

Odyssey Oracle

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Loving Langston Hughes1

Profile of
Brian Benford '0712

Thinking about Thoreau,
Gandhi, and King15

Guilty Crown: a review by
Brandon McCarey17

Civics Club Luncheon
By Run Barlow18

What a Saturday!
By Terry Hart18

Thoughts about "Ma Rainey's
Black Bottom"19

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Loving Langston Hughes

My People

*The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.*

*The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.*

*Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.*

Hughes views the dark sky as the faces of his black people and the stars as their eyes. The sun represents their soul as it shines brightly. If you have ever peered into the darkest night when the only lights in sight are the shining stars and it made you feel trapped in the beauty of it all, or if you awakened to the sunlight on the most beautiful morning and it gave you strength, peace, and courage, then you have looked into the face, eyes, and souls of our people. **(Run Barlow)**

This poem answered many black people's questions as to why we were put on this earth to be slaves, to be slandered and ridiculed and held down as a race, unappreciated, daily-degraded and disrespected. Langston Hughes took that mindset and inspired many to be the best they could be and to never give up. Mainly, he compared blacks to natural beauty created by God to show everyone that blacks are human beings and that they should be treated with respect and civility.

Hughes speaks very modestly, but the direct juxtaposition is incredible. The simple comparison between "night" and black people is truly authentic. Also, the comparison between our souls and the sun



gives me that warm feeling of love.
(Terry Hart)

People are beautiful in every single way. Think of a rose: no matter which country you are in, roses are always roses. . . . Even if you change their color, they are still roses. Why do people use color to change a human into a slave, or even worse, into a nothing?
(Elvira Rodriguez)



This poem is short but says a lot to me about my people. He sent a message saying black is beautiful by using the night to refer to black skin.
(Shaquida Johnson)



I, Too

I, too, sing America.

*I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.*

*Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.*

*Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed--*

I, too, am America.

In this poem, Hughes tells the white brothers

that he is also an American though he is black. He explains the discrimination and painful experiences that he faces because of his complexion. Hughes hopes for the future and is motivated to study hard and therefore become mentally strong. When Hughes writes, "Tomorrow I'll be at the table... Nobody'll dare say to me



'Eat in the kitchen,'" he is determined to prove his intellectual fitness. No one will be able to silence him, but they will realize how brilliant and equal he is.

The poet is saying that people may belittle or put you down, but you must fight back and prove you are brave enough to achieve and attain the unexpected. This poem encourages me not to settle for little things in life, but to dream big.
(Tatenda Bvindi)

This poem is about an African American person who works for white people in their house. The white people always send him to eat in the kitchen, but he accepts it and feels happy and strong because he has hope that tomorrow he will eat at the same table that the whites are eating at. He thinks that they will see how important and beautiful he is and be ashamed.



I love this poem. We are not living in a time when black people are segregated, but in this time, our society and government treat students, teachers, immigrants, and all low income people in ways which make us feel sad. We, too, are America.
(Beatriz Mairena-Kellman)

This poem shows the hope, willingness, and ability of African Americans to endure the barrage of unjustified and inglorious acts of cruelty and injustice bestowed upon them for the chance that one day the sons and daughters of African Americans will be able to walk in society as equals among all. He states that even though he must eat

in the kitchen when company comes, he “laughs... eats well... grows strong...” Often laughter is used as a defensive response when a person endured so much that they simply cannot cry another tear, but I believe he is referring to the divine laughter of God which has placed him in such a position because He knows that the subject will endure and be taught what he needs in order to fulfill his true destiny.



I like how he refers to himself or African Americans as the “darker brother.” By doing so, he unites himself with his white counterpart and invokes compassion in the hearts of others by referring to whites and blacks as brothers. He shows pride in the face of racism and prejudice by stating that they will eventually see his beauty or talent and be ashamed for wrong that has been done. . . . I do not believe that true equality exists or ever will exist in America, but we must strive for it nonetheless.

(Keith Johnson)

Mother to Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

It's had tacks in it,

And splinters,

And boards torn up,

And places with no carpet on the floor—

Bare.

But all the time

I've been a-climbin' on,

And reachin' landin's,

And turnin' corners,

And sometimes goin' in the dark

Where there ain't been no light.

So, boy, don't you turn back.

Don't you set down on the steps.

'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.

Don't you fall now—

For I've still goin', honey,

I've still climbin',

And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

The mother is telling her son not to give up and to keep on keeping on even though he will hit rough patches in his life. She is telling him that even though she has had trials and tribulations in her life, she always stood strong and kept it moving. She is saying she knows it's rough, but to be strong, hold fast, and thank the Lord for keeping her grounded.



I have had to tell my son not to give up on life and that it will get better for him as long as he changes the way he carries himself. I have had to be strong for him to show him that life tries to bring you down, but you have to stand strong and face it and you will come out victorious.

To be truthful, I had to stand up and make this change in my life because of my son. I have to show



him that even though life knocks you down, you have to stand strong and show yourself and others that have stepped on you that you will rise.

(Nkechi Johnson)

Still Here

I've been scared and battered.

My hopes the wind done scattered.

Snow has friz me,

Sun has baked me,

Looks like between 'em they done

Tried to make me

Stop laughin', stop lovin', stop livin'--

But I don't care!

I'm still here!

This poem lets everyone know that no matter what the situation we are facing, "we are still here." Our Creator has something better waiting for us if we just keep the faith. Once a person is battered so much, they become afraid of so many things. Their hope has been scattered just as the wind scatters all the leaves. The snow that has him curled up tightly and symbolizes happiness even causes him pain. The happiest and saddest moments pain him; between society and authority, he has been tortured enough. Yet, he is there and will always be, even if all the laughter, love, and life come to a stop.

This poem was very meaningful and powerful to me. It reminds me that no matter what I'm going through, I can overcome it. I just need to continue with the positive attitude, no matter how hard it gets. Stay strong now; things will get better. . . . One can never give up, never stop loving, living, or laughing. As long as we can look up, we can get up.
(Michele Withers)

Many people can probably relate to this poem: going through some things, supposed to be dead, rejection, dealing with people who allow evil to

dwell in them that are intent on destroying themselves and everyone and everything around them. Nevertheless, when you know God, you know power. To know power is to know love, real love. This love does not cause you to fall. That's why I'm still here, in spite of Satan and his attacks. My life is much smoother now because I've eliminated several things out of my life: prejudice, politics, and competitions. It feels good to know that having a relationship with God puts me in a different class...
(Yolanda Cunningham)



Frederick Douglass: 1817-1895

Douglass was someone who,

Had he walked with wary foot

And frightened tread,

From very indecision

Might be dead,

Might have lost his soul,

But instead decided to be bold

And capture every street

On which to set his feet,

To route his path

Toward freedom's goal,

To make each highway

Choose his compass' choice,

To all the world cried,

Hear my voice!...

Oh, to be a beast, a bird,

Anything but a slave! he said.

Who would be free

Themselves must strike

The first blow, he said.

He died in 1895.

He is not dead.

Frederick Douglass was someone who not only talked with boldness, but walked with boldness, capturing every street on which he set his feet



towards freedom. He was determined to be free... If he hadn't taken a stand and stood for what he believed, he would have felt dead. You have to stand on what you believe in; you can't back down.

(Marilyn Johnson)



Up-Beat

*In the gutter
boys who try
might meet girls
on the fly
as out of the gutter
girls who will
may meet boys
copping a thrill
while from the gutter
both can rise:
But it requires
plenty eyes.*

I believe this poem is commenting on sexual desire and attraction from the perspective of men and women. For most people, the gutter represents low points, a place of debauchery, loose morals, and skimming the bottom of the social structure... That gutter can represent an attitude, as Hughes writes how boys and girls meet there for a cheap thrill. Once the thrill has been felt and the feeling subsides, both sides find themselves empty and valueless. In the line "Both can rise: But it requires plenty eyes," Hughes is saying that both parties can rise from the gutter if their eyes are ready to see the truths about themselves.

This poem reminded me of so many relationships and thrill seekers today. People have become more sexualized and have adopted the "get mines" attitude towards intimacy to where sex for some is meaningless. As people devalue their bodies for momentary pleasure, they find themselves sinking



into their own personal gutter.
(Brandon McCarey)

Open Letter to the South

White workers of the South

*Miners,
Farmers,
Mechanics,
Mill Hands,
Shop girls,
Railway men,
Servants,
Tobacco workers,
Sharecroppers,
GREETINGS!*

I am the black worker,

Listen:

*That the land might be ours,
And the mines and the factories and the office
towers
At Harlan, Richmond, Gastonia, Atlanta, New
Orleans;
That the plants and the roads and the tools of
power
Be ours:*

*Let us forget what Booker T. said,
"Separate as the fingers."*

*Let us become instead, you and I,
One single hand
That can united rise . . .
We did not know that we were brothers.
Now we know!
out of that brotherhood
Let power grow!
We did not know
That we were strong.
Now we see
In union lies our strength. . . .*

In this poem, Hughes appeals to the white working poor people of the south to sit up and take notice of the lies they've been told about each

other and black people, and the power they collectively hold. The divisive tactics of the rich ensure that the rich stay in control of the money. Hughes says that Booker T. Washington was wrong about separate but equal and he encourages blacks and whites to shake hands, unite, and stay in the south to create the working conditions everyone needs instead of going to the north for work. He also suggests that by connecting with all of the folks in the community for the common good, a powerful force for change could be formed that would benefit the workers of the world.



I like this poem because it addresses the politics of the “haves” and the “have nots.” Rich people have been manipulating those who support their empires by singling out a part of a group as superior and thus chosen and more deserving than others. These “special people” are given jobs and pay rates that are better than the others, yet not enough to ever make them rich. This pablum of superiority placates those chosen ones into cooperating and supporting the rich entities and helping them to keep the less deserving ones in their places.

This poem made me think that maybe at the heart of current anti-unionism rhetoric is an undercurrent of racism that is used to fuel the flames of animosity between people who should be treating each other as sisters and brothers.

(Billie Kelsey)

Statement

Down on '33rd Street

They cut you

Every way they is.

33rd Street is one of the toughest streets in Harlem. It was notorious for gangsters, drug dealers, and drug addicts, gang shootings and mob hits. If you weren't on top of your game, you could certainly expect to get gunned down or



cut up really badly by a switch blade.

“Statement” is a bold poem that tells it like it is. Down on 33rd Street, they cut you every which-a-way but loose, meaning if you go over there messing around, you might come up missing.

(Eugene Smalls)

Hellen Keller

She,

In the dark,

Found light

Brighter than many ever see.

She,

Within herself,

Found loveliness,

Through the soul's own mastery.

And now the world receives

From her dower:

The message of the strength

Of inner power.

Hughes uses Helen Keller to show the “strength” of her “inner power”... The fact that she is the perfect example of Hughes's message because of her courageous influence moves me to feel like I have an inner power of my own.

(Tai'Kiah Phillips)



Justice

That Justice is a blind goddess

Is a thing to which we black are wise:

Her bandage hides two festering sores

That once perhaps were eyes.

Hughes's “Justice” is only 26 words long but says a lot in its brevity. In the poem, Hughes is referring to Themis, the goddess of justice, who is depicted wearing a blindfold over her eyes to denote that justice is blind. . . . He seems to call into question whether justice is blind in the sense of



not seeing color, or blind in the sense that it does not see the destruction that it brings to the black community. Considering the time of the writing, with Jim Crow laws largely in effect, justice would not have been dealt to Blacks under too many circumstances, no matter how the laws were written. The depiction of her blindfold being a bandage that hides two festering sores seems to suggest that seeing justice play out in this manner may have been too much for the goddess of justice herself to bear.

I think this is a poem that has relevance today as much as it did when written. While we like to think that our justice system is blind, the numbers suggest otherwise. In Wisconsin in particular, where we have the highest incarceration rates of Blacks in the country, it is difficult to believe that justice is being handed out fair and square... **(Hedi Rudd)**

The Negro Mother

*Children, I come back today
To tell you a story of the long dark way
That I had to climb, that I had to know
In order that the race might live and grow.
Look at my face -- dark as the night --
Yet shining like the sun with love's true light.
I am the dark girl who crossed the red sea
Carrying in my body the seed of the free.
I am the woman who worked in the field
Bringing the cotton and the corn to yield.
I am the one who labored as a slave,
Beaten and mistreated for the work that I gave
--
Children sold away from me, I'm husband
sold, too.
No safety, no love, no respect was I due.*

*Three hundred years in the deepest South:
But God put a song and a prayer in my mouth.
God put a dream like steel in my soul.
Now, through my children, I'm reaching the
goal.*

*Now, through my children, young and free,
I realized the blessing deed to me.
I couldn't read then. I couldn't write.*

*I had nothing, back there in the night.
Sometimes, the valley was filled with tears,
But I kept trudging on through the lonely
years. . . .*

*Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my
prayers*

*Impel you forever up the great stairs --
For I will be with you till no white brother
Dares keep down the children of the Negro
Mother.*

This poem is filled with hope and courage that a slave mother has for her children. She speaks in such a masterful way by telling of her struggles, pain, and hardships as a slave's wife, sister, and mother. She is telling a story of her life with the hope and desire she has for her own children to keep faith; she is speaking with the light of freedom. Just as my mother has often said to me, "Yesterday was the past. Remember, but don't dwell; you cannot change it..."

As I read this poem, I became emotionally filled with gratitude for the unwavering dedication and sacrifices of the many civil rights leaders who fought with urgency to give my ancestors the many rights that my children and I are blessed to receive... **(Phyllis Anderson)**

Never have I read the pain and misery of being an African slave so positively written. Here, she stands tall with style and grace. No shame is written across her face. She stands tall for us so that we should never ever forget what trauma she endured to have finally seen a new light, her children. We will gain all that she lost; we just have to believe and hold our hands up high...

Every day we come up with excuses not to move forward. I sometimes think that only we ourselves can keep us from our future. This poem touches the



subject so eloquently. But this is a Negro slave. She knows her flaws and all of the walls that keep her from breaking free... She gives us the advice that “no one’s holding you down but yourselves.” So, aim for the future and it will be yours.

(Arnella Royal)

This poem is telling other generations about the past and the hardships she went through to survive. She recounts the horrors of being a slave, stolen from her native country, separated from her family, and forced to work the fields. After 300 years in the south and being treated like nothing, she still stood as a strong black woman who fought for her children’s freedom.



This poem is a strong reminder to remember where I come from. It shows me the past struggles of the black female slaves who had to endure for hundreds of years with no freedom in sight in order to give birth to a new generation... Don’t forget the past, break down the walls of injustice, and fight for rights as a human being. A mother will always be there and will always love you no matter how hard the struggle.

(Samantha East)

April Rain Song

Let the rain kiss you.

Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops.

Let the rain sing you a lullaby.

The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk.

The rain makes running pools in the gutter.

The rain plays a little sleep-song on our roof at night—

And I love the rain.

Hughes is saying that we should enjoy the rain. Go play in it; work in it if you can. Look at the way it turns into a pool in which you can look at yourself. Listen to the way the rain makes music

when it falls on the roof tops of houses. It’s a peaceful sound that you can sleep to, like soft music to your ears or your mother singing you a good night song.

To me, Hughes is expressing his feelings about nature. I like the way he talks about the rain, like when he says to let it kiss you. That’s like when you go outside and get those first chilling rain drops. The best thing was when he said that it was like a little sleep-song, because it is. On those rainy days, I do get good sleep from the sound the rain makes. It’s like a calming constant beat of nature.

(Donta Starr)



Porter

I must say

Yes, sir,

To you all the time.

Yes, sir!

Yes, sir!

All my days

Climbing up a great big mountain

Of yes, sirs!

Rich old white man

Owns the world.

Gimme yo’ shoes

To shine.

Yes, sir!

Hughes speaks of entrapment and being bonded in servitude. The writer wants to be freed from the work of a porter: the load that is being carried, the fake smile, and “yes sir” is no longer acceptable. The porter wants to empty or put down this bag of fakeness. The individual in this poem no longer wants the job of a porter and wants to find a new line of work.



I believe that the time frame in which this poem was written was a very hard time for blacks. The individual just wanted to be respected. This person spent so much time being politically correct that the words “yes sir” began to eat away at this person mentally. This person just wanted to be able to speak his mind.

(Kenya Moses)

Mean Old Yesterday

*That mean old yesterday
Keeps on following me.
The things I've said and done
Haunt me like a misery.*

*What I did last year--
How come it matters still today?
The snow that fell last winter's
Melted away.*

*I thought you'd done forgotten
What happened way last week,
But when I saw you this morning,
You turned your head and would not speak.*

*Memory like an elephant,
Never forget a thing!
Well, if you feel like that, baby,
Gimme back my diamond ring.*

This poem is about a man in a relationship who has apparently made lots of mistakes in his relationship. He wants his girl to forget everything that has happened and move on. His mate seems very angry about the past and refuses to move on.



I thoroughly enjoyed this poem. I found it very visual. I could see her walk past him, roll her eyes, and turn up her nose. I continually see these things in relationships, and I see two problems, lack of forgiveness and lack of repentance, as relationship killers. As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter who goes first.

(Yetta Harris)

Subway Rush Hour

*Mingled
breath and smell
so close
mingled
black and white
so near
no room for fear.*

When I was in Chicago, I used to ride the subway train to and from work. The train was crowded with both black and white commuters. We were packed together like sardines in a can. Everyone was so close to each other, it was hard to breathe. You could smell their breath, perfume, or cologne. Blacks and whites intertwined as one, too close to escape, too far to run.

(Marcia Brown)



Poem to Uncle Sam

*Uncle Sam
With old Jim Crow--
Like a shadow
Right behind you--
Everywhere
You go.*

*Uncle Sam,
Why don't you
Turn around,
And before you
Tackle Hitler--
Shoot Jim down?*

Hughes is stating that the US government is being hypocritical. He's saying if the government is really about justice, then look at the laws that govern this country. Before they get involved in injustices in other places, start democracy



here by removing unfair and unjust laws like Jim Crow.

This poem reflects the intelligent, mindful person that is Langston Hughes.... This poem shows his focus on the political climate of his day and reveals the sense of responsibility he had. (Abraham Thomas)

Empty House

*It was in the empty house
That I came to dwell
And in the empty house
I found an empty hell.*

*Why is it that an empty house,
Untouched by human strife,
Can hold more woe
Than wide world holds,
More pain than a cutting knife?*

Langston Hughes used rhyme schemes, repetition, and imagery to convey his feeling of loneliness in the poem "Empty House." He rhymes "dwell" with "hell" in the first stanza, and "strife" with "knife" in the second. His repetition of the word "empty" throughout the poem emphasizes the feeling that the reader is supposed to pick up on. The imagery of pain that was caused being described as "more... than a cutting knife" helps explain the intensity of that loneliness.

When I read that poem, I felt like I knew its theme intimately. I feel that exact way when I walk into my house on Wednesday nights after class. On Wednesdays, my children sleep at other people's houses so that I can attend school. That's the only night of the week that that happens. You might think that I would enjoy my "time off" from caring for them, but that's not the case. Although it's difficult to be a single mother, and I often complain about not having any time for myself, I feel empty when my children are away from me. When I walk into my dark, quiet house on Wednesday nights, it



feels like my heart becomes encased in cement and falls down into my stomach... (Katie Pruitt)

Hurt

Who cares

About the hurt in your heart?

*Make a song like this
For a jazz band to play:*

Nobody cares.

Nobody cares.

*Make a song like that
From your lips.*

Nobody cares.

Who wants to listen to my problems? Who sees the loud and hard stress being placed into my heart? I will create a sound called hip hop or jazz so you can try to listen, but you still don't. You hear rock and roll and country but not my songs. No one even listens to my pain. No one even listens to my cries. . . . No one ever cares about the everyday struggles of being black.

This poem talks mainly about people caring about other people. When you hear and see someone getting mistreated, you should help not hurt them. Every day of a black person's life in these times was awful. You could not talk back to white people even if they were wrong. Black people lived in fear. So why not tell someone about it and get them to listen to this hurt white people created for blacks? (Jesse Hamilton)



Listen Here Blues

Sweet girls, sweet girls,

Listen here to me.

All you sweet girls,

Listen here to me:

Gin an' whiskey

Kin make you lose yo' 'ginity.

***I used to be a good chile,
Lawd, in Sunday School.
Used to be a good chile,--
Always in Sunday School,
Till these lickster-headed rounders
Made me everybody's fool.***

***Good girls, good girls,
Listen here to me.
Oh, you good girls,
Better listen to me:
Don't you fool wid no men cause
They'll bring you misery.***

In this poem Langston Hughes is giving a warning to girls who are known to be innocent, going to church and being seen right in the eyes of others. The warning is for them to stay clear of bald-headed men who seek to do nothing but take their virginity and bring them nothing but pain.



This warning given to these girls has been stated to girls from the time God placed men and women on earth. From then to now, the warnings go unheard because of their own willed decisions. (Lorraine Garrett)

**Expendable
*Expendable
We will take you and kill you,
Expendable.***

***We will fill you full of lead,
Expendable.***

***And when you are dead
In the nice cold ground,
We'll put your name
Above your head—***

***If your head
Can be found.***

“Throw those black folks on the front line for

they are expendable,” is what I get out of this poem when I try to get into Mr. Hughes's shoes and mind. Looking around today, I know that I am expendable if I allow myself to join or take sides with a government or its teaching and beliefs that are not for me. . . .

I have to be very careful in my own personal life as to which position I take and which uniform I choose to wear for any cause, for I simply refuse to make myself expendable!

(Juba Moten)



**Flight
*Plant your toes in the cool swamp mud.
Step and leave no track.
Hurry, sweating runner!
The hounds are at your back.***

***No I didn't touch her
White flesh ain't for me.***

***Hurry! Black boy, hurry!
They'll swing you to a tree.***

This poem describes an innocent black man running through a wet, muddy swamp, trying to escape from a group of aggressive hounds/dogs because he was accused of raping or maybe molesting a white woman. He is running away from his death, running away from being hung.



Langston Hughes wrote this poem very specifically, and emotionally as well, because when you read this poem it makes you feel like you were actually there, watching an innocent black man running for his life. Why do I say innocent? In this poem the black man yells from the top of his lungs that he would never touch a white woman. Throughout the poem, you can also feel the fear in him as he's running.

(Linda Thao)

Brian Benford: Father, Activist, Student an alumnus profile

Brian Benford's mission is clear: he wants to raise awareness of those considered voiceless. This is not surprising given Brian's strong ties to community issues through his activist work.

Brian started his academic career at UW-LaCrosse and attended several different schools around the country, yet his familial and financial obligations forced him to drop out in the 80's. He never believed that he would return to school, so he resigned himself to doing good deeds and participating in community work. Brian felt connected to society through his community work.

While he preached the value of a higher education, Brian felt that it was a "dirty secret" that he did not have a college degree of his own. "Maybe a degree wasn't that important,"

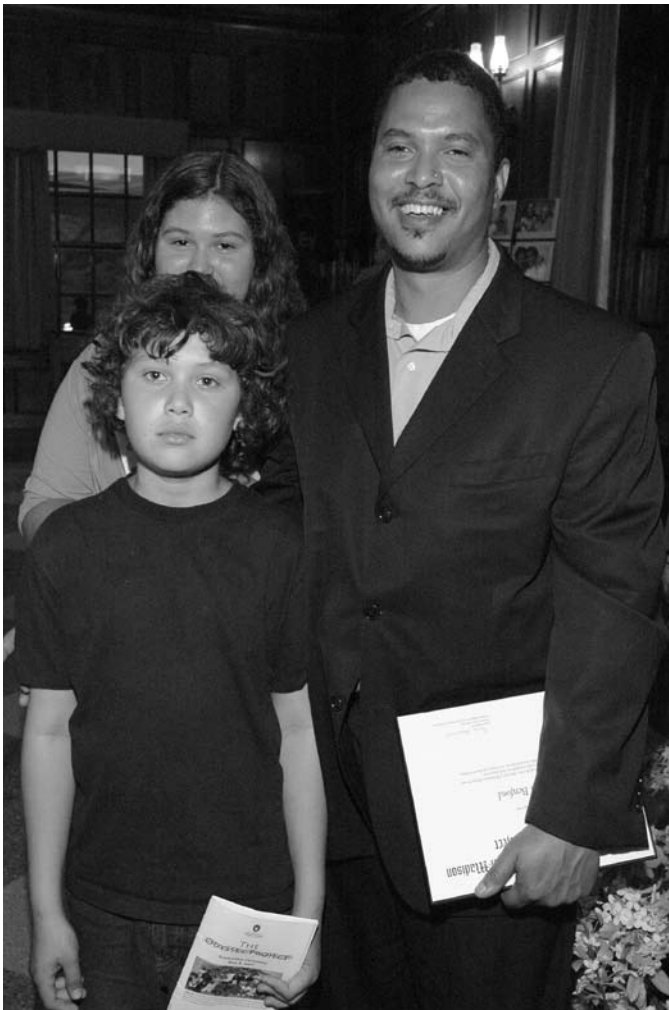
he remembers thinking, especially since he was fortunate enough to be hired based on his experience rather than his education. Brian held various positions at several community-supporting organizations, such as Neighborhood House and Headstart. He also delved into politics, serving on the city council and as an alderperson.

His political career stemmed from anger. While working for the Neighborhood House, he observed the differences between the extravagant lifestyles of the privileged in contrast to the lack of resources for the poor. "I wanted to empower other people to fight city hall, to take marginalized and underrepresented people and provide a voice for them, and to be a role model. If I could hold political office while being a single dad, then the very least others could do is engage in public policy. Not everyone has to run for office, but go out and vote and advocate for important things."

Brian continues to stay involved in both local and campus politics. "As we talk about diversity and inclusion, I think we often get lost on racial distinctions rather than age, socioeconomic background, parenthood, and things like that," he muses. "They talk about the Wisconsin Idea; it's a total lie. Right now, they're not committed to opening these doors, especially in these economic times where people have to go back and reinvent themselves. This campus and this whole university system really isn't serious about that. Odyssey is the only program that I'm aware of that takes all of that into account and allows people to come to UW-Madison's campus."

Brian credits Joe Robinson (Odyssey '04) and the South Madison Library for learning about the Odyssey Project. "I wouldn't have had a clue about Odyssey. I thought that Madison College was the only option that nontraditional students had. I'm always preaching about Odyssey."

On his first day of Odyssey, Brian felt nervous and somewhat anxious. "I felt that since I was in my 40's, I should have had my degree already." Those negative feelings were soon overcome by something way stronger. Although Brian thought that the



Brian at his Odyssey graduation ceremony, 2007

professors for the Odyssey Project were “fantastic,” he acknowledges that he was most moved by the power of his classmates. “It was the other people sitting around the table... I can’t say enough about them,” he says. “Hearing other people’s challenges, witnessing other people learn... it was really profound... It validated that one could be a lifelong learner despite age.”

Brian also felt that witnessing the accomplishments of the alumni helped him make it through Odyssey and continues to help him in UW. “I realize that I am not alone and that it can be done. I can reach the one goal that hasn’t been obtained.”

During his first semester back at UW-Madison, Brian felt that he was in way over his head. He hadn’t written a paper in 30 years. “I remember thinking, ‘Wow, what am I doing here? I can barely make it up and down Bascom Hill, and here are all of these brilliant 20 year olds around me... I’m old enough to be their father!’” Reflecting on the people from his Odyssey class helped to empower him and keep him focused on his goal. Brian also credits the Academic Advancement Program (AAP) with

helping him transition to UW-Madison smoothly. Even still, Brian feels that there should be more help for returning adults. “I didn’t know that I could get free health care until after two years of being here. Someone should have a half day workshop on the nuts and bolts of being a UW college student. That would have helped tremendously.” Brian also wishes that there was a space designated specifically for returning adult students’ needs, such as emergency child care, job placement, and a lounge area for resting between classes.

Brian recognizes the “strange dichotomy” between people that attend university and the “real world.” “I witness a great deal of privilege. There’s no diversity in my classrooms, there’s no inclusiveness. This institution is set up that way. If it were not for Odyssey [and other programs], there wouldn’t be people of color here.”

Brian stays connected to the community through his work with the Multicultural Student Coalition. “They fight for diversity on campus. We need to raise a level of awareness. On any given Saturday, the Badgers will pack sixty thousand people that are paying millions of dollars to watch football, yet the campus just doesn’t display enough respect and dignity for human worth. The campus should do something to allow more people to attend college.”

Brian is very grateful to Odyssey Project donors whose gifts help him buy textbooks every semester. “Books are hundreds of dollars, especially in the Social Work department. I love those books. At the end of the semester I watch all the students of privilege sell their books back. But those books are a reminder: that was five months of my life that I dedicated to trying to juggle a million things.”

When Brian thinks of the donors, an old adage pops into his mind: ‘Give a man a fish and he’ll eat for a day; teach a man to fish and he’ll eat for a lifetime.’ “Oftentimes when we give money or our time, we don’t really see the impact. If you give to Odyssey you’ll immediately see the benefits of your donation. All you have to do is come on Wednesday and hear the conversations around the table and you’ll know that that was the right thing to do. People in a position of privilege are teaching people to empower themselves when they donate to Odyssey.”

Brian is a single dad of four, one of whom is



Brian's Self-Reflection piece

also a student at UW-Madison. Brian and his son took the same class: “That was deep to have my son come over and we have this shared learning experience. I know he wouldn’t have taken that class if I hadn’t taken that class.” He also enjoys moments of study time with his family. “I love those moments where we’ll all be working on something and we share something we’ve learned.” Brian strongly feels that he’s learning from his children as well. “Their time management skills blow me away. I’m inspired by their dedication.”

He calls his balancing act of school, kids, and work “controlled chaos.” “I don’t sleep,” he says. “I know people have much harder lives; I’m cognizant of that. But through my work as a social worker, I see people who have horrendous life challenges. I’ve been fairly blessed in my life.”

To stay successful, Brian tries to keep current on his homework. “I try not to procrastinate. I don’t have the luxury,” he says. He also suggests utilizing tutors and the Writing Center to increase the chance of college success. He does warn about the physical toll on the body. “My arms have become fairly spindly from holding books for eight hours,” he jokes. “My eyesight is gone; I’m wearing glasses now... I haven’t watched TV in two years.” His current goal is to get his degree. “I want to get done before I’m too old to retire,” he laughs.

Brian knows that it is hard to stay motivated in school when there are so many other things happening in one’s life. “We’re all caregivers,

but it’s okay in life to do something to enrich and empower yourself,” he says. “It’s a leap of faith. By doing that, ultimately it’s going to improve the lives of the people you love. I think that’s hard to see when you’re thinking about dropping out. Education really is a gift to ourselves. That’s hard for people to accept... this is something that no one can take away from you.”

Brian will become the first man to graduate from UW-Madison via the Odyssey Project. “That’s a great distinction. I’m really happy about that. When I was elected to the City Council, I was the first African/Native American elected to local politics. Growing up, I was the first kid of color to go through my school district. So I guess I’m accustomed to firsts. But this is really an incredible honor. It makes me feel like I’m going to do it now. It’s inspirational for me. It will carry me through these papers I have to write!”

On his way to graduation, Brian has earned several scholarships from the UW. In a letter of recommendation for Brian, Professor Emily writes, “Brian is an absolutely fantastic student and human being. In class he demonstrated extraordinary motivation, superior writing and speaking skills, tremendous insight into literary, historical, and philosophical texts, and sensitivity to men and women from diverse political, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. In the community he served as an alderman learning the intricacies of local government, and he worked at the Neighborhood

House as a community activist, leader, and underpaid hands-on social worker for those who are homeless, speak little English, or struggle with a broad range of issues ranging from substance abuse to domestic violence. . . . He will be an incredibly sensitive, compassionate, and knowledgeable social worker in the future.”

Coach Marshall adds, “Brian is one of the most intelligent and thoughtful students I’ve ever encountered. His commitment to his community and to his family is an inspiration. I’m blessed to know this man.”

Brian’s community and academic work serves as an example of the power of a motivated individual.



Brian's children

Thinking about Thoreau, Gandhi, and King

After reading Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," I no longer wonder why Gandhi and Dr. King were influenced by Thoreau. I found a sense of possibility for me becoming an influence in my own community because Thoreau empowered the individual to be morally responsible for what is being done by the government in our country's name.

(Yetta Harris)

I enjoyed reading Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience." It gives you another way of thinking and makes you question yourself. How strong are you? What are you willing to do to stand up for yourself?

(Shaquida Johnson)

Thoreau's ideals were useful in a young, new society like the America of his era. Many of his beliefs were coated in justice that evolved from the inhumane treatment of the slaves. In my opinion, his principles were like those of Socrates.

(Abraham Thomas)

I love it when Thoreau said, "I ask for not at once no government but at once a better government." That was deep.

(Tai'Kiah Phillips)

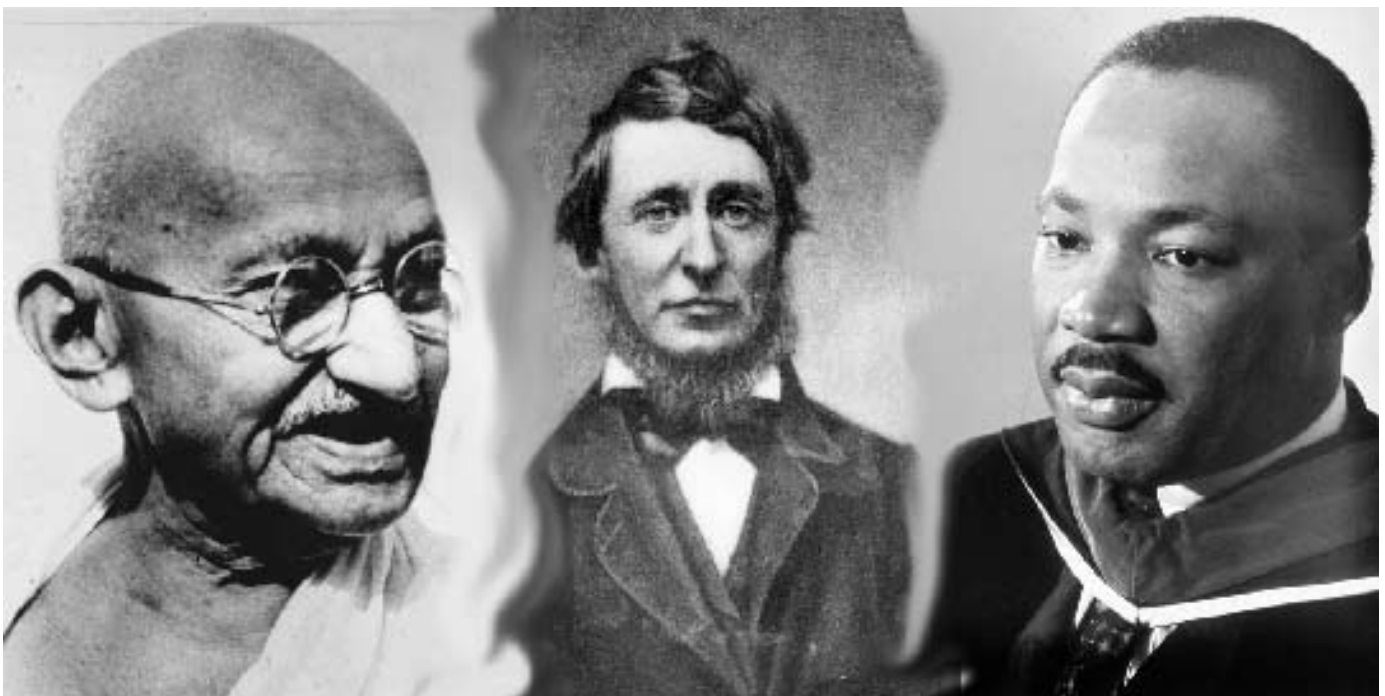
It seems like a big thing to ask people to not follow a government that has always been blindly followed. I liked how Thoreau said that he didn't feel confined in prison, and that he thought how foolish the people who locked him up were.

(Katie Pruitt)

Thoreau writes [of the pursuit of individual wealth], "this makes it impossible for a man to live honestly." This sentence and thoughts were very catchy as it does appear that in looking at today versus then, we are even more stuck on material features and competition (getting ahead) instead of working together and becoming stronger together.

(Michele Withers)

Although this was difficult to read, I personally found Thoreau's essay very engaging and relevant to our current socio-political system. Written over a hundred years ago, much of the philosophy can





be generously applied to the current situations of today. My favorite line from Thoreau's essay was, "Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it."

(Brandon McCarey)

In reading Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," I kept thinking that the dollar is manmade and that originally all we had were our skills and crafts to barter with and to make a way in the world. It is sad that now our lives revolve around the concept of making money to pay taxes and buy worthless goods and services.

(Hedi Rudd)

In his essay "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," Martin Luther King Jr. was amazed by the hospitality and warmth showed by the people of India during their trip. Through Gandhi's teachings, the people of India were running nonviolent campaigns to resolve their problems with homelessness, food shortages, unemployment, and segregation. King noticed that Gandhi's spirit was much alive in India and had created peaceful brotherly communities. He was inspired by the progress and effects of nonviolent campaigns

that he saw in India. King urged America and the Western countries to help India resolve its problems and to learn from Gandhi how to solve problems in their own countries.

(Tatenda Bvindi)

Dr. King compared India to America. Gandhi's nonviolence changed people. India had poverty, homelessness, and the caste system, but Gandhi helped people adopt the satyagraha system to get Congress's support. They still had problems, but they didn't turn to evil ways. Dr. King hoped the United States can follow suit and become a nation of brotherhood seeing no color.

(Samantha East)

Martin Luther King respected and admired Gandhi for the non-violent actions he instituted in the struggle of people who were opposed to the unjust laws of the government. Like Gandhi, King believed in facing the opposition with love instead of violence. King, so greatly influenced by Gandhi, traveled to India in 1959 to see and witness the country where this great leader lived and practiced his nonviolent principles.

(Marcia Brown)



Guilty Crown reviewed by Brandon McCarey

The right to use your friends as weapons is a crown of burden

When I ran across “Guilty Crown” on Hulu.com, I was immediately intrigued by the title itself. The story of Guilty Crown takes place in Tokyo in the year 2039; ten years prior on Christmas Eve, 2029, the unidentified “Apocalypse Virus” spreads throughout Japan and plunges the country into a state of emergency. An international organization known as the GHQ intervenes with martial law and re-establishes order to Japan but does so at the cost of its independence. Ten years later, Shu Ouma, a 17 year old shy and socially awkward high school student, meets Inori Yuzuriha, the lead singer for a popular web band called the Egoist. Shu considers himself a huge Egoist fan, especially of Inori. However, he discovers another side of Inori: it’s revealed she’s a part of Anti-GHQ group known as “The Funeral Parlor,” whose main objective is to liberate Japan from GHQ. Shu starts taking part in the militant actions of The Funeral Parlor, and the “king’s mark” appears on his right hand after he is attacked by GHQ. This mark gives him the super ability of “Void,” which grants him the power to reach inside another person’s body and extract and materialize a weapon from it that reflects the personality of the individual. The series tells the story of Shu’s reluctant involvement with Funeral Parlor and burden of using his power that often places his friends in danger.

After watching the available episodes on Hulu.com, I was quickly drawn in by the clean, high definition and detailed animation of the series. The battle scenes are all memorable and uniquely played out from episode

to episode. The plot in my opinion was slightly above average. Being an Anime fan of many years I’ve grown accustomed to various stereotypes within the genre. For example, Shu Ouma is the typical shy, awkward high school boy who gains supernatural abilities and is often thrown into danger because of friendship and love. This has been done plenty of times in Anime. The science fiction military theme is nothing new in Anime; however, the recurring theme of civil disobedience against an overly-oppressive group definitely falls in line with the material covered in Odyssey in the last few weeks of semester two. “Guilty Crown” explores both the sacrifices and challenges of rebelling against a corrupt established power structure. It ingeniously weaves contemporary civil disobedience themes within the plot structure, such as globalization, foreign policy, military states and civil rights of indigenous citizens, much like the struggles of Mohandas Gandhi in leading the Indian Independence Movement against British occupation. Simultaneously, it explores the introspective impact of one’s personal involvement and accountability of rebelling against a dishonest and oppressive system.

Having a deeper knowledge of civil disobedience via the Odyssey Project helped me appreciate the story of “Guilty Crown” on a fundamental academic level and as artistic expression of civil rights.



Civics Club Luncheon By Run Barlow

In 1912, five women from Madison formed an organization to promote equality for all American citizens, specifically to recognize women as American citizens by ensuring them the right to vote. Each of the five women invited three more women to a study session to discuss social events and raise awareness on community matters. These women made their efforts public by having a social luncheon where an estimated 75 women attended, thus forming the Madison Civics Club. They had four luncheons a year and continued their efforts to broaden the awareness of social issues.



...On Saturday, March 3rd, members of our Odyssey family went to their social luncheon to celebrate their centennial year of civil service. Although the Civics Club is no longer fighting for women's suffrage, on this particular Saturday we enjoyed a delicious meal with over 500 hundred people, men as well as women. We watched two separate high schools receive donations to secure an opportunity they may not have received without the Civics Club, received powerful information about women in business, and listened to two fantastic speakers about civil issues in our very own community. The first speaker, our very own Emily Auerbach, delivered a speech I'd like to compare to The Gettysburg Address: brief but direct, powerful and moving. After hearing her speech, you had to feel compelled to want to do more for your community.

The second speaker, University Police Chief Susan Riseling, gave us her take on the events that happened down at the Capitol after the Walker election. I did not hear this side on the news. She was very entertaining and informational. It was hard to believe she wrote her speech while stuck in traffic.

I would like to thank the Madison Civics Club for their invitation, as well as for everything they are doing in the community. Congratulations on 100 years of achievements and accolades. If you are interested in more information on the Madison Civics Club, feel free to check out their web site: www.madisoncivicsclub.org.

What a Saturday! By Terry Hart



... I greeted everyone at my table and sat down. The table was beautiful. In front of me was a nice salad and bread. The cookies looked tempting, but I passed on them. I was seated in between nine women. They were curious about the Odyssey Project. They asked what it was and what qualified someone to be in the program. Now, being the loquacious young chap I am, I talked and talked, and we laughed and laughed. I definitely sold them on what the Odyssey Project stands for.

Emily spoke briefly but, as always, she was so elegant, graceful, and passionate. When Emily spoke, we came together as a family; at that moment we were one. We

then enjoyed the perks at my table and the conversation ensued again.

After lunch, we were so thrilled to hear from Sue Riseling, Associate Vice Chancellor and chief of the University of Wisconsin Campus Police Department. Sue Riseling was as great as her credentials. She made us laugh, but she also let us into her life and her thought processes during the recent events pertaining to the Capitol Building... The event was amazing!



Thoughts about “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom”

I think the themes in “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” by August Wilson are as relevant today as they were in the 1920’s. Record companies are still ripping musicians off, racist cab drivers and cops still exist, and black people are still killing each other over stupid stuff. I was engaged during the whole play and surprised and saddened by the end. **(Billie Kelsey)**

I enjoyed the last scene of “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom.” When Mr. Sturdevant wanted to pay Levee only five dollars apiece for his songs, Levee ran up on him and then backed down. It pissed me off that Levee stabbed Toledo for stepping on his shoe. I feel that Levee is a real coward. If he was going to stab anyone, it should have been Mr. Sturdevant. **(Marcia Brown)**

I was very impressed with “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom.” The play gave me a feeling of pride. I learned a bit more about the blues. I will always remember Levee and his anger and hurt and pain. **(Phyllis Anderson)**

I found the scene when Levee was talking about the incident that happened to his parents to be very emotional. He had a lot of hatred in him against whites and God. Every time he spoke from the heart, it grabbed my attention. **(Linda Thao)**

“Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” gave me a lot to think about in terms of music, especially today’s music and the industry in general. It’s interesting how

artists can be creative and then swallowed up in commercialism and spit out. They want the fame for the money and the recognition. **(Hedi Rudd)**

The play made me think about life and how you can’t let past hurts affect your future. Levee couldn’t move forward in life because of his past hurt. I will remember to take the time to release anything that is negative and keeps me in bondage. **(Kenya Moore)**

“Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” was outstanding. What stuck out to me was the attitude of Ma. She knew that if she was not making money for the man, she wouldn’t be worth his time. She knew if you’ve got what they want, use it to your advantage. **(Run Barlow)**

The play was an awesome piece of Americana often overlooked in every day America. The language, the personalities, and the pain behind the people were all things I knew as a kid growing up in Chicago. I knew each one of the characters. **(Yetta Harris)**

“Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” was great. I like how the props and the clothes for that period were right on point. I loved that Ma Rainey did not take no for an answer. She knew how the white man used her and she used them right back. She was a big, bold woman that took no crap from anyone and her family was important to her. **(Samantha East)**





Knowing that Ma knew her worth was so powerful. The way she conducted herself was aggravating to me, but in the end, she helped me to see why she behaved that way. She never argued: she stated what her needs, wants, and demands were. For example, she refused to sing unless she got a Coca Cola and she insisted that they made sure the repairs were done and completed on her car. The play delivered a very powerful message. Thank you, Jesus, that I wasn't born in that time because I probably wouldn't have been as strong as she was! **(Arnella Royal)**

I'll most remember the part where Levee was explaining what happened to his parents. The scene kind of gave you a sense of where he came from and it meant more that it took place towards the middle/end of the play when you've had a chance to see how he acts, instead of in the beginning of the play when you're just getting to know everyone. **(Katie Pruitt)**

I enjoyed the actions of every actor in the play, but I enjoyed Levee. He really showed his emotions on stage like no other. Ma Rainey controlled the show and had the crowd into what was happening. I would like to see another play dealing with that era. **(Jesse Hamilton)**



The play was funny and amusing. Toledo and Slow Drag were my two favorites. I can relate to Toledo in a way that reflects the actions between my eldest son and me. Toledo really feels a sense of obligation and responsibility. **(Abraham Thomas)**

I was struck by the determination that Ma showed when responding to the white man. Levee's reaction towards the band members reflects the anger that he had throughout his life. **(Tatenda Bvindi)**

