

ORAL FORMS & RESISTANCE NARRATIVES

Geneva Smitherman

- put forth "sacred-secular circular continuum" which is explained below
- many African cultures derived from oral traditions
- positioned African cultures as inferior to European cultures because they were largely oral (dominant over spoken word cultures)
- European cultures = written text is privileged over oral
- Margaret Mead (American anthropologist) states the idea of comparing one culture with another culture, where one is better than another because it lacks the same kind of religious, practices, technology, written text, etc... in this case
- "book learning" leads to fallacies such as "educated fools" who know the text, but know nothing about life
- knowledge is juxtapose to mother wit, which signifies different types of knowledge based by experience, being steeped in cultural literacies, which is rarely obtained through reading a book
- used to pass on oral history => tell individuals stories, testify a collective story
- many stories have a didactic or teaching function => to help socialize into traditions/beliefs if culture
- stories told during specific time/context
- ritualized mature => rite of passage
- stories preserve traditions
- help in formation of identity and how it gets articulated (can be individual or collective)
- important sources of information, hope, inspiration
- stories of survival, resisting dominant and discourse, different

version for the world

- story teller must improvise in order to make it meaningful to the audience
- authorize => seeking approval of the story teller
- what is the function of the story?
 - it passes on history
 - teaching function
 - it has a socializing function
 - it preserves cultural traditions
 - it's important in formulation of identity-articulated-acknowledged
 - resists the dominant master narratives (songs, speeches)

Styles of communication (binaries)

- Sacred
 - southern, rural
 - black church tradition and religious experience
 - spirituals, gospel
 - testifying and hearing witness to god and prayer
 - emotional and highly charged
 - mother wit
 - call and response
- Secular
 - urban and northern (Chicago, New York City), and roots in rural south
 - the blues, rap
 - street culture style (pool halls, barber shops, clubs)
 - cooler, younger
 - not as emotionally charged (constrained)
 - type of language is distinct compared to the sacred style

- book-learning
- she emphasizes these two styles by hyphenating between them (the exchange between the two styles)
- ex: sacred-secular
- Malcolm X is secular (doesn't talk about religion, talks about basis of common experience and re-education and black economic power)
- Martin Luther King Jr. is sacred (he was a minister, scriptural reference points in his speech)
- the both share the same southern roots and traditions

Cultural lens

- acts as a filter through which you compare a person or scholar, or compare their cultural experience to another person's culture
- becomes a bias and is relevant to the fact of colonization (and that they did not see an emphasis in written literacy)

Mother wit

- distinction of knowledge based on lived experience
- distinguishes mother wit through book-learning (educated fool)
- emphasis on African American culture on lived experience (reputation-you are authorized to speak about these things because you have lived it)

Sacred-secular circular continuum

- in which both styles participate in the styles of the other, and often emerge

TUTORIAL NOTES

Oral Resistance Narratives

- Geneva Smitherman talked about cultural lens (black culture in america is viewed this way, less civilized, illiterate,)
- put forth the term sacred-secular circular continuum (distinction within black culture, binary opposites but are not holy exclusive [exceptions to the rule])
- Call and response (interactivity between audience and performer, process of legitimizing. It is in a sense, foreign to people outside the circle)