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poem, garner, fact, life, museum, officers, eric garner, john, slow, needful, department, small, gently, ross, racked, victim, hate crimes, likelihood, speculates, breathe

00:06

I'm Tracy k Smith, and this is the slow down

00:19

10 years ago, I wrote a long poem called, they may love all that he has chosen and hate all that he has rejected. Exploring several hate crimes committed in the spring and summer of 2009. I was pregnant with my daughter, and these stories racked me with anxiety. What was I doing, bringing a child into such a violent world. One of the victims my poem mourned with Stephen Tyrone John's, the security guard at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, who lost his life defending museum patrons from a gun wielding 88 year old white supremacist. I named the perpetrator in my poem, but on a subsequent visit to the museum, I was impressed by the fact that it was only John's was named and commemorated at the site. There is a portrait of him on a plaque near the museum entrance, his face, kind, smiling and somehow almost familiar, reminded me that while John's was a hero, he was also an ordinary person with friends and family hopes and struggles. Somehow, that fact, magnified my sense of what he had given and giving his life. Today's poem, a small needful fact, by Ross gay magnifies my sense of what Eric Garner lost when his life was taken as the result of police brutality. In July of 2014. in Staten Island, Garner was apprehended by police officers, and they did something banned by the department. They put him in a chokehold. Video captured during the incident shows Garner repeating I can't breathe 11 times. Garner lay on the pavement for seven minutes, while officers awaited an ambulance. though neither the EMTs nor the officers attempted to perform CPR. Many citizens, myself included, believe Garner's life was stolen. gays poem moves beyond the now familiar facts surrounding Garner's death, the fact that Garner's death was deemed a homicide, the fact that the court failed to indict the accused officers, the fact of protests. All of these things are well documented, and disgust gaze poem leaps to envision Garner's life before he was the victim of police brutality. It reminds us of a job Garner

once held, and it speculates about something small and beautiful, like working the earth that he may have once done. Gaze poem is an act of speculation, and it moves gently, tentatively, through an imagined scenario relevant to gardeners life. This is Ross Gaye's a small needful fact is that Eric Garner worked for some time for the parks and rec horticultural department, which means perhaps, that with his very large hands, perhaps, in all likelihood, he put gently into the earth, some plants, which most likely some of them in all likelihood, continue to grow. continue to do what such plants do, like house and feed small, unnecessary creatures, like being pleasant to touch and smell, like converting sunlight into food, like making it easier for us to breathe. The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily, go to slowdownshow.org and sign up for our newsletter.