
**Before I start this poem,
I'd like to ask you to join me in
a moment of silence
in honour of those who died
in the World Trade Centre
and the Pentagon
last September 11th.**

**I would also like to ask you
a moment of silence
for all of those who have been
harassed, imprisoned, disappeared,
tortured, raped, or killed
in retaliation for those strikes,
for the victims in both
Afghanistan and the U.S.**

**And if I could just add one more thing...
A full day of silence
for the tens of thousands of Palestinians
who have died at the hands of
U.S.-backed Israeli forces
over decades of occupation.**

**Six months of silence
for the million and-a-half Iraqi people,
mostly children, who have died of
malnourishment or starvation
as a result of an 11-year U.S. embargo
against the country.**

**Before I begin this poem:
two months of silence
for the Blacks under Apartheid
in South Africa,
where homeland security
made them aliens
in their own country.**

**Nine months of silence
for the dead in Hiroshima
and Nagasaki, where death rained
down and peeled back
every layer of concrete, steel, earth and skin**

and the survivors went on as if alive.

A year of silence
for the millions of dead
in Vietnam--a people, not a war-
for those who know a thing or two
about the scent of burning fuel,
their relatives' bones buried in it,
their babies born of it.

A year of silence
for the dead in Cambodia and Laos,
victims of a secret war ... sssshhhhh ...
Say nothing .. we don't want them to
learn that they are dead.

Two months of silence
for the decades of dead
in Colombia, whose names,
like the corpses they once represented,
have piled up and slipped off
our tongues.

Before I begin this poem,
An hour of silence
for El Salvador ...
An afternoon of silence
for Nicaragua ...
Two days of silence
for the Guatemaltecos ...
None of whom ever knew
a moment of peace
45 seconds of silence
for the 45 dead
at Acteal, Chiapas
25 years of silence
for the hundred million Africans
who found their graves
far deeper in the ocean
than any building could
poke into the sky.
There will be no DNA testing
or dental records
to identify their remains.
And for those who were
strung and swung

from the heights of
sycamore trees
in the south, the north,
the east, and the west...

100 years of silence...
For the hundreds of millions of
indigenous peoples
from this half of right here,
Whose land and lives were stolen,
In postcard-perfect plots
like Pine Ridge,
Wounded Knee,
Sand Creek, Fallen Timbers,
or the Trail of Tears.
Names now reduced
to innocuous magnetic poetry
on the refrigerator
of our consciousness ...
So you want a moment of silence?

And we are all left speechless
Our tongues snatched from our mouths
Our eyes stapled shut
A moment of silence
And the poets have all been laid to rest
The drums disintegrating into dust
Before I begin this poem,
You want a moment of silence
You mourn now as if the world will never be
the same
And the rest of us hope to hell it won't be.
Not like it always has been

Because this is not a 9-1-1 poem
This is a 9/10 poem,
It is a 9/9 poem,
A 9/8 poem,
A 9/7 poem
This is a 1492 poem.
This is a poem about
what causes poems like this
to be written

**And if this is a 9/11 poem, then
This is a September 11th poem**

for Chile, 1971

**This is a September 12th poem
for Steven Biko in South Africa, 1977**

**This is a September 13th poem
for the brothers at Attica Prison,
New York, 1971.**

**This is a September 14th poem
for Somalia, 1992.**

**This is a poem
for every date that falls
to the ground in ashes
This is a poem for the 110 stories
that were never told
The 110 stories that history
chose not to write in textbooks
The 110 stories that CNN, BBC,
The New York Times,
and Newsweek ignored
This is a poem
for interrupting this program.
And still you want
a moment of silence
for your dead?
We could give you
lifetimes of empty:**

**The unmarked graves
The lost languages
The uprooted trees and histories
The dead stares on the faces
of nameless children
Before I start this poem
We could be silent forever
Or just long enough to hunger,
For the dust to bury us
And you would still ask us
For more of our silence.**

**If you want a moment of silence
Then stop the oil pumps
Turn off the engines and the televisions
Sink the cruise ships
Crash the stock markets
Unplug the marquee lights,**

**Delete the instant messages,
Derail the trains, the light rail transit**

**If you want a moment of silence,
put a brick through
the window of Taco Bell,
And pay the workers for wages lost
Tear down the liquor stores,
The townhouses, the White Houses,
the jailhouses, the Penthouses and
the Playboys.**

**If you want a moment of silence,
Then take it
On Super Bowl Sunday,
The Fourth of July
During Dayton's 13 hour sale
Or the next time your white guilt
fills the room where my beautiful
people have gathered**

**You want a moment of silence
Then take it
Now,
Before this poem begins.**

**Here, in the echo of my voice,
In the pause between goosesteps of the
second hand
In the space
between bodies in embrace,**

**Here is your silence.
Take it.
But take it all
Don't cut in line.
Let your silence begin
at the beginning of crime.
But we,
Tonight we will keep right on singing
For our dead.**

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