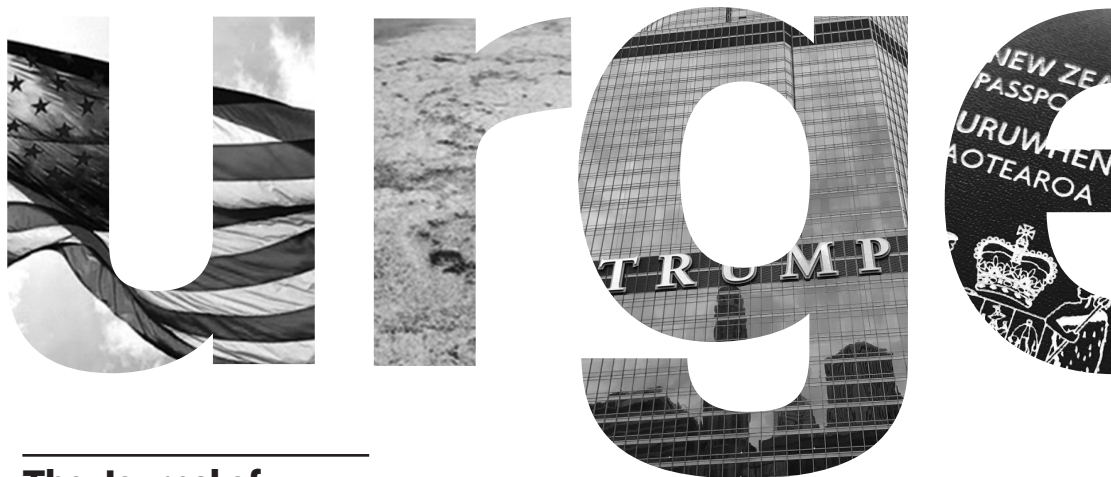

**The Journal of
Urgent Writing**





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Introduction

Simon Wilson

urgent

James Baldwin, whose friends Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Medgar Evers were all gunned down around him, once declared that he was an optimist because he was a human being. Victor Rodger writes in this collection about the inspiration he took from Baldwin, gay, black, a writer — and, he implies, someone who gave him a liberating permission to be something else: angry.

Anger's what happens when you realise there is no good reason for things to be as bad as they are. It gives you urgency and it gives you voice. You can hear it in this book in the essay by Teena Brown Pulu, an account of the aftermath of a bus crash in Gisborne. And in Mike Joy and Kyleisha Foote's record of the damage caused by dams, Carys Goodwin's discovery of cultural imperialism in the climate change movement, Andrew Judd's tale of the racist within.

Maria Majsa, Gilbert Wong and Morgan Godfery, meanwhile, present their own childhoods, each of them made urgent by the complexities of history and identity. Things are more than what they seem. That theme also emerges in Conor Clarke's formally beautiful yet whimsical photo essay, Sylvia Nissen's inquiry into the political views of young people, and Jess Berentson-Shaw's interrogation of welfare philosophy.

Māmari Stephens asks some tough questions about the future of marae and Giselle Byrnes does the same for universities. Sarah Laing muses on activism, mooncups and friendship, while David Cohen recalls an historical moment rich in intellectual stimulation and immigrant contribution.

Perhaps it's some heady mix of Baldwinian optimism and anger, but many of the writers here believe we are poised on the edge of something big. Jo Randerson is ready for it, in a radically personal way. Raf Manji is gearing up, Tim Watkin has some cautionary advice, and Max Harris wants us to keep our heads up, so to speak. Emma Espiner and I both propose new ways to do things, and hers is so utterly sensible it could be the making of us all.