

Centering Blackness Video: See the Stripes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KeOiYkgwR60&t=17s>

Welcome back to your Critical Allies Group. As usual, we will start with a Centering Blackness experience. This month's experience is entitled "See the Stripes" a poem by A. D. Carson.

[VIDEO]

The sight of the most exciting 25 seconds in college football was made possible by profit from the most shameful century in America's history. But come to the campus of Clemson University, and you'd hardly be able to tell it from looking around. Solid orange you'll see. The grounds are perfectly manicured, alluring, and monuments to the greatness that create such institutions stand as reminders from whence we came. And since we gained so much from what we see we smile, proud of the great tradition of which we have the benefit of saying we are now a part. Solid orange we are. And it's easy to buy in. It starts with the song that shakes the Southland. In the sea of solid orange tiger rags that kind of grab you and say, you are now a member of this family. You are now a Clemson Tiger. Wear your orange proudly.

But it's a pretty well-known fact that tigers have stripes and almost as well known is the reason they do, yet Clemson University home of the Tigers doesn't do much acknowledging of those dark marks it knows to be so integral a part of its existence. Solid orange we say at this university that was once a plantation, slavery being the positive good according to Master Calhoun, whose house sits still on a plot atop a hill overlooking the football field. Open seven days a week and I can even enter through the front door. What I cannot do however is depend on the tour guide to give me the whole history of the foundations of my university because for some reason or another, it's uncomfortable for some people to talk about slave owners, supremacists and segregationists, on those terms. Or it's unknown to the individual responsible for the dissemination of that information about this place. But 20 score and many more years ago, our forefathers brought forth on this continent our forefathers and our foremothers, and exploited them for hundreds of years which led to our being conceived in captivity and dedicated to the proposition that history is a matter of telling the story that makes us look best, solid orange, I think. And that forces me to confront my active participation in not only the crime, but the cover up. The whitewashing with orange of the dark parts of the history meant to be instructional lest we repeat it. And I repeatedly walk past the Strom Thurmond Institute of Government and Public Affairs and wonder, was it there that our ancestors were whipped? Because it happened.

Slavery was big business and being black meant you made profits to keep your master in the black. And if the master went into the red, he'd see red, and you likely wear red stripes across your back. And if that is an uncomfortable truth for the institution, so be it. These are the stripes we bear. So, see them. Slavery, sharecropping and convict labor, paved the streets and sidewalks of this high seminary of learning. And earning a degree from here tethers me to the legacy of that and John C. Calhoun, Strom Thurmond, Thomas Green, Clemson and pitchfork Ben Tillman, who with his henchmen killed Black members of a militia, never to be convicted but elected to public office, governor, and to have statues and buildings erected in his honor eventually. The one on this beautiful campus houses the California Honors College and the School of Education. So be it if it's uncomfortable to bear those strings. See them, because it's not uncomfortable to reap the benefits of the labor that went into building the buildings, attending the land, but very much so knowing the buildings in the land are stained with years upon years of the blood, sweat and tears of slaves and sharecroppers, and so-called criminals, who were led to the institution to do the work that needed doing. Solid orange, they say. And I say the tiger cannot survive without its stripes. We cannot ignore the troubling history that brought us to this, our glorious institution, with its memorials and monuments to honorable men and call ourselves a family. And we're damned if we think we're doing ourselves any favors, coloring the history one hue, one you, one me, one he, one she, one them, will be one us until we strive to see those stripes. The tiger cannot survive without them.

The sight of the most exciting 25 seconds in college football, was made possible by profits from the most shame for centuries, and America's history. Those are the stripes we bear and before you decide to wear that orange tee or that painted paw, think for a moment about those stripes. Think of the backs of the slaves. Think about the strips of land, and the sharecroppers tied to it after so-called emancipation. Think of the uniform of that 13-year-old boy, a slave of the state forced to help build the first buildings at this place. Think of the dark matters that matter more than you know. The difference between willing ignorance and active participation, complicit denial and abject perpetuation. Before you think solid orange, think of how ridiculous a solid orange tiger would look. Think of seeing its stripes. Think of being its stripes. And think of how terrible it is to not be seen, to not be acknowledged. Think about never being doomed to repeat and atrocious history and being better because of knowing better and doing better. Because as things are now, we are the tigers, built on a legacy of slavery, sharecropping, and convict labor, by slave owners, supremacists and segregationists. But come to the campus of Clemson University, and you'd hardly be able to tell it from looking around. And it's a shame. We'd be a beautiful tiger if only we could see our stripes.

We've learned a lot in recent months about understanding our history, hard history, as OSU faculty, Dr. Hasan Jeffries terms it. We can imagine that the Ohio State University too, has a storied past related to slavery and racism. America's 200+plus public and land grant universities, which include the Ohio State University, cumulatively receive hundreds of millions of dollars in state and federal funding each year. Charlotte Ammons, an outreach coordinator with the Center for Environmental Farming Systems at North Carolina State University, asserts that seeing public and land grant universities through the lens of racial equity means acknowledging the systemic racism that has powered America's astonishing agricultural productivity and educated a workforce to make that possible. She notes that land grant universities have benefited from historical inequities over time, and that the system left and still leaves, large bands of the population out when it comes to reaping the benefits of the bounty.

Beginning with the institution of slavery, systemic racism continued under the Jim Crow South. The systemic denial of loans, grants and land use to farmers of color, redlining minorities by denying them credit and entree into certain communities, or patented and trademarked plant and animal varieties that shut out all but the biggest and wealthiest farmers from the benefits of higher yields. Over time, these practices have led to higher rates of food insecurity among people of color and households in cities and rural areas alike.

Land grant universities have been essential to the historic and continued strength of the United States. They create and connect people with knowledge that is foundational to economic development. Strong communities and thriving individuals. These universities, including our beloved The Ohio State University, have been a part of the ongoing systemic oppression of black, indigenous, and people of color. It is imperative that we see our stripes and understand our history as we work to build equity, diversity and inclusion within our spheres of influence. We must maintain our commitment to our individual and internal work so that we can develop and sustain the capacity to ensure that we are grounded in knowledge, context, and integrity as we encourage and support our partners pursuit of racial justice.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>