Woken Word: Make Sure the Truth Is Not Omitted

Description

The AutoEthnographer

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The origins of Woken Word :The pandemic swept in like an undetected hurricane and had us all scrambling to board up our homes and create a new world from the pieces of debris that we could safely access at armâ??s length. For the first time in my memory, all the certainties of life became questions. We could no longer assume tomorrow and todayâ??s best survival strategy was a daily debate. But in reality, there were storms that preceded this epic event.

The social and political storms, whose winds blew progress backward and threatened truth, was already causing chaos prior to March of 2020, when we were all sent home on an early spring break, not knowing when my fellow teachers and students would regain access to our school. More than halfway through my twenty-fifth year of teaching history to high school students, I was cut-off. I was unable to deliver lessons, answer questions and discuss and debate world events. We could no longer enjoy the daily musings that we shared over our cross generational differences, and from the warm friendly environment of â??school.â?•

Being grounded, of course, taught us all the value of what we had previously taken for granted, but it also inspired me to look inward for my voice. For the first time in a long time, I had a great deal to say and no one to share it with. My mind turned to exercises that I often encouraged my students to partake in, particularly, that of â??stream of consciousnessâ?• journaling to discover and work out their ideas.

So, I turned my captivity into my process, and I started writing. And for once, I was not crafting lessons around unique and varied learning styles, but I was purging my own unfiltered thoughts, frustrations and hopes for humanity. It was such a liberating process that it became my daily meditation as I locked myself into the laundry room/office for a couple of hours a day, while my family found ways to re-imagine life around me.

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So, I wrote. I played with words and sounds and verse andâ??I got it out. My words reflected my politics and my anger with the disunity that was driving us apart and my perception of the inequities that I saw. I wrote to my students and to my children but mostly, I wrote for myself. It was through this period of reflection that my â??Woken Wordâ?• was born as my inner voice was awakening and the world, ironically was becoming â??wokeâ?• while simultaneously retreating into isolation.

This piece entitled â??Liberty Streetâ?• addresses both the movement for revisionist change in public history, and the backlash of self-proclaimed â??anti-cancel culturalistsâ?• who believe that established narratives are sacred and we should protect them at all costs. Throughout the piece I weave in reflections from a class trip with students from San Elizario, (just outside El Paso)

Texasâ?? when visiting the Alamo in San Antonio and the state capitol in Austin.

For nearly all of these first or second generation, bilingual, Mexican American students, this was their first extended venture outside the confines of non-Spanish speaking Texas.

And for most, it was their first glimpse of the reality of their exclusion from the unrevised narrative of American History.

For me, as their teacher, it was a chance to view the world through their eyes, even if they themselves might not perceive what was missing from the picture.

Liberty Street

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Chloe was born on Lee Street
but grew up on Liberty Street,
yet she never moved see,
my niece was three
so, she was not an active part of the cityâ??s initiative
to change the street names of Confederate Generals and leaders

We stood outside the State Capitol and stared
at the huge Confederate Monumentâ?¦
it was impressive to my twenty or so
first and second generation Mexican American students
who were so excited to be out of their barrio
in what they thought was a more significant place

â??Wow,â?• they thought, â??that is somethingâ?¦â?•
and it was somethingâ?¦
which was better than the nothing of their own story
which they would not find in the four stories
of the impeccably designed Texas State History Museum
All that glass, all that classâ?¦

and they will certainly â??remember the Alamoâ?•
those twenty or so African American students,
who stood practically bouncing with enthusiasm
at the front of the roped-off section of the display

as the docent proudly went through the play in his head
about bravery, courageâ?¦and what was that phraseâ??
â??against all odds.â?•

Would it have been odd for Robert E. Lee to know
that there were streets and monuments,
and flags, celebrating hisâ?? surrender?
I believe that in the end, Lee honorably surrendered to Liberty
and held no expectations of sign postings in his name
but all the same he knew he would never be erased from history
tagged by Lincoln, himself but choosing state over countryâ?¦a man of his timeâ?¦

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And I thought it was time to ask my young Latino crew
if they could find any clue to their past
as we passed display after display of the great Texas way
of land conquering and oil, and Friday night lights,
and rockets from NASA shot out of sight,
and of settlers who settled for nothing
who fought for their land, for their Manifest Destiny,

but now it was time for me to raise my hand
and ask the poor young man, this weekend re-enactor
who couldnâ??t wait for his raccoon-skinned hat to
come in the box that smiles

â??Yes sir your question?â?•

â??Just curiousâ?¦ is there a part in this presentation
when you are going to mention to these impressionable young minds
that these men who fought and died, who give this story so much pride,
who were undeniably committed and displayed such bravery
actually broke the rules and extendedâ?¦â?•

â??(donâ??t say it)â?•

â??â?¦.slavery.â?•
and now 50 pairs of young eyes were fixed on me.

â??Sir you must hold all further questions until the endâ?¦â?•

â??just tell the truth and donâ??t defendâ?¦
they were still brave and committed
but make sure the truth is not omittedâ?¦â?•

like the over thirty-nine percent of this stateâ??s population
the largest-growing group in this evolving nation
who canâ??t find what floor they are on
who canâ??t seem to find their statues or their heroesâ?¦
and who need to be reminded that they didnâ??t cross a lineâ??did they?
a border crossed themâ?¦again and againâ?¦
and that their contributions are worth statues too
that these institutions must begin to view
them for their survivalâ?? not their arrival.

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Now some argue that General Robert E Lee
will be erased from Chloeâ??s history
â?¦and that is simply untrueâ?¦
He will always be Lincolnâ??s first choice who was a man of conviction
so much so that I believe that he would prefer Liberty Street
to follow Chloeâ??s name on every form, and application she writes going forward

change is hard,
the truth is hard â?¦
the story is hardly done being told
and the decision of revision when it honors the truthâ??
is a battle worth fightingâ?¦

â?¦.against all odds.

MORE SPOKEN WORD

Credits

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4. Volume 2, Issue 4 (2022)

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