

BOB

I still hear my brother calling-- I can't breathe

Now I'm in the struggle---singing I can't leave

Calling out the violence of these racist police

We ain't gonna stop---til our people are free

We ain't gonna stop—til our people are free

A NEW MOVEMENT

I first heard this song (Written by Luke Nephew of Peace Poets)

during the shutdown of the mall of America by BLM Minneapolis last Christmas

it's almost Christmas again and another shutdown will happen

1. Because another national liberation movement is underway, BLM was Co-founded after the death of Trayvon Martin, by seasoned activist Patrice Cullors, and queer women colleagues. In Minneapolis it is led by 7 queer black women and two men, who are quietly determined that black lives will matter

2. ANDERSON'S VISION

3. Whether they know it or not, BLM may be embodying the vision that Victor Anderson set before us in 1995. When BOB, our affectionate name for Beyond Theological Blackness was published

4. I was one of Victor Anderson's graduate students. In this book Anderson challenged everything I knew about raced identity, As a black debutante, raised in the black church, steeped in the politics

of respectability, struggle, and middle class ladder climbing, I was stunned by the propositions that Victor posed that challenged all that I had believed

- a. As I read BOB over and over again I had questions that continue to intrigue me to this day
- b. Because BOB was before its time, people didn't quite know what to make of it.
- c. Anderson's book in 1995 came before the public emergence of black life with all of its diversities, we were still in the "after glow" of Huxtable conformities
- d. It came before legalization of same gender loving relationships, public trans realities and in 1995, the empowerment of women was more theoretical than actualized, most importantly, BOB was published before the towers came down and before a new "enemy" of the nation was in the cross hairs of America's anger and violence.
- e. The black community was so used to being the focus of dominant culture's violent attention that we had forgotten the blessing of liminality, the welcoming shadows of being ignored by the beast
- f. My grandmother taught me that things grow best in the dark....And so out of the glare of oppressions gaze, another generation of black youth arose, aligning themselves with the idea that Anderson suggests, "development of a healthy pessimism, a pragmatic and discerning hope with the intent of cultural fulfillment of basic human needs and subjective goods. "

In the shadow of the powers while bombs were falling on Afghanistan another generation of AA were challenging the mimetic forms of Christianity bequeathed by slave holders, exploring A diasporic religions, and the full spectrum of human and sexual identities. They would emerge as if from no where in the public sphere with simple tropes

1. Stop killing us
2. Black lives matter-
3. And to their parents and the black church: The politics of respectability will not save us

Afte reading BOB I can see the connection between our cycles of oppression, the blackness that whiteness created, and the ahistorical vacuousness and conformity that it breeds.

Anderson points to the rich diversity of black life, including its trickster elements and wrestling matches with the grotesque, its sliding scale of human, gender, and sexual identities that lay the ground work for the cultural fulfillment and moral flourishing that we long for....

I do not know whether or not BLM is the movement that we longed for but I do want to engage the issues in my local context of the Twin Cities in counterpoint with Anderson's groundbreaking work.

There are consequences to the blackness that whiteness created, can BLM arouse the black community from its consumer solutions to trauma and it's lingering commitments to the politics of respectability?

- iii Can we dream about closing the curtain on the ongoing public minstrel show that features the black ontological mimes homogeneity and heteronormativity, who alternately clown and resist in predicatable fashion, masking the intricacies and schisms in black life by performing the blackness that whiteness created?

We can hope

I want to briefly share three ideas that Bob inspires

- g. engaging the cyclical recurrences of familiar oppressions,
- h. leadership beyond the trope of black masculinity
- i. and singing the beloved community

CYCLICAL OPPRESSIONS

Although the media portrayed the mall of America shutdown as inconvenient activism, I knew that the young people were engaging the beast of oppressive reoccurrence,

That is the problem with overcoming

You have to keep doing it

Because the immortal beast of racism and violence reappears
from age to age

Just when you think that it safe to proclaim victory

Just when you think that you are post-something

The beast roars waking us from our delusions of overcoming

And when the beast roars, the outcome is always the same

Death and opposition

Anderson wonders whether or not we can

FLOURISH WITHOUT THE STRIVING

Can we defeat or keep the beast at bay.....oppose the forces of death and destruction without cycles of generational struggle

I am suggesting that BLM may be performing the reality that Anderson proposed

How are they doing it?

1. They are creating and living into a blackness that whiteness does not recognize
2. They are finding moral ground that is not mimetic of the rules of respectability imposed by the blackness that whiteness created EXAMPLE
 - a. After the killing of an unarmed black 24 year old man in Minneapolis last week, Jamal Clark, he was executed by the police allegedly while handcuffed in front of witnesses, I say allegedly, but the police will not release the body cam tapes that would resolve the matter and despite the fact that the coroner has deemed it a homicide
 - b. But I digress the mayor complained that the demonstrators were not being polite. The

- answer from BLM was that there are no rules of polite engagement when you are still killing us
- c. It turns out that the blackness that whiteness created has a set of rules of etiquette and engagement that are constantly changing
In Martin's day it meant hats gloves well-dressed leaders of black community, church, etc
 - d. If you wanted to be heard you had to look and sound a particular way or you would be dismissed.
 - e. As Anderson notes, This blackness that whiteness created is complicated
 - f. Today the blackness that whiteness created is not as focused on a one size fits all class assignment, upward mobility as a sign of worthiness, instead today's blackness that whiteness created allows acceptance of exotica and new stereotypes
 - g. Of course the old stereotypes of mammy, and the happy negro are grandfathered in...but the new stereotypes indicate that even racism can be updated, so we have the commodified rapper, the video vixen, the Obama/hybridity, and those educated beyond ontological assignments.

- h. The BLM M rejects those categories of acceptance and demands justice of both friend and foe. Interrupts Bernie and Hillary. The demand is the same Stop killing Us.....
- i. As I was leaving the Twin Cities Activists were shutting down the 4th police precinct where the shooting of Jamal occurred and the coroner has deemed the death a homicide. In days past that would be enough to end the demonstrations.
- j. But The activists are still there. The Governor and Mayor are confused, they are meeting with them, they have tried everything that usually works with the blackness that whiteness created
- k. Here is the difference, The activists, leading from the blackness that blackness creates are not appealing to scripture or pastors they lead as a group, they tweet that they are tired and hungry, there are no mythical tropes of bravery and dragon slaying.....

The leadership represents the very intersectionality that Anderson suggested is at the heart of black life

II LEADERSHIP BEYOND BLACK MASCULINITY

Victor says that BOB focuses on the cult of black heroic genius/masculinity and its often brutal forms of conformity that inevitably gain ascendancy.

Is BLM, a movement that can transcend the binary snares of oppositional racial discourse or liberative heroics?

I am not suggesting that the women leading this movement are immune to the intoxicating lure of the “unresolved binary dialectics of slavery and freedom, insider outsider black and white”

But I am hoping that because of the inherent intersectionality of the leader’s lives as queer black women, and the pragmatics of gender, gender identity and race that they may be less likely to submit to the simplicities of heroic genius only time will tell

But there is something intrinsically different about the leadership of this movement.

PERSONAL FREEDOM

The women leading this movement are acting out of a personal freedom that is palpable, they are vulnerable on facebook talking about their issues of trauma, needs and health. They are asking the community for what they need as they serve

DETACHMENT FROM THE HISTORICAL BLACK CHURCH

Many are emotionally detached from the black church

When challenged by church leaders

Who said to them how can you leave us out of this struggle,
we are burying the young people that the police are killing

The answer came back from BLM Minneapolis

we can't grieve where we are not welcome, we are here, we
are queer, and we will not play your identity games to find
solace in your midst.

Although some of the leaders of BLM Minneapolis are
seminary graduates, I can't quite fit Anderson's argument
for Public theology within this case study, because they are
engaging the divine in a different way

I would argue that BLM is better served by Anderson's
argument in Creative Exchange. For truly, the interaction
with community, society and self is an exchange that is
reflexive, generative and holy

MONEY TRAIL

They don't want the money of white liberals who are trying
to help..... One of the grotesqueries of postmodern life is
that money drives everything even the struggle for freedom,
but they believe that their resolve and the movement will be
harmed by the strings that come with financial support

and they are not intimidated by intra-communal struggles or the black church call for “decency and order”

They are fighting even against the blackness that whiteness created that has been internalized into the identities of the victims and their families

The sister of the young man who was killed
Railed against the protestors
Embarrassed angry, grieving she called them
Ignorant, declared the protest useless
There it was, politics of respectability on full
display until the next day when she recanted and
offered full support to the activists.

BLM activists are not trying to resolve the complexities of black life that Anderson raises or to mollify or resist the beasts of recurrence.....instead they are living into new realities and

SINGING ThemSELVES SANE: SINGING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

- i. can we sing ourselves sane: I am convinced that an aesthetics of joy may foster the manifestation of the already /not yet/beloved community. But this joy must be tempered with lamentthe blackness that whiteness encourages commodified joy, like the gospel choirs at political conventions.
- ii. The blackness that whiteness created is such an internalized phenomenon that we may have to grieve our way past it.

- iii. We have been encouraged to metaphorically buck dance while we bleed to death
- iv. So how do you hold joy and lament in the same bucket....you weep with those who weep, you rejoice with those who rejoice, you sing yourself sane
- v. Some of you may know that Dr. Anderson is an accomplished pianist....when he plays the songs of zion, you remember who you are and how you got here
- vi. You claim your humannesss, your flawed embodiment ...your sliding scale of being this and that, one thing or another, and finally you find comfort in the interstices or wherever you can
- vii. We are slowly shedding the blackness that whiteness created, emerging from a cocoon that almost killed us.....we were not supposed to survive but we are finding our way
- viii. Anderson's work pointed the way toward our own creativity and in doing so he blessed our brokenness and incongruity
- ix. He urged us to recognize our complicity in our psychic and social enslavement and then to leap toward transcendence
- x. A leap of risk to be certain, but Anderson assured us that We are not required to fight for our reality ,
- xi. We can live it

- xii. We are not required to explain our existence or conform to patterns of humanity that bring comfort to dominant culture
- xiii. We can be weird and whole and as shape shifting as necessary
- xiv. Thank you Victor for reminding us of who we are and who we can be
- xv. This blackness that blackness created is diverse and complex, it is peaceful and resolved
it cannot be bought or bargained with
- xvi. This blackness that blackness created is enough
- xvii. And
- xviii. We won't stop til the people are free
- xix. We won't stop til the people are free.

- xx.
- xxi.
- xxii.