CONSTITUENT

Poems



Emir Brown-Murillo

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black.ace — aseries of poems

how it feels to loveand love again: an anthology

Entitled in the Ghetto

CONSTITUENT

ONLINE EDITION

Poems

by

Emir

Brown-Murillo

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This edition is revised and formatted for online release, on emirbrownmurillo.com, 2025.

Name: Brown, Emir., 1997— author.
Title: CONSTITUENT / Emir Brown-Murillo.
Description: Online: Self-published, 2025.

Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Names, characters, and places are products of the author's imagination.

Front cover image by Emir Brown-Murillo
Book design by Emir Brown-Murillo
Font: EB Garamond, single-spaced

To my paternal grandparents, who passed within a month of each other. And to my father, who must mourn them until I must mourn him.

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INTRODUCTION

I don't know how to write.

That is, at least, what the academics spew to keep me from attaining acclaim. And I would be obliged to agree, since I have no idea what it means to be able to write. Language is violent by nature. And because of that, I am mocked for the way that I speak, in whatever language that may be.

I am multiracial, in that there are many, many stupid words used to describe my identity. What that allows me to do is exist in multiple spheres, without being questioned by monoracials[1] often.

I enrolled at Emory University in the fall of 2015. I was 17, a few days' shy of my birthday. Bug-eyed and feral, just about ready to explode in happiness.

This is it, I thought. *I did it. I made it out of the hood!*

It was true that I no longer had to see the ghetto's ugly buildings, sidewalks and even people. I immediately fit in. It appeared that a lot of people from my high school who went to PWIs[2] were unused to seeing so many white people. But I was trained pretty well on how to be white. Some may say I could truly pass for white if given a gun.

It was true that I no longer had to see the ghetto's ugly buildings, sidewalks and even people. And I tell you this because I genuinely believed I needed to escape in order to be happy. I thought Harlem was holding me back. And in a way, it was, but I was doing the majority of the holding. As a result, I cannot return home without feeling ~~white~~ rage.

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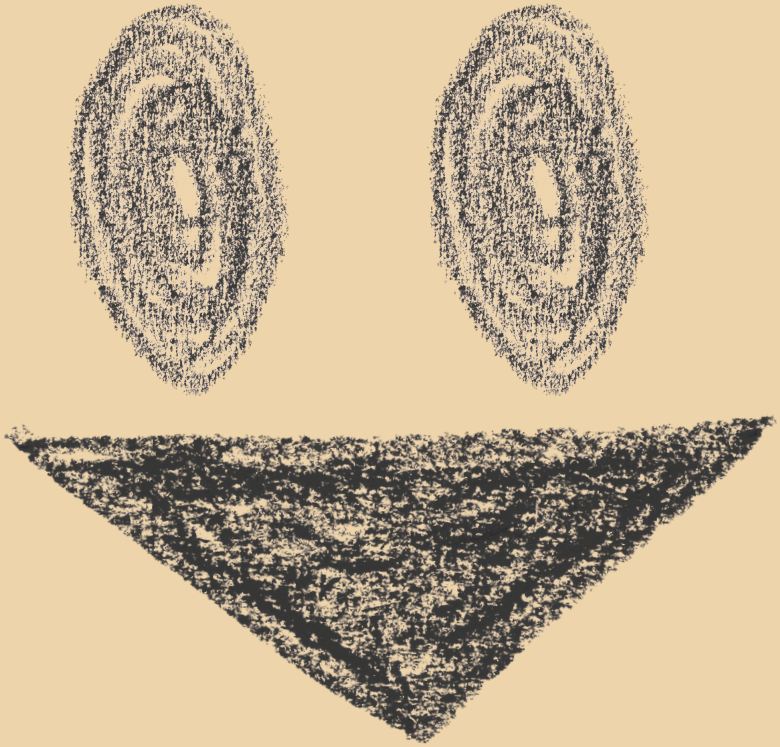
[1] Of one race; as opposed to multiracial

[2] Predominately White Institution

CONSTITUENT is an exploration of thought. Poetry — verse and prose — derived from rage and deep sadness. It is an analytical deconstruction of all the stupid shit I learned about over the course of several years. At this moment, I am completing my bachelors at Emory University after trying to drop out of both school and life. The poems reflect feelings of self-hate, multiracialism, a lack of love….

We wear the mask that grins and lies

Paul Laurence Dunbar





Prelude

...and this is where I die:
with my hands and feet
in bondage so that they
have become so familiar
with one another, they've
reproduced off-spring that
wiggle like fing—

Oh! Those are fingers.

They have taken from me all
of my wailing utensils! Now
I must scream until the sonnets
break through the white
padded walling that houses me.

What say you, great poet!?

In front and above me, on His wide throne,
sits the bastard King: He who holds the rope
and dangles its Knot that turns men to stone,
stiffened by the Klan: they who conceal hope

with public executions such as this.
Speak, peasant mutt! The joke is that they slit
my tongue and put it on a petri dish
to examine the lies of a Poet.

I force out a wicked bark; blood and spit
coat the colosseum flooring. The masked man
holding my leash rams his boot into my ribs. I
scream. I become fetal. Why? I ask.

Kill it now! Kill the dog before it breeds!
I asked, but I knew why they silenced me.

Sonnet 64

April 9, 1950

For tomorrow,

1. You must give an acceptance speech
2. You must thank the constituents
    a. Do not make fun of Gen. Emilio
        i. don't care if his dentures fall out.
        ii. Do not even smile.
3. You must formally admit to your crimes of treason
4. Alcohol consumption for inmates is **strictly prohibited**

Your compliance is expected
—San Martín Correctional Complex

A single sheet, bound and stitched
to my mouth; I, a drunkard with an inkless
quill, must use blood and bile for ink
to draft my speech, surely the final!
Barely able to hold on
to my body of bourbon,
bruises and burden.

I am still expected to perform:

Acceptance Speech

Thank you all for being here
to celebrate a collective of honored writers
and myself. (laughter) Thank you to the constituents,
who made it possible for me to be here today. It is an honor to accept this award. Now,
Iwas meant to come here to confess to treason.

Letme tell you about treason: in secondary school, I wasaccused of plagiarism by an Italian teacher.
Hehadjust arrived here from, well, Italy. (laughter)

I was shocked, as I was the best bloody writer in all of Galicia growing up. And yet, all he saw was a Negro.
That's treason.

Oh! now that I've got your attention, sea of white, face me! You want me to shuck-jive for my crimes?
Come on! I'll take you all on. Especially you, Emilio, I'll wipe that ugly ‘stache off your lip.

Of Part / Of Whole

Reborn again, I wear the guise that fits my muzzled demons; collarless and womanless, I tend to my wounds with a dry tongue, void of drool. I wear the guise that seduces institution. They sell flesh on the collegiate black market. We ate in tents for two years, so that they could spend more money on more convoluted buildings, and what's up with all the stairs? No handicap access, really? Every quarter hour, the bell in the looming clocktower tolls a tune that mocks—

DING
the chatter of the
punished. Its timbre is Black,
as if Black were made to dance for
financial aid. And as I roll to rid
myself of the fire I caught from the rings
I jumped through to get here, I pray my
music falls upon deaf ears. I am strangled
between the margins

I am 3, and I am old enough to know the word nigger; I heard it again and again – sometimes joined with lover – most places we go: — Natasha Trethewey, Vantage

My grandparents have passed
on. Perhaps I'll meet them

inthe life beyond life.
Icould show them my locs.

When we were younger, we split—
my mother looked after the Whites,

my father the Blacks.
And me.

Loving V. Virginia, 1967

THE OLD PEOPLE

inmy life are now all gone.
Iam the legacy of a dead

conglomerate. I have lost
my father, for he,

who sprouted into a
man last night,

faced the soil his parents are
nestled in like dirt co-

coons, put his lips to the ground,
and begged to god that I not

see him this way.

Featured in Sunday Mornings at the River Africa Anthology (2022)

Walamiseru buiti

I am property (partly) of the exiled, In
part due to shipwreck and drownin'.

Partial by nature: my darkest kin drown like
Live flounders kebabbed by Spanish javelins.

Spanish founders mince uncooked juveniles.
And they accredit our running to melanin,

But we ain't start runnin' until melanin
Was racialized for those who're lackin'.

Through racialism, we lack ourselves:
I am property (partly) of exilers.

I do my part by owning property: Those who
make song and dance of negrospeak.

Negroes who breakdown in song and dance.
They are articulate only in their pain.

White Man's Burden II

Take up the White Man's burden—
To pry open the blacks—
Go find the dark boys who ran,
An' bring their damned heads back!
'Tis our duty to tend; to
Mend the Orients' wounds,
(The wounds to which we append...)
Amend savage baboons!

Take up the White Man's burden—
Sailing ships of cargo; Half-child half-devil monkeys Whom we cast embargo Of oxygen an' chicken: Their favorite pastime. Aye, aye, an eye for an eye, Organs on which we dine.

Take up the White Man's burden—
Regal in our stride,
May we kill and feast on beasts
Greater only in size!
Grab ye crosses an' pitchforks,
We must break their might.
For we're more godless than them!
Set ablaze to Christ.

...here is where my ghazal dies and
returns anew, due only to my hand and

my pen's lousy stride across the meter,
inking the line fine between lies and

poetry—here is where I toss the bodies
after they've been sucked dry and

are no longer of use for my rhymes and here
lies eternity: the lullaby of "and" and

how endless it is—I've used everyone
around me to stay alive and

make me an end worth dying for;
to make Emerald out of life and...

A mixed-only cavern in Northern Argentina, 2052 after one of their members has been brutally beaten for suggesting equality amongst all races.

"We must eradicate the world of monoracialism to achieve global unity! It is for our benefit that we initiate war tonight. We start with their cattle, depleting their resources and weakening their footsoldiers." The crowd erupts in a collective screech, waving their rifles in the air.

Abram was a pale, white Mexican with wealthy Spaniards for parents. His fingernails were well kept and his hair lustrous. He was one of the only mixed people able to afford the luxury of running water. The other mixed people who had this privilege were members of los compasivos — a group of sympathetic mixed people who betrayed the revolución in exchange for safety. Abram wouldn't know struggle if it had struck him in the face, and yet, possibly due to his wealth and education, he was the primary speaker at all of these conventions.

"For much too long, we have been circus monkeys underpaid and overworked. For much too long we have allowed them to keep us out of schooling and from raising our young. Well, today this ends. ¡No más!" The intense, animalistic rage flows through the room as rage is a necessary lifeforce of the revolución.

The cavern quakes as the mixedbreeds stomp through the rocky flooring, pounding their chests until the dried blood of their singleraced counterparts erodes from off of them.

"Allies must remain in their bunkers at ALL times. We've listened to Tomás' requests for peaceful protest. We've tried to unite with the wholebreeds and they beat him until he could no longer breathe from his blood-clogged nostrils."

"Tomás is a fool that we never should have listened to!" The crowd quickly falls to a silence.

Many disagreed with Tomás' approach as it reflected the views of their traitors, los compasivos. However, no one had spoken ill of him since he was beaten to near death by radical policemen.

"Who said that? If you be not fearful of consequence, reveal yourself!" A tall, brooding dark figure emerges from a sea of turned heads:

"We should have struck decades ago! We don't need these pinche 'allies,' we need more arms. We need bombs. We need justice for our fallen brethren! Death to all Monos!"

The man had dreads wrapped around other dreads. A long intrusive scar runs down the bridge of his nose. Juan never enjoyed being called Juan; he considered it his 'slave name.'

"All you Mestizos think you run shit because you have more privileges. What about us? What about the Zambos?

The Garifunas? The Miskitos? You speak in these riddles and atrocious poetry and yet all that has come from it is regression. Look around, people! You think this White cabrón cares about the people?" The crowd murmurs in a mixture of agreement and confusion.

Juan has always been treated as an inferior due to his darker skin tone. Even within the social hierarchy of the mixed-race, the lighter skinned dominated discussions often leaving out their darker comrades. Abram glares at Juan, practically piercing a hole through the giant's forehead. Although he was in a greater position of power, Abram could never bring himself to look Juan directly in the eyes.

"Is it not clear that we are brethren?" Abram stammers. Nervously pacing around the stage, he had not planned for an intervention. This was not a part of the script: "Why must you use the logic of the monoracial? Our skin complexion will hold no value in paraíso." Juan grinds what remains of his tattered teeth and lets out a raucous cry.

"Enough! Either show your loyalty to us by bringing out the hostages or I will sacrifice you myself. And I have yet to sharpen my blade, so don't be alarmed if it doesn't go through your neck in one clean slice." Abram shudders.

"Fine! Bring out the hostages."

I have certainly experienced subtle discrimination at school.

Not of the racial variety (at least that I know of).
It is more so my inaccessibility to things due to
my economic background. I was punished often
by professors who could not fathom why I didn't
purchase a book on time. They questioned why I
didn't rather than why I couldn't. Poverty is not
a good enough excuse for the Constituent, but
you can't spell poetry without it.
I was ashamed and blamed myself
for something out of my control.
Often I needed money for insignificant shit
like food, but I should have instead spent
that on books from which we would only read
about ten pages
before tossing away.
There is a border between me and the higher
beings that run the higher institution.

A line which I cannot cross.

cross—this—line—do—not—cross—this—line—do—not
— Letta Neely

30 years after the court case that would allow me to exist, I was born. Although, I like to consider many periods in my life as ridiculous attempts to become reborn and

DONG

forget my trauma. I tried to drop out of school and go into
music full-time. That failed. Yeah turns out I make really
shitty music. So any ways, enough on that tangent.

I returned to my university, pretending I was no longer mentally ill and maintaining a façade of blissfulness. In my attempt to escape the rigid claws of academia, I crossed a line, and now they must reform me.

Every few years, they tear down a building or two, to
transform it into something no one asked for. Something
grander, so that they may justify the shit ton of money they
charge its students, putting most of us into immense debt
before we even set foot on their fancy brick-tiled campus. And
then they give you the whole “we’re here to help you” spiel.

Tepid in my grasp remains a with'ring soul divorced from life & accustomed to an affection I cannot afflict — not without selfcavitation. My hands soaked, sticky on the back of her denim jacket, stuck with a blade glued to my palm. I let instinct take over until I heard silence. It had to have been done, I had been told by my father, a shepherd with many a lamb— he who shifts in and out of marriage.

After my episode, I may sur-
render to security, sub-
mit my mind to the stu-
dent intervention ser-
vices, and com-
mit my body to Belle-
vue.

By and large, language is a tool for concealing the truth – George Carlin

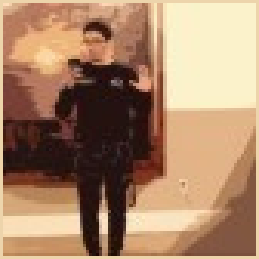
My god is better than your god.
It does not discriminate, incriminate,
insinuate. There's no book for my god.
There are no rules. My god leaves for
the day and returns the next.

My god is everywhere and
nowhere all at once.
My god brings both life and
death. I can see my god.
My god is better than your god.

My god has no race. My god has no face.
My god is in space. It is sexless, lifeless.
Yellow and perpetually dying. My god
is dying, like me. There are no hierarchies;
my god may be physically above me,

but it is mortal like me. And once my god
dies, my great, great grandchildren will die of
starvation and hypothermia. And my god
will not return for anyone, for he will die
and he, too, will go to heaven.

An Anti-Reading of "Black in my Country"



I used to perform this poem depress (and impress)

Black people. It was long and arduous as hell. Here is a synopsis:

Black inMy Country by Emiricus the Poet is everything but interesting. Its mundane nature comes primarily from my bizarre desire to impress an audience with unsurprising, unrefreshing lyricism. It is the most derivative, generic, and structurally predictable spoken-word piece I have personally had the displeasure of hearing.

The poem opens with a penetrative question that pretends not to already know its answer:

"What does it mean to be Black?"

I give the audience about half a second to psychoanalyze it before providing several non-answers myself.

"Is it the color of my skin?"
(I have fairly light, non-Black skin—sometimes.)

"Or the hood that I grew up in?"
While I am from a neighborhood in Harlem that is perpetual

in its burning, I have never felt truly at home there, nor would I claim it shaped any significant part of my life.

"Or the fact that I was born in sin,
so much that the church wouldn't let me in."

Looking back, and with my current understanding of Black Christian theology, I doubt any church was keeping me out for any reason whatsoever. But it rhymed, and at the time, that was enough.

What follows is a sequence of familiar gestures about how difficult life is for a Black person—police brutality, state violence, inherited trauma. The issue with these tropes is not that they exist, but that they are predictable. The death of Black people at the hands of police has become so narratively expected that it risks functioning as shorthand rather than reckoning. It is the spoken-word equivalent of a stand-up routine about Donald Trump: cheap, reliable, and applauded on reflex.

It is not fun to write. It is not fun to listen to.
Anyone stating otherwise is lying.

Allow me to provide a checklist.

Checklist for Typical Spoken-Word Poem About Blackness

- ☐ Police brutality
- ☐ The names of at least two victims
- ☐ A strategic omission of Black-on-Black violence
- ☐ A reference to slavery
- ☐ A Martin Luther King Jr. quote
- ☐ "I can't breathe"
- ☐ A closing identity twist

"But I'm only half Black,
so I guess I'm just a nigga in disguise."

I performed the dying-Black-people narrative to make my own Blackness feel credible. I shouted out Emmett Till for no reason other than the fact that his name reliably produces applause from anyone who passed fifth-grade history.

While I still believe he never deserved to die, invoking him in that poem was lazy, random, and transactional. It was not remembrance, it was currency.

I have attempted time and time again to
ascribe meaning to poetics and therefore
develop my own Ars Poetica: figuring
those who read my poetry academically

(i.e. no one)
wish to be taught exactly what the
Hell I am thinking when I
drool words onto a canvas.
Given that I've just reviewed
one of my own worst spoken
word pieces, I should then
categorize what I believe to be poetry.

***

Paranoia himself stumbles into
my carpeted quarters, easing
his way into my poetry.
The scripture on my desk is a mere
draft and is just as intangible as light.
It is full of words, but lacks
whatever makes a poem a poem:

1. Abhorrent unclarity
2. Dope rhymes
3. A shit ton of lies
4. A tired cliché or two

Without these elements,
we are unable to deduce
a poem from a confession,
and we do not want to go

to jail. Anyway, I should
provide an example of
a poem that consists of
good poetics, because is
what people came to see,
...right



132nd St, undated.
I went to school on this block, eventually.

Rest in Peace,Desmond Daniel Amofah

The Harlem River Houses rest between Polo Grounds and the Dunbar
Apartments;
by the bridge bordering the Bronx
forever burning as the bastards
bike across it to get to the baseball
park to play ball and run track.
I remember the stink of the rote
memory of rotten blacks, buried
beneath the barracks. Memories

I possess from before birth.
I lived (and died) between fireproof
brick buildings, between tandem

parents, stuck together by the will
of my potential market value.
(I knew they would sell me eventually,
but I didn't know to who).
Another Afrorican rumored to be
beaten to near-death.
It ain't Upper Manhattan.
This is Harlem,
and I'm a child of the Riots.

I was born in Harlem Hospital, across the street from the public library that houses the Schomburg. The usual reaction to that is dismay—very few people make it
out of Harlem Hospital alive. I was
not one of them.

1943

Why worry when they'll
expel me? The damned
brink-jumper. I fall faster than grades
define me. Fresh soil rests
upon a stressed body,
void of innards.
Surely you under
estimate how
badly I envy
the gone?

I could sleep
for a little while
without
the voices.

I overslept
the day I
was scheduled
to die

The earth is my turf, but the hearse like a
magnet – Thebe N. Kgositsile

Let me die here, in the margins between
bitches who will come to my funeral
but ne'er to my aid, & a guillotine's
blade pressed against the nape of my neck, dull

so that it doesn't kill. Don't be alarmed:
this is not a suicide note gone right,
solely a poem that may suggest harm
done to myself by way of what I write

here. It is scripture of pain, of sorrow,
of fathers, mothers, & bastards in swarms—
of crackling fire cooking rank negroes,
of Death who welcomes me with open arms.

These are sonnets 13-64:
Hell above the floor and outside Earth's core.

Sonnet 13

Death, fuck
Let's fuck
Just don't touch me
Just fuck-fuck me – Stefan C. Burnett

Our spit boils in a cauldron instead
Of rancid cum-guck layered in thy mouth
Between thighs thickened by a hatred for men:
Noname is what we called the lips south
Of the totem shrine that is your body:
Covered with faces stoned-plated and bones
That jut, jarring to the eye. We make hobby
Of dying 'til sunrise, then you go home
And hurt yourself for hurting me. I ne'er
Apologized for what I did to you.
And so I suffer alone, as it were,
Unable to slumber. I drown in dew.
Pills cannot save me from me, I have tried.
Even underwater, I have not yet died.

Sonnet 14

Fiddle with my snakeskin designer flute.
Eight point five inches – how big? (why?) How
big?
Why so high strung? High, huh, so why so
brute?
How high do I jump? My own grave I dig

further into the trench where bastards be. They pick the Daddy tribe to their demise. Why! Oh, why must I flee the screams beneath The floorboards that creak from the weight of
lies.

Shoddy arms reach out from Hell's horizon—
How big? Don'T Trust people who Talk like
This.
How far? Car fun? Got gas? Best head! Bar
none.
My head harpoons in him – he swoons in bliss.

I break at climax, down on ripe elbows
And knees, facing home: where all the gays go.

My piss runs down a sewage stream; yellow
in taste, hello it's great! Mellow I fade.
They t-t-tremble at my taboo trade
So much so they tend to hate my shadowed
Figure; it chases me like I'm a schizo!
Fear the negro: beware for he holds shade
Upon his skin, that there's that negro rage.
His eyes feral-like, rabid afro woes.

Who's he to try to talk like one of us?
He whose trial tribulates our tired eyes.
Singing slave sonnets meant for mutts,
Laid to rest on a bed of flames like soot.

Sonnet 16