

# THE NEW TROPIC

... the latest installment of  
our **Betsy Writer's Room** series.

July 19, 2023

## 👉 Poetry from The Writer's Room

"It's difficult to train a lens on a moldering trash heap when so much beauty makes up the landscape that surrounds it, but Geoffrey Philp does just that in July's poem," says Caridad Moro-Gronlier, curator of our monthly feature of work by poet alumni of The Betsy Writer's Room. "Despite his clear-eyed takedown of America's racist legacy — through distinctly Miami imagery —, I believe his protest poem is also a love letter. How else to eliminate the rubbish, if not by caring enough to point it out so we might clean it up once and for all?" (Caridad Moro)

"'America 2020,' a part of the Betsy Hotel's 'Overture to Overtown 2020,' appears in my latest collection of poems, Archipelagos," explains Philp. "Written during lockdown, the poem draws inspiration from James Baldwin's assertion that America's innocence is a facade that perpetuates white privilege and avoids the country's history of racism, discrimination, and violence. The poem then lists the many injustices committed against people of African descent, especially in Miami, with the destruction of Overtown and the erasure of historical memory in that once vibrant mecca of Black excellence. Using the imagery of turkey buzzards circling Miami's Federal courthouse, the city becomes a symbol of the failures of justice and accountability in America. Miami serves as a microcosm, inviting a close examination of the broader issues plaguing America." (Geoffrey Philp, Poet)

## AMERICA 2020

By Geoffrey Philp

America, you've lost your way.  
You've believed in your innocence  
for so long you've betrayed your promises  
on parchment, robbed fatherless children  
of their birthright, trapped children in cages,  
and while the oceans churn towards a slow boil,  
and a virus holds us hostage in our homes,  
you've allowed gangsters to prey on families  
seeking asylum from thugs  
in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.  
And you'd rather die than give up your privilege  
to hunt black men you think have become too uppity.  
Now for the millions lost in the Maafa,  
massacres in East St. Louis, Tulsa, Rosewood,  
the destruction of Overtown, and the poisoning  
of Flint, we are marking stones where our martyrs  
have fallen, taking note of your crimes that fester  
like scraps of flesh — desperate offerings  
to the saints for justice — littering the steps  
of the courthouse in Miami, where a wake  
of turkey buzzards returns to their roosts atop  
skyscrapers every winter, their wings darkening the skies.

**Geoffrey Philp** is a Jamaican author of poetry, short stories, novels and children's books. Philp taught creative writing at Miami Dade College and has a Master of Arts in English from the University of Miami. Peepal Tree has published eight of his books (with a ninth forthcoming). A huge supporter of Caribbean books and writers, he posts interviews, fiction, poetry, podcasts, and literary events from the Caribbean and South Florida on his blog. In 2022, he was awarded the Silver Musgrave Medal for outstanding merit in literature.