

IS, WAS, AND IS TO COME: FREEDOM DREAMWORLD DISPATCHES

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What impedes our paths to a world made new? What keeps the transformations entailed in “abolition” out of reach? Certainly, deeply pervasive material conditions of racial capitalist, patriarchal exploitation, dispossession, violence, and carceral captivity block our way. In the face of such impediments, the work of abolition is, in part, the collective work of dismantling, of tearing down, of clearing paths so that others may pass on through to the other side. Abolition also entails creating a world in which people share collective access to and control over the social goods that make flourishing and safety possible and thereby make carceral institutions obsolete.¹ But the work of abolition consists of more than the labor of rearranging materialities alone. Transformative abolitionist organizing, educating, and healing begins by inviting us to artfully imagine and envision the worlds for which we are fighting, because, as Robin D.G. Kelley puts it, “the map to a new world is in the imagination.”²

Abolition, in other words, requires freedom dreamwork.

Dreams are often associated with escape, with unreality, with naïve otherworldliness. What does an activity as seemingly immaterial as dreaming or imagining have to do with the concreteness of abolition, of a world made materially new? Contrary to what the term might seem to imply, dreaming as a practice for creating a more just world has a long history originating in Black radical and Indigenous practices of survival and self-determination in the face of white racial capitalism and settler colonialism. Indeed, because it is, in the end, “another world” that abolition fights for, freedom dreamwork that transcends the conceptual and material boundaries of the present order of things is a necessary tool for helping us all get there. When confronted with the violently imposed limitations

1. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore famously argues, “Abolition is about presence, not absence. It’s about building life-affirming institutions.” (Keynote Conversation, Making and Unmaking Mass Incarceration Conference, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS, December 5, 2019.) For a foundational account of what it means to make carceral institutions obsolete, see: Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2003).

2. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2008), 2.

of the present order, freedom dreams are a means not of mindless escape, but of buoying our capacity to believe that something new can in fact break into the present, and of becoming attentive to what that something might look and feel like—and, indeed, what it already has looked and felt like. In the words of Indigenous scholar Dian Million, “Dreaming . . . is the effort to make sense of relations in the worlds we live, dreaming and empathizing intensely our relations with past and present and the future without boundaries of linear time. Dreaming is a communicative sacred activity.”³

Entrenched as we are today in struggles against the seemingly unassailable forces of what bell hooks calls imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, dispatches from the beyond in our midst, from the freedom dream worlds among us, have the power to nourish us for the hard work of discerning how—and believing that—“the present form of this world” is neither natural nor permanent, but is instead, somehow, “passing away.”⁴ Imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy and the carceral cages it creates, sustain themselves in part on the basis of the idea that they are natural—that they reflect the world as it always has been and always will be. But they have not always been, and so need not always be. Propelled by the dreams of freedom fighters before us, abolitionist freedom dreaming disrupts the lie that the present order is inevitable, pressing us instead toward living faith in the realizability of the as-yet-unreal world we all deserve.

Practices that orient us to the actual possibility of a world beyond the present order constitute spiritual practices: they embody the hopeful refusal to accept the deadly material conditions of the present, insisting that radically different life-giving realities and arrangements are possible in our lifetime, and are already present in our midst, even if only partially. Freedom dreamwork discerns traces of those alternate realities in our past, present, and future. Practices rooted in an abolitionist imagination also constitute spiritual practices in the sense that they often draw both explicitly and implicitly from aspects of the ritual, sociality, singing, folk traditions, theologies, and philosophical frames of various religious and spiritual traditions. In the end, whether or not those who labor to forge means of life out of conditions of death do so by way of a conscious spirituality or specific spiritual or religious tradition, the work of believing in and struggling

3. Quoted in Lena Palacios, “With Immediate Cause: Intense Dreaming as World-Making,” in Abolition Collective, eds., *Abolishing Carceral Society: Abolition: A Journal of Insurgent Politics*, (Brooklyn, NY: Common Notions, 2018), 59. See: Dian Million, “Intense Dreaming: Theories, Narratives, and Our Search for Home,” *American Indian Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2011): 314-315.

4. bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2004), 17; 1 Corinthians 7:31. New Revised Standard Version. All subsequent biblical references come from this translation.

to birth a new world in the shell of the old may be understood as a work of sacred proportion.⁵

The movement for a world without police and prisons—a movement largely led, like abolitionist movements before it, by Black women—is often accused, usually with racial and gendered overtones, of being dangerously out of touch with reality. If so-called “reality” means economies of scarcity built on exploitation and dispossession, cultures of supremacy that value some by devaluing others, politics of organized abandonment that deliberately disenfranchise entire populations, and systems of organized violence that create the illusion of “safety” for a few through the caging and endangerment of many, then yes, abolitionists are out of touch with “reality.”⁶ Deliberately unaligned with a death-making order, refusing to accept the way things are as the way things must be, abolitionist freedom dreaming is ultimately less naïve, escapist, and otherworldly than it is anotherworldly: it discerns the present order as a distortion of the natural and sacred order of things, organizes collective transcendence and transformation of that order, and reconfigures what it means to live together by preparing and building—here and now, piece by piece—a new world in the wreckage of the old. Abolitionist freedom dreams—and the movements led by Black, Indigenous, and other people of color that catalyze and enmesh them—constitute a transformative refusal to conform to the deadly patterns of the racial capitalist, settler colonial, carceral world.⁷

The spiritual practice of abolitionist freedom dreamwork also requires reckoning with the fact that the capitalist-colonial-carceral order that abolition seeks to transcend and transform is a religious project, too. Serving and protecting the pseudo-sacred social order of patriarchal whiteness and private property by exiling those who trespass against it to carceral hell, cops and cages perform a mythological,

5. Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker movement regularly argued that “The Catholic Worker believes in creating a new society within the shell of the old with the philosophy of the new, which is not a new philosophy but a very old philosophy, a philosophy so old that it looks like new.” Peter Maurin, “What the Catholic Worker Believes,” <https://www.catholicworker.org/petermaurin/easy-essays.html>. For a compelling meditation on abolition as “sacred work,” see Laura McTighe, “Abolition is sacred work,” *The Immanent Frame*, January 28, 2021, <https://tif.ssrc.org/2021/01/28/abolition-is-sacred-work/>.

6. On “organized abandonment” and “organized violence,” see: Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore, “Beyond Bratton,” in Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, eds., *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter* (London: Verso Books, 2016).

7. Romans 12.2. This also echoes the spirit of Mary Hooks’ and Southerners on New Ground’s movement “mandate” for Black people, which includes the invitation to “be willing to be transformed in the service of the work.” See: <https://southernersonnewground.org/themandate/>.

salvific function for the order they uphold.⁸ The death-dealing religiosity of European-American carceral, capitalist, and colonial systems may tempt some to view a rigorously secularist or atheistic abolitionism that rejects any trace of spiritual thought or practice as our only hope. And understandably so. But liberating spiritualities and religiosities have, for centuries, permeated freedom movements—including the long slavery, prison, and police abolition and Black freedom movements in the United States that remain alive and well in the present.⁹ While carcerality pursues an exclusive, illusory transcendence—heaven for a few—by confining and dealing death to many, abolition pursues a world attuned to the abundance of natural and sacred order in which individual and collective wellbeing does not require anyone's harm or elimination.¹⁰ Whether incorporating formal religious practices and beliefs or not, the work of transcending the world as it is in order to transform it into the world as it could be entails a kind of hope and faith that exceeds the raw, scientific calculus of rearranging political and economic materialities alone.

Recognizing that abolitionist transformations take place somewhere between the possible and the impossible, the real and the imagined, and over great expanses of time, the dispatches that follow traverse freedom dream geographies in which an inspirited abolition “is, was, and is to come.”¹¹ Through shared rituals of prayer, song, and sacred reading under conditions of death, through vigil, communion, protest, and public grieving in the wake of state violence, through incantations for the earth consuming carceral machinery, through recollection of prison labor and prison rebellion, through imperfect struggles to establish police oversight and redirect funds from cops and cages to public goods, through neighborhood potlucks and fragmented accountability processes, through cursing at cops and

8. This is a central component of the argument I make in my forthcoming book, *White Property, Black Trespass: The Religion of Mass Criminalization* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2024).

9. Vincent Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981); Joshua Dubler and Vincent Lloyd, *Break Every Yoke: Religion, Justice, and the Abolition of Prisons* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020); Reina Sultan, “Say Your Prayers, Conservatives! Prison Abolitionists Are Reclaiming Faith,” *Truthout*, July 26, 2021, <https://truthout.org/articles/say-your-prayers-conservatives-prison-abolitionists-are-reclaiming-faith/>.

10. For more on “exclusive transcendence” as an expression of whiteness, see: Robert E. Birt, “The Bad Faith of Whiteness,” in *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question*, ed. George Yancy (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

11. Revelation 1.8. Some Christian monastic traditions, including the Cistercians, conclude the chanting of Psalms and other prayers with the following doxology: “Praise the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. The God, who is who, was and is to come. At the end of the ages.”

shouting at lifeless concrete walls, another world reveals itself, even if only “dimly.”¹² Abolition requires material negation and creation, but it also demands faith in the collectively realizable possibility of material worlds beyond our own. What has it been like and what will it be like to imagine and live such worlds into existence? Where is abolition forging fire that the darkness around us cannot overcome?¹³ Might we understand the faith that catalyzes abolitionist transformation as a faith of both spiritual and political proportions? Might we discern—and practice—abolitionist freedom dreamwork as a work of (the) spirit that is “making all things new”?¹⁴

The real and imagined dispatches that follow do not intend to be exhaustive, nor to represent all possible pathways through sacred abolition geographies. They are merely mine, dreamed both alone and together with my people, narrated both implicitly and explicitly from the Christian tradition to which I belong. And yet, though they are mine, they are also not mine alone. The world-making traditions of abolition and freedom dreaming come from the struggles of peoples organizing themselves to survive the destructive forces of heteropatriarchal whiteness and private property—forces that I have inherited and that vie for my religious devotion and political allegiance. Convinced that the invitation to cling to my racial, gender, and class inheritances as a means of salvation is in fact an invitation to my own spiritual death, and believing, as Black radical feminists and freedom fighters have taught us for at least the last century, that nobody is free until everybody is free, I channel the tradition of abolitionist freedom dreaming as one small means of pursuing my own spiritual and political transformation, as well as that of the world around me.

More than anything, the dispatches that follow are intended as a spiritual and political invitation to the reader to dream your own, both as an individual and together with your people. Where do you discern the transcendent and transformative spirit of abolition in your midst? Where does the sacred work of abolition manifest in your—and our—past, present, and future? How might your courageous freedom dreaming make a home worthy of those who came before and those who will come after? The new world that abolitionist freedom dreaming seeks to realize takes shape not all at once, but in piecemeal, partial, small-scale, mundane, incomplete, and imperfect acts and orientations that forge something greater than the sum of their parts. Utterly finite, and yet utterly transcendent,

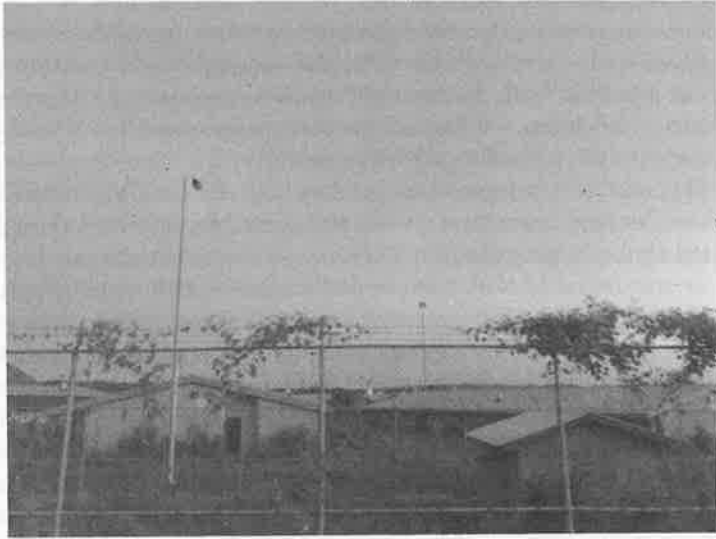
12. 1 Corinthians 13.12.

13. John 1.5.

14. Revelation 21.5.

perhaps abolition is at once a horizon and the ground beneath our feet.¹⁵

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THE EARTH RECLAIMS AN ABANDONED PRISON IN WEST NASHVILLE.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.

Ten miles west of downtown—out where industrial warehouses litter the road at the edge of green fields, hills, the Cumberland River—there is a razor wire fence holding no one captive. The emptied guard towers watch no bodies, no souls. No metal clinks or slams in the squat rows of empty cellblocks. The grass is waist high in this, the world of which we dream, for which we fight. Half-dreaming when I drive past it, I mistake the parking blocks stacked near the abandoned administration building for rows of raised beds, a community garden. My eyes deceive me. My mind sees clearly. Another mile down the road, past the mini airport, past more industrial headquarters, behind more razor wire, concrete, and steel, nestled inside a beautiful bend in the river, 748 men sit in cages on 132 acres of flood plain. Ten of us—insiders and outsiders—sit in a circle to read, share, and pray. This is a spiritual community not of this world, and yet very much fragmented by it. For two hours, we dwell together, aspiring to an unreal togetherness. We both obtain and fail to obtain it. Carceral walls and cages are not built for such communality, but we do the best we can. The razor wire fencing enclosing us does not untangle

15. On abolition as a horizon, see: Mariame Kaba, "Toward the Horizon of Abolition," in Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2021).

when we're together, but perhaps the path to a world without carceral cages is forged in part through the mundane collectivity of gathering to read, pray, and simply be together. We're reading a book of letters written during the Holocaust. "Which was worse," someone asks, "the Holocaust or slavery?" After some discussion, the answer comes back: "Yes." When the time comes for evening prayer, one insider asks another: "Do you think we're slaves in here?" No one answers as we close our books and put them aside. We know the answer.

Halfway through the liturgy, there sits the soon-to-be mother of God, intense. She voices anticipation for another world, maybe someday ours: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord / my Spirit rejoices in God my savior." *For he has looked with favor on his lowly servant*, we respond.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of Israel,
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
The promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
*as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.*¹⁶

A corrections officer saunters past the room and peers in the window, then keeps walking. We keep praying—for members of our group who have gone elsewhere, for those without food and shelter, for those who need medical care but have no access to it, for those on death row, for the hearts of those in charge, and for all our intentions. "Peace and stuff," we say, embracing, and depart, some of us to cars, some of us to cages. The sky blazes purple over the fences and hills. When we reach our cars, it fades.

Driving out of the prison parking lot, I've never seen anything like it: the dewy fields of June dusk outside the walls flicker to the hills with a million fireflies. Back on down the road, I pull over at the obsolete razor wire fence and get out of my car. That dark emptied gaol is filled with them—neon green-yellow flame flashing. And the darkness does not overcome it.¹⁷ Now, but not yet. Time of decay, work of transition.

16. *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1979), 119.

17. John 1.5.

Eight o'clock at night on November 6, 2018. Election day, a day that what would become a wave of progressive ballot defeats. On a third-floor loft on Rosa Parks Boulevard in North Nashville, organizers and volunteers are gathering, tired, nervous, excited. In the center of the room, a makeshift altar with a photo of Jocques Clemmons, murdered by the Metro Nashville Police Department (MNPD) on February 10, 2017. Next to it, a photo of Daniel Hambrick, murdered by the MNPD on July 26, 2018. Someone lights a candle between the images. Dan Dan's mother, Vickie Hambrick, sits somber, surrounded by her family. Jocques' mother, Sheila Clemmons Lee—who some call the “soul force” at the center of this grassroots effort to forge a community oversight board with subpoena power—hardly leaves Miss Vickie's side the entire night.



MISS SHEILA (BOTTOM CENTER LEFT) AND MISS VICKIE (BOTTOM CENTER RIGHT) EMBRACE AS THEY CELEBRATE THE COMMUNITY OVERSIGHT BOARD VICTORY. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.

It's been months, years—no, decades—of many hands on the freedom plow. TVs are showing one right-wing victory after another. And then they call our name: Amendment 1, the ballot initiative to institute a community oversight board to attempt to hold the police department accountable for its violence—134,135 votes for, 94,055 votes against. A burst of screams shift shape into melody and groove: the DJ blasts McFadden & Whitehead's “Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now” and the room is jubilant, dancing. At the center of a joyous circle, Miss Sheila and Miss Vickie embrace and pump their fists in the air.

*Ain't no stoppin' us now!
We're on the move!
Ain't no stoppin' us now!
We've got the groove!*¹⁸

This didn't come easy. On November 23, 1973, a Metro officer shot and killed nineteen-year-old Ronald Lee Joyce as he ran from the police after allegedly breaking into an abandoned house to play dice. Community members called for the resignation of the police chief and the creation of a civilian review board. On both fronts, the city ignored them.¹⁹ In October 2016, forty-three years later, despite a public image of a much gentler, more progressive police department, a coalition of community groups led by community organization Gideon's Army published a massive report detailing racially disparate outcomes in MNPD traffic stops and searches.²⁰ Despite clear evidence that echoed what Black Nashvillians had been saying for decades, MNPD denied the accusation of any racial profiling every chance they got, even calling the authors of the report “morally disingenuous.”²¹ Three short months later, MNPD cop Joshua Lippert chased and killed Jocques Clemmons while he ran for his life after a traffic stop in East Nashville. He was thirty-one, a father, brother, and son. Local organizers gathered around the Clemmons Lee family and formed the Justice for Jocques coalition, which demanded the firing of Officer Lippert and a civilian oversight board with subpoena power, among other things. Miss Sheila and a dedicated group of others—mostly other Black women—engaged in a months-long sit-in outside the East Precinct demanding they fire the man who murdered her son. The District Attorney opted not to bring any charges against Officer Lippert.

Fed up with willful governmental obfuscation and inaction, local leaders in the Movement for Black Lives seized control of a Metro Council meeting where their righteous grief and holy anger took its

18. McFadden & Whitehead, “Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now” (1979).

19. David Plazas, “Nashville police killed a black man, public wanted oversight board – 45 years ago,” *The Tennessean*, August 15, 2018, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/columnists/david-plazas/2018/08/15/daniel-hambrick-nashville-police-briley-oversight-board/986717002>.

20. Gideon's Army, *Driving While Black: A Report on Racial Profiling in Metro Nashville Police Department Traffic Stops* (October 2017), <https://drivingwhileblacknashville.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/driving-while-black-gideons-army.pdf>.

21. Joey Garrison, “Nashville police chief slams racial profiling report as ‘morally disingenuous,’” *The Tennessean*, March 7, 2017, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2017/03/07/nashville-police-chief-slams-racial-profiling-report-morally-disingenuous/98856754/>.

rightful place on the chamber floor.²² Emerging from those and other business-as-usual-disruptive demands for justice, the Community Oversight Now coalition was born. Agile, deft, resilient, and led by Black women, some of whom (including Miss Sheila and organizer Gicola Lane) had lost family members to police violence in Nashville, the coalition put in the work to follow through on local efforts dating back to at least 1973 to form a community oversight board. Those who came before dreamed dreams of a world without police officers chasing and murdering Black men. An impossible dream, it has long seemed, and one that will not become reality through community oversight alone. And yet, forty-five years later, nourished by faith that those freedom dreamers planted and sowed, faith in a world not yet seen, we walk a waking dreamscape and start to step into the real.²³

And then it happened all over again. A year and a half after MNPd killed Jocques, in July 2018, white MNPd officer Andrew Delke chased, then stopped, planted his feet, aimed, and shot Daniel Hambrick in the back of the head as he, like Jocques, ran for his life. According to the District Attorney, Delke “did not know the identity of the man he was chasing.”²⁴ Dan Dan was twenty-five. So was Delke. I was collecting signatures for the community oversight effort with another organizer when they heard that another Black man had just been shot by the police. When I drove to the police tape perimeter at Jo Johnston and Fisk Street, there were two women from the neighborhood pacing back and forth. One of them lost her son to gun violence a few years back. She heard the shots that killed Dan Dan ring out from her apartment. “God is not happy about what’s going on down here,” she kept saying. I agreed.

Two days later, I watched Miss Vickie weep before a crowd of people in Watkins Park, a hundred feet from where Delke murdered her son. “I gotta fight for my son because they shot him like he was a dog,” she shouted. “My child is not a dog. He was a human being!”²⁵ As the memorial came to an end, some of Dan Dan’s young family

22. Steven Hale, “Clemmons Protestors Seize Control of Metro Council Meeting,” *Nashville Scene*, February 22, 2018, <https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/pith-in-the-wind/article/20852881/clemmons-protesters-seize-control-of-metro-council-meeting>.

23. Hebrews 11.1-3.

24. Adam Tamburin, Natalie Allison, and Anita Wadhvani, “Prosecutors file homicide charge against officer in Daniel Hambrick’s death,” *The Tennessean*, September 27, 2018, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/crime/2018/09/27/nashville-police-shooting-daniel-hambrick-andrew-delke-charge-denied-homicide/1441834002/>.

25. Adam Tamburin and Natalie Allison, “Man shot by Nashville police remembered for caring spirit before protest blocks streets,” *The Tennessean*, July 28, 2018, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2018/07/28/nashville-police-shooting-daniel-hambrick-andrew-delke-tn-officer-involved-shooting/857788002/>.

members and friends moved into the street in formation behind one of Dan Dan’s cousins who rapped for a camera held by a man walking backwards down the middle of the road. As more people joined—family, friends, residents of John Henry Hale homes—the video memorial soon morphed into a full-scale march. The green-vested Neon Guard safety team followed and hemmed them in on all sides. People need space to grieve and rage, and sometimes that space is the middle of the road. Holy anger guarded by public pastoral care. By the time the march reached Jo Johnston and 16th Ave. N., a small army of unmarked police cars materialized out of thin air—they had been lying in wait out of view the whole time—and surrounded the group, their sirens yelping, their speaker boxes emitting unintelligible muffle. I ran down Henry Hale and cut over on Pearl Street in time to see the group entering the busy intersection at 16th and Charlotte—defiant, unphased, nothing to lose. “No justice, no peace!” they screamed. “Fuck the police!”



MNPd MARKS A WIDE PERIMETER AFTER CHASING AND KILLING DANIEL HAMBRICK, IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.

The security footage from Martin Luther King high school shows Dan Dan in full sprint in one frame, and flattened in the next. He laid there for two full minutes, his head torn open, when another officer arrived and placed the body of Vickie’s only son in handcuffs. In the middle of Charlotte Pike, I hear his brother ask a cop in his squad car, “Why’d y’all kill Dan Dan? Huh?!” He repeats himself, louder. Employees at the Burger King are standing in the parking lot next to customers filming the action with their cell phones.

Behind them, I see smoke rise—a century and a half back.

The old Tennessee State Penitentiary: built in 1831, demolished in 1898. A place of confinement, a place of wealth accumulated through captive labor, and therefore a place of fire. In September 1845, the Tennessee State Legislature voted to use people caged at the penitentiary to dig from quarries on the edge of town the stone that would be used to erect the new State Capitol Building. Marching westward down Charlotte with Dan Dan's people, we can see its tower and spire up past the highway where dozens of patrol cars flash their blue lights and block the on-ramps. It's a house built on convict labor, and a house built on slave labor: in the spring of 1846, Nashville stone Mason A.G. Payne loaned fifteen enslaved Africans for \$18 a month to the state to dig through the dense limestone atop the hill upon which the capitol stands at the end of the road blocked by the family and friends of yet another Black man killed by the state.²⁶ "Are we slaves in here?" my friend, the "convict," asks from the penitentiary descended from this one. Standing here in the middle of a stretch of road that connects the labor of the imprisoned and the labor of the enslaved, a road literally built by enslaved Africans in 1804, the answer couldn't be clearer.²⁷

"Oh shit, something's on fire!" I think I hear someone in the Burger King parking lot shout, pointing behind the store. The black cloud thickens and proliferates. Out in the street, a squad car presses slowly into the legs of a young Black woman standing her ground, her arms raised up, connecting dots between past and present, smoke and street.

Who were the people caged inside the thick stone walls behind the Burger King 150 years ago? By and large, they were men—Black and white, enslaved, formerly enslaved, and "free"—who offended against whiteness, property, and their owners.²⁸ Words like "larceny," "robbery," and "horse stealing" fill the penitentiary's record books.²⁹ In a racial capitalist social order, the rule of racialized property produces "criminals" out of those dispossessed by it. And then, it often turns out, those same "criminals"—exploited labor—produce property from which they are ultimately excluded. So "convicts" forced to labor within the walls of the original Tennessee State Penitentiary allegedly

26. Thomas Broderick IV, "They moved the earth: The slaves who built the Tennessee State Capitol," *Vanderbilt Undergraduate Research Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2008).

27. The owner of the enslaved African peoples who built this particular road was James Robertson, co-settler of Nashville. Ridley Wills II, *Nashville Streets & their Stories* (Franklin, TN: Plumblin Media, 2012), 25.

28. For more on the relationship between whiteness and property, see: Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1707–91.

29. "Inmates of the Tennessee State Penitentiary, 1851-1870," <https://sos.tn.gov/products/tsla/inmates-tennessee-state-penitentiary-1851-1870>.

set fire to furniture workshops there in 1855. Again, in 1876, inmates allegedly set fire to a wagon workshop inside the walls, which was followed a few months later by three hundred prisoners attempting escape. We can call this excarceral transcendence.³⁰ Leased convicts allegedly set fires again in 1881, 1884, and 1890, and in the Tennessee State Prison in 1902 and 1960.³¹ The destiny of an institution built for the purpose of disappearing and exploiting those discarded by racial capitalism can only be fire, even if now only just proleptically—now (and then) but not yet. Standing in the middle of Charlotte Pike, a few of us hold the sacred line against the force that killed Dan Dan in order to protect the crowd of family and friends gathered to mourn that murder and say "fuck you" to those who did it. In the all too real invisible smoke shadow of one burning institution of carceral death, Dan Dan's people defy the agents of another.

After the protest and a tense standoff—public grief facing down the cause of that grief—at the site of Dan Dan's murder, I sit on a ledge with Miss Sheila. It's been a year and a half since Lippert took her son's life. And here she is standing alongside another mother walking the same path she has. I ask how she and her husband Mark have been holding up. They get by with God's help, she said—wouldn't be here without it. "I didn't understand at first," Sheila says, "but now I do: Jocques was a sacrifice. God is using his death in the fight for justice. He died so others don't have to." Some sacrifices are mere appeasements, means of satisfying some abstract principle of debt or justice that relinquish us from any further responsibility. But not Jocques: his is the kind of "sacrifice" that catalyzes, that moves forward, that makes his mother bold and brave in the face of so much bullshit, helping us "believe," as the people say, "that we will win," even when the enemy seems bent on destruction. Sheila's belief, and the belief she's helping instill in the rest of us, is the belief that "the present form of this world"—the world that killed Jocques and Dan Dan—is neither natural nor permanent, but is instead, somehow, "passing away."³² Jocques isn't here anymore. And yet, in another sense, he is, Miss Sheila likes to say, especially on days like this one, and even more so in days to come. The soul force of Sheila's faith enables her to discern and declare her son's presence among those fighting for the world she and her son always deserved, the world of which so many before her have dreamed. With the great pain and struggle of mothers wailing in the park, of family facing down cops in the middle of the road, of public grief channeled into public power,

30. On the notion of the "excerceral," see: Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd ed (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 23.

31. Tristan Call, "The Splendid Gifts of God to the South': Struggles for Control on Tennessee Plantations," Ph.D. Dissertation (Vanderbilt University, 2020).

32. 1 Corinthians 7:31.

the dream of that “hoped for,” not-yet-seen world starts to take on flesh in our midst, a prayer becoming its own answer.³³

Three months before the Tennessee State Legislature voted to use convict labor to excavate raw materials to construct their new capitol building in 1845, the killer of Native Americans and enslaver of Africans, Andrew Jackson, died at his mansion in Nashville. A century and a half later, Nashville’s chapter of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) does its work from its headquarters at the Andrew Jackson Lodge. Acting on the basis that the deaths of two Black men and the trauma endured by their families and thousands of others are justified, Nashville’s FOP spent half a million dollars to proliferate bald-faced falsifications on the airwaves about the fight for a community oversight board. They surveilled and sought to intimidate the Black organizers spearheading the community oversight effort. They criminalized the men they killed even after their deaths.³⁴ They lied and lied and lied.

And it wasn’t enough. Money and lies often win. But sometimes people-power-moving spirit carves a new—even if imperfect—reality out of the heavy stone of impossibility. Sometimes the mothers of Black men murdered by the police get to sing:

*There’s been so many things that’s held us down
But now it looks like things are finally comin’ around
I know we’ve got a long, long way to go
And where we’ll end up, I don’t know
But we won’t let nothin’ hold us back
We’re putting ourselves together
We’re polishing up our act!
If you felt we’ve been held down before
I know you’ll refuse to be held down anymore!
Don’t you let nothing, nothing
Stand in your way!
I want y’all to listen, listen
To every word I say, every word I say!
Ain’t no stoppin’ us now!
We’re on the move!
Ain’t no stoppin’ us now!
We’ve got the groove!³⁵*

33. Hebrews 11.1.

34. Steven Hale, “Police Union Website Targets Daniel Hambrick,” *Nashville Scene* (February 19, 2019), <https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/pith-in-the-wind/article/21048001/police-union-website-targets-daniel-hambrick>.

35. McFadden & Whitehead, “Ain’t No Stoppin’ Us Now” (1979).



A BARBED WIRE FENCE IN WEST NASHVILLE. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.

“No Trespassing | Metro Nashville Government Property.” Someone recently used their finger to mark out two clean diagonal lines—a defiant “x”—across the dusty sign. A rusted chain and lock winds through the gate of the tall chain-link fence lined at its top with old barbed wire. A small strand of weathered blue tarp is caught in a barb, and waves like a sad flag in the wind. Behind the fence, 150 Chevy Impalas, give or take, sit no-longer-used, dirty, dented, lined up closely in long rows. The words “Nashville’s Guardians” are still legible in faded blue type across a few of the trunks. In some places, grass grows up to their windows, a number of which are broken in. When I walk along the side toward the rear fence of the lot, I hear quick rustling from inside. Some animal—a fox, I think—has made a home of one of the cars, a new world in the shell of the old. It wasn’t easy to find this place—unmarked industrial roads leading behind a waste processing plant in West Nashville. They would rather us not see, perhaps out of embarrassment.

It’s been twelve years now since they murdered Jocques. Dan Dan has been gone nearly ten. It was around that time, and especially in the years following the formation of the community oversight board, that officers started leaving the force. Reports about racially disparate stops and searches, lawsuits, complaints of a culture of racism, sexism, and fear within the department, public hearings about the good-old-boy chief and his eventual resignation, cell phone footage of cops harassing residents of Cayce Homes, mismanagement of funds, calls to defund, and the list of reasons why officers started to retire early

goes on and on. The oversight board did not end police violence—far from it. But it did create the conditions for, and contribute momentum to, subsequent struggles to build a city freed from the inherent violence of policing and surveillance by ending the mass looting of public dollars that was making it inevitable year after year. More and more residents slowly but steadily realized that the police weren't reducing crime rates, weren't keeping them safe. Folks in historically divested communities were fed up with violence in their neighborhoods, with gunfire piercing their windows, with a perpetual lack of resources for longtime residents being displaced left and right by settler colonial gentrification. The police were constantly driving around all hours of the day, pulling people over. Helicopters buzzed and rattled windows day and night. So why didn't the violence stop? When the police couldn't answer that question anymore, residents organized themselves to do something about it.

A new world comes not from above but from below. It started with the former gang members turned violence interrupters who weaved together relationship and accountability in a way the cops never could.³⁶ Then it was the neighborhood accountability and emergency response meetings, neighborhood-based safety and de-escalation training, piecemeal building of communication infrastructure, and regular get-to-know-your-neighbors potlucks. In the wake of these assemblies, organizers launched a "call your neighbors, not the police" campaign. As residents learned, it's one thing to call for a reduction or end to ineffective and traumatic hyperpolicing in predominantly Black and low-income communities, but another to put in the work to make that policing irrelevant. Obsolescence by replacement.

Standing with my fingers in the chain link fence, a blue jay lands on the busted spotlight of the cruiser in front of me. I freeze. We stare. Filled with a mixture of awe and dread, I wonder what he's thinking. *Is he standing his ground, telling me to get lost? Is he protecting baby birds from a potential intruder? Is he about to fly in my direction?* Bird calls sound from a distance, then get louder, and the blue jay breaks his attention, flitting his head around. The calls get louder and a moment later three cardinals swoop in to reclaim what appears to be *their* territory, not his. One cardinal perched on the spotlight, chest puffed proud, two on the roof lights no longer flashing. The blue jay nowhere to be found.

At a Metro budget hearing back in May 2016, an elder from our neighborhood, Miss Dorothy, took to the podium and told it like it was. "Two years ago, we had fourteen—*fourteen!*—murders in our neighborhood," she spoke firmly, looking into the eyes of each council member. "I'm here to tell you that we had only one murder in our

36. See: Steven Hale, "How Gideon's Army Is Making Peace in North Nashville," <https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/cover-story/article/21074753/how-gideons-army-is-making-peace-in-north-nashville>.

neighborhood last year!" Some of the council members started clapping, but she cut them off. "No, no, no! What are you clapping for?" she chided them. "You didn't do that! We did that! The police you still paying to chase our kids and grandkids around didn't do that—we did that! The developers you still trying to pay to kick people like me outta there didn't do that—we did that!" A hush from the chambers, hollers from the gallery—the sound of an old order passing away, a new one being born, half-formed figures crawling out of a valley of dry bones.³⁷

It was impossible to imagine this a decade or two ago. Policing, for the vast majority of people in Nashville, and in the United States more broadly, had for so long been a sacred cornerstone of the order of things. To publicly dream of its withering away was thus a kind of sacrilege. But the belief of people like Miss Sheila and Miss Vickie and Miss Dorothy—the belief, born of pain, that the life-upending violence of what "was" need not remain what "is" and what "will be"—chipped away at an edifice so many presumed to be permanent.

In the face of an ever-growing mass of residents and organizations rejecting and disrupting business as it had been, and with so many officers gone, the city could no longer justify funding the police department like it used to. By the next budget cycle, funding for MNPDP had been reduced by \$6 million. By the next, another \$5 million. By the next, their budget had been cut nearly in half. But the fight—a knock-down, drag-out, highly organized tooth-and-nail fight—wasn't just a fight to defund the police, as if the police alone were the problem. It was a fight to redistribute funds towards people's basic quality of life in the poorest parts of the city: new playgrounds, basketball courts, arts centers, and community gardens, increased funding for public schools and teachers, accessible and reliable transportation, quality affordable housing, the elimination of tax breaks for luxury development, expanded living wage job opportunities and worker-owned cooperative enterprises, community-based alternatives to juvenile and eventually adult incarceration, the eradication of money bail, dismantling and redistributing the power of the city's housing authority, and the development of resident-managed community land trusts in the most historically divested districts in the city.

But old worlds die hard. The freedom fighters whose belief in another world helped forge the paths we now walk taught us that the new world they dreamed of comes only through organized struggle, struggle in which victory and defeat often intertwine so subtly that it can be difficult to discern where one ends and the other begins. In the wake of the MNPDP's dwindling, with fewer police around, people who felt they had no choice but to rely on them before often felt helpless and got stuck whenever violence erupted on the block or people stole stuff from their backyard. Organizers and activists had

37. Ezekiel 37:1-14.

been calling on the department for decades to stop overpolicing predominantly Black and poor communities. And then, amazingly, they did. No more answered calls for service, no more patrols, no more cameras fixed to telephone poles. A passive-aggressive consent to a long arc of decline. *Fine, see how that works out for you*, we could hear them say. Things got worse for a few years, but with time, community safety, accountability, and crisis response formations strengthened and spread, and many residents in historically divested parts of town took a new, collective sense of ownership and pride in their neighborhoods.

It hasn't been easy, but perhaps nothing good is. About a year ago, I got a text message. "Someone was shot on our street." That used to happen with more regularity a decade ago, but it's rarer now. I hurried home and pulled up at the same time as a firetruck. They unraveled the hose and washed blood toward the curb, down to the drain. My neighbor tells me a young Black man was walking down the sidewalk when a car pulled up. Fifteen loud pops. Multiple bullets in his leg. He lied in the street screaming. They wrapped towels and old t-shirts around his leg to slow the bleeding until the ambulance arrived. The shots that missed him hit our house. Six, seven, eight, nine bullets lodged in blue siding. I found a single bullet sitting in a pile of broken glass on the windowsill behind our living room couch.



A SINGLE BULLET SITS IN A PILE OF BROKEN GLASS ON THE WINDOWSILL BEHIND OUR LIVING ROOM COUCH. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.

The police never showed—a cause for both concern and relief. Another neighbor called our sub-district's community safety and accountability reps. Thirty minutes later, they arrived, interviewed

and provided some care and presence for the neighbors who saw it happen, then paced around on the sidewalk making calls for the next hour. The next morning, the violence interrupters walked the neighborhood checking in with folks. A week later, the accountability team figured out who was responsible and what had happened. It was an old beef recently revived. A small group of them confronted the man responsible in his friend's living room, explained to him all that would happen next, then escorted him to the fellowship hall at Greater Heights Missionary Baptist down the street where the pastor and other safety and accountability folks were setting up metal chairs in a circle. The young man he shot wasn't ready to face him yet, but he gave directives on what he wanted to happen—get him to own up to what he did, and commit to taking responsibility for "making shit right," including with medical costs. The process was months long, extremely messy, and painstakingly difficult. The man responsible for the shooting did not cooperate at first, and even disappeared for a few weeks. Eventually, the process reached as reasonable a conclusion as was possible given the conflict. The relationship was not repaired, but a recompense agreement was signed, and folks are moving on. The young man is off his crutches, but still walking with a limp.

The police became obsolete not because they chose to, but because communities made vulnerable by the death-dealing principalities of racial capitalism and the policing that protects it forged their own means of safety in a world bent on their destruction. For some, the struggle of the last decade and more has been a struggle specifically for a world without police. For others, the struggle of the last decade has been a struggle with no objective other than survival: to enter a world in which it is possible to keep on living. Where these two dimensions of the same struggle converge, something at once ad hoc and organized—something very much imperfect and incomplete—continues to emerge. Catalyzed by radical faith that another world—or even just another day—is possible, carried along by the living prayers of those whose lost loved ones accompany us in spirit, this struggle is, was, and will be a sacred one.

At the far back corner of the dusty lot caging the old cop cars, Japanese honeysuckle winds in and out of the fencing: a wall of green dotted with white and yellow protrusion, fragrant, a scent that reminds me of childhood. The squad car backed into the corner of the lot is being eaten alive by the thing. It has pierced the rusted floorboards, snakes up the steering column, and tangles in the wires of the monitors on the dash, a holy, living vine. In the shell of an old world, a new one takes root. Today, more than a decade after the department began to deteriorate in public view, this is still no utopia we live in. People still hurt each other, reconciliation often remains out of reach, vultures still hover, and stray blue lights still chase young folks down back streets from time to time. But in some places—perhaps

eventually most places—beyond what we once thought possible, something verdant prevails.

Six months ago, after coordinated pressure from a coalition of community organizations, a newly elected Metro council member proposed a bill that would repurpose a portion of these unused squad cars, making them available at reduced cost on installment plans to low-income community members who have survived violence, and even to people with criminal records. The ordinance passed by a narrow margin. That it passed at all would have been unthinkable a decade ago. Sitting on our porch with our eight-year-old the other day, the young man whose blood they sprayed into the gutter last year drove by in an old Chevy Impala, his elbow in the window, and waved.

* * *

“Next,” the corrections officer calls out. I walk through the metal detector in my socks, then turn a full 360 degrees in front of the second metal detector, a vertical pole with little flashing lights, flipping the bottom of each foot up to face it directly. Put your finger on the scanner. “Scanner’s ready.” Step up and face radiation. “Scanner starting.” I imagine my cells shifting shape as the machine moves me slowly left to right. Shoes back on, key, invisible stamp. From there, I count them: fourteen heavy steel and razor-wire-fence doors—opened and closed from some invisible beyond—to reach the room where my new friends on death row sit in a circle, smiling. They are, in most but not all cases, guilty of immense harm. And they rise from their plastic chairs to hug me one by one. I came to ask them about spirituality in confinement directed toward death.³⁸

I have learned that if you listen, you can hear these inanimate walls and cages talk. They exercise a kind of agency, even. They shift, shape, and alter the life they contain. “What does this institution want you to know in your body?” I ask these men condemned to die. “How does it tell you? How do you hear it?”

The men translate what the rest of us perceive only dimly. “They want me to know that they have this body,” Don said.³⁹

“How does it tell you that?” I ask.

“I have to walk through eight locked doors to get from here [open gathering room] to my cell,” Don responded.

Kurt elaborated: “They tell you when you can do everything.”

38. I have also written about the following conversations here: Andrew Krinks, “Soulful Resistance: Theological Body Knowledge on Tennessee’s Death Row,” *The Other Journal* 23: The Body Issue (2014). Some of the following quotes also appear in the above essay.

39. For their protection, I use pseudonyms for all of the men quoted in what follows, with the exception of Don, who was executed by the state of Tennessee in 2019.

“What they tell [my body] is ‘control,’” Paul added. “They tell me how long I can visit with my family and how often.”

“There’s very little that remains yours in here. They have me captured. I know they want to kill me,” Thomas made clear. “I know these things—they’re obvious. They may have me physically, but I’m never gonna let them have my mind.”

These walls and cages are creatures of death: they victimize those who were already victimized, and who then, trapped by their trauma and pain, victimized others in turn. But to render Don, Kurt, Paul, Thomas, Jacob, and the rest of the men something as simple as either passive victims or monstrous offenders would be imprecise. They, too, shapeshift, altering the death-world around them.

“What do you want this institution to know?” I ask. “How do you tell it? And how does it hear it?”

Kurt tightens his body, sits forward in his chair, and points in the direction of the nearest wall. “I am not who you try to make me to be!” he exclaims intensely. Respecting the space carved out by Kurt’s vehemence, the others quietly nod in agreement.

“How exactly do you communicate this message?” I ask.

“I smile, shake hands,” he responds, “ask guards how they’re doing. I pay people respect; tell them I’m praying for them.”

Paul elaborates: “You tell ‘em by acting like a human, by being civil, being intelligent.”

“After a while,” Don added, “when they see all the hugging, and we shake their hands every day, we’re breaking down preconceived barriers.”

That was October 2012. A year later, the attorney general for the state of Tennessee requests execution dates for ten prisoners on the state’s death row—almost twice as many men as the state has executed since 1976. Don’s name is on the list. When I see him two weeks after the attorney general’s request, I ask him how he’s feeling. “They think they know when my life will end,” he says. “But only God knows that.” We sit in a circle—men on death row and their friends—and take turns praying for the dismantling and undoing of death in all its forms. I sit next to Kurt. When it’s his turn to pray, he grips my hand so tightly it starts to turn purple. He’s literally shouting, a corrections officer standing in the corner of the room, imploring God to stop the state’s march toward the death of men sitting among us.

Don’s date—and others’—eventually came and went by way of legal challenges and delays. Five and a half years later—May 16, 2019—we drive again past the razor wire fence holding no one captive, past the mini airport, past the industrial headquarters. At the ad hoc checkpoint past the prison entrance, a sweating, walking weapon of a man puts a piece of yellow tape on our windshield to mark us as against the death penalty. “Y’all have fun,” he says, pointing us further down the road. Past another checkpoint, past the mounted

patrolmen, we park in a field hemmed in by rolling green hills. They tower over the pile of concrete and fencing that tries but fails to impress us like those hills—earthen shoulders—do.

We stand with Don's friends, his congregants, his family, inside a large fence in a field, praying, singing, remembering, mourning lives ended too soon—his wife's, his, others'. Soon, we will take communion. First, traditional bread and juice, then, jailhouse communion: cookies and punch. We are here despite pleas for clemency from hundreds, thousands, including his own stepdaughter who, after decades of all-consuming hatred for the man who killed her mother, after unleashing her rage upon him in person, was surprised to find release, and the beginnings of reconciliation. But the demonic death machine was too much. "After a prayerful and deliberate consideration of Don Johnson's request for clemency, and after a thorough review of the case," the faithfully Christian governor Bill Lee announced, "I am upholding the sentence of the State of Tennessee and will not be intervening."⁴⁰

In the field outside the prison, Don's friend and former chaplain Jeannie steps forward, begins to speak, and then stops, holding her finger to her lips until her bearing, momentarily daunted by the weight of this moment, returns. The five years she spent in that building, she says, were the most sacred, transformative, and traumatic years of her life. Don was one of the ones who convinced her, against all reasonable judgment, to become chaplain in the first place. It's because of relationships with people like Don, she often says, that she went in a death penalty abolitionist and came out a prison abolitionist, an abolitionist of systems that define those they cage as monsters, when in fact it is the cages themselves that are monstrous. "We are called not just to visit the prisoner; we are called to set captives free, and in doing that, we find our freedom," she says, the buzzing sounds of the institution trying but failing to drown her out. "My prayer tonight is for God to damn these systems and send them back to hell where they belong."

"How do you visualize the future?" I asked Don and his brothers when we sat in a circle together six and a half years ago.

"One day, I will leave here," Don said, "either up [pointing upward] or through the front door."

Out in the field, at about 7:40 p.m., our brother Chris, once caged inside those same walls, steps forward to offer a benediction. He invites us to look not down but up, into the sky, as he blesses our brother Don. Across the circle, I see Lisa, friend of Don and so many

40. Adam Tamburin, "Gov. Bill Lee denies clemency for Donnie Edward Johnson; execution set for Thursday," *The Tennessean*, May 14, 2019, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/crime/2019/05/14/tennessee-execution-donnie-johnson-clemency-bill-lee/1094175001/>.

others on death row, somehow smiling, her face lifted toward a 'v' of geese passing above us. A few moments later, a handful of people start moving around quickly, touching the shoulder of the person next to them, holding their phones. Someone steps forward.

"Don Johnson was declared dead at 7:37."

Journalists in the witness room outside the execution chamber report that, before the State of Tennessee took his life, Don echoed the words of Jesus on the cross—"I commend my life into your hands"—before commending his final two minutes of breath to song:

*No more crying there, we are going to see the king,
No more dying there, we are going to see the king.⁴¹*

When we walk across the field to our cars, the sky is a subtle orange, clouds hovering low just above the earth's darkening shoulders—the color of fire turned to embers, smoldering. Driving away, in my rearview mirror, the lights of the prison recede until those beautiful hills swallow the place whole. Looking back again, only aerial embers remain.

Dear God, may it be so.



THE HILLS SWALLOW THE PRISON WHOLE. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.

41. Adam Tamburin, Katherine Burgess, Yihyun Jeong, and Mariah Timms, "Tennessee executes Donnie Edward Johnson by lethal injection," *The Tennessean*, May 16, 2019, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/crime/2019/05/16/execution-donnie-johnson-tennessee-leathl-injection/3668943002/>. Don's words echoed those of Jesus in Luke 23.46. The hymn Don sang is "Soon and Very Soon." He also sang "They Will Know We Are Christians."

Another mile on down the road, the emptied prison. I can't take my eyes off the freedom dream world beyond that futile fence, fixed forever in my mind. A pale blue steel door pressed open against the adjacent concrete wall, yawning wide. Another door, half-tilted, busted off its hinge. Large piles of dirt next to half-demolished cell blocks. I think I see someone bent over next to a wheelbarrow, digging.

Now but not yet. Fully awake but dreaming.

An hour later, I watch from my car as my partner Lindsey holds a box of pizza and talks to a man sitting on a bench by the Cumberland River at 1st and Broadway. When she tells him where the pizza came from—that a man named Don was executed tonight, that he skipped his last meal, and asked that people pool their resources to feed unhoused folks instead—he takes his hat off “in disbelief and reverence,” as she puts it, and partakes of the “third communion of the night.” The absent becomes present. This world becomes another.

The governor, faithful Christian, “prayed.” The outcome of his prayer was death.

Don, condemned to that death, prayed too. And the people, by loaves and fishes, under overpasses, on the steps of churches, on benches by the river, were nourished. In the dark wake of death, the subtle firefly flicker of a world made new.

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