

The inaugural anthology
from artist collective
POC United

GRAFFITI

Edited by

Pallavi Dhawan
Devi S. Laskar
Tamika Thompson

aunt lute books
San Francisco

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Artistic Director: Shay Brawn
Managing Editor: A.S. Ikeda
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The logo for POC United is a black, splattered, ink-like shape with the text "POC United" written in a white, sans-serif font across its center.

POC United

EDITORS' NOTE

What happens when whiteness is decentralized for writers of color? Where will the work take them when the focus is no longer the struggle, their oppression, or how their characters of color will be received by the white imagination?

To find out, we created POC United, an anthology series that serves as a literary safe space of creative play for writers of color far removed from the white gaze. A place where POC can focus on one another in solidarity. Where we can build together, with works that center neither “whiteness” nor “anti-whiteness.” We joined forces with poet and novelist Devi S. Laskar to showcase original short stories, essays, and poems across all genres. Our inaugural themed collection is *Graffiti*.

We put out a call to writers whose work we admired and told them about what we were trying to do, that we wanted to acknowledge the ways in which writers of color already support one another by welcoming, centering, and cultivating that effort. We expected that the stories would come flooding in, with kick-ass characters and vibrant, graffiti-adorned settings. But, for some, the focus of this collection wasn't easy. Peel back the ongoing fight for civil and/or human rights, remove the need to describe a character using the “othering” language of white supremacy, get rid of the notion of creating a story that must be the “right fit” for a white publication with white editors catering to a white audience, strip the story of over-explainers and translations for

the white reader, and some writers struggled with what to produce, as if the freedom to create a liberated and liberating work was confining.

We had to tell some writers to start again, remind them of how this collection would be different from all of the others. One wanted to write about a racist act that happened in Texas; another wanted to focus on police brutality. The 2016 presidential election was on the minds of many. But we wanted to create a space where the work is drawn by forces other than the interests of the white imagination that so often send writers of color down the path of centering oppression. All of that much-needed work is for a different anthology, we told them. Not this one. Not this time. We want the protagonist who can leap across rooftops without fear. We want a journey rooted in the hero's culture as if her heritage were the only one on the planet. We want a character who shouts, "Mashallah! Mashallah!" without italics, without footnotes, without an explainer in the text that follows. If the reader isn't following, she can look it up. If the reader isn't willing to do that work, this collection is probably not for her. We, both as editors and readers, wanted this anthology to appeal to a heterogeneous audience, so no one reader is likely to connect with all of the works via a path of shared cultural experience. With no explainers, readers are encouraged to connect in ways that don't run through the center of white consciousness.

And, after months of prodding, pushing, gentle reminders, and pulling, we—the editors and contributors—now have a collection that centers POC. We made it. WE made it. We MADE it.

Pallavi Dhawan and Tamika Thompson

Creators, POC United