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The Proper Way to Prepare the U.S. Flag

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2021 Vassar Miller Poetry Award, Honorable Mention

The Proper Way to Prepare the U.S. Flag
by Carmin Wong

Start with something simple: lines. 13 loosely lingering light-hearted lines. That eventually turns into crowbars; prison cells; laugh lines. Slave ships. Carve the middle out perfectly. Make its name into a noose. Mark its territory. Hang it on a shallow Cypress. Call it a show. Call everyone you know. Tie a mask around their necks. Sing of conquest *conquest, conquest, conquest, conquest, conquest, conquest*--- Call it ~~savagery~~ unity. Color over bloodlines. Color it blood until its red stains. Name it sacrifice. Silent. The Last Night. Jesus. Call it holy. Start with something simple: draw. 50 bullet holes into the formation of a third eye. A blinded country with a 20/20 vision of a white male as savior. Hold it against your heart and pray for your allegiance. Hold it against your chest and pray for democracy. Hold it up against a wall; a border; a blockade; watch it barbwire an entire world and strip the existence from right under you, leave you behind in star-spangled pieces. Call it diaspora. Dispersal. Dissipate the blackness from the bodies, the black away from the black body. Paint it across the back of a body. Wrangle it from bootstraps and watch it/ hang.