

8 Minutes and 46 Seconds

We played in the dust around our village
Our parents all out working in the fields
Only our grandparents watching over us
Men from another village, took us
Put us in chains, dragged us to the nearby town
White men paid them money, took us onto a ship

One minute gone
I can't breathe

We were packed tight in the hold of the ship
Men, women and children all together
Chained so we could not move
We were sick as the ship bucked and swayed
Men threw scraps of food, buckets of water over us
Many died; they were taken and thrown overboard

Two minutes gone
I can't breathe

We were taken off the ship into a strange town
They threw water over us to make us look clean
Stood us on a platform for everyone to see
Men shouted, waved pieces of paper, bidding for us
A white man bought three of us, chained us together
Pulled us along behind his horse as he rode away.

Three minutes gone
I can't breathe

All of us, men, women and children worked all day

Growing cotton for our master, Mr Jones
Sometimes we would see him riding by with his family
We looked down while they passed looking so fine.
Some of the women were taken to the big house at night
Sometimes they had a child who grew to work the land

Four minutes gone
I can't breathe

One day soldiers came to our town, told us we were free
We had nowhere to go, so we stayed working for Mr Jones
He paid us money, then took it back for food and rent
White folk still go by dressed so fine, living in the big house
Sometimes they come, drag one of us away, hang them from
a tree
Life don't seem too much different to me

Five minutes gone
I can't breathe

Politicians tell us we got "civil rights", get more if we vote
for them
Local white folk tell us we must go to another town far away
Queue for many long hours to register for a vote
We do that and come back, then, come polling day,
Those same white folk stand in the way, won't let us in to
vote
Don't seem like we got all that many rights

Six minutes gone
I can't breathe

Malcolm X tells us to have a revolution
Martin Luther King dreams of peace

Both of them get shot down.
We march peacefully
We shout and throw stones
Police shoot us regardless

Seven minutes gone
I can't breathe

Some of us do good
We got generals, judges
We even got a president
Most of us stay poor
No jobs, no hope
No place for us 'cept prison

Eight minutes gone
I can't breathe

Trayvon Martin
Eric Garner
Michael Brown
Breonna Taylor
George Floyd
The list goes on and on

Eight minutes and 46 seconds gone

I

Can't

Breathe