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Losing Count: A Re-Collection, by Numbers

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Content Warning: This poem contains images of colonial and racial violence that can be triggering or distressing.

60 million. 90%. 1830. 1831. 1832. 125,000. Sixteen thousand. 4,000 and more. 1619. 401. Years. Sixty Million. One more. 1/3/1979. October 29, 1984. *May 16, 2010*. 7. Years. Old. 1991. 2-26-12. Oct.22.2013. 8-9-14. August 13, 2014. 7-13-15. October 18, 2016. Twelve Hundred and Seventy-Four. One more. Decade. February 23, 2020. 2.23 miles. 3/13/2020. 32 shots. 6 Bullets. 247 Names. Say it. *May 25, 2020*. \$20. 8:46. Minutes.

Genocidal Trail. Tears that are tearing away the years. A Passage. No, we are in the Wake. The Hold. No. It's a field. Of cotton and tobacco and sugar. Indigo. Sweet Home. Eula Mae's bill come due and no Love. Eleanor evicted and eliminated. Aiyana raided and dispatched. Deborah's neighbor calling. For help? Whose help? Rodney's body battered. Trayvon's hoodied frame followed and left. Andy's brown body and toy gun met by 8 rounds. Michael riddled and displayed for 4 hours. 4 days later, Michelle mowed—at close range. Sandra stopped, "lit up," and left—hanging. Ahmaud running, pursued, publicly executed. George suffocated. Hundreds. Thousands. Millions. BIPOC. *E-rased*.

2020. 62,670,153. One Million, four hundred thousand fifty-eight, three hundred and sixty . . . and counting. Each one, teaches one. And all. Wait. Be very quiet. We are (still) counting. Too many come and gone. E-rased. And, you know, it's mostly US. What is left then? To begin again. And again. And, again. The struggle. Our Ancestors pushing the rock. Sideways. No, in the Middle. Passage. Where did the time go? Here's a six word story. No. It's a riddle: She lay sleeping. Bullets in flight.

A Knock. A Knee. Not Warranted. Please. Stop. Killing. Us. There is traffic. On This Bridge (still) called my Back. On the Road to Hazel. Witch. The Original. Pungent but somehow portending a pending satisfaction. A hope for healing. Perfecting. A Toner. For the pores. I smell an opening, a cleansing. An anticipation of accomplishment. Its pungent odor has an underlying sweetness. Like a riot. No, I mean a rebellion. A protest. A resistance to the false skin of nations. A Ceremony. For completing. Kneel. I hear Toni Cade breaking the silence—barrier. I hear Fred's Fugitivity. Let's go Under. Ground. Find the Commons. Shed the false identity. Take off the

covering. No, the smothering—of US. Let's wipe the imperfections of supremacy and hegemony and oppression and violence. There is a sweet smell mixed with the one that threatens to burn my lungs and stifle my breath. But there is too much traffic. I watch it go by, slowly. Crawling. I watch it like Chris C. watching the birds—the ones of flight and the ones of prey. We are all watching the Calling. For help? We have been watching for thousands of years. Centuries and centuries—of traffic. Go by. How many? I am struggling to re-collect them, to go with them across the Crossroads. Yield, but do not stop. I am focusing my rear view on what James Baldwin called "the tremendous potential and tremendous energy" which "this child represents." I consider what will be saved. What is worthy of being salvaged? What will be cleansed? What new Parable lies ahead? Octavia is calling. Wildseed begets Earthseed. Don't forget to read her instructions. And wear your mask. Because we are on this ever-tempestuous road—together. Traveling. Claiming. Re-claiming. I look skyward. I am breathing. Repurposed air. I bow my head, prayer-like, to sniff the potion again. I can smell it through the fabric of my mask. Safely. It smells even sweeter than before but the pungency is still present. It is too strong. I ask myself, "is the odor there to awaken US as it cleans? An antiseptic for the (new) ages?" Maybe. It is a queer smell without the white cotton ball absorbing the liquid mass. I re-imagine the white cotton ball. E-racing its own impurities. Where are the Master's tools? No, never mind. I don't need them. I am 100% natural. Use daily.

KIM D. HESTER WILLIAMS teaches at Sonoma State University in the English and American Multicultural Studies departments. She is co-editor of a collection of interdisciplinary essays on race and environment, *Racial Ecologies* (2018), and has published essays on the representation of race, gender, and economy in new media, popular culture, and film. In addition to her scholarly work, she writes poetry which is feminist-centered and grounded in the long tradition of Black poetics.