Pittsburgh isn’t like other cities.  
The ones that crawl across televisions screens,  
often accompanied by the matter-of-fact voice  
of a white man and his breakdown of why yet  
another black boy’s blood stains a police officer’s uniform.

The officers I knew helped me cross the road in the mornings,  
Held my pigmented hand in theirs, while I skipped across streets.  
Blissfully unaware of the world around me.  
My white friend’s dad was a police officer.  
I hadn’t talked to him before, but he seemed nice enough.

I shed these memories a long time ago.  
No longer was I coddled by the world,  
but any enemy of it.

Sirens and badges no longer symbolized protection.  
Red and blue lights triggered anxiety  
that coils around my core.  
Images roulette across my vision.  
A firearm smoldered in crimson.  
Seared flesh. Blood coppery on my tongue.  
Tears taste like sunlight, blinding and hot.  
My tongue rests heavy on the roof of my mouth.  
Lips cracked like desert fire.

Face to gravel, lungs seized,  
too scared to ask why I was pulled over.  
Why I am a threat.

I used to think Pittsburgh wasn’t like other cities.  
Now I watch the news and wait for the names  
of my father, or my brother, or my uncle  
to scroll across the TV screens.  
This time, the white man’s voice  
didn’t slide off my skin.  
It penetrated like the bloodstained bullet  
embedded in my childhood.