



Mermaids

ECL 305: Literature and the Environment
Fall 2025. Professor Pressman

Day 24: Rivers Solomon, *The Deep*

ADMIN

- Great work in the Google doc!
- Should have received feedback and grade for revised Essay 2, by email
- Extra credit blogs due next Thursday
- Final project feedback on blogs

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How are we feeling about final projects? Questions?

- Check out TAGS on blog, peer's blogs, etc.

Discussion

- Final project discussion/brainstorming together: in small groups—
- what are you struggling with? How can we help?

Discussion

- Passages to discuss?

Amazingly, despite the number of victims - the infamous “Middle Passage” of the Atlantic is the final resting place for at least 1.8 million people from Africa who died on slave ships and were thrown overboard - there is no international memorial to the role of sea crossings in the horrors of the slave trade.

Perhaps it's not entirely surprising that no such memorial exists, given that the bodies all vanished.

- Helen Scales for *The Guardian* (January 25, 2021)
- <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jan/25/drexciya-how-afrofuturism-inspired-calls-for-an-ocean-memorial-to-slavery>

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016)

“as, and in, the wake of the unfinished project of emancipation” (5)

“In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present” (9)

“In what I am calling the weather, antiblackness is pervasive *as* climate” (106)



CHRISTINA SHARPE *In the Wake*
On Blackness and Being

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016)

“the wake as the conceptual frame of and for living blackness in the diaspora in the still unfolding aftermaths of Atlantic chattel slavery” (2)

“Wake; the state of wakefulness; consciousness” (4)

“Living in the wake on a global level means living the disastrous time and effects of continued marked migrations” (15)



CHRISTINA SHARPE *In the Wake*
On Blackness and Being

From your blogs- lived history vs textbooks

- KAILA: Often, the history of the marginalized communities is placed upon them to educate. In which it is very important to hear history from the perspective of those who truly lived, we have to be open to the truth, the real traumas, and pain they experienced. When people tell their narratives, they should not feel they need to leave out details in fear of making the listener uncomfortable.

From your blogs- remembrance as active force

- ADRIAN: What struck me most in these chapters is Yetu's growing realization that carrying the pain of the past is not an unfortunate duty, rather that it is the thread that binds identity, ancestry, and community. Her confrontation with the memories shows that history is not passive, it actively presses against the present, shaping how people understand themselves.

From your blogs- generational trauma

- MELISSA: This book discusses generational trauma and how it is held and weighted in the body and mind. Yetu has been the Historian for 20 years, but it seems to be breaking her down faster than previous Historians. The system of the wajinru have her believing it is a personal failing, her struggle to hold this history alone and feed her people in measured sips, but I have my doubts.
- ALYSSA: Solomon complicates this idea of communal survival by suggesting that protecting the collective often requires emotional abandonment of the individual (Yetu).

“The Deep” song by The Clipping (2017)

LYRICS

Our mothers were pregnant African women thrown overboard while crossing the Atlantic Ocean on slave ships. We were born breathing water as we did in the womb. We built our home on the sea floor, unaware of the two-legged surface dwellers until their world came to destroy ours.

Tonight, we remember.

Y'all remember how deep it go
Started from the bottom

Y'all remember how deep it go
'Fore y'all had to come back, deep
Y'all remember when it used to be deep
So deep, so, so deep, ayy
When y'all swim up out yo' mama while y'all mama was asleep
So deep, so, so deep, ayy
And y'all remember when y'all had the dance floor lit, dark
No two-step, deep, y'all don't even sweat, deep

As deep as it gets

Dreaming dead asleep and keeping time

Y'all heartbeat, deep, y'all heartbeat, deep
And all the fishes had they eyes bugged out
Cause y'all dancing underwater and y'all don't get wet

And the dark smelled sweet and y'all tails touch reef
Y'all feed off the bottom, but now y'all remember

[Chorus: Daveed Diggs]

Y'all remember
Y'all remember

Drexciya, *The Quest* (1997)

- “During the greatest holocaust the world has ever known, pregnant America-bound African slaves were thrown overboard by the thousands during labour for being sick and disruptive cargo. Is it possible that they could have given birth at sea to babies that never needed air?”
- Recent experiments have shown mice able to breathe liquid oxygen. Even more shocking and conclusive was a recent instance of a premature infant saved from certain death by breathing liquid oxygen through its undeveloped lungs. These facts combined with reported sightings of Gillmen and swamp monsters in the coastal swamps of the South-Eastern United States make the slave trade theory startlingly feasible.
- Are Drexciyans water breathing, aquatically mutated descendants of those unfortunate victims of human greed? have they been spared by God to teach us or terrorise us? Did they migrate from the Gulf of Mexico to the Mississippi river basin and on to the great lakes of Michigan?
- Do they walk among us? Are they more advanced than us and why do they make their strange music?
- What is their Quest?
- These are many of the questions that you don't know and never will.
- The end of one thing...and the beginning of another.”
- —<https://www.discogs.com/release/12117-Drexciya-The-Quest>

Take-aways?