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Mrs. Billy

English II, Period 4

February 14th, 2013

Poet and Activist, Gwendolyn Brooks

Hands clapped as the awards were handed to Gwendolyn Brooks. African Americans were finally being heard in a different way. Their pride grew, as every word of her poems was being read and spoken to audiences. Gwendolyn Brooks’ experience with the Afro-American folk forms is reflected in the theme of blues and spirituals and developed through her use of sonnets.

Gwendolyn Brooks was born in Topeka, Kansas on June 7, 1917. She grew up on the south side of Chicago with her younger brother, Raymond, her mother, Keziah Wilms and father, David Anderson Brooks. Throughout school, she wrote many poems. At an early age, her works were published in the *Chicago Defender*, a newspaper geared towards the African-America folk. With the support of her mother and others, later on in life Brooks came to be a successful writer having her sonnets published in many places and receiving many great awards, most being presented to an African American women for the first time. I believe her drive to make a change for colored people and her belief in equality for all drove her to write the blues and spirituals reflecting on how things were in everyday life for African Americans.

Brooks’ style of writing consisted of a big variety. They varied from a few ballads, quatrains, sonnets, rhymed tercets, blank verse and lyrical free verse. The ones that seem to stand out the most were her sonnets. Brooks said, "No real artist is going to be content with offering raw materials. “The Negro poet’s most urgent duty, at present, is to polish his technique, his way of presenting his truths and his beauties," (“Gwendolyn Brook’s,” 1). That statement was made in an interview with George Stavos in 1950. It displays her full attention to the details and ways she expressed her poems. Writing the first line for Brooks seemed to be the toughest part of her poems because after the first line, “”the rest just follows automatically,"” (Ford, 1). Brooks had an almost song like feel to her sonnets and ballads. Some say it has to do with the influence of her friend, Langston Hughes and how he pioneered that style of writing. Her voice had its own persona, coming from her roots as an African American. Each poem carried out a theme of life, her life. Living as an African American. Her sonnets had a way of getting things across in a short personal way, “Her sensitivity to the authenticity and force of the Afro-American folk forms she learned as a child may be responsible…” (Williams, 1). Her poems showed us how living was through African-Americans eyes during that time period. She was one of the first women to take a stand for equality.

In Conclusion, Gwendolyn Brooks used her poems to express how life was lived. Without her poems it’d be harder to feel and understand how life was during that time period. We now have writing to refer to dealing with the Afro-American point of view during this period.

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