

**Lament for Mother Tubman**

*The median net worth for non-immigrant African-American households in the Greater Boston region is \$8. The household median net worth was \$247,500 for whites.*

—“The Color of Wealth in Boston,” a 2015 report by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Duke University, and the New School

America promises to print Harriet Tubman  
on a twenty-dollar bill  
A cruel and unusual honor  
Let the faces of greed remain on their god  
Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar  
but keep my Momma out yo’ filthy palms

Remember all the nothing that changed  
when this nation literally tokenized  
Sacagawea in fake gold  
Remember how indigenous people  
still live in squalor

You can’t blackface a dollar  
and call it reparations  
Newly bred Tubmans  
crammed into privileged wallets  
Sardined in bank vaults like  
the hulls of slave ships  
Businessmen pass a pimp  
a stack of Harriets to rape  
a teenage sex slave with African hips  
While Mother Tubman’s  
daughters and sons struggle  
to keep the heat on

In Boston  
a black father dies  
after decades of wanting to  
New England’s bitterness  
finally froze his will to hope  
He left his family a modest inheritance:  
a suicide-note-apology  
eight dollars  
and a special edition Celtics jersey

In Boston  
a black mother dies  
after decades of refusing to  
After freedom marches and protests  
After cancer stole both breasts  
After spending her savings  
on saving herself  
She leaves her daughter  
a closet full of church hats  
an award-winning  
corn bread recipe  
and a family Bible with  
eight dollars hidden in  
Philippians 4:19  
*My God will supply every need*

America really believes they doin' us a favor  
Painting our faces on their dreams  
Writing "In God We Trust"  
on this blasphemous economy  
Assigning net worth to human beings

Life ought to be priceless  
but only the breath of the  
highly appraised gets protected  
No wonder this nation considered black folks  
more useful as slaves  
Capitalism ascribes  
an eight-dollar value to free black lives  
If Mother Tubman was alive today  
she would need two and a half selves  
before she was worth the weight  
of her very own bill