

African American Literature: Unit 5—Lesson 2

Announcements

- ❖ Unit Assignment: “Black & Blue Journey to Harlem” (*revisit parameters & due dates on Google Classroom*)
- ❖ READINGS
 - Brown’s “Southern Road” <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/southern-road>
- ❖ Our Osher Database—Historical Cartographic Documents (*navigate to on Classroom on big screen and discuss*)
 - Maps, posters & broadsides, letters, census records, battle plans etc.
- ❖ The Mapping Discussion Question Assignment
 - Be sure to prep your Discussion Question; the first two happen next class

REVIEW: Fred Moten’s principles *In the Break* (from Unit 4) based on Aunt Hester’s scream

Aunt Hester’s ordeal: the paradoxical power of the black mind and its voice.

- ❖ The white man thought that by stripping her, he was diminishing her.
 - But when you take away a person’s social attachments and refinements, her traditions and her cultural accessories, and strip away and strip away, you’ve taken away the stuff, but you’ve left a naked, undiluted, powerful image of humanness.
- ❖ The slave master must’ve sensed that she had more power once stripped, and he attacked the flesh itself.
 - But all that did was soak his whip, his arm and hand, him, his land, his whole damn nation in her raw humanness, and fill the air her raw human scream.

DISCUSS Parallels between Aunt Hester & Spirituals

- ❖ the simple musical structure of the Spiritual and the stripped-down religious practice left room for the raw human emotion to wail and dance and become something more.

DISCUSS the Blues evolution. In the Jim Crow era, spirituals couldn’t stay the same as a vibrant black culture developed under segregation. There were things that the black voice needed to say and church wasn’t the place to say them. The spiritual didn’t fit in the Juke Joint.

Spirituals→the blues.

- ❖ Call-and-response openness detectable in the lines.
- ❖ The lyrics are still simple.
- ❖ The music is still structurally simple. (most common is 12-bar blues)
- ❖ All the room and the simplicity encourage self-expression.
- ❖ Differences.
 - slow swing beat
 - content secular instead of religious

- Call-and-response replaced with simple repetitive structure by soloist: A A² B— yet the soloist will vary the two A lines creatively
- Self-expression is featured and elevated, making creative improvisation a hallmark of black music

DEMONSTRATE the Blues

They gave me no books, and they took away my words

They won't let me have no books, and they took all my words

But I still got my voice, and it damn sure gonna be heard.

EXERCISE: Find something that would typically be a defeat. Write an A-A-B blues poem, with the two A lines varying some for expressiveness, and with the B line flipping the meaning in some ironic way, "Laughing to keep from crying."

DISCUSS Jazz developing from Blues improvisation

- ❖ Blues made from Fragments:
 - bits of broken cultures, broken bodies and families, homemade and reclaimed broken instruments
 - woven together by the raw humanness of the former slave's voice
 - the acts of reclamation and recombination → powerful creativity and transformation
- ❖ Black music was born from the "break"
- ❖ Jazz takes the power fully back
 - Instead of taking whatever fragments dominant society broke and gave them
 - The Jazz artist proactively breaks musical (and cultural) norms and forms
 - Highly divergent from the more "controlled" classical musical traditions of Europe
 - But rivaling the greatest Western composers in virtuosity

Work Cited

Moten, Fred. "Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester's Scream." *In the Break: the Aesthetics of The Black Radical Tradition*. University of Minnesota Press. April 9, 2003. pp. 1-24.