

# **A Mango on the Madrone Tree:**

*Stories and Scribbles from a So-Called Afakasi*

*Tafea Polamalu*

A Mango on the Madrone Tree:  
*Stories and Scribbles from a So-Called Afakasi*

A PORTFOLIO PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF PACIFIC ISLANDS  
STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMET OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS  
IN PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDIES

By

Tafea Polamalu  
April 2009

Project Committee:  
Vilsoni Hereniko, Chairperson  
Terence Wesley-Smith  
Robert Sullivan

This Portfolio is Electronically Accessible at <http://erasedgods.blogspot.com/> and  
<http://chasingoceania.wordpress.com/>

We Verify that we have read this portfolio project and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a portfolio project for the degree of Masters of Arts in Pacific Islands Studies.

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*“Objectivity is for such uncommitted gods. My commitment won’t allow me to confine myself to so narrow a vision. So vast, so fabulously varied a scatter of islands, nations, cultures, mythologies and myths, so dazzling a creature, Oceania deserves more than an attempt at mundane fact; only the imagination in free flight can hope- if not to contain her- to grasp some of her shape, plumage, and pain.”*

*Albert Wendt*

*In Loving Memory of Grandma Billie Fae Redenius*



## **Acknowledgements**

To the countless friends and family who have supported me along my journey: Thank you.

### **My aiga:**

To Milaneta and Maleata: Thank you daughters for finding stability amidst the movement and for finding calm amidst the commotion. Thank you for sharing me with all the books, laptops, and deadlines. Thank you for allowing me to get an education and to pursue my dreams. Thank you for your beautiful spirits and joy.

Thank you Sarona, for your unconditional love, support, and friendship. From apartment to apartment, town-to-town, and broken-down car to broken-down car, we have been through the fire together, and I could not have done it without you.

To Grandma: I know the family thinks I moved home to help you last summer, but I know that it was you who helped me. You can finally rest in peace now. I am eternally grateful for your love and care. Please give Grandpa a big hug for me.

To Ali'itasi: Thank you for guiding me to the extraordinary gift of self love.

To Silia: Thank you older brother for 20 years of taking care of me. Thank you for your patience, your wisdom, and your guidance. My day is not complete if I do not hear your voice.

To Joe: Thank you oldest brother for the path you cleared. Thank you for always letting me play in your room while you danced in front of the mirror to Kool and the Gang.

To Troy: Thank you for being the best younger brother in the world. Thank you for endless nights talking in our shared room.

To Mom: Thank you for always believing in me and encouraging me with the utmost love and support. Thank you for encouraging and creating space for my creativity. Thank you for your tireless work ethic and commitment to motherhood and family. Literally, thank you for everything.

To Dad: Thank you for all your hard work. Thank you for all your forty-hour weeks and overtime. Thank you for being there for our family.

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Thank you Coco for your extraordinary spirit and kindness. You always made me feel like family.

Thank you Terence Wesley-Smith for your kindness, and commitment to the students, and passion for teaching.

Thank you Vili for always challenging me to disrupt convention, to think outside the box, and to be limitless. Thank you for your relentless commitment to creativity. Thank you for clearing a path and “leaving a map.” I found your directions to be invaluable.

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## INTRO

Sometime in October of 2007, I finished reading Vilsoni Hereniko's *Woven Gods*. I was riding the 52 from Ala Moana to Laie: the last leg of my all-too-familiar six-hour round-trip journey from Laie to Manoa. I had a small flashlight that I used to read on the dark ride home. I closed the book, clicked off the flashlight, and in the darkness, I saw a wide path open through the jungle. I remember the first time I finished an Albert Wendt novel, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, I saw a path cleared through the jungle. At a young age, Wendt's work cleared a huge path for me as a writer and as an artist in general. Many years later, Hereniko's work did the same, but not in the field of fiction. *Woven Gods* forever changed the way I approached and understood research and scholarship. His unconventional research methodology cleared a path along the very edge of the academic universe. In his own words, he intentionally left a map: "... the self-reflective nature of this study is my desire to tell other Pacific Islanders interested in traveling the same road to take comfort in the knowledge that one of them has been on it before, and has left a map that they can use, modify, or discard as they choose" (Hereniko 11). That night, on the 52, somewhere between Punalu'u and Haula, I found Hereniko's map, and I am truly grateful for his direction. *Woven Gods* both challenged me and invited me to disrupt convention and push the limits of my own imagination. Inspired and guided by many artists and intellectuals, I have made my way deep into the jungle; *A Mango on the Madrone Tree* is my effort to widen and extend the many paths that have been blazed before me.

WE ARE US NATIONALS NOT  
US CITIZENS. WE Pledge  
our allegiance to the Flag  
of the United States of  
America. We are home of  
the pea: the Flying Fox  
home of Pago Pago  
harbor: The object of  
strategic Military lust  
that attracts WARSHIPS  
and MEN OF WAR. We are  
home of the aōā: the  
giant banyan tree that  
dances in hurricanes  
and shades seas. We are  
home of the highest  
per capita death rate  
in the current US  
occupation of IRAQ  
higher than any other  
US State or territory  
We are American Samoa  
American enough to stop  
enemy bullets: NOT  
AMERICAN enough to  
Vote. We are American  
Samoa: Locked and  
loaded and ready to die  
FOR YOUR AMERICA



FRANK TIAI  
TOASA TAVAE  
SIAI TOMETE  
JEFFERY LOA  
MAX A. GALEA  
LUI TUMANOVAO  
L. SEVARETOFI  
SAMMOND S  
MICHAEL T. FOGA  
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LUI TUMANOVAO

# ***INTERVIEW***

**An Interview with Tafea and the Self: Another Way to Listen and Talk to Our Many Selves**

**Self:** Tafea, you are only half Samoan, which makes you *afakasi*. You do not speak Samoan. You did not grow up in Samoa; in fact, you did not even grow up in a Samoan community. You are half diasporic settler and half white colonizer. Do you really think you belong in Pacific Islands Studies?

**Tafea:** First of all, I have problems with the labels that you stamp on me, but I will let my poetry dissect that. The answer is yes, I do belong in the field of Pacific Islands Studies. Belonging in Pacific Islands Studies does not mean that you have to be a native descendant of Oceania; I belong in Pacific Islands Studies because I care about the physical and metaphysical space called Oceania, and I am passionate about moving forward with decolonization. All people belong in Pacific Islands Studies if they desire positive change and care about the largest body of water on the earth. We need all the help we can get.

**Self:** But you grew up in Oregon Tafea. What is your connection to Oceania?

**Tafea:** I am a partial descendant of Oceania. My father comes from the island of *Tau* in the *Manu'a* archipelago. I have many connections to Oceania: physical and metaphysical. For example my understanding of and respect for *Fa'aSamoa*, my love of my father's stories, my connection to *aiga*, my ancestors, my love for Albert Wendt novels, my passion for decolonization, and so much more. You see, I am also a *Hau'ofa-ist* in the sense that I believe the people of Oceania are moving and expanding as we have been doing since the dawn of

time. I am a product of that movement. In this paradigm, physical location becomes less relevant because “the ocean that connects us” is a metaphysical concept.

**Self:** Haven’t you heard that interdisciplinary studies are the soft option? Haven’t you also heard that the portfolio option is the soft option? It seems you have chosen to do the soft option within the soft option; you are really taking the easy road aren’t you?

**Tafea:** Yeah, I’ve heard the whole soft-option thing. I have no control over the prejudices people may have toward interdisciplinary studies or portfolio option. All I can do is pour all my *mana* into my work and trust it will find its way to its destinations. I’ve also heard rumors among grad students and some profs that “portfolios greatly reduce the odds of being accepted into PhD programs,” but I don’t worry about it. If I am lucky, my work will help to change negative perceptions regarding portfolios. More importantly, I want be part of the decolonization movement through my actions.

**Self:** In one sentence, describe what is “A Mango on the Madrone Tree?”

**Tafea:** “A Mango on the Madrone Tree” is a multimedia multi-medium electronic art portfolio that I created while studying at the Center for Pacific Islands Studies.

**Self:** Which mediums of art do you use?

**Tafea:** Poetry, fiction, paintings, journal entries, and most recently, an interview with myself.

**Self:** In all fairness, how the hell are professors supposed to grade this?



**Tafea:** We have only spoken about the radicalness of the idea of this eclectic cyber creation, but the other element is the actual content of my art. My poetry and fiction are woven of themes and issues that are relevant to Oceania. I have many goals as an artist, but two of my main hopes are to raise social consciousness in order to influence or inspire positive change and always to decolonize. If I reach a single individual, that is my ultimate reward, but if I had to grade something like this, I would grade it on three main criteria:

- Quality of content
- Creative methodology
- Contribution to Oceania and the field of Pacific Islands Studies

**Self:** You must admit, your work is very light on citations, statistics, and objective material in general. How much subjectivity is too much?

**Tafea:** Albert Wendt once wrote, *“Objectivity is for such uncommitted gods. My commitment won’t allow me to confine myself to so narrow a vision. So vast, so fabulously varied a scatter of islands, nations, cultures, mythologies and myths, so dazzling a creature, Oceania deserves more than an attempt at mundane fact; only the imagination in free flight can hope-if not to contain her- to grasp some of her shape, plumage, and pain“* (Wendt 72). This quote is a cornerstone to the way I approach and understand scholarship and Oceania. As far as sources and research are concerned, I have immersed myself in research; however, research surfaces in many different ways depending on the medium of expression. My chosen mediums of expression do not use citations, but they heavily reflect my research and experiences in other ways.

**Self:** What is the point of doing an electronic portfolio?

**Tafea:** Oceania people are voyagers, and cyberspace is no exception: especially with the younger generation. Oceania people stay very connected through the web. It is really amazing. Social networks such as facebook and myspace are thriving with Oceania people from all over the world. New chat forums and blogs are popping up every day where Oceania people share ideas, art, news, and chat. My purpose is to make my work accessible and to reach new audiences. Too many paper thesis fall into obscurity because they are passed around among a small circle of privileged academics, and then they are shelved. The Internet gives me the opportunity to raise consciousness, promote art, and discuss decolonization on a global stage. The possibilities are endless because my work will be floating in cyberspace indefinitely.

**Self:** Don't you think there is a danger in all of this cyber connection? Doesn't it promote passiveness and discourage real-life face-to-face interaction?

**Tafea:** As with anything in life, there must be a balance. The Internet keeps people connected in ways that were never possible before. This morning, I sat at my house in Manoa and chatted with a Samoan in Alaska, a Fijian in Sydney, and a Hawaiian in New York. We were all cyber chatting with each other at the same time in four completely different parts of the world. This was unheard of twenty years ago, but the Internet transcends space and time. It's not so much about replacing face-to-face interaction, it is about staying connected as we voyage. The amount of sharing and connecting going on out there is difficult to comprehend.

**Self:** What does “A Mango on the Madrone Tree” do to help decolonize scholarship?

**Tafea:** Vilsoni Hereniko once wrote of his own research, “*I want to understand this phenomenon as fully as possible. To limit myself to a single discipline is to limit my angle of vision. The result of such an approach would be a study that is narrow and likely to be of little use outside the confines of disciplines or university corridors*” (Hereniko 8). I hope that “A Mango on the Madrone Tree” encourages students to really think freely, not only in their research methodology, but also in their production. From the beginning, “A Mango on the Madrone Tree” has been an exercise in decolonizing the way I understand and approach scholarship. For over twelve years, I was taught to research, think, and produce within the compartmentalized confines of Western disciplines. When I came to the Center for Pacific Islands Studies, I was challenged to research and produce beyond these confines. For a while, I felt like that dog on a leash tied to a tree. My creative movement was restricted for so long, when the leash was removed, I still moved as though I were tied to the tree. Interdisciplinary studies and my work have helped me to fully realize the leash is gone. The act of interdisciplinary studies has been a liberating experience. *Woven Gods* gave me permission to push the envelope and disrupt convention. I think disrupting convention goes hand in hand with decolonization; I just hope there is some method to my madness but that’s not for me to decide. *If* “A Mango on the Madrone Tree” helps people to decolonize their understanding and approach to scholarship, I will be happy.

**Self:** As a Pacific Islands Studies scholar, are you trying to push the limits of interdisciplinary studies from within?

**Tafea:** Very much so. The phrase Pacific Islands Studies is a massive phrase that encompasses an unfathomable amount of possibilities. I remember when I first saw those three words, Pacific Islands Studies, I thought to myself, “Wow, that is such an expansive idea.” I had heard of Pacific Literature before, but Pacific Islands Studies is such an all-encompassing word. I used to think interdisciplinary studies meant to study multiple disciplines and then to write a thesis that reflected that multidisciplinary research. But I don’t think that way any more. *Woven Gods* ruined that image for me. Interdisciplinary studies within Pacific Islands Studies is more than combing conventional disciplines. It would be more accurate to call it inter-epistemology studies.

**Self:** A Mango does not grow on Madrone trees. Madrone trees grow in the Pacific Northwest region of North America, and mangos grow on mango trees in the tropics. Why the title “A Mango on the Madrone Tree?”

**Tafea:** In Oregon, I always felt like a mango on the Madrone tree because I was a person of “mixed race.” I felt out of place, yet, I was growing in a strange land where I looked nothing like my peers. The Madrone tree is significant to me because I grew up among them. Their twisty unpredictable bodies were perfect for climbing, but they were also a huge part of my family’s everyday life. Although both of my parents worked fulltime, we also cut and sold firewood as a source of extra income. Times were tight and the extra money helped my parents to make ends meet. On weekends, my father would drive me and my three brothers in a beat-up old Ford pickup truck deep into the Coastal Mountains of Southwest Oregon where we would cut fire wood, and then, we would haul it down and sell it to people in the community. Cutting firewood is hard work and many people didn’t have the time or resources to do it, so we filled a need. My father had four boys, so he had a labor force. We

also burned firewood as our primary source of heat and because Madrone burns hotter, longer, and cleaner than any other wood in the region, we burned lots of Madrone. Madrone trees are beautiful trees. I have great reverence for them.

# **POETRY**

Silver Spoon

Then circles the improbable possibility of now  
Salivating like a lone vulture  
Orbiting a starving nightmare

History splashes, clashes, whirls, and  
Collides with the most convenient truth and  
Drips onto the thirsty tongue of a bloodshot moon

Spit Sprays into the atmosphere scattering  
Like thunder-spooked flying foxes

The stone relic of a woman stands on  
Coral callused feet  
Her ideas burn perfect holes in  
A half-drown sun as she concludes  
"Freedom is only accessible  
Through the tunnel of  
A loaded gun"  
BOOM!  
She vanishes and with her  
One thousand years of oral  
History melts into mystery

An elder sings a soft chant of doom  
In a language that is lost to me he  
Reveals the location of my  
Freshly chopped roots as  
The flies relentlessly dine on the exit wound  
I begin to melt memories on a silver spoon

And when the bloodshot moon turned green  
You were nowhere to be seen you were  
Too busy weaving hollow gods  
Searching the earth's core for  
Untouched metaphors and stockpiling  
Heavy artillery for a  
War that is no more

You see, long before birth we were  
Robbed of ancestral wings and hung by  
Imported puppet strings  
With a rusted wire brush they scrubbed our  
Uncivilized tongues until we regurgitated  
Foreign scriptures that later became our crutch

When I finally woke I found myself  
Sitting in the center of  
A black field of stone  
The moon glowed bright as a sun-bleached bone  
My only possessions were bitter questions boiling  
Venomous blood like fresh Lava

I am and was  
A snarling one-eyed, three-legged dog chained to  
The burning tree called God  
Searching like the flying fox  
For Lava fields of endless black rock  
For Lava fields of endless black rock where  
We are born and will die in the sweet red light  
Of a bloodshot moon  
Where we will bathe in village song and  
And wash clear our fears in blue  
Salty flesh of sea

Tonight I promise to pay close attention to dreams  
to my birth  
to my death  
to all of the stories never told that were washed away by rip tides  
to the stone relic of a woman who disappeared but never died  
to the ancient chant that never lied  
to my ancestral wings that  
continue to fly  
to my roots that stretch too deep to up-root,  
to the sacred tongue of the bloodshot moon and  
every memory melted on  
a silver spoon



**They Call Me Afakasi**

a word that never  
should have been  
invented a word  
that belongs nowhere  
that belongs on no tongue  
that should be used  
to describe no one

a word that is one  
half hateful and one  
half ignorant and one  
hundred percent racist

they call me afakasi  
a word used to hide  
the expansiveness  
of my identity

a word used to  
prevent us from  
understanding our  
humanity

they call me afakasi  
but afakasi does  
not exist

we are all chameleons  
twilights  
amphibians  
mixed  
mongoloid  
mutants  
perfectly imperfect  
purely impure  
indefinable  
unpackagable  
expansive

they call me afakasi  
sometimes I think it  
makes them feel safe

**Afakasi: A Word Meaning**

half caste  
half  
halfy  
half breed  
.5  
50%  
50/50  
1/2  
< 1  
< whole  
not full  
not whole  
Incomplete  
un-solid  
Impure  
Imperfect  
Mutt  
Mutant  
Mixed Race  
Biracial  
Part  
Partial  
Divided  
Split  
Melted  
Other

Afakasi: the colonizer's bastard child  
Too brown to be white  
Too white to be brown  
Almost  
Not enough  
Less than

Afakasi: Belonging nowhere  
Landless  
Homeless  
Raceless  
Ethnicless  
Peopleless  
Speciesless

Afakasi: creature of two Worlds  
Between  
Tweeners  
Liminal  
Border

Borderland

Afakasi:  
Hafakasi  
Halfakasi  
Halfacaste  
Half caste

**Who Are We**

We are *American Samoa*[n]

We are *US nationals* not *US citizens*

We pledge our allegiance to the flag of the United States of America

We are home of the **pe'a**: the flying fox

Home of **Pago Pago** harbor: the object of strategic military lust that attracts fleets of warships and men of war

We are home of the **āoa**: the giant banyan tree that dances in hurricanes and shades seas

We are home of the highest per capita death rate in the current US occupation of Iraq: higher than any US state or territory

This is *American Samoa*

We are *US nationals* not *US citizens*

*American* enough to stop “enemy” bullets  
Not *American* enough to vote

We are home of the **highest per capita death rate** in the current US occupation of Iraq: higher than any US state or territory

We are *American Samoa*[n]: the only US territory in the Southern Hemisphere

We are five islands: an essential piece of the imperial puzzle

*American* enough to stop “enemy” bullets  
Not *American* enough to vote

We are *American Samoa*[n]  
locked and loaded, armed and ready to defend America from *terrorists, terrorism, and other unnatural forms of un-Americanism.*

We are *American Samoa*[n]

*American* enough to stop “enemy” bullets  
too *un-American* to vote

**Red Rock**

*Yesterday you found me  
Knee deep in Olalla creek  
Fishing for the silver Coho  
That swam thick in my grandfather's  
Stories. You called to me in a deep red  
Voice that shined through the  
Noisy sun water of August.  
I took you home  
And asked you to hold me  
Through bad dreams.*

*Today, you still hold me deep  
In your red as I roll  
You in my palm and  
Glide your cold smooth  
Skin down my arms. I have  
Memorized your touch, contours,  
And consistency and  
As I grow from boy to man to boy  
To man to boy to man, you  
Remain a rock*

*Tomorrow I will take you  
Home where the Olalla runs  
Into the Lookingglass  
And the Lookingglass runs  
Into the Umpqua. Tomorrow  
You will take me home to  
My daughters and  
Give me back to them. I  
Will put you in their little  
Palms and ask you to hold them soft  
In your deep red*

Away

Silence stuck to your skin  
When you spoke  
It was the ever changing  
Color of water

You decorated the body  
Of a dead Banyan with your  
Poems knowing the wind would  
Carry your words across

The sea when you left  
Your breaths created silent  
Currents inaudible to the  
Untrained ear

But I listened  
Memorized tides  
Planned my life around  
The two-beat rhythm  
Hoping they might  
Take me beyond

The reef of jagged teeth  
Take me to the house of the sliding sun  
Where no walls divide

Take me away  
To January... to March... to May  
Where we used to paint our  
Faces blue with the moons tongue  
And say nothing

I was in Jersey last year and  
I heard wind echoing your  
Voice through stone alleys  
And concrete canyons

Your words have traveled long  
From dead Banyan across sea  
In soft breezes and strong gusts  
Inside me the current recognizes  
Your rhythm and we do not skip a beat

Silence is your voice  
Reminding me to love

**Throwing Stones at the Sun**

*I really don't remember writing too much back then, when I was eight and you were ten, and we rode bareback on fire-breathing, math-teacher-eating dragons and shot at rabid angels with our gorgeous sub-machine guns. We had so much fun, but I don't remember writing too much back then, back when we rolled from town to town in a beat-up old beer can looking for jagged stones to throw at the sun because we disagreed with the temperature, brightness, and contrast. I don't remember writing too much back then, but I remember us grinning in the face of sin, eating salty scriptures, and laughing at missionaries with unanswered prayers dripping from our chins. I don't remember writing too much back then, back when we dangled our feet off the edge of the universe and cursed at falling stars because we loved the sweet aftertaste of the phrase "Holy Fuck!" I don't remember writing too much back then, but I remember everything.*

*You were always there holding me in your bleeding arms and clearing nests among the shrapnel for me to rest. As you softly whispered, "dream of other places, other times, and other things."*

*The night you left, I tried to so hard to follow but lava swallowed your footprints and I've been writing ever since.*

**War Down the Hall**

*A tranquil cloud of cigarette smoke  
Snakes through the hall into  
Our bedroom*

*Big brother sneezes as he bravely pilots a  
B-1 Bomber made of Popsicle sticks*

*He weaves in and out of the inversion  
Dipping and diving  
His hypnotic hums rise and drop in  
Perfect rhythm with the motion of  
His finely tuned war machine*

*I am sitting  
Legs folded flat beneath me on  
Cracked linoleum floor  
Admiring the craftsmanship of his vessel  
His aerial maneuvers  
His concentration  
His grace*

*Beyond our room  
In the hall, where  
Grownups roam with  
Heavy voices  
Heavy footsteps and even  
Heavier burdens,  
Fist-sized holes decorate the walls  
A broken door hangs  
By a single hinge*

*A platoon of green plastic army men is  
Nestled in the orange long-shagged carpet  
Poised for ambush  
Eager to kill*

*They look so calm and peaceful with  
Their M-16s, RPGs, and bazookas*

*I whisper to self  
“They have no idea what’s about to hit them.”*

*Brother hovers above the cover of clouds  
Patiently plotting doom*

*In my fist I clutch  
A purple and gold Crown Royal Bag*



*Waiting to collect the bodies*

*Down the hall  
Voices rise  
Screaming and shouting  
Erupt*

*“Oh god here it comes”  
A glass of whiskey shatters against wall  
B-1 Bomber rips a hole through smoke and  
Swoops downward  
Brother's eyes the color of rage*

*Machine guns rattle, bombs explode  
Heavy artillery rains  
rat-tat-tat-tat  
Boom, Bang, Pow  
Spit severs clouds*

*But as hard as he tries  
Brother's battle cannot  
Drown the sound of  
The war down the hall*

*Dead green bodies fly  
I put palms over ears and press inward  
As hard as I can*

*But the sound of home breaking  
Comes from all directions  
Bleeding through walls  
Echoing through heater vents  
Thundering down the hall*

*Loving to the ears as  
A hollow-point slug*

*Door slams  
Engine roars  
Wheels throw gravel against  
Our trailer home*

*Brother crashes B-1 Bomber against  
Window with all his might!*

*Popsicle stick shrapnel litters the room  
Brother survives and runs outside  
Mama is crying*

*I am trembling  
They are all dead  
Again*

**Missionaries of Erased Gods (tribute to Wendt)**

It is us  
The quote unquote  
Fish bone lodged sideways  
In the throat of progress  
The gaping wound at the end of the corporate rainbow  
Oozing lava from our pores  
Searching the earth's core for untouched metaphors  
Chanting and paddling across the universe  
Rummaging through the rubble of untold stories  
Digging in the bone yard of forgotten dreams  
Sifting through shrapnel of dead and dying song  
Malignant tumors  
Surgically removed from the history books  
Dwelling in the aftermath  
Called paradise  
Hovering like immaculate  
Blood clot sunsets on  
The horizon of Western consciousness  
Black clouds impregnated with white-sale nightmares  
Poised to deliver blue bolts of flame and moonlit rain  
Electric umbilical cords connecting erased gods to  
Metallic flesh of night sea  
Seeking shelter in  
Pyramids of ancestral skulls  
Weaving together maggots, centipedes, and banyan trees  
with smoke, marrow, yoke, and eel  
Retrieving our ability to feel  
Chiseling memories in our skin with shark tooth and ink  
Protectors of the earth's salty reservoir of blood  
Fluent in the language of the stars  
The myriad of lights that guide us inward  
Where the dead swim vibrantly in our heads  
hearts and *mana*  
Leading us forward toward our past  
to placenta, to womb, to mother  
to birth, to death, to life  
to us

**You Have Me**

*You have me shining relentlessly like  
The misunderstood blackness that  
Accentuates the stars and  
Floods the space between  
Everything I am gleaming*

*Prophetically upon bankrupt dreams that  
Lay coiled like lustful rattlesnakes in  
My otherwise hollow skull*

*I said something to you but  
You were too busy sharpening your  
Machete to hear me say, "My heart is  
Full with you" because you have me*

*Whether the weather permits  
Or not we did not come this far  
To stop now, fuck the "How" we are  
Emperors of the "What"*

*And though I do not worship warships I  
Will fight for something more because I  
Am all yours emancipated from fear and  
Freed from need*

*I used to have God on speed  
Dial but all I ever got was*

*ring, ring, ring...  
Smile because you  
Have me*

*Immersed blue in flame spinning and  
Grinning with embers stuck between  
My teeth, I drink  
Hand-fulls of poetry and  
Hold you in each line*

*As you laugh at time that  
Bloodthirsty shark swimming  
Figure eights in my lavalava*

*Ravaging me into orgasmic memories of  
Tomorrow where I remain yours because  
You have me on the ropes coughing up  
Sweet dragon flies when I should be  
Paying the rent*

*Gnawing off that cobwebbed noose that  
Was wrapped around my neck at birth or  
Was it death or am I shining  
Relentlessly like the  
Unappreciated blackness that  
Accentuates the stars*

*Your touch turns my open wounds  
Into perfectly sculpted scars as you have  
Me gleaming prophetically upon  
Resurrected dreams because*

*You have me freed from  
The prison of prisms  
Dancing on silver flesh  
Of night sea*

*I am not stopping until I find me  
For you I swear there is  
Nothing I will not or  
Cannot do*

*Tonight the moon is full and neat like  
An ethereal bullet hole in the gut of heaven  
Bleeding beams of soft green light into our eyes*

*But I don't know why and  
I don't know why and I don't know why I  
Have these same seven nightmares*

*Simultaneously orbiting my  
Yesterdays like kamikaze  
Boar-tusked super novas diving to  
Bathe in my spinal fluid but  
I am not afraid anymore because*

*You have me and you handed me your  
Sharpened love machete and taught me how  
To surgically remove the pain that has  
Rooted its way into my identity*

*I know that you know that  
you have me wanting to  
Heal myself so that  
One day I can access  
All of me and  
Have you the way that  
You have me*

**Diasporic Dream**

*Fa'afetai* Grandfather and congratulations

I am the end product of opportunity  
the final result of your foresight

I am what they call

“second-generation US Samoan”  
that generation who has  
never been to Samoa

I am first-world  
fully-developed  
fully-civilized

I am born and  
raised among them  
melted into them  
fluent in their language and ways

I am Educated,  
Modernized,  
American

I am the quintessential neo Samoan  
a walking wealth of Western knowledge

I know my pledge of allegiance  
my presidents  
all fifty state capitols

I can solve quadratic equations  
formulate a thesis  
type over 60 words per minute  
dissect a frog and identify all of the vital organs

discuss the theory of continental drift

I can tell you the difference between  
Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia  
I am well versed in the Lapita theory

I know all about Samoa  
population, climate, geography  
average life expectancy

I am the vision  
the progress  
a masterpiece of assimilation

The world is at my finger tips

I am the future  
woven of fear and survival  
the fully evolved immigrant  
the diasporic dream  
I have forgotten what is useless  
and learned what is important

I am what eventually becomes of  
those who left  
not native like you  
but settler like them,  
but not one of them  
nor one of you

I am lodged between worlds in  
the war zone where mine fields and  
barbwire connect cultures

I wish I would have known you  
I would like to show you this place,  
but I do not remember you  
or Samoa  
or speak your language  
or know your ways  
I do not remember why I am here

I will never return  
I know nothing of Samoa  
I am Samoan-less

I am gone from you  
empty of you  
lost to you

*Daddy Said*

Son,  
I prunk you hea  
because tis is ta lan of  
opprotunity

In Samoa,  
te is nofing  
To you heard me Son?  
nofing

Hea in Ameika,  
ta worlt is at  
you finka tip  
and ta sky is ta limits

You know why I nefa  
teach you Samoan Son?  
cause Samoan no ket you  
anyfing in life

tis is ta white man's worlt  
an Enklisch is  
only fink tat matta

You heard me Son?

Tis is ta white man's worlt  
an at ta en of ta tay, we all haf  
to walk fru his toor

at ta en of ta tay, we all haf  
walk fru his toor  
cause he sign ta check Son

look at me,  
my whole life i strukle wif  
fo try speak ta Enklisch

i strukle my ass off Son  
so tat you can ket you



pestes echucation

So i make tamn sure  
my sons masta Enklisch  
pecause tis is what pestes

You see what I'm said Son?

Tis is why it pisses me when  
te say, "How come I nefa teachet  
you speak Samoan?"

What ta hell te fink I prunk you here fo eh?  
tes stupit hets know  
nofing apout Samoa

Rememper sumfing Son,  
Ameika is ta pestes place in ta worlt  
so ket ta echucation

pe ta tocto  
pe ta lawya  
tis is my tream fo you  
tis is why fo i prunk you hea

fo to kif you ta  
opprotunity to haf ta  
fings i nefa haf

You see what I'm said Son?

Okay, koot talk  
*alu*  
ko prush ta teef  
an to ta Maf homewok

*Nifo Oti*

**PART 1:**

You no longer drip  
the sweet war blood of  
your enemies

You no longer hang their  
freshly severed heads  
from your *lave*  
hook-shaped fang

*"Nifo oti"*

Tonight  
the *aitus* call your name!

**PART 2:**

Tooth of Death  
in a colonial breath  
you have "progressed" from  
wood-bone flesh  
to stainless steel

You have moved  
from the art of killing to  
the art of dancing and  
traded red blood for  
blue flame

No one knows your name or  
remembers your former life  
they now call you the "fire knife"

**PART 3**

*Siva Afi*  
Dance with fire,

*'Ailao*  
Dance with knife

*'Ailao Afi*  
Fire Knife Dance,

Warrior from then: that pre-Christ dark age  
time warped to now: today

you dance on your stage cage  
for minimum wage  
what is the source of  
your rage?

They say,  
just smile and spin your  
savage knife  
you are here to woo  
papalagi eyes

You know the routine,  
spin, break, under the legs  
around the head  
side to side, between the legs  
toss and catch behind the back...

hear the oooos and aaaaahs  
hear the *pate* and the *lali* drumming  
don't forget to smile because  
a pleasant-faced savage keeps  
the tourists cumming

*Afakasi Philosophy*

I used to carry my Samoanness like  
a mouth-full of salty semen: never knowing  
whether to spit or swallow.

But that is the ethos of a halfy, right?  
Born on a twilight shoreline, unable to define  
land from sea or darkness from light

Because half is less than whole, right?  
At least, this is how we are made to feel.  
So unfold your collar to hide your gills and  
wear closed-toed shoes so society will not see  
your freakish webbed feet

Or,

I have a better idea,  
let's blow cum bubbles at  
other peoples' troubles and  
celebrate our amphibious identities

**Thank You Colonialism For:**

Jesus and Crack  
Duct Tape and SPAM  
Elongated Lifespans and Artificial Tans  
Tongue Scrapers and Anthrax  
401Ks and Bikini Wax  
Pi = 3.14159 and Colostomy Bags  
Mosquito Nets and Breast Implants  
Hiroshima and Styrofoam  
Anthropology and The Donkey Show  
Laser Eye Surgery and G-Strings  
The Genocide of Uni-Brows and Slim Jims  
Dangling modifiers and The World Bank  
The Equator and Swank  
Vasectomies and Segways  
Mad Cow and Columbus Day  
The US/Mexican Border and Menthols  
Sputnik and Cubicles  
Carbon Dating and Urinals  
Rogain and Wall Street  
Condoms and The Easter Bunny  
The NRA and Wounded Knee  
The Greenhouse Effect and Anal Beads  
The Jewish State of Israel and Anabolic Steroids  
The word "other" and Suppositories  
Dog the Bounty Hunter and Youtube  
Carnies and Blue Tooth  
Throw Pillows and Spermicide  
Social Security and Pimp My Ride  
The Panama Canal and Astroglide  
The "Discovery" of the Pacific Ocean and Lucifer  
Liposuction and Disposable Diapers  
<http://www.samoanews.com/> and Pace Makers  
The Electric Chair and Henry Kissinger  
Jim Crow Law and The Polynesian Culture Center  
Super Big Gulps and the Letter "Z"  
I-Pods and H3s  
The CIA and MP3s  
SUVs and PCP  
ATMs and PS3s  
FOBs and M16s  
The WTO and Idaho  
Battery Operated Nasal Clippers and HMO  
Eight-Minute Abs and The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Tests  
Microwaves and Crystal Meth  
1-800-GET-U-SUM and McRibs  
CNN and Rubber Dog shit  
Artificial Insemination and Rambo

Waco and Pepto Bismol  
Root Canals and XM Radio  
Lobotomies and Mobil Homes  
Tribal Identification Cards and Rock Star  
Syphilis and George W. Bush  
Mormonism and Hydroponic Purple Kush  
Lygers and Corndogs  
Steel Reserve and ENRON  
The Great Melting Pot and Botox  
Free Trade and Nine Eleven  
Hell and Heaven  
Weapons of Mass Destruction and the International Space Station  
Erectile Dysfunction medication and One Nation  
Under God  
indivisible  
with liberty  
and justice for all

*Death of an Uninsured Heathen: A Letter to the Missionaries*

I no longer want to  
rip off your faces and  
stew your flesh

I no longer want to  
find the gods  
you erased

I don't hate you anymore  
nor do I hate  
any insurance salesman

Perhaps one day  
when I am near death  
I will put an ad in the paper that reads  
"ALL DENOMINATIONS WELCOME!"  
and I will host a  
soul-saving tea party for  
myself

I will invite  
a representative from each of your agencies into my home and  
I will fix all of you stale crackers and fish-head soup

I will carefully listen to each sales pitch  
then, after careful consideration  
I will purchase the package that  
offers my soul the richest god and  
best heaven so that  
I can spend eternity in  
the ultimate retirement home

Yes, I will choose the most immaculate  
and highest heaven so that  
I can piss down on all those foolish consumers who  
were suckered into  
lower heavens and lesser gods

But if I die before then,  
before my skin rots and my time is up

If I have one of those deaths  
they call "tragic"

I guess I will die uninsured, unsaved, and un-Christian, and  
I will join my ancestors who  
died long before the insurance agencies  
came to our shores

I will join them and the erased-gods  
in that place that never existed to us but  
you call hell



**Epistemology**

For the first 25 years of my life,  
I was fed shit and told it was food.  
Then, one night, I had a dream and  
Found myself sitting next to  
My great-great grandmother.  
She asked me  
What I knew of *fa'aSamoa*,  
So I explained to her everything I had  
Ever learned.  
She sighed deeply,  
Stomped her coral-callused foot on the sand  
And informed me  
That I had been eating shit for  
My entire life

*Sweet Blackness (inspired by the works of Albert Wendt)*

Sometimes I envy the flying fox  
swinging from the mango tree  
by his one rope wing

I envy him because  
he vanished and  
left us all here-  
he had the last laugh  
then disappeared

Sometimes I wish to  
swing so freely-  
check out of this body  
never look back  
join him at  
the lava fields where  
sweet blackness unites  
the universe

where no one cares to  
count sinking suns or  
rising moons

Sometimes I read his last letter  
and wish he were still here for  
us all to ignore and frown upon

I would put my hand on his face-  
kiss him on the forehead-  
follow him to the mango tree-

the fruit-filled door way to  
eternal lava fields where  
we can finally spread our wings  
and soar high above the puppet masters  
and their celestial strings

Sometimes I dream of my death bed-  
dying as a savage heathen who has  
nothing to believe in

A wretched son of the erased  
and forgotten gods who  
prays to no god and  
disappears with no fear and  
a sinful smile on

my dead face  
to haunt those who  
fear life-  
fear death-  
fear me

Sometimes I sneak into  
the back row and  
listen to the preacher man as  
he towers above a crowded room of  
soul-safe converts

I listen to him as  
he sculpts faith on his tongue and  
spits tropes that keep  
nightmares open like  
magnificent exit wounds and  
minds closed like marble tombs

Sometimes the preacher's voice is  
swallowed by sounds of fear-  
pounding of hearts-  
uncertainties-  
trembling-  
weeping

Sometimes I wish to be the banyan tree  
rooted so deep  
progress does not have time to  
destroy me-  
rooted so deep  
I tower above jungles  
dance in hurricanes  
shade the sea

You see,  
I have stood with the lion and  
the aitu on the edge of the cliff-  
together we drank silence  
offered our eyes to the horizon and  
focused on the swells where  
the world bends  
knowing that each on-coming set brings  
more of that thing they call "progress"

each set re-writes history  
each set erases us and  
erodes the cliff we have stood on since

before time was kept-  
before words were written

I have seen the bleeding owl dying  
on my jungle path  
it told me not to worry because  
the dream  
the lion  
the aitu  
the cliff  
the flying fox and his one rope wing and  
the savage son of the erased and forgotten gods will  
all soon be gone

it told me to have no fear because  
even me  
the banyan tree and  
all our pain and love will  
disappear and  
in our vanishing  
we will be healed and  
delivered to eternal lava fields where  
sweet blackness unites the universe

And all that will be left  
will be monuments  
converts  
preachers  
scriptures  
puppets and puppet masters  
time  
money  
success  
progress and  
of course the most convenient god

*The Empty Bible*

When I was six,  
an elder told me that  
to be Samoan,  
I had to be Christian

I never found much use for  
the bible until  
my teen years and puberty when  
I began the universal  
unnatural art of masturbation

It was then that I came upon Jesus and  
I began truly using the bible  
Page by page I tore to  
wipe the sinful substance from  
my stomach and penis

Soon, I had absorbed every page  
and the bible was a soft-leathery  
pageless shell

When the elder asked me if  
I had found Jesus,  
I handed him the empty bible

He beat me until  
I understood the relationship between  
being Christian and  
being Samoan

# ***F I C T I O N***

### Almost American Almost Samoan

Afi hates recess. All the other kids love recess, but he hates it. The playground is too big. There are too many spots that the tall lady with the whistle cannot see. She has too much ground to cover and only two eyes and one whistle. He knows they will be out there waiting for him. He watches the second hand pushing time closer to recess. He hates that clock; hates the hands even worse. And the sound of the bell: when the recess bell rings, he just wants to stay in the desk. But Mrs. Dewey makes him go out everyday. She is one of those teachers who hate kids. The kids call her Satan because her classroom is hell, and she is evil. As recess gets closer, he stares at the clock, and he nervously shakes one of his legs under his desk, sometimes he shakes so hard the desk squeaks. He used to get detentions and Satan would make him stay in the classroom during recess and make him write I WILL NOT MISBEHAVE, over and over. At first, he loved detention because he didn't have to go to recess, but after a while, notes began getting sent home and those lead to the belt. He looks down at his spelling test. He misspelled every thing but his name, and the entire test is bleeding red ink from Satan's pen. He stares at his name, Afi: the name that has brought him so much trouble.

I don't like my name, Afi. No one can say it right. My name is different, like me. I want a normal name like everyone else: a name like Mike, John, or David. I hate school. Last quarter I got an F in every subject, and Daddy took the belt to me. "F" is for failure. Satan told Mommy that I might have to repeat the fourth grade. "F" is for flunk. Flunking is the worse thing that can happen to a kid at Tenmile Elementary School. Stupid people flunk, and they call stupid people retards. Daddy says if I flunk, I am going to grow up to be a fuckup

like my two oldest brothers. “F” is for fuckup. My two oldest brothers are locked up, but I am not supposed to talk about them. No one knows about them because they have different Moms than me. When our family first came here from Samoa, they put my brothers in retard classes because they didn’t speak like the other kids. They flunked them and then they became fuckups. My brothers hated school. I hate school too. Satan is talking about Thanks Giving and the wonderful feast that the Americans shared with the Indians. She begins singing and the class follows:

♪ *My country, 'tis of thee,  
 sweet land of liberty,  
 of thee I sing;  
 land where my fathers died,  
 land of the pilgrims' pride,  
 from every mountainside  
 let freedom ring!*

Afi mouths the words and never takes his eye of the clock. The bell rings, and the kids rush out the door; they love recess. Normal kids love recess, but he is not a normal kid. As always, he is the last one left in his desk. Satan gives him the evil eye, and his nine-year-old memory has a flashback of the belt. He is up on his feet and out the door. His mind switches off as he steps onto the playground. Out here he must rely on instincts. Survival is about positionality. He must stay close to the tall lady with the whistle, but he can’t let her see me following her because she will tell him to quit following her and to go make friends. As Afi steps on to the playground, his eyes begin frantically searching for the tall lady with the whistle, but she is nowhere to be seen. The sky is dark-gray with a hole allowing a single ray of sunlight to



beam down on the baseball field where kids stand in small, separate groups soaking up the warmth. Sunlight is a delicacy this time of year. The tall lady with the whistle is nowhere to be seen.

I should just wait here, in the middle of the playground, by the swing set and the slide. If they come, I will be out in the open. That is my best chance. The cold makes my face sting. My friend G runs up and stops in front of me. He is breathing hard, and steam is coming out of his mouth and nose and rising from the sweat on his face. He wants me to come and play behind the play-shed cause he says he dug a really deep mud puddle that is cool as shit! I say no, but G is an only child who always gets his way, so he buzzes circles around me like a fly until I say yes. We run to the other end of the playground pretending to be Jedi Knights. I like G. For a minute I forget about how bad I hate recess. Kids at Tenmile love to stomp in mud puddles and splash other kids, so G digs the puddles as deep as he can so that when people stomp in them, they sink to their knee. I think it's his way of getting back at the mean kids who splash mud on him. We get to the puddle and he proudly shows me its depth by poking a stick to the bottom of the muddy water. He was right, it's as cool as shit.

Four of them run up and circle Afi. G is scared of these four boys. Everyone is scared of these four boys. They are sixth graders. The one with cigarette burns on his arms and the long dishwater blond hair grabs hold of G and puts him in a hold, and G cannot escape.

They call G nigger lover because he is my friend; he is my only friend. The name-calling begins: NIGGER, SPICK, WETBACK, SAND NIGGER. Here we go again. I put my head down and look at my Velcro shoes. The voices get louder with each shout. They are hoping to get a reaction from me: NIGGER, SPICK, WETBACK, SAND NIGGER! I can feel their steaming breath on my face and their spit spraying with each shout. The shouting is angry. They are really mad at me for being not white. I am the only person in the entire

school who is not white. MY DADDY FOUGHT IN NAM TO KEEP FOREIGNERS LIKE YOU THE FUCK OUT OF AMERICA YOU UNAMERICAN FUCKIN NIGGER! I never look up at them. It makes them angrier if I look at them.

Afi sometimes wishes he were white so that he could blend in and be like everyone else. Life would be so much easier, if just he were white. Suddenly, a swift punch to the gut drops him to his knees. He falls to his side and lays in the fetal position gasping for air. He hears a splash, and an OH SHIT, and then they are gone. The bell rings. Air slowly begins returning to his lungs. G helps him to his feet.

G is muddy like me. They must have thrown him down too. He tells me to get up because he knows if I am late, a note will get sent home and, Daddy will beat my ass. I think G gives a lot to be my friend. I want to repay him but don't know how. We don't talk about what happened. We never do. We walk in silence for a long ways until G starts talking about Skelator and the Castle Grave Skull. My stomach hurts, and my entire body is shaking. I will be shaking for the rest of the school day. I always get the shakes when this happens. Before they walk into the classroom, G pats him on the back and tells him how his cool-as-shit mud puddle booby trap worked cool as shit: sunk that fucker up to his knee. G laughs like it's the funniest thing ever.

Satan grabs G and Afi by the arms and scolds them for getting so muddy. As punishment, Satan puts them in separate corners of the classroom and has them face the wall. While the rest of the class gets to color maps of Oregon, Satan makes them write fifty sentences: I WILL STAY OUT OF THE MUD ON RECESS.

After school, I go to Good News and learn about the Bible. I love Jesus. Good News is taught by a lady named Ms. Azalea. She parts her hair perfectly down the middle, wears big tinted glasses, butterfly earrings, and plays the guitar. She loves Jesus too. One time Ms. Azalea took me into the back room and asked me if I had ever asked Jesus into my heart.

That day, I asked Jesus to forgive me for all my sins and invited him into my heart. I love Jesus because sometimes I have big nightmares, so every night I pray to Jesus that I have no nightmares. I Love Jesus because I am scared of hell. One time Ms. Azalea's friend came to Good News and taught us all about hell, and I had nightmares weeks. Now that I know about hell, I pray all the time. I don't ever want to end up in hell. Jesus lives in my heart.

After Good News, Sherry is waiting to take Afi home. He gets into the old red Ford pickup, and he scoots all the way across the bench seat and gives his mom a big hug and kiss. On the way home he tells her about the story of Samson and how he fought the Philistines with a donkey jawbone. The old red Ford rattles and shakes, so he has to almost shout so she can hear. She listens attentively as they pass through muddy green pastures of horses, sheep, and cattle.

I love Mama. She is the most beautiful person in the world. I tell her everything, but when she asks me how I got all muddy, I pause. But mamas know everything, especially my mama. She asks me again, so I tell her what happened.

They turn onto Olalla Canyon Road, into the thick forest of towering Douglas Furs, leafless Maples, and orange twisty Madrones. The Forest is so thick, the road tunnels beneath large mossy Oak branches and leaning furs. Sherry takes a deep breath, reaches into her purse and pulls out a pack of Winston cigarettes. As she operates the wheel, she lights her cigarette, rows down her window, takes a deep drag and blows it out the side of her mouth out the window. She tells him to ignore the name-calling. She always tells him to be the bigger man and to turn the other cheek and just walk away.

Mama always tells me to ignore them but not Daddy. My daddy is a fighter. He is the toughest man ever: tougher than Luke Skywalker and tougher than He-Man. Every kid thinks their daddy is the toughest. I always hear boys at school telling each other, "my daddy could whoop your daddy's ass." But the difference between them and me is that when I say it, I am

telling the truth. My daddy is the toughest, and my daddy can kick your daddy's ass. He is big, fast, and mean. He was a boxer in Samoa: never lost a fight. I have seen him fight lots of times. Every time someone calls him a nigger, they end up on the ground with their eyes closed. They never even knew what hit them. He's lost jobs for fighting. People call him nigger and he knocks them out. Daddy is a fighter. When he hears me talk about getting picked on, he tells me to go to school and punch those sons of bitches. But I know I cannot beat them up. They would kick my ass six ways from Sunday, but I can't tell Daddy that. He hates weakness. He won't allow it: no crying, no complaining, no whining. Daddy has fighting hands: scars all over his knuckles. I have seen his hands bleed plenty times. I've seen him punch through windows, walls, and doors. I've seen him break faces. My daddy could whoop your daddy's ass, but I don't ever tell people that. I don't like when he fights. I hate the sound of mad grown ups. It sounds like... like the sound of hurt: the sound of pain. I hear that sound too much. It makes me close my eyes as tight as I can, and put my palms over my ears and push in as hard as I can, but I never can drown out the sound of hurt. It finds its way into my head like a nightmare.

They pull into the driveway of their home. Home is a lime-green trailer that sits on cinder blocks. Sherry tells Afi to go play outside since it is not raining. He runs out into the trees; into his refuge. She goes into the trailer and pours herself a glass of Gin and Tonic. She sighs deeply, lights another smoke, and begins the process of making dinner. Soon the boys will be home, and they will all be hungry. She puts on a pot of rice, takes a sip of Gin, and a drag off her smoke. This is her favorite time of day: the calm before the storm. She is between shifts, sort of. She grew up in these mountains. Her spirit was free and wild like the clear winter waters of the Lookingglass Creek that rages through Olalla Valley. She won the local beauty pageant: long blond hair, blue eyes, and soft white skin. All the local boys wanted to wed her and raise a family with her. But she was an adventurer. She wanted out of

this town: wanted to see the world. After high school, she was gone for five years. Then one day, she came back. She came back with him. The tall, lean, muscular dark skinned man with an Afro. Didn't she know? It is no accident that there were only white people around these parts. There were forces at work here; forces have been at work for over a hundred years. Certain white people have worked real hard to keep these mountains white, generation after generation. When she was in high school, there were sundown ordinances still in effect that stated, if you ain't white, get out of town before sundown. When she was a little girl, the KKK paraded down main street behind the high school marching band and the fire truck. Just over eighty years ago, the very last of the Umpqua Indians were removed from these mountains and sent off to the Warm Springs Reservation. The nerve of her: the audacity to bring him here. Perhaps she was naive, or perhaps she wanted to bring change. So change she brought.

I love running through the woods. Grandpa Skipper, Mommy's dad, says there once were Indians all over these woods, but they are gone now. They are gone from these mountains: gone from these valleys. We don't see them, and we don't learn about them in school. But Skipper tells me all about them. He is part Indian, but you wouldn't know it by looking at him. That means I am part Indian too, but I'm mostly Samoan and white, but no one sees the white. Grownups always ask me what I am. They say, you're not from around here are you? They ask me what I am, but that is not what I hear. What I hear is them asking me why I am not white like everyone else. I like to tell them I'm a Jedi Knight, but that always seems to disappoint them because they are not sure what I am, and they want to know if there guesses are right. Sometimes when I tell them I'm Samoan they think that means I come from Somalia. I heard that so many times that I went to the library and looked up Somalia in the encyclopedia, and they look nothing like Samoans. Samoans are big, like Daddy. Samoans love football, like my brothers. We watch football every Saturday and

Sunday, and Daddy knows the names of all the Samoan football players. We are American Samoan. Daddy says we are better than Western Samoans. He says all Western Samoans want to live in American Samoa and all American Samoans want to live in the states, so that means all Samoans want to have what we have and be who we are because we are American Samoans living in the states. Daddy is proud to be American. I think I'm proud to be American too, but the kids at school say I'm not American because I'm not white, and Americans are white. Satan has pictures of all 40 presidents on the wall of the classroom. They are high on the wall, in a row that goes around the whole classroom. From Washington to Regan, they all stare down on us like 40 gods, and they are all white, just like the pictures of Jesus. I sometimes think maybe they are right: maybe Americans are supposed to be white?

As the sun sinks behind the mountains, he hears his mama call his name. Dinner is ready. Afi walks inside to the familiar smell of cigarette smoke, pork chops and mushroom gravy, and the sound of the evening news. From behind a newspaper, Toa's deep accented voice orders him to go outside to get an arm full of wood before he takes off his shoes. He runs outside to the woodpile, peels back the canvas tarp, and loads two jagged chunks of Madrone into his arms. He takes the wood into the house, loads it into the wood stove, and Toa's voice thunders again from behind the new paper.

*Nofo i lalo*, says the voice.

I sit down Samoan style: legs folded flat beneath me, arms crossed in front of my chest. When Daddy speaks, I must hold still and make no sounds, but he continues to read paper for what seems like forever. My legs begin aching and my stomach is growling. Daddy is a workingman. He works real hard. He pulls lumber off a belt all day, and he comes home smelling like saw dust. He is covered in sawdust, and it adds a layer of light powder over his dark skin and black hair. My mind cannot stop guessing what he is going to say. Maybe he

wants me to tell him what I learned about the bible? He knows all about the bible. All the old Samoans know all about the bible. When I am old, I will know all about the bible too.

Toa folds down the corner of his paper and begins speaking:

*What's dis I heard apout you ketting pick on at school? You lisen to me son. If anyone eva call you a Nicker akain, you ko right up to dem, and you punch 'em in da face. You heard me? I am tire of heard apout you let kids pick on you. You have to learn to fight. How you fink we have all da fings we have today? Cause I fight, and i stukle, and i work my ass off fo us to a have dis American Dream. You see what I'm said son? You have to be a fighter to survive in dis world. Nufing is handed to you son. You have to ko ket it. You are not nicker. You are American Samoa. Your ancestor was King Tuimanu 'a. Do you heard me son? Don't let anyone call you dat name eva. You haf to show dem dat you are better dan dem. Like me, I work twice as hard for half as much, but I neva take no handout. I ket my own on my own. You see what I'm said son? Now ko eat.*

The dinner table is set: two pots of rice and a big frying pan full of pork chops and mushroom gravy. Toa and Sherry do not eat with the boys. Sherry sits in the living room on her favorite rocking chair. She is reading a Stephen King novel and from time to time, she takes a sip of her drink and a drag off her smoke. Toa continues to read the paper. Sefa, the oldest brother, says a short prayer and the feed begins. No one says anything at the dinner table. The only sound is the sound of food smacking, and the occasional slurp of one of the boys sucking the marrow from the bone.

After dinner, I help Mama with the dishes and she quietly reminds me, in a voice that Daddy cannot hear, just to ignore the boys at school and not to fight. I finish dishes and knock on the bedroom door to Sefa's room. He shares a room with my cousin Sotaio. Sotaio lives with us because his mama, my auntie said he was getting into too much trouble in LA, so she wanted to send him to Oregon to live with us because there are no gangs in Oregon,

and Daddy is really strict. A lot of my LA cousins join gangs and get in to trouble. Sometimes my aunties and uncles will send the troublemakers to Samoa, and sometimes they will send them to us. We have had a lot of cousins come through. It is hard for them here. They are not used to country work, or the quiet, and they are not used to all the trees, mountains, or white people. I can hear Cool and the Gang on my brother's boom box. The door opens and Sefa is working his dance moves. He always dances in front of the mirror, every night. I ask him if I can play in his room and he nods his head. Sefa has a small cardboard box of toys from when he was a kid like me. He always lets me play in his room while he dances in front of the mirror. Sefa is going to be an NFL football player. Daddy says he is already the best football player in the county; maybe even the whole state. I think he is the best in the world.

Afi leaves Sefa's room and wanders down the narrow hall of the trailer. He can hear Toa loudly slurping the marrow from a pork chop bone. His other brother Silia is in the front room playing with an airplane that he made from Popsicle sticks. He is humming the sound of the motor and occasionally rattling off machine gun rounds on the platoon of plastic green army men that are nestled in the orange long-shagged carpet. Silia loves war. He has toy soldiers, toy machine guns, and lots of camouflaged clothes. Someday he wants to join the army so that he can fight for America like Skipper. Skipper was in the navy; that's how he got the name Skipper. He fought the Japs in World War II. Silia is concentrated. When he is in battle, he is very focused.

In the corner of my eye, I see Sotaio outside standing in the porch light. Toa has built a wooden porch around the trailer with handrails and a chicken-wire screen. Sotaio is resting against the rail staring out into the darkness. I walk up next to Sotaio and look up at him. He is tall and lean with eyes that make me feel really safe. Sotaio is always joking and playing tricks on me and my brothers. I don't know too much about him, but I like him. He always



takes time to talk to me and he never seems to get bugged by all my questions. He reminds me of my two other brothers who are locked up. They all have something in common. I'm not sure what. Maybe it's the way they deal with the pain. Maybe it is because they are all fighters like Daddy. But I am not a fighter. On Sotai'o's hand, I see his tattoo that reads, *100% SAMOAN SOS*.

*What does that mean?*

*It means I am full Samoan.*

*What do you mean full?*

*It means my dad and mom are both Samoan, so that makes me full Samoan.*

*So I'm not full?*

*No, you are afakasi.*

*What is afakasi?*

*It just means you are half.*

*Why do you tattoo it on your arm?*

*Because in LA, we have to represent our culture little man. In LA, you got Vatos, Asians, Blacks, Tongans, Flips, Whites and we all competin' for a spot on the street. You know what I'm sayin' little man?*

*Na, not really.*

*You don't understand cause it's all white up here in the sticks, but that ain't how it is down there. You got to represent your race down there. I'm full Samoan and proud of it. So I ink it on my arm to let the world know, I'm a pure blooded hamo. I'm an endangered species, little man. Ain't no such thang as a pure blooded Hawaiian; they all done bread out by the Asians and whites. That's why we got to try and keep our race pure. So it don't be 'out like all the other Islanders.*

*So I can never be full?*

*Sorry little man, but that's okay, you my cousin, so ain't no one gonna mess wit you.*

*What's the SOS mean?*

*Oh that little man: that's my set. I run wit the SOS: Sons of Samoa.*

*Huh?*

*Damn little man, you country folk sure are ignorant. SOS is the gang I be bangin' wit. We hundreds of usos strong. Ain't no one wanna tangle wit us cause we gangsta. You know what I'm sayin' little man. We got guns, knives, and numbers. We got Gs on the street and Gs in the prison, and we growin' in numbers every day. I'm SOS fo life: ain't nothin' yo pops can do to take the SOS out of me. Why do you have to fight? Cause if you don't you die little man, the Tongans and the Mexicans are gonna come up on your turf. You know what I'm sayin' little man. We gots ta protect our turf. I hate Tongans. If I see one, I'm gonna take him out. That's just the way it is.*

*Why do you hate Tongans?*

*Cause little man, they ancient enemies of ours. Dat shit goes way back to the islands. Samoans been hatin' Tongans for hundreds of years. It's in our blood.*

*But uncle Talati says we are related to Tongans. He says we are all related and hating them is like hating our selves.*

*What? Don't ever let me hear you say that again little man. Uncle Talati is jus ignorant. You betta go inside and do your homework little man. Don't tell yo pops nothin' we talked about all right little man?*

*Okay Sotaio.*

I go inside, do my homework, brush the teeth, and go lay on the floor next to Silia's bed. Mama comes into tuck us in. I love when Mama tucks me in. She sits down beside me and runs her fingers through my hair and hums softly. I say a prayer to Jesus and ask him to please not let me have nightmares and to please not let me burn in hell, and I ask him to

forgive me for my sins, and I tell him I love him and say amen. I let out a big yawn and close my eyes as thoughts flash drift through my head like floating TVs playing different things. I see Jesus, Ronald Regan, bullies, Mama's pretty face, Daddy's hands, Sotai's tattoo, jagged chunks of Madrone, plastic green army men, and pork chops. I hear Silia's machine guns rattling, Cool and the Gang, Satan telling me to sit in the corner, Daddy slurping pork chop bones, and the word NIGGER ringing in my ears. I smell cigarette smoke, pork chops and mushroom gravy, and saw dust.

He falls asleep wondering: wondering what it's like to feel American, what it's like to feel white, what it's like to feel Samoan, and most of all, what it's like to feel full?

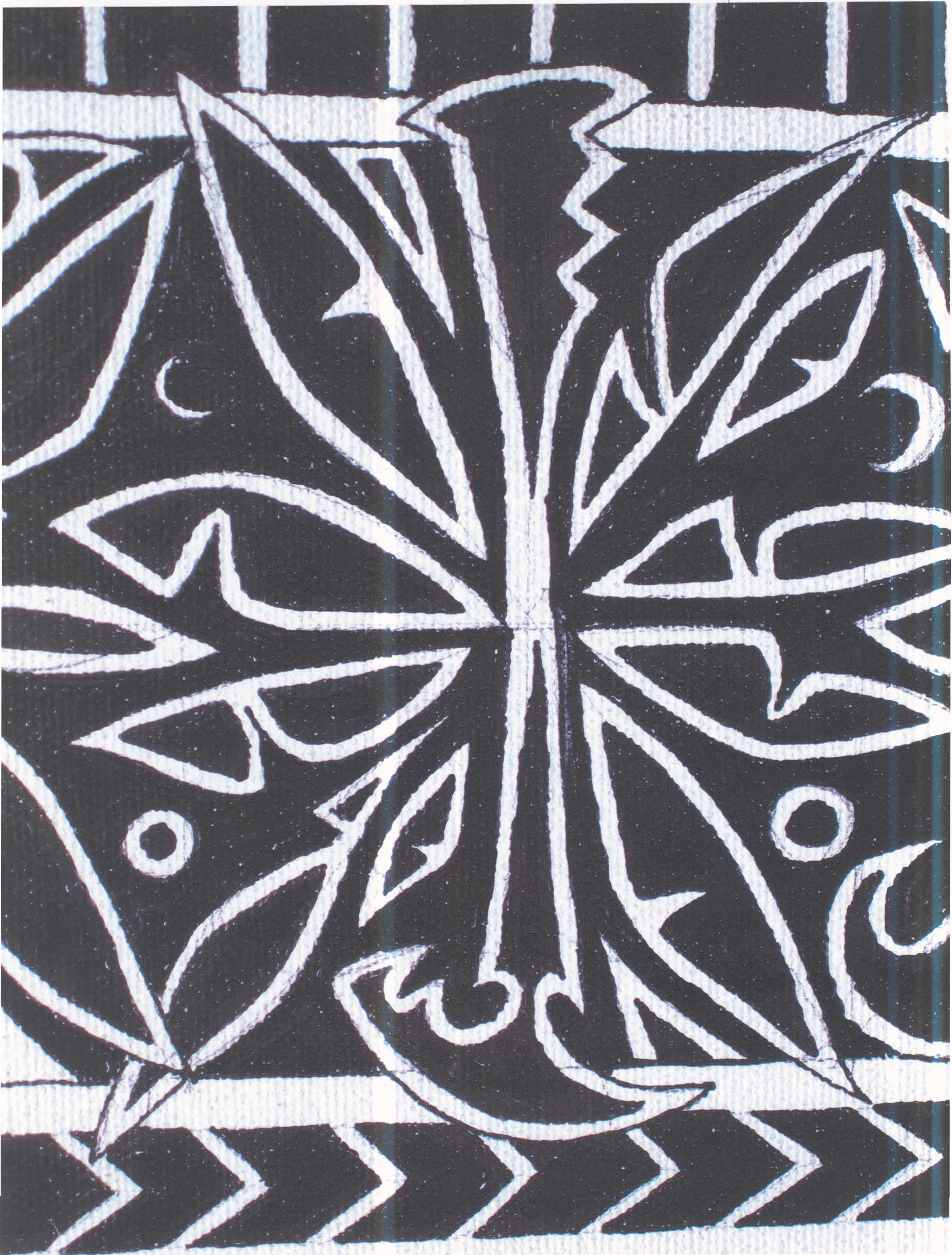
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SEARCHING THE EARTH'S CORE FOR UNTOUCHED METAPHORS  
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# **PAINTINGS**











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THE BIRD IN THE THROAT OF PROGRESS  
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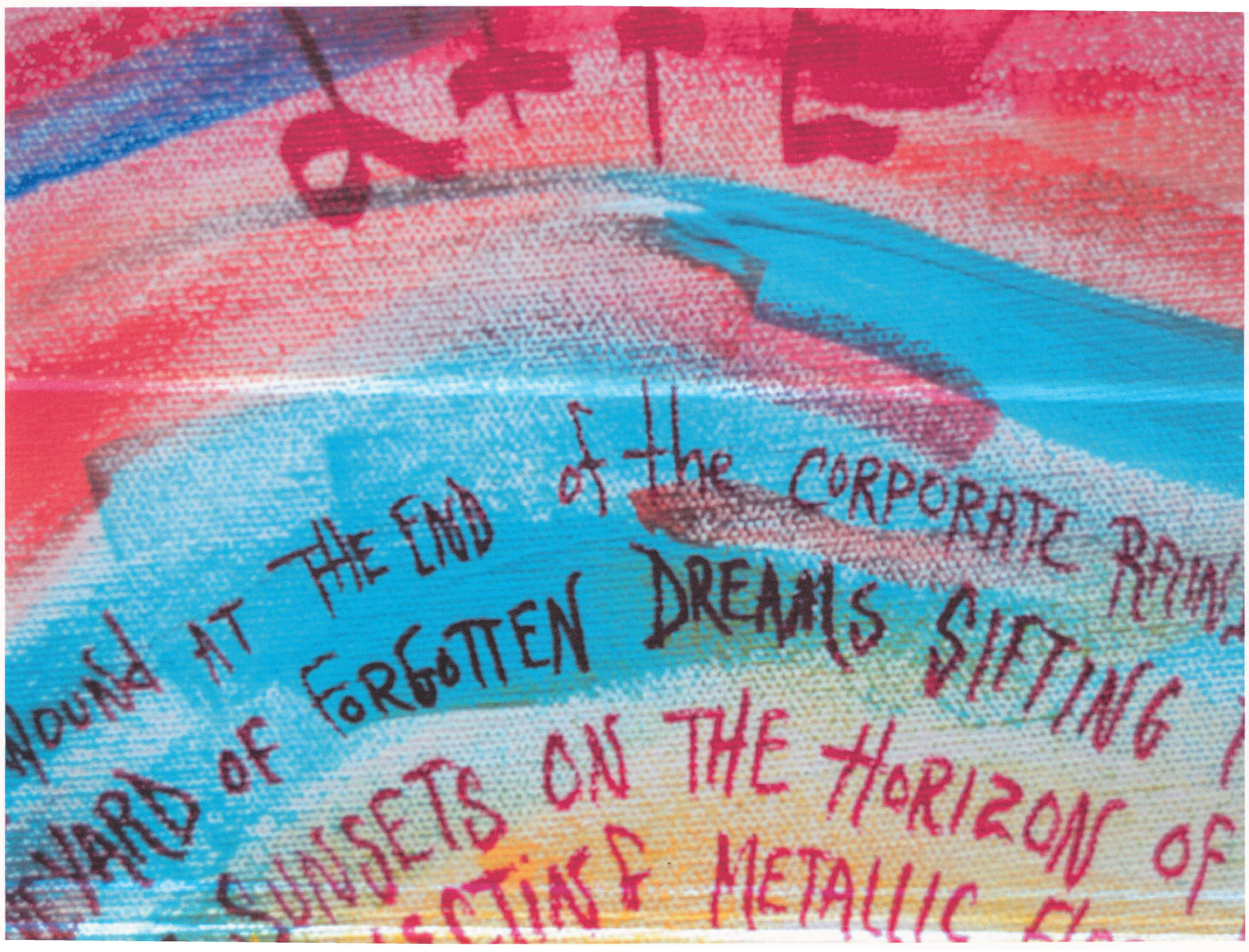
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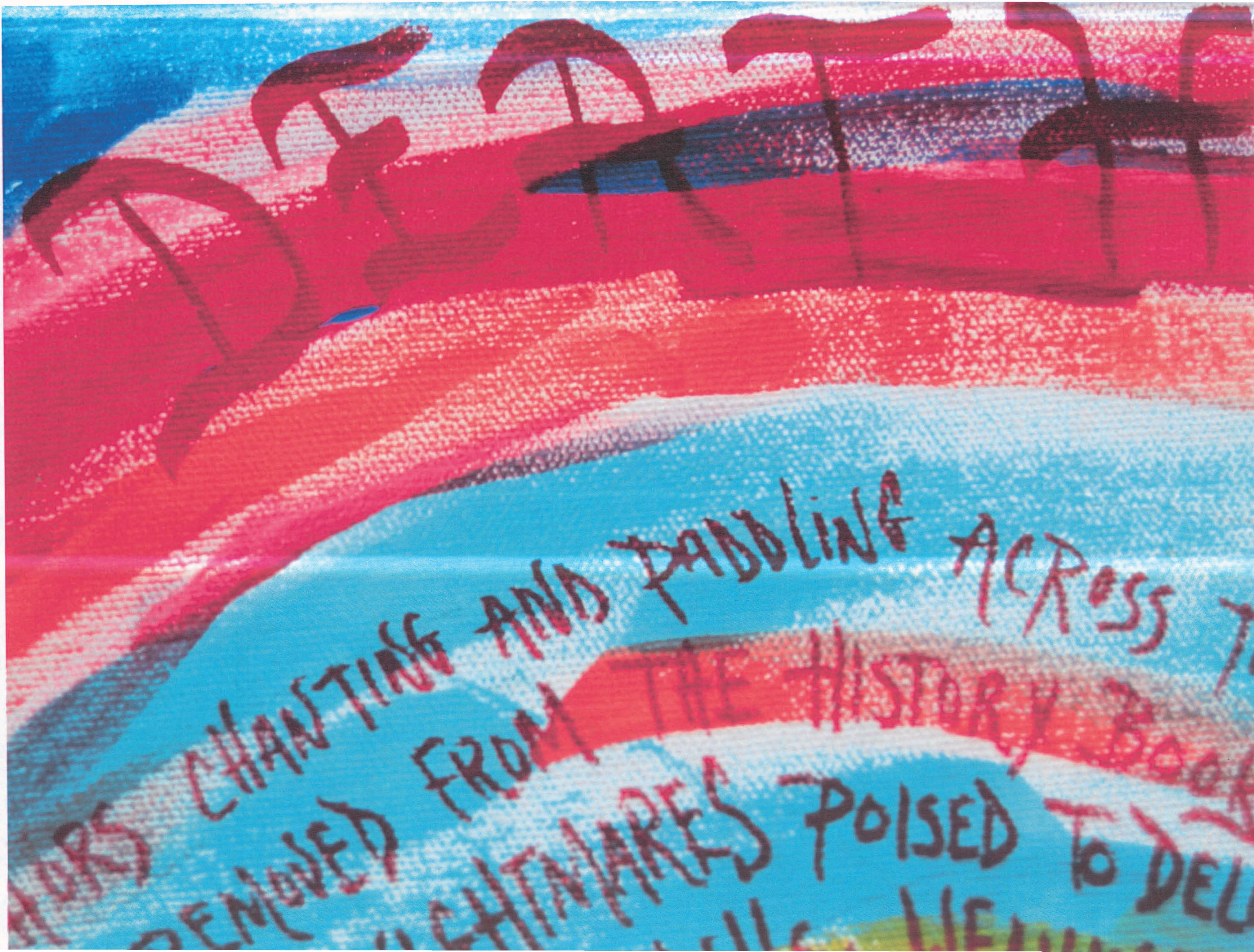
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FOUND AT THE END OF THE CORPORATE DREAM  
FORGOTTEN DREAMS SHIFTING  
SUNSETS ON THE HORIZON OF  
METALLIC



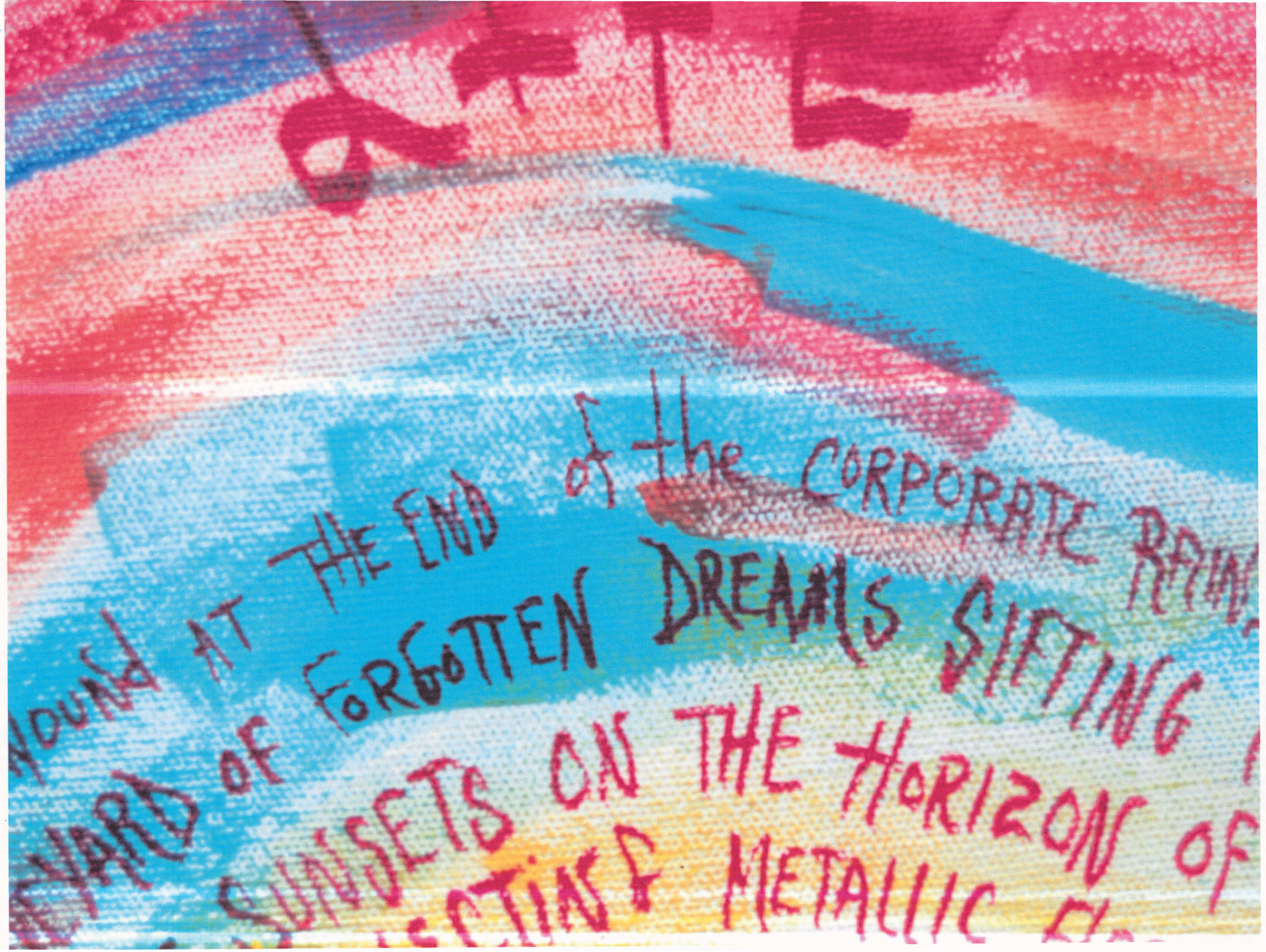
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ONE LODGE SIDWAYS IN THE  
A RUBBLE OF UNTOLD STORIES  
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AND MOONLIT RAIN & LIKE  
CENTIPEDES, WITH BANYAN TREES  
THE EARTH'S SALT RESONANCE



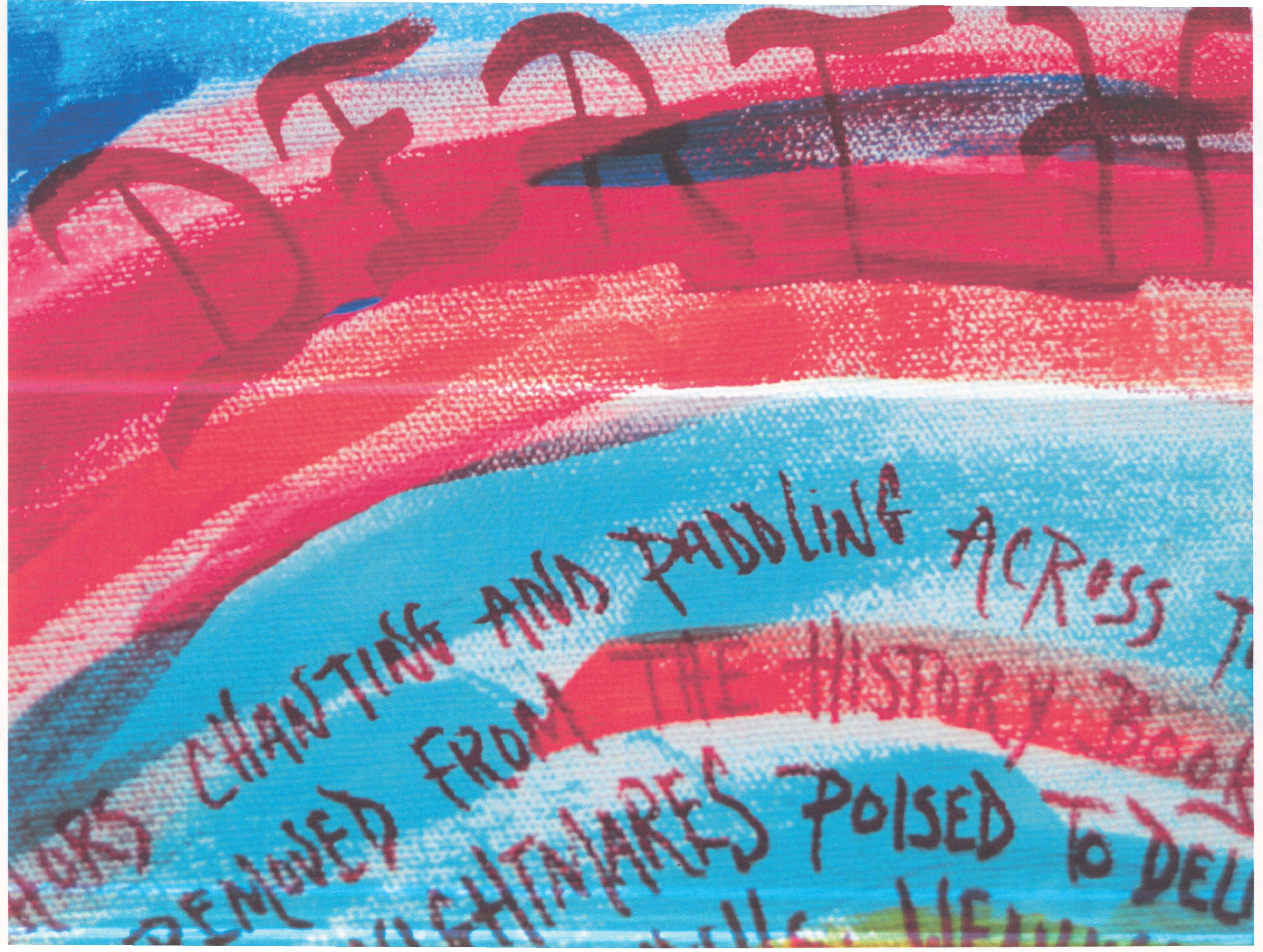
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... CHANTING AND PADDLING ACROSS  
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WE ARE AMERICAN SHIPMAN  
 WE ARE US NATIONALS NOT  
 US CITIZENS. WE PLEDGE  
 OUR ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG  
 OF THE UNITED STATES OF  
 AMERICA. WE ARE HOME OF  
 THE PEA: THE FLYING FOX  
 HOME OF PAGO PAGO  
 HARBOR: THE OBJECT OF  
 STRATEGIC MILITARY JUST  
 THAT ATTRACTS WARSHIPS  
 AND MEN OF WAR. WE ARE  
 HOME OF THE AOR: THE  
 GIANT BANYAN TREE THAT  
 DANCES IN HUMANS  
 AND SHADES SEAS. WE ARE  
 HOME OF THE HIGHEST  
 PER CAPITA DEATH RATE  
 IN THE CURRENT US  
 OCCUPATION OF IRAQ  
 HIGHER THAN ANY OTHER  
 US STATE OR TERRITORY  
 WE ARE AMERICAN SAMP  
 AMERICAN ENOUGH TO STOP  
 ENEMY BULLETS: NOT  
 AMERICAN ENOUGH TO  
 VOTE. WE ARE AMERICAN  
 SAMP: LOCKED AND  
 LOADED AND READY TO DIE  
 FOR YOUR AMERICA