

Tricia Johnson ([00:00](#)):

This podcast is supported by PayPal. The racial wealth gap in the United States is as wide as it was in 1968. And the black community continues to face significant economic barriers, limiting opportunities for longterm wealth creation. PayPal believes that financial health is essential for people to pursue a better future for themselves and their families. That's why PayPal is committed to supporting, sustaining and investing in black owned businesses. Learn more by visiting the newsroom@paypal.com. This is Aspen ideas to go from the Aspen Institute. I'm Tricia Johnson, policymaking and good intentions. Aren't enough to dismantle systemic racism says author and Yale professor Claudia Rankine. She says white Americans need to slow down and think even be suspicious of their internal responses to black people. She says racism is so ingrained in American culture that whites don't see it, and don't understand what it's like to live as a black person.

Claudia Rankine ([01:09](#)):

Then whiteness gets its power from anti-blackness. Many of the policies that have been put in place to promote whiteness was specifically targeted against blackness mass incarceration. When you look who's in those prisons and more at the most spectacular demonstration of that is who gets gunned down the streets, unarmed black people in the streets or in their homes,

Tricia Johnson ([01:39](#)):

Aspen ideas to go brings you compelling conversations from the Aspen Institute. Rankin says conversations about racism are difficult, but this is the way to start recognizing and reckoning with the problem. She says, building coalitions among all people is necessary to make change. Eric Lou is the CEO of citizen university and directs the citizenship and American identity program at the Aspen Institute. He speaks with Rankin about her latest book, just us an American conversation beyond the topic of racism, their discussion sheds light on how to have difficult conversations without destroying the many different relationships that enrich our lives. Here's Lou,

Eric Liu ([02:17](#)):

You know, one of the things that is so powerful about this book is that there are many, uh, so many ways in, um, like your previous book, citizen and American lyric. Um, it's written in this way where I know there is a logic and an intention and a flow to the whole thing, but one could literally open it up at any point and begin waiting in the waters of whiteness, so to speak, right? And your exploration of what whiteness means and what it is. And, uh, and the ways in which so many Americans who would call themselves white are blind to it are resistant to the naming of it, uh, saturates the pages of this book. And I think the first question I want to pose to simply do you come away having written this book and have you engaged with so many people around the country now around these ideas, do you come away more or less hopeful, uh, that white people in the United States are ready for a reckoning with the meaning and the content of their whiteness?

Claudia Rankine ([03:18](#)):

Well, I think that the people who are ready are the people who are engaging me. I think a lot of people are not engaging me and I cannot speak to those people, but I think that the people who are interested in a book like justice are interested in interrogating why we are still in the moment that we're in,

Eric Liu ([03:44](#)):

No, the, the, the, you call the book in American conversation. Um, and yet you also use the word interrogating and that's, I think quite on purpose. So much of what's in the pages is you interrogating others, but also you interrogating yourself and you being interrogated, um, and, and many candid reflections, whether it's encounters, um, on an airplane, uh, or discussions with people who, with whom you would have assumed you were aligned, uh, and you suddenly realize one way or another, um, or maybe there's a misalignment or miss, uh, apprehension of, of where we stand and what we bring into a room. And I think one of the things that is so moving about the book is that it is this, um, you know, the lens I'll use is kind of Buddhist, almost towers, kind of just, um, you know, the phrase you used, the, the, the quotidian of disturbance, you dive into the quotidian of disturbance, that daily feeling of asking questions, asking how did I handle this asking how did this person handle, how I handle this? Right. Um, and, uh, and so it's very, it reverberates out, yes, the people who are engaging with you on this book are prime to want to engage, but even those, and even those you call and describe as friends in the pages of this book, um, often there are misunderstandings or realizations that you're coming from, different power positions. Um, what has been, what have you learned, uh, in the course of sharing these ideas, uh, about your own place and position in this ecosystem of power, um, as it is color-coded in the United States?

Claudia Rankine ([05:21](#)):

Well, I think the most, um, positive thing I've learned is that we can take it. We can actually take these conversations in the sense that it will not destroy friendships if they are friendships. And, um, many of the people, um, who I have engaged with inside the conversations that are represented in just us, we now have even deeper conversations. And, um, and I think it came from the, the sort of taking apart close reading of everything that we were saying. And so that that's been, um, good, good. It doesn't mean that we won't have other moments where we stumble and stutter and, um, um, have to sort of reassess, but at least we have a groundwork that it's not the end of anything. Um, so that's good. The other thing I learned was that there's some, there are a number of phrases that are sort of, um, send us in the wrong direction.

Claudia Rankine ([06:28](#)):

And one of them is white privilege. I think that phrase, um, allows people to divert from thinking about the construction of whiteness or blackness into economic privilege. And so often, especially with white men, I get, you know, I've worked hard for what I have, et cetera, et cetera. So I now use the term white living because, you know, because that's what I'm talking about. I'm talking about my ability to want a life where I can just walk out my door, go to the store, buy what I want, come back home without being without, you know, being racially profiled or, um, having surveillance, um, even at my own front door. Um, so I think people, at least some of the people that I've been talking to are beginning to see the difference between the two and that's something I would not have come to had I not, as I say, push the moment to their Christ, you know, it's crisis.

Eric Liu ([07:39](#)):

No, but in pushing the moment, at least in the conversations you recount in the pages of justice, um, that same generosity that I was describing, that you have shown me and others over the years, you, you show to everybody you encounter, um, whether they want to resist you or not in the way that you're probing. Um, and that probing that idea that, um, you came to learn that while living, it might be a better way to phrase this and frame this than white privilege. Um, well it brings to mind a couple of things. I mean, at citizen university, we have this slogan live like a citizen, uh, which whatever your

documentation status might be, uh, whatever, however, you might enter into this country to be able to live like a citizen and have voice and have agency and have power and have dignity, um, what you're describing in a way as live like a white, uh, live like you were white. And that idea that that is not available to all, um, is the aha moment that you're able to awaken in a lot of people who call themselves white. Right.

Claudia Rankine ([08:41](#)):

Well, you know, I think in a way you're right, that it does come down to live white, like a white, but, but, um, but I really want us to live like a human, you know, like human beings are citizens of this great country. Um, and it just so happens that white people have that available to them and others do not.

Eric Liu ([09:05](#)):

Yeah. Well, I think one of the things that you quote in here along the way is something that LBJ said to a young bill Moyers and I'll roughly paraphrase, but, uh, um, you know, I think he said a fee and he said this, not in praise of the sentiment, but just as a candid recognition of it in politics, that if you can convince the lowest white man that he's better than the highest black man, uh, you can pick his pockets, uh, if you can convince them you spirit, in fact, you can empty his pockets. Um, and what that quote illuminates in part is, again, what you were alluding to a moment ago, which is the conflation of color and class, um, uh, and, and cast in a way. Um, and, uh, you know, when you have these conversations or when you had them originally about white privilege and white men, for instance, resisted, um, uh, the reaction is very telling, but I've worked hard for everything I got.

Eric Liu ([09:58](#)):

Um, and you quote Brett Kavanaugh and his Supreme court confirmation hearing saying that, you know, to that effect. Um, but, uh, it's a non-sequitur and part one can both have benefited from inherited unearned privileges and work their butt off. Right. Um, and, uh, and that conversation unfolds with a certain valence among people of privilege, elite circles, highly educated. Um, but when it comes to working class white people, um, who feel the pinch and the crunch of economic injustice and the price of globalization, um, whiteness pays, what do boys with David Roediger what others have called a wage, a psychological wage. Right. Um, and how have you found it possible in talking to what people who consciously or not hold on to the wages of whiteness to let go of that, to realize that it's not a zero sum thing, that if they open it up, this greater humanity is available to them rather than something, rather than simply something's getting taken from them. And their last form of social standing gets eliminated.

Claudia Rankine ([11:07](#)):

Well, I think the people I am in conversation with, um, who are friends are people who, many of whom have done this kind of, um, work for themselves already. So it's not difficult for them to take another step towards, um, thinking about negotiating their own privileges and whiteness and living, uh, with, you know, in conversation with me, the people I approach, um, blindly like the men in, in airports. I think those people find these conversations novel because they haven't actually them previously. And, um, and when that, when the first, um, essay in the book, um, with the white men on the plane was population in the New York times, one of the things that happened was I received, um, two over 200 letters, like all fashioned letters saying, um, this is what my life looks like, and I don't understand why you say this thing or that thing or that thing.

Claudia Rankine ([12:22](#)):

And, um, and that was, you know, that's interesting to me because I think people are really struggling with, um, what it is they don't get, like why I think something and they don't understand why I think it and, and why they think something. And they think I find it antagonistic. And so I think as a culture, we have to understand that the, the culture has made us into these things that are, um, segregated and, um, pushing forward in ways that will lead us to greater apartheid. And so we're just gonna have to stop and, and start again in a certain way. And in a way, it's, it reminds me of your endeavor at citizen university that, that sense of allowing people to understand exactly what it means to be a citizen and without a PO you know, one or the other party in play, but just this notion of civic involvement, um, whatever your public is. And so this conversation, this book, um, is an attempt to really open it out to butterfly it open in terms of a subject that has enormous effect on our ability to live our lives.

Eric Liu ([13:48](#)):

Would you, would you attach the word to that butterfly, the word responsibility? Is that a word that, did you feel like this is a book, is both an invitation and an example of responsibility taking rather than responsibility Shirky

Claudia Rankine ([14:01](#)):

I agree. I would, I, you know, um, I, it's an interesting word because I feel that the book is an invitation and as an invitation, it doesn't come with any responsibility. I mean, in a sense you can open it, it's an open, it was intentionally written as an open text that you can take what you can when you can and live with it in whatever way you want and how you move away from that and experience and what you feel you need to be accountable to once you that's up to you. And I, you know, I don't know where you are in terms of who you are and what you need from this world. And so I leave that part to the person who is the reader,

Eric Liu ([14:59](#)):

One of the ways in which you do extend that invitation though, it's not invitation only to contemplations and invitation to, to various versions of what would you do, kind of moral quandaries or dilemmas. You described one situation where you're at a dinner party, where you're the only black person at the dinner party, um, and the conversation unfolds where you, you want to, um, and choose in fact to, um, do the non socially lubricant thing and say, hold on a second, wait, um, on something that, that, uh, that, that provokes you around these assumptions about race, um, and, uh, in that essay, or in that passage of the book, you, you talk about the trade-off between being right and being in the room, say more about that. And, and that trade-off, and, uh, that I, I thought that sentence could have been heard or read in different ways. So one being, sometimes you just got to eat it and shut up if you, if you want to stay in the room. And other times it's just like, nothing's worth staying in this room. So you've just got to let it out, which I suppose it's different readers will take a different ways.

Claudia Rankine ([16:07](#)):

Exactly. I mean, there's a cost to speaking and I don't want to pretend that there's not, you know, and, um, and in that case, um, that was a dinner party where people were talking about the 2016 election and the, the constant insistence that, um, our sitting president ran on, um, economics became more and more insulting to me. And, and, and so that's a, you know, a situation where I decided I was going to push. And, and then I, you know, somebody said, maybe you went too far, but I went as far as I could. That's how I going to think about it. Um, and you know, I've never been invited back to that house since.

And, um, um, so there are, you know, there are consequences, but that was a moment when I felt like I needed to take it.

Eric Liu ([17:04](#)):

One of the ways we often frame it in our work is just the, is about, is when you take stock of the power you have, in your case, the power of voice, the power of that position, when anyone takes stock of that, the power they may hold, uh, and sees it clearly you face a very binary choice of whether you're going to hoard it or circulate it, right. And you made a choice there to circulate it, spend some of that capital, uh, even if it meant to the consequence might be that you wouldn't be invited back. And, um, and this is, this raises a question that I think is woven throughout the book in different ways, even though you talk about collective systemic ills, you talk about history in a way that situates, that's not just in the perpetual now, but th th the through-line question is

Claudia Rankine ([17:50](#)):

How do we move from individual level, heart work to collective change? And how, how do you mean in the framing of this book too? If not answer that question to invite us, to reckon with it? Well, what I wanted the book to do is take intimacy, um, those intimate conversations. And first of all, I'll ask the question, what are conversations? You know, when you and I are talking, what are we doing? We're building something between us, perhaps, you know, and, um, and what do we want from these moments? And then I wanted to then almost create an autopsy of the conversation so we could see, um, where it, where it went, literally, where it went and then show how, what seems like a, um, inconsequential moment is tied to systemic patterns in our country. So, you know, a child gets called violent in class. You might think, well, that's one kid in a school somewhere and well, you know, but, but then you look over to the Verso side of the page and you can see that institutionally, this is something that has gone on, um, so that even, um, children in preschool begin to understand the social capital of whiteness and the criminalization of blackness, um, from the get-go.

Claudia Rankine ([19:34](#)):

And so that was really the intention of the book to take the microaggressions, which is still racism, but the microaggressions,

Speaker 4 ([19:43](#)):

And to

Claudia Rankine ([19:45](#)):

Open them out to the, the long history of systemic violence that has been done.

Speaker 4 ([20:00](#)):

This podcast is supported by PayPal. The racial wealth gap in the United States is as wide as it was in 1968, and the black community continues to face significant economic barriers. That limit opportunities for long-term wealth creation. The global pandemic has impacted vulnerable populations and underserved communities, especially hard papal believes that financial health and security is an essential foundation for people to pursue a better future for their families and communities, and to join and thrive in a more equitable global economy. Everyone should have access to affordable, convenient, and secure financial services. And PayPal is committed to fulfilling this mission by championing equality,

diversity and inclusion inside the company and outside PayPal is working to address the economic underpinnings of racial inequality. Learn more about how PayPal is helping to close the racial wealth gap by supporting, sustaining and investing in black owned businesses and communities visit the newsroom@paypal.com.

Eric Liu ([21:12](#)):

When you began this book, uh, indeed, when you were ready for publication, uh, it was before the pandemic. It was before the murder of George Floyd. It was before the nationwide cascading of multi-racial protests for racial justice in the United States. That's kind of reckoning. Um, but also before the kind of easy, soft commodification by lots of, you know, big institutions and corporations, we decided finally to get on various bandwagons of justice and black lives matter and so forth. Um, but the net of the last several months is that there is a, um, a more radical. And I mean, that, in a sense, literally, I've just getting to root causes, focus on structural change, um, and your book and the way that you frame just us. Um, and part of the reason why it resonates with me is that, uh, uh, it is about the thing that is upstream of structure, and that is culture, right?

Eric Liu ([22:08](#)):

It is about the dreams, the interior monologues, the conversations, the norms, the things unsaid and said. Uh, and I'm wondering now in the wake of how much more, uh, visible, uh, surfaced, uh, agitation there is in our society for change at a structural level, um, uh, one possible response would be, Oh, well, okay. You know, this was nice, but now we gotta get into that other mode. Another possible response, which is my response to the book is this becomes all the more important in a time like this attending to conversation in this way, attending to that kind of listening without knowing where it's going to go. Um, and have you found it harder, uh, in the environment that we're in right now to convince people of the worth and the, uh, potential benefits of this sort of patient, uh, dyad by dyad engagement?

Claudia Rankine ([23:03](#)):

Well, I think, um, I don't think I am trying to convince anyone. I feel the book will do the work that it does and find its way on its own. I, I still believe that one, the two things can live, um, together that, um, overt, um, radical, um, movement still needs close readings still needs, um, um, subtle nuance shifting within the conversations. Um, and that, you know, I think the book arriving at this moment means that for certain people, this is not the book for them right now, because they want a solution. This book has no solutions. They want, um, um, direction, how to be an anti-racist. You know, even Kennedy's book is a great book, but this is not that book. And, um, and there are other books that they can go to and, you know, thank God we have a democracy and books are not yet banned, you know, so they can make these choices.

Claudia Rankine ([24:23](#)):

But I think for those readers who are able to understand that institutions are made up of people and that people will have to, I, it sounds a bit corny, but change how they think about the things they think about, but in a way, in order for us to actually meet that kind of work is close to, you know, it's, it's close it's, it's, it's word by word, it's stitch by stitch it's thought by thought, and you cannot jump it. I mean, one of the things that is interesting to me now that's happening and I've, I've seen it in a number of conversations is that people are saying to me, and many of them white people are saying to me, well, you know, I got a call from Yale and they told me that a job opened up and it was the perfect job for me, but they're being made to give it to a black person.

Claudia Rankine ([25:32](#)):

And again, and again, that idea that this moment is forcing this establishment to override rather than an understanding that there is a way in which many of these spaces are actually so monolithic that they are not capable of, of progressing properly, unless they create a more diverse field, but that's not how it's being said. It's being said, we're being forced into hiring blacks, but you, you, you would have been the perfect person for this job. And I cannot tell you how many. Um, and even as my white friends are saying, I understand I get it, but that's how it's being reported to them. So that, you know, this is you CA you can change policy, but the work of changing deep seated cultural racism is a whole nother thing. If, if it didn't take a different approach, um, we wouldn't be where we are now. The work that was done during the civil rights period would have done the job because it did actually, um, occasion policy changes. And this will occasion policy changes as well, but will it change people? I don't know.

Eric Liu ([27:03](#)):

Well, you ask, um, you asking the book is understanding change and your answer is fittingly ambivalent. I'm not sure, I'm not sure, I'm not sure. And that is, uh, that itself is an invitation to the reader to keep reading, uh, for one thing, but it's also an invitation to contemplate where you stand and sit in relation to this topic. I think one of the things that you, there's a passage in the book where you talk about, um, Latino and Latin X friends and colleagues, and, um, and of course I entered into this conversation, uh, in a kind of categorically comparable position, which is to say, non-white non-black, I entered this American conversation as a non-white non-black American. And, um, and I think, and yeah, I come into this conversation completely convinced that the problem we have in the United States is that from, from before the beginning, you, you excerpt passages of Thomas Jefferson's notes on the state of Virginia, which you retitled notes on the state of whiteness, because it's just literally passages of, um, uh, norms, values, attitudes, and so forth of white supremacy and superiority, and from the get-go Americanness and whiteness were seen as the same overlapping thing seen as nearly indistinguishable.

Eric Liu ([28:24](#)):

Um, and even though we had an answer patient, and even though we had reconstruction, even though we had the civil rights movement, even though we're having black lives matter today, um, it's only been lately, um, that people are realizing partly because of the irresistible demographic tides that are shifting that we're about to become a majority people of color country, but Americanness and whiteness are de Lincoln, right? They are decoupling, uh, and for Asian Americans who often have been forced to go into that binary and decide, are you going to act white or quote, you know, act black? Um, uh, that's a very, I can't wait. You know, that, that day can't come soon enough when those things do you link right.

Claudia Rankine ([29:05](#)):

Act American, you know, and that would mean something in terms of how you treat everyone. Yeah.

Eric Liu ([29:12](#)):

So maybe back to what we were saying earlier about, it's not live like a citizen, it's not live like a white, it's lived like an American, a certain expectation of a combination of Liberty and responsibility, um, that has always been underwritten as that's what white folks get to do. They get to live like Americans and others, maybe, you know, Asian Americans can be honorary whites under certain circumstances and certain environments and, uh, others, you know, people with Brown and black skin who teach at Yale under some circumstances can well, but, um, that, that breaking of the binary, um, do you feel any tension between on the one hand that desire to bust that binary, um, and other on the other hand, the

need to keep at the center whiteness and the ways in which the worst of whiteness manifests itself as anti-blackness?

Claudia Rankine ([30:02](#)):

Well, I think it's a complicated question because I think, um, whiteness gets its power from anti-blackness. And, um, in many ways, many of the policies that have been put in place to promote, um, whiteness was specifically targeted against blackness, um, mass incarceration. When you look who's in those prisons, um, um, and more, you know, the most spectacular demonstration of that is who gets gunned down in the streets, um, unarmed black people in the streets or in their homes. If they're women, we don't see those on videos in the same way, but that's happening. So there is a, there is a way in which black people are targeted, specially intentionally categorically. Um, and that's just it, but, but then you have all these other people, you know, um, Latin X people who, who, it's a, it's an amazing spectrum of people who are moving. You have Asians who are, again, it depends on what country depends on who you are, where your political alliances are Vietnamese, very Republican.

Claudia Rankine ([31:32](#)):

You know, it just depends. And that work, um, is necessary to do, because I think without some kind of coalition building the investments in whiteness will continue. No matter the numbers, no, we have an ally, you know, I would love to know what you think about the electoral college, because that's a way that was put in place to make sure the, um, the population at large and one vote, one person doesn't matter. And, and so if that's the case, then we are still in South Africa in the United States where a small minority of people control and ever expanding majority. And it stays that way. I mean, you know, the scariest thing about this this time in part is the appointing of the new judges Supreme court. And, and that's scary because it locks in a treatment that the ramifications will keep black people in a certain place.

Claudia Rankine ([32:56](#)):

And me, you know, how can I know that it will keep both women and black people in a certain place. And so, and we also know that, you know, Mitch McConnell's, um, entire project in the last three and a half years was to lock down the courts with, um, conservative judges who will maintain the system, the status quo. So, so in that way, I think the binary stays the same, but the only way to defeat the binary is coalition-building within all of the other hyphenated, does Toni Morrison would call all of the other hyphenated Americans who, who, um, who make up America,

Eric Liu ([33:43](#)):

You know, the, the, the work of that kind of coalition building is partly tactical political about organizing and so forth. But again, to just come back full circle to where we began, that coalition building begins in the imagination, every nation is an imagined community. And every idea we may have of who is us, um, is one that is navigated through books, like just us. And, um, Y you know, I think the question of you can have a statistical majority of people of color, and yet still have many of those people of color identifying aspirationally, maybe even explicitly as white, um, means that white then becomes a proxy, not only for the color of one skin or the privileges that attend to it, but just for power itself, proximity to power itself is what I want to identify with. Right.

Claudia Rankine ([34:36](#)):

The mobility power. Yeah.

Eric Liu ([34:40](#)):

Yeah. And so the opportunity that you're describing ultimately in this book is one of the imagination. Could we imagine a different kind of coalition, one that is not centered on that color coded, um, allocation of power, um, and that work of imagination, um, you know, there, there's so much that you, you talk about in here and what if is of course the central question of all acts of imagination. And, um, and I think at the very first pages of the book on page five, uh, how does one say, what if without reproach? Right. And that to me is kind of the central question of the project of the next bunch of years for us as Americans. How do we invite a full people into the, what if work of imagining without it feeling like it's reproach, without it feeling like it is Dan in some centers and others as saved, um, and is it possible, right? And, uh, you know, your work fundamentally, and the reason why, I don't know what genre you would put this book in,

Claudia Rankine ([35:47](#)):

I guess non-fiction is where it's living non-fiction,

Eric Liu ([35:49](#)):

But it's poetry. It is imagery. It is, uh, you know, dream narration. It is history. Um, it has all these things melded. It is interior just reflection, uh, and it is ultimately, um, the external deposit of your interior imagination. Right? And you are showing us how to imagine in this way. And I guess the last question I want to pose to you, Claudia, is, um, what other tools can you encourage us to use? Whether it's other books, other ways of engaged people to build more imaginative muscle, to be able to imagine a different way of being American. That's not bound to an old power Laden notion of whiteness to imagine one that's inclusive, whether or not it feels like you might be losing something or gaining something, right. How do we, how do we build that imagination right now?

Claudia Rankine ([36:43](#)):

Well, you know, I think I'm going to read you this little paragraph that I was reading an article today, but Nina LA honey. Um, and she says, researchers reviewed 1.8 million hospital birth records and Florida from 1992 to 2015, and established the race of the doctor in charge of each newborn 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 a black doctor. And then she goes on to say that they're, they're only, um, 5% of doctors who are black. So when I read something like that, I mean, which is so killing in a way that, um, that three times more likely to die. If the attending physician is white. I think that the other piece of this act of imagination has to be an active interrogation. Um, you know, people have to begin to really ask themselves, why do I think the things I think, why am I not listening to this black woman? Why am I dismissive of Serina Williams saying that she is not feeling well, that she has an embolism that she, you know, while she's in the hospital, why I think white people have to slow down in a way and become suspicious of themselves, um, because it's not cutting it to say my intentions are good.

Claudia Rankine ([38:50](#)):

And that is one of the things. This is why I use my own life as a Petri dish in that sense, you know, because for all of us, we are made by the culture and we have to, I don't think these doctors want to kill black babies, but I do think that there are unconscious assumptions around black people caused them not to listen, not to value, not to care on a certain level. So I, I think, yes, we need an imaginative Robin Kelly calls it almost like a surreal leap into what is possible, but I also believe that we need to slow down

and begin to interrogate how racism and a culture of white supremacists orientation has positioned us to distrust disregard each other.

Eric Liu ([39:58](#)):

I will close in turn by reading a final paragraph on the final page of just us. Um, you've been speaking throughout our conversation about close readings, those readings of texts, of situations of, uh, our society. Uh, and of course the people, um, and you, right, our lives could enact a lot of close readings of who we each are. The love of a newly formed, newly conceived, one made up of obscure, but sensed and unnamed publics in a yet unimagined future. And then the very last line of the book, a couple of lines later is tell me something, one thing, the thing, tell me that thing quite a, you have been telling us to tell us that thing in so many beautiful, powerful ways. And, uh, I have talked about the imaginative leap. I have a deep, deep, deep faith. It doesn't require a leap. It's just inquire sitting here, uh, that this book is going to transform our country and our society over time. And it's going to sink in deeply in many hearts, um, of many Americans. And, uh, thank you, Claudia, for this book, just us and for this conversation. It's been wonderful just to be with you again,

Claudia Rankine ([41:17](#)):

Thank you so much. And thank you for all the work that you do at the citizen university. And in terms of having people understand their own power in this case.

Eric Liu ([41:28](#)):

Thanks buddy.

Tricia Johnson ([41:35](#)):

Award-winning poet, author, and playwright. Claudia Rankin teaches at Yale university. She co-founded the racial imaginary Institute, which explores race through interdisciplinary arts and collaborations. Her latest book is just us and American conversation. Eric Lou leads the citizenship and American identity program at the Aspen Institute. He's the founder of citizen university, which works across the political spectrum to foster a culture of powerful citizenship. Their conversation was recorded in October. Make sure to subscribe to Aspen ideas, to go wherever you listen to podcasts. Follow us on social media at Aspen ideas. And listen on our website. Today's show was produced by Shauna Lewis. It was programmed by Aspen ideas. Now our team is kitty Boone Killeen. Bratman Katie Kasita, Kristen Cromer, Libby Franklin, Ava Hartman, Merci Krishnan, Azalea, Milan, Jonathan, Mel garde. And me, our music is by Wanderly I'm Trisha Johnson. Thanks for listening. This podcast is supported by PayPal. The racial wealth gap in the United States is as wide as it was in 1968, and the black community continues to face significant economic barriers, limiting opportunities for longterm wealth creation. PayPal believes that financial health is essential for people to pursue a better future for themselves and their families. That's why PayPal is committed to supporting, sustaining and investing in black owned businesses. Learn more by visiting the newsroom@paypal.com.