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Black On White: A Found Poem

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In 2007, I asked hundreds of students at traditionally black colleges to help me better understand common social stereotypes of white people in the African-American community.

White people tend to ask a lot of questions, want more than they need, take a lot of vacations because they have more money than most everyone I know. White people get away with stuff I would never try, are unafraid, don’t understand that they can make it in any city they might like to live. White people act like race isn’t an issue anymore, like racism doesn’t exist. White people can trace their ancestors a dozen generations back. White people act extra friendly, smile a lot. White people behave like the modern-day effects of slavery aren’t a good reason for me to be upset right now. White people believe that history is the history of white people as that is what they learned in school. White people talk about spirituality only on Sunday, if at all. White people are good in groups, good at business, good at reaching out to others. If I were to change one thing about white people, it would be this: for them to realize how few nonwhite friends
most of them have, how hard
it is to live in a world where
people see you as a possible criminal,
that they will never find out who they are
by asking questions
about how black people see them
as a group. Or maybe this,
for them to understand that to be black
is to have two sets of eyes,
one looking to see
what your black friends think
of you,
the other fixed
on white people quietly judging you
from the far side of the room.

Todd James Pierce