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Honors Project

From the Harlem Renaissance to Trump's America

General Description:

From the book jacket of *How to be an Antiracist*, Dr. Ibram X. Kendi explains "the only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it- and then dismantle it." For my project, I will be analyzing poems from the time period of the Harlem Renaissance written about racism and comparing them to Trump's America. Additionally, I will be reading sections of Kendi's book.

I hope to further my own understanding of racism and how to be an antiracist. This topic has impacted America so greatly, and I want to be more educated on the topic. One of the reasons I want to take this on is that I want to be a better ally to the Black community and to other people of color.

Notes:

Incident

Once riding in old Baltimore,
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
I saw a Baltimorean
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,
And he was no whit bigger,
And so I smiled, but he poked out
His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."

I saw the whole of Baltimore
From May until December;
Of all the things that happened there
That's all that I remember.

- Recounting an incident where a young white boy yelled a racist slur to a black boy around the same age we can assume.
- Can see the development of the young boy's emotions = "heart-filled with glee" to having this incident take over his entire memory, "that's all that I remember"
- Baltimore, Maryland: many incidents involving racism in Baltimore
- The poem rhymes and yet, Cullen is describing and writing about something very serious.

Harlem

By Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

- Almost every line has a simile
- If a dream is deferred does it come up on your skin then fester away
- "Stink like rotten meat" = stink
- shows what you feel/happens when your dream is deferred
- "Maybe it just sags" = your dream being deferred is bringing you down; weighs on you.
- Relate to a lot of situations-a universal poem
 - Like having your dream taken away by something out of your control
- Title "Harlem"-- there are still inequities in Harlem

We Real Cool

By Gwendolyn Brooks

The Pool Players

Seven at the Golden Shovel.

We real cool. We
Left school. We
Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We
Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We
Jazz June. We
Die soon.

- Begins the poem as if it will be a fun, light-hearted poem like the title “We Real Cool”
- Turns quickly, “die soon”
- Alliteration, assonance (repetition of vowel sounds)
- Repetition of the word “we”
- “Sing” relates to how Black people’s voices have never been fully heard
- “We Thin gin” and “We Lurk late” leads to “We Die soon”
- Relates to Black people not knowing when their lives are in danger

Chapter 3 of “How to be an Antiracist” quotes/notes:

Dr. Kendi relates back to when he toured a good school, the majority being black students and white teachers. He asked the first black teacher he saw “are you the only Black teacher,” she responded with, “yes.” After reading about Black leaders with his dad, Dr. Kendi began to discover the long history of inequality for Black Americans; it “brought to life the kind of racial consciousness for the first time” (37).

He then relates his experiences as a child to now. He still identifies as black, because society, policies, ideas, history, and different cultures have “rendered race and made it matter”(37). Dr. Kendi is also a close ally to all and has and still is working to equate and empower differences of all kinds.

- ❖ “Race: a power construct of collect or merged difference that lives socially”(35)
- ❖ “At seven years old, I began to feel the encroaching fog of racism overtaking my dark body, It felt big, bigger than me, bigger than my parents or anything in my world, and

- threatening, What a powerful construction race is--powerful enough to consume us.”(37)
- ❖ “It is a racial crime to look like yourself or empower yourself if you are not White.”
 - ❖ “Race creates new forms of power: the power to categorize and judge, elevate and downgrade, include and exclude”(38)
 - ❖ “Powerful economic, political, and cultural self-interest--the primitive accumulation of capital in the case of royal Portugal and subsequent slave traders--had been behind racist policies” (43)

Final Reflection:

After having continued my Honors Project from Trimester 2, I have furthered my understanding of being an antiracist and educating myself. From “If We Must Die” by Claude McKay to “The Hill We Climb” by Amanda Gorman, there is a recurring concept of how money and power have crafted racial inequality. Like Dr. Ibram X. Kendi wrote, “Race [is] a power construct of collected or merged difference that lives socially”(35). Since long ago, the root problem has always been self-interest. “Powerful economic, political, and cultural self-interest--the primitive accumulation of capital in the case of royal Portugal and subsequent slave traders--has been behind racist policies” (43). White men created the slave trade for economic profit and power. Prince Henry was the first. The name Henry comes from Prince Henry the Navigator, and he was “the first character in the history of racist power”(39). After learning the history behind his middle name, Dr.Kendi changed it to Xolani, meaning peace. The very thing Prince Henry’s slave traders took away from millions of people.

Besides reading Dr. Ibram X. Kendi’s book, “How to be an AntiRacist,” I have read the poems "Harlem" by Langston Hughes, "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks, and "Incident" by Countee Cullen. Each has a similar theme: race impacts one’s dream and lifestyle because, in many people’s eyes, it is a racial crime to look like yourself or empower yourself if you are not White. “We Real Cool” begins as a light-hearted poem, then progresses to “We Thin gin,” “We Lurk late,” and “We Die soon.” The word “we” is repeated throughout the poem restating that Black people do not know when their lives are in danger. The same progression is seen in “Incident.” She is recounting an incident where a young white boy yelled a racist slur at a black boy around the same age the reader can assume. The young boy’s emotions develop from “heart filled with glee” to having this incident take over his entire memory,”that's all that I remember.”

However in “Harlem,” almost every line refers to a dream and how if a dream is deferred it come up on your skin then “fester” away. This poem is more universal than the last because it is as if one’s dream was taken away by something beyond one’s control. The title in itself is also explaining how this “dream” is taken from people everywhere, but specifically in “Harlem” because of the inequalities out of anyone’s control.

Final Poster:

From the Harlem Renaissance to Trump’s America

Definitions:

Racist: One who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea.

Antiracist: One who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea.

Racist Policy: any measure that produces or sustains racial inequality between racial groups.

Antiracist Policy: any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups.

Assimilationist : One who is expressing the racist idea that a racial group is culturally or behaviorally inferior and is supporting cultural or behavioral enrichment programs to develop that racial group.

Segregationist: One who is expressing the racist ideas that a permanently inferior racial group can never be developed and is supporting policy that segregates away that racial group.

Race: A power construct of collected or merged difference that lives socially.

Do these definitions apply to the past or present, is a question I ask myself? Each definition does face the inequalities the Black community has and does face everyday. How far has America truly come from the Harlem Renaissance? Read my Final Reflection where I answer this question.

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