

HOUSTON A. BAKER, JR. AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPRESSIVE CULTURE

Lee Yu-cheng

ABSTRACT

Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s archaeology of African American expressive culture owes much to Michel Foucault's archaeology of knowledge, particularly Foucault's theory of discourse and statement. Baker begins his project with an analysis of various governing statements in American history to elucidate and sum up the New World experience of European male protestants. The experiences of other races, religions, sex, and cultures are thus denied from entering discourse. In his reflections on the New World experience of the people of African descent, Baker finds that this peculiar experience in fact results from the economic motivation of the white people. He therefore suggests that "commercial deportation" and "economics of slavery" be served to figure as two governing statements in African American historical discourse. These statements will be deployed to counter the hegemony of traditional American historical discourse. Baker further explores the meaning of the economics of slavery with reference to the tropological symbols of black dwellings and blues.

Baker's critical archaeology represents a complicity between African American discourse and contemporary theory in an effort to subvert the canon of American historical and literary discourse. It is also to be seen as part of the larger critical project in writing/righting American literary history.