

Poetry Series 2 – An American Chorus

Experiences perceived as universal in the American tradition often fail to account for those identities marginalized through the active silencing and erasure of minority voices throughout history. Even those documents we deem universal exclude entire communities of people: one only has to look at the Constitution for evidence of this. However, the inclusion of the minority perspective does not undermine the universal, it augments it. This is the inspiration for our next poetry group. Through reading poetry from the perspectives of Black, Asian, Latinx, and Arab Americans, Indigenous People, and other historically marginalized groups, we can gain insight into their communities and the people within them clearly and in their own voice. In our modern, pluralistic society, and perhaps especially in the United States of America, the myriad of voices and perspectives offered by Americans of different, disparate identities offer a chorus of voices as they pursue similar questions of what it means to be an American, while taking distinct approaches to this matter.

Within the poem we can consider our inner world in conjunction with our experience of the outside world, blend the historical with the contemporary, fact with fiction, and emotion with experience. Poetry does not exist in a vacuum— it is not apolitical, ahistorical, or entirely divorced from our unique experiences as humans. This means that poems are never objective, and they necessarily intersect with the writer's life and identity whether overtly and intentionally or not. This does not mean that poems are inherently autobiographical – only that one's experiences of the world necessarily inform and create a unique perspective from which they write. From the position of marginalized communities, poetry can be an outlet for a voice that, both historically and contemporarily, is in many spaces stifled and silenced. Poems allow the reader to hear, feel, and sense the identity of the speaker more deeply through figurative language and melody which is not inherent in any other media. This is the inspiration for our next poetry group. Together, we will delve into the poetic worlds of 8 authors to discover how these writers understand identity, nation, and themselves.

This group will run from **December, 2021 until July, 2022**. It will meet once monthly on the first Wednesday of each month. The fee for this group is \$800.

"The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Selected Texts:

Thrall by Natasha Trethewey

Thrall explores the complicated roots of interracial relationships in America. Trethewey is the daughter of a black mother and white father, a student of history and of the Deep South, she is "inspired by everything from colonial paintings of mulattos and mestizos to the stories of people forgotten by history." *Thrall* reflects on our living history.

Postcolonial Love Poem by Natalie Diaz

Winner of the 2021 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry, *Postcolonial Love Poem* "demands that every body carried in its pages - bodies of language, land, suffering brothers, enemies and lovers - be touched and held. Where the bodies of indigenous, Latinx, black and brown women are simultaneously the body politic and the body ecstatic." Her poetry is both critical and hopeful, wondering about both how the past brought us to this moment and what kind of future we can create.

Hybrida by Tina Chang

Named a Best Book of 2019 by NPR and Publishers Weekly, *Hybrida* is "a stirring and confident examination of mixed-race identity, violence, and history skillfully rendered through the lens of motherhood." Blending many traditional forms with essay and contemporary poetry, Chang describes the experience of raising her mixed race son in all its splendor and terror.

Dien Cai Dau by Yusef Komunyakaa

Dien Cai Dau is a collection of poems chronicling Komunyakaa's experiences as a journalist in Vietnam during the war. As a black soldier in Vietnam he lived and witnessed the brutality of war and raises questions within his poems about ethics, violence, and what it means to fight for a country.

Pilgrim Bell by Kaveh Akbar

"How does one recover from addiction without destroying the self-as-addict? And if living justly in a nation that would see them erased is, too, a kind of self-destruction, what does one do with the body's question, "what now shall I repair?" Here, Akbar responds with prayer as an act of devotion to dissonance—the infinite void of a loved one's absence, the indulgence of austerity, making a life as a Muslim in an Islamophobic nation—teasing the sacred out of silence and stillness."

American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin by Terrance Hayes

A finalist for the 2018 National Book Award for poetry and shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot prize, this is a collection of over 70 sonnets written after the 2016 American elections. In them, Hayes uses the sonnet form to engage with and break tradition as he explores issues of masculinity, race, and politics.

Unaccompanied by Javier Zamora

Javier Zamora was nine years old when he traveled unaccompanied 4,000 miles, across multiple borders, from El Salvador to the United States to be reunited with his parents. This "dramatic and hope-filled poetry debut humanizes the highly charged and polarizing rhetoric of border-crossing; assesses borderland politics, race, and immigration on a profoundly personal level; and simultaneously remembers and imagines a birth country that's been left behind."

An American Sunrise by Joy Harjo

A nationally best-selling volume of "wise, powerful poetry" from the first Native American Poet Laureate of the United States. In this collection, Joy Harjo "finds blessings in the abundance of her homeland and confronts the site where the Mvskoke people, including her own ancestors, were forcibly displaced. From her memory of her mother's death, to her beginnings in the Native rights movement, to the fresh road with her beloved, Harjo's personal life intertwines with tribal histories to create a space for renewed beginnings."