

# On the Question of Open Carry

What has happened to our minds to make us think  
2015 was the worst of our violence?

What of the 406,496 killed by firearms in the ten years prior?  
How they lay in our arms: a pieta built by guns.

The American way – to desire more  
desire strength refute the softness within us

disregard others punish them for their heart  
insist we know more than all others

One handgun in each fist still leaves our hands  
empty. What is missing that we must find

meaning within a spinning cylinder or trigger?  
Missing – the soil within our fingers, the  
co-creation of homes.

Don't give me rationale.

How many mothers must suffer, fall into themselves, crack  
their lives apart when their child is hurt or killed?

What baby picture has a chance of surviving in our minds  
when we have seen, in a tireless loop, four cop cars, no sound,

and a boy lifted, almost in a dance, by 16 bullets?  
What remains of a woman who knew her voice,

recognized her own mind's limitations, but still, without fear,  
gave her words to the world, and pointed at what wasn't right?

## NOTES FROM A RALLY

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*Note: The following remarks were made at a rally at the JW Marriott Hotel in Austin, Tx on January 9, 2016 at the Modern Language Association conference. After the rally, about 500 MLA members marched up Congress Ave, to the Capitol behind a banner reading "Armed With Reason." We stacked books around the speakers to create a gun-free classroom space where UT Professor Ann Cvetkovich, UT alum & University of Indiana Professor Purnima Bose, MLA Incoming President Diana Taylor, Mayor Pro Tem Kathy Tovo & Rep. Elliott Naishtat spoke.*

Welcome, welcome from Gun Free UT.

When UT law professor Ranjana Natarajan came over to my house one hot August day before school started this year, and we scribbled the names of victims of campus shootings in kindergarten markers onto sheets of construction paper, we thought there would be one rally. It turned out that there was a giant roar of NO waiting to be amplified into a movement. Thank you, thank you, for your support and presence. It means so much to us here to know you are with us.



La Pietà

What happens to her when she's left alone,  
or not left alone, and her neck is cradled by a plastic trash bag?

You think black lives matter has nothing do with open carry?  
It is all about fear.

Those who are black or brown or poor or anyone else  
conveniently made monster. Don't

tell me this isn't about the 20,528 slave ships  
making their way to different ports in the span of  
315 years. Don't

tell me this isn't about protecting territories held by  
others long before colonizers set their teeth in. Don't

tell me this isn't about protecting land owners  
from slaves with the second amendment. Don't

tell me this isn't about misread masculinity in defense of women.  
How much terror lies within those who cannot imagine

black men walking free? How much of the ghost of racism  
are we accepting in our minds?

When do bullets end their echoed light? What one  
straw will break this camel's back?

When do we learn our lesson?

—Jo Reyes-Boitel  
San Antonio poet, educator, mother



Photos: Laura Lyons

Gun Free UT was recently cited on a national top 10 list for having changed the gun debate in 2015. The media cited our emphasis on campus carry's chilling effect on freedom of speech in the classroom as a new and powerful argument in favor of gun control.

But for me, the visceral outrage—that giant roar of NO—that I felt and saw reflected among friends and colleagues last summer was less about whether First Amendment rights trump Second Amendment rights—I'm more of a "repeal the Second Amendment" kind of girl myself—and more about my heartfelt commitment to the university as a space of teaching and learning.

Many MLA members, I imagine, share my sense that research and teaching in the humanities is more than a just another profession. It's a vocation with a long history stretching back through every wisdom tradition in the world, every religion, philosophy, scientific inquiry, and artistic discipline. Humanities classrooms are a place where we ask how best to live in this world, what it means that we are born both

with a love of life and the knowledge that we and all we love will die. Teaching and learning how to ask these questions, how to address them, how to live with ourselves and others in the face of them, is a sacred trust that the threat of gun violence brutally extinguishes—as it does so much else.