



ABHM Book Club Discussion Guide

May 23rd, 2024

***Blue Legacies & Black Feminism* by Angela Y Davis (1998)**

How to Use this Guide:

[America's Black Holocaust Museum](#) staff created this guide to assist in reading and discussion of *Blue Legacies & Black Feminism*. Please feel free to print a copy and keep it with your book as you lend to friends and others who are interested. Do not expect to get through all of the questions during the upcoming meeting nor in one sitting. Perhaps consider them as conversation starters or an invitation to reflect more deeply about this book.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. How does Davis show connections between the blues tradition and African cultural traces? Between the blues and race slavery in the United States? In what ways was the artform of the blues connected to spirituals sung on plantations throughout the South? See pages: xix, 22, 26, 49, 70, 72, 122, 128, 129, 155, 159, 161, 165, 166.
2. What did you think about Davis' investigation of the themes of sexual liberation and autonomy within the blues tradition? How was this connected to freedom more broadly? Where does travel fit into her analysis and in the practice of the blues? See pages: 4, 7, 8, 9, 14, 19, 22, 24, 44, 46, 54, 67, 68, 75, 76, 79, 84, 130, 131, 173, 179.
3. A central theme of this book is how class division and "respectability politics" influenced the ways in which blues and blues singers were seen in their own time. Where do we see a class-consciousness in the lives of these three women as argued by Davis? Why were the blues overlooked as a serious art form during the Harlem Renaissance (except for by Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston)? See pages: xiii, 13, 21, 38, 43, 60, 65, 94, 107, 111, 123, 124, 137, 142, 144, 145, 150, 154, 162, 171, 189.

4. How did the lived experiences of Rainey, Smith, and Holiday in the wake of emancipation inform their socially-conscious lyrics and performances? How did they speak to larger social issues facing women, specifically Black women, in their time? See pages: 18, 33, 81, 83, 89, 96, 101, 106, 112, 113, 116, 163, 164, 175, 176.
5. In what ways did these three women blur the lines and make connections between individuality and community? Why were individual pursuits important in the emancipation era, as well as a collective consciousness? See pages: 5, 20, 25, 28, 45, 55, 57, 62, 119, 136.
6. How does Davis complicate the perception that Billie Holiday's love songs as apolitical or that "Strange Fruit" was an aberration in her catalog? What was the connection between Lewis Allen (pen name for Abel Meeropol) and Billie Holiday? Did you know that Abel Meeropol wrote his poem after being inspired by the photograph of the lynching that Dr. Cameron survived? See pages: 95, 162, 167, 181, 182-184, 188, 194.
7. Why did Davis choose to include transcriptions at the end? Did you read any of them? Have you listened to any of the three artists discussed previously? If so, had you already picked up on the themes/arguments presented by Davis? How might *Blue Legacies* change the way you listen to them in the future? See pages: 199-358.
8. How does Davis' state that blues music by Black women form an earlier collective consciousness surrounding the normalization of domestic violence? What is the private and public sphere? In what ways do Black female blues artists allude to Black women's experiences as complicating a supposed divide between domestic and commercial realm? See pages: 18, 72, 98.
9. How is feminism reconsidered in Davis' analysis? What are some examples that highlight the factions within feminism that these blues artists sing and write about? To what extent does blues music by Black women intersect and challenge feminism of that era? See pages: 21, 32, 34, 37, 41, 42.
10. In what ways does Davis examine religion in relation to Black peoples' creation of music? What role does Christianity play in the Black people's perception of secular and non-secular music? How do binaries (good/bad; devil/angel) within Christianity impress themselves onto class division within Black communities? See pages: 6, 121, 125, 129, 133, 137, 156, 159.