We Didn't Start The Fire.

black /blak/ • adj. 1 having no color from the absorption of all or nearly all incident light (like coal or soot or determination). 2 a of the human group having dark colored skin, esp. of African descent. b of or relating to black people. 3 an historical endeavor to perservere (as in come hell or high water).

The medical examiner who autopsied Michael Brown described the six bullets to his body, and two graze wounds. Brown had soot, or unburned gunpowder, on one hand with a graze wound, indicating the shot was fired from a distance of 6 to 9 inches, the doctor said. One shot pierced a lung, another penetrated an eye. The final shot was to the top of his head.—Autopsy report on Michael Brown

Oh, yeah. It ain't over, mutha-fuckas!!-Ice Cube

We's a consequence

of the second law of thermodynamics: Anything that can happen

will happen. Like Murphy's Law

code-switched to stereotype: C.P.T. become metaphor. Walking through hell

with a five gallon can of gasoline strapped to our backs,

& five sticks of dynamite clenched in our teeth.

We's drowned at the bottom of the sea. Calcium sign posts vomited from the belly of a slave ship.

Lynched from a tree.

Chained

beneath a Mississippi high noon

with a bit placed in our mouth: Is it hot out here, or is that in-just-us?

We's blackness

handcuffed to a body. The flyblown stench of statistic: Michael Brown's dead body remained in the street for four hours in the summer heat.

We's pecan-tan to blue-black kaleidoscope. Melanin blessed misery tire & chained to second-caste like a pit bull. Harnessed it to generate semblance supply voltage for Tasers & electric chairs. We's biology with a morbid sense of humor.

We's radical optimism. A dated activism baptized in the river MLK. We's open-mouthed need.

Defined: Weshallovercome . . .

despite Obama still ain't made black folk bulletproof.

We's last nerve tried, again & again & again. We's riots & funerals

riots & arrests

riots & political sound-bites

riots & nothing changes. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. . . like shit happens!

We's black revenge fantasy where justice is dispensed with all sort of remorseless projectiles of ballistic metal. We's who? would willingly give wings to such rage. This is how the apparatus they propel us into begins to multiply de-nigger-ation.

We's reaching into a pocket extensive furtive movements selling untaxed "loosies" reaching for the cop's gun unresponsive to repeated threats to rewire our non-compliance. An adjective of rebellion.

Would rather drink muddy water

[etc.].

We's car chase into a hail of 137 bullets. We's po-lice "justified" murder: Black & unarmed posted to YouTube with 2,000,000 hits.

We's "all lives matter" which necessitates "black lives matter."

We's 1.5 to two seconds between the arrival of po-lice & another dead child.

We's knowin': While some things change most remain the same still composing the Blue(s) in ebony veins.

We's "why? should we follow their laws."

Note: C.P.T (Colored People Time)

Previously published in *Eleventh Transmission & The Oakland Review*.

El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz

1. The Lost Years

The soon-lion began, was Malcolm Little once, the man-child soon zoot-suit hustler & thief, soon Detroit Red snared in the U.S. of Penitentiary, like 90 goin' north of freedom, east of where his murdered father

once sermonized the Black Train Homeward.

An incremental stealth

stranded in a hungerland of great prosperity, like every black man who stores his hope in an unsure place—always looking for something better than Made in Amerikkka—aware

of that which is most dangerous, of duplicity, of that which is to be withheld & granted selectively: language that says one thing & means

an entirely other.

He lion wait where the freedman fades causality, with courage spitting bullets, as complex as revolution with the swagger of conviction, as willful as by any means necessary.

2. Up, you mighty race; you can accomplish what you will!

The dignity of the idea, invisible, but undiminished, our jazz & our slang—coalescing holy dervish of the inner-city blues faced with the intransigence of the outside gaze & fragmented into stereotypes of blackness:

Minor Al Capone in the U.S. of Negro. Prisoner no. 22843, compressing the moan that becomes a cry that shines forth faceted light, like a tribe of hammers striking railroad spikes because we remembered

that we could.

He rose, renewed, renamed became much more than there was time for him to be: Orator supreme reborn X of messianic vernacular, his incandescent glare conjugated defiant while black.

3. What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow Out of this stony rubbish?

First minister of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam, rising from the belly of the beast, from the mist of segregation per Elijah, fleshing out our dreams of freedom from the hate that made hate:

this liberty, this beautiful & terrible thing, this needful to man as air.

Testing fate between gravity & Allah, between how much pressure to make a diamond, between each word a logical Word spoken as truth, as more militant metaphor: lion-like brave & unafraid, like why delay anger that must rage & exclaim & grow ancient?

Our collective blackness, a voiceless, massing maelstrom of moths seeking out our own burning, as needs must when the devil drives.

I've seen a man drown in an inch of determination, a love of self wielding the eventuality of a force greater than our weaknesses.

I've seen a man wrecked in noon but having ridden the eddies of the sun, buried alive, neck-deep in what only he perceives & passionately dreaming the Black Train Homeward; the messiah, betrayed with a kiss. . .

our manhood, our living, black manhood into the redeeming pressure of Allah & carrying the scent of things lost in the fire.

Note: incorporated into this poem are italicized fragments by June Jordan (2nd stanza), Robert Hayden (7th & 9th stanza), T.S. Eliot (3rd subtitle) & Ossie Davis (12th stanza)

Previously published in *Dead Flowers: A Poetry Rag; Mandala Literary Journal; Portside.org & OTHER. Magazine.*