

Abelardo Llamas
Professor Helman
Cultures and Traditions
April 19, 2007

“Ethnic Notions” Discussion
March 28, 2007

Points Discussed:

- “The Harlem Dancer”
 - “I Too”
 - The way children were portrayed (eaten by alligators)
 - “Rivers”
 - Images
- 1) Discussion opened up with “The Harlem dancer”. The first question was “what was the poet trying to say in the last lines?” We discussed that prostitution seems to look good by the way the lady portrays it, however, he says that prostitution is, obviously, bad. A question that arose from this was “why didn’t he write more if this was meant to be an anti-prostitution poem?” He could have written more so that we got the message that prostitution is indeed bad despite by how “good” it may seem to be. He did show this though by pointing out that there is nothing to be proud about in being a prostitute by showing the prostitute was merely feigning her happiness for business’ sake. The overall message of this poem was to not settle for a mediocre job.
 - 2) Next, the poem “I too” was discussed. A message discussed is that they will succeed no matter what and that they are always growing stronger. We also discussed that the poet builds a common ground with the reader by using “Americanness”. The poet also seems to be prophesizing.
 - 3) We next discussed the poem “Mother to son”. We said that the main message in this poem is to remember your roots and heritage. To do that the poet says that you should remember your struggle and how you got to where you are. This will help you to always remember your roots and heritage. We also said that this should be a life lesson for everyone and not just blacks. Also, we felt that the poem talked about the importance of having dignity. There was a strong portrayal of the slave masters. Slave holders (white men) are portrayed as wild dogs, while slaves (blacks) are portrayed as intelligent. This is image opposes the general image that’s often held by whites. This is different from “The Harlem Dancer” because there is a message to rise up as opposed to a passive and sympathetic view. This is a sonnet, but it is not done in the formal sonnet matter. By doing this the poet is trying to show intelligence, for poets do everything purposely and everything has an intention. By showing this he shows that he knows what he is doing and thereby showing great intelligence.

- 4) “Rivers” was next on the agenda that we discussed. We discussed the idea that the poet said in that all blacks come from the same backgrounds and so they are united by that. This is essential for their lives, to be united. This poem didn’t seem like there was a lot of thought put into it so we didn’t feel like there was a whole lot of deeper meaning that we could pull out of the poem.
- 5) We then moved on from the poems to the movie that we watched. We first talked about the images of fear that the movie presented and from there we moved on in our discussion to the quote that ‘black children are like “little fury animals.”’ To demonstrate this we get the image of the alligator pursuing the children. A question that arose from this is “why direct all this towards children?” We answered this by saying children are our future and so have a very powerful impact and eventual influence on the world.
- 6) The last thing that we discussed was the images that we looked at for class. The first image that we noted as very powerful was the image of the black Jesus. Jesus is typically portrayed by Europeans as well... white. To have Him portrayed as black is very powerful. It serves to show that Christianity is not just a white religion anymore. It has been fully accepted by blacks and the suffering of Jesus represents the plight of the blacks. After this image we talked about the image with tombstones. In the image we talked about how everyone looks depressed. They all have their heads down and this is to show that Harlem wasn’t the answer that the black needed and were looking for. Blacks in this painting are portrayed as still being kept down so from this we can deduce that Harlem wasn’t the only answer for them.