

Commentary on *Oaklandish*

I wrote this story so long ago it feels at this point like someone else is responsible. I remember I was reading Saul Bellow's *Adventures of Augie March* and a bunch of Pynchon, which obviously bleeds through. I was in a stage in my writing where every story I wrote was a sort of pastiche of whatever I was enjoying at the time. Nothing original about that, but it's nice to look back now and feel like I've found a more authentic voice for myself. This story is still definitely *me*, but I'm more me now. As for the content, it's painfully autobiographical at its core. It was 2013 and I was new to Oakland at the time, living in a historically black neighborhood, displacing people by trying to live cheaply. I was deeply ashamed of this, but unapologetic too. I just wanted to write and that meant earning just enough money to get by. Young punks, musicians, and artists of every variety were doing the same. There were a lot of efforts at utopian, communal living. Everything was saturated with a sense that this lifestyle in this kind of neighborhood was a part of a proud heritage, as if art scenes had manifested themselves like this forever. But of course this was all against our politics. We *had* to hate ourselves for being there. In that environment, anxiety about privilege was ubiquitous. And my own racism was tested daily. I grew up in a very white, very small town. And though I had plenty of experience with poverty and grew up with friends who were PoC, I didn't quite understand how racist my brain really was. To help myself grow out of racism, I needed to write about it. So out popped this long-winded satirical riff in which I throw a lot of punches and maybe land a few.

For me, growing out of racism has been an inherently flawed, brutal practice. If it sounds like I'm disowning this story, it's because it scares me. I last edited it in 2017 and even then I had to decide to let it be what it was—a time capsule of a story from a racist perspective that cleaves dangerously close to being racist itself.