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Response papers

Week 2      8/29

In “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” Langston Hughes describes his disappointment for a young negro artist that goes by the name of Countee Cullen. Cullen is a promising young negro poet who claims that he wants to be recognized as a poet and not as a negro poet. At first I felt that this meant that Cullen wanted his poetry to be compared to all poets and not just poets with African descent. But as I continued reading I picked up on that Cullen represents the issue of youths in black culture not wanting to be recognized as Negroes. In other words, the young poet would much rather be white. I for one agree to Hughes statement that this urge to be bleached compels black Americans to be more self-hating. There are many causes for this issue which basically stem back to Americans symbolizing beauty and dignity as being White.

What I love about this essay is that it doesn't focus on an age group, but an entire culture. Hughes not only sees this issue in children, but in the parents as well. Hughes states that being white was made to be the color of success because parents try to get their kids to act more... white. how this form of brainwashing makes poets believe that there is nothing to be taken from their culture to write about. But as Hughes explains, “A true black artist will write what is on his or her heart without changing it and thinking about how their work will be received” this

one-line means everything in the case of Hughes' argument. One thing this line tells me is that inspiration can be taken from anywhere. That a real artist can take every little thing about him: race, culture, background; and make something beautiful. Another thing this line tells me is the significance to not let society dictate who you are. That you can write everything about yourself non-paper and will be people who feel you and others who don't

Week 3-4     9/12

"O Black and Unknown Bards," is a commemoration to the anonymous composers of the negro spirituals sung during the times of Slavery. It was during this time that Blacks had their culture and identity ripped away from them. To which blacks began creating a new culture reflecting the strife they were put through and the spirit that kept them going. What I love about this poem is how it highlights the fact that blacks created this culture out of nothing. That the spirituals they created came from people with no lyrical practice or previous knowledge of music. How each song symbolizes an ideal or carried a hidden message showing that blacks always planned for the revolution and the end of slavery.

Johnson opens the poem by posing an unanswerable question "How came your lips to touch the sacred fire? How, in your darkness, did you come to know, the power and beauty of the minstrel's lyre?" admitting his query on how the black slave came up with their music even though they had no prior knowledge. Throughout the poem, he weaves lines from the actual spirituals "Steal Away to Jesus," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Go Down, Moses," and

others--marveling at the ingenuity of the composers, who produced their works without any training and under the worst possible conditions. And it is not merely as artistic successes that Johnson views the songs, but as signs of the spiritual depths of their creators. Being the agnostic that he is, Johnson nevertheless empathizes with the listeners for whom the songs were composed for. This poem recognizes the importance of religion in helping an enslaved people to survive with their spirits intact.

Week 5      9/19

“The Negro Speaks of Rivers” is a collaboration of Langston Hughes’ early writings. The narrator of this story describes himself as something ancient and documents its existence through the well known rivers of the world such as the Congo, the Nile, the Mississippi, etc. there is plenty of wordplay like this throughout the poem. Even though the speaker says he is ancient his tone is comforting yet bold allowing him to come off as a grandparent telling his story to his children.

When the narrator talks about his travels he informs the reader how he saw the birth of civilization and the abolishment of slavery. In these proclamations, he refers to both the Nile in Egypt and the Mississippi in America which is a reference to the birth of civilization in the Nile and the new world while also how both civilizations started with the practice of slavery. But even though in both circumstances started as such both ended with liberation. This gave me an

image of history repeating itself and how freedom is an inevitable outcome to all forms of tyranny.

Like how my own grandfather used to speak, this narrator's story telling Tyler is kind of lyrical as if he was telling his story through song. There's also multiple section in the writing where the narrator refers to himself using "I": "I bathed... I built... I looked... I heard". This ironically doesn't give the size of a single person but the feeling that this story is being told by the collaboration of multiple entities. As if it was being song by a church choir.

Week 6      9/26

The first thought that came to mind while reading "The Life of Olaudah Equiano" was how lucky the narrator was when compared to the lives of slaves like the ones described in other narrations like "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass" the narrator even admits to this in the first paragraph when he says "I consider myself a favorite of heaven, and acknowledge the mercies of providence in every occurrence of my life". I began to wonder what I was supposed to take out of this story, but as I kept reading I came to a far greater and more insightful conclusion about this work.

One of the biggest themes I loved about "The Life of Olaudah Equiano" was the pursuit of discovering one's own identity. This narrative starts off with Equiano describing every aspect of his hometown in Africa down to his role and the chief's son. When Equiano was kidnapped and sold to slavery he ends up losing his name and obtaining multiple names for each

slaveholder. As he works his way into saving enough money to buy his freedom he takes on his original name and pursues his own goals. I found this plotline of having an identity, losing your identity, and rediscovering your identity easy to relate too and humane. Life seemed simple when I was a kid and I identified myself as the member of my family whose job was to get good grades in school (let's just say I was adequate at my job). But while facing the turmoil that come with puberty and social status I lost track in who I was. It was only after graduating and leaving for college that I began to explore who I am. Not only that but I find this to be a plotline many black Americans live through every day.

In Sigmund's "in melancholy and mooning" Freud states that a loss of an object can lead to a person being consumed by that loss. "The ego wants to incorporate this object into itself, and, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it" (587). When enslaved blacks lost their home they became consumed by their identity as African and held on to that they may redefined themselves as something that is both American and African. There is a rising issue of African Americans losing their identity, forgetting where they come from, and fitting into whatever society dictates for them. When Equiano bought his freedom because he had the desire to escape societies grip he took his identity back. He took back his right to decide who he was.

“The incident in the life of a slave girl” daringly displays the conviction a mother holds when it comes to protecting the lives of her children. This book gives an account of Linda Brent, an ex-slave who reveals the special kind of cruel treatment that was inflicted on enslaved women. This novel displays the caring and nurturing side of enslaved mothers. To gift the reader a sense of maternal instinct and the desperate will to protect one's child. This novel shows that black mothers are just as devoted to their child as a white mother. Brent's grandmother for instance had to watch her son get sold at the age of ten. Despite the sadness and rage this event puts on Aunt Martha, she still goes out of her way to open a bakery and raise the money to free her children. The important thing in Aunt Martha's character is that she is not described as a weak victimized woman. Instead she portrayed and a strong willed other who braves through life for the sake of her family. Even when she lost three hundred dollars to when she loaned it to her mistress she still relates the pain and devastation of this to the reader as if they could see it happening to themselves.

There is a scene where Linda laments the birth of her daughter and says "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women". Jacob illustrates this by showing that not only do women endure the brutalities and horrors and enslaved men due, but also the anguish of having their children yanked from their clutches. Previously I talked about how Jacob displayed the bond between mother and child and how sacred their love for each other is. Now we're seeing this bond being destroyed and ridiculed by the by enslaves who only focus on their own profit. Slavery goes so far as to taint the sacred role of a mother by Turning them into breeders that are

forced to do nothing but increase their masters stock. I believe that Jacob wrote her narrative to appeal to the white mothers of the north. To appeal

Week 8      10/10

“the souls of black folks are” a well-versed essay that describes W E B DuBois’ view on race. I love everything about this essay because this is the essay that coined the term double consciences. As a red boned textured American I'd be lying if I didn't wonder where I belonged in the American social system. Chapter I lays out an "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”. Like Dubois said I've also notice what he described as the veil. I've wondered what kind of jobs I'll be expected to take, if the new political policies are being made to help me or to be against me, and if I have the right social connections to help get me a high paying job. I've wondered what kind of people I'm comfortable hanging, but mostly I wonder who's comfortable hanging with me.

Later, in the chapter DuBois argues against booker T Washington’s idea of focusing solely on industrial education. I for one lean more towards Dubois opinion that an end to segregation had to be fought for immediately.

In Chapter XIV, "The Sorrow Songs", Du Bois heralds the "melody of the slave songs", or the negro spirituals, as the "articulate message of the slave to the world." They are the music, he contends, not of the joyous black slave, as a good many whites had misread them, but "of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways." [7] For Du Bois, the sorrow songs represented a black folk culture—with its origins in slavery—unadulterated by the civilizing impulses of a northern black church, increasingly obsessed with respectability and with Western aesthetic criteria. [8] Rather than vestiges of a backward time that should be purged from black repertoires and isolated from what Alain Locke called the "modernization of the negro" (coincident, for Locke, with urbanization), negro spirituals are—for Du Bois—where the souls of black folk past and present are found.

Du Bois passionately advocated for the preservation of the spiritual, along with Antonín Dvořák and contemporary black aestheticians, including Harry Burleigh, Robert Nathaniel Dett, Alain Locke and Zora Neale Hurston. [9] It is in the retrieval of black cultural folkways—particularly "The Sorrow Songs"—that one of the major complications of Du Boise's project and, later, the Harlem Renaissance (where Hurston and Locke [10] debut their own retrievals) surfaces. For Du Boise's contention that the sorrow songs contain a negative excess, and element Yolanda Pierce identifies as the "soul" of the sorrow songs. [11] The mappings of sound and signs that make up the languages of the white Western culture would prove insufficient to many black literary critics of the 1920s and beyond, and the debates over the abilities to retrieve and preserve black

folkways find their roots in Du Bois's treatment of the sorrow songs and in his call for their rescue.

Week 9      10/17

I always doubted Du Bois's belief in the talented tenth. What did he mean by that? Did he believe that a tenth of the black community held talent? And what about the other ninety percent? Were they just stepping stones? Questions like these flooded through my head as I read this essay and each one of them eventually got answered. I came to understand from Du Bois that with the current mindset of the American system during his time getting ten percent of African youths into a proper school was the reasonable choice. It was certainly better than zero percent. He also planned that the top youth would probe the potential held in the black community and reveal their true worth. Truly they would be the one to lead the nation into a non-segregated country.

Du Bois claims "to attempt to establish any sort of a system of common and industrial school training, without first providing for the higher training of the very best teachers, is simply throwing your money at the winds." Du Bois hated the idea of segregation and the separate but equal was not separate but equal. Du Bois's vision of the proper school system was one of the ideas that led to an equal school life we have today.

It is because of the noise vision that I take his side more than Booker T. Washington's idea to take on the jobs white people did not want or know. This kind of educational system wouldn't improve the lives of blacks in the long run. It would teach youths how to fix a roof, but not how to

fix a country. “The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the best of this race that they may guide the mass away from the contamination and death of the worst, in their own and other races” (33).

Contrary to popular belief, Du Bois is not opposed to technical or industrial schools. He argues that there must be a system of education in place for African Americans in the same way there is a system for white Americans. This must include both technical and/or industrial schools, classic educational schools, and schools of higher education capable of training teachers for all. This is counter to the belief held by Booker T. Washington, who argued the African American community should focus on industrial training. Du Bois’ program of higher education, on the other hand, seeks to promote “intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is and of the relation of men to it” (33-4)

Week 12      11/7

I loved how sojourner truth used the hypocrisy of chivalry in America to address the inequalities that women and blacks have faced. Sojourner used powerful rhetoric to deliver this message so well that I can feel her energy and cries as if I was listening to her speak directly. I related to her whenever she drew on one of her personal experiences to draw an emotional response from the audience. I admire her use of biblical references. I love how this lady is even more rhetorical and

sarcastic then the snarkiest teens. It's like using the white Americans words against them.

Sojourner's speech connects with me because she made it so.

In Sojourner's speech she addresses the crowd quotes "women need to be helped into carriages, lifted over ditches, and have the best place everywhere" from how white men say they should treat women. She then refutes this statement by pointing out how she was never given this treatment even though she is a woman. "Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me the best place!". In the telling of this speech Sojourner proves her femininity by exposing her breast. A drastic but admirable way to prove her point that she is a woman and deserves to be treated as such

Week 13      11/14

"Our Nig" is the perfect fusion of a slave narrative and a sentimental novel. It comprises the synthetic mindset of black American women. Frado, our tragic sentimental heroine, is poor, parentless, friendless, and abused, her life is basically the opening of a Disney movie. When faced with these many trials Frado has to rely on her strength of character to survive a dark age.

But honestly this story isn't so much about Frado as it is about the Belmonts treatment of her. The Belmont family can be split into who hates Frado and who cares for her. Frado was gracefully taken in by Mr. Bellmont, the seemingly kind patriarch of the family. Mrs. Bellmont on the other hand is a cruel disturbed woman who beats Frado on the daily. The Belmont sons love and try to defend Frado from their mother's cruelty. James even buys her a dog to comfort her. Their

sister Mary on the other hand hates frado enough to throw knives at her. What this family represents is the state of the white nation in the eighteen hundred where the community was split between white people who hated blacks and white people who accepted blacks as people, but wasn't doing anything to stop the cruelties being done on their behalf.

Week 14      11/21

“The autobiography of an ex-colored man mostly deals with the theme of passing. During the turn of a century any man with a drip of African American blood in him was considered colored. With that in Maine many people with African descent went out of their way to hide their ancestry. This was also done unintentionally in the case a person grew up with their African genes diluted by their other ethnic heritage. The narrator of this story e,oldies both of these practices at some point in his life. Still, as he wrestles with his identity the narrator IN. The end decides to take on a white identity and suppress the other half. But in doing so the narrator ends up destroying any chance of closure in who he is or self awareness. In class we talk a lot about double consciences and realizing that one can be split with their American and African half, but what about coming to terms with that?

For that question the narrator gives us smiley. A we'll dressed clean cut kid who's so black he's purple. Despite this he still gains respect from his peers and grows up to become a professor. When you compare smiley to the narrator you can pick up on that there's more benefit to accepting who you are then denying the traits you don't like. Honestly, I still believe passing is

still, practiced today as you get a lot of African Americans bragging about how they're one eighth Cherokee.

The narrator goes on to categorize African Americans into three different classes. The bottom class are described as bitter and lack the motivation to better themselves. The domestic class found a part as servants of the whites and live their lives as such. Finally the educated class fight for equality. While the narrator looks down on the former class choices he admires the ladder to the point we're he regrets not accepting that part of himself.

Week 15      11/28

“Their eyes were watching g God” is celebrated for its unique use of language and mastery of the rural southern dialect. Throughout the novel she utilizes an interesting narrative structure splitting the high literary presentation of the story country jargon. This emphasis on language plays on the theme that a person's voice has power. For instance the scene where Jody stifles Janie's speech and prevents her from talking after he is elected mayor symbolizes the loss of power in the marriage. As does the scene we're Janie speaks up to Jody and regains her power.

Having found her voice Janie begins interacting with others, enters a somewhat healthy marriage, and obtains a swagger that tells others “I don't care what you say”. Hurston places great emphasis on the control of language as the source of identity and empowerment.

After Janie discovers her ability to define herself by her speech interactions with others, she learns that silence too can be a source of empowerment; having found her voice, she learns to control it. Similarly, the narrator is silent in conspicuous places, neither revealing why Janie isn't

upset with Tea Cake's beating nor disclosing her words at the trial. In terms of both the form of the novel and its thematic content, Hurston places great emphasis on the control of language as the source of identity and empowerment.

Week 16      12/04

"Sweat" is a novel by Zora Neale Hurston that tell the story of Delia Jones, a hardworking wash woman with a heart of gold. Like in most of Zora Neal Hurston stories Delia is married to a cruel violent man who is known to sleep around with many of the women in town. The setting of this story takes place in a small town in Florida where women's rights still is non-existent.

This story addresses the type of unrealistic domestic life style where one of the partners is a leach on the other. Since the start of this story Sykes has went out of his way to be a terror on his wife. He stole Delia's horse. Kicks her laundry around, and even brings a poisonous snake into the house. Delia gets fed up with this behavior and chases Sykes out with a skillet. Instead of being scared Sykes is "a little awed by this new Delia" (25). I love this moment because it shows that when a woman gets fed up with her husband's nonsense she will take action against him. Karma comes in an even better form when Sykes dies from the snake he used to harass his wife.

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