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[00:22 - 02:14] We've started folks, it's great to be with you all here this afternoon. And as much as we would love to see you all in person and be with you, we're happy that you're able to join us virtually. My name is Ria Vigil, and I serve as an assistant vice president in the office of the vice president for diversity. And I have the privilege, along with the Diversity Symposium Committee, to oversee the entirety of this symposium. And this is one of our featured keynote events of the week. We do still have two more events or two more days, excuse me, happening full of sessions for the diversity symposium. So if you haven't had a chance or this is maybe the first time you're joining in, please attend and visit some of the other sessions that we have. You can see the full schedule on our web page, diversity@csu. A couple key tips about technology before I turn it over to our Rams Read committee, we have the function of closed captioning at the bottom. So if you look at the bottom of your screen, you have two options. You can actually pull up an entire transcript, so you can see the transcript of the session that is happening today. You can also click the closed captioning and is computer generated, but it's done effective and extremely well. So there is a slight lag time, but you're going to get even better than youtube. You're going to get good closed captioning there. We do ask that you submit questions if you would like to submit them throughout the talk, that's fine, they will be answered at the end of our talk when we host the Q&A session. But go ahead and use the question and answer, not the chat, so that all the panelists can see them. We are recording the session today. We have the ability to record so that we can offer this up for other people who are not able to join with us today. It'll be on our website in the next few weeks. And with

that, I would like to turn it over to Angelica Murray-Olsen, who is from our Rams Read committee, who will be giving us an overview of the Rams Read initiative.

[02:18 - 04:17] Angelica Murray-Olsen: Hi. Thank you for that, Ria. Hi, everyone. My name is Angelica Murray-Olsen. My pronouns are she, her, and hers. I work in the Women and Gender Advocacy Center within the Division of Student Affairs here at CSU, and I'm thrilled to welcome the author of today's keynote for the Colorado State University Diversity Symposium in collaboration with the Rams Read program. So I have the privilege of serving on the Rams Read program at Rams Read, sorry, Implementation Committee as a representation from student diversity programs and services. This is the first year of the Rams Read campus reads initiative at CSU. And the goal is to encourage the University committee to read together and discuss what they have read. The implementation committee has representatives from every college and both divisions at the university, and we have worked diligently to implement this powerful shared experience that directly engages conversations of representation, racism, anti-blackness, police violence, and white privilege. The book chosen this year is Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*. *Citizen* lands on every reader as both an emotional and intellectual journey, engaging all senses. I found the stories told to be personally relatable and also reflective of the everyday experiences of black people in the United States. And I'm glad that the impact of this book is one that we can share with all of you. Before we introduce Professor Rankine, we want to thank all of the sponsors who made this event possible, including the vice president for diversity, the president's office, the Women in Science Network, Lory Student Center, and every college and many other groups who are listed on our website. [Ramsread.colostate.edu](https://ramsread.colostate.edu). I now have the responsibility of introducing the person who will introduce our keynote. Everyone, please welcome the 15th president of Colorado State University, Joyce McConnell.

[04:19 - 08:51] Joyce McConnell: Thank you, Angelica. I really appreciate your service on Rams Read, it's really made a difference and it's great to see you. Thank you all for joining us this afternoon. Today, I have the distinct honor and great pleasure of introducing Professor Claudia Rankine as one of this year's keynote speakers for Colorado State University's Virtual 2020 Diversity Symposium. But first, I want to thank vice president for diversity, Mary Ontiveros, and her team for their hard work to make sure that this essential annual event would happen despite the ongoing pandemic. This symposium, which is celebrating its 20th year, gives us the opportunity to hear from activists, advocates and scholars about how we can work together to challenge and ultimately eradicate the seeds of racism, anti-blackness, anti-Semitism, and prejudice of all kinds from our own lives, from our communities, and from our nation. Mary and her team help us keep that work front of mind every day. The diversity symposium shines a light on that work and engages our larger

community in conversations on some of the most pressing issues we face. It also highlights our commitment to free speech, both as individuals who are part of that community and as a university. We have found ourselves in difficult conversations over the past few years, both on campus and off, and it can be tempting to walk away or to try to shut down the voices that are painful to our own ears. But I fervently believe in the engaged, inclusive discourse that a university like CSU is uniquely able to foster. One of the ways we are to foster engaged, inclusive discourse on campus this year is through our inaugural Rams Read initiative and the selection of Professor Claudia Rankine's excellent and amazingly accessible book, *Citizen: An American Lyric*. As a writer, thinker, activist and educator, Claudia Rankine illuminates the questions of race, sex, racism and sexism in our country with an urgency, clarity and incisiveness. So I can think of no one better to share her thoughts and perspectives on how we might approach those issues individually and in our communities than Professor Claudia Rankine. She is a poet, playwright, educator and multimedia artist. And in addition to *Citizen*, she is the author of five other collections of poetry and has just published a multi genre collection called *Just Us: An American Conversation*. She's written three plays, is co-editor of several anthologies, and has been part of numerous video collaborations. And now I'm just going to tell you about a few of her recognitions. In 2013, she was elected Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. In 2016, she was awarded a MacArthur Genius Grant and named United States Artist Zell fellow in literature. In 2017, she co-founded The Racial Imaginary Institute, an interdisciplinary collective described as a collaboration with other collectives, spaces, artists and organizations towards art exhibitions, readings, dialogues, lectures, performances and screenings that engage the subject of race. In 2019, she was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Among her numerous awards and honors, Rankine received a Bobbitt National Prize for poetry for *Citizen*, The Poets and Writers, Jackson Poetry Prize and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Lannan Foundation, United States Artist, and the National Endowment of the Arts. Thank you so much for being with us, Professor Rankine. It's truly an honor and a privilege. Thank you so much for being with us.

[08:51 - 14:54] Professor Claudia Rankine: Oh, thank you so much. And hello to everyone out there. It's amazing that even inside the pandemic, in this very precarious year, we're still able to gather. So I feel very excited to be joining you and also to be addressing diversity issues. Given that the pandemic was able to shut down so many things but not anti-black racism, somehow black people are still being killed in the streets, shot in the back, stopped from breathing. So I feel that these discussions are as crucial as they ever were. And I'm going to start by, I know you all have or some of you have read *Citizen*, and so I'm going to start by just looking at the first image which is the cover image it's by David Hammons. He's a conceptual artist who was influenced by Duchamp and Duchamps use of the readymade. And what's amazing about David Hammons is his ability to take

one object and have it represent an American dynamic. And the hoodie, as you know, is one way of criminalizing black people. This piece is called *In the Hood*, it was done in 1983 after the beating of Rodney King. When people got *Citizen*, they thought that he had just created that piece. He did actually, he did *In the Hood* in 1993, yes, Rodney King was beaten in 1992. And when he made *In the Hood*, it was two years before Trayvon Martin was born. So that tells you how deep and systemic this kind of treatment, this anti-blackness and police violence and racial profiling has been. And let's see if I can get to the power point here. How do we do that now? Okay, so that's David Hammons, *In the Hood*. And that's Hammons there and those are snowballs that he sold on the side of the road in 1983. And I love to think about that moment as one where whiteness can melt in your hands, but he was talking about the arbitrary value of art. This bejeweled basketball hoop is another of his pieces that was another way of talking about the aspiration of life, of inner city youth towards the NBA. This is Hammons inside his own piece called *Concerto in Black and Blue*. And that's a piece that's referenced in *Citizen*. It was an art piece that I came across in the street. I was walking down the street in Manhattan, and there was a sign that said David Hammons, *Concerto in Black and Blue*. And when you entered the room it was completely dark. This photograph makes it seem like it was blue, but it was black. And they handed you a blue flashlight so that you wouldn't trip over anyone. And I found it an interesting metaphor to use to think about blackness, that you enter into a kind of space and suddenly racist comments, anti-Blackness will just come up out of nowhere, you don't know when you're going to bump into it. And so that's why I was interested in including it here. When you're alone and too tired even to turn on any of your devices, you let yourself linger in a past stacked among your pillows. Usually you're nestled under blankets and the house is empty. Sometimes the moon is missing and beyond the windows, the low gray ceiling seems approachable. Its dark light dims in degrees depending on the density of clouds. And you fall back into that which gets reconstructed as metaphor. The root is often associative. You smell good. You were 12 attending St. Phillip and James school on White Plains Road, and the girl sitting in the seat behind asked you to lean to the right during exams so she can copy what you have written. Sister Evelyn is in the habit of taping the hundreds and the failing grades to the coat closet doors. The girl is Catholic with waist-length brown hair, you can remember her name, Mary, Catherine?

[14:56 - 19:12] You never really speak except for the time she makes her request. And later, when she tells you you smell good and have features more like a white person. You assume she thinks she is thanking you for letting her cheat and feels better cheating from an almost white person. Sister Evelyn never figures out your arrangement, perhaps because you never turn around to copy Mary, Catherine's answers. Sister Evelyn must think these two girls think a lot alike. Or she cares less about cheating and more about humiliation or she never actually saw you sitting there. This is one of the first memories I had personally of a moment where I understood that the interaction, what

was being said to me, was being determined by a white person's imagination of blackness. And as the years passed, I always remembered that child, even as I was a child, saying this thing. The piece is followed, the first image inside the book is by Michael David Murphy. It's an image of a street, a photograph of the street on a Jim Crow Road. And I saw this and I asked Michael if he asked the people in that town, Florida, Branch, Georgia, it's in Georgia, why the street is called Jim Crow Road. And he said he did ask them. And they said it was named after Jim Crow, James Crow. And then he asked them, so why isn't the street called James Crow? And they said, because we call him Jim. And so that's how. But apparently there are Jim Crow, somebody did research and there are Jim Crow roads all over this country. Another kind of monument to the then Jim Crow segregation. And that's why I wanted it to be the first image, because I think at the very root of anti-blackness in the country is this system of segregation that was put in place from the get go and everything from residential segregation to redlining to gated communities, even voter suppression is a kind of segregation as a methodology in order to keep some people away from the polls. I hope you're all going to vote and utilize that right that you have for a better America soon. So as you know, the beginning of Citizen are small vignettes with the exception of this first one. Many of these were told to me. I interviewed people and I said to them, can you tell me a moment when you were just doing something ordinary? Oh, this is an image of segregated. I know every year everybody gets younger. So I just thought I would show some images of people in the back of the bus. This part of the bus for the colored race. The back steps here colored those are historical images from Jim Crow times. This was 1925 image of a march on Washington. I wanted to include this because we often think of the mall in Washington as a site of protests but that tradition, the first time that happened, it happened with this demonstration by white supremacists, the KKK.

[19:18 - 23:33] These were the images from Charlottesville, you might remember. So in the beginning of Citizen, as I was saying, these images, they're kind of like images, word images were collected from people. I said to them, can you tell me a time when you were having an ordinary conversation with someone and then something happened? Somebody said something. And these are not, you know, people who you would expect to say these things, just ordinary people who seem like good folks who you have other interactions with and suddenly they say something that is racist, that makes you understand that racism lives inside of people despite even their good intentions. And many of those opening pieces were then written down based on what was told to me. And I'm going to read one of them. It was told to me by a woman who teaches in Northern California. The new therapist specializes in trauma counseling. You have only ever spoken on the phone. Her house is a side gate that leads to a back entrance she uses for patients. You walk down a path bordered on both sides with deer grass and rosemary to the gate, which turns out to be locked. At the front door the bell is a small, round disc that you press firmly. When the door finally opens, the woman standing

there yells at the top of her lungs, get away from my house, what are you doing in my yard? It's as if a wounded Doberman pinscher or a German shepherd has gained the power of speech. And though you back up a few steps, you manage to tell her you have an appointment. You have an appointment? She spits back. Then she pauses. Everything pauses. Oh, she says, followed by oh, yes, that's right. I am sorry. I am so, so sorry. When my friend told me that story, I was shocked. I mean, you know, maybe it's just me, but I always assumed that therapists was, you know, cornered the market and empathy. And so to hear that a therapist yelled at a potential patient like this was really unthinkable to me. And when I asked her what she did, she said she went to the appointment. And I too I was shocked by that as well, because I felt like after what she said to you, after how she yelled at you. But we often do that. We often manage racism and take it in and move forward. And because we want our lives to continue. You know, she probably had waited for that appointment, she had gotten a recommendation, and then it was hard to turn around and then just walk away from it. But that trauma, because it is a moment of trauma, lives inside her. And I said to her, so then what happened? And she said, after the appointment, I went home. I burst into tears and I canceled the next appointment. And so she never went back to see her. That piece is followed by this the image on the right, which I had seen a long time ago before writing *Citizen* and stored it. I have a kind of visual database in my head. And when I literally, as I was writing the words, it's as if a wounded Doberman pinscher or a German shepherd has gained the power of speech.

[23:33 - 27:15] I thought if this white woman is my therapist is to me like a Doberman pinscher or a German shepherd, what is my friend? What is this black woman? And I remembered this image of a deer and how painful the face of the deer looked inside this image. And Kate Clark, the artist, she actually buys hides, taxidermist, and stuffed them and then she casts a face and she puts the face and then stitches and staples it back together again. And so I contacted her and asked her if I could use this image in the book. And she said, let me read the book and see if I can't do better than that. And so she did. And she gave me the image you see next to it with the horns. And I said to her, you know, I don't want this image with the horns because it's not how it feels. And she said, yes, but the book is full of so much pain. Kate is a white woman. I wanted, you know, black people are so noble and I wanted to make something beautiful and noble in response. And I said, you know, but the idea that black people should arrive feeling noble in the face of racism is yet another fiction that white people create in order to manage their own aggression and hate. And in fact, how it feels is devastating and crippling. And so I stayed with the original image. I'm not going to...these are some other images of Kate. I'm very fond of the one with the two faces. One of the things that has thrown a few people about *Citizen* as a book of poetry or lyric is that it has an essay in the middle of it. And the essay has to do with Serena Williams. Why did I want to put this essay in there thinking about inequity and anti-blackness? I wanted, you know, sports are American pastime. People have shown

up all kinds of people at tennis, basketball and yet it is not a safe space, even though it's entertainment. Racism flares up like, you know, a bad sore. And for years, I have been watching Serena Williams and Venus Williams, their career in tennis. And I started watching not because I was that interested in tennis, but because I was interested in them in the world of tennis. And I thought I would write this essay about Serena because I felt like people had no idea how much she has had to endure in terms of moments of aggression, misreading, unfair practices simply because she is a black woman. And I then settled on doing the essay because I figured if anybody says to me, Claudia, you misremembered this, this is not how it went down.

[27:16 - 32:28] All of these matches that are referenced in the essay are available on YouTube. So you can go and watch the match yourself and see that she was hitting balls that the umpire were calling out that were landing not even on the line, but in the middle of the box. But because whatever unconscious desires existed inside these white umpires couldn't be contained by them. They were then calling things out and then they have the last word and Serena had to bear it. What does a victorious or defeated black woman's body in a historically white space look like? Serena and her big sister, Venus Williams, brought to mind Zora Neale Hurston's "I feel most colored when I'm thrown against a sharp white background." This appropriated lines stenciled on canvas by Glenn Ligon, who use plastic letters, stencils, smudging oil sticks and graphite to transform the words into abstraction, seemed to be hard copy for some aspect of life for all black people. Hurston's statement had been played out on the big screen by Serena and Venus. They win sometimes they lose sometimes, they've been injured, they've been happy, they've been sad, ignored, booed mightily, (see Indian Wells) they've been cheered and through it all and evident to all were those people who were enraged that they were there at all. Graphite against a sharp white background. For years you attribute to Serena Williams a kind of resilience appropriate only for those who exist in celluloid. Neither her father nor her mother, nor her sister, nor Jehovah, her God nor Nike camp could shield her ultimately from people who felt her black body didn't belong on their court in their world. From the start, many made it clear Serena would have done better, struggling to survive in the two dimensionality of a millet painting rather than on their tennis court. Better to put all that strength to work in their fantasy of her working the land rather than be caught up in the turbulence of our ancient dramas like a ship fighting a storm in a Turner, Seascape. Inside that essay, that lyric essay, which, you know, there's a lot of poetic techniques used in the essay, which is why it's called a lyric essay is this image the bent over image by Nick Cave. And Nick Cave is an amazing contemporary artist who started out as a Alvin Ailey dancer. And I wondered, I really love this idea, this celebratory back, but then this dark underside where you have to get past that to get to the celebration as an image to include inside this portrait of Serena. But I wondered why Nick Cave used this technique of making these things, these Matisse's body things that covered the face completely. And I did a lot of

research. It took me a long time to get back, but I found the first statement he made regarding this. He said, I was thinking about, well, you know, I'm a black male. I know what it's like to feel discarded, dismissed, devalued. You know, the moment I leave my house, I could be a victim of circumstances. You just never know. I looked down and saw a twig, something that I walked on. Something that I dismiss and it just sort of clicked while meditating on the media portrayal of Rodney King, Larger than Life, ten men to bring him down. What does that look like in my head? It ended up looking like a suit made of twigs. I drilled holes in the delicate tree parts to create a massive object. But I didn't even think I could put it on my body. But then once I stepped into it, I thought about building this sort of second skin, you know, a suit of armor or something for protection purposes. Then I started thinking about protest, in order to be heard, you've got to be aggressive. You've got to speak louder. You have got to make sound, hence the name sound suits. So these became named by him as sound suits. This is Caroline Wozniacki.

[32:28 - 38:53] And what's interesting about her is she's a very good friend of Serena. They have a very close friendship. And in a way, I think the friendship is what made Caroline think she could do this, mock Serena in public as fun. And when people objected to it as racist and they went to Serena Williams and said, what do you think of your friend Caroline's depiction of you? And Serena said, well, you know, we're friends. I don't think she had any ill content. But I really wished she would think about why people are so upset, why they're calling her racist at this moment, which I thought was a wonderful response. And this is a reflection of that Venus of Hottentot, who was put on display in France. I'm going to skip this because I don't want us to run out of time. This is the Glenn Logan that was referred to earlier. I do not always feel colored. I do not always feel colored until it fades out. And I feel most colored when I'm thrown against a sharp white background. The most difficult image to get for the book was this image, and I'll talk about it in a minute. My brothers are notorious. They have not been to prison. They have been imprisoned. The prison is not a place you enter, it is no place. My brothers are notorious. They do regular things like wait on my birthday they say my name. They will never forget that we are named. What is that memory? The days of our childhood together were steep steps into a collapsing mind. It looked like we rescued ourselves, were rescued. Then there are these days, each day of our adult lives. They will never forget our way through these brothers each brother, my brother, dear brother, my dearest brothers, dear heart. Your hearts are broken. This is not a secret, though there are secrets. And as yet I do not understand how my own sorrow has turned into my brothers hearts. The hearts of my brothers are broken. If I knew another way to be, I would call up a brother. I would hear myself saying, my brother, dear brother, my dearest brothers, dear heart. On the tip of a tongue, one note following another is another path, another dawn, where the pink sky is a blood shot of struck, of sleepless, of sari, of senseless shush. Those years often before me and my brothers, the years of passage, plantation, migration, of Jim

Crow segregation, of poverty, inner cities profiling. Of one in three, two jobs, boy, hey boy, each a felony accumulate into the hours inside our lives where we are all caught hanging. The rope inside us, the tree inside us. Its roots are limbs. The throat slides through. And when we open our mouth to speak, blossoms blossoms no place coming out, brother, dear brother, that kind of blue. The sky is the silence of brothers all the days leading up to my call. If I called, I'd say goodbye before I broke the goodbye. I say goodbye before anyone can hang up. Don't hang up. My brother hangs up, though he's there. I keep talking. The talk keeps him there. The sky is blue. Kind of blue. The day is hot. Is it cold? Are you cold? It does get cool. Is it cool? Are you cool? My brother is completed by sky. The skies is silent eventually says it is raining. It is raining down. It was raining. It's not raining. It is raining down. He won't hang up. He's there. He's there. But he's hung up, though he's there. Goodbye, I say. I break the goodbye. I say goodbye before anyone can hang up. Don't hang up. Wait with me. Wait with me. Though the waiting might be the call of goodbyes. When I wrote that piece, I actually wrote it thinking about my own brothers who live in New York. And I was in California at the time. And every time I heard that a black man in New York City had been shot, I called home because I always...the possibility that it's somebody in your own family or somebody you know is part of what it means to live in these United States as a black person. But when a friend called the writer, Nick Flynn called me and he said, do you have anything you've written recently that I can publish in the journal? So I sent him this poem and he said, Oh, did you write this because of Trayvon Martin? And it was true Trayvon had just recently been killed and he had been on the phone. And so it became in memory of Trayvon Martin. This image following it was the most difficult image to get for the book. When we contacted Getty Archives to buy the rights to replicate the image, we were told we couldn't do that, that the image was held by Hulton archives and that they had forbidden Getty from selling the rights to the image.

[38:54 - 44:40] And they did that because they felt that people were buying the image in order to use it in support of what was going on in the image. And that was striking to me. I mean, it took me, he had to say it to me twice. I thought they were buying the image in support of what was going on in the image. And it was, I guess, white supremacist groups or white people of some kind were buying the image to use it in much in the way that lynching postcards were used originally during Jim Crow that was sent around to friends and family. This is what I did on the weekend. And they were also sent through the mail as acceptable. And as you can see by the number of people there, people felt like it was a fine thing to do on a Friday evening or Saturday evening or any evening. And so I think that the death of Thomas Schiff and Abraham Smith, as harrowing as it is happened. And I thought, you know, those men are dead. But the real horror, what happened to them is horrible. But the real horror are the people who are attending something like that, the people who made it happen. And often we get distracted by the spectacle of the death. And move away quickly from the people who

caused the death, the people who have commitments to anti-blackness. So by removing the men, I was able to reposition the gaze onto the people who are actually attending the lynching. This technique was also used by other artists earlier, but I didn't even realize it. I could have maybe gone to his work. I don't want the time to go away, so I'm going to do two more. This is the Zidane headbutt from the World Cup, and I'm not going to read the piece that goes with it. But I will tell you that the way it was made is that we took the video and John Lucas, the filmmaker, and also my husband, he took out the individual shots and then he took out all of the players who were on Zidane's team in the white uniforms so that you could see the Italian team and only Zidane. So that's what you're seeing when you see it in the book. And black long fall is how the incident was referred to in France at the time. But I'm going to end let's go here. I'm going to read two final pieces. On the train, the woman standing makes you understand there are no seats available. And in fact, there is one. Is the woman getting off at the next stop? No. She would rather stand all the way to Union Station. The space next to the man is the pause in a conversation. You are suddenly rushing to fill. You step quickly over the woman's fear, a fear she shares. You let her have it. The man doesn't acknowledge you as you sit down because the man knows more about the unoccupied seat than you do. For him you imagine it is more like breath than wonder. He has had to think about it so much, you wouldn't call a thought. When another passenger leaves his seat and the standing woman sits, you glance over at the man, he's gazing out the window with what looks...into what looks like darkness. You sit next to the man on the train, bus, in the plane, waiting room, anywhere he could be for saken. You put your body there in proximity to, adjacent to, alongside, within. You don't speak unless you are spoken to. And your body speaks to the space you fill. And you keep trying to fill it except the space belongs to the body of the man next to you, not to you. Where he goes, the space follows him. If the man left his seat before Union station, you would simply be a person in a seat on the train. You would cease to struggle against the unoccupied seat. When, where, why? The space won't lose its meaning. You imagine if the man spoke to you, he would say it's okay, I'm okay. You don't need to sit here. You don't need to sit. And you sit and look past him into the darkness. The train is moving through a tunnel. All the while, the darkness allows you to look at him. Does he feel you looking at him? You suspect so. What does suspicion mean? What does suspicion do?

[44:42 - 48:50] The soft grey green of your cotton coat touches the sleeve of him. You are shoulder to shoulder, though standing. You could feel shadowed. You sit to repair who? Who? You erase that thought. And it might be too late for that and might forever be too late or too early. The train moves too fast for your eyes to adjust to anything beyond the man, the window, the tile tunnel, its slick darkness. Occasionally a white light flickers by like a displaced sound and from the aisle track's room, a horrible world a woman asks a man in the rows ahead if he would mind switching seats. She

wishes to sit with her daughter or son, you hear, but you don't hear. You can't see. It's then the man next to you turns to you. And as if from inside your own head, you agree that if someone asks you to move, you'll tell them we're traveling as a family. And finally, the hardest thing to write in this book, and it took me a long time to write it was the final piece in the book. I didn't know how to end a book about anti-blackness, racism, systemic racism, inequities, all of it, without seeming falsely optimistic. You know, we have seen this book was written in 2013, published in 2014, and now in 2020 with the death of Donatello, George Floyd we're right back in it. So how do you show that we can rely on this kind of soul killing attack on black people as part of what it means to live in this country? And I was waiting and waiting and trying to think how to communicate that. And finally, my publisher said, we need the manuscript. And I was sitting there thinking, how are we going to end this book? What am I going to say? And I had a tennis appointment. And so I went to the club and I parked my car, I was early and I parked my car and I was eating a banana because potassium it's good before playing tennis. And I had just come back from a five mile hike. And I'm sitting there waiting for the time of the appointment. And this white woman drives into the parking lot and parks her car facing mine. So she's in the opposing spot and she drives up, she parks the car, she turns it off and she looks up and she sees me and our eyes meet. And, you know, she looks at me and then she turns the car on again, backs out and drives across the parking lot and parks over there. And as I'm watching this happen, I'm thinking, what is she seeing? What's inside this decision. If she's feeling fear, I assume it's real fear. Where is it coming from? You know, I'm a middle aged woman eating a banana in a car. What in Claremont, California? What does she think is going to happen in the middle of the day?

[48:51 - 53:24] And so I jump out of my car and I think, you know, the one thing I haven't done in Citizen is ask white people why they do and say the things they do. So I start running across the parking lot so I could ask her why she just did what she did. But then I remembered something that I would be late. I hadn't taken my racquet with me, so I had to go back. So this is the final piece in Citizen. I can hear the even breathing that creates passages to dreams. And yes, I want to interrupt to tell him her, us, you, me, I don't know how to end what doesn't have an ending. Tell me a story, he says, wrapping his arms around me. Yesterday, I began, I was waiting in the car for time to pass. A woman pulled in and started to park her car facing mine. Our eyes met and passed as quickly as the look away. She backed up and parked on the other side of the lot. I could have followed her to worry my question. But I had to go. I was expected on court. I grabbed my racquet. The sunrise is slow and cloudy. Dragging the light in. But barely. Did you win? He asks. It wasn't a match. I say. It was a lesson. So that's how Citizen ends on the lesson. And it's followed by this image by c alled the Slave Ship. And it was painted in 1840. The original title by...image is by Turner. And the original title was Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying Typhoon Coming On. And what was interesting when...the reason Turner painted this image was this painting, the Slave Ship, was because there

was a big case in London at the time because the ship captain had thrown the black slaves into the ocean and then was making an insurance claim. And so the question was, should he be reimbursed for merchandise that he himself destroyed? So it wasn't even about people. It was about merchandise. He says he threw the black people in the ocean to lighten the ship during a storm. Here's a detail from that painting. The slave ship was called Zong. And 133 slaves were thrown overboard for the insurance painting. John Ruskin said of this painting that if I were reduced to rest Turner's in mortality upon any single work, I would choose this one. And I love this painting, and I love Turner. And I wanted to end here because I wanted it to point out that no matter what's happening and when it's happening, there are people who know better. There are people who are anti-racists. So if you're wondering why do diversity training, despite our sitting presidents claim that it should not happen, this would be why. Because either you're a racist or you're anti-racist. Thank you very much. Let's see. Did I stop to share? I think so.

[53:28 - 54:06] Ryan Barone: Yes. Thank you, Professor Rankine, I'm not sure if my video is working, but this is Ryan Barone. My pronouns are he, him and his, and I have the privilege of serving on the planning committee for Rams Read along with Angelica. And she and I are happy to moderate approximately 30 minutes of question and answer. And so thanks to the folks who are putting questions in the Q&A, let me just offer that you're talking and certainly engaging with Citizen is a holistic experience for me that is engaging equally, emotionally and intellectually and are just so grateful for your labor and for you joining us here today. So thanks again for being here and for your work.

[54:06 - 54:07] Professor Claudia Rankine: Thank you.

[54:08 - 54:21] Ryan Barone: The first question we have, I believe, is from a student, Janay. Janay asks, do you have any advice for students who perpetually feel the most colored against the sharp white backdrop of predominately white institutions?

[54:23 - 57:16] Professor Claudia Rankine: Well, what I would say to that is that the institution in and of itself is just an institution. Everybody at Colorado State University deserves to be a Colorado student. But there are lots of white people in that institution that makes it feel like a white institution. But I think it's important to separate the institution out and the whiteness of the overwhelming whiteness of the student faculty, staff body as who is there now. But it doesn't mean that you are any less a part of that world. But the reality is one does feel it. One does have to manage it. And I like to use and think about the word management. You're going to come up against things and the more you can expect them and understand them not almost as targeted as you, but at blackness in general, then the more you can manage it, the more you can call it out as racist when it's racist, you

can call it out as defensiveness when you call it out as racist, depending on what response you get back. And the most important thing, I think, for me as a faculty member at institutions where there are many white people and that has been the case since I went to college at Williams and then graduate school at Columbia. And I have taught in many places where there have been...I have been outnumbered in terms of other white people. I think it is important to have your people and your people can be of any race. I'm not saying you need...they could be white people, they could be Muslims, they could be Arabs, they could be Latin, they could be Asian, they could be whatever. But you need to find your people, the people who you can go back to and talk to, who will understand, will not question you, who will believe you when you say this thing has happened. So that you have a space where you are believed, you are valued, you are listened to. And that is crucial and that is maybe the first thing you need to build when you get into spaces where you feel as if you're an outsider, even though you're not an outsider because the space belongs to you as much as anyone else.

[57:25 - 57:41] Angelica Murray-Olsen: You have another question. I believe this one is also from a student. So in examining the role of art in anti-racist efforts, do you believe there is value in Black Lives Matter street murals, hand shocking paintings of victims faces?

[57:43 - 58:54] Professor Claudia Rankine: I believe that everything comes together to move us forward. This is my way of working within our current situation. I think protests are another way of working. I think Black Lives Matter art is another way of working. You know, I don't make choices. I feel, you know, one way of thinking about it is how important Malcolm X was to us, how important Martin Luther King was to us, how important the Black Arts Movement was to us, how important black artists are to us, and all together and black thinkers and black theorists, you know, theoristsians and black everything. So all of that together becomes a thing that in different ways move us forward. So, yes, I guess the short answer is yes, I think it is an important contribution. And one of the many ways our current situation can be addressed.

[58:59 - 59:17] Ryan Barone: Thank you. I'm tracking. We've got some other artists who are participating, including some colleagues from the theater department. And someone asked if you could offer any advice to young artists as they face this moment in history to engage in what I assume is equity work, social justice work through the lens of their art.

[59:18 - 01:02:36] Professor Claudia Rankine: Well, you know, I think that people should.. .w hen I was writing Citizen, I wasn't thinking I was doing social justice work or equity work or I was doing...I wanted to make visible something that was invisible. And I wanted the language to be able to communicate something that I know existed. And so when I was working on it, I wasn't really thinking

about Citizen as a kind of activist text. I was thinking about it as a text where language would bring forward an action that was happening like that. It would, you know, it happened and it would be gone. And could I do that in language? Could I get the language to hold that moment? So I think artists have to do what they're doing and they can't really know how the work will function in the world. They just have to be committed to whatever it is they're doing. If it is cutting off a hoodie and putting it in a museum space as was done, then do that. Like I can't tell you if you could maybe paint a thousand apples and somehow a thousand apples would be exactly the right metaphor of something. I don't know. So I wouldn't advise young artists to go forward thinking they're making activist work if they identify as artists. If they're activists, then they identify as activists and they need to have an activist agenda, something that they're actually doing. But if they're artists, I think they need to be committed to their practice and write or make what they know in the sense that what they really are driven by, what you stay up at night thinking about. And you know, that's what it was like for me writing Citizen. I was like, what is the right word here? How? What? How much real estate can I get if I use this word versus this word? I had no idea when Citizen was published that, you know, half a million people would read it. I just thought, it's the book I want to make. And it's closest to the thing that I wanted to achieve. And if only ten people read it, it's still the book I want to make. And so I think as an artist you have your practice and you just go. You just make the best thing you're going to make and be committed to it. And if nobody cares about it, that's okay, because you care about it.

[01:02:44 - 01:03:02] Angelica Murray-Olsen: All right. So your next question actually got put in the chat. So I'll read it from there. What would you...what message your messages would you want biracial students, half white and half black to internalize after reading your book, Citizen?

[01:03:06 - 01:05:04] Professor Claudia Rankine: Well, again, you know, I shy away from questions of what do I want. I don't want anything. I mean, you know, Citizen uses the second person you so that it becomes the you ideally becomes a space that the reader can step inside. And if you're inside that space and you recognize this dynamic is something you know, no matter who you are, you know, if you're biracial, if you're Asian, whoever you are, if you're queer, if you are trans, if you step in there and you think, I know something up this moment, then I want the moment to hold you in a way that you can explore how and what feelings are brought up in you around that. But I don't, you know, one of the reasons I'm really interested in including images in my work is to create a kind of open text, a text where the reader can live inside the image and associate to other things and bring their full self to the page. I mean, you could be a right reader and actually identify inside the you not with the aggressor, but the person who's being aggressed against. And that would be fully okay. Because that's what reading is. It's personal. You bring yourself to whatever text you are engage

with. So I can say that I want anything from anybody reading the text. I can only say that I wish for the text to be open enough that it can receive a lot of people inside the world of the text.

[01:05:10 - 01:05:39] Ryan Barone: Another person noted the piece in the book talking about the woman sitting on the train next to a white man and feelings of powerlessness. And this person noted that reminded them of times in their life when they felt powerless as well, related to perhaps things like interpersonal violence or other issues. And so the person is wondering what the piece was about for you, Professor Rankine, when you wrote that? And how was powerlessness a part of the narrative that you put together?

[01:05:40 - 01:07:50] Professor Claudia Rankine: Well, that piece really was about the seat that stays empty next to black men often. I remember how that piece came about was my walking partner in California was a white woman, and I said to her, tell me something you do as a white person to combat the anti-racism, you know prevailing racists modes in this country. And so it was kind of I didn't use the term at the time because I didn't but I was really asking her tell me, give me an example of an anti-racist thing that you do. And she said, well, I think one thing I do and I don't do it in California because I'm in my car all the time, but when I lived in New York, one of the things that I often did was when I entered a bus or train or a waiting area and I saw that seat next to a black man that is always left empty, I would sit in it. And I thought, you know, I do that, too, actually, because both of us were assuming that the reason that's the one chair that's left empty is because other people don't want to sit next to black people and especially not next to black men. And so that it's a kind of chronic condition in the country that that seat next to the black man is left empty. And so the piece was about exploring like, who if I go and sit in that seat, am I doing it for me or for him? Does he even care that I'm doing it? Does he feel the exclusionary activity of white people inside these spaces? And so it was a way of thinking about that thing that she and I both did and asking questions about why we did it.

[01:08:03 - 01:08:05] Ryan Barone: You are muted Angelica.

[01:08:10 - 01:08:37] Angelica Murray-Olsen: Thank you for that. All right. So for the next question, this person starts off by sharing a little bit about themselves. So I heard you say that you were from Claremont, California. I am from Claremont, too. And I'm assuming that you were talking about the Claremont Club in your parking lot, parking spot story. As for someone who has been a member of the club since I was very young and was recently employed there, what can I or others bring to the table that can promote anti-racism?

[01:08:42 - 01:12:42] Professor Claudia Rankine: Well, first of all, I don't know if you know, but the Claremont Club was closed during the pandemic. They've closed down. But, you know, I think this kind of discussion is a start. The ability to begin to speak openly and honestly about how race plays in our lives, how, you know, there is historical anti-blackness in this country. But how is whiteness constructed? What are the investments in whiteness? You know, we all make jokes about Karens, you know, I wish a Karen would. But if you think about those women like the Karen's who assume that black people couldn't live in the building that they live in or shouldn't live on the street, you know, and are always calling the police on black people doing ordinary things. I think we can start thinking about what does whiteness think it owns, what are the assumptions around whiteness that give it the mobility that it has? You know, white people don't think about being under surveillance. They can go in stores and buy things and nobody's thinking they're stealing things. So, you know, the next time somebody just opens the door for you, you know, you might remember that that's happening because you're white, not because you are you. And begin to understand the complex dynamics, you know, race, blackness, whiteness, all of it was constructed. There's nothing organic about it. But now that it is, it actually is real in the world. It's a real thing. And so I think white people really need to start thinking about what they take for granted. I think in the classroom as a professor, I think it's important for me to begin to interrogate texts that I teach to make sure that I am not going along with assumptions within the texts themselves that centralize whiteness in ways that are often found in the biographies of the people I teach. I go out of my way to give the full biography instead of the kind of truncated one that I have often been given in my own schooling like an example of this would be Walt Whitman. You know, Walt Whitman is often put out there as every man, the one who speaks for us all, the one who was an abolitionist. All of that is true. But he was also incredibly racist. But nobody mentions that part of it. And we as professors need to start not being afraid of the truth and giving us the entire story rather than just the feel good story about white benevolence. It doesn't do anybody any good to not be given the whole story that in fact it's bad scholarship. But that's what has been perpetuated in the classrooms up until now. So, you know, you can just start interrogating what assumptions have created your behavior, your teaching methodology, your research methodology in terms of centralising whiteness.

[01:12:46 - 01:13:18] Ryan Barone: Thank you. And there's a really robust question and answer. So Angelica and I will do our best in our limited time to combine themes or surface questions as they arise. Thank you for this rich discussion. The next question says that over, nope, I just skipped because another question got asked, over the years of having *Citizen in Prints* what is one thing that you've noticed as more people read it from different generations, from different age groups? Is there something that stands out as you reflect on readership, depending upon age group or generation?

[01:13:20 - 01:15:11] Professor Claudia Rankine: Well, the thing that surprised me the most about *Citizen* when it first came out was the number of Asian women who said, this is my book. You know, I would go places and Asian women would come up to me in tears and say, I know you wrote this book for black people, which I didn't I just wrote the book, but they would say that. And then they would say, but this is my book and then they would burst into tears, you know, and there was a lot of statements around what the kinds of things white people say to them. So that was a surprise in terms of the readership of the owning of the material. And that's why I said to the biracial person who asked the question that you don't know who is going to own the material, in what way, you just can't know as a writer. But, you know, a friend of mine said something to me which was sort of the ultimate compliment about *Citizen*. She said that *Citizen* was the only book she knew of, where she had met teenagers who had read it, people who had been in prison who had read it, people who were in graduate school who had read it, people who were in college who had read it, people's grandmothers who had read it, and that it was a book that all of these different people, groups that normally would not intersect are suddenly able to enter. And so when she told me that, I thought, okay, then I guess *Citizen* is good. Maybe. Maybe [laughs].

[01:15:25 - 01:15:50] Angelica Murray-Olsen: So, Dr. Rankine, your work has given space and voice to black voices and ingenuity. Today, we often see the discrediting of the black experience, placing black oppression in competition with other acts of oppression against communities in our society. As educators, how can we commit to centering anti-blackness and specifically the black community at this moment in time as an imperative and not as a competing priority?

[01:15:52 - 01:19:11] Professor Claudia Rankine: Well, I don't think there's any way not to at times feel like things are being competed with, equity is something we want for everyone, and everybody has their own agendas. But I think one of the things that has come out of this year, this quarantine year, is that we see how inequity works for black people. You know, we have a sitting president who is an advocate of white supremacy stand by he said to the Proud Boys, I'm a nationalist, use that word, he has said. So we see that white supremacy is a foundational source of what it is, a foundation to what it is, what it means to be American. And if you can see white supremacy, then you have to see the importance of anti-blackness. The two things don't exist exclusively. They are tied and married together. And that is why anti-black racism is so hard to dismantle, been 400 years and we're still in the same place. Why is that? Because the country was built on it. And everybody, you know, everybody from Abraham Lincoln to Thomas Jefferson says, I believe white people are superior to black people. And the culture has insisted on this and insisted on this. And the only way for us to make any strides against it is to be as vigilant as we can. We are smart people. We know how to bring our full capacities to other things. And we now have to bring it to this. We have not done

it. As a people, as a country, we have not done it. Doc Rivers said, you know, black people have loved this country and this country has not loved us back. Biden repeated it because it's true. So I think everyone has, you know, either you are fighting anti-blackness or you're a racist. I really believe that. And I will continue to say it. Either you are actively doing things against the proliferation of racism in this country, in whatever small way you can in terms of what's on that syllabus, and I'm not saying change your syllabus, I'm saying teach the syllabus honestly. I can teach, you know, there's a great example in the...there's a painting by Manet called Olympia. Do you guys know this painting?

[01:19:11 - 01:22:41] It's a white woman lying under a Divan and there's a black woman standing behind her holding some flowers. And the white woman is a lady of the evening. She's a prostitute. And the black woman's her maid. And the flowers presumably belong to the John who's giving her a gift for her services. And people, important art historians in this country have written about that painting and devoted one sentence to the black woman standing behind the white woman. One sentence. And it's only a few years ago that a black art historian said, what is that all about? One sentence. And that sentence is, let me quote it, "There is no significance of the black woman and the black cat in the painting. As if Manet himself didn't make. And, you know, she went back and actually did the scholarship and Manet actually was talking his whole point was that there was a whole new working class people in that part of France and that included these black workers and that black woman who modeled for Olympia he did other paintings with her. So she was clearly his subject. But white art historians and this is what I mean by bad research in order to put forward and centralize whiteness. That's how bad it is. So I think, you know, there's a lot to be done. In fact, I was just today reading this article. Listen to this. It says researchers reviewed 1.8 million hospital births records in Florida from 1992 to 2015 and established the race of the doctor in charge of each newborn's care when cared for by white doctors black babies are about three times more likely to die in the hospital than white newborns. This disparity halves when black babies are cared for by black doctors. So can you believe that? Three times more likely to die if a black woman is in hospital giving birth to a black baby and the attending physician is white. And how that plays out is because the doctor doesn't listen, doesn't care what the black, you know, even Serena Williams had a story like this. So this is how pervasive and this is why it really has to be centralized because it is killing people, not just police shooting people in their back or kneeling on their neck it's stuff like this where this kind of basic disregard and lack of value of black people leads to their deaths. So yes, I think it should be centralized.

[01:22:46 - 01:23:11] Ryan Barone: Thank you. We've got two questions from CSU faculty members, and it's related to your teaching, and I'll try to combine those. They ask about strategies that you'd

employ to facilitate conversations around race in classrooms. And the other question is how do you select and use images in your teaching as, again, a strategy for enriching conversations, so using images and facilitating discussions around race?

[01:23:12 - 01:28:10] Professor Claudia Rankine: Pedagogy. Well, I think, you know, I am always suspicious of anything I'm teaching in terms of what's been left out. So when I do the research for the class, I always question what has not been taught relative to this thing? So, for example, when I teach Whitman, I actually read those articles that he wrote in his abolitionist newspaper and realized he wanted black people to get the hell out of this country. And there are other really, I think in every field if people didn't take for granted the research that was given to them, but went into the archives a little bit more you could extend those questions. And I think more and more work is being done. We cannot take for granted what is being told to us about any subject. Also, my use of images in the classroom has to do with opening out the subject so that an ordinary moment can be connected up to its systemic history, and it's historical. And that's why I bring in history, because I wanted, for example in *Citizen the Turner* for me is the side of hope in *Citizen*, the Turner painting. Because here is a man who was saying, hey, this shit ain't cool. And could tell that he didn't need, you know, how people always say, well, you know, you can't see its context, you can go back and then impose 21st century ideas on. But no, you know, treating black people badly is not cool. And anybody who is a thinking person can figure that out. John Stewart Mill is somebody else who could figure it out. You know, so if you go into the writings of John Stewart Mill, if you go, you know, I won't list everybody. So I think in pedagogy, I try to I never sit in a single moment. I try and butterfly it out and I will use whatever I can. In fact, *Just Us* the new book tries to do that, I created in *Just Us* a system where let's see if you can see it, a system where on the opposing page you get on one side the text, but on the opposing page you get referential material. Sometimes it's sociological. Sometimes it's historical. Sometimes it's an image. So anyway I can make more complex, the thing that I'm talking about within its racial history, I do. Because I think there has been an intentional wipe that has happened. In fact, I will tell you that one of the things that's happening I won't name the school, but one of the schools, it was a public institution, they have taken my work off because they're afraid that they will not receive public funding from the government. So it's going both in the government and on the state level and in the federal level. So that's, you know, so we also have those kinds of fascist mechanisms in place to present a certain take on history that doesn't include a critique of whiteness. So it's on professors. They need to become less defensive and understand that maybe their orientation and their scholarship has been compromised by their whiteness in the same way those doctors, because of their white orientation do not value their black patients and consequently have a higher mortality rate for black infants.

[01:28:17 - 01:28:56] Angelica Murray-Olsen: Thank you for responding to that question and taking the time to participate in the Q&A and responding to all of our audience questions. That does pretty much take us to time. So we will leave it there. For the audience, we do just want to remind everyone that the diversity symposium is happening, it is happening through the rest of the week. If you weren't able to RSVP for the sessions that you're interested in, you can still access the link to those sessions if you visit the VPD website. And yeah, hopefully you all have some other good session that you want to attend for the rest of the week.

[01:28:57 - 01:28:57] Professor Claudia Rankine: Thank you.

[01:28:57 - 01:29:34] Angelica Murray-Olsen: So I just want to thank you for your time, Professor Rankine we very much appreciate it. For those of you that are still listening, if you haven't been able to pick up the book, please do. It is available in Morgan Library and the CSU bookstore. The Rams Read program is continuing throughout the rest of the school year. So you will continue to see messaging coming out, promoting the ways in which you can engage with the program and engage with the book. And we hopefully we can find ways to connect with Professor Rankine in the future. I think we have some discussions going on about what that could look like. So I'm excited for that as we continue to work together.

[01:29:35 - 01:29:37] Professor Claudia Rankine: Thank you very much.

[01:29:37 - 01:29:37] Angelica Murray-Olsen: Thank you.

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