

# “Race in the Media: A Poetry Workshop”

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#100hardtruths-#fakenews

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# Workshop Description

- In this two hour workshop, we'll encourage participants to think about representations of race in the media through poetry. Inspired by Claudia Rankine's collection *Citizen: An American Lyric*, and other texts that grapple with race and visual images, our workshop encourages creative writing responses to the media. In particular, we will focus on representations of Black and Asian Americans in the media and questions of justice, solidarity, and poetics. We'll spend some time looking at historical and current cultural representations while offering poetry writing prompts based on media images. The workshop will conclude with an informal reading of participants' writing that is open to the public. Selected poetry from the workshop will be published at the Institute of the Racial Imaginary's website.
- "Race in the Media: A Poetry Workshop" led by Chet'la Sebree and Margaret Rhee is part of Alex Juhasz's collaborative poetry project #100hardtuths-#fakenews, a radical digital media literacy project in the face of fake news. Please check out this article "10-tries-100-poems" for further information.

# Framing

“A boy hissed at me in the hall while I was on my way to the bathroom. As I spun around, angry, I realized that he might have thought I was another student. “Watch yourself,” I said, “I’m a teacher.” He gave me a low-lidded half smile and looked me up and down. A kid—he was a kid in a baseball cap. But he was a foot taller than me and he leaned in to say, “Mmmm, so wuz your name?” Then I sat in the office of the Harlem school, sorry I had said anything, while my boss went to hunt down the kid. I had a sickening sense that I was about to be responsible for a lynching on my own tiny plantation. A boy came to the door of the office and looked at me uncertainly. “I’m sorry I sexually harassed you.” I stared at him. He wasn’t the same kid. “But it wasn’t you,” I said finally. “Yeah, he said as he pulled down his baseball ca and started to walk away, “but it might have been my cousin.”

Like me, my cousins have European blood. They also have the colonized blood of Jamaica and the massacred blood of Native Americans. My skin is white, but I have the ravaged blood of Africa in me.”

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I apologize for slavery. It wasn’t me, true. But it might have been my cousin.

Eula Biss, No Man’s Land

# Additional Quotes

- “Racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.”-- Ruthie Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*
- “Film and television, for example, have been notorious in disseminating images of racial minorities which establish for audiences what people from these groups look like, how they behave, and "who they are.”<sup>17</sup> The power of the media lies not only in their ability to reflect the dominant racial ideology, but in their capacity to shape that ideology in the first place.” - Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*

# Exercise One:

- Recall the first time you learned about race? How old were you? Where were you? What did you hear/learn? Draw into senses such as taste, smell, touch, color to describe?
- Remember the first time you remember when you learned of your race. How old were you? Where were you? What did you hear/learn? Draw into senses such as taste, smell, touch, color to describe?
- Recall the first time you saw your racial group represented in the media? What was this representation? Where were you? What do you remember? Describe beginning with I see...

# Poetry Prompts

- Beauty, Race, Desire
- Power, History, and Violence
- Race and State Institutional Violence















Chinese



Japanese

#### HOW TO TELL YOUR FRIENDS FROM THE JAPS

If these four faces of young men (above) and middle-aged men (below) the two on the left are Chinese, the two on the right Japanese. There is no infallible way of telling them apart, because the same racial strains are mixed in both. Even an anthropologist, with callipers and plenty of time to measure heads, noses, shoulders, hips, is sometimes stumped. A few rules of thumb—not always reliable:

- Some Chinese are tall (average: 5 ft. 5 in.). Virtually all Japanese are short (average: 5 ft. 2 1/2 in.).
- Japanese are likely to be stockier and broader-hipped than short Chinese.
- Japanese—except for wrestlers—are seldom fat; they often dry up and grow lean as they age. The Chinese often put on weight, particularly if they are prosperous (in China, with its frequent famines, being fat is esteemed as a sign of being a solid citizen).
- Chinese, not as hairy as Japanese, seldom grow an impressive mustache.
- Most Chinese avoid horn-rimmed spectacles.
- Although both have the typical epicanthic fold of the upper eyelid (which makes them look almond-eyed), Japanese eyes are usually set closer together.
- These who know them best often rely on facial expression to tell them apart: the Chinese expression is likely to be more placid, kindly, open; the Japanese more positive, dogmatic, arrogant.

In Washington, last week, Correspondent Joseph Chiang made things much easier by pinning on his lapel a large badge reading "Chinese Reporter—NOT Japanese—Please."

- Some arbitrary: Japanese have thin, aquiline noses, narrow faces and, except for their eyes, look like Caucasians.
- Japanese are hesitant, nervous in conversation, laugh loudly at the wrong time.
- Japanese walk stiffly erect, hard-heeled. Chinese, more relaxed, have an easy gait, sometimes shuffle.



Chinese



Japanese







# Prompt 7:



# Quite Writing Time

- Try to develop 1 - 2 poems to share (10 minutes)



# Discussion

- “Race in the Media,” Poetry, Fake News?