



Handout 1 - Class Readings

Selections from Alain Locke, "Enter The New Negro"

Hope rests in the revaluation by white and black alike of the Negro in terms of his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, past and prospective. It must be increasingly recognized that the Negro has already made very substantial contributions, not only in his folk-art, music especially, which has always found appreciation, but in larger, though humbler and less acknowledged ways. . .The South has unconsciously absorbed the gift of his folk-temperament.

A second crop of the Negro's gifts promises still more largely. He now becomes a conscious contributor and lays aside the status of a beneficiary and ward for that of a collaborator and participant in American civilization. The great social gain in this is the releasing of our talented group from the arid fields of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression.

And certainly, if in our lifetime the Negro should not be able to celebrate his full initiation into American democracy, he can at least, on the warrant of these things, celebrate the attainment of a significant and satisfying new phase of group development, and with it a spiritual Coming of Age.

Langston Hughes, "The South"

The South
The lazy, laughing South
With blood on its mouth.
The sunny-faced South,
Beast-strong,
Idiot-brained.
The child-minded South
Scratching in the dead fire's ashes
For a Negro's bones.
Cotton and the moon,
Warmth, earth, warmth,
The sky, the sun, the stars,
The magnolia-scented South.
Beautiful, like a woman,
Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,
Passionate, cruel,
Honey-lipped, syphilitic—
That is the South.
And I, who am black, would love her
But she spits in my face.
And I, who am black,
Would give her many rare gifts
But she turns her back upon me.
So now I seek the North—
The cold-faced North,
For she, they say,
Is a kinder mistress,
And in her house my children
May escape the spell of the South.

Langston Hughes, "Theme for English B"

The instructor said,

Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you—
Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it's that simple?
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.
I went to school there, then Durham, then here
to this college on the hill above Harlem.
I am the only colored student in my class.
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:
hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page.
(I hear New York, too.) Me—who?
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach.
I guess being colored doesn't make me not like
the same things other folks like who are other races.
So will my page be colored that I write?

Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
You are white—
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
That's American.
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
But we are, that's true!
As I learn from you,
I guess you learn from me—
although you're older—and white—
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.



Langston Hughes, Letter to Carl Van Vechten, June 11, 1927

Dear Carl,

Last night at a revival I heard what was to me a brand new train song with this refrain:

“We’s bound fo’ de
Heavenly depot,
“Where de angel
Porter wait.”

It’s the first time I’d ever heard angels referred to as Red Caps!

Beale Street is not what it used to be according to its present inhabitants. But it’s still full of Blues coming out of alleys and doorways. Yesterday I spent the afternoon in a barrel house at 4th and Beale where three musicians, all of whom claimed to have been with Handy, played all kinds of Blues until they were overcome with gin. And the girl who won the amateur contest at the vaudeville show last night sang a Flood Blues something like Bessie’s on the record.

“The National Grand United Order of Wise Men and Women of the World” meets nightly just across the street in front of my windows, over the Yellow Pine Café. The “P.Wee Saloon” is just down the block.

Tomorrow I’m going to Vicksburg, Miss. and the flood region, then on to New Orleans. My address there for mail will be

3444 Magnolia St.,
c/o Mrs. Jackson

“Ain’t gonna sing it no mo”

Langston



Langston Hughes, Po' Boy Blues

When I was home, de sunshine seemed like gold.
When I was home, de sunshine seemed like gold.
Since I come up North, de whole damn world's turned cold.

I was a good boy, never done no wrong.
Yes, I was a good boy, never done no wrong,
But this world is weary, an' de road is hard an' long.

I fell in love with a gal I thought was kind.
Fell in love with a gal I thought was kind.
She made me lose ma money, an' almost lose ma mind.

Weary, weary,, weary early in de morn.
Weary, weary, early, early in de morn.
I's so weary, I wish I'd never been born.

Robert Johnson, "Love in Vain Blues"

I followed her to the station, with a suitcase in my hand,
And I followed her to the station, with a suitcase in my hand,
Well, it's hard to tell, it's hard to tell, when all your love's in vain,

When the train rolled up to the station, I looked her in the eye,
When the train rolled up to the station, and I looked her in the eye,
Well, I was lonesome, I felt so lonesome, and I could not help but cry,

When the train, it left the station, with two lights on behind,
When the train, it left the station, with two lights on behind,
Well, the blue light was my blues, and the red light was my mind,

All my love's in vain, hoo-hoo, ooh, Willie Mae.,
Oh oh hey, hoo, Willie Mae
Hoo-hoo, ooh, eeh, oh woe, all my love's in vain.

Langston Hughes, "Weary Blues"

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
I heard a Negro play.

Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light

He did a lazy sway . . .

He did a lazy sway . . .

To the tune o' those Weary Blues.

With his ebony hands on each ivory key
He made that poor piano moan with melody.

O Blues!

Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.

Sweet Blues!

Coming from a black man's soul.

O Blues!

In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—

"Ain't got nobody in all this world,

Ain't got nobody but ma self.

I's gwine to quit ma frownin'

And put ma troubles on the shelf."

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.
He played a few chords then he sang some more—

"I got the Weary Blues

And I can't be satisfied.

Got the Weary Blues

And can't be satisfied—

I ain't happy no mo'

And I wish that I had died."

And far into the night he crooned that tune.

The stars went out and so did the moon.

The singer stopped playing and went to bed

While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.

He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.