Timothy Bryant

Professor Trager

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Citizen: An American Lyric

The book *Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine opens the readers eyes to the racism that is still present in America today. The book is a collection of stories, poems, and pictures that provide an example of the everyday hardships of an African American in recent years. Throughout the book there are numerous racist interactions that are shown to be very offensive to African Americans. Even though racism is not explicitly or physically expressed as much, there is still very much systematic racism that is in place that prevents racism and superiority from being gone in America.

Most of the books discusses global sport events like the US Open and World Cup to reveal that this problem of racism is not just in everyday African American citizens, but in famous ones too. When the book goes over the US Open event, it focuses on Serena Williams’ US Open appearances in 2004 and 2009. In 2004 Serena Williams was playing against American Jennifer Capriati in the quarterfinals, and the umpire of the match, Mariana Alves, made “five bad calls against Serena” in that match (Rankine 26). The book says that calls were clearly in that the “commentators, spectators, television viewers, (and) line judges” could that the balls were good. Alves was excused from officiating any more matches after this (Rankine 27). In 2009 the events seemed to happen again with the same umpire in another crucial moment for Serena. The umpire this time called foot fault against her when she was down and at that point Serena had just lost it. Later Serena was punished by the Grand Slam Committee be a $82,500 fine and two-year probationary period. The words Serena said were that of anger towards her being wrongfully accused and targeted by the umpire. Serena let her anger loose and to the audience that just made her look unprofessional and insane. Serena had the right to outraged to accusations during her crucial match but due to her actions of threatening the umpire she was punished instead of the umpire. The story of Serena is a perfect illustration that all African Americans are not immune to the harsh racial experiences that they are going to face in their lifetime.

In the book there is a narrative on a stop and frisk involving an African American that has been misidentified by the police. Stop and frisk happen to often for African Americans because most people think that they all look the same. Police brutality in recent years against African Americans has been discussed, but the problem continues. Throughout the story the phrase “and you are not the guy” is always repeated at the end of the page to emphasize that the police are in the wrong because they do not ask this guy any questions and they just harass him. Once the protagonist is taken to the station, the misunderstanding is dealt with and he charged with speeding, but he is then told to get naked. After he gets naked, he is instructed to get dressed and leave, but he must walk home. The police should have never been allowed to do this to an African American and they should understand that there is a possibility that two people could fit the description. If the police would have just questioned him at the scene, it could have saved the man the harassment and embarrassment. In America the police have gotten more violent with African Americans in recent years, but they are now being held accountable of their actions by recordings of the events that the public can see.

The book was very eye opening to the racial incidents that happen in America. Claudia Rankine does a wonderful job connecting all these occurrences and images together. The racial incidents from big to small all affect the society that people are going to growing into and the people they are going to be. America needs to the problem of systematic racism because if not these incidents could possibly become more violent, not just for African Americans but all minorities.

Works Cited

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Graywolf Press, 2014.