

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS
HONORABLE MENTION

Othering

It turns out the dead can't be reborn,
and our most glorious songs exist in
a history that never existed outside
our pining for it. Hunger makes our
heroes shed their faults; the past is a
distancing, though we're all bound
to its damage. Are we a less broken
proposition? Muddy veins dry out,
river-to-land, opening doors to new
countries that spit their people back
to where they came from. Knowing
the back of a father's hand is surely
better than knowing his fist, we say.

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As my wife's grandfather bombed a
country once called home, a woman
he would later wed learned to knit
dolls for the other internees in high
Idaho desert. The land had no color.
The fence cut well short of sky, and
the sky was gray. Girls handed back
and forth these raw mirrors sewn to-
gether from scraps of their favorite
Sunday dresses. The dresses, black.
The dolls therefore black. Last night
she told me blacks would be happier
returned to where they came from,
as her dead knew contentment only
after the earth swallowed them.

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In learning our blood spread back to
Andrew Jackson, the few remaining
drops older than his whitening dried
out like arroyos in August, like love
in a land not known for its kindness.
We asked, has any land grown from
wildness to city on kindness alone?
Erasure making us *other*, again.