

## Summary of NCL Diversity and Inclusion Book & Film Club 26.11.21

### Book, Music and Film Club

#### Film - Harriet



In this biopic, Harriet Tubman makes a harrowing escape from slavery and then risks her life to lead others to freedom via the Underground Railroad.

Harriet Tubman (born Araminta Ross) was an American abolitionist and political activist. Born into slavery in 1822, Tubman escaped and subsequently made some 13 missions to rescue approximately 70 enslaved people, including family and friends, using the network of antislavery activists and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad.

When the Civil War began, Tubman worked for the Union Army, first as a cook and nurse, and then as an armed scout and spy. The first woman to lead an armed expedition in the war, she guided the raid at Combahee Ferry, which liberated more than 700 enslaved people. In her later years, Tubman was an activist in the movement for women's suffrage.

The facilitator and another staff member also provided a summary of the film including the fact that the main protagonist, Harriet used to use many disguises when travelling and leading others to freedom. She was also referred to as Moses (a biblical reference) because she walked through treacherous water with her hands held above her head, which encouraged others to follow. Harriet was able to bring her family to freedom including her mother. There was a moving scene where the mother is sitting contentedly in a rocking chair at their new home. Previously the slave owner promised the mother her freedom at the age of 45 but he regained on this prior to his death.

Harriet was known to experience what appeared to be premonitions following a previous head injury and appeared to be able to predict what was to happen to her in advance thus helping her to escape danger.

(Information extracted from the NCL Staff Newsletter 26.11.21 - **Disability History Month - Historic people with disabilities**)

“Tubman was beaten and whipped by her various masters as a child. Early in life, she suffered a traumatic head wound when hit on the head by an overseer. The injury caused dizziness, pain, and spells of narcolepsy and for the rest of her life she had symptoms of brain injury.”

Further information can be found here:

[Harriet Tubman: the woman who led hundreds of slaves to freedom | Migrant Help \(migranthehelpuk.org\)](#)

[BBC Radio 4 - You're Dead To Me - Ten heroic facts about the incredible Harriet Tubman](#)

There was a sub-plot with Harriet and the slave owner’s son as they had grown up together. When Harriet was at risk of being captured for the 1<sup>st</sup> time following her initial escape she was trapped on a bridge with the river below. Harriet climbs onto the bridge and is warned she will risk certain death. Harriet’s response is “I will be free or die.” She is also encouraged to follow the North Star and if there are no stars to follow the river when escaping to freedom.

There is a moving scene towards the end of the film where the slave owner’s son confronts Harriet in the forest. Harriet is able to take his gun and states that there are “the bones of generations of young men dying around you in agony for a lost cause, for a vile and wicked idea, for the sin of slavery.” Harriet ends by stating, “God don’t mean people to own people” and “God has shown me the future and my people are free, my people are free.”

**Other quotes from the film:**

- “Fear is your enemy.”
- “I would give every last drop of blood in my veins until this monster called slavery is dead.”
- “I was never nobody’s property.”

There was a discussion where it was highlighted that this film is one of people who valued dignity above everything else, who lead a fearless life. Two themes emerge from the film: courage and fearlessness – both of which were unstoppable.

You can watch the film on [Netflix](#).

## Books/Poetry - A Hymn to the Evening by Phillis Wheatley



Among many accomplishments, Phillis Wheatley was the first African American to publish a book of poems. The acclaimed poet was born in West Africa in 1753 and sold into slavery as a child.

After her enslavers taught her to read and write, she wrote poems about the American Revolution that were later used to support abolition. “Wheatley was not alive to see her poetry make a consequential impact on the abolition of slavery,” wrote Dillon Hartigan of Southern Methodist University. “However, years after the Great Awakening was over and people understood its meaning, Wheatley’s poems were used to fight Southern views towards slavery.”

You can read her poem 'A Hymn to the Evening' [here](#).

The facilitator read the poem and gave an overview as follows:

- “The speakers desire to take on the glow of evening so that she may show her love of God.”
- The Theme is that “everything in the world has beauty. It may not be extremely obvious, but beauty is there.”
- The speaker describes the many “beauteous dies of heaven” – this phrasing evokes the “diabolic die” ascribed to the black people in the poem “On Being Brought From Africa to America.”
- The line “the west glories in the deepest red,” this red is the “colour of blood and symbolises anger and aggression, the west is an aggressive and deadly place.”
- There are references to the Roman Goddess Aurora and Zephyrus, the personified word for a breeze that is westerly.

There was a discussion that there are similarities with this poem and contemporaries about describing nature, creation, thoughts and feelings about the day that has passed which has a universal appeal.

**Music - Ella Sheppard**



Ella Sheppard was an American soprano, pianist, composer and the matriarch of the original Fisk Jubilee Singers of Nashville, Tennessee.

**Music - Jessye Norman**



Jessye Mae Norman was an American opera singer and recitalist. She was able to perform dramatic soprano roles, but refused to be limited to that voice type. She was a commanding presence on operatic, concert and recital stages, associated with roles including Beethoven's Leonore, Wagner's Sieglinde and Kundry, Cassandre and Didon by Berlioz and Bartók's Judith.

You can listen to Jessye Norman singing [here](#).

### **Book and Film Club – 17.12.21**

There was a discussion about what to include for the Book & Film Club on 17.12.21. The Facilitator suggested the following:

#### **Film**

**Jingle Jangle** – available on Netflix

#### **Book**

**Girl, Women, Other** by Bernardine Evaristo

#### **Music**

Nat King Cole - [Nat King Cole - Chestnuts roasting on an open fire - YouTube](#)