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### Reading Journal

#### **“Why I Write” by Joan Didion:**

Joan Didion presents many concepts and ideas about the idea of writing that hold true. She suggests that when a person writes they are trying to “[impose] oneself upon other people” (pg 1) which I feel is quite true of the industry of any kind of writing as it is necessary to get the funds needed to continue or even secure the author’s own livelihood. Even fictional pieces are attempting to win you over with their plot to make you recommend the book or even buy more, especially if it is in a series. I just think back to something like Paolini’s “Inheritance Cycle” or George R.R. Martin’s “Game of Thrones” series, both of these authors wrote amazing books that they still teased out every time they were close to making another to keep readers coming back. Still it was all to stay relevant and keep their series alive in the event that they may continue it.

I did appreciate the realism of Didion’s reflection of herself as a writer. I think we all have moments of feeling like a fake or at least have some growing doubts about our path that I think a few college students like myself can relate especially with how expensive college is and wanting to make it count as a result. But even just as writers, people can doubt themselves like she had with her “forged passports to the land of imagination”. The structure of her work is more of a internal reflection than a story/timeline that I believe works well to speak from the heart in a way that draws the reader in with their own internal fears or struggles that makes the work relatable. Don’t get me wrong it starts with her current situation and education background to

give us something to work off of but it works to give us readers an idea of what Didion is like and ground us instead of spiraling into her personal thoughts in an abrupt way.

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**“Letter from Williamsburg” by Kristen Dombek:**

Kristen Dombek has an interesting take on God that is refreshing from what I have read in other classes particularly when they concerned America’s colonization that had overly pious texts. Weirdly it reminds me of a text where it was an account by a woman who was kidnapped by Native Americans and she had a very pious account and attributed her survival to God. It was irksome considering she considered herself the victim constantly despite her town being the invading colonizers. So, in that sense it is nice to see a text that really accepts that God may not forgive them and isn’t some all-forgiving entity like many pious authors pull. I really enjoyed how the ending focuses more on the strength of the person/people involved that isn’t attributing all of their success to God but actually acknowledges that some of these achievements are their own.

The structure of “Letter from Williamsburg” was less straightforward in its pacing. We get her background but then jump into Williamsburg and then jump between her life with her man at the time that is coupled with the other relationship she later pursues. Yet it all seems to take place in the same room in a way. She described the room with her first man and then at the end, despite moving out, she describes the room like how it was in the beginning with the bed, pet, and rug. Thought it does leave out the chair that was some manifest of her depression. I say that the chair was depression, since it was described as pinning her and she experienced moments where she couldn’t recall moments in the chair. Both the feelings of being pinned down and the experiences line up with what is diagnosed as symptoms of depression. This is also supported by

the second guy she is with who also has a “chair” to which he expresses having the same symptoms in and that gives us the consistency to confirm that the chair is a manifestation of depression. I also think this is why the relationship between them works so well than the one she had with her ex, they can both commiserate with their shared commonality of depression.

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**“Thanksgiving in Mongolia” by Ariel Levy:**

The beginning of “Thanksgiving in Mongolia” set me up to expect that this was a work that was going to be more about her experiences and career achievements, I mean the experiences were there but I wasn’t expecting motherhood to be the main point in the work. It tackled both as frontiers to explore—motherhood and exploration. What a story though, that the sad ending with a miscarriage is paired with the happiness that usually comes with a holiday like Thanksgiving. The stark contrast of her as a strong woman traveling hard passages and surviving in mountains that killed others, yet when she loses her baby it is the moment that ultimately breaks her more than any journey.

The vagueness of the events at the hospital really nailed the confusion of the situation by not revealing the status of the baby and how she talks about the flashes of the events in a combination of describing the event in a way that reflects upon it and yet also lives in the moment by not revealing the events in a the detached way of recalling events and filling in the pieces with information received afterwards.

**“Costco” by Emily Mester:**

Mester’s introduction of Costco makes the experience of shopping in such a big supermarket is a wonderful experience. Her inclusion of her dad and his habits give it a personable aspect that gives her article an immersive feeling. So many articles may talk about an experience they were apart of but lack any real substance that engages memories that are specific to them that it makes their words detached from the topic at hand as they pick at it with a scientific-like view. Her description of her dad as a person along with her memories of him, I find really is “down-to-earth” as it allows us as readers to connect with our own experiences of ourselves and parents. It helps that she doesn’t try to paint her dad as perfect or defend some of his actions, in fact she down right pursues his bad habits as they relate to Costco as he buys with almost wanton intent.

I really enjoyed the pacing and structure of the article, the introduction of her dad as an example of the standard Costco shopper, the practices of Costco as a company and yet she balances it with an inclusion of humor especially with the part about the *universal casket* with an ominous reviewer saying they would “purchase again”. Despite its humor it also shows how crazy diverse Costco is with that example and how she lists that Costco could retila a kitchen, refinance your estate, check your vision, and just about anything else.

**Kiese Laymon's "Gross"**

I noticed that within at least the first sixteen minutes of the reading of chapter "Beach" that Kiese Laymon had a strong intent to steal something from the Mumphers and his Grandma always advised not to steal. It works as an interesting contrast between Laymon and his Grandma, He "kept wishing [he] would have gone into the Mumpher's house and stole something they couldn't do without, stealing something white folk valued felt like the only way to make [his] rotten feeling in [his] belly go away". Yet Grandma was focused on achieving small wins against the white folk, because losing meant losing everything you had and work for. Grandma strived for going high by taking the societal blows, while Layton went low wanting to take something white folks couldn't do without. Grandma sums up the point as "it ain't about making white folks feel what you feel, she said it's about feeling what they want you to feel".

For the chapter "Gross", the way Laymon and his friends changed words around seems to have some sort of meaning to each of them. The previous chapter it was mentioned that he always loved talking about words with his grandma, which was revealed in their exchanges as they argue over quick feet or quick feets. It appears to function as a way to own a word by changing it up to their "version" that has more style to it that is an inside joke among friends and family. There is a theme or mantra of being "better" to not stand out. Laymon is told in this chapter to be "twice as excellent" and "twice as careful" to only get half as the white kids. How crazy that the teacher gets concerned about them cutting up an apple with a plastic and dull knife, just because it is a knife and they are black. Even then they went as far as segregating Laymon and Lathon for "safety". I did enjoy this piece for the view of racism it gives. I've read to many books about racism that is a view from a white kid's perspective or is a work about slavery

which is too far back to give the history of racism in the 1900s that lead up to the emergence of figures like MLK and Malcolm X.

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### **“How it Feels” by Jenny Zhang**

Wow this piece went straight into focusing on suicide, I thought it was going to build up the bullying or the classmates claims of abuse. Also, what a weird rumor of the classmate trying to kill herself with a spoon? The form of this writing is somewhat sporadic with how it jumps from each topic, they all relate with the focus on one’s inner “darkness” but the context or focus is changing every few sentences—not even from a “true” paragraph. It seems the author views people in groups and paints a broad brush based on the cliché teen movies of jocks and geeks. This piece really views the geeks as fragile people that are inciteful deep thinkers of written pieces as they see beyond the “tree/bird/building/urn/body of water” that the jocks fall short of. I believe the piece really captures the charms of high school as there are some kids who could care less about the meaning of works within an English class and the horrible things people say like the kid trying to kill herself is following a “trend” with the suicide note. Truly it captures the relentless and meanness in some kids’ hearts.

I can’t say I was expecting a jock vs geek mentality of the world that focuses on one’s inner entertainments of dark thoughts and suicide with the title “How it Feels”. Coming from reading “Gross”, I was expecting more combatting of racism than the “people vs people vs self” style of conflict. Even the association made between suicide and poetry was refreshing with how she notes that poetry is usually called for in moments of grief and yet in all others it is cringe despite how they are usually attributed towards someone in a nice way that would be further appreciated if they were alive.

## Next Unit

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### James Agee, “Knoxville”

I noticed right away that “Knoxville” is a very visual work with its descriptions of the scene of Knoxville’s summer. I almost didn’t note the title including 1915 as the year, so the smattering of the horse drawn buggy and the streetcar isn’t so vague as a marker of the year. It seems to be the year that is on the brink of industrial advancements occurring to mass produce cars to make people opt for cheaper cars instead of horses (or it was just very country with enough ranches with horses). Although it primarily focuses on visuals it also gives particular attention to sound like the clack of the horse buggy and the belling/moaning iron of the car. I get the sense that James or at least, the character in the work, is either a child or a young teenager. His parents are in the story and are described as having “larger bodies than mine”.

I do have to say I don’t quite exactly understand the end quote: “but will not ever tell me who I am”. I’m guessing it is saying that never will my parents impose some sort of wish upon me or at least influence them to some sort of measure that is directly their own will than theirs? I am coming to this kind of conclusion based on the type of people that his parents appear to be with their description in the story. They are obviously very caring and happy—I mean they are certainly not an unhappy couple as they cozy up in the sun. I kind of concluded from their positions as his father is a painter and the mother is a musician that these are positions that require creative and even free soles that really must rely upon themselves than the information they hold as we all know with how liberal arts is poked fun at while STEM is a buzzword.

### Maggie Nelson's "Bluets"

I read a bit of Lauren Slater's "Lying" before this, so the introduction starting with color strikes me once more as an interesting choice to begin a work. I am a little relieved it is a love of color and not "seeing" color come from a secret world, both relieved of their difference/originality and also that at least Nelson isn't suffering horrible seizures and seeing colors as a clear symptom of epilepsy. I do find it a little funny how she is drawn to colors and yet has writing as her medium which is traditionally black and white, maybe she just missed her calling as an artist (or she is, with writing as a side job).

The work had so messages and/or lessons woven in from Goethe's works. For example is talked about not mistaking desire as a sense of yearning, that when we desire it is not an effect of being presented with the object of desire but it is when it draws us in with it's effect of want or need to have it. Which makes sense, you can be presented with an apple, but it doesn't mean you will desire it even if you enjoy apples. But if it had some special effect to it like the skin having a rainbow hue it might become an object of desire for it's odd coloring that draws us in. It also implied that beauty is something to take in and not apply with any kind of word(s), "*Isn't X beautiful?* Such demands are murderous to beauty".

The numbered entries gave a nice touch that allowed for breaking in new ideas or stories that weren't so jarring as some of the other works we have read. Some of these points talk about the author's life, their interest in blue, other peoples' interests that may or may not be in blue as well. Overall it helps to break up the text in an interesting way that works almost like sub plots in story-telling as the author can switch to another section without losing attention from the reader and yet also introduce a new idea without it coming from out of no where as much as just sticking it in randomly between paragraphs that don't have such distinct sectional numbers.



**“Letters to Wendy’s” by Joe Wenderoth**

I liked the touch Wenderoth added with the inclusion of the dates of the letters that played itself more into the nonsensical aspects of this work as he wrote letters toward a corporate entity/mascot. I got a little worried with the first few pages having July’s first three days that the next page might have revealed that there was no brake. I truly feared that letters were going to be written every day since the 1<sup>st</sup> of July. Thankfully the chain breaks and has a span of nearly two weeks before the next letters are written.

I do have to say that this is a unique form. There are plenty of works that have journal entry styles that are both fictional and non-fiction but very few use a letter format like this work especially for something like this that is over the top and not something sentimental like a work presenting a collected presentation of letters from like World War soldiers that died to make the letters have an impact with their value as the last words. Usually letters are held with high importance as they contain the words of those we (usually) care about, I mean is that not why someone usually goes to the trouble to write one and stamp it to send out?

It is an interesting presentation as the work almost personifies a Wendy’s as person the author visits and writes the time in a Wendy’s akin to dating. Overall it is a sickening obsession with the store that is pretty toxic to the writer. At one point the author talks about their lactose intolerance and yet still gets a frosty that will make them ill just to basically experience all that Wendy’s has to offer and possibly as to use as an excuse to stay within a Wendy’s. Very odd work in the end.

**“Lying” by Lauren Slater (1<sup>st</sup> Half)**

The start is reminiscent of the “unreliable narrator” trope with how Slater claims to have epilepsy but doesn’t confirm if it is true as she never brings up a doctor’s diagnosis, her mother’s habit of lying may have rubbed off on her, and she expresses she isn’t sure herself if it was made up. Interesting too is how she never stated seizures in the beginning and instead opts to focus on the smell of jasmine as a marker for her episodes. I can’t say I have heard of this but if I had to guess it is probably a hallucination or an absence seizure that has its blanks filled in by the scent of jasmine. I feel like it is more so hallucination as she said her words came out with colors and her mother’s piano playing had “I could see the sounds she made, the high piano notes pink and pointed, the low notes brown and round. I don’t mean this metaphorically. I watched the colors and I watched my mother.” (Lying.2.2).

I do find it fascinating how she turns epilepsy into a positive when it is really a scary experience considering the loss of control and threat towards your life can occur about any time. She romanticizes it by calling the visions she sees while, assumingly, under a seizure as “dreamy” and a “secret world”.

I think it was a nice touch to add the symptoms of epilepsy later as her mother tells her to “stop staring into space” and how the “secret world” doesn’t always reveal itself when willed. I believe that it shows realism as she grows up and her body changes so does her condition react by maturing as well when additional symptoms come into the fold. It shows that she has an understanding of the condition and isn’t really the “metaphor” she jokes about in the beginning but actually provides some insight into the actual condition of epilepsy.

**“Lying” by Lauren Slater (2<sup>nd</sup> Half)**

I like how at the start of chapter 5 the abstract reveals that “60% of patients with temporal lobe epilepsy display a psychological profile [called] mythomania [which creates a tendency toward exaggerations and untruths]”. So there is a 60% chance that Slater is not lying out of her own sense of self to make her background seem at times fantastical, but is in fact encouraged by her condition of epilepsy to lie and exaggerate. Though she could be the 40% that don’t suffer mythomania and may use it as an excuse.

Before I forget later in the week it was a great discussion, we had last week, about the piece. I didn’t notice how she was having a seizure during the times she sensed her mother was having strong feelings of depression at her inability to do better or live up to what she said she was (masterful piano player).

After reading chapter 5 I wasn’t sure what these “auras” of Slater’s were. The way they were described in chapter 5 made them seem exactly like the visions she had in the previous chapters that accompanied her episodes. It appears that now in chapter 6 that the auras are oncoming moods that have some sort of profound sense to them as they consume her beyond oncoming seizures. I say consume as they appear to override her current feelings with sensations that are either euphoric or depressing.

Chapter 6 also does a name drop of this book, which appears to be something Slater thought about for a long time starting at 19 years old.

**“Girlhood” by Melissa Febos**

I noticed that the character twists the negative events in her life with a positive spin that is usually containing aspects of other worldly attributes. For example she talks about her drug use through syringes likened to constellations as she describes the holes of the needle. The holes also have a highly sexual aspect to them as she includes her body’s “natural holes” like her mouth and sex.

The work does a wonderful job of introducing the characters life in a numerical way that although brief speaks volumes as it focuses on the important parts and leaves other side details with just enough information to draw accurate conclusions. For example she refers to her father multiple times without a mention of her mother beyond dropping a pie once. But we can infer that she must live with her mother or someone as her father is clearly stated to have “left port” in the 13<sup>th</sup> entry. It might be drawn from the 13<sup>th</sup> entry and the 11<sup>th</sup> entry that mentions the character receiving a book of knots that the father has an occupation as part of a ship’s crew.

This makes for an interesting dynamic as the character reveals piece by piece that there is some admiration of her father and that becomes sort of limbo as she shaves her head to relish her father’s “stricken face” when previously she mentions how he was proud of her when she called him to pick her up from a baseball game at dusk. He also seems to be an involved parent in her life as she mentions, “He has coached you teams since Little League. He wraps ice packs in dish towels, makes you hold them against the new scar”. Yet despite all of this we as the reader don’t get a discernable reason why this relationship was rejected by the character as she “stop[s] returning [her] father’s phone calls”. I say that she rejected the relationship than it being changed as he clearly cares about her as he attempts to contact her in what seems to be in a constant manner based off the text.

### **“Wanting Bad Things” Andrea Long Chu**

I'm happy we had an article like this assigned with how Chu gives us her perspective as a person in high school before their transition. I find it hard to search for any article that gives a genuine perspective that really gets to the meat of the person that isn't heavily edited for sensational value but really speaks truly about the person's feelings in a raw way that doesn't try to cover up or frame the bad in the best light possible. Instead it was nice to see all the awkward parts especially with the scenario of Chu on the athletic bus as the manager of the girls' volleyball team that had many emotions/feelings being addressed in a moment surrounded by “erotic bodies”.

I think it is concluded best by Chu's final line in her book, “The truth is I have never been able to differentiate liking women from wanting to be like them.” I feel like this is a great line as it captures the strangeness and at times confusing feelings, we all develop as we grow and gain new experiences. Though these feelings are for the most part the strongest in puberty. I mean even the statement shows some glimmer of possibility that Chu still doesn't know how to sort these feelings as Chu says “never” when talking about differentiating between likes and wants of women.

Even then these feelings about being Trans is echoed oddly within the feelings people have towards the Trans community as mentioned in the article that people have reservations as people suggest that they are “men who are aroused by the idea of being women” or villainize the Trans community by saying “the reason that trans women transition is so that they can have easier access to little girls in bathrooms”. This interview and Chu's story do a wonderful job of highlighting the general confusion as an individual and as a society with our interpretations of

transitions and our feelings/wants as they relate to our sexuality by addressing the wonderfully good and the ugly bad.

### **“Still Eating Animals” by Charlotte Shane**

I did enjoy this article with how it analyzed the processes involved with reducing climate change across the world. I didn't know about the Kyoto treaty as I was too young, but it does share some striking similarities to Trump's withdraw from the Paris deal that also dealt with reducing climate change. I felt it was a shame that the article only mentioned the Kyoto treaty, especially as the article is dated 2019 or perhaps it didn't happen in 2019 I could be misremembering. She is right that it is “an absence of action” that many of these problems are happening, the problems that we are seeing on TV and in projections about climate change conditions/damages from increasingly occurring natural disasters resulting from the melting of the ice caps in the ocean and mountain tops.

Though I wish there was more analyzation of the governments abysmal impact/actions towards taking a stand against climate change, I was happy to see that the analysis of Safran Foer who advocated for a more vegan diet, to reduce the cruelty of farm animals that were in those conditions for the sake of mass production of meat, was much like his readers—dismissive of the cruelty falling prey to their desires. Which as Foer puts it, “[my] desire to eat cheese and eggs was stronger then my commitment to preventing cruelty to animals and the destruction of the environment.” It is refreshing to see how even a huge advocate and figurehead can still struggle to follow their values especially in a situation like this where it is easy to relapses from veganism or ignore for the sake of not wanting to abandon personal pleasures/preferences for the greater good.

**“Last Men’s Hotel” by Katie Prout**

I was happy to see that the article provided some historical significance to men’s hotels both for getting a background of the idea but also I’ve seen many articles forget that section as authors tend to forget that section as they don’t remember that the reader might not have researched the topic as they did. Many authors assume that if you found the article you probably have the background information or at least expect you to seek it out if the article interested you so it was nice to see how Prout added a brief section on the history.

I did enjoy the beginning with the consideration of the manager of the Men’s Hotel, Mike Bush, is on the path to retire and that leaves the status of the Men’s Hotel ambiguous in its continuation as a Men’s Hotel and not torn down to become something else. It really brings home how much this location is as a refuge for men in a time where the economy has increased the cost of living and punishes former criminals despite their possible redemption. I did appreciate the pictures that were sprinkled throughout that paint more of a picture that these spaces aren’t luxurious but they do give a place to stay with affordable prices that can give the chance for someone to get back on their feet especially when the article describes how some of these residents are former criminals and drug users that now have the chance to clean up their act which is helped by giving them a place to stay that treats them like human beings than living in the streets being looked up as something sub-human.

But mostly with the interviews of the tenants we see that these behaviors are really a result of mental illness not quite done by rational choice to do crime and take drugs. Now with such a record it makes it a mix of mental illness as prisons treatment of the mentally ill is poor and causes them to revert back into old ways with the lack of treatment than actually reform and

the criminal record now makes crime the primary way of survival as the record shies away employment. So, for someone like Bob the Men's Hotel is the ONLY place of salvation.

### **“Whereas” by Layli Long Soldier**

This was a fascinating piece that always started with “whereas” and focused on visual metaphors when describing people and their actions. We see here that even the character or author is nitpicky with everyone even themselves when it comes down to talking about the “Apology” that references Native Americans and Pilgrims.

It does show different viewpoints with the narrator and the other people that are talking about the state of American history. We see how the narrator attempts to express disagreement with their statements about the “Apology” as good enough because there is one rather than entirely ignoring the historical issues but the narrator remains silent and unmoving in reaction that creates discomfort for the other speakers. It still plague the narrators mind that despite disagreeing non-verbally they should also been verbal and corrected the softer phrasing they were using in the conversation about the history of Native Americans exploitation. That it was “genocide” not “conflict” that colonizers inflicted upon Native Americans.

We see that the narrator is quite violent about this as they “wished most to kick the legs of that man's chair out from under him” and even describes how the beer would splash that would cause elation for them in response to his statement about the Apology that was lack luster.

The ending paragraphs were a bit confusing to me as a statement about Native Americans is made that is clouded by the transit to the airport in the narrative. It seems it is talking about the culture of Native American's being their own but that we specifically refer to the reserves which as colonizers we make them live on we refer to them as living over *there*, when really it is living



over *here* and everything around us as a result of their race namesake as Native Americans. Yet the irony of being the most native out of all Americans and our value of freedom we contain them and as a community we lack a sense of need for atonement for our ancestor's actions.

### **“Crazy in Love” by Hannah Black**

I enjoyed that beginning paragraph, it really took me off guard until the work revealed itself as regarding schizophrenia. I noted it for our discussion because it is a unique effect that only works once and therefore, I think it is quite brilliant as an introduction that can only throw you off guard on the first read. I also like how Black ends the over-the-top introduction saying, *“That’s not my understanding of what happened, or, That’s not how I remember it.”* It still lends itself to still having that initial story still be possibly true as there wasn't an outright denial as the key word was not “my understanding” or “how I remember it”. But upon learning her brother is schizophrenic we see that these terms are to disarm in a gentle way her brother's memory that isn't a complete and rude shutdown with a “you're wrong”.

So even with the first paragraph and in the others we see a distinct effort being made to not invalidate her brother's ability with his condition overriding reason. Instead we see how she cushions and skirts around the rougher edges of the condition to a degree to keep him safe and calm yet employs fewer gentle phrases when talking to others. We see how she gets a bit harsher with how she wards away people from her brother with the reasoning to keep them both safe, “I told them, ‘Yes, but he's crazy.’ *What is crazy?* People would ask, or, *aren't we all crazy?*, trying to be kind, and I would say, “You'll know it when you see it.” It is here we see how her love is a bit beyond sisterly and into almost needy with how she wards away possible friends or

acquaintances her brother could have with using his condition against him and as an excuse to protect.

### **“Bad TV” Andrea Long Chu**

The introduction of the article is kinda messed up. “One of us would name a male star . . . the other would respond on instinct—first, with the chances of his being outed as a sexual predator . . . . The goal was to pick men who scored high [for possibly being a sexual predator].” I found it interesting how it was sexist with specifically saying they were targeting male stars for this mish mash of spin the bottle and truth or dare. Then have the person judge if they felt these men were or were not at a high risk of being a sexual predator purely based on the person’s judgement made almost on instinct with how brief the time frame is to say what they feel.

Though I feel that is a pretty twisted game to engage in, it does set up for the rest of the article as it engages with the particularly hard subjects that stars are either causing like the sexual predator nature of someone like Harvey Weinstein or those tackled by stars performing through on screen and having the character’s plight ruined by the actor’s actions off screen as Chu describes in her binge of steamed shows as she quotes one scene from the binge, “‘I don’t wanna be trans!’ cried Tambor’s character, in a bitter argument with her estranged sister. ‘I am trans!’ Me neither; me too.” To which Tambor had ruined such a wonderful character that was a figure for the trans community by, as Chu puts it, “a transgender actress sexually harassed by [Tambor] a cisgender actor playing a transgender woman”.

Truly we let stars have too much power as a result of their status rather than choosing our own role models to look up to that are hopefully closer to us than a person on a tv screen. Chu is very right with saying that stars are falling one by one and that TV has too much control in our

lives by taking advantage of its sensational effect on us with visuals made from heavily researched social engineering and psychological mind games.

### **“Citizen” by Claudia Rankine (1)**

With the way that “Citizen” started I was expecting a narrative that was going to feature a woman of color’s experience within 1900s America as it started out using “you” and detailed a girl’s experience with school and mentioned race. I believe there is a sudden transition that is subtle that goes from the memory of the speaker’s time as a little girl with her best friend’s racist commentary to her current drive in the rain that reminds her of conversation she had recently with a man that claims to have hired her as a writer for the sake of diversity not because she was skilled. I really enjoyed this introduction as its subtle transition still involves the same problem of racism, yet the way it is done really makes us, as readers, feel this problem as a constant and nagging point as it pulls us through multiple situations in the speaker’s life that even stretches into between many elements in her life not just age, but relationships both personal like her best friend and professional like her writing being picked up for “diversity sake”.

I did take a course in slavery narratives for a semester, but I have to say this section although brief, really captured the essence of how racism wears away at the lives of people of color. I mean that section that described how their house sitter had the cops called on them by a neighbor who was blatantly racist and even somewhat forgot himself as he used the n-word without considering how she was a woman of color standing there talking to him about this situation. Then the situation where she went to meet the therapist who was defensive and aggressive until she realized that the speaker was there for the appointment, she had the day. You quickly get the feel of the ever-present aspect of racism.

**“Citizen” by Claudia Rankine (2)**

I am amazed at the variety that “Citizen” presents with the perspectives of Serena Williams, Youngman, and its creative direction with Obama’s birth certificate. Initially I was going to write about the listed victims towards the end of the book where each had their own piece of poetry that speaks about their injustice; instead I want to talk about the situation that was presented with Serena Williams as I feel certain aspects although came about from racism have some elements that relate to the rage we can all feel time to time when faced with unfairness. But the level of ridiculousness that Serena Williams faced was on a whole different level. Just to briefly put all of the situations that are presented to really feel the way these wore down Williams: Mariana Alves’ repeated bad calls against Williams (2004), Umpire gives warning at outburst threatening point penalty if violated again (2009), line judges claim Williams stepped on line (2009), Eva Asderaki rules correctly of Serena’s distracting shout that awards point to opponent when ball was clearly unable to be returned (2011).

I think what was the most important about the situation that Williams faced in the 2009 US Open was the quote by tennis official Carol Cox, “You don’t make a call, that can decide a match unless it’s flagrant.” That this is a situation that isn’t just done as there is a higher need to keep the game going than to cop out every little injustice when the people and players are here to compete for the sake of excitement. So, the fact the umpires called out the most minor of faults, which may or may not have happened is a clear use of bias/racism against Williams that is ultimately done to wear her down to this state and for what? I think that Rankine captures the feeling of being beat down and angry best in the line: “Yes, and the body has memory. The physical carriage hauls more than its weight. The body is the threshold across which each

objectionable call passes into consciousness—all the unintimidated, unblinking, and unflappable resilience does not erase the moments lived through, even as we are eternally stupid or everlastingly optimistic, so ready to be inside, among, a part of the games.”

### **“Ghost of” by Diana Khoi Nguyen (1)**

I did enjoy “Ghost of” with how it made use of artistic interpretation with the style that was at times confusing but done in that way to make us as the readers give it some thought than mindlessly reading off lines of text. Yet I think the most brilliant thing about the use of the bizarre structure is that it could not be captured by any other medium than through written word. The way she has text that is written both inside and outside of outlines and the list of names that fades away are used in such a way that works to have a double meaning. We have a visual representation with the cutouts of her brother and the text that accompanies that doesn’t attempt to explain the image places us with in a thought provoking situation where we must face what the artistic/visual meaning is being displayed and what she is trying to communicate through her text with her use of prose and language. It works to gives us a kind of literal version of the written device that is imagery and symbolism in both the forms it can come in-visual and written.

I can’t imagine how this would be replicated within another format with the exception of possibly a movie/video that took the visuals a step higher with special effects or techniques that focused on the gaps Nguyen’s brother created within their family, photos, and the impact it had on Nguyen’s life in general. I guess it might make it more personal seeing her as she is if she was presented on the screen reading her own work. That is the only way I can imagine how this written work could be elevated.

**“Ghost of” by Diana Khoi Nguyen (2)**

Reading the article by Eva Heisler about the background information and history that lead to Diana Khoi Nguyen’s development of her work “Ghost of” was very eye-opening with regards to the impact of the work that Nguyen was presenting. I didn’t realize that the cutouts were quite literal and were done by her brother two years before his suicide. I did piece together that it was suicide and not something sudden within the first few pieces I jumped between, but it was shocking to learn that these cutouts were done by his hand and not done on a digital version that was then incorporated into the work. What an odd thing to do as well, I can only reason that he cut himself out of pictures was done to spare his family in the odd way by making it harder to remember him or his face now that any picture that could retain his likeness was marred. Just knowing that is deeply tragic especially when he did it two years before his death, meaning that he was in a dark place in his mind for a very long time that lead to some quite destructive tendencies that weren’t just towards his body but towards the very tangible memories that preserved him. This even shows that this wasn’t exactly a hidden depression, but one that was known about and one that her brother had struggled with for a considerable amount of time.

Knowing this now makes the way she incorporates this into her poetry gives it more of a meaning. Seeing his photo filled with text is like her trying to replace him with him being made up of text that either describes him or almost personifies him. Then when she has text outside his cut out it evokes that void that was created with his loss that can’t be filled despite how hard Nguyen’s family may try.

**“Indebted” by Lucy Schiller**

I appreciated the insight that Lucy Schiller provided with the industry that is radio. I find it incredible that radio still has so much of an influence still in the digital age, especially with all of the video streaming platforms that have visuals that work in their favor to be more appealing than radio. I do realize that radio is adapting to the digital age by also hosting their recordings in video format as well but I believe that Schiller explains best that the magic of radio is the use of their audio being both clean in sound and clear in the sense that there are no other distractions that can come from visuals. Radio is certainly a platform that captures a person's attention that is solely to the topic at hand, not influenced by the person's dress, figure, or any other visual element that can create bias.

The history lesson of radio's past laws was a nice touch as well to let us know more about the situation that Dave Ramsey was working under or manipulating with bending the rules imposed upon radio like the “Fairness Doctrine”. The doctrine gives a nice overview that radio was designed to be fair and reliable when involving subjects that may be controversial as the doctrine required: “listeners had to be presented a variety of viewpoints about controversial subjects” and “a licensee had to create a ‘detailed demographic outline’ of an area, determine ‘significant community groups,’ perform interviews with leaders of those groups”. Although Schiller did illustrate that this wasn't a perfect system as evident of the lacking voice for the poor and minorities, it shows that there is a clear unfairness in the system that is a result of these laws that can be twisted and shaped into whatever is needed. So, it is no wonder how far Ramsey has come with such lenient laws, but I believe that wouldn't even matter at this point with how much public support he receives gives him considerable influential power that not many would dare oppose him if he was breaking a perfect version of the system.

**“Lessons” by Justin Torres**

I really wasn't sure if those kids had actually taken the bird or not with how much detail was involved it made me think that they did as they “tossed them into a shoebox”. Happy to have discussed it in class to clear up that confusion that was leaning more towards just a metaphor for their scrappy personality and hectic living with multiple young brothers. I liked how they were working together like a tribe or a clan as they chanted “body heat” over and over along with their movements being described as “six snatching hands, six stomping feet; we were brothers, boys, three little kings locked in a feud for more.”

Then that heritage section was interesting for the reasons that we discussed in class that the father kind of gatekept them from being apart of his culture as a Puerto Rican as he called them “Mutts” and even stated that they weren't also a part of their white mother's culture saying, “You ain't white and you ain't Puerto Rican. Watch how a purebred dances, watch how we dance in the ghetto.” I appreciated that even the children had a hard time reading their father's emotion in that response as reflected in their inner statement, “Every word was shouted over the music, so it was hard to tell if he was mad or just making fun.” I was glad to have had a chance to talk about this in class. I thought the point that was brought up about the father's own pride as a purebred hinted almost at a hate towards other races and himself in marrying a non-Puerto Rican. But we do see later on in the third part that there is a tender love for his children that he doesn't show often but it further supports that he has some inner turmoil with himself about race that he appears to want to reject but has these values built in from home as he describes his time with his own father and family in Puerto Rico. It seems that he even had some relationships in



Puerto Rico that could have led to a family there but instead here he was with his white wife and three mixed children.

### **“Mister Rogers’ Enduring Wisdom” by Tom Junod**

I thought the initial hook within the sub-title made for an interesting statement to start this article off, “I first met him 21 years ago, and now our relationship is the subject of a new movie. He’s never been more revered—or more misunderstood.” What really hooked me in about this statement was the point about Mr. Rogers becoming more misunderstood, which seems to have come about after his death. It doesn’t help that many rumors have popped up about Mr. Rogers due to his increased popularity as a kind hearted figure that has lead to wildly imaginative stories with the rise and resurgence of his popularity. For instance I found one of the more searched rumors was that he was a highly accomplished military sniper who used his now iconic red sweater to hide his sleeve tattoos from his time in the military. This was quickly debunked as he never served in the military in any form and was seen plenty of times without the iconic sweater with non-tattooed arms.

Another statement that caught my eye from Junod was the mention of the shooting in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio, “What would Fred Rogers—Mister Rogers—have made of El Paso and Dayton, of mass murder committed to fulfill the dictates of an 8chan manifesto?” I think this is a thoughtful question to consider with Mister Rogers’ mission to be a role model to look up to for both children and adults. Especially as an iconic figure it would be interesting to hear his take on the situation at hand as someone who strived to be a good Samaritan despite all of his experiences and his life where he had risen above America’s segregation, racism, and seen other kinds of violence in his long life.

### **“Punching the Clock” By David Graeber**

I thought it was clever for Graeber to start out with the uselessness of certain jobs and better yet have a personal accounting by a person who can give a first hand narration of this kind of job. Kurt's description of his position as a subcontractor for the German military paints an important picture of how convoluted government/entities have made jobs become with the abundance of useless paperwork and processes for the simplest of tasks like Kurt's delivering of a computer to IT. I mean the description alone takes over six lines to describe in the article.

But the section of this article I liked the most was when it got into the history of human work patterns and how time played a role. Going off of the past the most common form of a work cycle was “intense bursts of energy followed by rest”. That seems to be the most ideal of work cycle forms as it is the most natural to the human body and was performed within our own built-in cycles that evolution has given us. Now we live by artificial measures as revealed within the article as the clocks in the fourteenth century was a pivotal point of workflow change. Now time was far more highly valued in society as it was now a measure element.

Now that time had a tool to become measured by it quickly was used by jobs and people. The article raises a great reason for this was that now “The change was moral as well as technological. One began to speak of spending time than just passing it . . . .” Time now exhibited not just a measured form but now took on a form that was being valued, as our ever-approaching mortality could be measured both in time spent already and time that was approaching. Where in the far past people spent time without much consideration of how it was spent and how much had past to now having a means to stress about time with how much was left in our lives to spend towards something worthwhile or towards getting the most out of life.

**“I Was a Cable Guy, I Saw the Worst of America” by Lauren Hough**

I feel like this article was the most relatable out all of the other articles we have read this semester, simply because it involves trying to make the most out of a miserable job. Reading about the cat hoarder reminded me so much about the time my family owned rabbits especially when Hough talked about “the problem with her cable service was that her cats chewed through the wiring.” Once we had the rabbits we had to put thick plastic cable protectors on all the cords or risk one of the rabbits chewing through it and cutting off the power of either our water heater or the lamps around the house. Still a few casualties happened despite the protectors.

Although I don’t have much job experience in my life I will also never forget the most crazy of customers I have experienced in my own job. That is the part that makes this article so relatable to me. I still not-so fondly remember how a woman lost it on my forgetfulness on telling her that her extra sauce on her pizza was going to be twenty-five cents more than without. I mean she still even remembered my name from our brief phone call where she placed her order, which is pretty insane considering how small of a role a Little Caesars plays to have that moment be memorable enough for her to remember my name. Really made me consider answering with a fake name with how crazy that was and the other customers I still remember.

So, with that experience I can relate to her statement of “the next job that day was the guy whose work order said ‘irate’.” It’s these kinds of lines sprinkled in the article that make me really enjoy it and laugh along as it hits a little close to home with my own experiences and probably like the rest of my peers.

**“Ways of Seeing” by John Berger**

After reading through the first paragraph of the assigned reading of chapter 3 and seeing how it focused wholly on women as women with some regard to their imagery and use in media mediums. It seems that the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter was about children and the use of imagery that related to children through their sometimes childish nature with use of their spirit that can become captured in many forms like paintings. Much emotion is used in this form with the composition having usage of light, dark, and the closeness of objects hinting at relation. Chapter 2 and 4 has examples of this imagery of women with chapter 2 creating a contrast of modern vs classical imagery and chapter 4 having only classical art. Chapter 5 is focused on the concepts of painting with their impact, but more specifically makes comments on the technique of oil paintings with discussion of big artists of the technique. Chapter 6 also has classical art that is used to now highlight race in classical art with an emphasis upon both men and women this time.

But getting back on topic with chapter 3, the discussion is focused on the contrast of male and female presence as it presents itself in society through multiple platforms. The text suggests that men have a power that can be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, or even sexual. Yet unlike a woman's promised power it can be fabricated, pretending to act far more capable. Meanwhile a woman's power/presence is expressed through her “own attitude to herself”.

**“Falling Man” by Tom Junod**

Once again, this is one of the articles chosen for this class that provide an interesting insight to situations that you couldn't find elsewhere unless specifically searching for it. I was surprised to have found that this article was tackling an element of 9/11, with focus on the photography industry as it relates to newspaper photography. With the title “Falling Man” and knowing it was about an image that featured a man on 9/11 jumping from a building makes it really harrowing with the background knowledge now being linked to something tragic. I was expecting something far more lighthearted remembering the movie “Free Solo” having about the same ambiguous title.

So after knowing now the situation and the photo taken it definitely set itself up for ridicule to capture and feature someone in their darkest hour with regard to giving them their rightful respect by not featuring it for the sake of gaining sensationalism for such a featured picture. I think it is put best by the family in the article, “That image is not my father. You don't even know my father. How dare you try telling me how I feel about my father?” Luckily it seems that the photographer had a soul, as regret was expressed that surround the above statement as they realized that their intended statement was never going to come across as they imagined. With that statement being simply, “to say something about the way we all feel . . . but people thought I was trying to say something about the way they feel—that I was trying to *take away* something only they possessed.”