

Did You Know?


By Jaime Manuel

WILLIAM L. STILL, born in 1821 was the youngest of 18 children born to Levin and Sidney Steel. William spent most of his younger years working on his father's farm in New Jersey. He left New Jersey in 1844 and eventually settled in Philadelphia. When Still arrived in Philadelphia he was an illiterate farm boy. Within three years he had taught himself to read and write. In 1847, he married Letitia George, who made him a proud father of four children. The same year, Still landed a job as a clerk with the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. Still immediately became involved in the broader activities of the Anti-Slavery Society. As a result of the Fugitive Slave Act, Philadelphia's White Abolitionist community organized a Vigilance Committee. The committee assisted the increasingly large numbers of fugitive slaves who were passing through Philadelphia. Still was named chairman of the committee.

William Lloyd Still was one of the Underground Railroad's most remarkable conductors. Under the threat of severe penalty if he was caught, Still heroically assisted 649 Black men, women, and children in their journey from slavery to freedom. He published *The Underground Railroad* in 1872 which was a record of the life and death struggles of hundreds of runaway slaves. The book provides the best and most accurate documentation of the Underground Railroad.

After the Civil War, Still devoted his time to combating racism and discrimination. His efforts had begun as early as 1859, when he started a campaign to stop racial discrimination on Philadelphia's railroad cars by exposing the practice in the press. In 1861, he helped organize social, civil, and statistical association to collect and preserve information about Black Americans.

Later in life, William Still became active in philanthropic and business efforts. In 1880, he organized one of the first YMCAs for Black youth; served on the Freedman's Aid Commission; and as a result of his success as a businessman, became a member of the Philadelphia Board of Trade. Still's success in business resulted from a thriving stove and coal business which he established during the Civil War.

After a long and prosperous life, William Still died in Philadelphia in 1902, at the age of eighty-one. 

Modern Form of Surrealism

By Tiffany Black


Hip-Hop is the modern form of surrealism for the younger generation based on the lecture of Dr. Robin D. G. Kelley, author of the 1997 essay collection "Yo' Mama's Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America." Dr. Kelley is a Professor of History and Africana Studies at New York University. His lecture was the kick-off lecture in the Black Cultural Center's Blacks in the Diaspora Lecture Series.

"It's always night or we wouldn't need light," a quote from Thelonius Monk and the inspiration for Dr. Kelley's lecture entitled "It's Always Night: Surrealism in the Black World." The night represents a time of pleasure but to our ancestors night meant danger as they escaped the night riders and the terror that night time brought.

Surrealism was a political movement. The impact of surrealism as a body of thought on modern black culture is that it bridges the gap between our dreams and our actions. "Surrealism is freedom, revolt, imagination," says Dr. Kelley. "Sexuality can be seen as revolt by a surrealist." Black music is an example of surrealism in history and content.

Surrealism has lived in black music since 1910. However, the first mention of surrealist thought in black music was in 1929 and black music was labeled dangerous due to its bewitching lyrics and uncharacteristic melodies to the time period. In 1932, "Hot Jazz" was identified as the first surrealist music. Jazz and freedom go hand in hand. A chord can be added or taken away and it all adds to the flavor of jazz music and exemplifies the freedom jazz music allows.

Black music, including Hip-Hop, R&B, Blues and Jazz as we know it today are the modern forms of surrealism. It is present particularly in rap. Hip-Hop is a reflection of the elements of black life that are both light and dark, good and bad. Black music artists "see things you can't possibly imagine, see body images that don't exist." A good example of this is R. Kelly. Only R. Kelly could relate a jeep to a female and capture the magical quality of sexuality.

The Blacks in the Diaspora Lecture series is dedicated to serious academic investigation of the struggles and triumphs of people of African descent. The next lecturer in the series is Dr. Sterling Stuckey as he presents "Paul Robeson's Impact on the Carribean." The lecture will be Monday, February 15, 1999, at the Tate-Turner-Kuralt Building. 

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