

Tuesday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 28, 2023

Recommended reading: pp. 372-379, "Music" (part two)

In Chapter 14, Wesley Morris critiques the ways in which white artists and industry executives have often profited from Black music without properly crediting or compensating Black musicians. "[Frederick] Douglass understood [the singing of slaves] as a testament to a particular kind of pain, and to a unique form of perseverance and self-inquiry. *Why us? And how much longer? And what more?* But also—with respect to both physical and spiritual deliverance—*when?* The music testifies to a perilous condition as much as it offers hope that, somehow, it will end. This is to say that when we're talking about Black music, we're talking about what the borrowers and collaborators don't want to or simply can't lift—centuries of weight, of atrocity we've never sufficiently worked through, the treasure you know is beyond theft because it's too real, too rich, too heavy to steal."

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:3-5)

Morris argues that these practices are a continuation of the historical theft and exploitation of Black labor and creativity, and that it underscores the ongoing struggles for racial justice and equality. Despite these challenges, he affirms the enduring power and significance of Black music, and its ability to inspire and uplift individuals and communities across the globe. It is amazing to know and ponder how enslaved people found something inside of them to rejoice in their situation. Scripture reminds us to rejoice in our suffering for good reason. Suffering leads to endurance and endurance leads to good character and good character leads to hope. The enslaved people had hope which got them through perilous times. When African people were taken from their homelands...they had hope. When they passed through the Middle Passage...they had hope. When they were sold and traded as livestock...they had hope. When they were humiliated for other's pleasure...they had hope. When their music, art expression and talent were stolen, and others benefited...they had hope. Hope and the good news of the Gospel got them through to be people with hope undenied.

Prayer

Good and gracious God, we thank you for using music as a guide to break the chains of bondage and lead your people to freedom. We thank you for music as a universal language which reaches the souls of your people. We triumph with music. We dance with music. We laugh with music. We solve problems with music. We tell stories of your people with music. We live, yearn, and grow with music. As musical beats fill our hearts, may we keep suffering, endurance, good character, and, above all, a hope in our mind, body and soul. Amen