Poems shared by Yazmin Monet Watkins at the 2014 Race & Pedagogy Conference

**A Lesson in this Queer African American Woman's History**

Part 1:
The Outsider Within phenomena is more than just a historical rhetoric
Stampede in to the bloodlines of centuries of scholars.
Even Libraries of congress dedicated to the sole collective collections of W.E.B.
DuBois, Angela Davis, Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberle Crenshaw
Will never warn us enough
Of the all too familiar potential of the boot at our back
The bruise of the bat
The other side of the welcome mat
Merely covers the fact that we are just visitors in this land of plenty
For some and nothing for most.
This is the legacy we’ve inherited.
Lorde knows Audre predicted
"The master's tools would never dismantle the master's house"
But look at this grand McMansion we've built for you.
For US!
Trust, noo that glass ceiling doesn't exist
Why look how void of color we are in this post racial society
Just reach out and grab that mythical pot of gold
Stamped out at the foot of rainbows they will never fully acknowledge in this church
ordained state
No H8! Tiptoeing around the issue
In the shiny brand new shoes
They have bought us, fooled us
Cosmetic distractions tap dancing on reality TV's
Dance Sister Outsider
You will never quite belong
Will never feel welcome in this land that never wanted to acknowledge your rightful chosen name.
Never wanted to paint your smile across billboard
Without certain condition
Of jezebel'd slut or welfare mammy
Hattie McDaniel wore that same grateful grin for the academy
Help!
Viola, it never out of style
The message all too clear:
Equality is a myth just as fictional as the American Dream

A shallow politically correct band-aid
Triaged on an axe wounded history
Still bleeding from the rope burn of
Centuries of whip lash and lynchings
Topically bandaged with sub par educations
Pipe lined straight to the prison industrial complex
A star spangled banner cloaking the lies this country was built on
Class afforded solely to the rich and wealthy
With Lady liberty at the gates
'Don't be mistaken
This is a private party
There is no room for difference at this table
Didn't you know the tickets to this luncheon were fixed
For the highest bidder?"
Come one come all
Place your bets on this crumbling system
Take stock that
Perhaps at the very least,
You can sweep together the remaining crumbs
Make a meal out of nothing
That's it chap
Pull up yourself up by your bootstraps
Kneel and get your hands dirty
At the altar of this so called democracy
Welcome to America
This is "home"

Part 2:
It is here at the very literal self aware intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality on my person, that I finally decide when and where, I enter.

"Love Letter for Puget Sound"
My dearest University of Puget Sound
Before time and space sprint us away
(as they tend to always do)
and separate us from this moment
I have to take a second to say thank you.
Thank you thank you thank you
For your bravery, for your activism
For your commitment to hold each other accountable.
For your fearless dedication to making
Your campus a better place
And thus, this earth a better space for
ALL of us to THRIVE!
We need more people like you out here in the "real world"

These past few days I've learned
What courage looks like
Seen first hand on the faces of those committed students and pastors and teachers and warriors
What it means again to stand at the front lines for justice
Even in the face of difficulty,
Especially in the face of difficulty.
How entirely valid and necessary you are to this vibrant community
I am honored and humbled to join your family.

Thank you.
For opening up and sharing your unique skill sets and perspectives
I don't think you fully acknowledge
the weight of your own strength.
What amazing power you hold collectively.
Don't ever forget what can be achieved when you join hands together.
Exercise and trust your power
Know that you CAN impact the institution
Despite where you are
You will always have a team of at least a few down ass admins
Doing guerilla work from the inside
Who genuinely care.
But they can't go this thing alone.
Utilize your network
If you ask,
they'll help you translate, transcribe and navigate
the often times institutionalized bull shit of academia
Force them to address your issues.

It was asked of me
what my parting wish for you would be and
Upon my departure
My hope for you all is to stay honest.
Find your passion
Define your unique story
On your own terms
Push back against the system.
Examine your own privilege
Ignite fires around intersectionality
Keep them burning
Rattle cages
Rupture the system from the inside out

Shake.shit.up!

Refuse to accept apathy from one another
(and yourself)
Engage in those heavy & challenging conversations and
Be responsible for your education
You are here to learn some lessons.
Explore and connect far far outside the bubble of your own comfort zone
There are some incredible allies waiting just beyond those ivy walls (I see you IPC).
Embrace the terror of being inaccurate.
Trip, fall, stumble (civilly) into conversations that lead to action
And help each other welcome and build across difference.

Take the momentum built when
We cinnamon-roll hugged one another
Do the sometimes hard work it takes
To actively connect with each other
Run marathons
Walk miles
Volunteer
to take a stroll
in your fellow Loggers' shoes
Don't give up
This is your community.
Nurture your garden and watch what sequoias grow

LOVE each other.
Remind yourself why you still care
Remember to care
Feel
From one human heart to another
Open your eyes
Stare in to your neighbors'
They have the same heartbeat that you do.
Muster the courage to
Keep building empathy and compassion
This is how you enact real change.

Thank you for joining me on this journey.
I am not your typical educator
You remind me why I write and share stories and
I leave here with so much love and motivation
To continue doing this empowering work
I can't even begin to describe how transformative and affirming this residency has been for me.
What vital and timely
Lessons you all have taught me.
It's funny, I came here to "teach"
Yet I learned just the same
You leave me so inspired.
As our (class) time runs out
If there's nothing else you remember but this-
My homework assignment for you:
Love yourself
Love each other
Remember you are worthy
Tell your story
Speak out, speak now
Some one needs to hear you.

"Borrowed Tongue"
I speak with a borrowed tongue
In the language of an oppressor
English does not feel like a place to call home.

I imagine all the possible dialects I could have come from
And try on creole? try on Yoruba?
Like a young girl in her mother's clothes
Too big, too complicated
More fabric weaved in to all my flags
Than I know what to do with.
I don't fully understand why

English feels like a foreign language
When this is all I know of nation:
My race my class my gender my sexuality
All reminders of why I am more second class
Than citizen
Born in a country where my children
are not safe from unjust laws
with infrastructures built to oppress
Feeling anything but
Home
I wear this red, white & blue with trepidation
A wary outsider within
A complicated history
Whispers of forgotten stories
And lack of representation
More question mark
Than origin tale

I know nowhere is perfect.
But all I’ve got for background
Is my grandparent’s light skin
Gene expressing in my own
From the South without much collective memory
Our family has no crest.
No tidy explanation of our generations
Just blank empty roots dangling from our family tree:
Wondering
Who was my grandmother’s mother
and the mothers’ mothers before them?
What branch were they plucked from?
What languages did they leave back home?
Where did they learn to speak?
[Sorry (not sorry) plantation ain’t good enough]
I wonder what my voice would sound like
Without the erasure
Without the colonization

Sometimes I dream of
Flying places
Even my ancestors do not remember
A space where our true song and dance
Drums deep in our speech pattern
The floral rhythm of rolling r’s
Full of mango and spice
I am an orphan
Robbed from a dialect
I will never get to move in to
I wish I knew where my blood comes from.
Perhaps that is why there is such an irresistible urge to travel
Wander lusting in my bones
Always searching for some place
To call home.

"9 things I really meant to say to the white boy who thought it was okay to shove his hands in my hair last night at the bar after I politely said don’t do it:"

1) Not sure why you haven't learned this basic concept in life already
But for your first lesson in acceptable human social behavior:
DON'T PUT YOUR HANDS IN MY HAIR!
I do not know you.
There is absolutely no reason why
I should feel
your grubby fingertips
on my
scalp!
Ever!
Don’t do it.

2) I get it.
My hair is amazing, yes I know.
You’ve never seen anything like it.
Perhaps you don’t have any Black friends back home
Who could have warned you but-
Don’t touch a Black girl’s hair!
I am not your chia pet.
My hair is not some exotic creature
My body is not a petting zoo
For your personal perusal.
Paws off!

3) You just fucked up my curl pattern, man!
Do you know how much Miss Jessie’s Curly Merengue
I had to use to tame this 'fro??
That stuff is not cheap!
How would you like it
If I came up to you
Out of nowhere and
Ruffled all that bleach blonde goo
You call hair and shook your head uncontrollably?

4) In what world is it ever acceptable
To touch strangers
Without their admission?
Is there some particular reason
You felt welcome to invade my section of the bar
With your neocolonialist exploration
And lay your hands on my person??!
I am not your property.
Stop looking like I kicked your kitten
When I told you don’t touch my hair.
You don’t have the right to grope me!

5) If you truly have questions about Black hair
And its care
There’s this amazing new fangled device called
The Internet
Look it up.
6) Real talk,
Why is it always white people
Who feel so privileged to reach right on in?
Who taught you that our
Bodies were yours
For the touching
For the taking
Who taught you that
Consent does not matter?
I don’t care HOW curious you are
Your primitive interest
In a cultural investigation of "other"
Does not trump my discomfort

7) While we’re at it
When was the last time
You walked up to a white woman
And fondled her hair?
What makes you feel so entitled
To violate MY personal space?
I was trying to be nice but,

8) Fuck I look like?
Hottentot Venus? Saartjie Baartman?
This is not some 1800’s exhibition
I am not on display.
Further
I don’t know you like that!
I’m sitting here like everyone else
Trying to enjoy my lemon drop martini
Which I was *peacefully* doing before you came along
And shoved your hands deep inside me
That’s creepy dude

9) Did you forget that it’s 2014?
I don’t owe you an explanation.
My body, my hair, my space
Period.
Unless I explicitly give you permission
For the last time man,
Look but
Don’t
Touch.