

Summary of NCL Diversity and Inclusion Book Club from June 2021

Book Club

1. **White Fragility – Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism by Robin DiAngelo**

This book was discussed at the NCL Diversity and Inclusion Book & Film Club from December 2020 – May 2021 and has been summarised. [Summary of NCL Diversity and Inclusion Book & Film Club 25.05.21.docx](#)

2. **“Your Silence will Not Protect You” by Audre Lorde**

Born in New York in 1934, Audre is known as the 'black lesbian mother warrior poet'. She worked as a librarian for many years before she published her first volume of poetry, *First Cities*, in 1968. Audre's work covered everything from civil rights (*The Black Unicorn*) and sexuality to her own battle with breast cancer. Audre dedicated both her life and creative talent to confronting and addressing injustices of racism, sexism, and homophobia. Almost three decades after her death, she continues to be rightly celebrated for her artistry and civil rights activism.

Your silence will not protect contains the essay:

The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House:

The author introduces this essay by stating that she agreed to partake in a New York University Institute for the Humanities Conference in 1978 to comment on papers “dealing with the role of difference within the lives of american women: difference of race, sexuality, class, and age. The absence of these considerations weakens any feminist discussion of the personal and the political.” The author also discusses the following:

- “What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable.”
- “For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered. It is this real connection which is so feared by a patriarchal world. Only within a patriarchal structure is maternity the only social power open to women.”
- “Difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic.” “difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged.”
- “Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference – those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older – know that *survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and

seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.* They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support."

- "Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of women of colour to educate white women – in the face of tremendous resistance – as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought."
- "Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and time. I urge each one of us to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices."

There was a discussion about this essay where it was stated that the Author was ahead of her time regarding intersectionality and why you cannot talk about these issues in isolation. It was felt that the Author used a direct approach to the subjects she discussed.

The following essays were suggested for the July 2021 book club:

- *Man Child: A Black Lesbian's Feminist Response.*
- *The Uses of Anger: Responding to Racism.*

There was also a suggested to discuss some of the Author's poetry as well.

Man Child: A Black Lesbian's Feminist Response

This article is based on the author describing bringing up both her son and daughter and the history that they have shared:

- "All our children are outriders for a queendom not yet assured."
- "the sons of lesbians have to make their own definitions of self as men. This is both power and vulnerability. The sons of lesbians have the advantage of our blueprints for survival, but they must take what we know and transpose it into their own maleness."
- "Raising Black Children in – female and male – in the mouth of a racist, sexist, suicidal dragon is perilous and chancy."
- "I wish to raise a Black man who will recognise that the legitimate objects of his hostility are not women, but the particulars of a structure that programmes him to fear and despise women as well as his own Black self."
- "The strongest lesson I can teach my son is the same lesson I teach my daughter: how to be who he wishes to be for himself. And the best way I can do this is to be who I am and hope that he will learn from this not how to be me, which is not possible, but how to be himself. And this means how to move to that voice from within himself, rather than to those raucous, persuasive, or threatening voices from outside, pressuring him to be what the world wants him to be."
- "Frequently, when speaking with men and white women, I am reminded of how difficult and time-consuming it is to have to reinvent the pencil every time you want to send a message." – the facilitator emphasised the poignancy of this image.

The Uses of Anger: Responding to Racism

- “Women responding to racism means women responding to anger; the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal and co-option.”
- “Guilt and defensiveness are bricks in a wall against which we all flounder; they serve none of our futures.”
- “Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change. And when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile or feel good. I am speaking of a basic and radical alteration in those assumptions underlining our lives.”
- “But anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies.”
- “We are not here as women examining racism in a political and social vacuum. We operate in the teeth of a system for which racism and sexism are primary, established, and necessary props of profit.”
- “Mainstream communication does not want women, particularly white women, responding to racism. It wants racism to be accepted as an immutable given in the fabric of your existence, like evening time or the common cold.”
- “Anger is an appropriate reaction to racist attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change.”
- “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.”

Poem

For Each of You by Audre Lorde

“Be who you are and will be
learn to cherish
that boisterous Black Angel that drives you
up one day and down another
protecting the place where your power rises
running like hot blood
from the same source
as your pain

When you are hungry
learn to eat
whatever sustains you
until morning
but do not be misled by details
simply because you live them.

Do not let your head deny
your hands
any memory of what passes through them
nor your eyes
nor your heart
everything can be used
except what is wasteful
(you will need
to remember this when you are accused of destruction.)
Even when they are dangerous
Examine the heart of those machines you hate
before you discard them
and never mourn the lack of their power
lest you be condemned
to relive them
If you do not learn to hate
you will never be lonely
enough
to love easily
nor will you always be brave
although it does not grow any easier

Do not pretend to convenient beliefs
even when they are righteous
you will never be able to defend your city
while shouting.

Remember our sun
is not the most noteworthy star
only the nearest.

Respect whatever pain you bring back
from your dreaming
but do not look for new gods
in the sea
nor in any part of a rainbow
Each time you love
love as deeply
as if it were
forever
only nothing is
eternal.

Speak proudly to your children
Where ever you may find them
tell them
you are the offspring of slaves
and your mother was
a princess
in darkness.”

There was a discussion about the poem where it was felt that it was written by someone who went through a very different life journey - the author did not receive love as a child, to being in love and then not being loved – you are able to sense this experience through the author’s writing.

The author immediately switches from experience to the metaphysical sun analogy whereby the concept of time is introduced – the end of sunlight brings about darkness – looking at the continual struggle as a human being and that this darkness does not last forever.

Reference is made to the fact that the Sun is the nearest star – from one perspective it is the nearest star but there are other perspectives.

Emphasis was made to the author’s view of difference and that there are many other perspectives than the dominant one.

It was felt that the author was a very persuasive writer and uses very difficult/different skill sets (essays/article/poems) and the references made are very articulate. The author describes and articulates what it feels to feel different in multiple ways and how they intersect.

There are deep-rooted experiences that the author is relaying which shows determination and strength to drive forward and moving through the blockage of her experiences.

It was highlighted that the first part of the poem speaks so much about what the poet is going through – whatever pain is there and how to find the strength to move forward.

3. Poems of Linton Kwesi Johnson: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linton_Kwesi_Johnson

Linton Kwesi Johnson (born 24 August 1952), also known as LKJ, is a Jamaican dub poet and activist who has been based in the United Kingdom since 1963. In 2002 he became the second living poet, and the only black poet, to be published in the Penguin Modern Classics series.

1. <https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=video&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiR0Jfj2uTwAhWt3OAKHc80Bl4QtwlwB3oECACQAw&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3D7uvY5qU7ayg&usg=AOvVaw0WzEIUfWErA-RkA-11YrAu> – Linton Kwesi Johnson - Sonny’s Letter

2. [Linton Kwesi Johnson - New Crass Massahkah - YouTube](#) – Linton Kwesi Johnson – New Crass Massahkah

3. https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwil1OPu3OTwAhV07OAKHc1nD30QwqsBMAJ6BAGIEAE&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3D0zL1rmcl-eY&usg=AOvVaw1_hqe9afp54n9JqxzLn_W3 – Linton Kwesi Johnson – More Time

There was a focused discussion on **Linton Kwesi Johnson’s Poem – “More Time”** as follows:

- The Poem “More Time” is a timeless piece; it transcends time as we “live in our reality.”

- Time is a concept that has been discussed by poets, spiritual leaders and philosophers for centuries.
- Time is limited – we only have limited time. You can't add time to your existence even if you want more time.
- The main essence about time is how we make time more meaningful – should time be spent productively or to benefit the wider community?
- "Time is me and me is time."
- There was a question about we do we do with time? It was queried that there is no such thing as free time.
- The Poem "More Time" resonates with modern living; individuals are trying to prioritise their time – leisure, spending time with family etc, which is different for each individual.
- It is not about how much time you spend – it is what you do with your time.
- Reference was made to the phrase "You're a long time dead" which is a Scottish Proverb "Be sure to live your life, because you are a long time dead."
- There was a discussion about meaningful moments, even sitting in comfortable silence – feeling at ease with a person and the importance of having quality time where everybody is happy in that environment.

Music

[War / No More Trouble \(Live At The Rainbow Theatre, London / 1977\) - YouTube](#) – Bob Marley - War/No More Trouble (Live at the Rainbow Theatre London 1977)

4. The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga



Based on the New York Times bestseller and 2008 Man Booker Prize-winning novel by Aravind Adiga, the film tells the epic and darkly humorous tale of Balram Halwai, a rickshaw driver's son who ascends from servant to self-made entrepreneur in modern India.

The facilitator stated that the book/film shows how the main protagonist ingratiates himself into a wealthy family and becomes their driver. He becomes close with the son and his wife. When the wife accidentally knocks down a pedestrian who dies, the main protagonist is made to sign a statement to say that he was the driver. The servant then realises how trapped he has become in his life and questions “Do we loathe our masters behind a façade a love – or do we love them behind a façade of loathing?”

The Servant takes his nephew to the zoo and sees the White Tiger and quotes “The moment you recognize what is beautiful in this world you stop being a slave.” In order to escape his fate the servant kills the Master’s son and sets up a successful mini-cab firm.

There was a discussion about how you free yourself mentally – getting stuck in the mind-set and not being able to break away. If you are shackled emotionally, it is hard to break free.

There was mention of being stuck in the poverty cycle. How do you become mentally independent and how do we internalise our history of subordination? – we carry that subordination with us through generations – how do we free ourselves from this?

There was also a discussion about assertiveness – how people play out their assertiveness. Leadership and assertiveness can be portrayed in different ways.

The Facilitator also made reference to the Jimmy Cliff quote from the Song “The Harder they Come” – “ But I’d rather be a free man in my grave. Than living as a puppet or a slave.”

Music

Chanda Mama Door Ke – Ravi Shankar <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nbujUoZS1Y>

This piece of music was played and a translation was given confirming that it was a song about the Uncle Moon and it is a Hindu lullaby.