS TURN OFF.

Well except for rage, I need that, because we're bust'n through that muthafucka!

Corners cleared, scanning sectors of fire 360 degrees. Looking for every direction for any excuse to unleash hostility.

The smell of HATRED undreath my dragon scales is complimented only by the taste of TERROR on the tip of my forked tongue.

I trace the barrel of my gun which leads to lock EYES with an 8-year old Angel. Her naive gaze sets me free from my bloodlust.

In this moment I'm warped back to a time where I'm the kid with the intimidation in my EYES. Watching helplessly as my house is ransacked by destructive detectives.

Members of the (N)ew (Y)ork City (P)rofilng (D)epartment.

I did to her exactly what was done to me... I see now, I'm an ignorant hypocrite.

A scared little boy who killed innocence...

- Hipólito Arriaga, USMC veteran who served in Iraq twice

I STILL CAN'T BREATHE

A couple of years ago, I asked a friend what a Black man should do when he is stopped by a policeman. My friend, a highly ranked police officer, said you should do whatever the officer tells you to do.

"What if the officer is wrong?"

"It doesn't matter," he said, "avoid the conflict, just do what he says. The officer controls the circumstances. You can sort out the ethics later in court." It seemed like sound advice. Except, for George Floyd there can be 'no later in court.' He's dead. He was arrested, restrained, handcuffed and choked to death by a cop's knee on his throat. Three other guardians of the public order held George down while he was killed. I wonder what advice my friend would give after that.

We are all wondering.

People identify with George Floyd, particularly black and concerned white people.

"They have their knees on all our necks, they are choking us to death."

"I can't breathe..."

Not really. We have choices. George was immobilized, cuffed, face down on the ground. He had no choice. He couldn't breathe. All he could do was beg to be allowed to breathe; he asked for his mother. In fact, we are more like the other officers on the scene, the accessories to the murder. Or perhaps we are like the bystanders, the witnesses to the crime, asking the cops to show leniency while taking cell phone videos. Still, the true transgression was not the lynching but rather our compliance with the white supremacy which framed the atrocity. Stifled by racism, breathing becomes difficult. African-American men, my age or older, know the story of Emmett Till.

In 1955 Emmett and I lived on the Southside of Chicago. He was 14; I was 12. As was the custom, During the Summer, he visited his Uncle down in Mississippi. He was kidnapped by white men. They accused him of wolf whistling at a white woman. They tortured and lynched him. Jet, a Black magazine, published a picture of Emmett's mutilated corpse. Thousands of us cascaded by Rayner's Funeral Home to view his body. His mother kept the casket open so the world "could see what they did to my son." The desecrated remains I saw in that glass walled casket stayed in my nightmares long into adult life. The horror did not end there.

Because of the publicity generated by the murder there was a trial. A jury of twelve white men heard the testimony of eyewitnesses, viewed damning evidence. They took a little over an hour to acquit the later self-admitted murderers. One juror said it wouldn't have taken that long except "they stopped for a pop." It did not end there.

Instead of creating the atmosphere of fear as intended, that lynching became the last straw after so many burdens of oppression. It became part of the conscious narrative of the modern civil rights movement. Rosa Parks said she remembered Emmett when she refused to give up her seat on the Montgomery bus later that year. Upon seeing a picture of the mutilated Emmett, a young

incensed Cassius Clay later known as Muhammed Ali was prompted to vandalize a local train yard to vent his frustration. My friend and leader of Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964, Fannie Lou Hamer, told me that she often used Emmett's memory to inspire her work in the Movement when things got particularly tough. It helped deal with the fears.

What did we do with the fears? We used them to generate the energy which led to the marches, the rallies, the voter registration campaigns, the early morning organizing, the crazy notion that we could end racial discrimination. We used the hateful act of our brother's murder to reconstruct love, love for each other as mutually oppressed people, love for a movement which created possibilities of hope for the future. We used that love to breathe and that breath to sing. Those songs helped transform the world.

The most hopeful story that I have heard in this most catastrophic of times comes from the sheriff in Flint, Michigan. Trying to restrain a group of protestors marching against the lynching of George Floyd and demanding the arrest of his killers, he came to a stumbling block. He said he wasn't sure what to do next. So, he chose to do the inconceivable. He took a breath. He took off his helmet, put down his riot control club, and joined the protestors. He showed us our next step.

We must take off our helmets so that we are revealed. Beyond the helmet we will see others as human beings. We must put down our clubs so that we can come together in peace and love. We must breathe. Then and only then, naked, vulnerable and loving, we can join together in our march towards justice!

- A short narrative by Charles Dumas, Navy Veteran

"SONG OF CYCLOPS"

Polyphemus

alone in your cave

I can hear you

In your dark place

who would watch

on a moon-surface hillside

your brothers and

sisters circle in an

windswept orbit

from land to land.

Ramallah

Port au prince

Baltimore

Fallujah.

- Carlos Sirah, U.S. Army Veteran
