

“Black Women Poetry” seminar

Audre Lorde

Freie Universität Berlin

Early spring through 26 July 1984

1984 (1:34:01)

I do not believe that you learn by a passive interaction between you and the material. I think the only learning that takes place is in a very active examination of the material you're reading and your own lives, in other words, let that interaction take place [inaudible] your own functioning as a computer, and I'm not interested in computers, human computers, and I don't think that any of you are really either. So, it's going to be necessary for use to know each other, to know who we are as we look at this work, as well as begin to have some idea of how is [inaudible] doing the writing, what is this work all about. Poetry, as I've said to some of you who were in an earlier class, is perhaps the most subversive art there is and it is subversive because it is erected to change. Change in the deepest sense, which is concerned with feelings. Poetry comes out of feelings. It works with feelings, it grows from feelings, and it is about altering the very essences of our lives. And anything less than that is not poetry, in any real sense. Now of course for an 18th century poet what is alteration and change is very different from a 20th century poet but nonetheless this is a very real thing and I've said one is to see how this unfolds within the lives of the Black women whose work we are going to study.

[Audre asks students] What are you doing here? What is it you want from this group? ... What is it you want to come from this investment?

If this kind of examination does not meet your needs, you should feel free to leave.

What you want will help form what you get. What you want will help influence what you get. Keep asking yourself: What do I want from this? What do I hope will come? Maybe it won't but at least it gives us a sense of what you have a right to be expecting. It's part of living self-consciously and I like to encourage everyone I know and everyone I come into contact with, and certainly for women, to lead self-conscious lives. Self-conscious in the sense of being conscious of the self, being conscious of yourself moving through whatever it is you are moving through [inaudible].

I'm not used to standing in Berlin but I'm doing it.

What I consider poetry, and I think what you will find in the work that you're going to be dealing with is something a lot more direct and a lot more lively than you have been led to believe, and in fact this is the way in which we being to develop – is there in fact a Black women's aesthetic? I believe there is a Black feminist aesthetic. I believe there is a Black aesthetic. I believe that these cross-over in many ways. It has been said over

and over again that the way you recognize a society, the way you really take the pulse of a society or group is through women and women's poetry.

Poetry is the most economical use of language. It is the quickest way to getting to the essence of an experience.

Poetry is part of literature. It is a particular way of expressing. It is a particular use of experience.

[Audre explains to the students that by reading Black American women's poetry they will know more about Black American women's experiences than if they studied prose or novels]

I am committed to poetry. I am committed to poetry not only as an art but as a way of life, which it is, that poetry will give you the things you want to know. What poetry will demand of you, when dealing with Black women poetry in the next 13 weeks, will *demand* of you is that you will not do it comfortably. You will have to get involved or you will not get anything out of it.

[Audre tells students to keep a journal of their experiences with the class materials]
It documents a journey.

I find that it is crucial that I recognize I do not have one single identity. When I speak of identifying myself, and each one of us must identify ourselves [inaudible] because if you don't someone else will. And remember if you allow someone else to identify you, it will always be to your detriment...it will always be less than what you want, it will be always somehow used against you, so the need for self-identification is a self-protective need, as well as one that strengthens us. I know for myself how crucial it is that I identify myself to myself, to whoever else, and that I take control of that identification.

We are all opaque. We are made up of so many different ingredients. We don't give all of them to everyone every time. It is a natural selection, and it is a selection that we do almost unconsciously. I'd like to make it a little more conscious. I'm a great believer on making the most of what we do conscious to ourselves and [inaudible].

Life speaks life.

What can we share? Together we can make something that is very real.

I am here because poetry is crucial to me. It's not merely what I do. It's a way of living and I believe it's a way of living that can strengthen every person who takes part in it. I think that it is a crucial way of living for women and [inaudible]. I think that self-conscious recognition of our feelings are one of the primary ways of making the stuff

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we need to move through our lives. I think poetry is the visual actual recreation of this stuff in a way that can be shared and used. I'm here because I want to examine this body of literature, which is very important and I feel very vital to me, in conjunction with the rest of you. ... I know that I will find something no matter how many times I go over Gwendolyn Brooks or June Jordan or Sonia Sanchez or Audre Lorde for that matter, no matter how many times I go over that work I [tape break]

What is the dynamic that will build up in this room and with this work?

That's why I'm here, because I'm greedy, because I'm curious and because I believe that I am an endangered species, the same way each one of you is endangered.

Poetry is a very important weapon. I want you to see how it is a weapon in the lives of Black women who use it. I want to encourage you perhaps to use it yourselves.

This is my first time in West Berlin. I told you that I'm scared. You don't believe me.

You are mysterious to me, as I am to you. The only things we have to go on is a belief in each other's good faith, and a kind of curiosity and an excitement. I was scared walking in here, but I was also very excited to learn something new together.

What I really have learned is being afraid or being scared is no reason not to do something. You know! I recognize it. I listen to what lesson it's teaching me, but it doesn't necessarily have to stop [me] from doing it.

People often say how do you write so openly? Look, if someone wants to know who you are, they [can] look deeply into your face, they will find out as much.

[Audre hands out her "Poetry is Not a Luxury" essay]

It [poetry] helps shape a vision of a future, whether your concept of the future is the same as mine is less important than that we *have* a concept of the future, and if we are to have that it must be of something that has not yet been, because obviously what has been has not gotten us very far. We are in the most dangerous times in human history, so there must be another way. Poetry begins to construct that out of our dreams, out of our hope, out of our fear.

I do not believe in making up lists of material before I meet the people who I am going to be studying with. So now that I've met you and get a sense of where you're going, and who you are, I will make up a syllabus.

I suspect poetry is taught in Germany a lot like it's taught in America, which is to turn you off of it as early as possible, by analysis. No amount of analysis will [inaudible]. You

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only analyze a poem after you have it and you want to find out – well how did the writer do in fact what has been done? But poetry is not accessible by analysis. Poetry communicates by feeling and you must somehow enter into a relationship with the poem so that the feelings can flow. Once that happens you can analyze how it is done.

[Audre asks the class how many students work and take classes]

Personal has become a very negative word for a lot of people ... but how do you feel? Do you feel objectively? How is it possible to feel other than personally? You can feel personally about things that are very large and outside of yourself but is it possible to feel objectively? There's nothing wrong with the personal but I want to feel you, yes poetry is personal, it must be, it is the first place you start but it does not remain there. We take what is personal, we take what is experienced and we make a bridge, hopefully to your experience that is different. That is the magical and wonderful quality of poetry, that it can arc across differences. It's one of the few ways that we have dealing with what is genuinely different between us. One of the key ways of making something creative out of that.

[Audre mentions again why she uses term disenfranchisement versus minority: see "Poet as Outsider" transcript]

I usually find something in a way I identify myself that causes trouble to someone who hears it. Usually there is something in my identify that makes people upset. So, if you are upset, that's good. I believe in being upset. I think it's one of the ways we reach the real contacts between ourselves. So, I'm sure the more we go on, you'll be more upset. There's nothing wrong with being upset. This is a safe place where we can examine those things that make us uncomfortable. That's one of the functions of, I think, learning together.

I teach poetry because as I said I am *crucially* involved in it. I am crucially involved in survival, and I consider poetry one of the best weapons, or tools of surviving. I am also crucially involved with your survival because your survival is involved with mine and the survival of my children and the [inaudible]. I do not make a great separation between any of the things in my living, so that teaching, writing poetry, raising children, gardening, somehow becomes very similar to each other. There are less divisions, in other words, less categorizing. I enjoy talking about poetry and enjoy, as I say, examining how to use [inaudible] and every time we deal with it, every time I deal with it [poetry] in a group, I learn something different. And that's very important to me. It keeps me young.

I came specifically to Berlin because Dagmar Schultz invited me to come to Berlin, to the Institute, and I thought well...my opinion about Western Europe and its opposition to Black African, and I think of so much of what American civilization takes from Western Europe is a phrase I use frequently and I thought at some point I cannot

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continue to use that phrase without knowing first-hand what I'm talking about. I've traveled to so many places in the world and I've lived in so many other different areas. I thought it would be really interesting, that I owed it to both myself and the work.

I could not come here if the University did not pay me. I teach because it pays me money. I write because it pays me money. But there are things that can pay you more money quicker. [laughter]

The things I choose to do, I choose to do because they satisfy me.

As a Black American woman, you must understand that Western Europe has been to me the seed of some of the most repressive concepts of my life. When I think of white America, white America is Western Europe. So, when I think of Western Europe in the abstract, it represents it represents to me the home of the boot upon the neck of [inaudible] my people. I felt that it was also necessary to me, and that's why I had never come, all the places I've traveled to work...I felt it was something I needed for my own honesty. To look into your faces...to make it real so it was no longer a concept or theory.

I require a new honesty in terms of questions, so I had to give it.

I deal with it theoretically. I deal with it through the mirror of white America.

There are certain words I think we need to have a common definition of, and I'd like to throw out my definition of racism so that when we use it, we are talking about the same thing. If you want to change that definition, we certainly can but I don't want us to talk about or have discussions using a word that we are meaning different things.

[student mentions that they don't talk about race in Germany and that's why she is taking this class]

Racism is a disease and it's a disease like the common cold. You catch it and very often you're not even aware of it because we are raised to so often with it, and I say we, because in America Black people catch that disease too. I know that none of you here have been immune to it because you've grown up in [inaudible] where racism isn't quite as obvious...but nevertheless it's wrong. We are not at fault for the diseases we catch [inaudible]. This is a safe space, remember that.

[Audre acknowledges the "secret unspoken agendas and secret feelings" that must be in the room by way of her identities: Black, American, woman, lesbian]

This is a place where you can examine them [secret unspoken agendas and secret feelings] with yourself and with each other. There's not too many places where you'll have a chance to do that.

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No matter what happens, I will get paid by the University. I am a woman of good will. I believe rightfully in the survival of women.

1984 (1:20:17)

[Audre mentions Kitchen Table Press, first women of color feminist press “ever to exist in the whole world”]

Reads “The Bridge Poem” by Donna Kate Rushin [poet not explicitly named on tape]

GUILT IS AN IMPERFECT FORM OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE, useful but imperfect.

[students are “looking for new ways of reading” Black women’s experiences and to understand the differences with their white experiences]

[Audre had students fill out a survey that included: name, address, a phone number “where you can be reached, and “if you are attached to this institution, what is your major”]

Speak up! I don’t want to have to look enticingly into your face.

You are really struggling with the absence of Black German women, because I know you exist, and I really very much wanted to have some kind of input and some kind of connection. As a Black woman in a class so far with the exception of [student name] is all white, though there are certain assurances that I feel you have to have which is that you are not being paid to run this class and you should therefore see yourself as part of this group and not feel under any pressure to explain the Bridge poem. I say this publicly because I think in this kind of situation it is always so loaded. I heard a couple of, well, I dialogue with Black women and that the -en- plural means more than one, and there is a certain assumption that goes along why I gave you “The Bridge Poem” to begin with.

You should know that there is a viable growing and very real Black feminist movement in the United States of America and that Black feminism is not white feminism in Black face.

What do I have to do with your survival?

[student responds: “ I don’t know”]

Well you’d better start thinking about it.

[most students do not and have not read poetry before; Audre wants to know what the possibilities in the room are, so she is asking them to talk about who they are]

Because a poem must come out of experience and is a very real bridge of the poem, not the person, is a bridge between experiences that are very different, we deal with

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the work, when I said specifically [student name] that is not the function in this group. It is my function to extend myself as well as the work and this is what in fact what I do. You must make a distinction there. So you don't have to also remember that a poem is not an autobiography. We'll talk more about what a poem is, a thing. It is a piece of art. A work. A poem is a thing. The poet is a person and the ability to make that division at the same time that you recognize the relationship is crucial.

[Audre asks two male students to leave 30 minutes into class]

Let me explain. Because I feel there are some gaps in a group this big, I cannot make. It's not that you will not profit from this, but I have to make some way so I'm asking you because you are men. Yes, I'm not going to be dishonest. I'm telling you because you are men, I'm asking you to leave the group. You can stay till the end of the hour. It's not that I don't want to talk to you. It's that I have to figure out some way of getting, pulling this group together, in some way and I feel since we are here primarily with, since we are dealing with women's work, that that is going to be an additional gap that I don't think we can make. Maybe someday there will be a group that you can take part of.

Next thing, for those of you who are here because you feel as though this is a general broadening of your general knowledge, I would ask you to really think about coming back also. I am going to require that you put yourselves on the line here because there's nothing less than that that you can bring to poetry, neither as a poet or as a person who experiences poetry. If you find that too threatening or if you are in fact you are afraid, I can say on one hand we are all afraid all the time. I mean that as a condition of women, so don't make a dive for the door but if this is not an effort that you are prepared to make in terms of reaching through the air to examine things that yes are intimately involved with your survival, each one of you sitting here. This is not an academic procedure although it is taking place god knows in a very academic setting, it is not theoretical, it's not theoretical for me, contrary to the fact that yes, I am being paid, I'm not being paid enough for that. It's work. I require work of you too. We are in other words going to be in a relationship with this work together. There are no spectators here. There are not theoreticians. There is a journey that will happen, and I hope you will take it too. It will be very difficult in this large of a group but not impossible and I've decided there is no real way that I can, short of saying the first five people count off, and I'm not into that. I can't do that. So, we'll see what happens.

To begin with [student name] you are never going to trust me completely. There are too many gaps between us but there are perhaps things that I can say to you answering your question directly. What am I doing this class? Because I came to Berlin to do the three classes that I am teaching here. I could not have come to Berlin otherwise. In addition to that, I am teaching classes in Black women's poetry because I am passionately involved with poetry, not merely as production but as a way of life. I know what it has meant for me. I know what the connections between feeling and my

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empowerment as a Black woman lesbian. I believe in the function of poetry for every one of your lives. And I also believe that my survival is tied up with yours. I recognize that it is. I think that those of you who do not recognize that this is so are in a bad place and that we are all in a very crucial place in our lives and the place I'm in a different place than you are, but we share a common Earth and we are commonly in danger.

[Audre tells students to read her essay "Poetry is Not a Luxury"]

It is part of my work that I came to do, and I don't have 300 years any more than you have. I am interested in doing my work because it satisfies me on a lot of different levels, and part of my work is coming here saying to you – how are you doing yours? What is this work we are dealing with have to do with your work as a white woman, as a white German woman, as in who you are. More than that I can give you no assurance, except that I will answer honestly, except that I will share or say what it is I have to say. I'm not an angel. I cannot descend upon you with a magic wand. I can't transform you. I can throw out those things that I know and invite you to make some connections. I invite you to use them for your life. And because every single time I look at this work, and I'm very familiar with it by now, because, it is work that is meaningful to me in my life both what I have written and not, every time I look at it in conjunction with other women, no matter how at war I may be with them, I find something new and I am very greedy. I like to learn. I expect to learn from you. I hate being bored.

You've been raised to believe that you approach poetry by analysis. No amount of analysis will ever give you a poem. You need to enter into a relationship with every poem you read, in the same way that you enter into a relationship with someone you meet in the elevator, whose eyes your eyes cross. You jump into the poem, roll around in it, and read it, read it again, and you ask yourself "What is it I feel?" That's the first place, the first legitimate question that opens the relationship between you and any poem. Now you can get to it with how I feel about this line, what that smells like, what that reminds me of, we all have different techniques but how do I feel. And so, I ask you when you first respond to poems that you pay both yourself and the poem a kind of respect, which is to begin there. How do you feel reading a poem? How did you feel hearing the poem?

[student asks Audre if she will be a "useful" teacher] My measurement of myself is not centered on whether you think I am useful or not. I do what I do, now that is an assurance for you. It's meant as an assessment for you.

You are probably used to believing that it is only the interaction between you and the teacher that is important but that is not true. That is just not true. You learn from yourself and from each other. That is important. If you can express it [writing in journal] more clearly in German, then do your paper in German. I would hope that you would translate a couple of them in English so that I can see the them but if you can't do that, Source: Freie Universität Berlin, University Archive, Lorde estate. "Black Women Poetry" seminar at Freie Universität Berlin. Audre Lorde. Digitized analog recordings. 25 October–3 November 2017. Transcript by Ginger K. Hintz.

that's fine too. The important thing is not that I see this but that you do it...that you take part in this process.

A poem is a thing. It goes out. It's got work to do.

This is a safe environment. If you cannot speak here, you cannot speak anywhere. The point is not right now to be right or correct, god knows we've been hung up those words from the time we were born to be women, the point is not that we are correct but that we attempt some kind of dialogue, and dialogue always means friction. So, you have a right to say what you feel...there is nothing wrong with strife and there is also nothing wrong with anger. As I said elsewhere, it is not anger that is killing us, it is hatred, and hatred is very cold. Anger is very hot. Hatred is very cold. It's not that the angers of women are destroying us. Frequently we feel much more comfortable becoming theoretical. It feels easier to us because it's safer.

We have been lured into forgetting how in danger we are and where the dangers lie. We have been raised to be afraid, first of all ourselves, and certainly then of each other. We have been socialized to fear so you are going to be afraid. The question is what do we learn from our fear? How do we learn to go through it and use it? If we wait until we are not afraid to speak, you'll be spending little cryptic messages from a Ouija board from the other side. You know what it's like to work when you're tired? Everybody in here knows what it feels like to work when you are really tired. Well, we can work when we're afraid. That's something we have to accept. I am afraid all the time, it gives a particular edge and recognition to what I do. When I'm not afraid, I have to start asking myself what's really going on. How useful am I being? It's one of the ways in which I measure usefulness.

Poetry is the most highly concentrated use of a language. It speaks to feeling. The words have weight.

10 May 1984 (1:34:09)

How do we begin to live self-consciously? What do we alter? We don't necessarily alter what is happening because we have limited power and access over what is happening. I say limited, not none, limited. What do we alter?

We need to bring into our lives those possibilities that focus different...we need the ability to have different visions. We need to have both vision and possibility that does not yet exist. It is difficult to turn around our living and our consciousness. It is necessary if we are to begin to create something now because what has been is not serving us. We are dedicated, hopefully, to change. If we are speaking as poets or as people or women who are involved in poetry, I've naturally assumed that the only thing that brings you into this room is that you are interested in change, because if you are not, you will not stay. It's going to be too painful and too upsetting. You are invested in your lives in the way that I'm invested in my life. They are very different lives, but they

can recognize that change must come, however it does for you, for me, for the earth we share.

Poetry, I feel is a very important part of that change because as I say in “Poetry is Not a Luxury” it is through our poems, as well as our dreams, we begin to focus, we begin to shape what has not yet been. And this is a legitimate and important function of poetry. To give a shape to a future that does not yet exist. It is what we speak of when we talk about vision or dreaming, but not dreaming in the sense of idle fantasy. Dreaming in the sense of making an emotional blueprint for what we can then work toward.

We are told the process of education is one of recording, becoming a computer. The process of reordering this [white male culture], of reaching down inside to what is chaotic, what is sometimes upsetting but what is genuine, is a hard process, but it is an absolutely necessary one to begin to forge what is new. We have been taught to distrust deeply what is deepest within ourselves.

I capitalize Black whenever I am referring to a quality of living, a quality within us, a people, a self, to force us, to force you and the people who read, as well as myself to deal with the fact that ultimately color is the bottom line. So however we deal with the hierarchies of life we have been given, what is dark is terrible, what is black is frightening, threatening, the whole collection of adjectives that are negative, and I would like...how do we in fact turn this around consciously. Well one of the ways to begin with that it's done, the way I do it, is to make the conscious, to make Black capitalized.

[Audre talks about how “Poetry is Not a Luxury” is the backbone for all the class discussions. She explains to the class that when she wrote it, she felt as if she was writing a poem. It was one of the first pieces of prose she ever did “in an attempt to make linear, the way that prose does make linear, the poetic process, or what in fact I believe about poetry.”]

It's not our ideas that are going to save us. It is not the idea that the pollution of the planet is wrong. It is not the idea that if we detonate one hydrogen bomb on this Earth, we are done for, that idea has been around for a long time. It's not the idea of how to live that is needed. We have those ideas. Why are we wiping ourselves out? Why do we sit as women and continue to believe that we are powerless? Why do you sit and believe that you are learning when you take in life like a computer, what is hurled at you? Obviously it's not because someone has never given you the idea that there's another way. There are no new ideas. There may be in fact ideas that are new to me or new to you, but rest assured in this long and troubled human history, that goes back more than 30,000 years, believe me someone has thought it before. That's not where it's at is it?

I say to you that I believe this is part of what keeps us marching in the long step. We wait and we wait, and we wait for a new idea, but to tiptoe along and

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transform our living. It is not going to happen. It is not going to happen. That is hard to hear but it is not going to happen. It is what we do with these ideas, how we make them real, how we flesh them and love them and give them power and life to move. An idea has no power beyond the person who holds it and makes it living. You must understand that. What you think will never save you. You must be able to think, yes, but without making that alive and real you have once again only the functions of a computer, that is to say you have recorded, and none of us lives as I say 300 years, whatever you have recorded in time you will die and that will go. What you live and what you do with the ideas you have is what will make a change in your life, in your living, and the worlds within which you must move, which I move.

You can come to an idea for the first time, yes, but the fact that you have a new idea means absolutely nothing unless you siphon it through your living. Getting that idea does not change your life, the way in which you apply it, the way in which you connect with it, intersects as I say, is ultimately what changes your life.

We have been raised to respect only our ideas. We have been taught that our feelings are something female, that we don't need to consider, that we push behind us, and until we can make them central, we essentially cannot move upon the ideas we have in any new way. It is our feeling that draws or, you know there is a scientific, let me tell you, it has been scientifically proven, you know what paramecium are, little one-celled animals, tiny tiny that reproduce, you know cut a piece of them and they regenerate, same thing with hydra, but you cut off an arm or you cut off a piece of these very simple creatures and they will grow another one. It is now been proven that once it has been cut off, there is an electrical charge that goes out in the shape of what is to be regrown.

It is perhaps the scientific way of saying what in fact we have been saying, that until we can conceive of what has not been, until we can conceive the shape of what is not there, we cannot fill it, until we can feel beyond what we have been given, what we have found, what we have been told is right, until we can feel a need, a desire, a sense of what does not exist, now then we can decide or even think of how to provide it. This is the function of poetry. This is the function of dreaming. Our ideas follow. Our ideas follow our needs and our desires. Our ideas follow vision.

[Audre talks about how the first level of a poem is the words, the initial surface meaning: the shared knowing of a language]

Reads "Nikki-Rosa" by Nikki Giovanni

We are raised to believe that if I assert my identity and define myself that somehow, I am lessening you. That there is one little pie called identify and if I take a quarter of it that leaves less for you. This is not true. My ability to identify myself, to explore my definition for use does not lesson you. It does not take away from your power, but we

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are trained to believe in fact it does. So therefore, a Black woman poet to define herself, to speak of “Black love is Black wealth” does not detract from what, for some people, white love is white wealth too. That is not what the poet is talking about. She has a legitimate position that she’s exploring. That the concept of that reductible part of definition is very very important and we have to move away from that, or we will never be able to get into any of these poems on a real basis. We will not be able to explore what in fact the poet is saying, and then once we have done that, we can then legitimately examine where the bridges are, so that the bridges no longer become a false stretching, oh I don’t have to deal with Nikki Giovanni as a Black woman, I don’t have to deal with this as a Black woman’s poem because of course it’s the same for me [as a white woman] How do we identify across differences? We cannot in fact make that identification until we explore what the differences are. It is not that these bridges do not exist, it is that if we make them falsely, they will collapse.

[Audre goes on to state that white women commonly collapse the Black woman’s experience into an “everybody”] You must explore those particularities.

The concept of “we’re poor but happy” is very frequent in white literature. So, what makes this so very strange that “Black love is Black wealth”?

[Audre names to room that Black people] by and large are not allowed to have multi-dimensional lives stereotyping robs us of the fullness of our experience, in the fullness of our living, complexity yes but also full.

No matter what the identification is, if we wait to be identified from the outside, if you wait to have your definition, your identity provided for you from the outside, it will always be to your detriment. Because whoever is defining you, will define you in terms of their needs not yours. So, it is essential, it is essential that each of us begin to recognize and to define for ourselves what in fact identity means. And even if, for instance, the external identity may in large appear to be the same as what we ourselves would do, the fact that it comes from outside makes it problematic. Makes it dangerous.

Reads “Woman Poem” by Nikki Giovanni

You want to get up and stretch? Are you tired of feeling?

You need to be able to grapple with what the poem is doing, what the poem makes you feel. You need to grapple with that. It is legitimate. I don’t want you to escape this poem. This poem deals with the realities of some Black women’s lives in a very real and immediate way and I want you to live that. I want you to feel it. If you say that you are interested, why are you here? I want you to get into this poem in order to feel the pain of it.

Source: Freie Universität Berlin, University Archive, Lorde estate. “Black Women Poetry” seminar at Freie Universität Berlin. Audre Lorde. Digitized analog recordings. 25 October–3 November 2017. Transcript by Ginger K. Hintz.

17 May 1984 (2:19:44)

It is not enough to think...this is a discipline, this is a particular discipline, which has to do with writing it down. You need to be able to plot the progress. What happens when you think – when you keep it in your head – it alters depending on how you're feeling.

One of the reasons I felt it was important for you to articulate what you are doing here is so that you could in fact hear it in your own ears and recall it, as well as to give me a sense of what your investment is. Now I don't know if in fact we have a common language. I would hope we do. We're calling it, for the lack of anything better, English, and that's what we're using. That's what the poetry is in. Now we have read a few poems...how do you feel I said to you? And let me play back what I heard. I heard: I'm very glad this isn't my life. I heard: I can't identify with this so I can't relate to it. I heard: I don't understand this. I heard: this is too painful, I don't want to think about it. [student laughs] This is not in the least humorous. It may be painfully understandable, but I am doing this for two reasons. I am not interested in defensiveness. I am not attacking you, so a response of defensiveness is useless to all of us. I am not interested in guilt, that is also not useful to you or me. I am interested in your looking at these two manifestations of what happened within a three-week period of time and giving a little bit of feedback about what it means because either you are prepared to jump in and your both feet are going to get wet or in fact you wish to remain observant, in which case you do not belong here. There is a gap in what you said you wanted to do and what in fact you are prepared to do. It happens to us all. I have called your attention to it, now I am saying that I require you to hold yourselves to what you said your intention was coming here. If your intention has changed, then you are free to leave. It's not going to kill you to feel someone else's pain. You might for instance find something that will tell you something about yours or about your power or about your strength. You will never do it cheaply, and when I say cheaply, I am saying what turns you on very lightly or what seems to be familiar you take and what seems unfamiliar you don't. That will leave you in exactly the same space you were in before you ever exposed yourself to this powerful experience.

Feeling is like being pregnant. You can't be a little bit pregnant.

Whether you deal consciously or not with whatever it is that's going on, you're going to have to deal. So, it's a question of dealing with your eyes open as opposed to dealing with your eyes closed. And yeah, beginning to touch the work of Black women's poetry, beginning to really see and examine what is going on there is...probably going to encourage you or require that you deal with a lot of other levels in your life and yes, it is not easy. The one thing I can say to us is you're having to deal anyway. It's just a question of doing it open or doing it closed.

[Audre wants class to deal with poems in an “open way,” references French essay “English is on Laughter” it examines the different ways laughter “covers insecurity, fear, separation, basically it’s a separating device”]

There is no such thing as universal poetry. Poetry communications by feeling. You encourage feeling, you evoke people’s feelings through language, by making a bridge between experiences that are not common to you both. We bridge that difference through our language. We do it by evoking feeling. That feeling must come out of a particular experience. The reason why we believe there is something called universal poetry is because what is being called universal for years and years and years is usually what is male and what is white. So, the universal experience out of which poetry comes is usually the experience that is usually a white male experience and a white male poetry. Poetry that comes out of experiences that are neither white nor male does not invalidate that experience nor that poetry. You need to become educated within your own selves to become aware of that. That’s the first problem that happens. However, you will never connect. I am interested in the intersection of your lives and the lives of the word we are doing. What is this causing? What is this making happen? But you will never come to this by attempting to bypass the fact that there are real differences, real differences. And every time you tip that toe into that difference, I hear you say that is too cold, hey I don’t wanna deal. That’s what I’m talking about. You’re going to have to deal with difference. You will never find the bridge until first you recognize what is different. Plumb that difference, examine it, and examine the feelings that go with that. You will find in those feelings that there are very much feelings that you have also, you may have them out of different experiences, but you have the feelings. There is no easy way to connect with another woman’s experience that is different from yours. You need to recognize the differences before you can approach the similarities. And if you try to have an easy connection of similarity, it’s not going to work. There are easier ways of spending your time.

[Audre acknowledges students exposing their emotions *feels* threatening]

While you are here, be open to what’s happening and be open to what’s happening to yourself. Yeah, it is very threatening. Yeah, I’m asking a lot from you. I am not asking anything more from you than what you’re gonna have to put out outside and call it a different name. But I recognize this is coming in a package that is not familiar to you.

You must not think too long because I get really bored with silences.

How are you emotionally traveling through this poem?

Nothing happens accidentally in a poem.

Being aware is the first step to change but one needs to be aware and to feel the pain involved with awareness, not to step over it but to go through it.

Source: Freie Universität Berlin, University Archive, Lorde estate. “Black Women Poetry” seminar at Freie Universität Berlin. Audre Lorde. Digitized analog recordings. 25 October–3 November 2017. Transcript by Ginger K. Hintz.

I think aggressiveness is a very necessary part of living and it's certainly something you will find quite frequently in a very positive way in Black women's poetry and Black women's literature in general.

[Audre wants students to tell her if they are using aggressive in a negative sense to tell her because when she hears "aggressive in terms of women's poetry, I hear it as a positive thing"]

Reads "24 Hour J.O.B." by Mari Evans

Power isn't only a question of who runs what, it's a question of a total environmental underlining of what you are not.

Reads "Harriet" by Audre Lorde

One of the tools of keeping any disenfranchised people separate is you got to keep them separate. You have got to build in enough distrust and enough separation that they never really come together because if they ever do, what will it mean? So, the tools by which Black women are kept separate are many but the fact we have been encouraged to be separate is very real, that we have been encouraged to testify against ourselves is something that comes up over and over again.

21 June 1984 (1:10:16)

If you're here, you've got to be prepared to work.

Reads "Jesus Was Crucified Or: It Must Be Deep" by Carolyn Rodgers

The kind of identification you are looking for is a very real one. When I say what implications do these poems have in your living this is a necessary connection you have to make, but you can't make it cheaply, you can't make it easily. You can't pass over the fact that these are Black women's experiences, that there is something to be found. That you remember you said: I want to find out about the lives of Black women, I want to taste, feel, some of this consciousness. You can come to that identification but not until you really grasp the emotional textures of this work, the emotional textures of this poem, of the life of the woman who has created within it, of the experience out which it comes out of, in other words which is not to say that of course because a poem must of necessity make that bridge, it must jump that gap between your experience and hers. But you cannot do it without first going through her experience, in other words you cannot wipe out the poet. You cannot wipe out the poem.

[Audre is asking students to decenter whiteness]

Black women must get across to their daughters very very early the fact that survival, as I frequently say, is not a theoretical proposition. We don't have time to worry, or to work it out. That there is certain real things we have to attend to.

[Audre explains Social Security to students] Social Security is something that working people pay into all their lives long. When you get to be 65, and you can no longer work, you are then supposed to draw Social Security benefits. It's more or less, it's a public old-age pension, but you pay into it. It's not given to you by the government. This is, you invest in other words your money over thirty, forty years of working life.

I'm trying to encourage you to jump in [the poem], to take off your shoes, put on your bathing suits and jump into it, to roll around in this poem a little and some of the flavor instead of being so tight-assed and worried that you've got the wrong words.

Humor is used in a very interesting fashion, particularly Black poetry. It is first of all part of, because Black poetry draws so much of its power from Black music and Black speech, and humor because mostly Black speech has a great deal of humor in it, we have a talent, a long line of saying sometimes very terrible things in very beautiful ways. And one of the ways you do that is always to have to touch with humor. You must not allow humor to blanket or to blind to the real seriousness and the real power of what is said also. Even if the experience in the poem is not the same as yours, in this case white German women and Black American women, there is still possibility of touching your life. The ways within which the feelings of the poem speak to you.

The binding thread behind many, all of these poems, for the next couple of weeks will be an examination of how do we touch the power that we need as Black women, how do we find it, what is there to be learned from the worlds in which we live, how do we in other words move beyond recording toward vision, which is of course where we as a group will end up. The poet as visionary. And I would like us to look at "Power." I would like us to read that and to talk some about it.

Reads "Power" by Audre Lorde

28 June 1984 (1:18:34)

Any kind of vision that doesn't allow for us both is very dangerous because they're limited. They leave out our living. You have only yourself to implement the things you believe, yourself how you affect the person next to you, how you affect me, what you do. But you have only yourself, and if you don't exist your ideas are totally beside the point.

How do we learn to use whatever power we have? How do we learn to recognize, and converse of that, for a Black woman the poet is warrior, how do we come between, what are the forces, what are some of the, what are some of the realities of the lives of poets, of some Black women in North America, in time that come between us and the

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realization or the ability to look at where our power lies and I think that Pinkie Gordon Lane, who I assigned to you, has done a poem that really begins to deal with some of the sub rosa, under surface constructions that support powerlessness or the image of powerlessness.

Reads “Sexual Privacy of Women on Welfare” by Pinkie Gordon Lane

[asks students if they understand what “welfare” is] It is a public assistance, public living assistance. It is at this point well in New York City and most of the states 80% federal and 20% state. It is however, it is administered by state and local jurisdictions, city jurisdictions, and certainly in the east and throughout most [of] the United States of America it carries a most degrading set of circumstances so that it’s not really a question of receiving public assistance but it’s a question of really having to disvalue yourself in the structures, in the ways in which people are treated and by the large when we speak of the feminization of poverty in the United States of America, we are speaking about larger and larger groups of women finding themselves in positions of being heads of households, unable to find jobs, unable to work, and in within the welfare system. It’s a social system.

Think about it [“Sexual Privacy of Women on Welfare”], run it through yourselves. Feel the effect of this documentation, constant emotional deprivations. Mitigate against power. [poet as warrior]

It is necessary at every point to recognize the weight of what you have to say can make [inaudible]. How are we encouraged to give up our power? What are some of the mechanisms that have to be actively, for instance, fought against?

Reads “Where Will You Be?” by Pat Parker

You cannot identify with a poem until you have really made an attempt to get into the feelings and stand in the place of the poet, or the person who is speaking in the poem, until you really get of who, and why, all of the feelings that the poem are anchored in the experience, the actual experience the poem is anchored in. Once you set the feelings that come from those experiences then you bring those to yourself, but the question of identification cannot be an easy one. The question of nonidentification can’t be an easy one.

[Audre wants students to go deeper than simply saying “I don’t feel...”]

[Audre makes reference back to endangered species from first class] I really wonder how close you can come to recognizing some terms for your own survival.

[student references Berlin politics of foreigners using food stamps and shares there was a political action of those from Berlin using food stamps too, in solidarity, to break the shame of using them]

I think we all stand up in some way if we continue to survive. I have a real respect for survival. And by survival, I do not mean existence, which is the province sometimes of the walking wounded, sometimes of the walking dead. Existence is the ability to draw one more breath after the other and put one food after the other. Survival has a more active, live quality...so when I speak of survival, I mean living, in fact, living with focus, not merely living. Survival is the ability to move and to teach, to find both power and joy relative to our lives.

5 July 1984 (1:33:58)

[shares essay "Lesbian Poetry in the Classroom"]

[class discussion about "perversion," poem not mentioned on tape]

We have to recognize there are those people who give *silence* accent to the structures but there is a structure that serves none of us, not even for the most part the moral majority, which is neither moral nor in the majority. ... We have to make a distinction between that, and we can call it the mega force, because at some point it is a human. It is a structure of the machine that we are all seduced into function as part of. That we need to recognize when we do our jobs, when we are good little girls, that when we do march to whatever step we are supposed to, we are fitting into this machine, we are fitting into the structure that has been created for us which is comfortable, but not all that comfortable, gives us the illusion of safety, but it's not really very safe. I mean I know I'm constantly saying to you – what has your silence bought you? Are you rich, happy, secure, well-to-do, comfortable? I mean, what does it serve? But we have the illusion that if we perform as we are expected to perform then we will be part of this machine and it will give us sanction. This in fact is not so, but there are those people who therefore function as part of the machine and there is the machine itself, call it a structure, call it a political system, call it the hands or the fingers within a society that press the buttons that send out the call that move the police, that decide who is going to be moved on this year, this century, this week, this particular clearinghouse. Who shall we arrest? Who shall we move on this week? Shall it be the prostitutes on Potsdamer or shall it be Black Indian children in America? I mean for each society within each time there are structures that makes those decisions and then there are the moral majority, the silent majority, the people in your village who move to the directives. We have to make this distinction at the same time as we recognize that there are many hands that perform these operations, I would like you always to keep that distinction as you move through your lives. It's necessary that you recognize when we talk about the forces aligned against us, the forces aligned against me, who I am, the forces aligned [against] each one of you, that you recognize in reality, who are the people you have to deal with and what is their relative power, because until you follow

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sources back, until you can recognize where power comes from, that is oppressing you, that is oppressing me, that is oppressing each of us, we are not really able to move on, because yes we do move against the skinheads, we move against our parents, we move against our villages, and when we have wiped them out, there's another wave to take their place. What are the structures that continue to perpetrate this kind of oppression? This kind of dehumanization.

It is always a question of hierarchies. There are those people who delude themselves they have power. It is usually easier to reach them by illustrating how little power they really have, sometimes that works, sometimes it doesn't. I don't want to become theoretical about this...but I think there are distinctions that we have to make constantly, not only in our personal posture but in our social and political ones also, and I think these three are closely connected but they are not identical.

[regarding making comparisons] In the same way that slavery was a lot worse than racism in 1980, this doesn't work. It doesn't work to say, well anti-Semitism was worse during concentration camps than it is now. It does not serve. These comparisons don't move us in any way that is useful. What those comparisons do is make us move along as one of us is not free, none of us are. We are merely just more or less removed from being able to see the connections.

[regarding a comment of "look how far we've come"] When we speak of poet as warrior, it is hard to draw strength from a future that is not assured but that is certainly stronger than drawing strength from a past that has already been. We need to know the past, we need the information of the past, but to have it be the source of our security is a very fragile kind of security. It does not move us beyond where we are.

You figure if you change the terrain, the problems become less important, but they don't. They just maybe become about 5 years removed. They are essentially the same problems. It always feels to me when people say that "there is no use."

[in regard to moving to another place, like Germans moving to America and vice versa] My feeling is to give them a little, want to give them a little individual dose of poison. If there is no use then what are you doing occupying space, and breath, and time? I feel that very strongly. It's not that I don't have moments of deep pessimism and despair. I think that despair is something those of us who recognize our oppression, as opposed to those of us who are oppressed and not oppressed, those of us who recognize our oppression, because I think this is the difference, have many moments of despair. I think a real answer to that despair is the knowledge that current loving, that I've said elsewhere, and a question of what we can do for a future. Cynicism serves none of us. I believe it is unreal. There's a difference between cynicism and despair. I think despair is a problem that we need to fight, we need to recognize why it makes us useful and fight. I think cynicism is almost a fake position. It's a way of putting distance between you and any feeling. But that's my personal feeling.

Reads “Poem at Thirty” by Sonia Sanchez

[Audre talks about moving into the poem from its effect, how to develop skill to see the emotionally pivotal lines in a poem]

The poem comes out of the particular experience and connection of the poet who is making the poem, comes out of the experience, the way in which she internalizes and creates out of it. We, as the reader, must attempt to feel the poem in terms of the poet, in terms of what the poet wants us to feel, then we can take that feeling and identify it, make the intersection within our lives. What I don't want you to do is jump over the experience of the poet without ever examining it, dealing with it as it arises out of the poem, and simply make a too easy jump because that jump doesn't last. It's like plastic food. It has no nourishment. What I'm saying is the only way to really identify with the poem is to go directly through the experience of the person who writes it and that requires some real feeling, that requires rolling around in the poem for a while. Sometimes rolling around in it even more than we have a chance to do here.

[Audre references why poetry is powerful: it functions/works on so many levels] words have meanings, connotations, associations, and when we put together, if the poet did not want us to feel the things we were feeling, she would use her language differently. [there's a richness buried] emotional information

Reads “Love Poem 7” by Sonia Sanchez

One of the best crafted poems in the last 20 years.

12 July 1984 (1:02:09)

[discussion starts with context of broken Native American treaties]

The murders of women of color, Black women, Native American Indian women, Chicana women are usually not noted and very rarely are anyone held for their murders unless a great deal of pressure is brought to bear either by community or unless she is well known or connected in some other way. The deaths of women of color as the deaths of children of color are usually not recorded or marked in any real way.

Reads “Poem for Nana” by June Jordan [in *Black Sister*, page 148]

Rise to deal with the work.

[Audre names the low-energy in the room]

How will you deal with poetry when I'm gone? How do you move into it?
How do you begin to integrate the kinds of assaults we get throughout our whole lives?

Source: Freie Universität Berlin, University Archive, Lorde estate. “Black Women Poetry” seminar at Freie Universität Berlin. Audre Lorde. Digitized analog recordings. 25 October–3 November 2017. Transcript by Ginger K. Hintz.

[Audre asks students what they know about Native Americans in the United States: students say they know ALL the treaties were broken] We know that the American Indian people were very wedded to nature and to natural things, believe in the preservation of Earth. We know that they believe power lay in the ability to connect with the Earth, with what was supernatural, with what was spiritual as well as what was real.

[Audre talks about reservations and displacement, student talks about how capitalism is doomed to fail]

[Audre encourages students to go deeper than surface anchors of the poem, asks them to see and pull out the vision of the poet, to notice when the poet shows up in the poem, ask them to speak out about the vision of the poet speaks personally to them]

I recommend you submit yourselves to this poem.

19 July 1984 (1:31:14)

Reads "Chain" by Audre Lorde

[Audre wants to know how to break the silences with the students, feels impatient after meeting so often at this point] How do I continue to encourage you to ask questions that may seem very threatening, that may seem very terrible, but are very important to both about the poems and about your lives? There is nothing in our lives that cannot be used, used for insight to other women and to the state of the world in which we live, into recognizing feelings that are difficult to approach, but are very essential.

[Audre asks students if they understand the words she is saying] So if we are having difficulty communicating it's not about the language.

[Audre talks about how she will always be involved with the ways in which tragedies are never gone, whether they are ours or someone else] The ways within which they bind all of us together. What do we do with the people who are either too unpleasant, too upsetting, or too much of a reproach to us? Do we deal with them or ignore them? What is our relationship, our responsibility, to those people who are discarded? How to understand beyond condemnation?

[student talks about her struggle with the words/lines "promise," "vomiting," "love"] That's what happens when you use the energy around words, when you put them together, that don't belong, somehow, they pollinate, they cross. Their story is legion.

[students talk about how all the common ways abuse happens repeatedly, examples shared: when your uncle smacks you on the butt or kisses you with his mouth half open] The poem has its own work, different from the poet's work. What I do when something won't let me rest, I write about it. This poem ["Chains"] is like a recurring

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nightmare that haunts, in the same way as “Power.” I have not met anyone who is powerful and complacent.

Reads “Revolutionary Blues” by Julie Blackwomon

Developing a sense of power in the absence of the realities of our lives is like trying to sail across the Atlantic Ocean in a paper boat. Simone de Beauvoir says, and I really love this quotation because it feels so real to me, that it’s only in the recognition of the genuine capacities of our life, it’s only in the recognition in the genuine quality of our life that we can develop the power to change it and the motivation to act, in other words, acting and the motivation, in other words, acting and believing in a vacuum or from a position of naivety is very ungrounded. It’s very chancy. You’re building a house with no foundation, and it’s true. It’s in the face of recognizing enormous odds that face us, it’s only in recognizing that we can genuinely act and genuinely touch our power, and that it becomes genuine power. We’re not living fantasies or fairy tales. So, it feels to me to be a very strengthening thing to recognize as the shape of what opposes us, to recognize the shape of the realities of our lives, particularly when they are painful and insoluble.

[Audre discusses how the set-up of “Revolutionary Blues” is a Passion Play] A whole series of plays that came down in the Middle Ages here and in Europe that only dealt with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everyone knew how it was going to turn out. [class laughs] It’s a way to talk about, there may be different characters in a story, but everyone knows how it will end. It happens so frequently and is so well known that we don’t question the shape of it, only what’s being made of it.

[Audre shares she has read the student’s journals “with enormous interest.” She was glad to read them and wants copies – “interesting is a very naked word.” She found them reassuring, a reflection of what she hoped was going on, found them rewarding, recognizes and voices how difficult what they were doing, some journals were more successful than others, owns her mistakes and admits it succeeded for her at various points, hopes they ask or will ask “how do I approach a literature of difference”]

How do you use a literature of difference, not only to investigate the lives and consciousness of people who write it but also to examine are there places, for instance, once you have established what these lives [Black American women] and concerns are, are there places they intersect with your life? And what are the places where these lives and concerns do not intersect with your lives and in some cases diametrically opposed to your concerns? These are three questions I hope haunt you over and over again. I hope that you will go back to the work that you have read here in the past 12 weeks. I hope you will seek out more of the writings of these women. Most of all, I want you to examine what I’ve been yelling and screaming about for 13 weeks, about living a self-conscious life, about examining where your power is because ultimately I am less concerned with leaving a group of women who are rabidly involved

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with the lives of Black women in America, although that would be really good to make those connections, I am more concerned with leaving a group of women who begin to ask questions about their own lives in new ways, who make it that much have a sense of a new approach to some aspect of your living, some aspect of the worlds which you move and if that happens for each of you in some way, well then, we're ahead of the game. If it didn't happen, I hope it does.

[Audre wants to know the students:]

- 1) Hopes and fear about this class
- 2) What they feel they got out of it, and what did not that they wanted to get (what did this give you? how did this fail you? important piece of any exchange)
- 3) How they feel they can use something that they did get, a nuts and bolts question, a practical – how will this translate into your living? Or will it? Specifics.
- 4) Cultural differences teaching in Berlin – it has been radically different than in Idaho, New York, and California [everyone laughs about Idaho], used as an example, differences between small town and New York City are almost as big as New York City and Berlin.

[when asked about her direct experience in Berlin] It has been very difficult and checkered and very rewarding. Those are three separate things. It has been very difficult because the language, although you speak English wonderfully, considering how poorly if not at all I speak German. I thought therefore since you spoke English that there were certain assumptions about language you could make, and I have learned that is not true. So, this has been a real learning experience for me on the level of how do we talk about feelings. I've really come to see that the language in which you talk about feelings affect the ways in which you talk about feelings. That's different from saying you feel differently from me, that's not the point. I think how you talk and how you talk in English about feeling is different from how I talk in English about feelings. It was difficult also because Berlin is a very, very white city.

[moved discussion to reception to talk more about her Berlin experience]

26 July 1984 (1:03:21)

[note: discussion is centered on debriefing class experience and their feelings and audio is very hard to hear]

[critique often seen as threatening from the group, students didn't want to be wrong, or feel judged as a racist, which was their own projection of white guilt. Audre acknowledges meeting only once a week is hard to establish personal connections, felt she was carrying a lot of emotional work, she said she was under constant constraint and conscious of wanting to be patient in this new environment, didn't want to just lecture, "might have been easier but not productive," suggest having a personal debrief earlier in the course, like 5th or 6th week]

Source: Freie Universität Berlin, University Archive, Lorde estate. "Black Women Poetry" seminar at Freie Universität Berlin. Audre Lorde. Digitized analog recordings. 25 October–3 November 2017. Transcript by Ginger K. Hintz.

[Audre admits she felt “a lot of resistance and a lot of hostility,” discussion about fear versus anger, “fear is useless,” learn to work through it, admits, again, she was afraid of coming into classroom “look at what I’m up against” – walked into all white group and then being asked to tell them about Black women, reiterates that she really meant and wanted to create a safe environment]

[in context of students’ feeling Audre was “aggressive” a student admits she is “very German, afraid of authority,”] Audre asks: When you say I’m an authority, do you feel that the seat of my authority came because I was sanctioned by the university or it was because I’m a Black woman poet?

What will you do in the next situation based on what you learned from this class? Because that tension and discomfort will happen again and again.

[Students acknowledge the silence was related to conflict, specifically racism. One student said class would be really different if there were more women of color in the class, “these things” (racism) are not discussed in Germany]

[Afro-German is a new word for the students. Student says it was very valuable to hear that term and then be able to put into social context during the class. Audre says “Afro-German not a community as she would see but it is a reality.”]

[Audre asking in context to having open conversations about race] Do you think it’s possible to have this kind of class in Germany?

[Students respond with needing more information, data, to talk about racism better. Audre encourages them to keep exploring, by using their own lives, and in particular this experience to build upon and keep learning about racism and how to have conversations about it.]

[Student mentions that hearing poetry versus reading was different (not how she was taught), she was able to get images from poem from that method.]

The sound is part of the poem

Do I want to do this to myself or do I want to allow them to do it to me? These are the two choices. If you don’t use who you are in the service of what you believe, someone is gonna use you in the service of something you don’t believe.

I wish you good luck in your living. I wish you power in your lives.

[Audre hopes as a result of this class the students ask different questions about self or standing up to authority/power] to do that again different in some other way

I'm much more interested in leaving people behind who will ask questions about their lives...and see racism in a living context inside your living here, now.

[Audre hopes the next time she comes back they can read Afro-German poems]

[conversation is about the particularly cold and rainy summer, Audre is headed back to New York City on Saturday]

I need the sun like I need water. The sun that I've met here in Berlin has been many of you here, and I want you to know I don't say that lightly. It's been very restoring for me...