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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

carrie mae weems, poem, blood, cried, slow, laboratory setting, blues, ford, gaze, racial inferiority, viewers, echo chamber, images, photographs, scientific discovery, freedom, kin, foot soldier, depictions, photography

00:06

I'm Tracy k Smith,

00:08

and this is the slow down.

00:23

Because photography can capture the world as it actually appears. We can sometimes forget that photos aren't always depictions of objective reality. There is always a gaze we viewers are subject to an unseen observer, whose values and blind spots hinder objective truth or render it outright impossible. I'm reminded of the scientific discovery that electrons become self conscious when they're aware of being observed. Even in a laboratory setting, what is seen, is partly a portrait of who is watching. This makes me think, specifically of the 19th and early 20th century photographs used to persuade viewers of the racial inferiority of blacks.

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They were used as propaganda. Now, there's a contemporary black photographer Carrie Mae Weems, who aims to reclaim some of these historic images from the gaze of white supremacy. Her installation from here I saw what happened and I cried, re photographs such images, tents them, and mounts them between sheets of glass etched with phrases like descending the throne, you became a foot soldier and cook today's poem. From here I saw what happened and I cried by Thai freedom Ford, borrows Weems, his title and references her work. It behaves like an echo

chamber, asking us to hear certain terms as central and inescapable. Blood, blues,

02:14

black skin, kin

02:17

reading the poem, I pay attention to what it feels like to register these words again and again. On one level, it's like an assault. But on another I follow a trail, a progression. I watch history happen in fast motion, and I am as moved by what has changed as by what hasn't. From here, I saw what happened. And I cried by tie freedom Ford after Carrie Mae Weems. The blood is red, the blues is red. The Blues is blood. The red is dirt. The dirt is brown. The brown is red. The dirt is blood. The blood is blues. The Blues is brown. The brown is skin. The skin is blood. The blood is kin. The kin is red, the red is blood. The blood is new. The new is skin. The skin is news. The news is brown. The brown is noose, the noose is red. The red is blues, the blues is dirt, the dirt is skin. The skin is blues, the blues is kin, the kin is brown, the brown is blood. The blood is News, the news is black. The Black is new, the new is red, the red is noose, the noose is black, is blues, is brown is red, is blood.

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The slow down is

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