

Segregation Continuum

after Ella Baker & Glenn Ligon

layered in black on black on white canvas
we who believe in freedom cannot rest
looking at the way we look looking forward
stepping back by way of upturned neck by way
of three steps back looking black coded by way
of black modes by way of reconstruction by way
of insurrections by way of colored fountains by way
of elected democrats or elected aristocrats
it is obvious we are a presence
though we have been discomforted
at school gates at rental offices at museum entrances
even we cannot rest who believe in freedom
we are to some an irritant an ire some tire some lot
we do not subscribe just because something comes
out of a leader's mouth out of the mouth of a tyrant
so we are too difficult we are much too difficult
we are much too aware we are much too marked
we are all that matter to us that matter
we are the most comforting presence by way of
nod by way of pound by way of sup
we are always fashionable when we do not try
we do not try to insult except when we do
but we do not hesitate to speak of the things
about which we agree or disagree we participate
at the level of our thinking by way of our thinking
by way of our mass expression
we who believe in freedom cannot rest
where once hundreds & even thousands of we
ordinary people had taken a position—that made us—
very uncomfortable when we decided for instance
to walk rather than take the bus

Dark and Lovely After Takeoff (A Future)

Nobody straightens their hair anymore.
Space trips & limited air supplies will get you conscious quick.

My shea-buttered braids glow planetary
as I turn unconcerned, unburned by the pre-take-off bother.

"Leave it all behind," my mother'd told me,
sweeping the last specs of copper thread from her front porch steps &

just as quick, she turned her back to me. Why
had she disappeared so suddenly behind that earthly door?

"Our people have made progress, but, perhaps,"
she'd said once, "not enough to guarantee safe voyage

to the Great Beyond," beyond where Jesus
walked, rose, & ascended in the biblical tales that survived

above sprocket-punctured skylines &
desert-dusted runways jeweled with wrenches & sheet metal scraps.

She'd no doubt exhale with relief to know
ancient practices & belief died hard among the privileged, too.

Hundreds of missions passed & failed, but here
I was strapped in my seat, anticipating—what exactly?

Curved in prayer or remembrance of a hurt
so deep I couldn't speak. Had that been me slammed to the ground, cuffed,

bulleted with pain as I danced with pain
I couldn't shake loose, even as the cops aimed pistols at me,

my body & mind both disconnected
& connected & unable to freeze, though they shouted "Freeze!"

like actors did on bad television.
They'd watched & thought they recognized me, generic or bland,

without my mother weeping like Mary,
Ruby, Idella, Geneava, or Ester stunned with a grief

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Yona Harvey

our countrymen refused to see, to
acknowledge or cease initiating, instigating, &

even mocking in the social networks,
ignorant frays twisted & bent like our DNA denied

but thriving & evident nonetheless—
You better believe the last things I saw when far off lifted

were *Africa, Africa, Africa*
Africa, Africa, Africa, Africa, Africa

& though it pained me to say it sooner:
the unmistakable absence of the Great Barrier Reef.

