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Poem: Black Berry

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FRANK X WALKER

BLACK BERRY

For Timothy Pigford

If Wendell Berry was black and planting
seeds, If Henry County was still in Virginia
or Carolina, his Mad Farmer's Manifesto
would have wrapped the good dishes
for the move, after he left the farm

Of course, being a real farmer poet
he would no more quit the land
than the land would quit him, at first

he'd hire himself out, sharecrop
somebody else's dreams, dig up their soil
and plant his own ambitions
deeper than the *cancer* of his skin

He'd water it with regret and longing
until it petaled and bloomed, yielding
a harvest of angry black letters and tears

If Wendell Berry was a mad black farmer
his grandson would be standing here
right now, telling you how the closest he
ever got to farming was the liberation garden
we planted on railroad property
and the bean that finally broke ground
in the chocolate milk carton in the fifth grade.