

Variations on a life in bars

High School Youth

Urban Assembly, Bronx, New York

ALL: *Race is a social construct. What?!*

INTRODUCTIONS:

[My name is Ingrid Chung & I have the distinct pleasure of being these young people's English teacher this year as well as serving as their assistant principal.

In music, a variation is a way of organizing a piece of music by taking a theme & repeating it in several different ways. As individuals who have experienced race & racism in a variety of different ways, we have created a project that we are calling *Variations on a Life in Bars* because we all live in prisons we can't see]

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I got bars all around me that I can't see. [Jannine]

[I grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio—the only Asian girl in a white school whose closest friends were the other token minorities that were there. & I operated in that world like my race wasn't a thing to think about even though everyone else who saw us together definitely did]

I got bars all around me that I choose not to see. [George]

[I grew up as a chameleon—or so I thought. In my white suburban high school, I thought that I blended in with the crowd (with a sprinkle of exotic). I did all the things that the other kids were doing. In Taiwan, where my family would spend summers in to see my extended family, I spoke Taiwanese fluently & sweat just as profusely as the others in the humidity. At Taiwanese Camp in Indiana (yes, these things exist), I represented my race & culture like the proud first-generation, firstborn daughter that I was. I was a chameleon—I knew how to blend, lilt my voice in just the right way, & saunter through the crowd as needed.

Little did I know, they called me “Mai-Gwo-Zen” or “Wai-Gwo-Zen” as I walked through the crowds of Kaoshiung—words that mean American or “outsider.” They did the same thing here—I just didn’t know it at the time. To my white friends I was never white enough; to my yellow friends, I was simply white-washed.]

I got bars all around me that I can't help, but see. [Benito]

[As an Asian woman, my voice is largely missing from this conversation on race. To some, I am “basically” white; to others, I am clearly not. & although the conversation on race courses through the country & is so relevant in my life’s work—the work that I go to bed dreaming about & wake up thinking about—I continue to exist as an outlier, a minority, because in this conversation, my voice is presumed to be irrelevant, not important, or worse, non-applicable. & while I often am an outlier in the work that I do because I am neither white nor black nor brown—it doesn’t make my race a non-factor.]

I got bars. So do you. [ALL]

Jannine Presents:

*I've got bars that I'm stuck behind
Because not even in school I'm safe
I'm targeted because of how I look and my complexion
It's like there's danger in my melanin
You judge me on your prejudice instead of getting to know me
But your judgement is very subtle
Almost undetectable
I've got bars because my brothers and sisters are being attacked by our educators
How is it a 3 year old boy has been suspended 5 times?
Oh right, cause he's black
You see young black children are already perceived as criminals
Some people view black boys as older and less innocent than their white peers"
Here are the facts to the truth that I am stating
I won't blame these people however
I blame the privilege they've been living under that's kept them so ignorant
Believing that the difference in their pigment
Is a fine line between who's inferior and superior
I've got bars because I'm seen as a failure before I even begin*

*My chances and opportunities are stripped from me before I even know they exist
How can I succeed if there's no path carved for me?
Now you can say I can create my own
But how can I when you've taken the tools away from me?
I've got bars because my education system hasn't changed in a hundred years
A hundred years ago, it was 1915
Do you really think the system was meant for me?
How can I benefit from a system that wasn't designed for me?*

George Presents:

*We're all different jelly beans inside the same jar/
We're encaged with racism that's why "I GOT BARS"*

*Behind those bars are people just like us/
Us as the colored in which nobody trusts*

*Why is having a diverse group of friends so hard/
Whether if its vanilla, caramel, chocolate "I GOT BARS"*

*Bars as the piece of snack this topic maybe to most/
But the fact that there is still racism is just gross*

*People are born to racism and don't notice the scar/
I don't take a drink of racism but "I GOT BARS"*

*Bars as the place people go to escape their daily problems/
But if race is a social construct why can't we solve them*

*Let's wish that racism ended upon a star/
And lets also wish that you don't forget "I GOT BARS"*

Benito Presents:

*Race is a social construct, But how do we destruct
a construct with the ideas that it brings up?
I got bars all around me,*

*and they constrict the way society is supposed to be.
Race is thing of the mind, a made-up idea that
the people try to justify.
I got bars that they lock us up in,
a meaningless cause, because all they see is skin.
Race is the cause to the problems in society,
which leads to hate and starts to build a notoriety.
Perceptions that a person of color is more mature and aggressive,
but why do we take these misconceptions so excessive?
I got bars and they keep holding me back,
I'm stuck in a prison cell, and my
mind is being hijacked
I got bars that could teach
I got bars that could preach
But I also have bars that could suppress my freedom of speech
I GOT BARS.*

We all got bars around us [Jannine]

NOW WHAT?!? [ALL]