

AUNT CHLOE

2020 ISSUE YEAR

Life Sentences by Teresa Leggard

(for Oscar Grant, Tavares McGill, Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, Rekia Boyd, John Crawford III, Ousmane Zongo, Ayanna Jones, Alonso Ashley, Miriam Carey, Aaron Campbell, Yvette Smith, Eric Garner, Ezell Ford, Pearlie Golden, Ramarley Graham, Tarika Wilson, Dante Parker, Kimani Gray, Shantel Davis, Kendrec McDade, Timothy Russell, Malissa Williams, Steven Eugene Washington, Tyisha Miller, Ervin Jefferson, Patrick Dorismond, Kathryn Johnson, Victor Steen, Gabriella Navarez, Timothy Stansbury Jr., Orlando Barlow, Wendell Allen, Ronald Madison, James Brisette, Levar Jones, Vonderrick Myers, Akai Gurley, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Darrien Hunt, Dontre Hamilton, Jemare Reid, Brandon Tate-Brown, Tony Robinson, Freddie Gray Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, Jacob Blake, Daniel Prude and others)

i

You have the right to remain silent;
anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.
You have the right to speak to an attorney.
If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you.
Do you understand these rights as they have been read to you?

ii

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iii

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I never really knew someone could hate you just by looking at you*

<https://www.revolt.tv/2020/6/25/21303243/black-woman-set-on-fire-madison>

She drove
to her brother's house
then the hospital
said it was lighter fluid
at a red light
in her blind spot
someone yelled "Nigger!"

I don't know them

They don't know me

What would make her
turn around?
She's lived here
on the east side of Madison
all her life
down the street
from the farmers' market

...now to have this memory

that sort of ruined all the [] memories

Nothing provokes
like hate
a rancid white
aged to perfection
opened up
and allowed to breathe.
Allowed to breathe.

(You know oxygen feeds flames?)

The very thing
meant to sustain—
death by life
life a death sentence
What do you call a nation
built on stolen land
by stolen people?
A curse
A hex
A litany of lies
A baptism of bullshit
Louisville
Minneapolis
DC

But we are not the flame.
We are the entity with it.
We are the fourth—
Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego,
and there was another
and they would not burn
and we would not sink.
You dumped us into the ocean
We walked across the sea floor
and emerged
immersed in salt and pearls
dripping with life.
And we walked together
Each Black step
is every Black step.
Each Black body
is every Black body.
We the soil
we the air
we the water
we the trees you hanged us from...
and now
we the fire too
Now, we are everything.
And what is left for you?
Only what you've made
with your own hands,
death and destruction
disease and lack
suspicion and greed—
keep it all.
Keep everything you have wrought
the laws & codes & loopholes
nonessentials.
[Then] get back on your boat
sail out
into the vast,
oil-slick-rich depths
and drown.

*Direct quote from burn survivor, Althea Bernstein, for *www.Revolt.TV*