

## **“Race in the Media: A Poetry Workshop”**

**Brooklyn College, 2018**

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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.

### **Workshop Schedule**

2:05 - Introductions - Alex, Chet’la, Margaret

2:10 - Introductions - All participants

### **2:20 Framing - Quotes About Race and Racism**

#### **Close Reading:**

“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**

**2:35 - Exercise One:**

- 1) 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?
- 2) 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?
- 3) 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...

Reflection; read over your freewrite. Circle key words and phrases that came up for you. Share with the larger group

2:50 pm

**Prompts**

**6 Poetry Prompts About Race**

*Beauty, Race, and Desire*

1)



**Prompt:** What does this image say about representations of beauty in the black community? What does this image say about how you present yourself to the world versus who you are? How do you grapple with your own understandings of “universal” and cultural beauty? Write a poem in which you unpack the self you present to the world.

(7 minutes)

2)



**Prompt:** Reflect on the images of race and desire in the media. How do we rethink desire and Black and Asian relationship? What is the intimate gesture here, and is this an image that you've seen before? Write a poem in which you reflect on attraction, desire, and race: Who is supposed to be together, and not?

**(7 minutes)**

*Power, History, and Violence*

**Prompt 3**



**Prompt:** This image is featured in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*. In this photo, lynched people have been removed. What initial responses do you have to this photo? What does this image communicate without the lynched people? Write a poem in which you were complicit in an event. *Or* write a poem in which you wrestle with the way perception has been slightly altered to highlight a particular idea. (7 minutes)

**Prompt 4**



Elizabeth and Hazel, September 4, 1957 Photo: Will Counts Collection, Indiana University Archives

**Prompt:** This image is from the racial integration of black students in the public schools. Here the angry image of the white student resonates of racial anger.

Focus on the story of emotions in the photograph: anger, fear, bravery. Consider the body such as hands and eyes. Consider objects in the poem Begin your poem from the point of view of an object (sunglasses, books, or a description of eyes/hands) and tell this story from there. Focus on emotions. What emotions are being expressed in this negotiation of race?

(7 minutes)

Prompt 5



Time Magazine explores how to make a few key distinctions, 1941.

**Prompt:**  
 In 1941, *Time Magazine* tried to help Americans understand the difference between Chinese and Japanese,

who is the racial enemy. These characteristics focus on the body. Start your poem by providing a poetic mapping of your face? What is this mapping? How do others see you? How do you see yourself? How do we remap dominant stories of our body and race?

(7 minutes)



**Prompt:** Consider these two images of Michael Brown, who was killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. What does each convey? Which one do you think the media used? Consider how the media would present you, in the service of news, in a poem.

(7 minutes)

### **3:35 pm Quiet Writing time or Final Prompt**

#### **Prompt Seven:**

If there are media images we have not covered, consider media images now. Go back to a resonant media image of race, please feel free to use your smartphone and write a poem in regards to this image. Or begin your time to generativity write your last poem, or review and revise the work you have already completed.

### **3: 40 - Quiet Writing Time**

Please continue to take time to go back to your writing, or begin develop one or two into poems to read and submit.

### **3:50 pm - Open Discussion**

### **4:05 pm - Final Reading Celebration**

Please choose one poem, and feel free to share a brief introduction to the poem.  
Everyone has 3 - 5 minutes