

Aryielle Conwell

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Dr. Watley

Writing Against Silence

Silence is the central theme of Audre Lorde's piece *The Transformation of Silence Into Language and Action* and Mia McKenzie's writing *White Silence*. The idea of silence is explored by both authors in different ways. Lorde emphasizes the importance of collective efforts in breaking silence, while McKenzie critiques the silence of privileged individuals. McKenzie calls out white people's reluctance to engage in conversations about race, noting how their lack of action supports discrimination and racial inequality. Although both writers examine the dangers of silence, they approach its causes and effects differently. However, both agree that fear is often the root of silence. They also stress the importance of facing that fear in order to break silence and promote change.

Lorde uses personal experience to reflect on silence, especially when she recalls a health scare that made her think about her past regrets. She realizes that silence doesn't protect anyone, stating, "Your silence will not protect you" (Lorde 41). From early on, Lorde presents language as a powerful tool for empowering marginalized communities. She sees speaking out as a revolutionary act, especially for women, and encourages them to challenge societal norms and patriarchal structures. Her essay serves as a call to action, urging people to confront their fears and speak out against a system that forces the underprivileged into silence.

Like Lorde, McKenzie focuses on the impact of silence, especially in racial and social contexts. She introduces the term “white silence” to describe how privileged people, including those who say they care about racism, often avoid discussions about race. McKenzie points out how her white friends interact with her non-racial posts on social media but ignore the ones addressing racial issues. She recalls the murder of Trayvon Martin as a moment when she hoped her white followers would speak up, but instead, they stayed silent. She sees their silence as a form of complicity, arguing that inaction helps keep racial injustice in place. While Lorde sees silence mostly as an internal struggle, McKenzie presents it as a conscious decision rooted in privilege.

Despite their different views, both writers agree that fear contributes to silence. Lorde explains that people often stay silent because they fear conflict or harm. Still, she argues that the effects of silence are worse than the fear of speaking out. McKenzie also points to fear, specifically the fear white people have of saying the wrong thing about race. Both authors show how fear becomes a barrier to important conversations and to progress.

Another shared idea in both texts is the importance of responsibility. Lorde urges individuals to take ownership of their voices and speak out against injustice. McKenzie pushes white people to take responsibility for their silence and to learn how to speak up in racial conversations. Neither author treats silence as a neutral act; instead, they show how it supports systems of oppression.

In conclusion, both Audre Lorde and Mia McKenzie explore the dangers of silence, though from different angles. Lorde views silence as a personal and internal struggle that marginalized people must overcome, while McKenzie sees it as a social issue tied to privilege

and racism. Still, they both agree that fear plays a major role in keeping people silent and that breaking silence is necessary for change. Together, their writings offer a powerful reminder of the need to use our voices in the fight for justice and equality.

Works Cited

Lorde, Audre. "The Transformation of Silence Into Language and Action." *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Crossing Press, 1984, pp. 40-44.

McKenzie, Mia. "White Silence." *Black Girl Dangerous*, 2014.