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Quote Journal

***Citizen, An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine**

“People who felt her black body didn’t belong on their court, in their world” (Rankine 23)

This quote comes from the essay Rankine wrote about Serena Williams. It really resonated with me because the world and the leaders of the world, especially America or some countries in Europe, love to say that everyone is equal and that there is no discrimination or prejudice. However that is false and this quote shows that. They saw Serena as a black woman instead of just a woman who loves to play tennis and is great at the game. They used her color against her because even though she earned her way to that stage, they still didn’t think she belonged because of her color and that’s very upsetting. You think the world has changed and became better, but in reality nothing has truly changed and people are finding other ways to show their prejudices and discriminations of others and what happened to Serena Williams shows that.

“She is, he says, beautiful and black, like you” (Rankine 78)

I really love this quote because black women are beautiful in every way, but it also makes me feel wary. In the passage, the reader can feel the sweet and uplifting emotions that come from Rankine’s words and the way she constructed this poem. However, when I read this quote at the end of the passage I was unsure by my feelings towards it. I felt like why did

Rankine need to emphasize “black” in the passage. I think she wanted to show that being black is beautiful and also that many people believe that and love having a black woman as their significant other.

“Yes, and this is how you are a citizen: Come on. Let it go. Move on.” (Rankine 151)

This quote comes from a passage that talks about Trayvon Martin and the aftermath that African Americans experience from this heartbreaking situation. Rankine explains how the character talking in this passage is driving and is even nervous when driving because at any point a cop could pull them over just because they possibly fit the description of a suspect or for no reason at all. It’s sad that people of color are fearful of doing normal human actions because of the many deaths that have happened to black people just for being black. Literally breathing as a black person can enrage someone and even cause them to kill that person unprovoked. This quote shows the way African Americans have to act in America and this is the kind of “citizenship” they are subjected to. Blacks aren’t supposed to be mad or want justice for unjust racial killing, but they’re supposed to let it go, move on, and act like nothing happened. It really shows that depending on your skin color defines the type of citizen you are and the type of citizen you are allowed to be in society.

Sing, Unburied, Sing by Jesmyn Ward

“When I first got to Parchman, I worked on the fields...Parchman was a working farm right off”

(Ward 22)

In this quote Pop is talking about his time in Parchman, which he frequently talks about. Before reading this book, I have started learning about Parchman Prison from my African

American Theater class. In that class we are learning about August Wilson and he incorporates that past of Parchman in many of his plays. Reading this quote with that background knowledge made me feel more sympathetic towards Pop and his family because the treatment of African Americans in that prison was horrible. It was a prison where all they did was work, but it wasn't a good kind of work. These men were abused and locked up longer than needed and sometimes locked up for no reason. This quote really resonated with me because this place has a horrible history and it still lingers with people.

"They thought he was selling weed in school... brought him into the principal's office with two other boys his age. Friends. Made them drop their pants and strip so they could search them."
(Ward 113)

This quote exudes abuse and racism through the actions of this school and its teachers. The kid that they are talking about is an African American male and they assumed he was selling weed so called him and his friends to the principal's office and made them strip to find weed on them. There are so many better ways to see if someone is selling weed, but at the same time what made them assume it was him selling weed and not anyone else. Ward does a great job depicting the struggles of African Americans, especially men, in the south during the 40s and it's so sad to read about because these situations definitely happened to black individuals. Also, a school is supposed to be a safe space where people can just worry about their education, but it's hard to do that when people assume illegal things about you because of your skin color.

“I remembered being spread-eagle in the dirt, surrounded by hunched, milling men, and a teenage boy at my shoulder who stood tall under the long shadows. River. River, who stood as the men flayed my back, as I sobbed and vomited and turned the earth to mud” (Ward 135)

Reading some of the experiences Richie faced while at Parchman Prison is horrendous. He was beaten until his bones felt brittle and he could barely walk. Something I couldn't understand is, was his father, River, the one beating him or watching him be beat? I was a little confused by the context with his father, but I was more concentrated on the abuse that he went through. He didn't really do anything wrong, but they made him lay on his stomach on the ground and whipped him until he had many deep lashes on his back. That is extremely cruel. The little care these officers had for the wellbeing of the prisoners was absurd. They already had power over them since they were inmates, but they truly wanted to instill fear into them.

“I hear it. Sometimes. When the sun. Sets. When the sun. Rises. The song. In snatches. The stars. A record. The sky. A great record. The lives. Of the living. Of those beyond. See it flashes. The sound. Beyond the waters” (Ward 281)

It's interesting how Jojo and Kayla could see and talk to ghosts of African Americans. However, one thing about the ghost is that they seemed to be unfinished business and that's why they couldn't crossover. For example, Richie was around because he wanted to find his killer and the other person has raped and killed by her attacker. All these ghosts lived in anguish and sadness and they still do after the grave because they have found peace. The ghosts truly represent the pain that African Americans went through during the 40s and that even beyond the grave they don't have peace from the injustices they faced. I guess Jojo is being used to help seek out those injustices and be a guide for the ghosts.

***She Would be King* by Wayétu Moore**“Gbessa the witch” (Moore 14)

The book starts off telling us the story as to why Gbessa is seen as cursed by her village and this quote truly stuck to me because Gbessa does nothing wrong and just lives her life in peace and she is constantly scrutinized and receiving horrible names and attitudes from other people. They are calling her a witch, but they know she doesn't do witchcraft and they are just calling her names because they believe her to be cursed. It's just crazy how people turn on others based on the words of others and not based on their actions because never once has Gbessa shown that she was a witch or even evil, she just has special powers that two other characters have and they weren't born the same day as her.

“You cursed too (Moore 145)

I love how Moore incorporated the three characters with special powers together and let them realize that they all have gifts. I understand why Gbessa decided to use the word “Cursed” to describe what her, June Dey, and Norman are because of the experiences that she has had to deal with in her village. It's just nice that all three of them realize that they aren't alone with these gifts and that there are other people that have it like them. They might be very different, but they all understand what it means to be different and outcasted. Now they understand what it means to be similar to others and find people who understand them and the life that they have lived and this quote shows that.

“I knew the boy’s father. The prince in the jail.” (Moore 274)

I felt like this quote was very ironic based on the past situations that happened to Gbessa. They believed that Safua’s son was dead and they blamed Gbessa for it. However, the boy she found in the jail is actually Safua’s son, the one that was supposed to be dead. The boy never died and yet they still believed it was all because of Gbessa. The village people tend to make Gbessa the scapegoat and they blame her for everything sad or bad things that happened because she’s a person that is easy to blame. No one would believe her if she said it wasn’t her and that’s why they always use her as the excuse for everything and it’s not fair. This situation shows how she doesn’t do anything and isn’t responsible for bad situations and still ends up being responsible for it.

Poetry

History Lesson By Natasha Trethewey

“It is 1970, two years after they opened the rest of this beach to us”

When I read this poem you could feel the happiness from the narrator being at the beach with her grandmother, but when you read the quote ahead you also feel the disrespect and cruelty that her, her grandmother, and other African Americans have faced in America. This quote saddens me because a beach is public property and should be open to all, but yet, being black in America during this time, you weren’t seen as a regular human being and you were definitely treated less than. Overall, Natasha Trethewey does a great job at conveying emotion in her poem and really targets the hearts of the reader to feel a certain way.

Igbo Landing: Afro Atlantan Ornithology By Candace Wiley

“All three white men flew to the water. The goddess snagged them from the air and dunked them into the deep”

The history of Igbo is that they started a rebellion against the men who captured them and wanted to enslave them. They ended up killing the white men and committing mass suicide. The author takes this history and tells a mystical story about how a goddess saved them and showed them the way to freedom. This quote depicts a goddess taking the white men and drowning them in the water showing that a higher being was the result of the rebellion and that it was bigger than the Blacks on the ship. It is truly a powerful image full of strength and resistance. However, I feel like the goddess isn't one person doing this, but almost as if she possessed the Africans and gave them the strength to overpower them.

Principles By Danez Smith

“Ask if your country was built of stolen land and stolen breath”

This poem is very powerful and talks about issues within America that people try to forget or even act like it never happened. I could've picked many other quotes from this poem, but this one spoke to me the most because it talks about the start of America that people like to forget. The quote talks about how European countries stole from Native Americans and killed them in order to take the land. They all stole and killed to have land that never belonged to them. Then America had a Civil War against England as if the land actually belonged to them, but it all still belonged to the Native Americans. They loved to describe the Native Americans as savages, uncivilized, and ruthless, but they were the ones who took their land by killing and ruining the lives of Native Americans and to me that is more savage and uncivilized than anything. I think

this poem and quote has shown how important it is to be aware and not forget the history of America and the pain it caused for the real Americans in order to start this beloved country.

Riddle by Jericho Brown

“Shhh. We can’t take that sound. What is a mother wailing? We do not recognize music until we can sell it.”

Riddle By Jericho Brown talks about all the horrible things that white men have done towards minorities and anyone they have felt superior to. Even when they end up killing an African American male, they don’t care about the cries of their mothers and their families. They don’t even hear the noise of their mother’s cries. They just ignore and only think about it when it sounds good, they can make music from it, and sell it to make them rich. This reminds me of the ending of the Ma Rainey movies because after she recorded her song and gave it to their label, they turned it around and made it into a more “white” song and sold it that way instead of the original song. Why is it that they always take from the black and claim it as their own? Even all the black and brown lives they have killed and ruined, that’s just not enough for them and there is always something more for them to take.

A Mercy By Toni Morrison

“Once every seven days we learn to read and write... [Reverend Father] is forbidden to do this but he teaches us anyway, watching out for wicked Virginians and Protestants who want to catch him.” (Morrison 6)

During slavery times, the white men didn't want blacks to be educated and be better than them so it was illegal for them to teach other slaves how to read and write. The Reverend knew this fact, but didn't care because it was more important to him to teach other blacks how to be educated so that one day they can be seen as equals to the whites. The caucasians wanted blacks to be illiterate so that they would always have to work under a white man and not be able to succeed without one. Also, then they would feel that the only thing a black person can do is work on a plantation and work on fields and nothing else, it was a brainwash. However, the reverend knew that wasn't the case and taught them the necessary skills that any human being needs.

“Just imagine. No illness. Ever. No pain. No aging or frailty of any kind. No loss or grief or tears” (Morrison 116)

I feel like this quote is universal. I believe everyone has thought about this same thing at least once in their lives because this world is filled with dangers and diseases that create pain and cause death. In the book, Rebecca, Lina, Jacob, and Florens have experienced much pain and suffering due to the ways of life. It is inevitable, but what if that didn't happen anymore? What would life be like without pain or weakness? I've heard that to live is to suffer and that suffering is what makes us strong. I think life would be boring without those vices because with the possibility of fear and weakness, it makes us live life to the fullest and live life without regrets.

“To be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion over another is a wrong thing; to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing.” (Morrison 196)

I feel like she is saying that people shouldn't let others dictate their lives. The first part, I think, alludes to motherhood or parenting because you are responsible for another human being.

The second part alludes to slavery and the owners constantly giving slaves away or them fighting to have a slave. Finally, the last part is not allowing someone to have control over you and I feel like that represents Florens because she allowed the Blacksmith to control her actions since she was kinda obsessed with him. Also, I think this shows the way of life because in some way someone will have dominion over you whether it's on the job or your parents or someone you love, it will always be a power struggle and it's come to the person to determine how to go about it.