

Understanding & Dismantling Privilege

The Official Journal of The White Privilege Conference and The Matrix Center for the Advancement of Social Equity and Inclusion.

After Claudia

Hakim Bellamy

Abstract

A response poem to *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine, 2014 National Book Award Finalist for Poetry.

As the inaugural Poet Laureate of Albuquerque, NM (2012-2014), Hakim Bellamy is a national and regional Poetry Slam Champion, and holds three consecutive collegiate poetry slam titles at the University of New Mexico. His poetry has been published in on the Albuquerque Convention Center, on the outside of a library, in inner-city buses and in numerous anthologies across the globe. Bellamy was recognized as an honorable mention for the University of New Mexico Paul Bartlett Ré Peace Prize for his work as a community organizer and journalist in 2007, and was awarded the Emerging Creative Bravos Award by Creative Albuquerque in 2013. This year Bellamy was named a W. K. Kellogg Foundation Fellow and was awarded the Food Justice Residency at Santa Fe Art Institute. Recently, Bellamy was named *Local iQ*'s "Best Poet" for the fifth consecutive year on their annual Smart List, and he has been named "Best Poet" in the *Weekly Alibi*'s annual Best of Burque poll every year since 2010. He is the co-creator of the multimedia Hip Hop theater production [Urban Verbs: Hip-Hop Conservatory & Theater](#) that has been staged throughout the country. He facilitates youth writing workshops for schools, jails, churches, prisons and community organizations in New Mexico and beyond. Having recently released his first book, *Swear*, Hakim was conferred his Master's Degree in Communications at the University of New Mexico in May. Currently completing multidisciplinary arts projects from his travels to Turkey and Nepal this summer, Bellamy has had his work featured on AlterNet, Truthout, CounterPunch and the nationally syndicated Tavis Smiley Radio Show. He is the proud father of a 7 year-old miracle and is the founding president of Beyond Poetry LLC.

After Claudia (Rankine)

A book later, and words for it still escape you. A celebrated title, and they will still call you out your name. Even “boys” write books. **Citizen** is what we call people who belong, people who vote. And if you don’t *do* one, you can not *be* the other. You can never *have* the other.

My country orphaned me, and everyone who looked like me, on a rooftop in the center of my stomach. You rafted me this poem, one hundred and sixty pages thick, from a yellow lawn chair in the middle of that roof. The weather was growling. The acid was rising, overcoming the lip of shrinking island inside me in the selfsame moment I recognize another me, being digested on a small screen. Without thinking, my knee erects my foot towards the box. Turning the channel to Dickie V. Always for sport, all the time. Where it’s *always* safe to *always* discuss our catlike reflexes. Never castration.

The isolation in you speaks to the isolation in me, like you are tired of talking to yourself. But they will ask you to write about something else like they’ve heard it before. But I *beg* you to write about nothing else because they’ve never heard *this* before. Because they’ve never been the sore thumb at the Whole Foods checkout. When the cashier asks if “I’m sure that’s my card” when I mistype my pins and needles. Because no random Black Man in blazer and Bugle Boys has ever pulled me aside at an airport to share photos of his other-racial wife in order to show me how down he’s not. Because no one has ever accused them of trying to break into their own house. Because sometimes, commiseration is the closest thing to community that we’ve ever spelt. Because, in practice, exile means dark. Means alone. But in person, exile means Black.

Sometimes spring still makes me sick to my stomach. When America’s favorite “past” time is in full swing. I could never figure out if it was the gardenias or the poplar I was allergic to. Neither could Billie. But there are whole families in ‘dem ‘dar trees. If our arms be the roots, linking us in the face of Selma firehouses and Ferguson firearms, will the blossoms simply blue inside us? Does a history of being shackled together sometimes have us railroad each other? Does it make us run as far and as fast away as possible? Do they feel like they want their money back when we congregate on any given day, other than Sunday? When we still don’t mind the intimacy of what a group of us smells like? Their mob mentality hates our mob mentality, which is simply confounding. Until you remind them that they are the ones, that tied us all

to the same family tree.