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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

bias, responsible, unchecked, sexual orientation, inform, gloria, claims, guarantee, shocking, carrying, harriet, gloria steinem, attitude, resentments, gender, smoldering, crosshairs, mellon, rights, equal rights

00:05

I'm Tracy K. Smith, and this is the slow down.

00:16

It is shocking to me that the idea of equal rights and protection under the law for all humans, regardless of race, gender, religion, place of origin and sexual orientation is still in practice, a radical idea. It is shocking that every day in this country, people in positions of authority operate on the basis of egregious and unchecked bias. And then again, I'm not at all surprised. This is America. After all, there's hardly a facet of this nation's early history that doesn't feature unchecked bias being leveraged to the advantage of its white male founders. The thing about bias is the way it can become unconscious, automatic. Many people don't realize the degree to which their estimation of another person's character, intentions and innate worth, are informed by their deeply held attitudes toward things like race, gender, faith, and sexual orientation. But fortunately, conversations about bias and discrimination are becoming more and more prevalent. We're getting better at talking about what we have gotten wrong in the past, and how we might work to make things right. As a black woman moving through the world, these ideas are never far from my mind. But I'm thinking about them in particular today, because I recently attended a performance of the play Gloria elife, about the life of feminist Gloria Steinem. At one point, Gloria tells the audience, we don't just live in the patriarchy, the patriarchy lives in us. We all have work to do, if we are to ever free ourselves from external and internal bias. Today's poem is we are not responsible by Harriet Mellon. I think of it as a poignant reminder of what it feels like to be caught in the crosshairs of bias. A citizen of a society that has not yet lived up to the true promise of democracy. We are not responsible by Harriet Mellon. We are not responsible for your lost or stolen relatives. We cannot guarantee your safety if you disobey our instructions. We do not

endorse the causes or claims of people begging for handouts. We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone. Your ticket does not guarantee that we will honor your reservations. In order to facilitate our procedures, please limit your carrying on. Before taking off. Please extinguish all smoldering resentments if you cannot understand English, you will be moved out of the way. In the event of a loss. You'd better look out for yourself. Your insurance was cancelled because we can no longer handle your frightful claims. Our handlers lost your luggage and we are unable to find the key to your legal case. You are detained for interrogation because you fit the profile. You are not presumed to be innocent. If the police have reason to suspect you are carrying a concealed wallet. It's not our fault you were born wearing a gang color. It's not our obligation to inform you of your rights. Step aside, please, while our officer inspects your bad

04:30

attitude,

04:31

you have no rights. We are bound to respect. Please remain calm, or we can't be held responsible for what happens to you. The slowdown is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.