

Native Son Redux

Homecomings and reunions hold a particular type of significance in the African American community that have no identical corollary in other communities. There are certain possible explanations but no single theory is likely to be satisfactory in the absence of the group of explanations, also there is a to perform substantial contextualizing. A few of these explanations, have to do with the selling of black bodies and the separation of families, the need to escape the institution of slavery with the possibility of leaving behind members of one's family, forced migrations brought about by the need to escape the oppression that followed slavery with the knowledge that a return was unlikely, and other explanations stemming from black bodies existing in the American context. Although there are no explanations for the significance found in the African American context, to dispute it's existence is, in someways, to admit having never been present during an occurrence.

On Thursday night (October 26, 2017), one such occurrence was peculiarly evident in ways that go beyond the presumed importance of the occasion, given its title and location. Eddie S. Glaude, Jr.'s appearance as the Inaugural Guest Lecturer for the Presidential Lecture Series on Social Justice, in the Historic Woodworth Chapel, was a homecoming/reunion indeed. A native son, he most certainly made this moment a homecoming in the obvious meaning, simply a visit home. However, he did not come empty handed, which gave a symbolic meaning to the occasion, one that was understood by all present, as demonstrated by the seemingly endless questions and responses he received. He was definitely not empty handed, because along with his person, if I may speak in dualistic terms, he brought a mind.

For one hour, he excellently elocuted the value gap which exists in America and which causes the American citizenry to be ill-equipped and ill-formed to be the type of citizenry Democracy requires. He stood on the firm foundation of James T. Kloppenberg's 912 page treatise, *Toward*

Democracy, and drove home the point that it is the American majority's investment in the myth of whiteness that causes this democracy to be stymied and undeveloped. He infused this verbal provocation with the blue note of the tragic, found in the writings of James Baldwin from *The Fire Next Time* to *No Name in the Street*. At the same time, he soaked our feet in the blood of our ancestors found in the very soil of Mississippi by recalling significant interruptions of democracy in practice from our dark past. Then he jolted us into reality by revealing the meaning of Black Lives Matter, not to be understood as black life matters only, but simply as white life does not matter more.

His working title was "Social Justice in the 21st Century: Myth or Reality." In choosing such a title, the contours and contexts were set prior to his beginning the lecture, but he found the subject matter to be malleable in such a way, that it allowed him to mold this topic, bending, twisting, and even applying heat rising from his provocative words, stirring all hearts and minds. Although, they were not stirred by an emotional rant, instead his *raison d'être* of the possible world came to rest heavily on each attendees motivational center. The pressure this applied is certain to have had a lasting effect, one that will burn in the minds of those present as a live coal, changing and also bringing forth new creations ready to march on until victory is won!

What I found to be most unique and compelling, was his ability to bring the message home. No, I don't mean the fact that he spoke in Mississippi, but that does play a large role. I mean that he would not allow anyone present to think, for one moment, that being from Mississippi somehow exempted them from this moment of struggle and resistance. He made it clear that we were endowed with a great responsibility stemming from the spilled blood of our ancestors and extending to perpetual generations. Here was this Princeton Professor, a son and a brother, one of us, A Native Son, who brought word back from the front, that we in Mississippi are needed also, and we must keep on pushing. Thank you, Eddie Glaude!

Tougaloo is to be commended for this inaugural lecture and the entire series on Social Justice. Spaces which are conducive to this type of intellectual activity are becoming increasingly absent, but greatly needed. Tougaloo has begun strong and I look forward to seeing what will be next. The video for the Glaude lecture was live-streamed and certain to be archived at Tougaloo College. Efforts such as this require great coordination and support. This goal is a worthy one, and surely the support of the entire community is warranted. Thank you, Tougaloo!