

Gather

©2014 by Alice Walker
for Carl Dix and Cornel West

It is still hard to believe
that millions of us saw Eric Garner die.
He died with what looked like a half dozen
heavily clad
policemen
standing on his body, twisting and crushing
him
especially his head
and neck.
He was a big man, too. They must have felt
like clumsy midgets
as they dragged him down.

Watching the video,
I was reminded of the first lynching
I, quite unintentionally, learned about:
it happened in my tiny lumber mill
town before the cows were brought in
and young white girls
on ornate floats
became dairy queens.
A big man too,
whom my parents knew,
he was attacked also by a mob
of white men (in white robes and hoods)
and battered to death
by their two by fours.

I must have been a toddler
overhearing my parents talk
and mystified by pieces of something
called “two by fours.”

Later, building a house,
i would encounter the weight,
the heaviness, of this varying length
of wood, and begin to understand.

What is the hatred
of the big black man
or the small black man

or the medium sized
black man
the brown man
or the red man
in all his sizes
that drives the white lynch mob
mentality?

I always thought it was envy:
of the sheer courage to survive
and ceaselessly resist conformity
enough to sing and dance
or orate, or say in so many outlandish
ways:

*You're not the boss
of me!*

Think how many black men
said that: "*Cracker,* you're not the boss
of me;*"
even enslaved. Think of how
the legal lynch mob
so long ago
tore Nat Turner's body
in quarters
skinned him

and made "money purses"
from his "hide."

Who are these beings?

*Now we are beginning to ask
the crucial question.*

If it is natural to be black
and red or brown
and if it is beautiful to resist
oppression
and if it is gorgeous to be of color
and walking around free,
then where does the problem
lie?

Who are these people
that kill our children in the night?

**Murder our brothers in broad daylight?
Refuse to see themselves in us
as we have strained, over centuries,
to see ourselves in them?
Perhaps we are more different
than we thought.
And does this scare us?
And what of, for instance,
those among us
who collude?**

**Gather.
Come see what stillness
lies now
in the people's broken
hearts.**

**It is the quiet force of comprehension,
of realization
of the meaning
of our ancient**

**and perfect
contrariness;
of what must now be understood
and done to honor
and cherish
ourselves:
no matter who
today's "bosses"
may be.**

**Our passion
and love for *ourselves*
that must at last
unite
and free us. As we lay our sacrificed
beloveds to rest
in our profound
and ample *caring:*
broad, ever moving,
and holy,
as the sea.**

****Cracker: from the crack of the whip wielded by slave drivers.***