



Decolonising the Voice 5: Historical Vocalities (Part Two)

[00:00:20] INTRODUCTION

Deelee Dubé: Welcome back to episode five 'Historical Vocalities'.

You are now going to hear four creatives and activists from across the 20th and 21st centuries in the US and the UK. Please note that the forthcoming recordings include language of a very sensitive nature which may be of some offence to listeners.

[00:01:53] JAMES BALDWIN (1924-1987)

Deelee Dubé: Cambridge, 1965. James Baldwin, the renowned African American social critic, meets William Buckley, a leading Conservative whose silver tongue and social class had for years masked the vile racism at the core of his philosophy. It was a seminal debate. This in itself is a reliving of the occasion, when Baldwin dismantled his racist opponent through cool reason and unimpeachable sincerity, earning an unprecedented ovation from the practically all-white audience at the Cambridge Union in the process.

[00:01:50 to 00:05:02] Extract from James Baldwin's 'Pin Drop Speech'

[00:05:07] GWENDOLYN BROOKS (1917-2000)

Deelee Dubé: In this recording, Brooks' confident musical voice emphasises the rhythmical patterns of her poetry. On performing the poem 'We Real Cool', Brooks has said:

The 'We' – you're supposed to stop after the 'We' and think about their validity, and of course there's no way for you to tell whether it should be said softly or not, I suppose, but I say it rather softly because I want to represent their basic uncertainty, which they don't bother to question every day, of course.

The recording was made on 19th January 1961, at the Recording Laboratory, Library of Congress, Washington DC, and is used with permission of the Library of Congress.

[00:06:14 to 00:06:36] 'We Real Cool' by Gwendolyn Brooks, read by the author

Next up, you may hear how each phrase melts, lands, and settles into the next in this second short poem by Brookes as she mellifluously recites and melodically speaks each line with effortless rhythm, this poem is titled 'A Song in the Front Yard'.

[00:07:10 to 00:08:06] 'A Song in the Front Yard' by Gwendolyn Brooks, read by the author

[00:08:10] AKALA (1983-)

Deelee Dubé: In this next recording Akala gives a full address and Q&A at the Oxford Union.

This event took place in 2015 and the opening passages from his address give a strong sense of his position about the Black voice in the UK and the deep distortions of colonialism and his clear, open, and direct ability to make vibrant contact with his audience.

[00:08:43 to 00:12:27] Extract from Akala's 'The Lost Pages of History' speech



[00:12:30] AMANDA KHOZI MUKWASHI (1969-)

Deelee Dubé: Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, Chief Executive of Christian Aid, shares the eight tracks, book, and luxury she would take with her if cast away to a desert island. With BBC Radio broadcaster, Lauren Laverne, here she speaks about the injustices and inequities Black women and girls face in the world at large and in employment, and how she has allowed her faith to be a saving grace throughout the adversities that she has endured throughout her journey.

[00:13:11 to 00:16:10] Extract from the BBC Desert Island Disks with Amanda Khozi Mukwashi

[00:16:12] WRITING EXERCISE

Deelee Dubé: Thank you for listening to four key Black creatives and activists, James Baldwin, Gwendolyn Brookes, Akala, and Amanda Khozi Mukwashi.

Please give yourself a few moments to think about the ways in which their vocal sound, and intention in its public expression, impacts on your own vocal positionality in a public or private context.

Now we're about to proceed with a reflective instruction:

Please reflect on the ways in which the voices that have made a difference to you have been heard over your lifetime. Allow any feelings about their presence or absence, their dominance or lack of dominance to come to the surface. The feelings that arise may be difficult and complex.

Take a breath and give yourself permission to notice what is going on. Keep your feet on the ground and allow the exchange of breath to keep you rooted in the here and now so that any of the feelings this reflective work gives rise to are acknowledged and given shape in your reflective notebook.

Can you remember how the voices that have meant the most to you have reached you? Did you hear them on: a) public media platforms, b) private audio exchange c) familial gatherings, d) friendship groups, e) live performance contexts, f) spiritual contexts, g) other?

Write down the ways in which their influence has made a difference to you:

- a) Vocal use in public and private – volume and pace
- b) Spoken word confidence in groups – type of words
- c) One-to-one conversational tone – musicality, tone, pitch, inflection
- d) Any distinctive features in your vocal sound-pitch range.

[00:19:15 to 00:21:25] 'Lakushn' Ilanga' by Miriam Makeba

Deelee Dubé: Relax and notice the breath. Stretch and shake out, and give yourself a few minutes to notice your feelings and sensations in the body before you go back into your day.

Thank you for engaging in the Historical Vocalities podcast workshop.

Clips Summary

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Works Cited

Akala (2015) 'The Lost Pages of History' – Full Address and Q&A, Oxford Union, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUtAxUQjwB4>.

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