

# FIELDNOTES

by Keith S. Wilson, runner up

1  
it helps to observe from a distance:  
the field, for instance,

as a statement

the south has chosen to make,  
the way whiteness too  
is often rhetorical, as when an older student remarks

that in those beginning days  
only he observed mlk's holiday

and why was it that he did  
while his black friends, working, did not

2  
in physics dark matter isn't "made"  
of anything, it's a free citizen

that passes  
unburdened through the field, through itself,

through you—

3  
sometimes love is a black dot  
in a field

sometimes, suddenly  
it is not.

4  
or how can black be

the absence  
of all color? take this cruiser. see the light strike blue off the car like copper  
through a fountain

5  
there is a difference between what is fair and what is just,  
for instance,

it is fair  
that i try  
to love your skin even when it is not touching my own

6  
whiteness is an alibi, the way the officer was like a steam-  
liner

only I could see

7  
inside where nothing shows I am of course not black  
but that does not matter

to the field

8  
some colors are indistinguishable  
at night. *put your hands behind your back*

a different cop once asked me.  
it was so sincere. he was so

polite

9  
as a boy you learn to know the inside  
without being required to feel it

as when, even now, I understand a bucket  
or a hood

10  
he asks my girlfriend not if she is white  
since even in this light

what we are is obvious

but instead the sheriff offers some western  
philosophy: *ma'am* he asks  
*are you here of your own free will*

11  
look at the word black  
on the paper  
& you will see a certain black, a kind,

a certainty,

or if you see nothing at all that of course  
is a kind of black too

12  
whiteness can be anything, even  
hyperbole. try this:

sit in a field. try reading

andrew jackson's quotes on liberty.  
now force them away from him.  
attribute them to the children of his slaves

13  
by the road  
my father showed me cotton  
once

*look at that*  
he said

## Art by Jordan Thompkins

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*"Through a series of poignantly observed field notes, Keith Wilson looks racial injustice and white supremacy in the eye and cracks open a world where difference can be re-imagined through physics, color and observation. While 'whiteness sometimes is a form itself / of hyperbole', he reveals that 'dark matter isn't 'made' of anything. It's a free citizen / that passes / unburdened / through the field.' Fieldnotes is a poem to revisit again and again. It is a testament to poetry's visionary power to transform the way we see the world."*

— Jess X Chen, poetry judge