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To: foothill; ASFC Elected; ASFC Elected & Appointed
Cc: centralservices
Subject: Addendum to our Book Report

As we close Black History Month, I want to share some additional “readings” from our colleagues which are getting broader in scope, and even more on Henrietta Lacks....

Here’s one excerpt:

- *I decided to pair my love for food and Black History month together. I read "Notes from a Young Black Chef" by Kawame Onwuachi and am about 1/4 way through "Black Smoke" by Adrian Miller. Kawame's autobiography illustrated the "whiteness" of fine dining both in the types of cuisine that could be served and the people who make the food. Although he was a trained CIA chef, owned his own catering business, graduated top of his class and worked in the best restaurants in New York, opening his own fine dining restaurant was riddled with difficulty. The stereotype of black food, soul food as working class food rather than fine dining resulted in difficulty raising capital and people questioned whether they should pay that much for a table at his restaurant. Adrian Miller's Black Smoke is a book I have wanted to read for a while. I love barbecue. Growing up in Singapore, I was introduced to barbecue by two restaurants- TGI Friday's and Kenny Roger's Barbecue Chicken. I know- the bar was not set too high. BUT, my very first roommate in New York was from Texas and she really introduced me to Texas Barbecue and I've loved it even more. However it was not only til the pandemic that I learned of the roots of barbecue and its place in African American heritage. I was listening to a podcast discussing how the media, and Food Network in particular, has swept the central place and contributions that African Americans have on the history of this cuisine and their contributions.*
- *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm’s Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land* was just given to me by a faculty member and I am looking forward to reading it. A review says this book “helps us remember why land cultivation is such a significant part of the fight for freedom for Black people. Reading this book provides practical tools along with a beautiful visionary template for practicing land development that is rooted in healing and transformation.” Hmmm, Foothill has a lot of land that could be.....

And another comment about reading about Henrietta Lacks:

- *I teach in a concurrent enrollment English 1A class of high school seniors ... where almost all of my students are first-generation college bound from under-represented groups. We have been reading Lacks for a number of years and the students are always engaged with it. For our final assignment on the book, the students read bell hooks' criticism of the text "Tragic Biography: Resurrecting Henrietta Lacks" from Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice and they respond to the question of whether they agree with her critique of Skloot's ability to tell Lacks' story. It is a fascinating conversation and students always have exceptional insights.*

Here are two excerpts from a written piece from one of my most articulate students on this topic:

In “Tragic Biography: Resurrecting Henrietta Lacks”, bell hooks is effective at asserting that to genuinely reflect on and write about the life of a black woman, specifically Henrietta Lacks, an author must assume a completely unbiased, anti-racist, anti-sexist perspective because black women live in a society that is perpetually threatening their personal choice to identity therefore writing must be framed so that it does not perpetuate the very stereotypes that threaten black female identity.

Hooks uses paragraph 9 as a specific case study to prove her larger thesis that Skloot writes from a perspective that can never accurately portray the Lacks' story. This specific example exemplifies how Skloot's implicit bias prevents her from acknowledging and truly understanding the nuanced race themes that are a huge part of the Lacks' story. This makes it impossible for Skloot to transcribe their story in its entirety. Hooks effectively proves Skloot's inability to tell the Lacks' story.

We use this as a jumping-off point to talk about the importance of telling their own stories, paired with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk "Danger of the Single Story". I love engaging in this important conversation with my students and seeing them articulate and advocate for their points of view. I am also incredibly grateful to Foothill for providing the opportunity for my students to engage in this high-level discussion as part of a college-level course. They are poised to do big things in the world and I am so lucky to get to see a glimpse of it in the making.

Thank you for including the entire community in this discussion.

Though we have concluded Black History Month, it should not be the last day that we continue our reading community on this topic.

Best regards,

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