

Centuries of Sorrow

I remember growing up in Iowa
without the Sioux and Dakota.
Our high school mascot
was a mighty Indian.

I remember learning about plantation slaves
but Mr. Lubach didn't tell us about rape
by the master, lynching parties in the town square,
and the auction block selling humans
like cattle in a sale barn.
We named our beloved black lab Niggie.

I remember dad and mom whispering about Hitler,
Dachau, and Auschwitz as smoke from their stacks
drifted across Europe, blanketing the complicity
of Germany's Christian churches.

I remember the Navy stationed me in Mississippi
in 1967 and during my first week, two synagogues
burned to the ground. White Only signs in
Wideman's Restaurant, biracial Navy couple's
home burned, white schools, black schools,
white churches, black churches, Klan rallies.

Today, the Cherokee Nation still walks the trail of tears,
white knees choke black necks, mass incarceration
of black teens and profiling dominate injustice,
Latinas face The Wall, immigrants separated
from their weeping children, mosques burn,
antisemitism and Muslim phobia blare like sirens
that echo up the family tree.

Sadly, I remember I am a privileged white man,
standing high on the podium while being protected
by the dark umbrella of caste.

