Toward Camden

Mercy Romero

TOWARD CAMDEN

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She breathed new life into me that night. This book is dedicated to her, with all my love. Thank you for being my first and best teacher, for loving me as I am, and for so much laughter. I'm also shaped by my love for my father and his love for me, especially when I have been sick. I hope this book holds some part of what that love has meant for my understanding. Thank you for trusting me. Thank you for reading and loving Walt Whitman and James Baldwin and for passing this love to me. That I can turn to you both, even still, means the world to me. My three sisters and their families hosted, fed, loved, and encouraged me when I was out running around Camden, returning from the loneliness and confusion of an empty and boarded up house or trying to sort out a language to understand what was happening and write this book. I am thankful that parts of me come from my sisters and that we come from the same place. Thank you, M. J. P., for being the love in my life for a long time. I love you. I am grateful to you and your family, especially your mom, whose love and care for our kids made it possible for me to go to work and not worry. I'm grateful for my family, and lately I've been thinking a lot about my grandparents. Their migration stories and the places that made them—Morovis, Barranquitas, Adjuntas, Jayuya, Ponce, Lorain, Bridgeport, and Camden—turn and sound in my imagination and extend what this book has taught me. Thanks to my beautiful and brilliant children who have been with me as I've written this book. You showed me the waves, the lightning, and the clear path; I am ever grateful for your camaraderie and love. May you know the full blessings of the Puerto Rican and African American dreamers who made you, and may you be in service to that vision.

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PROLOGUE

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When I was eighteen or so I got to hear the poet Martín Espada read. I went to the reading with another girl. We were new friends. As we crossed Broadway, the distance between Barnard and Columbia, I listened to her talk about where she was from, one of her many stories about the beautiful Bay Area city that was the source of her father's blues and her mother's kind of love. The poetry reading must have meant a lot to us that evening and there must have been a special discount (maybe a two-for-one) because, as poor as we were, we each bought a book. She got *Rebellion Is the Circle of a Lover's Hands*, and I, *City of Coughing and Dead Radiators*. We waited in line so Espada could inscribe them, bless us with a few more words. A few years later when she left New York, her son in her arms, she gifted me her copy. (You can only take so much when you move.) Where are those books now? They may be down to the rot of our Camden basement, or hiding out in a Rubbermaid somewhere in my sister's storage container.

That evening, Martín Espada prefaced his reading of his poem "Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper" with a story. Once, when he was a law student, he held a legal pad, the long yellow pages made less unruly because they are bound at the top. And he remembered his own teenage hands working the paper edges of what would become the bundle. When he was sixteen he had worked at a factory where they made legal pads.

Glue secured it all, but it made his paper cuts burn and shout. Now he dwelled in thought, of the assembly, the cuts, and the paperwork.

But maybe after all he didn't preface his poem with a story? Maybe it was just the poem. Either way, I remember it this way. I remember it twice and in two voices, or between story and poetry.

I think of the story now. It is a couple of hours before sunrise. My boyfriend is asleep next to me. I asked this prologue to come. I asked yesterday. Make me ready to write tomorrow, I said, almost aloud. I stood at the kitchen window above a clean sink, my own children dealing in their evening homework, notebooks, and math facts, and I almost prayed it.

A Pair of Hands Upturned and Burning

Puerto Rican rallies mother, father, poet, writer, abuelita, grandfather, cousin, friend, titi, tio, sister, brother, daughter, you, beloved, son, neighbor, self, singer, nobody, me, and so on. You can shout, whisper, sing, draw out, or spit out some of these words when you read this list aloud. This may be how it is chosen, how it is made in relation, how it agitates against loss, is lost, or is what endures.

We arrived in Camden a handful of years after the 1971 riot, and after most of the storefronts in our neighborhood were permanently closed to us, hung in what would seem like an eternity of wooden boards and nails. My father trailed his brother, mother, and sisters. Eventually they all moved away, but we stayed on. I suppose we watched as houses vanished too, first behind the telltale of wood and neighborhood tags, then in fire, smoke, or wrecking ball. I grew to wonder about what remains, the left-behind and haphazard shapes on a landscape, like empty lots and vacants, and what might be pictured at and below the boards, all indications of life or life signs.

In the late summer of 1971 Puerto Rican people in Camden, New Jersey, rallied when police beat a Puerto Rican man. Over the course of three August days, people took to each other to grieve and protest in Camden. The Puerto Rican man had been pulled over by two Camden police officers. They beat him brutally and murderously, because afterward he was put on life support. He was reported to be in a coma and internally poisoned by his own ruptured small bowel.[1] When his life signs waned, his family's attorney (a man called Poplar) received a call from Camden's Mayor, Joseph Nardi: "He's not dead, but everyone figured that in order

not to throw fuel on the fire, we didn't want him dead." Poplar convinced the Puerto Rican man's wife to keep him on life support.[2]

The Puerto Rican man's death was put on hold. He was kept on life support in the hospital in order to abate what the city's leaders imagined as an impending riot. Such was the administrative attempt to slow his death and control the movement and narrative of Camden's insurgent Puerto Rican political histories of 1971, which would constellate with other antiracist and anticarceral rebellions across the country.[3]

> He's not dead,
> but everyone figured that
> in order not to throw fuel on the fire
> we didn't want him dead.

I find this statement in an online newspaper archive. I sat with the phrasing for some time, a long time, troubled. I think of a part of Rick Barot's poem "Tarp," when he writes:

> There is no tarp for that raging figure in the mind
> that sits in a corner and shreds receipts
> and newspapers. There is no tarp for dread,
> whose only recourse is language
> so approximate it hardly means what it
> means:
> He is not here. She is sick. She cannot remember
> her name. He is old. He is ashamed.[4]

What does it mean to be pushed through accounting? To be figured as fuel and fire? To become a remainder.

On either end of this equation is a "not" death, a want of not dead:

"He's not dead . . . we didn't want him dead."

This is the administration of life and the logic of population control. It is the other side of care for Puerto Ricans (in Camden), an administrative figuration of need, and the order of our dispossession and disappearance there.[5]

It may then have been unthinkable to say instead, "We wanted him to live." The Puerto Rican man who was beaten on July 30, 1971, and kept on life support through August 20 and reported dead on September 15 is called by two names in newspaper reports: Rafael Rodriguez and Horacio Jimenez. It is said that he gave the police a different name, a false name.

The line between Rafael/Horacio holds this tension, gestures perhaps toward how he tried to pass, cut, and slip interrogation, rally—all that he was up against—before he was finally allowed to die. For me, that slip continues to resonate and disturb the scene.

Rafael/Horacio was forty when he was killed. He had been driving through Camden, coming back home for a visit, it is said, because he had moved, lived elsewhere. Newspapers from that time describe the ensuing three or four days of rebellion and fires in the city that followed the breakdown in talks between the mayor and Puerto Rican community leaders and Rafael/Horacio's death. Camden structures, homes, businesses, gathering spots, and vacants were burned. Hundreds of people were arrested, and this rebellion was, like Rafael/Horacio, called by at least two names: the Camden Riots and the Puerto Rican Riots.[6]

A 2011 *Courier Post* newspaper retrospective on those four days includes the voices of Camden residents who were present at City Hall during the first rally against police brutality. The article describes a scene conjured by a man named Delgado, whose memory of that night reaches toward the making of an energy and a peoplehood, somewhere between a nowhere and a here: "'I remember that night, the people got energy from nowhere. . . . These parking meters here, we pulled them up out of the ground. That's how mad we were.' K-9 dogs and police in riot gear filtered out of the building. The mob overturned police cars and shattered windows. 'People can only take so much,' Delgado said. 'That was the last straw for Camden.' 'The people of Camden went to city hall to demonstrate,' he said. 'They wanted justice. Nardi said he had no time for the people, [but the] people wanted to say something.'"

Shared feelings crowd and collect. They accompany, want, extend, and claim. They may pass for other things—wanting to "say something" may look like the mad pulling of a parking meter right up out of the ground, the shattering of a window for what cannot be recovered. Delgado's repetition of "the people" of Camden pulls away from the reportage's characterization of a mob. It is the police who are in "riot gear," a tactical performance that sets the stage for and anticipates violence. The reportage turns away from Delgado and narrates the scene of a riot, as cops filter out of a building and the people become a mob, pulling and overturning a landscape. Yet what does Delgado mean when he says, "the people got energy from nowhere"? What is the generative promise and spatial power

of and to the people? If nowhere is a site of energy, then the recollection's turn toward this landscape may indicate another generation, a making at work. In this landscape a wrested parking meter is an uprooted signpost; what was designated as a point of arrival becomes the sign of a moving target (get back in your car), as the driver is accosted, is beaten, and dies, in transit, both in and away from home, toward Camden. The article narrates a Puerto Rican man who was off work that day and who was from Camden. He is returning to the city, driving around on his day off. In the media rendition of those hot, humid, and rainy days that stretched between July 31 and August 21 is an imagined transparency of possible events (the will to riot, the will to destroy), not toward a collective movement and an always in relation, but at a downfall, an unbecoming of a people and a place. An excerpt of a statement released by the city's director of public safety at the time launches an attack against Camden's Puerto Ricans and is totally laden with this vision of unbecoming, of absolute downfall: "The ruthless, despicable, cowardly and shameful conduct attributed to that animalistic group of rationless two-legged beasts could only be surpassed in nature and degree by the two-faced appalling actions as represented by the representative negotiators busily disgracing their name and culture while their cohorts unleashed their fury against an unwilling police contingent situated at the scene."[7]

Camden's Mayor Nardi imposed a state of emergency that closed the city and imposed a curfew to restrict outdoor movements between 8:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. Routes into the city were closed. Alcohol and gasoline sales were suspended, as they, too, were imagined as "fueling" the collective body. The curfew that closed the city was also an act of (preemptive) mass criminalization thinly disguised as care and protection. Curfew shut folks inside and deprived them of the consolation of each other and their many forms of nighttime movements. The curfew attempted to stop for three consecutive days any reunion with the cover of night, that which necessitates and makes home for all forms of life and strides. The curfew attempted to still Camden's community force, the many Puerto Rican and African American people who worked regularly and il/legibly both with and against the prevailing democratic order to effect change in their communities, to push and shift the world.[8] Of course, people did not obey: "'The whole problem lies with the mayor,' Mario Rodriguez, former Camden City councilman who now is a commissioner for the

State Division of Civil Rights, claimed. 'He kept those people waiting for 10 hours. He kept them waiting in the heat and in the rain. He avoided sitting down with them.'"[9]

Sometimes in the Camden summertime it is finally cool enough to be outside at nightfall. Sitting outdoors with the shapes of trees and things, or at the threshold of a porch, your bit of sky may be wrapped in trees and the sounds of a neighborhood breathing together, however quickly. What comfort in that necessary night walk, even if it's just to the end of the block or around the corner, the air outside against the full heat of the indoors. No air conditioner. Broken back doors nailed shut, all the downstairs windows barred—you've got to get outside. To think, act, and move. Just here and just in this way. If the solution and grieving come this way, at the electric charge of activity, movement, stroll, pull, and run, and if it can arrive in place, in that movement between you and this ground and piece of atmosphere, at that corner, between these houses, that generative public where we leave a bit of ourselves and our mark for the next one who comes along. When all of nature isn't the "property of man," but rather the space where we come to be, walk, and think as a part of it all.[10] To exist this way at a state of emergency, against curfew and isolation, against the nightly transformations of an entire city into a jail or prison cell, is kind of impossible. At the state of emergency, the coming night itself inaugurates an open-air prison, a controlled atmosphere. At the logic of the curfew, all of Camden's skies were bullet ridden, lit up by smoke and fire, and so all of the night and its seasonal and cyclical choreographies were suspended. It amounted to people being kept apart when they really needed to be together, and the only place where we can all be together is outside.

Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper

The Walt Whitman House in Camden did not burn that summer. Not necessarily because people wanted to spare Whitman's old house or honor the poet's legacy (in the city), but rather because the curator at the time, Eleanor Ray, an African American woman who grew up right next door, came outside and told people to keep it moving. In this way, she is said to have held off the fires and ushered along the people outdoors.[11] Ray's thirty-five-year tenure at the Walt Whitman House started in 1955 and

she was told, "Because the neighborhood (located just south of Broadway) was changing, they wanted a Black person to be custodian."[12] Ray began to see the house as "an extension of me." Reports of Ray's presence outdoors that August of 1971 describe her as protective, both sitting on the porch and sitting on the porch with a broom. The three days of rebellion are called a "rampage," "tide," "disorders": "When Puerto Ricans and blacks went on a rampage here last August, Mrs. Eleanor Ray sat protectively on the stoop of poet of democracy Walt Whitman's old home. The disorders, in protest against the alleged beating by two policemen of a Puerto Rican—he later died—led to about a million dollars' worth of damage. The tide came to within two doors of the Whitman house at 330 Mickle Boulevard before receding."[13]

In another article about the uprising, Eleanor Ray is pictured seated outside on the steps with a broomstick held across her lap. The caption reads, "A Broomstick against a Riot . . . Custodian Protected Walt Whitman's Home." Her body faces the camera, but she peers off to the side and into the distance, as if she is watching someone outside the frame. She holds the broom like a shotgun across her lap, but also like someone who is going to sweep the stoop. It strikes me that this hold is the same, and I rethink what she might have meant when she said this house is "an extension of me." Five years earlier, in 1966, Ray remarked that the house had hosted just three visitors one week and none the next: "Not many people know about the home and it's been so hot. . . ."[14] She posits the heat as keeping people at bay.

From inside this little house, Walt Whitman would often ask, or his friend and interlocutor Horace Traubel would ask him, after the weather. The heat. Traubel described August 23, 1891, this way: "Spent about five minutes with W. Sultriest day of the year. The whole community a growl."[15] Whitman asks Traubel whether it is as hot in Philadelphia as it is in Camden. Horace says yes, maybe even hotter. Traubel describes Whitman as fanning himself, passing a whole day sitting and fanning and dozing in the heat of his bedroom. Those days Whitman kept his bedroom windows mostly closed or only partially open. Whitman remarks that he likes ventilation. Their different perspectives on how open a window must be to be "open" and to circulate the air is amusing.[16] I wonder whether Whitman's mess, his piles of papers and things scattered around the floor, were part of the reason he kept just one window open.[17] Imagine the papers flying around the room in a gust or the rains coming in. He

couldn't walk very well by this time. He was old and infirm, and too much of the wind may have moved his stuff around more than he liked or perhaps chilled him more than he liked. Whitman had been a walker. Sometimes it seems as if *Leaves of Grass* is a walk.[18] Of the heat, Whitman complained often, and yet he said too: "But this cool weather don't entirely satisfy me. It is important for my best condition that the pores should be kept open—that I should exude freely—throw off—shake away—have good operations of the skin. And I find I do not, as the days get cool. The heat brought its own troubles, I know—I was feeble under it—it sapped me of some strength—but after all gave me a sense of liberty."[19]

That this heat should be in Camden, where he felt free and was open at the pores, delights me and also helps me to understand summertime nights and (body) heat in Camden and what liberty means in Camden: to "exude freely" and to feel "feeble" and "sapped." When Camden is made at its African American and Puerto Rican histories and Black freedom movements, that is, to exude freely, to throw off, to shake away—like the fights for just housing for the poor, for a life, and against police brutality. At political protests that wrest property from land/scape and the riotous energy and sociality of a gathering is the energy and peoplehood of sapped, feeble, and willing bodies, a collective sensing its liberty.

To deal with the heat, Whitman often assumed different positions and states of dress, seated just at the top of the stairs or by a window or with head in hands. He asked his friend Horace about the meaning of heat one evening: "W. in his room—not reading—thought the light was up—head resting on hands, elbow on arm of the chair. Room hot—air pretty bad—he conscious of it, said, 'This heat today—what does it mean? It seems to me as bad a spell as any yet.' But he keeps two windows out of three closed, which is one cause of the oppressive air."[20]

Whitman asks, "This heat today—what does it mean?" Perhaps he was referring to a quality, a kind of thought or meaning made in that heat. What does heat mean? What does summertime heat in Camden mean? On August 25, 1891, two days after Traubel described the Camden heat and the whole community as a "growl," Whitman and Traubel overheard a Black person laughing just outside Whitman's window:

> We heard the hearty laugh of a negro out on the street. Warrie remarked, "I do believe the niggers are the happiest people on the earth." W. saying at once, "That's because they're so damned vacant." I laugh-

ingly interposed, "That would be a bad thing to tell an anti-slavery man." He taking it up in this way, "It would—it was a bad thing. But I used to say it, though it always raised a storm. That was one of the points on which O'Connor and I always agreed. Charles Eldridge, however, *not*. That the horror of slavery was not in what it did for the nigger but in what it produced of the whites. For we quite clearly saw that the white South, if the thing continued, would go to the devil—could not save themselves. What slaveholding people can? Not, of course, because I could be cruel to the nigger or to any of the animals—to a horse, dog, cat, anything—especially *me*—for my dear daddy was remarkable everywhere he went for his kindness to the dumb beasts. A fine trait I hope I inherited—which I believe I did."[21]

Like the public safety officer whose 1971 statement likens Camden's Puerto Ricans to "two-legged beasts," Whitman overhears, storms, and corrals the sounds of free Black life in an awful taxonomy set to realign self-making freedom movements to slur, to slump, to a damnable vacancy.[22] The two patrolmen who beat and killed Rafael/Horacio in this way on July 30, 1971, in Camden were suspended, but they were ultimately acquitted of manslaughter, and each continued to work for the Camden Police through many more seasons and summers. Rafael/Horacio's father filed a lawsuit. According to newspaper reports, when word came that his son's death would be settled for $15,000, the father, a merchant marine, was away at sea. The settlement offer arrived some five years after his son's death.[23]

In the narrative of Camden's political histories, of this uprising as riot and economic ruination, the son's death figures centrally. Just $5,000 of the monetary settlement came from the city; the rest, from its insurance agency, the Insurance Company of North America.[24] Rafael/Horacio was kept alive on life support, made to live, in the days between July 31, August 21, and September 15, in order to stall what was imagined as a potential escalation of violence. That the insurance settlement would be used to cover hospital bills is staggering in this sense. That his body appears and is tethered to Camden's imagined breach and indebted to what thereafter is figured as the city's perpetual loss or recovery seems incommensurable.

A spider cast a line below the porch railing. Gray bundles are holding the shape and pattern of her eggs. I trip down the steps. I grip the railing and

poke her deposits, the silk sac tucked just below. It sticks to my fingers. There is a summer wind in the trees today. There is wind in the house. It comes in through the open windows. When the house is lost to us, broken, opened, vacant, or burned, it comes in everywhere and moves between treetops, and streets, and our empty rooms. The spider's lines will move this way, too, on the wind.

The slope of the floor, the angle of the wall, a busted bedroom window plugged up with a white crew sock. One of dad's lost socks! Watching the fire, keeping time with it. The climb, lick, frenzy, crack, and explosions. This bedroom had been my father's mother's, my abuelita's, too. She'd given us her house. She'd strung a line of small cast-iron bells from one of the two bedroom windows. Left them when she moved away. The bells would sound if someone who'd climbed up the porch rails and made their way onto the roof tried to get in through the window, to come into the house sideways. I take down the bells, untie all the knots, and replace the string. They are hanging at my window now, a different window in another house, next to a soft pouch on a string where I stashed a bit of my daughter's umbilical cord. I don't know why these bits of skin, cloth, and metal matter, but they hang and stake out the window.

The wood holds the burn. A summer at the steps, between a wooden porch, glass windows, metal bars and rails. No indentations there; everything is so light. Maybe you are looking out the busted window, and you finally get what you like about this city. All the kids are walking home and playing their way outside. The shape of the houses, the mix and turn of lots and vacants. Maybe this looks ugly to a lot of people. Maybe it is ugly. But you start to feel a lot of love for what you are seeing, and a general sense of peace. Memory is strung together like this, at kinship with a landscape and a people, the exhaust of a corner or a day.

NOTES

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Prologue

1. According to local newspaper reports, the hospital public relations director and administrator "refused to release information regarding Jimenez's injuries, issuing only status reports." It was also reported that "information was being withheld from the public, the press and from the police upon the advice of both the hospital's and Jimenez's attorneys." "He (Jimenez) is apparently suffering from internal poisoning which allegedly resulted from the rupture of a diseased internal organ, which in turn was allegedly caused by a body trauma and/or strain immediately prior to his admission to the hospital on July 31, 1971." "Jimenez Reported to Be 'in a Coma,'" *Courier Post*, August 20, 1971, 29.

2. Lucas K. Murray, "Days of Rage: Summer Riots of 1971 Sparked Camden's Undoing," *Courier-Post*, August 21, 2011. In 1971 there were "about 16,000 Puerto Ricans, 35,000 blacks and about 50,000 whites living in this city across the Delaware River from Philadelphia. The Puerto Rican population has nearly doubled in the last 10 years, and currently there are no elected Puerto Rican officials."

3. Rebellion at Attica Prison in New York erupts September 13, 1971; imprisoned intellectual and Soledad Brother activist George Jackson is killed August 21, 1971, in San Quentin, California, just a day after Puerto Ricans set off rebellion in Camden.

4. Rick Barot, "Tarp," *Poetry Magazine*, May 2013, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/56241/tarp.

5. Lisa Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014); Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). Darnell Moore's beautiful memoir, *No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black and Free in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2018), opens with and treats these histories as well, thinking critically about Black Lives Matter and Camden's insurgent histories.

6. As today, the names of the victims of police brutality come to stand in for the scene of violence—and the newspapers I read from this time refer to the murder of Rafael Rodriguez/Horacio Jimenez as the "Jimenez Incident."

7. This excerpt is from a longer statement issued by William Yeager, Director of Public Safety. "Officials, Leaders in Opposite Stand on Rioting in City," *Courier Post*, August 20, 1971, 29.

8. Howard Gillette Jr., *Camden after the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). Charles Poppy Sharp, chairman of the Black People's Unity Movement, is quoted expressing solidarity between Camden's communities of color: "We support the Puerto Rican community because we too have been victims of police brutality."

9. Joseph Bulser, "The Protestors," *Courier Post*, August 20, 1971.

10. Denise Ferreira da Silva, "No-Bodies: Law, Raciality and Violence," *Meritum (Belo Horizonte)* 9, no. 1 (2014): 119–62.

11. "20 Hurt, 40 Arrested as Rioting Hits Camden," *Courier Post*, August 20, 1971, 8.

12. Kevin Riordan, "Whitman House Caretaker Shares Legacy of City's Good Gray Poet," *Courier Post*, April 18, 1983.

13. "Broom Protected Whitman House," *Asbury Park Press*, December 26, 1971, A15; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 3, 1972.

14. Steve Klinger, "A Shrine to Whitman, But Too Few Know It," *Courier Post*, July 30, 1966.

15. Horace Traubel, August 23, 1891, in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, vol. 8 (1996), 435. From the Walt Whitman Archive, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/8/whole.html.

16. Traubel notes of Whitman: "It is astonishing how little disposed he is to really throw his window open to the winds—will only open one of three windows. Yet I have repeatedly argued with him, and Longaker has done so with much emphasis. Now, today, he complained of heat. Yet, while hot out-of-doors a free breeze was blowing. Nights, again, he will close the door to Warrie's room, lock the hall door, and close the blinds of the shutter of one

window" (Saturday, August 22, 1891). In *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, vol. 8 (1996), 433. From the Walt Whitman Archive, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/8/med.00008.193.html.

17. In an autobiographical sketch, Whitman wrote: "As he recuperated and still found himself alive, in Camden some years ago he came across a little wooden cottage for sale; and having nearly the money required for it, he bought it (he was aided by G. W. Childs) and has lived in it ever since and lives there now. His special apartment or living and writing and sleeping place (has been likened to some big old cabin for a kinky sailor-captain of a ship) is a large room on the second floor front 20 by 22 feet in area with a couple of tables (one rough old mahogany one, a Whitman heirloom over 100 years old, and another made for him in Brooklyn by the poet's father), a stove, chairs, a good bed, several heavy boxes, and a big ample rattan-seated chair with timber-like legs, rockers and arms large as ship's spars with a huge wolf-skin spread over the back in winter, a plain but very comfortable and ponderous edifice-built retreat in which WW ensconces the greater part of his days and whence, using a tablet on his lap, he issues all his poems, essays and letters of late years. He has within reach a Bible (English ed'n), Homer, Shakspere [*sic*], Walter Scott's Border Minstrelsy, Prof. Felton's Greece, Macmillan's ed'n of Burns, and Longfellow's Dante with the old few other volumes he still reads lingeringly and never tires of. All around where he sits spreads a great litter of newspapers, magazines, letters, MSS, proofs, memoranda, slips, on chairs, on the floor etc., with pen and ink handy, and one or two bunches of flowers. As he cannot walk, hardly move or get up without assistance, he has abandoned any attempt at apparent order and what strict housekeepers would call neatness but lets his books and papers 'lay loose.' The only point he is particular about is careful ventilation." Quoted in Traubel, July 30, 1891, in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, vol. 8 (1996), 375–76. From the Walt Whitman Archive, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/8/med.00008.170.html.

18. Traubel recounts a talk with Whitman: "Spoke of the beauty of the day. 'What did you do yesterday?' And I told him of our walk yesterday along Carsham Creek to Devil's Pool—Reeder, Longaker, Gilbert, Anne, along. He asked, 'Did Anne walk it? Six or seven miles? Good girl! It is a great thing to hear of the girls walking. She must be quite a walker.' And further, 'How well I know what such walks mean! What they lead to.' I happened to say *Leaves of Grass*. 'How well I know what *that* leads to. Its value is not in what it exhibits but in what it stirs us to exhibit—not in what it brings but what it leads us to find ourselves.' And he exclaimed, 'Good! Good! I hope it is! That is what we have always had before us—that is the sort out of which all the rest comes—a few indicative splashes—a little field—trail—then

silence.'" Sunday, July 5, 1891, in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, vol. 8 (1996), 302. From the Walt Whitman Archive, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/8/med.00008.145.html.

19. Quoted by Traubel, Tuesday, September 15, 1891, in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, vol. 8 (1996), 510. From the Walt Whitman Archive, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/8/med.00008.217.html.

20. Traubel, Tuesday, September 22, 1891, in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, vol. 8 (1996), 544. From the Walt Whitman Archive, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/8/med.00008.224.html.

21. Traubel, August 25, 1891, in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, vol. 8 (1996), 438. From the Walt Whitman Archive, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/8/med.00008.196.html.

22. James Baldwin wrote: "In our image of the Negro breathes the past we deny, not dead but living yet and powerful, the beast in our jungle of statistics. It is this which defeats us, which continues to defeat us, which lends to interracial cocktail parties their rattling, genteel, nervously smiling air: in any drawing room at such a gathering the beast may spring, filling the air with flying things and an unenlightened wailing. Wherever the problem touches there is confusion, there is danger. Wherever the Negro face appears a tension is created, the tension of a silence filled with things unutterable. It is a sentimental error, therefore, to believe that the past is dead; it means nothing to say that it is all forgotten, that the Negro himself has forgotten it. It is not a question of memory. Oedipus did not remember the thongs that bound his feet; nevertheless the marks they left testified to that doom toward which his feet were leading him." James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 29–30.

23. "Francisco Rodriguez, Rafael's father, filed suit in August 1972, seeking $250,000 in damages and alleging negligence on the part of the patrolmen and the city. Out-of-court negotiations resulted in an offer of $5,000 from the city and $10,000 from the Insurance Company of North America." The article continues: "At least half of the $15,000 settlement will reportedly go to pay remaining hospital and funeral bills and Medicaid payments stemming from the death." Larry Reibstein, "Fatal Beating: Settlement Seen in Rodriguez Suit," *Courier Post*, October 3, 1975, 3.

24. Each articulation of these times points out the loss of commercial retail and the economic assessment of harm and damage to Camden's future. "In the years after the riots, virtually every major retailer on Broadway—which once boasted J. C. Penney's, Woolworths, and Lit Brothers—left town. Before the advent of malls, Camden had been the shopping destina-

tion for South Jersey residents." In the wake of Camden's transformation what emerges is another site-specific commerce, corner markets and today the downtown business of complex medical care. In 1968, Camden city's riot insurance lapsed; the city itself became for a time, uninsurable, as the Insurance Company of North America refused to renew Camden's riot and civil disobedience coverage. "Camden's Riot Insurance Lapses," *Courier Post*, August 1, 1968, 7. See also "In Camden, a Bit of the Old Bustle," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 4, 1991, 19.

Chapter One. Toward Camden

Epigraph: Fred Moten, "B 4," *Poetry Magazine*, February 6, 2010, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2010/02/b-4.

1. Mom texts me: "The letter Dad wrote from Vietnam is dated January 22, 1968. That's his birthday! I just realized that! Things became bad throughout the year, when he and his buddies were bathing in a river and they started to get hit, bombs, and Dad got hit on his left leg, by the knee. He got out of the water and hopped into a 'hole' with other guys. That was when he was wounded and sent to Japan to recuperate. When he came back, he found out that many of the guys in his unit had been killed. That bombed him out. That affected him so much that he kind of changed inside. Even now Dad remembers every detail. One good thing he did was help people, help the older ladies and poor people. He would get things for them and learned to communicate with them in their own language. He has stories to tell. He wrote letters to me. I did not receive all of them. I mailed a letter every morning to him. He would get them in bunches sometimes, as the company moved frequently. Will call you tomorrow morning, Lord willing. [Kiss emoji]"

2. Atul Gawande, "The Hot Spotters," *New Yorker*, January 24, 2011.

3. David Weisburd and Cody W. Telep, "Hot Spots Policing: What We Know and What We Need to Know," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 30, no. 2 (2014): 200–220.

4. Nadine Ehlers and Shiloh Krupar, "'When Treating Patients like Criminals Makes Sense': Medical Hot Spotting, Race, and Debt," in *Subprime Health: Debt and Race in U.S. Medicine*, ed. Nadine Ehlers and Leslie R. Hinkson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 31–54.

5. Andy McNeil, "Police Step Up Presence at Northgate," *Courier Post*, January 12, 2014, https://www.courierpostonline.com/story/news/2014/01/12/police-step-up-presence-at-northgate-i-/4437911/.