

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  
Stamped 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, nooo 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.

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### **"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.

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**"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.

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**"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.

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