

A Lesson on Whiteness

By Donna Dormeus

On Thursday, February 20th, Winter with the Writers was fortunate enough to be on the receiving end of several timely lessons by Claudia Rankine, award-winning poet, playwright, and professor. Claudia Rankine is author of *Citizen*, a book of poetry that won both the PEN Open Book Award and the PEN Literary Award, the NAACP Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry, and was a finalist for the National Book Award.

Claudia Rankine started off her festival period strong by giving an amazing morning presentation to Rollin's rFla courses in the Galloway room of the new Kathleen W. Rollins entitled The Creative Imagination and Race. She followed this presentation later in the afternoon by giving a seventy-five-minute-long master class entitled The Making of Citizen, where interns and audience members alike were given the opportunity to ask Professor Rankine questions on her process and the creation of her book of poetry, *Citizen*. The Q&A began with a question that had been buzzing in our intern's minds since the very beginning of festival preparation: What do we call *Citizen*? Is it a novel, an art gallery, an essay? Professor Rankine answered this question artfully by referencing her classical training as a poet, stating that she focused on the lyrical nature of the written sentence and that *Citizen* was most prominently a collection of her poetry. That interesting question kicked off a series of thought provoking inquiries into how Professor Rankine created *Citizen*, one of which prompted Claudia Rankine to treat the audience to a short reading of one of the pieces.

Following this mini reading, Claudia Rankine concluded the night with her official book reading to a packed auditorium of Rollins students, faculty, and Winter Park guests, all of whom were excited to hear the poet read her work. In this reading, Claudia Rankine showed a power point of the images in the book and images related to the book while explaining the books goal of revealing systematic and cultural racism in modern American Society.