

20190507_theslowdown_20190507_128

Wed, 9/30 7:11PM 5:00

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

tomatoes, gettysburg, forced, betray, poet laureate, blood, grew, victor, janetta, risen, poem, ancestral lands, southeastern states, landscape, leapt, republic, vanquished, white settlers, rail, indian removal act

00:05

I'm us Poet Laureate Tracy k Smith. And this is the slow down.

00:20

In early April, I rode from Oklahoma City to ADA, Oklahoma State Poet Laureate, janetta Calhoun mesh. It was a spring afternoon and the landscape leapt out at us. Golden, forsythia, pink Redbud blossoms, a carpet of purple handed flowers overtaking fields. ginetta grew up in this landscape. She remembers foraging as a kid for wild blackberries and plums, carrying a tiny salt shaker in her pocket, so she could enjoy fresh ripe tomatoes off the vine. Her childhood stories reminded me of picking a apricots and peaches from the trees my own father grew and eating tomatoes whole, like apples back when tomatoes still tasted like a mouthful of summer. But our conversation covered other ground to Oklahoma is the home of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Muskogee Creek and Seminole nations native communities that trace their heritage to southeastern states of Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida. These tribes were forced by Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830 to move west into federally designated Indian Territory. By these means, the US government was able to seize their ancestral lands, and all of their belongings which they were forced to leave behind. They then distributed them to white settlers. That forced march upon which thousands of lives were lost, is referred to and metaphorically as the Trail of Tears janetta and I talked for two hours. It was a beautiful spring day, a day in which the earth seemed so so jubilant with new life. And yet we could not deny all that this very same Earth has witnessed all this spilled blood that has seeped into this very same land. In our conversation, I learned I can grow better tomatoes by feeding the soil bone meal. Lettuce thrives on blood meal, the weight of those words, blood bone was not lost upon me. And yet, something grows. Today's poem to the Republic by Pulitzer Prize winning poet Frank Bedard calls my mind

back to the violence and the inhumanity of war to our nation's many crimes against the innocent. It's a poem in which the conquered and the victors of history all seem to be saying the same thing. And it makes me think there is more we must nurture more we must coax back into flowering. To the republic by Frank bidart. I dropped I saw a caravan of the dead start out again from Gettysburg. close packed upright in rows on rail car flatbeds in the sun. They soon will stink. Victor and vanquished shoved together, dirt had bleached the blue and gray one color risen again from Gettysburg, as if the state were shelter, crawled to through blood, risen, disconsolate that we now ruin the great work of time. They roll in outrage across America. you betray us is blazoned across each chest, to each eye as they pass. you betray us. assaulted by the impotent dead, I say it's their misfortune and none of my own. I dreamt I saw a caravan of the dead move on wheels, touching rails, without sound to each eye, as they pass, you betray us. The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation.