

Spirit of Black Descendant Encouragement as Reflected in *Black Gold Lyric* by Esperanza Spalding

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CHAPTER 1 – Introduction

The slavery era of black people from the 17th until 20th century had inherited wounds toward the descendants of black people. After Civil War (1861-1865), slavery was abolished by the combination of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1865. However, although the Blacks were no longer slaves, they were still treated as second class citizens and continued to live in poor conditions without many chances to make their life better. It would take a long time before their life would be improved. However today, people of black descendants in the United States are able to blend with society. Indeed, their presence is considered better these days. However, they factually are not totally free from discrimination. News is reporting about discriminations that are faced by black descendants nowadays. As for example is the killing plan that is conducted by white supremacist group Ku Klux Klan that put target into President Barack Obama. News canal *thesun.co.uk* published it on June 21st, 2013. It is said,

Fanatics Glendon Scott Crawford, 49, and Eric Feight, 54, were nicked after a six-month FBI undercover operation. Mr Obama was among those said to have been targeted by the futuristic device that would have fired lethal doses of radiation.

Engineer Crawford, a member of the white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan, told undercover agents his design was “Hiroshima on a light switch”. He said his plan was to hide the death ray inside a van and park it near to a target. (Samson, “Obama is death ray target of Ku Klux Klan nut”)

One of many black descendant musicians, Esperanza Spalding, wrote *Black Gold* in Spalding’s album: *Radio, Music, Society* which was released in 2012. *Black Gold* lyric contains the indication of today’s ‘new’ and ‘contemporary’ discrimination toward black descendants. Discrimination, as Sue states in *The Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination* by Bernard E. Whitley, Jr. and Mary E. Kite, is “treating people differently from others based primarily on membership in a social group” (2010: 12). Discrimination is resulted from prejudice, as prejudice according to Brewer and Brown is “an attitude directed toward people because they are members of a specific social group” (2010: 11). However, *Black Gold* lyric is also provocative toward black people; therefore it is interesting to figure out what lies ‘behind’ each stanza of the lyric. It is to find out what message or meaning inside it, since not every word in a lyric depicts its literal meaning.

Lyric as one kind of literary works may function as a medium to represent the message that is contained inside, and it has coercing nature. As Wellek and Warren states in *Theory of Literature*, that “Literary kinds ‘may be regarded as institutional imperatives which both coerce and are in turn coerced by the writer” (1949: 226). As an institution, literature also has its ‘institutioner’ or in this case, its author. This author’s work is not only affected by society, but also intended to influence the society in the future. Wellek and Warren state that “Authors are not only students of literature and society, but also prophets of the future, monitors, and propagandists” (1949: 95). This analysis about author is a part of this study’s general theory that

is Hippolyte Taine's Historical Approach to Literary Analysis. Based on the previous explanation, the writer is eager to reveal this Esperanza Spalding's *Black Gold* lyric.

CHAPTER 2 – Author's Biography and the Object

2.1. Author's Biography

Esperanza Spalding grew up in a single-parent home and learned early lessons in the meaning of perseverance and moral character from her role model who is her mother. She was born in Portland, Oregon from an African-American father and of Welsh, Native American, and Hispanic descent mother. She was home-schooled for a significant portion during her elementary school years, since she was holding a highly intuitive learning style that often put her at odds with the traditional education system. However, the one pursuit that made sense to Spalding from a very early age was music. At age five, she had essentially taught herself to play the violin well enough to land a spot in The Chamber Music Society of Oregon, a community orchestra that was open to both children and adult musicians. She stayed with the group for ten years, and by age 15, she had been elevated to a concertmaster position. Spalding also played bass. Spalding was the 2005 recipient of the prestigious Boston Jazz Society scholarship for outstanding musicianship. In 2006, she released her first album *Junjo*. After that, it is followed by her second album *Esperanza* in 2008. Numerous awards and appearances followed, including an invitation by President Barack Obama to appear at both the White House and the Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony, and an appearance on the *Late Show with David Letterman*. In 2010, she released *Chamber Music Society*. In the same year, she was awarded a Grammy for 'Best New Artist'. Her latest album *Radio, Music, Society* which was released in 2012 has been nominated for 'Best Jazz Vocal Album' in Grammy Awards, an annual music awarding for musicians in US.

Esperanza was born in Portland, Oregon. African-Americans in Portland have made a sizeable contribution to the city's development since the era of the pioneers. They kept the city and the nation running with their invaluable work in the railway industry and the World War II shipyards. World War II brought a great influx of African Americans to Portland. Thousands were worked in the shipyards and lived at Vanport, a wartime housing project that was destroyed by flood in 1948. Portland has the oldest continuously chartered NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) chapter west of the Mississippi. Today's African-American community in Portland dates back to the beginnings of the transcontinental railroad. Many black workers made Portland their home in order to have access to Union Station and jobs on the railroad. Local members of the NAACP, the Urban League and other organizations were fought tirelessly for civil rights. Their efforts brought about the removal of discriminatory laws in Oregon.

It is true that today the life of black descendants is considered better. Many African-American descendants in Portland, Oregon today are possibly quite diverse in occupation. Since the writer is writing about lyric analysis, it is interesting to know some of other musicians who are quite renowned in Oregon besides Esperanza Spalding. There are two examples of African descendants that are resided in Portland, Oregon. They are Jujuba music band whose forte is Nigerian Afrobeat and Juju music, and Obo Addy, a Ghanaian drummer master who is settled in Portland, Oregon since 1978. With his wife, he created *The Obo Addy Legacy Project*, a non-profit organization which has introduced thousands of people to the music of Ghana. In 1996, Obo Addy was awarded the National Heritage Fellowship Award by the National Endowment for the Arts. He is the first African born artist to ever receive the award. Esperanza Spalding

herself concerns on jazz music. She is well-known as a vocalist, bassist, and songwriter. *Black Gold* itself has a touch of jazz.

2.2. *Black Gold* Lyric

“Black Gold”

(Esperanza Spalding featuring Algebra Blessett)

Hold your head as high as you can (1)

High enough to see who you are, little man

Life sometimes is cold and cruel

Baby no one else will tell you so remember that

You are Black Gold, Black Gold (5)

You are Black Gold

Now maybe no one else has ever told you so

But you're golden, baby

Black Gold with a diamond soul

Think of all the strength you have in you (10)

From the blood you carry within you

Ancient men, powerful men

Built us a civilization

They'll be folks hell-bent on putting you down

Don't get burned (15)

Not necessarily everyone will know your worth

etc.

CHAPTER 3 – Grand Theory by Hyppolite Taine’s Historical Approach to Literary Analysis

In analyzing the topic, the writer uses *historical approach to literary analysis* by Hippolyte Taine. Historical approach to literary analysis is a deep study of literary work by observing all four of environmental causes that joined together in a literary work’s creation. The four environmental causes are *race, milieu, moment, and dominant faculty*. In his opinion about **race**, Taine posits that authors of the same race, or those born and raised in the same country, share peculiar intellectual beliefs, emotions, and ways of understanding. In addition, it is a must to examine the author’s **milieu** or surroundings. For example; English citizens, he believed, respond differently to life than do French or Irish citizens. Accordingly, by examining the culture of the author, Taine proposes that people would understand more fully the intellectual and cultural concerns that inevitably surface in an author’s text. Further, Taine maintains that people must investigate an author’s epoch or **moment** –that is, the time period in which the text was written. Finally, Taine decrees people must examine each author’s **individual talents** that make him or her different from others who share similar characteristics of race, milieu, and moment. For Taine, a work of art is ‘the result of given causes’ and can best be represented by using the following formula: $\text{race} + \text{milieu} + \text{moment} + \text{dominant faculty} = \text{work of art}$. Taine argues that people cannot therefore appreciate art as it “really” is without considering all four of his stated elements.

By analyzing it, people will be more comprehend of ‘why’ such literary work is made. Based on Bressler in *Literary Criticism: an Introduction to Theory and Practice*, “science seems to provide us the key to our past and an understanding of the present and would help us determine our future if we relied on the scientific method in all our human endeavors” (1994: 29).

CHAPTER 4 – Short Analysis

Based on Taine’s theory *historical approach to literary analysis*, he argues that people cannot appreciate art as it “really” is without considering all four of his stated elements that is race, milieu, moment, and dominant faculty.

1. Race

Black Gold is sung by Esperanza Spalding together with her partner, Algebra Blessett, that both inherit black drop. Since *Black Gold* lyric is aimed to eagerly encourage black people, Spalding and Blessett are considered shared the same emotions or ways of understanding.

2. Milieu

Esperanza Spalding was home-schooled when she was a child. Her highly intuitive learning style often put her at odds with the traditional education system at that time. However, she quickly found her interest in music especially in violin and bass playing. Her strong passion about music has brought her into many achievements such as being invited to perform at the White House and the Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony, has released four albums until today, even

being nominated and won the Grammy Awards. Her personal experience may be one of the reasons why she wrote *Black Gold*, to encourage her listeners to make achievements.

Esperanza was born in Portland, Oregon. African-Americans in Portland have made a sizeable contribution to the city's development since the era of the pioneers. They kept the city and the nation running with their invaluable work in the railway industry and the World War II shipyards. Portland has the oldest continuously chartered NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) chapter west of the Mississippi. The tireless efforts of the local members of the NAACP, the Urban League and other organizations to gain the civil rights were ultimately brought about the removal of discriminatory laws in Oregon. This short history about African-Americans in Oregon is probably also the reason why Esperanza wrote *Black Gold*. It is to remind her listeners about the struggle of black descendant pioneers in Oregon that were settled and fought for racial equality to make a better social environment today.

3. *Moment*

Hernan Vera in her work *Handbook of the Sociology of Racial and Ethnic Relations* (2007) wrote on how racism is still a matter that has been taken for granted for too long and it seems unconsciously internalized in people's mind. She also wrote that although there are laws that, at least officially, prohibit overtly racist discrimination, purportedly "new," "modern," and "aversive" racist practices persist. This issue of 'new form of discrimination' might had trigger Esperanza Spalding to write this *Black Gold* lyric. Racial discrimination is also supposedly to become a reason to express her racial pride.

4. *Dominant Faculty*

Other musicians who share the similar *race, milieu, and moment* as Esperanza does are Obo Addy and Juju Music Band. Both of them are black descendants, reside in Portland, and passionate in introducing African music as their racial pride. Obo Addy is a Ghanaian drum player with his *Obo Addy Legacy Project*, a non-profit organization which has introduced thousands of people to the music of Ghana. Juju Music Band plays the Nigerian Afrobeat. Meanwhile Esperanza Spalding plays bass and concerns on jazz music.

CHAPTER 5 – Conclusion

Black Gold lyric mainly speaks about black encouragement. The concern can be inferred from the intrinsic aspect analysis comprises diction, imagery, and figurative language. Through analysis of the intrinsic aspect, the reader may understand the intention of the lyricist in making *Black Gold* lyric that is to eagerly push the black people.

The history of the pioneer African-American people to be settled and fought for social equality in Portland, Oregon maybe was the background why Esperanza Spalding wrote the lyric. Through *Black Gold*, Esperanza Spalding tries to respect the former pioneers or expressing her feelings to her reader of the struggle which is conducted by the pioneers in Portland. *Black Gold* maybe was also a means which is used by Esperanza Spalding to express her racial pride.

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