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THE TROTTER REVIEW

Literacy, Expression and the Language of Resistence

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The William Monroe Trotter Institute
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Contents

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Introduction

Barbara Lewis

The Trotter Review, which has been published for over fifteen years, is entering a new phase. That is what the current issue represents, a marriage of old and new, a branching out into expanded territory that does not betray, we hope, the ideals or principles of the past.

What we have put together is historical and cultural and political. We raise questions. We draw connections and provide context as we focus on the local, the national, the international, and the diasporic. In addition, we give cognizance to the literary, as an expression of the urge to order the real, to give it utterance, or, as Chuck D would say, to bow to the power of the pad.

We wanted to sample the range of work that the Trotter has produced, and for that reason, many of the articles and essays are drawn from papers that the Trotter Institute has published as monographs over the years. There is a theme here, and it is the resistance of the African-inflected spirit, generation after generation, community after community, and country after country in an internecine war that has not yet come to an end

Deborah Elizabeth Whaley writes of the continuing relevance of William Monroe Trotter, and his journalistic activism, how he connects to the insurgent black rappers and cartoonists and visual artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Cultural citizenship is at the core of her concern, how do folks of color (and that definition is porous these days) factor into the discourse of the post-9/11 world, with its focus on domestic terrorism.

Where is the moral imperative in the contemporary? With all the talk of family values in the midst of galloping hypocrisy, is the moral a mask to be put on and taken off according to convenience and

circumstance? Not everywhere, Claudine Michel argues. She demonstrates how vodou, which marries African belief and Catholic practice, has created an abiding moral resource as Haitians struggle for sociopolitical significance.

Marta Cruz-Janzen ventures into fraught territory in her investigation of the ways in which the black female is maligned and victimized in Latino culture, and specifically in Puerto Rico, her native land, where she learned that the only social role open to the woman of darker skin is a subservient one. Throughout Latin America, efforts to whiten the culture, to eliminate the stain of the African, have been rampant and persist still.

Ida B. Wells and Anna Julia Cooper were feminists and activists in the crossover from the nineteenth into the twentieth century. They were also contemporaries of William Monroe Trotter. Indeed, Wells and Trotter were allies. Like Trotter, they call out to be revisited and remembered, and Stephanie Athey places them not only in the context of their times but also shows how the legacy that they pioneered is very much the feminist agenda today.

Housing for people of color in Boston and around the country has long reflected how much access to the good life is off limits. In the nineteenth century, it was illegal in Massachusetts for blacks to will property to their children or heirs. Inheriting wealth was a privilege denied. Robert Hayden, historian of black Boston, writes about that time and its extended impact.

We end with a short story by Richard Tenorio of sibling love and sacrificed ambition, which is set in Roxbury, traditionally the twentieth-century home territory for blacks in Boston. Today, Roxbury is poised on the lip of gentrification, and blacks in Boston are on the move again, seeking home and security and belonging.

The Trotter Review, in its new incarnation, will seek to have one hand in the academic and the other hand in the journalistic or topical as it pays close attention to and tracks the issues that matter most to blacks (broadly defined and inclusive of the diaspora). With its location in Boston, the *Trotter Review* has a wide and important vantage. This city on a hill, where democracy fought for air in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and is still trying to catch its breath, remains an educational portal for so many around the world, who come here to study and learn.

The new *Trotter Review* aims its lens out into that world, which is increasingly diverse.

Further, emboldened by the onslaught of history repeated, I end with a question that is motivated by a current crisis. What distance have we as a people covered if we are still living in a country that in 2007 attempts to legally lynch young black boys in Jena, Louisiana, with a loss of their futures because they fought back against a noose hung on a southern tree? Lynching, which galvanized William Monroe Trotter and Ida B. Wells and countless others, is still alive and kicking backsides into jail and into a dead tomorrow in the twenty-first century.

Barbara Lewis, Director
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Contributors

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Robert C. Hayden is an educator and editor of long-standing who has taught at Northeastern and at the University of Massachusetts Boston. As a historian in the field of African-American Studies, he has authored, co-authored, or edited nineteen books and manuscripts.

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Richard Tenorio is a cartoonist, writer, and frequent blogger who lives in Malden, Massachusetts. His art has appeared in the America Online Elections Blog, *Moment* magazine, and inthefray.com. He is a graduate of Harvard and the Columbia Journalism School, and he studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Deborah Elizabeth Whaley is assistant professor of American Studies at the University of Iowa. As a cultural historian, her areas of focus and publication are Comparative American and Ethnic Studies, popular media, black cultural and literary studies, film studies, and feminist theory, particularly the history of black sororities.

Clyde Taylor is a professor in the Gallatin School at New York University, where he teaches courses such as Modernism and Imperialism and Borders of the Western Imagination. His most recent book is *Breaking the Aesthetic Contract: Film and Literature* (1998). Previously, Dr. Taylor was Associate Editor of Black Film Review and is now Associate Editor of Black Renaissance/ Renaissance Noire, published by the Institute of African American Affairs at NYU.

Black Expressive Art, Resistant Cultural Politics, and the [Re] Performance of Patriotism

Deborah Elizabeth Whaley

Introduction

During World War I, the Boston editor William Monroe Trotter described black American patriotism as a cautious endeavor and America's willingness to participate in the World War while it turned its back on domestic issues as misguided. In an era when freedom bypassed most black women and men within the nation-state of America and in an era of mass lynching in the American South, he proclaimed that black Americans and the U.S. government might refocus their efforts on making the world safer for "Negroes." As historian Eric Foner reminds us, black Americans were aware of the limits of American proclamations of freedom that Trotter alludes to in his discussion of nationalist loyalty during war:

> It was among black Americans that the wartime language of freedom inspired the most exalted hopes. Blacks subject to disenfranchisement and segregation were understandably skeptical of the

nation's professions of freedom and fully appreciated the ways the symbols of liberty could coexist with brutal racial violence.[1]

Like William Monroe Trotter, the rap group Public Enemy's rap odyssey "Welcome to the Terrordome," from their critically acclaimed concept album *In Fear of a Black Planet*, emphasizes domestic terrorism through lyrically exposing how our nation's state apparatuses inflict terror into and upon the everyday lives of black Americans. *In Fear of a Black Planet* comes out of the protest tradition often characterized in black American music; MC's Flava Flav, Chuck D, Professor Griff, Terminator X, and Bill Stephany chronicle a historical, cultural, and social lyrical map of the dominant culture's fear of, and attack upon, black Americans.[2] This process, their album cover explains, is a form of domestic terrorism often covered up by the dominant culture (and, at times, by people of color) as an exercise in legitimizing white supremacy and in protecting the toxic well of nation-state social relations from which historically marginalized groups are asked to drink. In response to the poisons of discrimination, Chuck D asserts in "Welcome to the Terrordome" that the creation of useful knowledge is a constructive response to oppression and a vehicle to unveil, and therefore transform, U.S. white supremacy. His proactive politics are evident when he raps:

Can't wait for the state to decide the fate
So this jam I dedicate
Places with racist faces
Just an example of one of many cases . . .
Instead of gettin' physically sweaty
When I get mad
I put it down on a pad
Give ya somethin' that cha never had controllin'
Fear of high rollin'
God bless your soul and keep livin'
Never allowed, kickin' it loud
Droppin' a bomb
Brain game intellectual Vietnam
Move as a team
Never move alone

But
Welcome to the Terrordome

Chuck D's phrases that black Americans cannot "wait for the state to decide the fate," and "instead of gettin' physically sweaty when I get mad I put it down on a pad" highlight the transformative power of the written word. Later in the piece Chuck D appears to critique those who fear the cultural politics of black contestation and who revert to uncritical patriotic sentiments in a time of political upheaval when he raps: "Every brother ain't a brother cause a color. Just as well could be undercover, backstabbed, grabbed a flag." When he includes the line "brain game intellectual Vietnam move as a team never move alone but welcome to the Terrordome," Chuck D brings to light strategic, intellectual maneuvering as a constructive response to political and cultural turmoil. As William Monroe Trotter argued about the atrocity of lynching in the American South and the need for a cross-racial response to end it, Public Enemy's "Welcome to the Terrordome" suggests that disparate race relations in the United States are upheld by the nation's constituents regardless of ethnic heritage. It also implies informed, collective pro-action as a tactic, or, in the words of Chuck D, we need to "move as a team never move alone."

Trotter's argument and Public Enemy's "Welcome to the Terrordome" open up a discussion about domestic terrorism perpetrated by the state upon its black citizens who are disenfranchised, although not exclusively so, from the nation. In the name of national loyalty, the subject of domestic terrorism is avoided, and perhaps no more so than in post-9/11 discourse. Right now, there is a lot of talk about international terrorism and terrorism against the nation-state of America, but little talk about domestic terrorism and how the former informs the latter. National crisis tends to promote in citizens the sentiment of sacrifice, where protection of the nation-state is synonymous with protection of the nation's citizens. In the words of historian Gerald Leinwand, patriotism asks that the

> individual put national interest ahead of self-interest, ahead of personal or material gain. It

requires that short-term gratification be deferred so that the long-term interests of the nation and of future generations may ultimately be achieved.[3]

But for groups disenfranchised from the nation through gender, ethnicity, race, religion, and sexual orientation, patriotism also mandates that these citizen-subjects suppress and subsume subgroup identity and allegiance to, and avocation for, the communities from which they come, for the good will and maintenance of the nation-state. Patriotism is therefore more than the celebration of freedom, democracy, and the nation in its literal/material form; it functions as a complex mechanism of social control that permeates the nation's ideological state apparatuses.[4]

What I want to speak about here are the advantages and consequences of this process for people of African descent living in America. The work of this paper is to focus on how black Americans forged and retreated from a critical national consciousness in response to domestic terrorism in the later 20th century and in the recent aftermath of 9/11. I focus on the multiple meanings and consequences that their reactions hold for realizing cultural citizenship in the public sphere, that is, actualizing the right to practice culture and politics as autonomous social agents committed simultaneously to a sub-cultural collective and to the national identity. The thread between these two historical moments—the late 20th century and 9/11—is provocatively visualized in a climatic scene in the 2001 film, *Ali.* The film depicts the life of boxer Muhammad Ali during the most significant time in his boxing career—the later sixties to early seventies, during which time Ali refused the draft, and converted to Islam and thus became a Muslim. In one pivotal moment in the film, Ali asserts cultural citizenship by refusing to answer to the name given to him at birth, Cassius Marcellus Clay, at a draft board line-up during the Vietnam War. Soon after his draft board defiance, a media personality asks Ali about his decision to refuse the draft and his position on the war in Southeast Asia. In a historic moment that would change the trajectory of his life and career, he defiantly responds, "Man, I don't have qualms with no Viet Cong. No Viet Cong ever called me Nigger." When a U.S. Boxing Association

official asks him to apologize for his, "anti-patriotic remarks," Ali refuses. Soon after, in a press conference, Ali adds:

> I ain't draft dodging, I ain't going to Canada, and I ain't burning no flag. You want to send me to jail? I've been in jail for four hundred years and I can be in jail for four or five more. But I ain't going to help murder and kill other poor people. If I want to die, I'll die right here. Right now, fighting you. If I wanna die. You my enemy. Not no Chinese; not no Viet Cong, no Japanese. You my opposer. You my opposer when I want freedom. You my opposer when I want justice. You my opposer when I want equality. You want me to go somewhere and fight for you? You won't even stand up for me, right here in America, for my rights and religious beliefs. You won't even stand up for me right here at home.

Ali's refusal of the draft board and his comment about the Vietnam War to the American media led to a series of extreme political and personal attacks, His criticism of international policy and of the war was construed as antipatriotic and therefore threatening to the national consensus and to U.S. liberal rhetoric of ethnic and religious inclusion. Ali's statement and actions illustrate that despite the U.S. government's rhetorical commitment to free speech and our legal apparatus to uphold that commitment, there are consequences for speaking out against domestic terrorism. The film also reveals the disjuncture between the promise of inalienable rights for all Americans and the real limitations placed on black people to realize and exercise those rights in the public sphere. This cohered most violently in the aftermath of his comments, when his ability to continue to box professionally was suspended for three and a half years, thereby threatening his professional status and his ability to make a living. While there is much to glean from Ali's punishment in the filmic depiction of his life, there is even more to learn from his unrelenting cultural politics and integrity. In a key scene in the film, a boxing promoter tells Ali that the U.S. government was seeking to take his title of heavyweight champion away. Ali, in response to the proposed threat, remarks, "Oh, so

they're going to take something from me that no other fighter in this world can?" No matter what the draft board, U.S. courts, and U.S. Boxing Association tried to do to Ali, this scene insinuates, they could never (re)possess his proven mastery of his craft, the skill with which he exercised it in the boxing ring, or the critical consciousness he developed after converting to Islam.

The film *Ali* is pertinent to an examination of patriotism and the cultural politics of contestation for several reasons. One, the film came out only two months after September 11, 2001, and its depiction of Ali's critical consciousness stood in stark contradiction to the strong tenets of symbolic and rhetorical patriotism in the public sphere at that time. Two, *Ali* acted as a reminder of black Americans' historical estrangement from national belonging and the conditions that often muster patriotism in the masses. Ali's insistence that black Americans were threatened and under siege every day by various forms of domestic terrorism exposes this contradiction (this is clearly seen when he asserts that no Viet Cong ever called him "Nigger"). Third, the film points to the troubled relationship between patriotism and the cultural politics of contestation, especially in that an international public service announcement about the U.S. government's possible response to 9/11 ran concurrently with the release of *Ali*. In the public service announcement, the real Mohammed Ali said to his intended audience—peoples from Pakistan, the Middle East, and Muslim groups generally—that the U.S. war on terrorism and any subsequent military action toward Iraq was not a war on Muslims or Arab-Americans, but a war that targeted "terrorists." Given the politics of the film and of Mohammed Ali, this public service announcement shows that the patriotism of people of African descent and of Muslims living in America, was impacted by the two competing practices of asserting a sense of place and belonging in the nation. Ali performs important cultural work, as it is a historical reminder of the zeal to silence even the most popular iconic figures, especially those who purport any position strongly in opposition to entrenched ideas, of what it means to be a patriot in times of (inter)national upheaval.[5]

The arguments presented here, are inspired by the insurgency of the black public intellectual William Monroe Trotter, the film *Ali*, and the rap and hip-hop group Public Enemy's album *In Fear of a*

Black Planet. After the heinous attacks of 9/11, the influx of flags and ribbons in my diverse Boston, (Dorchester) community perplexed me, which immediately brought to my mind Public Enemy's most commercial hit *In Fear of a Black Planet*, "9-1-1 is a Joke." On this track, Public Enemy's Flava Flav unabashedly lyricizes the racism of the nation and argues for a call to action against black subordination in the United States, racial profiling, and police state tactics. While I too felt pain for those who lost their lives and felt those behind the attacks were murderous cowards, my observations did not translate into a heightened feeling of domestic pride, as it initially seemed to do in many of the communities around me. As Public Enemy isolated 9-1-1, the emergency police assistance line, as having adverse effects for urban, black communities, it seemed to me that uncritical patriotic responses to 9/11 within black communities largely remained within symbolic rather than politically progressive realms, which, like the unreliability of 9-1-1, holds similar consequences for the masses of everyday black Americans. I argue that this struggle was especially apparent in response to the events of September 11, 2001, where black cartoonists, politicians, artists, actors, musicians, and everyday people struggled to make and inflect meaning into nationhood. This process of meaning-making, I will demonstrate through an analysis of black expressive art,[6] fell on and between representations of symbolic patriotism and the more overt cultural politics of contestation.[7]

I draw on black expressive culture and art—comics, hip-hop, visual culture and art, poetry, and political speeches to explore the relationship between symbolic representations of patriotism in popular culture and everyday life, and the forms of expressive art that question and assert national belonging, rather than assume national belonging. I illustrate how the former approach has created a form of cultural and political contestation through the inversion of revered, American national symbols, while the latter approach represents an already assumed place in the nation without reference to the work of political struggle needed for black, political transformation to occur. This paper was originally titled "Get Up, Get-Get Get Down, 9/11 Ain't a Joke in Your Town: Patriotism and Contestation in Black Expressive Culture." My own self-censorship in retitling this paper "Black Expressive Art, Resistant Cultural Politics, and the [Re] Performance of Patriotism" speaks volumes about the legal and professional ramifications of

intellectual work not squarely and definitively situated within the confines of post-9/11 symbolic patriotism. But the change in title also points to a central strand in my argument, that is, that 9/11, like 9-1-1, means different things for different racial, ethnic, and religious communities. Various members of those communities, my analogy of 9/11 and 9-1-1 hopes to convey, performed and re-performed their national consciousness based on their perceived relationship to, or estrangement from, the nation. For some, quite obviously, 9/11 meant unexpected tragedy aimed at a largely innocent nation; for others, the attacks seemed congruent with a long history of U.S. domestic terrorism targeted toward historically marginalized groups and the multiple international infractions by the U.S. government. In what follows, black expressive art is a critical tool in evaluating the uneasy tenets of cultural politics and the necessity for historically marginalized groups to re-perform their patriotism as a process of asserting and demonstrating their rightful place in the nation.

Wherever one stood on the issue of the U.S. government's fault, or lack thereof, concerning 9/11 and its aftermath, it remains an important marker, a critical moment in U.S. social and international relations, which has had adverse effects on intellectual political groups, and the personal freedoms of everyday people and prominent personalities in the black public sphere. In the name of military expediency, since September 11, 2001, U.S. citizens and those living within the U.S. borders have had their rights signed away by Congress through search, seizure, and artificial intelligence laws. The U.S. Patriot Act has encouraged and enforced this legislative atrocity, despite the idea that the wave of patriotism since 9/11 is predicated on the notion of America as an innocent, national entity that welcomes all and refuses no one their voice, civil liberties, or justice. While I acknowledge the emotional necessity, contradictory, and important meanings black communities derive from enactments of post-9/11 symbolic patriotism, I also offer that the performance of patriotism absent a discourse and politics of contestation leaves black men and women, as members of a historically marginalized group, culturally and politically vulnerable. I contend through my analysis of the arts that genuine reverence for a nation can be compatible with critical thinking and oppositional politics, and that it is the varied forms of black expressive culture that may provide the needed artistic and intellectual matter for working out and

through the cultural morass created from the events surrounding September 11, 2001.

I begin with pivotal media responses to 9/11 from three black Americans who used their voice or art to reconstitute black patriotism within the cultural politics of contestation: cartoonist Aaron McGruder, actor Danny Glover, and congresswoman Barbara Lee. All three were publicly scorned and in the first case censured, because they challenged unthinking patriotism and refused to support—in their own various ways—the racial profiling of Arab-Americans and the immediate counter attack on Iraq. Next, I compare grassroots hip-hop youth movements and post-9/11 responses by popular rap and hip-hop artists. The latter reflects, in my estimation, the changing role of commercial rap and hip-hop as the most insurgent voice of everyday urban, black youth and communities. I end with a discussion of the rearticulation of black patriotism and exposure of domestic terrorism in the work of black artists Faith Ringgold, Emma Amos, and writer Amiri Baraka. The last two groups, I argue, provide insights into the successful, although often painful and difficult negotiation that the black citizen/subject endures in order to claim space in the nation, while at the same time defiantly maintaining an overt political platform through his or her artistic productions.

The Cultural Work of the Hip-Hop Generation and Post-9/11 Politics in the Public Sphere

In October of 2001, the popular black cartoonist Aaron McGruder came under verbal assault by newspaper conglomerates for his comic strip *The Boondocks*, which outwardly questioned the flood of patriotism among Americans after the World Trade Center and Pentagon collapsed. On October 5, 2001, McGruder's comic strip featured one of the black characters, Huey, telephoning the FBI to report a perceived connection between the September 11 terrorist attacks and the 1980s Reagan-Bush administration. *Boondocks*'s Huey went so far as to suggest that Ronald Reagan and the CIA trained Osama bin Laden and that the current Bush administration covertly funded the Taliban. Although the United States government's relationship to bin Laden is insinuated elsewhere in political discourse and the media, newspapers across the nation specifically targeted McGruder, threatened and in a few

cases did pull *The Boondocks* comic strip from major newspapers. *The Dallas Morning News* isolated the comic strip from the comic section, Long Island's *Daily News* pulled it altogether for one week, and the *Daily News* in New York examined the strip each day for appropriateness before making the decision to run it.[8] McGruder responded by temporarily changing the name of his hip-hop, youth-inspired comic strip from *The Boondocks* to *The Adventures of Flagee and Ribbon.* The strip featured an animated flag and ribbon that would "pontificate" Monday through Friday on the wonderful state of the nation, the necessity of patriotism at all costs, and how vital it was to shield youth from the dirty truth of American race relations, international policy, war, and politics. In one characteristically sarcastic strip, Ribbon asks, "Flagee, why do people do bad things to America?" To which Flagee responds, "Because they hate our freedoms Ribbon. They hate our right to privacy. They hate our right to free speech."

McGruder commented in a *New York Times* interview that he struggled with how to represent 9/11 through his comic strip characters or if he should represent it at all.[9] He knew *The Boondocks* might be pulled from news dailies for his polemical, political spin on 9/11 and its historical precedents, but McGruder argued that post-9/11 was "one of those critical moments in history, and I did not want to look back and regret not having said something."[10] Yet many newspaper readers did not appreciate McGruder's integrity, especially those who were concerned their children might see and read the comic strip. The most consistent critique of McGruder's strip was that it was inappropriate and was sending a bad message about the U.S. government during a time of mass mourning. A reader in the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* echoed this sentiment, writing in opposition to the strip's inclusion in the comic section. "If publishers are committed to Aaron McGruder's serial diatribe, why not move it to the editorial pages where people are invited to vent their bitter spleens?"[11]

McGruder, a college graduate who holds a degree in African-American Studies from the University of Maryland, has used his comic strip *The Boondocks,* which has become a popular cable TV show, for political critique since its inception in 1998. McGruder combines his knowledge of American politics and black history with his growing power within the realm of popular media and culture to critique U.S.

social relations to argue for the intelligence of the "hip-hop generation."' *The Boondocks*—and rightfully so—regards black youth as a central source for fresh political outlooks and political mobilization.[12] As journalist Bakari Kitwana argues in his 2002 book *The Hip Hop Generation,* instead of dismissing urban black youth as apolitical and socially apathetic based on assumed nihilism, low voter turn out, and contradictory positions on material wealth and violence, one might see this generation as a critical mass of insurgent cultural workers.[13]

The question for Kitwana in his analysis of the potential of the hip-hop generation in shaping and critiquing American politics and social relations is not only how to go about politicizing and galvanizing the critical mass that the hip-hop generation constitutes, but also how to learn from the cultural work of youth in everyday life. This work includes political advocacy, the politics of hip-hop style, and the representative struggle to negotiate the ideological poles in two of the hip-hop generation's iconic heroes, that is the late multi-million-selling rappers Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls.[14] Rapper Tupac Shakur's mother, Kitwana, suggests that instead of standing on top of youth and telling them what they are not doing, or what they are doing wrong, we need to look at the way in which we, as black pre-hip-hop generation intellectuals and cultural workers, are failing to meet the needs of our youth.[15]

While McGruder and Kitwana posit hip-hop as a political movement, actor Danny Glover was one of a few established black actors in the pre-hip-hop generation to rigorously use his position as a public personality to widen the discussion on international relations post-9/11. After a talk at Princeton University, an audience member asked Glover if he was against the death penalty in all cases, including the execution of Osama bin Laden. Glover reiterated that he was against the death penalty in principle in all cases, but he did not directly address the possible execution of bin Laden. Spearheaded by Ronald Reagan's former U.S. military front man, Oliver North, after Glover's Princeton appearance, a seminational boycott of Glover's current film, *The Royal Tenenbaums,* began.[16]

As news spread about his comments at Princeton, Glover became the target of a character assassination campaign by a wide range of both conservatives and liberals, replete with racially inflected insults that equated his political consciousness with a lack of, and disdain for,

American nationalist loyalty. In the conservative newspaper the *Trentonian*, a writer retorted on the editorial page that if Glover did not support a bin Laden execution, he should "go back to Afghanistan."[17] For a period of several months after his Princeton talk, Glover also received written threats and city authorities attempted to cancel his talk in honor of the Martin Luther King holiday scheduled at a Modesto, California, community college. Officials there aimed to pull the plug on what they deemed his inappropriate, public political platform, and trustees threatened to withdraw funding to the auditorium where the MLK holiday celebration was scheduled to take place.[18]

Despite critique, censure, and financial assault, Glover stood by his position on the death penalty, and remarked that he was "shocked when right-wingers accused him of being pro-Taliban or suggested that he was personally campaigning on bin Laden's behalf." He included that "people had made a promise to Japanese Americans who had been put in interment camps in WWII—'Never again.'" This means, said Glover, "stepping out now to oppose the targeting of Arabs and Muslims."[19] Political nay-sayers and monetary gatekeepers notwithstanding, Glover delivered his speech at a local black church in Modesto, titling it in memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, "The Long Road to Modesto." The irony here, of course, is that the attempt to pull Glover from the MLK celebration stood in stark contradiction to what King was being celebrated for, that is, standing up for what he believed and free speech. As John Lucas, president of the Modesto Peace Life Center noted, the censorship of Glover takes us back in time instead of forward in time. "Given Dr. King's opposition to the Vietnam War," he commented in the *Workers World* newspaper, "I find it interesting that [this decision suggests] Martin Luther King would not even be invited to his own event [if it were held today]."[20]

Perhaps the most controversial position on 9/11 within black public life came from Washington, D.C., when California's Congresswoman from the 9th Congressional District, Barbara Lee, cast the sole vote on September 14, 2001, against taking action toward Afghanistan. It is, in fact, this incident that began Aaron McGruder's call to critical conscious about 9/11 via his character Huey. In his October 2, 2001 edition of *The Boondocks*, McGruder's Huey sits at a computer station and is in the midst of writing to Congresswoman Lee to thank her for her lone stance against Bush's "warmongering." In this now

infamous comic strip, Huey wrote to Lee in critique of black politicians who, in his opinion, stood by and did nothing about the government's presumed precipitous action. "Tell the rest of the punks in the black Caucus," wrote Huey in *The Boondocks*, "they have a steel-toe boot comin'." Lee, though strongly supported in the majority of the black media, for her vote that found popular voice in a website launched days after her decision, titled the "DumpBarbaraLee website." Here, David Horwitz,[21] the famous former liberal turned conservative described Lee as "a 'Communist,' who 'collaborated with America's enemies.'" In addition, Lee's vote of conscience, in the minds of critics, made her "a traitor, un-American, and one who engaged in 'American hating.'"[22] Lee held a press conference to respond to her critics and the widespread curiosity about her vote of conscience. The following excerpt appeared in the *Los Angeles Times:*

> I could not ignore [that what Bush was calling for] provided explicit authority, under the war of Powers Resolution and the Constitution, to go to war. It was a blank check to the president to attack anyone involved in the Sept. 11 events . . . . A rush to launch precipitous military counterattacks runs too great a risk that more innocent men, women, and children will be killed. I could not vote for a resolution that I believed would lead to such an outcome.[23]

As Kitwana in the *Hip Hop Generation* argues, grassroots political formations within the hip-hop generation are more likely out-of-synch rather than in-synch with established, black political institutions and politicians. Still, my examples attempt to elucidate the ways the mass cultural collision of Lee with McGruder's *Boondocks* cites the possibilities in energizing a cross-generational movement between the two. Success in revitalizing the insurgent qualities of black political life for the long term depends on genuine cooperation and shared leadership among artists, youth, and those with a voice in traditional political realms.

In Tucson, Arizona, for example, Wade Colwell, a bilingual education teacher in the Tucson Unified School District, and Ranson Kennedy, a record producer and founder of the hip-hop group Poetic Souljazz, co-created a political, educational, ,and

musical formation for youth, the Funkamentals. This educational formation teaches primary subjects, global, national, and political issues in secondary education using hip-hop and traditional teaching methods. Funkamentals' motto is "education by any means necessary," which is also the title of their first album and video that instructs teachers on using hip-hop in the classroom. Using measured instruments and the collection of statistical data on test scores before and after introducing their program, Colwell and Kennedy found impressive improvements in students' attitudes toward learning, their test scores, and knowledge retention. Other organizations that integrate arts, performance, community advocacy, politics, education, and hip-hop culture for youth include Project Hip Hop and Hip Hop University, which are designed to create new pedagogies and spaces for the artistic cultural productions of youth and their education. In 2002, Harvard University launched its Hip-Hop Archive project and first conference to commemorate its founding, where the Funkamentals, Project Hip Hop, Hip Hop University, and other grassroots youth organizations convened with university educators, musicians, and cultural workers to discuss and assess hip-hop's impact on transforming social relations and galvanizing interest among youth in politics and community development. Grassroots hip-hop formations show how making the necessary linkages between the social, political, and cultural, especially among black youth, opens up exciting possibilities for a better America.[24]

9/11 Sentimentality and the Contradictions of Post-Soul Hip-Hop

During the months following 9/11, political mobilization through mass culture elided a form of black popular culture known for initiating critical discourses of change in times of cultural turmoil, that is, the field of rap and hip-hop music. Since the 1980s, hip-hop as a musical form and sub-culture alienated itself from uncritical, patriotic embodiments of the nation and emerged as the voice of everyday, urban black youth. I argue, however, that today's rap and hip-hop, in contrast to yesteryear's, is increasingly subtle in its critique of the nation—if that critique exists at all—and it appears to carry a less potent political message. This despite the reported mass disenfranchisement of African-Americans in the

2000 presidential election in Dade County, Florida, and the steady number of hate crimes and police brutality targeted at urban black youth. One of the most visible rap and hip-hop producers, Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliot, serves as an example of this context I describe and the textual contradictions of patriotism and contestation. In her patriotic dance number at the end of her tribute to the late R&B singer Aaliyah, in the music video "Take Away," Elliot and a group of back-up dancers performed in red, white, and blue attire against a lit American Flag. Before their dance number, Elliot enthusiastically signals the dancers by the announcement "this is for my American people!" Elliot's dance and her musical epilogue bear little relevance for the original concept of the video, and thus highlight a deliberate move of Elliot's to take part in, and make a statement about, hip-hop's place within the national schema of international relations post-9/11—one that is largely an assumed place and not an oppositional one.

Hip-hop and R&B singer Mary J. Blidge taped her music video "No More Drama" as a quasi-tribute to the victims and families of the 9/11 attacks. Blidge's video consists of a series of vignettes cast on a large screen then refocused by the camera in a wide-pan where everyday people of various genders and colors struggle to work through common cultural hardships and various social and narcotic addictions. In many ways, the song perfectly fit the sentiments of mourning and reconciliation needed after 9/11, as evident in its melancholy yet hopeful lyrics:

I don't know
Only God knows where the story ends for me
But I know where the story begins
It's up to us to choose
Whether we win or lose
And I choose to win

(No more pain)
No more pain, no more pain, tired of hurting . . .
(No drama)

Blidge won an MTV award for the video and said in her acceptance speech at the 2002 MTV Music Awards ceremony that she

was especially appreciative of the award for "No More Drama," because it was "taped after 9/11 when everybody was feeling so much pain and just needed to come together." Blidge's music video, which compressed the aftermath of 9/11 into a multi-racial statement of amorphous, national pain, echoed alternative rock band REM's 1994 hit single "Everybody Hurts." Nevertheless, Blidge's visual and rhetorical prescription of unity did not highlight the specificity of pain that results from the stark contradiction of subjugation in a nation built on and upheld by the backs of black Americans.

The apparatus that once disseminated the largest number of black music videos, the now Viacom-owned cable station Black Entertainment Television, also engaged in what one might construe as color-blind, nebulous patriotism. In black Entertainment's commemorative programming for 9/11 on September 11, 2002, the station's two main music-video shows—*Cita's World* and *106th and Park Street*, focused its day's programming on heroes of 9/11, which highlighted black police officers and 9/11 rescue workers. The programming ended with rap mogul Russell Simmons and RZA from the rap group Wu Tang Clan facilitating a conversation on unity in the black community post-9/11. There are contemporary exceptions of politically focused hip-hop, including the work of Lauryn Hill, Bone Thugs in Harmony, DMX, The Roots, and Nas. Yet the music from major players in hip-hop and the largest black-themed television media conglomerate BET illustrates post-9/11 patriotic performances and rhetoric symptomatic of what cultural critic Mark Anthony Neal describes as an increasingly fragmented, less-potent and therefore less-directed post-soul political discourse of twenty-first century hip-hop artists.[25] Nevertheless, these contradictory moments, wherein we find hip-hop politics wanting for the progressive elements cultural critics often like to pin on them, (or depin, respectively) is likely the result of looking in the wrong places. Today's hip-hop culture is popularly associated with P Diddy Combs' *Bad Boy Entertainment*, the label that is responsible for the success of Ja Rule and Ashanti, *Murder Inc.*, and Master P's *No Limit Records*, which overshadow the grass-roots cultural work of hip-hop as a cultural and political movement.[26]

Post-9/11 reactions from the most visible players in the hip-hop community beg comparison with the political discourse

disseminated by rap group Public Enemy slightly more than ten years prior to 9/11 in the Spring of 1990. It is precisely the type of consciousness espoused by Aaron McGruder and a smaller fraction of today's rap and hip-hop community mentioned earlier that Public Enemy cast attention to through their lyrics about the material marginalization of black people from the concept of, and the full citizenship of, the nation. Included in their lyrics and in the everyday politics they espoused was a proactive stance for the rectification of black subordination. As mentioned, Public Enemy used the example of the police assistance telephone number 9-1-1 as a semiotic signifier to expose a site that makes claims to protecting citizens, but carries little relevance to and in actuality at times works against the masses of black people in everyday life. The music video for "9-1-1 is a Joke" parodies everyday black people who call 9-1-1 for help only to find that law enforcement considers black men and women a threat to the nation-state and in need of surveillance, *not protection*. In their lyrical commentary on the nation's exclusion and innate distrust of black men and women in urban sites and communities, Public Enemy's Flava Flav goes about the work of "droppin" science':

> Everyday they don't ever come correct
> You ask my man right there with the broken neck
> He's a witness to the job never bein' done . . .
> Was a joke "cause they always jokin"
> They the token to your life when it's always croakin'. . .
> 911 is a joke we don't want 'em . . .
> You better wake up and smell the real flavor
> Cause 911 is a fake lifesaver . . .
> So get up get, get, get down
> 911 is a joke in yo' town
> Get up, get, get, get down
> Late 911 wears the late crown

In their insistence that 9-1-1 is a joke to black people, Public Enemy demystifies the paternalistic idea of the "white protector," cautioning black Americans to rise up and create change for themselves, as suggested by the sampled phrasing of the infamous 1960s James Brown song "Get-Up, Get Down." Although the

cultural politics of Public Enemy's music is the subject of many publications on rap,[27] there is little written about their confrontation with American nationalist myths and the way their work rethinks the patriotic symbols that uphold and sustain the nation. In Public Enemy's (in)version of the "Star Spangled Banner," for instance, titled "Nutterbutter Song," (as in nothin' but a song) Chuck D espouses parallel sentiments to their hit 9-1-1:

> I always thought dat power was to the people
> O say can I see we ain't the people
> When I pledge allegiance I should got a sticka . . .
> Verse that worked in the middle of class
> Instead of singin' bout bombs
> Like a dumb ass
> Land of the free
> Home of the brave
> And hell with us cause we slaves
> That should been the last line
> Of a song that's wrong from the get
> So when everybody stands [for the Star Spangled Banner]
> I sit.

Public Enemy thus positions their music as a voice of contestation by their use of revered American entities and symbols, such as the un-reliability of 9-1-1 in urban communities and the "Star Spangled Banner." In this way, they forge a cultural politics in the spirit of transformation, which lyrically intervenes in their and other black folks exclusion from American cultural citizenship. Through their (in)versions of American signs and symbols, an assertion is made about their right to reclaim the history of America and the semiotic referents of the nation that are used against them as people of African descent living in America.[28] In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, on September 13, 2001, Chuck D said as much in a letter to his fans, where he spoke of patriotism in the aftermath of 9/11:

> I have issues with the US talking cocky. I have a problem with heartless cats training to fly planes in order to kill thousands of innocent people in the air or on the ground. I have a problem with Amerikkka,

> and its relentless hyping and macho barroom tales of its "beat-u-down" past, [but] *I don't have a problem on what America can be* (sic). In NEW YORK a place known for people not giving a damn about the next person, all of a sudden people are communicating with one another regardless of background unless the person has a Middle Eastern "visual characteristic" and that's where Amerikka not America rears its ugliness. Understand the difference ya'll (italics mine).[29]

Chuck D's statement not only alludes to U. S. imperialism and domestic terrorism, but he also specifies the contradiction and danger in supporting all Americans except those with "Middle Eastern visual characteristics" post-9/11. While he celebrates the renewed sense of commitment everyday people began to feel toward each other in the name of humanity, his support of the nation is not absent of critical thinking about race relations. Instead of calling for color-blind unity, Chuck D explains the way in which an informed consciousness about and intervention in the *misuse* of color, ethnic, and religious exclusion is a starting point for cultivating the potential of what he so poignantly states "America can be."

The Black Citizen-Subject and National Negotiation: Imagined Communities and Artistic Polemics

Despite the cultural havoc and media frenzy caused by the insurgent stances of McGruder, Lee, and Glover, everyday people, especially within black East Coast ethnic communities, expressed patriotism and national identity. I turn now to the use of symbolic patriotism in post 9/11 urban blacks in order to tease out the nuance and complexity of their reactions. In New York City, Washington, D.C., and Boston, everyday people of African descent—like their other patriotism to prove their American counterparts—displayed flag bumper stickers, wore red, and espoused the rhetoric of what Aaron dominant culture McGruder parodied in his *The Adventures of Flagee and Ribbon* as uncritical, naïve American patriotism. Yet, this performance of post-9/11 patriotism among black ethnic groups and

immigrants requires historical and contextual framing. The display of patriotism in black communities is analogous to cultural critic Benedict Anderson's idea of an imagined community: their symbolic patriotism is reflective of the shared emotional trauma experienced as residents of the states where the terrorist attacks were initiated or aimed.[30]

Displaying flag stickers and wearing ribbons also acted as an attempt to claim space within the nation for which immigrant populations and black Americans typically do not have access. Many immigrant groups and people of color on the East Coast and cab drivers used flags and ribbons as a material shield from misguided nationalistic vigilantes who might boycott their businesses or act in violence against them in the name of American nationalism. Immigrant cab driver's involvement in symbolic American patriotism in particular was not reactionary paranoia. In the wake of the Patriot Act, which provides for an increase in surveillance of American citizens suspected of engaging in suspicious, un-American behavior, cab drivers that do airport pickups are now seen as potential suspects and police may conduct random searches for terrorist paraphernalia at perceived key airport sites. It is surely no coincidence that in these proposed key airport sites where the attacks were initiated or aimed, that is, Boston, D.C., and New York City, a large percentage of cab drivers are of African, Middle Eastern, or South Asian heritage. This suggests an always-already idea in the popular imagination about the ethnicity of a terrorist. It is not a stretch to say then that while white Americans use symbolic patriotism to demonstrate their national pride post-9/11, many people of color felt the need to engage in symbolic patriotism to prove their loyalty to the United States in order to avoid acts of domestic terrorism propagated by the dominant culture.[31]

Rather than read flag display and ribbon-wearing among black ethnic and immigrant groups only as a sign of misguided nationalistic pride, it is equally useful to understand symbolic representation as ambivalence about national belonging and domestic social relations. Historian Lawrence R. Samuel said of black patriotism during World War II that many black Americans, purchased war bonds to assert their place within American social relations and to help stimulate the war-diminished economy. He

cautions hasty skepticism and judgment about black patriotism when he writes:

> viewing the significant African-American investment [in patriotism throughout history] as a display of ideological alignment with the power bloc consensus . . . is an incomplete and inaccurate conclusion. Black patriotism can at the same time strengthen group identity through its insistence of a national one.[32]

It may be helpful then to closely examine examples from black art and poetry that negotiate the two poles of assumed inclusion and the subtler forms of contestation that Samuel implies: the flag art of artists Faith Ringgold and Emma Amos and the spoken word of Amiri Baraka.

In the 1960s through the 1990s, Ringgold and Amos used the most recognizable sign of patriotism—the fetishized American flag—as an illustration of the negotiation between national, gender, race, and ethnic group consciousness. Faith Ringgold remains the most commercially successful in this use, as she employs various signifiers of black oppression in her work alongside versions of the American flag to provide a counternarrative of black patriotism. Over the past four and a half decades, as cultural critic Lisa Farrington observes, Ringgold has transposed signs of American nationalism, race, class, and gender to depict black realities and national violence.[33] Through absence and subversion of the flag as a signifier of freedom, Ringgold and Amos complicate the meanings of patriotism to encompass the subjects rendered peripheral to the nation they inhabit, especially black women and men. Centering subjects such as sexuality, interracial unions, racial epithets, militaristic symbols, and crossracial political units, Ringgold and Amos transform the American flag into a symbol of protest, reconciliation, and paradoxically, black American hope.

The above aesthetic, cultural, and political mixture is seen in Ringgold's *The Flag is Bleeding* (1967), and *The Flag is Bleeding, Part Two* (1990). *The Flag is Bleeding* places three subjects, a black male, white woman, and white male against a flag that drips with spurted blood. The men in the painting lock arms with the white woman in the middle. While the black male holds a dagger in his left hand

toward his genitals, the white male places his arms on his hips. The black and white males smile, while the white woman in the center projects a matter-of-fact, ineffectual stare. Visual artist and cultural critic Patrick Hill writes that Ringgold's decision in *The Flag is Bleeding* to superimpose blood over the flag and the three subjects that stand before it "rejects as illusory any suggestion that interests of a racially balkanized body politic might be served simply by linking blacks and whites arm in arm."[34] While Hill's observation is insightful, this image seems to also work as a statement on masculinist notions of freedom as predicated upon protection of, and access to, white women. Given Ringgold's second version of the painting, *The Flag is Bleeding, Part Two,* this seems probable. In this image, a black woman stands behind a bleeding flag, huddling two black children, one in each arm, close to her chest. Blood flows from her breasts and back splatters onto the large flag that has colorful quilt patches as a border. Both images provide significant statements on how race relations work in society and for the latter, how the black female subject produces and understands culture. Through absence in the first image of the black female subject and centered insertion in the second image, Ringgold illustrates how black women are iconoclastic symbols of re-constitutive meanings of patriotism, a struggle that, as *The Flag is Bleeding, Part Two* shows, is often forged by a woman alone with her offspring. Again, writes Patrick Hill, as Ringgold asserted a self-conscious gender politics, she began to use her art "as a forum to openly address concerns specific to African-American women, and iconographic ground less thoroughly imbued with the violent history of American patriarchy."[35]

Flag of the Moon (1967) and *Flag Story Quilt* (1985) alter the formal components of the traditional American flag by integrating visual depictions of speech, and speech acts, overlaid on or as constructive material for her new, interpretive version of flag imagery. In *Flag of the Moon,* the word "die" is placed horizontally behind white stars embedded in a blue square, and the racial epithet "Nigger" is placed vertically in grayish-white to create semblances of red and white stripes. By transforming the American flag into a speech act, and act of hate, Ringgold provocatively asserts the contradictory meanings of freedom that the American

flag communicates for different communities: for some citizens it means freedom, for others, as the words "die" and "Nigger" convey, it means annihilation of the other, or *Othered* black citizen-subject. In comparison, *Flag Story Quilt* uses tie-dyed, appliquéd red stripes, strips of a written narrative that resemble newsprint, and profiled white heads with sequined eyes to form an image of an American flag. *Flag Story Quilt*, writes Ringgold, is

> about Memphis Cooley, an armless, paraplegic Vietnam veteran from Harlem, who is accused of an unlikely crime. The story is based on the premise that the black man's guilt, whether likely or unlikely, is almost always taken for granted long before it is actually proven. *Flag Story Quilt* seems to bear a resemblance to [the] Rodney King case in which we were asked to disbelieve the classic video we all saw on television of the brutal police beating of Rodney King that would seem to suggest that the police applied undue force to an unarmed man.[36]

Ringgold's mélange of patriotic symbols and a written narrative about attacks upon black freedom and the black body is used to illuminate the inconspicuous and unfortunate truths of democracy as it is unevenly disseminated. *Flag Story Quilt* also portrays the contradictions of law enforcement Public Enemy directly spoke of in "9-1-1 is a Joke." Her dialogic images that take shape in the image of the American flag invites inquiry into the multiple and contradictory meanings of, and the limits placed upon, freedom. Moreover, through her use of biography in conjunction with the quilts and altered flag imagery, she tells a story of American history that the traditional version of the flag might obscure.

Artist Emma Amos integrates signs and symbols of black American history and segregation into her use of the flag in *X Flag* (1994), *Confederates*, (1994), and *Equals* (1992). Amos's depictions of the American flag are similar to Ringgold's use of the famous, iconic sign of freedom in the sixties and early nineties. Her approach, like Ringgold's, implicates black Americans as in the middle of the paradoxes of American patriotism. In Amos's work, the flag is a sign of racial

hatred and racial pride; freedom and entrapment; segregation and integration. *X Flag,* for example, places a Confederate flag border around a roughly painted American flag and she replaces the traditional stars and stripes with a black and white photo of three black children surrounded by stamps of revolutionary leader Malcolm X. In the middle of the painting Amos etches an "x" as a cross-out overlaid upon a smaller Confederate "x." Here, Amos fuses competing positions on civil and human rights while asserting that black history and the black subject is at the center of the fight for American freedom and justice. In addition, the use of the two flags—American and Confederate—symbolize the beginning of a history that allowed black patriotism to form, that is, the Civil War. But Amos is too smart to leave symbols of patriotism un-mediated by contestatory politics, hence her use of Malcolm X stamps and the three children pictured in the left-hand corner that depict the historical moment of 1960s segregation, something for which post–Civil War reconstruction efforts promised to, but did not, end.

Equals pictures a black woman drowning in the ripples of an American flag with appliquéd yellow stars outlined in black with peering eyes in the center; a picture of a modest dwelling is positioned in the far left corner and the parameter is trimmed with quilted images of Malcolm X against Kente cloth. *Confederates* is a multi-media installation that fuses white interpretations of Southern pride, that is, the Confederate flag, with a photo of an interracial and mixed gender threesome who stand defiantly as if challenging a spectator's gaze. Amos's *Equals* and *Confederates* are indicative of patriotism as a process of national negotiation and confrontation with American history. Her use of national signs of patriotism, especially her integration of flags that represent the poles of bondage and freedom, situate patriotism as a fluid question and as a signifier for the need for national healing in cross-gender, white and black social relations. Like Ringgold, Amos illustrates that the black female subject is often caught in the middle of this negotiation, described well by the telling title of Debra Gray White's history of black women's political organizations *Too Heavy A Load,* and Akasha Hull's book on black feminism, *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave.*[37]

Ringgold and Amos transform the most prototypical American sign of freedom—the flag—and they embed it with multiple layers of meaning that eschew trendy deployment in culture, as represented so well in the white female artist Liane Ricci's painting *Patriotism, the New Black* (2002). In this work, one might see the contradictions of contemporary, post-9/11 patriotism, where Ricci images a woman with large, dark sunglasses and full red lips. The woman's head is wrapped in a red and white stripe scarf which hides her face and hair, and she stands behind a wall of white stars encroached within a blue background. The wrap the woman wears strikes an uncanny resemblance to the traditional dress of Arab-American women, especially in that the wrap and sunglasses obscure large portions of the woman's face and body, revealing scant ethnicized features, such as her full mouth. Ricci's form of artistic masking makes the woman indistinguishable and therefore distinguishable as an Arab-American woman at the same time. Her image, I believe, invokes at least two key questions: Have Arab-Americans—as implicated by the woman pictured—replaced black Americans as the threatening Other of the nation? Are Arab-American women, in this post 9/11 moment, the new black, and if so, how does this help one understand the problems suggested by Barbara Lee, Chuck D, and Danny Glover concerning black Americans' responsibility in forming cross-cultural coalitions in order to realize long-term change and healing in U.S. race relations?

Although not produced by a black artist, I use *Patriotism, the New Black* as an illustration of my argument because it invokes such difficult questions, and because of the artist's admitted intent with the painting. The intent with *Patriotism, the New Black* was not to depict an Arab American woman, racial profiling, or race relations; it is a "celebration," in the words of the artist Liane Ricci, "of America." Ricci's painting of a woman wrapped up in the apparent goodness of the nation presents patriotism as now "en vogue" in our post-9/11 moment.[38] Ironically, perhaps no other painting then, fits the argument of this paper more perfectly than *Patriotism, the New Black,* as it reveals the multiple ways of seeing patriotism, freedom, and the ways this seeing is impacted by post-9/11 racial discourses and subject position. In this image one can both see race and not see race through the woman's features and dress; as a central subject the

woman pictured can work as an assumed sign of international oppression and as a sign of ceremonial reverence for a nation, depending on who is doing the looking. *Patriotism, the New Black* is a signifier for the complex layers of iconic signs of freedom as one may interpret it differently according to the gaze of the looker, their subject position, and relationship to oppositional looking relations.[39] An analysis of the use of patriotic signs by the art of Ricci, Amos, Ringgold, and everyday black Americans demonstrate the utility in exploring the many facets and performances of patriotism as a critique of social relations and how artists and spectators simultaneously manipulate gaze. By rethinking how, why, and to what ends patriotism is expressed in culture, art, and everyday life, we not only discover the unlimited possibilities for evaluating its use and misuse in culture, we also discover the grounds by which we might combat it in its ideological and less progressive forms.

A historical venture into how patriotism shaped and mediated social relations is the subject of Roger Wilkins' book *Jefferson's Pillow,* where he traces the formation of black patriotism and contestation since the Revolutionary War. Black patriotism, argues Wilkens, is present throughout the history of America; it developed precariously in the shadow of the well-known historical reality that the nation's leaders "created a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that whites were and should be supreme. They celebrated freedom while stealing the substance of life from the people they owned."[40] Amiri Baraka offers a strong example of Wilkins's argument in his October 2002 poem "Somebody Blew Up America?" a work that takes historical moments and reinterprets them through the rhythmic mixture of metaphor, metonymy, polemics, black oration, and stylistic conventions characteristic of African-American spoken word poetry. Baraka's poetic piece argues that the cause of terrorism—domestic and international—is an already answered question. New Jersey's Governor, Jim McGreevey, asked Baraka to relinquish his title of poet laureate because of his controversial work, claiming that one line in a stanza, where Baraka insinuates Israel had previous information about the 9/11 terrorist attacks before it took place, was anti-Semitic.[41] Baraka refuted claims of anti-Semitism in

"Somebody Blew Up America?" by insisting upon a separation between a people (Jews) and a nation (Israel).

Charges of anti-Semitism also plagued the group Public Enemy, as well as other "isms," such as heterosexism and sexism, before their dismissal of Professor Griff, a member scorned for making anti-Semitic statements to the American media. Critiqued for their Black Nationalist leanings and commentary about black gay men, Public Enemy's cultural politics is not free from jingoism, homophobia, and other components of well-documented hip-hop hypocrisy.[42] The accusations directed at Baraka and Public Enemy is not something I will seek to prove or disprove here. Rather, I bring this up as an opportunity to assert the work necessary for cross-cultural and cross-religious coalitions, which is especially important in our post-9/11 era of ethnic, cultural, and religious profiling directed at Americans and those within our borders not connected to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As Henry Louis Gates observes, "attention to black anti-Semitism is crucial, however discomforting, in no small part because the moral credibility of our [own] struggle against racism hangs in the balance."[43] This is especially so because in the words of bell hooks:

> If black anti-Semitism is to be eradicated and not merely evoked in ways that pit one group of black folks against another, that make one group of black folks 'darlings' among white Jews and another the 'enemy,' we must create critical spaces for the dialogue where the aim is not to cast "blame" but to look more deeply at why two groups who should and must maintain solidarity are drifting apart.[44]

While one line in Baraka's poem has gained scrutiny, the entirety of Baraka's response to 9/11, where he expresses a possible cover-up of domestic and international infractions on the part of the U.S. government, has gained less attention. I quote Baraka's telling stanzas at length to provide a nuanced picture of his poignant and emotionally charged political and historical arguments:

> They say its some terrorist,
> some barbaric
> A Rab,

in Afghanistan
It wasn't our American terrorists
It wasn't the Klan or the Skin heads
Or the them that blows up nigger
Churches, or reincarnates us on Death Row
It wasn't Trent Lott
Or David Duke or Giuliani
Or Schundler, Helms retiring

They say (who say?)
Who do the saying
Who is them paying
Who tell the lies
Who in disguise
Who had the slaves
Who got the bux out the Bucks

Who got fat from plantations
Who genocided Indians
Who tried to waste the Black nation

Who live on Wall Street
The first plantation
Who cut your nuts off
Who rape your ma
Who lynched your pa . . . .
Who made the bombs
Who made the guns . . . .
Who? Who? Who?

Who stole Puerto Rico
Who stole the Indies, the Philippines, Manhattan
Australia & The Hebrides
Who forced opium on the Chinese

Who the fake president
Who the ruler
Who the banker

Who? Who? Who?

Who own the mine
Who twist your mind
Who got bread
Who need peace
Who you think need war

Who own the oil
Who do no toil
Who own the soil
Who is not a nigger
Who is so great ain't nobody bigger . . . .
Who killed the most niggers
Who killed the most Jews Who
killed the most Italians Who
killed the most Irish Who
killed the most Africans Who
killed the most Latinos

Who? Who? Who?. . . .
Who killed Malcolm, Kennedy & his brother
Who killed Dr King, Who would want such a thing?
Are they linked to the murder of Lincoln?

Who invaded Grenada
Who made money from apartheid
Who keep the Irish a colony
Who overthrow Chile and Nicaragua later . . . .
Who decided Affirmative Action had to go
Reconstruction, The New Deal,
The New Frontier, The Great Society, . . .
Like the acid vomit of the fire of Hell
Who and Who and WHO who who
Whoooo and Whooooooooooooooooo!

Conclusion
Patriotism: The New Black?

The poem's incessant rhythmic meter is apparent in its concluding "who." Baraka presents his poetry in the style of a rhetorical dialogue in which the reader is invited to fill in the answer. Amiri Baraka's suggestive response makes clear the need of reconstituting patriotism through a critical politics of contestation. I hope to have shown that this work, as well as other forms of black expressive culture-rap and hip-hop, mass culture and art, play a key role in thinking through the limits and possibilities of traditional understandings of patriotism, and the consequences that uncritical patriotism holds for all Americans. For McGruder, Ringgold, and Amos, signs of patriotism simultaneously function as signs of contestation. Their use of symbolic doubling, counter discourses, and deliberate, artistic alteration shows this contradictory aesthetic. Lee's and Glover's unrelenting public position in support of the vote and the expression of conscience despite the risk of censure and overt political attack—carries strong utility in the creation of emergent political consciousness to the ends of long-term change. Whether Lee is re-elected and Glover recovers from the minor and now largely diminished assaults on his public persona, both set a precedent for those who will follow them. They will put their critics on notice concerning the misuse of nationalistic, paternalistic power in times of cultural crisis. As Public Enemy and Amiri Baraka use rap and poetry to reveal and to remind Americans of the forms of domestic terrorism for which black bodies continue to be targets, they also show how the same entity is often responsible for that terrorism in their very own sites.

For those cultural workers committed to change and transformation, we must decide whether we want patriotism, as represented in Liane Ricci's postmodernist painting, to become the "new black," or if we want clearly defined, interventionist cultural politics to become the way in which we represent and express *a new form of American patriotism*. This patriotism would "not demand assent at all costs and romantic notions of unity based on an assumed national consensus and silence of domestic forms of racism and violence. Rather, this form of patriotism would rely upon the much harder work of

maintaining diverse political polities composed of mutual respect, divergent and shared political goals. The latter, opposed to the former, would constitute a truly valuable and self-reflexive American patriotism worth fighting for and sustaining for the long term." Certainly, one might argue that in times of crisis, scarce resources, and mass mourning, such critiques and insurgent knowledge production in the arts is counterproductive. At the least, it may be seen as bad timing. But I argue quite the opposite. If now is not the time to highlight these problems and contradictions in the culture, and in domestic, and in international relations, when is the right time?

In response to black accommodation to segregation, disenfranchisement, and cultural marginalization espoused so well by Booker T. Washington's political and cultural prescriptions during Reconstruction, William Monroe Trotter wrote at the turn of the century that "it is not wise to assume one might obtain rights by not protesting their being taken away."[45] We might heed the words expressed in the film *Ali* where Mohammed Ali insisted (drawing from the words of Martin Luther King) that historically marginalized groups have already waited more than four hundred years for the unalienable rights experienced by few, but promised to all. For those who might be sympathetic to my arguments but still contend that, in times of mass mourning, contestation and insurgency are not wise choices for black cultural workers, intellectuals, and artists, I respond by reiterating Danny Glover's argument in his MLK speech. Never again, Glover argued, can the nation-state take precipitous action or target a group based on wartime (or war play) hysteria; we cannot ask questions and open up discussion AFTER committing abominable acts of mistrust and war. In these troubling times of military expediency, surveillance in the name of national security, fragile international relations, and U.S. avarice for the natural resources that lay beneath the hot desert grounds thousands of miles away from our own nation-state, it seems appropriate to end with the words of Amiri Baraka: "All thinking people oppose terrorism—both domestic and international . . . but one should not be used to cover up the other."[46]

Notes

A version of this paper, titled "Get Up, Get-Get Get Down, 9/11 Ain't a Joke in Your Town," was delivered at the American Studies Association meetings in Houston, Texas, in November of 2002.

1. Eric Foner, "The Birth of Civil Liberties," in *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1998), 172–73.
2. Public Enemy asked Professor Griff to leave in 1992 after a series of public remarks construed as anti-Semitic.
3. Gerald Leinwand, *Patriotism in America* (New York: Franklin and Watts, 1997), 14.
4. One might recall, for example, the use of patriotic symbols and language used by working-class whites during school desegregation in Boston, where manipulated notions of patriotism were used to make claims to moral superiority in order to defuse public opinion about the horrors of their race- and class-inflected discrimination targeted at black Americans. See John Bodnar, *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define Their Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 10.
5. On Ali and his public service announcement post 9/11, see "Hollywood Wants Ali as Messenger," *Associated Press News*, Los Angeles (December 23, 2001).
6. Black expressive art is chosen as the primary mode of textual analysis because it widens the parameters of meaning and distinctions made between folk, popular, elite, and oral art and cultures. Black expressive art encompasses all of these forms in their most permeable and performative forms. See for example, Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998).
7. By cultural politics, I mean the process by which organic intellectuals, community activists, and organizers, that is, cultural workers, intervene in processes of subjugation produced and upheld within cultural realms. On black cultural politics see Brian Allyene, *Radicals Against Race: Black Activism and Cultural Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Bill Mullen, *Popular Fronts: Chicago and African American Cultural Politics, 1935-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Michael Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African American Political Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), Paul Gilroy, *Their Ain't No Black in Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
8. Jayson Blair, "Some Comic Strips Take an Unpopular Look at U.S.," *New York Times* (October 22, 2001), Section C, Page 9. Censorship of the *Boondocks* continued when McGruder retired *The Adventures of Flagee and Ribbon*. In a November 22, 2001, strip, Huey is pictured at a table on Thanksgiving reciting the prayer: "Ahem—in this time of war against Osama bin Laden and the

oppressive Taliban regime, we are thankful that our leader isn't the spoiled son of a powerful politician from a wealthy oil family who is supported by religious fundamentalists, operates clandestine organizations, has no respect for the democratic electoral process, bombs innocents and uses war to deny people their civil liberties. Amen." The *Dallas Morning News* pulled this strip. See Eric Celeste, "What's Up, Docks? The Morning News Keeps the Evil Thoughts Away," *Dallas Observer* (December 6, 2001).

9. Jayson Blair, "Some Comic Strips."

10. Ibid.

11. Author Unknown, "Letters to the Editor: Move the Boondocks," *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, Sooner Edition (September 27, 2002), 43.

12. See Aaron McGruder, *The Boondocks, Because I Know You Don't Read The Newspaper* (New York: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2000).

13. Bakari Kitwana, "The Emergence of the Hip Hop Generation," in *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: Basic, 2002).

14. Tupac Shakur and Bigge Smalls are two of the most influential icons in rap and hip-hop music. See Alan Light, ed., *Tupac Amaru Shakur, 1971-1996* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997); Cheo Hodari Coker, *Unbelievable: The Life, Death, and Afterlife of the Notorious B.I.G.* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003).

15. Ibid.

16. Author unknown, "Glover's Long Road to Modesto," *Revolutionary Worker*, Number 1137 (February 3, 2002).

17. Joe Strupp, "The Trentonian Plays Up Glover Controversy," *Editor and Publisher* (January 7, 2002), 21.

18. See Lisa Millegan, "Big Names Coming For King Day," *Modesto Bee* (January 17, 2002).

19. "Glover's Long Road to Modesto."

20. Bill Hackwell, "Rally Goes Ahead Despite Right Wing Campaign," *Workers World News Paper* (January 24, 2002); Joe Strupp, "The Trentonian Plays Up Glover Controversy," *Editor and Publisher* (January 7, 2002), 21.

21. Horwitz is best known for his opposition to affirmative action and reparations for people of African descent living in America. He is the editor of the online magazine *Frontpage.com* and former president of the Center for the Study of Popular Culture.

For an archive of all his articles opposing affirmative action, reparations, and advocacy of neo liberalism, see http://www.Frontpagemag.coml ArticlesAuthors.asp?ID=4.

22. See http://www.DumpBarbaraLee.htm. This link, where David Horwitz's comments were cited, was active as of November 2002.

23. Quoted in Gary Rivlin, "Looking Glass Politics: Barbara Lee Casts the Sole Vote Against Military Retaliation for the Sept. 11 Terrorist Attacks. Think Her

Career Is Over? You Don't Know the East Bay;" *Los Angeles Times* (June 16, 2002), 18.

24. I culled this information from my attendance at Harvard University's hip-hop conference in September 2002 and interviews with Wade Colwell and Ranson Kennedy of the Funkamentals.

25. Mark Anthony Neal, *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Public Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

26. An interesting contradiction is that all of the record labels mentioned here are blackowned labels, and the aforementioned artists who retain a political platform are on mainstream labels. I am not suggesting a causal relationship, as Mary J Blidge and Missy Elliot are on MCA, but it is interesting to note that generally speaking, black-owned labels formedwith the intent of taking control over the distribution of the music and the monetary rewards and general artistic freedom, rather than the dissemination of a cultural and political message was their goal.

27. See for example Tricia Rose's seminal work on the cultural politics of rap music in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994). Rose writes of the cultural work of rap and hip-hop, examining the contributions of Public Enemy as well as other influential artists in this genre.

28. See Chuck D (with Yusuf Jah), *Fight the Power: Rap, Race, and Reality* (New York: Dell, 1998).

29. Posted on Public Enemy's official Website, http://www.publicenemy. com. The link was active as of November 2002.

30. On this theory, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

31. I would like to thank the American Studies Association panel titled "Cultural Citizenship in the Age of George Bush" at the Washington, D.C. meetings in 2001, which brought to my attention the use of flags and ribbons, post 9/11, as carrying contradictory meanings and consequences for nonwhite cab drivers.

32. Lawrence R. Samuel, "Dreaming in Black and White: African American Patriotism and World War II Bonds," ed., John Bodnar, *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define Their Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 210.

33. Faith Ringgold and Lisa Farrington, *Art On Fire: The Politics of Race and Sex in the Paintings of Faith Ringgold* (New York: Millennium Fine Arts Publishing Incorporated. 1998).

34. Patrick Hill, "The Castration of Memphis Cooley: Race, Gender, and Nationalist Iconography in the Flag Art of Faith Ringgold," *Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold's French Collection and Other Story Quilts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 28.

35. Ibid.

36 Faith Ringgold, "We Flew Over the Bridge: Performance Art, Story Quilts, and Tar Beach," in *We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold* (Boston: Bulfinch, Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 254.

37. Debra Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves* (New York: Norton, 1999), Gloria Hull, Barbara Smith, Patricia Bell Scott, eds., *All The Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us are Brave* (Old Westbury, New York: Feminist Press, 1984).

38. Liane Ricci is a New York–born artist who works in the post-modernist tradition. She explains her approach to *Patriotism, the New Black,* as a part of her press biography. She was a part of the artist coalition Unity Canvas in New York that responded to the 9/11 events through paintings inspired by the tragedy and local New York aesthetics. See Ajay Ghosh, "Unity Canvas Held in New York," *Art and Culture* (February 2002). The artist may be contacted at liane@lianericci.com.

39. On the gaze and looking relations see Ann Kaplan, *Looking For the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997) xviii-xxi. For oppositional looking relations theory, see Kobcna Mercer, "Skin-head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary," in CD. Bad Object Choices, *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991) 169–222; bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," CD. Manthia Diawra, *Black American Cinema: Aesthetics and Spectatorship* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); Deidre Pribram. ed. *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television* (London: Verso, 1989).

40. Roger Wilkins, *Jefferson's Pillow: The Founding Fathers and the Dilemma of Black Patriotism* (Boston: Beacon, Press, 2002), 5.

41. On the controversy over Baraka's poem, see Philip Weiss, "If Poet Amiri Baraka Becomes Ex-Laureate, Is It Bad for Writers?" *Newsday* (October 21, 2002), 1; Maria Newman, "Poet Laureate Stands By Words Against Israel and Won't Step Down," *New York Times* (October 3, 2002), Section B 8.

42. For a discussion on black cultural politics, rap, and misogyny see Trieia Rose, "Black Texts/Contexts," in Gina Dent, ed., (a project by Michelle Wallace), *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1994) and bell hooks, "Misogyny, Gangsta Rap, and the Piano," Z *Magazine* (February, 1994).

43. Henry Louis Gates, "The Uses of Anti-Semitism," *Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1994), 219.

44. bell hooks, "Keeping a Legacy of Shared Struggle," *Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1994), 233–34.

45. Gail Buckley, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* (New York: Random House, 2001), 134.

46. This statement was the epigraph to Amiri Baraka's poem "Somebody Blew Up America?"

Tapping the Wisdom of Our Ancestors:

An Attempt to Recast Vodou and Morality through *the Voice*[*] of Mama Lola and Karen McCarthy Brown

Claudine Michel

Introduction[†]

> In no other area of the world has the African been more dynamic or more influential in keeping the ethos of the motherland alive than in the Caribbean. Out of these small islands have come the culture-bearers, freedom-fighters, artists, and apostles of Africa in America.[1]

Morality as an aspect and derivative of religious beliefs is difficult to appreciate when looking across cultural divides. Trying to establish universal principles of ethics and to ascertain the existence of absolute moral standards is an attempt to objectify morality at the

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[*] The paper will make clear why "voice" is in the singular.

[†] This paper was written before I met Mama Lola and Karen McCarthy Brown. I subsequently had the good fortune of meeting both of them. If anything, my interaction with these women has further reinforced the views that I previously held. I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to both of them for their great wisdom and their inspiration. I also wish to thank my family for the support provided during those long hours of work. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the William Monroe Trotter Institute and the support of James Jennings, the Institute's former director.

expense of contextual reality—a reality that can only be apprehended through the filters of subjective perceptions, influenced by ideas, cultures and ideologies. If one rejects the traditional definitions of Kant, Habermas, Piaget, or Kohlberg, who equate the more complex and abstract with an objective standard of the more right and moral, it seems that the notion of universal rationality, as a basis for morality, must be abandoned in favor of a contextual morality—one that is grounded in the individual histories and cultures of various people.

In this essay, I demonstrate that morality is culture-specific and contextual. To illustrate this point, I focus on Vodou, a religion that has been almost entirely misrepresented in the West, foremost because of its African origins, and that is perceived as having no legitimate basis for morality. I attempt to interpret morality in Vodou by presenting a model of ethics construction based on the true meaning of the religion rather than on the *exotica* of its myths and ritualizing. My analysis is based on the fact that Haitians seem to have turned to their ancestral religion and to their African past to survive isolation and ostracism from the West—consistently using the Vodou religion as a tool of both resistance and continuity. In that respect, Vodou is a microcosm that reflects a reconstructed form of the traditional African world view and the moral values inherent to it.

What is Vodou?[2]

Vodou is a conglomeration of beliefs and rituals of West African origin, which, having incorporated some Catholic practices, has come to be the religion of the greater part of the peasants and the urban proletariat of the republic of Haiti as well as members of the Haitian elite and some foreign nationals. Its devotees ask of it what people have always asked of religions: A basis for daily living, a remedy for ills, help in times of hardships, satisfaction of needs, and hope. McCarthy Brown states that: "Vodou is the system that [Haitians] have devised to deal with the suffering that is life, a system whose purpose is to minimize pain, avoid disaster, cushion loss, and strengthen survivors and survival instincts."[3] Courlander wrote: "In short, [Vodou] is a true religion which attempts to tie the unknown to the known and establish order where there might otherwise be chaos. For those who believe in Vodou, no event or episode is a thing in itself. In birth and death, good fortunes and bad, the loa[4] are somehow involved."[5]

Bellegarde-Smith's[6] encompassing definition of *Vodun* sheds light on the true meaning of the religion:

> Vodun is a coherent and comprehensive system and world view in which every person and everything is sacred and must be treated accordingly. In Vodun, everything in the world—be it plant, animal, or mineral—shares basically similar chemical, physical, and/or genetic properties. This unity of all things translates into an overarching belief in the sanctity of life, not so much for the *thing* as for the *spirit* of the thing. The cosmological unity in Vodun further translates into a vaunted African humanism in which social institutions are elaborated and in which the living, the dead, and the unborn play equally significant roles in an unbroken historical chain. Thus, all action, speech, and behavior achieve paramount significance for the individual and the community of which the individual is part.[7]

The American ethnobiologist, Wade Davis, also unveils some interesting truths about the Haitian religion:

> [Vodoun is] a complex mystical world view, a system of beliefs concerning the relationship between man, nature, and the supernatural forces of the universe. Vodoun cannot be abstracted from the day to day life of the believers. In Haiti, as in Africa, there is no separation between the sacred and the secular, between the holy and the profane, between the material and the spiritual. Every dance, every song, every action is but a particle of the whole, each gesture is a prayer. . . . Vodoun not only embodies a set of spiritual concepts, it prescribes a way of life, a philosophy, and a code of ethics that regulate social behavior.[8]

The followers of the ancestral cult refer to their religious beliefs and practices by the phrase *sevi lwa yo*—which can best be translated as "serving the spirits."[9] An adept of Vodou simply says, "I serve the spirits," which in itself is a revealing statement about the nature of the

religion, the importance of withdrawing the self and serving *others*, and about the spiritual connections existing between living human beings, their ancestors, and their gods. Also, an understanding and knowledge of African religions and philosophy allows one to read even more into such a phrase: It clearly connects this religion of the New World to the African ethos and world view.

Courlander offers yet another compelling definition, which further exemplifies Vodou's African connection, resilience, and pervasiveness:

> Vodou permeates the land, and, in a sense, it springs from the land. It is not a system imposed from above, but one which pushes out from below. It is a thing of the family, a rich and complex inheritance from a man's own ancestors. It is not the priests of Vodou who control and direct its course. They, like the poorest peasant simply move about within it and make use of its resources. Vodou is strong and it cannot die easily. . . . You cannot destroy something with such deep genuine roots. You may warp it, twist it, make it crawl along the ground instead of growing upright, but you cannot kill it [especially] in light of the inner history of the race.[10]

C. L. R. James wrote in *The Black Jacobians*: "Left to themselves, the Haitian peasantry resuscitated to a remarkable degree the lives they had lived in Africa . . . and above all their religion. . . . All this was Africa in the West Indies. But it was Haitian."[11] In a work focusing on the persistence of African religions in the Americas, Barrett comments: "The slave master was able to claim the body of the slave, but the world view of the African was nurtured in his soul and this soul was impregnable."[12] Barrett explains how religion was the motivating and unifying force for the many different ethnic groups who found themselves in the New World[13] and he acknowledges Vodou's "noble history" as a catalyst for the revolutionary accomplishments for which Haiti is known.[14] It is well documented that through their traditional religion and world view, Haitians have survived oppression, found modes of expression, and recreated a modified African society and ethos which have to some extent Africanized the American continent. Thompson wrote that "vodun was Africa *reblended*." [15]

For years, scholars have pursued the possibility that the term Vodou is of Dahomean origin, derived from the *Fon* word for "god" or "spirit." This is one means by which Vodou has been distinguished from "Voodo," the sign of the fabulous creation of the Euro/American imagination. Increasingly, with the aim of reclaiming the West African origins of the religion and for the sake of authenticity, a number of scholars are rejecting all Western spellings, including Vaudou, favored in the francophone world, and Vodou for the terms Vodun or Vodoun. Different spellings suggest different meanings. Bellegarde-Smith, for example. favors *Vodun*, which, according to him, derives from two words *vo* and *du*, which mean "introspection into the unknown." He writes about a Zulu teaching, which, like other forms of African humanism, stresses the need for further self-exploration: "The challenge of being human is forever to explore myself. I challenge the universe to show me a being higher than myself."[16] Bellegarde-Smith further explains the introspective communion with higher beings and possessions: "One who has not become a divinity should not worship. Anyone worshipping a divinity without first becoming one will not reap the fruit of that worship."[17] The renaming of the religion as *Vodun* or *Vodoun* should be placed in the context of an even larger movement to redefine, recast, and reconstruct the origins, the meaning and the sociopolitical significance of the religion of the Haitian people.

"Voodoo," the Euro/American-created term, never fails to spark excitement. It suggests distorted images of superstitions, sorcery, blood sacrifices, and sexual orgies. In particular, in novels and films, American popular culture dwells on images of Voodoo's malevolence, on zombies and snakes. Writing about Vodou and morality may therefore seem paradoxical since Voodoo is usually presented in the West in opposition to true religion; that is, Christianity. It is often said that Haitians are 85 percent Catholic, 15 percent Protestant, and 100 percent Vodou believers. The same saints who decorate the altar watch over the *hounfort*, or the Vodou temple.

In the United States, the word Voodoo is used in a casual and derogatory manner to indicate, on the one hand, anything magical or miraculous and, on the other hand, anything from the deceptive to downright evil.[18] Such constructed views, widely shared in the West and in the foreign press, are used as evidence of Haitian backwardness and represent ethnocentrism at its worst.

The wide distribution and negative cultural impact of such demeaning characterizations of Vodou and of Haiti are exemplified by their appearances in various media—a dictionary, a popular magazine, and a scholarly book chapter.

> [Voodoo encompasses] a body of primitive rites and practices, based on a belief in sorcery and the power of charms fetishes, etc., found among natives of the West Indies and in the southern United States, and ultimately of African origin.[19]

> It is Voodoo that is the devil here. It is a demonic religion, a cancer on Haiti. Voodoo is worse than AIDS. Did you know that in order for a man to become a houngan he must perform anal sodomy on another man? No, of course, you didn't! So what can you expect from these people?[20]

> The ancestor cult appears to be fundamentally apolitical.[21]

The Cultural and Political Ideology Surrounding Vodou

Laguerre, Bellegarde-Smith, Desmangles, Davis, McCarthy Brown, and other scholars have attempted to penetrate Vodou's true meaning and to recast the real significance of the religion. Using new epistemological foundations and methodological approaches, their work aims at re-constructing the essence of the Vodou religion, which, in turn, sheds light on Haitian traditional values as well as on social and political realities.

The anthropologist Michel Laguerre is among the scholars whose work has consistently refuted, among other false depictions and misrepresentations, the contention that Vodou is apolitical. He has published a number of studies[22] establishing the close connections between Vodou and Haitian politics and substantiating, for example, how secret societies are a "paramilitary group connected to the voodoo temples."[23] While Desmangles devotes a significant section of his latest book, *The Faces of the Gods*, to the historical and political setting that shaped the Vodou religion, the argument is not new.[24] One of the first scholars to have suggested the revolutionary role of Vodou was C. L. R.

James who declared that "Voodoo was the medium of the conspiracy." [25]

In *Passage of Darkness,* Wade Davis showed the complex role of the Vodou secret societies in first sustaining, and then in overthrowing the Duvalier regime.[26] He also retraced the political ideology of these societies to the maroon communities of the colonial era. He explained how zombification[27] is the ultimate form of sanction imposed in the Vodou world as a means of maintaining social and political order in local communities. Bellegarde-Smith called these societies "a governman lannuit" (nighttime government) that governs while the official government is asleep.[28] He explains how in the Haitian countryside, away from the control of the official government, the vodun communities are respected more than feared "as they mete out justice in a *democratic* setting (if democracy is defined as being of and for the people). They run what is a parallel judicial system to that of the elite-controlled government."[29] In his book, *Haiti: The Breached Citadel,* Bellegarde-Smith sustains the argument that the significance of the Vodun religion in Haitian history is profound and undebatable.[30]

Western Objectivity: Obstacle to the Truth?

Maya Deren in her important work on Vodou, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti,* questioned the very notion of Western "objectivity":

> Is it not worth considering that reverence for *detachment*—whether scientific or scholarly—might be primarily a projection of a notion of a dualism between spirit and matter? . . . . Is it valid to use this means to truth [Western objectivity] in examining Oriental or African cultures that are not based on such dualism and that are, on the contrary, predicated on the notion that truth can be apprehended only when every cell of brain and body . . . is engaged in that pursuit? [31]

In the same vein, Karen McCarthy Brown explains how, in some traditions, people write history books to remember their ancestors and capture past experience, while in others they call *gede*[32] and other *lwas* to hear about their forefathers in a lively and relevant fashion:

> Whereas in our eyes truthfulness is the paramount virtue of any historical account, in theirs [the Haitians]

> what matters most is relevance and liveliness. . . . I am part of a culture that seeks to capture experience, historical and otherwise, in books. So I write a book about Mama Lola. But in doing so, I try to remember that she is part of a culture that serves Gede . . . the one who tells the ancestral tales in the form of fictionalized short stories and in so doing plays with truth, seeking to bring it alive for its immediate audience.[33]

In *Writing About "the Other,"*[34] McCarthy Brown related how she stopped seeing the mambo, Mama Lola, as the other, how she herself became *the other* in the academic world because she could no longer be a totally detached and objective researcher, and how their voices became *one voice*[35] through which is revealed the beauty of the social and spiritual message of their religion. Despite real differences inherent in their origins, class, and level of education, they had much in common and were able to reach a level of friendship and symbiosis which is communicated via the craftsmanship of McCarthy Brown, who steps back as often as necessary to let Mama Lola speak and, through her, to tap the wisdom of the ancestors.

Standards of truthfulness, objectivity, and clarity were less important to Karen McCarthy Brown than those of fairness and justice toward her primary informant, Mama Lola. In spite of the canons of anthropological methods and despite the fundamental cultural epistemological dilemma that she faced, she set out to do justice to Vodou, which gave her a "rich, unblinkingly honest view of life" and to Mama Lola, the one whom she calls mother, a traditional title of respect for one's Vodou teacher.

Her mission was larger than the mission her academic training prescribed: She was determined to study Vodou in its own right. She wrote:

> I felt compelled to do justice to Alourdes[36] and to her world in my writing. Both moral and aesthetic judgments came into play, for example, in choosing the telling detail or the revelatory incident designed to capture definitive aspects of her life.
>
> Justice as a goal in my relationship with Alourdes has

always meant, among other things, that I could not exploit her, misrepresent my intentions, or turn away from her once I had what I needed. Financial obligations, like those of time and energy, could not be limited to what was necessary to grease the flow of information in the book. A true friendship is not over because a writing project is done. . . .

I could not have written *Mama Lola* if Alourdes had not challenged me, trusted me, and become my friend. Through our friendship, we have served scholarship's end of deepened understanding, in this case by showing Vodou at work in the intimate details of one person's life. We both hope that our risk taking will help to counter the distorted image of this ancient religion.[37]

The Dancing Voice of Mama Lola and Karen McCarthy Brown

To elucidate some of the forms that morality takes in Haitian Vodou, I have chosen to investigate the work of Karen McCarthy Brown, scholar of religion[38] and Vodou initiate,[39] because of her rather special approach in this area of scholarship. In particular, I focus on her book, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn,* a ground-breaking work,[40] in which she presents Vodou as it is lived, as it is incorporated into one's daily existence, as it shapes and "balances"[41] one's psychological, social, and moral world. She wrote to that effect: "I have chosen to enter the public discussion of Vodou by another route: constructing a portrait of this religion as it is lived by Alourdes and the people closest to her." [42]

As McCarthy Brown stated, her intent was to let Vodou speak in its own terms though, at times, she interjected some analysis in her narrative. Despite the brilliance of her comments and remarks, clearly, analysis and theory building were not her primary concern. This latter task is what I endeavor to do here. Using McCarthy Brown's texts and narratives, her comments and remarks, her observations, her account of Alourdes's fictional family tales and life experiences—often reported in Mama Lola's own words—I propose a framework within which morality in the context of Haitian Vodou can be analyzed. Here I am using Mama Lola and Karen McCarthy Brown's many combined voices as a primary source of data[43] that provided me with the insiders'

comments, views, insights, and feelings that I needed to develop my model of analysis.

To the extent that some form of morals and ethics constitutes the essence of all religions, Mama Lola's life, her deeds and tenets—as an individual and as a priestess who orchestrates religious gatherings for the benefit of her Vodou family—reflect the moral beliefs of those who *serve the spirits.* These beliefs, which originate from a world view deeply rooted in a traditional African value system, represent a code of ethics, though not a rigid, prescriptive, or written one. This complex code is passed down from generation to generation and people have to learn to interpret it and transmit it. McCarthy Brown had to understand and *live* this new vision of morality in order to attempt the formidable task of describing it to her readers.

Combined here is a wealth of data and voices: the various personae of Karen McCarthy Brown—the scholar, the writer, the feminist, the initiate—which communicate through her scholarly voice, distant enough to identify patterns and relationships and to stress the significance of events and behavior, but sufficiently immersed in the fluidity of Vodou not to be limited by logically coherent molds. Also combined here are the many voices of Mama Lola, the Haitian, the one who lives in a foreign land, the mother, and the priestess, along with the cohort of voices coming from the spirits who dance in her head and balance both her inner self and her public figure. The many voices of Mama Lola, combined with those of McCarthy Brown become one voice that has done and continues to do justice to the Vodou religion and to the African ethos, one voice that is dancing[44] with all their personae and that is inviting us to partake—that is, to find our own rhythm and balance, the only means in Vodou cosmology to lead a moral and ethical life. All this is the voice that helps sustain the theoretical foundation presented in this essay and, in particular, the notions of resistance and African continuity in Haitian Vodou.

Morality in Vodou Religion as Shaped by the African Ethos

In the introduction to *Mama Lola,* McCarthy Brown sets some parameters to understand how morality operates in the Vodou religion:

> The spirits talk with the faithful. They hug them, hold them, feed them, but also chastise them. . . . Ogou/Saint James . . . not only liberates his people but also betrays

them. Ezili Danto/Mater Salvatoris, the mother, cradles and cares for her children but also sometimes lashes out at them in rage. The Vodou spirits are not models of the well-lived life; rather, they mirror the full range of possibilities inherent in the particular slice of life over which they preside. Failure to understand this had led observers to portray the Vodou spirits as demonic or even to conclude that Vodou is a religion without morality—a serious misconception.

Vodou spirits are larger than life but not other than life. Virtue for both the *lwa* and those who serve them is less an inherent character trait than a dynamic state of being that demands ongoing attention and care.[45]

The Vodou world manifests a particular ethical orientation reflected in life lessons shared in the pages that follow and grounded in an African ontological conception of women and men and in their modes of interactions. Many of the monotheistic religions—Christianity, Islam, Judaism—are prescriptive and are accompanied by a book of law. From sacred texts, people extract general principles as measures of moral quality found therein. Things are more complicated in Vodou. Since Vodou does not have a prescriptive code of ethics, people have to find and define their own morality.

Adepts of the Haitian religion have to *balance* their lives in order to follow a moral path, ever guided by the overarching African ethos on which their religion is based. In Vodou cosmology, morality is dynamic, fluid, and contextual, as is life itself. The moral life of those who serve the spirits revolves around the following perspectives: Communal Emphasis, Respect for the Elders, Wholeness of Being, Black Aesthetics, and Healing and Coping Strategies. Their moral life also revolves around a form of collective self-consciousness where the inner self and the outside world converge, where content and form merge in one aesthetic. However, it is reasonable to say that Vodou offers no absolutes, no generalities, only trends and thematic modalities of lived ethical life.

- **Communal Emphasis**

"Sim salalam, sa salawu [You in, you in]"[46]

> " . . . human connection is the assumption; it is separation that requires both effort and explanation."[47]

A form of communal humanism could explain the dependency of Haitians on one another. In the Haitian world, people derive both energy and their concept of selfhood from interactions with others. Individual personhood and the unique life history are supressed in favor of the collective self. Traditionally, Haitians are not individualists: They have difficulty identifying themselves as separate individuals. As McCarthy Brown wrote:

> The moral wisdom of Vodou lies in its teaching that it is precisely in responsive and responsible relation to others that one has the clearest and most steady sense of self . . . [that] leads not to self-sufficiency but to stronger and more sustaining social bonds.[48]

This idea is echoed by Mama Lola's down-to-earth wisdom: "You eat with people, you always have food. You eat by yourself, you don't have nothing."[49] For her, the way to a well-balanced self is to gain respect from the collectivity by maintaining responsible relationships with community members and by not harming others: "When you do bad to people, that return—right on your back!"[50]

Family is the first unit where communal sense manifests itself. It is a highly valued institution that prepares the individual for integration into the community. Children—one's own, nephews, nieces, cousins, neighbors—are central to the well-being of a household. Early on, people learn that children are needed to continue the chain of human beings and that dying childless is probably one of the worst curses. Haitians, in particular women—mothers and grandmothers alike—assume that the children born to them belong to them and are their responsibility until they are grown, and even after. Grown children do not usually leave the family home until they marry and they are expected to contribute to the financial well-being of the group, even when they have the responsibility of their own children and household. Older siblings are expected to assume a large part of the financial and moral responsibility for the education of their younger brothers and sisters. Great respect and care

are routinely accorded both the elderly and children, who are treated as precious gifts from God. A number of Haitian proverbs express some of the societal values associated with children: "One child is not a child" (in the sense of one is not enough) and "children are wealth." McCarthy Brown acknowledges this cultural phenomenon when she states: "During my visits in the late afternoon and early evening, children clamber over me."[51]

Nothing is ever immoral if it allows someone to fulfill responsibilities towards one's children. Mama Lola, for example, told McCarthy Brown: "Woman got to do all kinda thing. Right? I do that [working as a Marie Jacques[52]] to feed my children. I'm not ashamed. . . . You got to put that in the book. Because that's the truth."[53] In Alourdes's code of ethics, morality in the absolute sense can never be placed above the welfare of the collectivity—in this case her children.

The extended family is without any doubt the dominant characteristic in Haitian society—both in Haiti and abroad. It defines status, makes choices, appropriates and divides time, controls assets and wealth, and distributes praise and blame. Mama Lola lives with two of her sons; her daughter, Maggie; the latter's two children; and often offers accommodation to members of her Vodou family who are in a period of bad luck, and to clients who are undergoing treatment. One of her sons, William, has a mental deficiency; the thought of putting him in an institution has never crossed her mind. The elderly, the sick, the handicapped traditionally have their place in the Haitian household. The rules that govern hospitality are strict: Mama Lola, for instance, could not conceive that McCarthy Brown would not spend the night of the spirits' birthday party at her place: "I don't care. Even you got to sleep on the floor, even I got to make a bed on top of my closet. . . . I always find a place for you, sweetheart!"[54]

Tales and memories are held preciously and collectively in the family. The forefathers' stories and their words of wisdom are often told and quoted. Mama Lola's great grandfather, Joseph Binbin Mauvant, in reference to one's obligations toward the Vodou family, used to utter these African words: "*Sim salalam, sa salawu. Pa salaam, pa salawu* [You in, you in; you out, you out]."[55] This also shows how hard it is to penetrate the "family unit" to become one of them. McCarthy Brown explains, how, for example, as *a blan* (a white person) some were at first quite suspicious of her and fairly unwelcoming when she started visiting

Alourdes' house. But, once you are accepted, "You in" as Karen is now often reminded: "You are family."[56]

Allegiance, love, prayers, support, and faithfulness are automatically due to the members of the group under all circumstances: You in, you in! Communal support takes the form of reciprocal gift giving and sharing among the living and between the living and the spirits, reinforcing the idea that they belong to the same world, although they are at a different phase of their spiritual journeys. Rituals allow the bridge to be crossed, so the ancestors actually meet the living. The services[57] are an opportunity to partake in the life of the Vodou family and to offer sacrifices and other types of gifts in appreciation and support. What one gives—that which goes from the material to the spiritual—is determined by hierarchy, status, and financial means:

> Virtue is achieved by maintaining responsible relationships, relationships characterized by appropriate gifts of tangibles (food, shelter, money) and intangibles (respect, deference, love). When things go as they should, these gifts flow in continuous, interconnected circles among the living and spirits of the ancestors. In the ongoing cycle of prestation and counterprestation, each gives and receives in ways appropriate to his or her place in the social hierarchy—an overarching, relentless hierarchy that exempts neither the young child nor the most aged and austere spirit. Moral persons are thus those who give what they should, as defined by who they are.[58]

More than in the West, where social conventions do prescribe concern for others, there are major communal expectations in the Vodou world. Ignoring family responsibilities, jeopardizing communal interests, and neglecting the *lwas* are serious moral matters and major offenses that trigger the disapproval, even the ostracism of the group, but moreover, that may diminish the care and protection of the spirits.

- **Respect for the Elders—Those Who Have *Konesans*[59]**

  > You coming after I don't see you for six months—no, almost a year I don't see you—and you don't even say, "Hello, how are you Mommie Lola?" Right away you

telling me what I got to do for you! [60]

> The child who mimics the words of the mother and claims them as her own is the child who pretends to what she is not yet.[61]

This latter statement came as a result of McCarthy Brown's reflecting on an occasion when she may have been somewhat "out of order" for letting her Western feminist views direct her thoughts during an encounter with her Vodou mother. She had told her: "I am the one responsible for my life," which brought Mama Lola "into a stony silence that lasted for the better part of the day." McCarthy Brown noted: "When [Alourdes] spoke with others, words 'would drift my way. . . . 'Karen say *she* the one responsible for her life. Ehh!'"[62] This was certainly a faux-pas; one never speaks like this to an elder—any elder for that matter—and, in particular, to someone who is, because of her very role as a priestess, responsible for people's life, responsible for bringing about *balanse* in and among members of her Vodou family and in the community in general.

The same goes for the first statement that Alourdes uttered to Theodore, a young Haitian, who had befriended Karen McCarthy Brown and who was bringing her to Mama Lola's house for the first time. What arrogance from this young fellow who, after being absent for six months or a year, had the audacity to show up at her door, telling her that he had brought a stranger, and what she could do for his friend. Mama Lola stated "and, you don't even say, 'Hello, how are you, Mommie Lola?' " This statement is yet another example, where the words mean more than what meets the ears. Theodore most certainly greeted her upon entering the house. Her statement probably referred to what she perceived as a lack of respect and deference exhibited by Theodore's casual greeting, which, in her estimation, did not pay her due respect by showing genuine concern for her and by inquiring at length about the details of her life, her heath, or her family.

Her warmth came back later as she hugged him and said: "Theodore like my child! Even I don't see him; I know he thinking about me."[63] It is important to display affection to loved ones, and, importantly, no opportunity is ever lost to remind the younger generations of their duty toward the elders who, by virtue of their

seniority or status (both often come together), deserve absolute respect in Haitian society. An African-American proverb says: "You don't get old being no fool" while an Igbo proverb states: "What an old man sees sitting down, a young man cannot see standing." With age, come experience, wisdom and *konesans*, which bring about profound respect from the younger generations. To be virtuous is to provide for the elderly, to give them care, food, money, clothing, but also to show them love, respect, deference, and appreciation.[64]

Vodou honors all bearers of *konesans*, which include the spirits, the ancestors, and the departed who communicate their wisdom through dreams and possessions. Respecting them, honoring them, serving them is inherent in the very essence of the religion. Although visits to the cemeteries are frequent, ancestors are mostly saluted during ceremonies and ritualizing—the Vodou services. On the other hand, the *lwas*, the gods of the Vodou pantheon, protect the living, watch over them, and serve as mediators between God, Bondye, the supreme being, and the humans with their real life problems (such as health, matters of love, work, finances, family difficulty, and the stressful life in general).

> In binding reciprocity, the *lwas* serve humans as much as the living humans serve them. . . . Gods without worshippers are a sad lot indeed! For their part, the ancestors enforce reasonable laws, and the entire Vodun belief system is designed to provide a collective morality.[65]

Failure to properly serve the *lwas* and the ancestors, failure to respect the elderly, and ill-treatment of the poor are morally destructive for the entire community. This may attract imbalance in the life of the person who has departed from the traditional values of the society, bring about "bad luck" for her or his family or, else, result in a form of "lashing out" against the living.

- **Wholeness of Being**

"I don't eat today."[66]

> "Vodou operates as a moral system not because it takes up what is good in life and human behavior and accentuates that, but rather because it takes up all of life

and intensifies it and clarifies it."[67]

The concept of wholeness of being is grounded in the idea of oneness and unity of all forces of nature, in the idea of interdependence and interconnectedness of these forces, and in the premise of supremacy of totality over individuality. We must seek out the idea behind every force of nature for all things have their philosophy, their meaning, and a connection with other entities:

> From God to the least grain of sand, the African universe is a seamless cosmos. Each living force is in necessary union with other forces. . . . It is inserted in a dynamic hierarchy in which everything is interdependent. Thus, we are introduced into a universe of correspondences, analogies, harmonies, interactions.[68]

The Cosmic Universal Force, Being itself,[69] explains how all things are forces in harmony and interconnected "since things that are contemplated, experienced, and lived are not separable."[70] Moreover, Bellegarde-Smith commented that, "Intelligence, wisdom, energy, and power are born of the flesh of their origin, and the divine continues to inhabit the flesh. Morality, too, is born of matter." [71]

Whereas morality in modern Western societies is almost always based on the concepts of individual rationality and personal responsibility, which stem from Cartesian philosophy ("I think, therefore I am"), "We are, therefore I am" is a paradigm that better expresses the dominant essence of ethics in an African context by showing the ties that link humans to one another. We are part of the human web, and each of our actions and deeds influences the balance of the outer world. We are not only responsible for our individual acts, we are responsible for the sake of others, and for the world around us. Acting morally implies keeping things balanced and respecting nature's harmony.

Jean Manolesco explains in *Vaudou et Magie Noire*[72] how, after initiation into Vodou, a person becomes one with all other living creatures as well as with the four main forces of nature: air, fire, water, and earth. Then, and only then, does the initiate lose forever the will and the desire to impose his ego on others. McCarthy Brown, as she described her psychological state after her Vodou initiation, echoed a similar idea:

> All of us [North American feminists] have sought a spirituality that is more about empowerment than about gaining power over others , , ,, We have searched for a spirituality that enriches life without leading us to pretend that we know things we do not know or that we have a truth which rules out the truth of others. We have searched for a moral vision that is not abstract but interpersonal, with a complexity that does not paralyze and a tolerance that is not abdication of responsibility. In this difficult balancing act, we have at times acted as if we had to reinvent the wheel. What Vodou has shown me is that there are living traditions . . . that have long experience with the sort of spirituality we seek.[73]

She further stated:

> Vodou empowers women to a larger extent than the great majority of the world's traditions. As Haitians struggled to survive and adapt both during and after slavery, women gained social and economic power, gains that are mirrored in the influence of women within Vodou.[74]

However, as in most elements that characterize Vodou, there is fluidity, imbalance, conflicts among poles—conflicts that keep us questioning: "Why, then, Gede, who is so flexible in other aspects of his character, held on so firmly to an ideology of male dominance?"[75] This question constitutes a catalyst to continued thriving to create harmony and recreate equilibrium in the area of gender. As McCarthy Brown wrote, "[we] . . . anxiously await Gedelia's emergence from the cocoon of Haitian history and religion . . . a full-blown Gedelia [who] will be more than a Gede who happens to be female."[76]

Moreover, from the concept of wholeness of being derives the fundamental idea that the Vodou spirits are not saints because they are good, but because they are all-encompassing, global, full, complex, and because, as such, they mirror human life. They are whole and real and reflect life conflicts—which are always manifestations of disturbances in the web of human relations, manifestations of existing contradictions, and signs of imbalance. "The point is not to make conflict go away, but

to make it work for, rather than against, life."[77]

The spirits as they mount their *chwals*[78] during possession-performances do not always appear fair, even-tempered, humble, level-headed, and self-sacrificing. They comfort, but also chastise; they console, but also ask for support; they give, but also make demands. And, during the ritualizing, they clarify things for the participants: They help us see what we may otherwise be oblivious to in our respective lives. It is often for the participants to realize how the particular images evoked by the spirits apply to their individual situation.[79] The *lwas* do not introduce what is not there already; they help us find equilibrium in the midst of a multiplicity of truths. In fact, "The Vodou participant does not turn to religion to be told what to do, but rather, to be shown how to see." [80]

Mbiti wrote that "the essence of African morality is . . . 'societary,'"[81] an observation that certainly applies to the Vodou religion. Creating dissonance in society's polyrhythms, disturbing the harmonious flow of things, bringing about division in the community, are all acts that represent moral transgression in the Vodou world. Due to the web of interconnectedness, a person's moral violations distract, disturb, and perturb the outer world, which ought to seek restoration of its harmonious state and rhythm. Vodou communities have their own set forms of restitution and punishment imposed for moral harm or offenses committed against customs and implicit rules regulating obligations and responsibilities towards the collectivity and the entities that compose it—the spirits, the ancestors, family members, society, or even nature. Morality, for those who serve the spirits, is a constant effort to maintain social cohesion, harmony, and balance. What is "right" in the Vodou world is not a function of abstract reasoning but is relative to what will achieve unity.

- **Black Aesthetics—Fluidity/Balance/Rhythm—as Creator of Moral Style**

"Don't put money on the bed."[82]

> "You cannot pray to Ogou alone. He is too hot. Light a candle for Damballah too." A moral person . . . is thus one who can balance, "dance," in the midst of forces pulling in opposing directions without missing the beat.

> The moral person is one who has a strongly developed metronome sense—that is, a strongly developed sense of self. Yet . . . no rhythm, not even one's own, has any meaning outside of relationship."[83]

"Don't put money on the bed!" yelled Alourdes at McCarthy Brown who one day was emptying the content of her purse on a bed. One should never do that, never. A bed and money belong to antithetical poles and, therefore, could be objects of conflict and sources of dissonance. McCarthy Brown was reminded that money, like the *ason,*[84] can be an instrument of coercive power and thus, of potential immorality and, as such, it should never be put on a bed, a place where people *kouche,*[85] "the place where children are made and born, the place where family begins."[86] Objects in vodou are not just things; they have a meaning that goes beyond functionality. There are prescribed ways to behave, rituals that highlight the function, purpose, and usefulness of any particular object or act. By acting, a person gives life to what is being acted upon. Objects and things have a soul and a life of their own originating from the cosmic energy infused in them in the making or through usage. Haitians, for example, believe in the power of the crossroads. The horizontal plane is said to be the mortal world and the vertical plane to be the metaphysical.Thus, the significance of the place where they meet, the *carrefour* or *kafu*—the crossroads—in Vodou cosmology. Deren wrote, "The crossroads, then, is the point of access to the world of the invisible which is the soul of the cosmos, the source of the life force, the cosmic memory, and the cosmic wisdom."[87]

Vodou cosmology emphasizes uniformity, conformity, group cohesion, support for one another. Initiation ceremonies are a primary conveyor of this world view. To be initiated, to *kouche,* represents, in the most simplistic term, the death of the old self, and the birth of a new self, originating from a type of non-individualistic collective consciousness. During the days of seclusion, one is forced to regress into infancy and childhood—and, consequently, is treated as is appropriate for these stages—only to be brought back, through rituals designed to overcome fear, pain, and selfishness, to a new state of adulthood and maturity. McCarthy Brown wrote:

> It was hard to become a child again, to let go of being in charge of myself, to give the care of myself over

> to another. Most difficult was letting go of words, of the appearance of control. . . I bit my tongue to stop the *How? and When? and Why?* questions that pushed up inside me. I knew that they would be ignored or met with evasive answers. . . . Entering the chamber was like dying. Friends and family cried as they lined up to kiss the initiates goodbye. The genuineness of their tears gave me pause. The drums were pounding as they had been for hours with urgent, intricate, exciting Petro rhythms. . . . Seven times I raised my hand and then the darkness. . . . I was thrown off-balance in order to learn to find balance. . . . Ever so briefly I died.[88]

When the initiates leave the chamber where they are secluded, their heads are covered. They must remain so for forty days after initiation.[89] Clearly, the how, the exercise of the art of initiation, is a moral message in itself: The forces of life and death are reckoned with, the limits of knowledge and power are challenged, truth and faith are revalorized through the initiation process—which is, to say the very least, an experience in humility and brotherhood. At these ceremonies, people voice their life conflicts—what would be called in the Western world, moral dilemmas. The task of the moral leader is to orchestrate the process (the energy of the participants, the choice of the songs, the rhythm of the music, the arrival of the spirits, the possession rituals) by which Vodou addresses these moral dilemmas and clarifies choices for the participants. Moral leadership is attributed to the spirits, never to the person mounted by a *lwa*, nor to the *hougans* or *mambos*. Therefore, the challenge of the moral leader is to be skilled at orchestrating the reception of that message. And that is where Alourdes truly excels. As she often says about her ministrations, her leadership, and her life in general: "I got plenty confidence in myself." As an accomplished Vodou priestess, Mama Lola is a superb orchestrator of Vodou services, and therefore, in Haitian cosmology, a true moral leader. She presides to restore harmony and bring about equilibrium; her ritualizing style makes her a truly powerful technician of the sacred world of Vodou. She "serves" with style, "in order to lead" and is a teacher of distinction. McCarthy Brown, having witnessed many of Mama Lola's "heroic" performances, and reflecting on the role of the moral leader, concluded:

> The moral problem is not evil but imbalance, both within and among persons. In the context of this pluralistic and conflict-centered description of life, the moral leader is not one who sets her own life up as a model of imitation. It is rather that person who, as a subtle and skilled technician of the sacred, can orchestrate ritual contexts in which each person discovers how to dance his or her own way through a process of dynamic balancing with others who dance in their own way.[90]

- **Healing and Coping Strategies**

> "You just got to try. See if it works for you." [91]

> "There is no Vodou ritual, small or large, individual or communal, which is not a healing rite." [92]

In addition to the perspectives already discussed, there is in Haitian Vodou a very down-to-earth and utilitarian component grounded in the history of poverty and oppression of the small Caribbean nation. "It is no exaggeration," comments McCarthy Brown, that "Haitians have come to believe that living and suffering are inseparable."[93] Alluding to the incredible accomplishments and resilience of the Haitian people, she wrote elsewhere, "The wonder of Haiti is that its people seem to have responded to suffering throughout history by augmenting their stores of aesthetic and spiritual riches."[94]

Trusting that the spirits will help in their struggle for survival, people turn to Vodou to secure a better life for themselves and their families, to heal their souls and their wounds, and to find hope for this life and the afterlife. Unlike other faiths, Vodou does not have a concept of a Golden Age, of an Eden or Heaven. The afterlife may turn out to be as harsh as present living conditions. Consequently, no value is more important than survival in this lifetime—survival of the self and survival of the group. Thus healing for immediate survival becomes a core element of the Vodou religion.

People bring to Vodou—as they do in all religions—their burdens, difficulties, and sorrows. The moral function of a ceremony becomes apparent as it turns into a collective healing service: "The

drama of Vodou . . . occurs not so much within the rituals themselves as in the junction between the rituals and the troubled lives of the devotees. . . . There is no Vodou ritual, small or large, individual or communal, which is not a healing rite."[95] At Vodou ceremonies, crucial community bonds are reinforced through the airing of group and individual problems. Through interactions with the spirits, misunderstandings are clarified; "good luck" and protection given; and herbal treatments, divination, card reading, and preparation of charms are put to work as part of the ancestral cult. McCarthy Brown describes the range of Mama Lola's healing practices as follows: "She deals both with health problems and with a full range of love, work, and family difficulties. . . . Alourdes combines the skills of a medical doctor, a psychotherapist, a social worker, and a priest."[96] Healing in Alourdes's world is never one thing or some work to be done. It is much more encompassing: It is an attitude and, moreover, a dance with the spirits.

In a Haitian setting, even children are toughened so that, later, they are able to cope with life's inevitable disappointments and deceptions. "You got to make them tough," said Maggie to Karen after an encounter that would have disturbed more than one Westerner. A child was promised that he could go with Karen if he ate his dinner—which he did. When time came for him to put his coat on to go out as promised, he was told to "sit down" because Karen "was not going to take him."[97] Mock promises, changes of plans, excessive authoritarian measures are used often in the Vodou world to teach children that life is not a bed of roses and that, at times, you don't get what you were promised, even after you have worked for it. During rituals, children often hear people singing about "*Travaj, travaj* [work, oh, work]," the single leitmotiv of a Vodou song, which honors the value of hard work as much as it conveys the resignation and sadness of a people who have not always reaped the benefit of its labor.

"You just got to try. See if it works for you," Mama Lola told Karen, who was then considering the possibility of further involving herself in the Vodou religion. Karen was not asked whether she believed in the religion; she was not asked to make a commitment to the faith; it was only suggested that she try it to see if it helped her in the serious personal difficulties she was facing at the time. Vodou is not a doctrinal religion that one may systematically study; it has to work for you to be valuable. As Karen later realized, had she "brought less to this Vodou

world, [she]. . . would have come away with less." She confided: "If I persisted in studying Vodou objectively, the heart of the system, its ability to heal, would remain closed to me." [98] After her initiation, Mama Lola further instructed her "daughter" on the power that she herself may exercise by listening to the spirits:

> That your power. That your *konesans*. That how it works!. . . . You got a feeling you not suppose to do something, you listen, you don't do that thing. But, if you got a feeling the spirit telling you to do something. . like you want to help somebody. . . . Then, you do it, that person is going to be okay.[99]

When to do what? What to use? When to use it? Whom to listen to? When to listen? These are questions to which experience and time bring answers. One has to learn to use good judgment in order to maximize power to one's advantage and for the benefit of others we wish to assist. As the various personifications of Ogou show, there is a potentially destructive force in the use of power: "Power liberates, power corrupts, power destroys."[100] Using power negatively creates disharmony in society and nature, but also, as Mama Lola believes, doing wrong to people comes right back onto you. This further exemplifies the pragmatic side of the ancestral religion: Self-protection and self-preservation should temper our actions. Alourdes, the empathic person, the giver, also exhibits a down-to-earth side, necessary for the survival of her kin:

> Alourdes is a strong woman who provides the main financial and emotional support for a hard-pressed family. She is a fighter, a survivor who has had a hard life but nevertheless shows little trace of bitterness from her sufferings. She is a presence to be reckoned with, someone who commands the respect of others. And her self-respect is palpable. But Alourdes is also a giver, a caring and empathic person who takes pleasure in helping others. By necessity, she has to become adept at balancing this desire to help others with the need to care for herself.[101]

Like the *lwas*, Mama Lola is not a moral exemplar, she is *whole*,

with strengths and weaknesses. Her known moodiness and unpredictability, her capriciousness and changeability, her sullen withdrawal simply highlight her human nature. McCarthy Brown wrote about the number of times that she waited to no avail: "During the early period . . . she never seemed particularly happy to see me. More than once, I waited for hours while she talked on the phone or worked with clients, only to be told that she did not feel like talking that day."[102] Sai Baba, an Indian religious leader, is reported to have a similar temper and to exhibit the same unpredictability.[103] Could their behavior be yet another manifestation of their divine mission? Could it be that they find themselves in another dimension less apparent to human awareness? Could it be that they try to emulate the behavior of "playful gods"? Things are never that simple in the arena of religion.

Mama Lola's reputation goes further than the boundaries of the Haitian community. She has performed "treatments" throughout the United States and Canada and in several places in the Caribbean and Central America. In that respect, the international impact of her ministrations is quite unusual, although many other technicians of the Vodou religion share her worldly approach and interest. Alourdes is not afraid to incorporate elements from other cultures into her own world view. This new ethos manifests itself in more areas than one. For instance, one day, sitting in Mama Lola's living room, as she drifted away from the conversation for a moment, Karen noticed:

> Shelves covering one wall were filled with souvenirs from her clients: Ashtrays, dolls, feather flowers. . . . On the opposite wall were color photographs of Maggie and. . . . Johnny, along with pictures of movie stars and Catholic saints. Over the door a Vodou charm to protect the house hung next to a horseshoe entwined with a Palm Sunday cross. Dominating the room was a colorful plastic cut-out of the word *love*. Vodou and Catholic, American and Haitian—the elements were disparate, but the aesthetic was unified.[104]

In Vodou cosmology, as I demonstrated using the voice of Mama Lola and McCarthy Brown, life is about movement between people, movement between cultures, and about balancing differences to create global harmony and peace. This explains why the Haitian anthropologist

Michel Laguerre contended that because of Vodou's continuous development, it is a living rather than a preserved religion.[105]

Conclusion: Vodou as a Medium of Resistance and Continuity

Vodou is a way of life for most Haitians. It is embedded in both the history and the daily existence of its devotees,. It permeates and sustains their entire being as was illustrated in this essay through the experiences of two devotees. Haitians are very religious, maybe more so than most people from other African-based former colonies, and continuous and pervasive African retentions are more recognizable in Haitian Vodou than in some other forms of New World African religions such as Bedwardism in Jamaica, Kali in Guyana or Rada in Trinidad. Vodou's close ties to its African origins are primarily a result of Haiti's virtual isolation from the rest of the world for nearly a century following its 1804 successful slave revolution. Haitians have consistently had to turn to their ancestral power and their African roots to cope with Western isolation, ostracism, and betrayal. To maintain their sovereignty and to prevent the annihilation of their culture, the Haitian masses have had to continuously resist, and this ongoing resistance was made stronger by their African past and communal values.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Vodou is that it has survived the ideological onslaughts accompanying slavery, colonialism, modern capitalism, and class oppression. It is at one and the same time, resistance and continuity, adapting and preserving a moral and spiritual universe from those ruptures that would constitute cultural and psychological genocide. The new situation encountered by the African slaves on the island of Haiti created a form of "Americanized" African religion—Haitian Vodou—which has shaped the lives of generations of Haitians, including those of the nearly seven millions now living. The voyage over the Atlantic physically removed Africans from their land, their culture, and their families. But most traumatic for the slaves was the realization that the old order could not be recreated in the New World since they came from different ethnic groups and lacked a common linguistic platform. To re-stitch their past as they knew it, they had to develop a definition of family, no longer based on blood or tribal appurtenance, but one grounded in a new religion—Vodou—and in their common aspiration for liberty and freedom.

Suggesting that a long history of oppression forces people to

organize and to create new communities, Charles Long wrote:

> Many of the manifestations related to opposition, to imperialism and other forms of cultural and economic-political oppression find expression in the construction of alternative communities among the oppressed. Such communities are often centered around a forthrightly religious enterprise. [106]

Thus, Vodou became not only the means for revitalization through ancestral African traditions but also the channel to air complaints, to organize, and to act. In an attempt to stop the practice of the Vodou cult, slaves were forbidden to organize public gatherings of any sort. The imposition of European values and religion by force and repression took many forms, from baptism of the slaves to harsh punishments imposed on the "wrongdoers." Thus, the slaves were forced to hide allegiance to their ancestral religion and to worship their African deities in secret. These repressive measures along with the clandestine nature of Vodou ceremonies led to the revalorization of the very African cultural values that Europeans had tried to suppress, and to the creation of new communities such as the maroon societies and the secret societies, which played key roles in Haitian political life. This regrouping around a common past and ideal fueled a number of slave revolts, culminating in the war for independence.

The persecution of Vodou practitioners, far from ending when independence was gained, took new forms: various systematic attempts to assimilate and acculturate the Haitian people. Roman Catholicism there was headed exclusively by Westerners until the Duvalier presidency, always had the political and financial support of the state and was the sole official religion until the 1987 Constitution recognized Vodou as the national religion. Haitian history is marked by a number of infamous antisuperstitious campaigns—in particular those of 1896, 1913, and 1941—responsible for the massacre of hundreds of *mambos* and *houngans*, for the destruction of Vodou shrines along with other ritual objects, and for the persecution of those who openly admitted their adherence to Vodou. These raids to eradicate "superstition" left terrible marks on the country and on a people who responded through a conscious effort to sustain the same African values that the genocidal campaigns had sought to annihilate and were then supplanted by

Catholic belief. Though governments have turned their backs on the Haitian masses, Vodou seems to continue to support them spiritually and to offer some counsel on matters affecting survival as well as cultural continuity. Nevertheless, under such adversarial conditions, sustaining these values was quite a challenge.

Despite their history of resistance, sociopolitical realities have prompted many Haitians to integrate Catholic elements into their Vodou cosmology, in an act of harmonious fusion of heterogeneous cultural and religious elements—a phenomenon called "syncretism" that is not unique to Haiti. For instance, Haitians have incorporated into the Vodou religion Catholic prayers and hymns, often chanted and recited at the beginning of Vodou ceremonies, elements of hagiology, the iconography, and the Gregorian calendar, which honors the days of different saints. That calendar is now used in Vodou to celebrate the *fet* of the *lwas* [day of Vodou spirits] who have been symbiotically linked to the iconography and hagiology of various Catholic saints.

Until recently, Vodou remained unofficial and was practiced secretively. Vodou priests and priestesses do not wear recognizable garb; there is no listing of members, no written documents, no formal place of worship. Adepts of the Vodou religion gather in *hounfòs* (temples), which may not be readily identifiable as places of worship and are often located near churches—yet another element of spatial juxtaposition of Haiti's two religious traditions. It is not unusual for people to leave a Vodou ceremony early in the morning and proceed to the four o'clock service at a nearby Catholic church, where they might hear a sermon about the need for "eradication of superstitious beliefs." The Haitian elite sneer at Vodou in public and practice it in private. But such a formal distinction between the two systems has no room in the world view of ordinary Haitians—religion can never be about organization and systems, about rationalizing and philosophizing. Their religion must satisfy immediate needs and help provide a means of living. Often to be seen in the Catholic church was a form of self-protection against possible persecutions, a preventive measure against "bad tongues" as well as an extension of their quest for protection from the saints and the omnipotent *Bondye* (God).

But the rage of the *lwas* coupled with a certain form of *prise de conscience* from the Catholic church (typically an ideological weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie and a force for Haiti's Westernization),

contributed without doubt to the overthrow of the Duvalier regime and to the ascension of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide—an advocate of "Liberation Theology" and a leader of the grassroots "base communities," the *ti légliz* movement.[107] Such an alliance between intelligentsia and peasantry had not taken place in the country since the early revolutionary days and held great promise for the democratic struggle and the cultural revalorization of Haiti's African past.

Though this attempt at democratizing the Catholic church seems to have aborted, Desmangles commented that we may well witness a new phenomenon:

> If Haitian society remains stable and free of political revolutions that have plagued it since Baby Doc Duvalier's departure in 1986, Catholicism in Haiti may well become more creolized, gradually "de-Europeanizing" itself by growing more flexible in its ritual observances and in its theology, and appropriating indigenous folk traditions into that theology.[108]

Moreover, he commented:

> If Catholicism is to survive in Haiti, it will have to . . . accelerate its eventual "Haitianization" (or remythologization) in its direct engagement with Haitian culture. It must allow Haitians the opportunity to exercise its own resourcefulness in their religious practices, to take their destiny into their own hands, and to determine once and for all the fundamental choices necessary to ensure the fomulation of, and adherence to, their own genuine religious traditions—whether these be purely Vodou, or a Vodounized Catholicism.[109]

Bellegarde-Smith goes further to state that the ancestral religion and the Creole language are the pillars of Haitian society, and that democratization will never occur in Haiti without the full inclusion of these cultural elements in all aspects of government life and social institutions. He further states that "Haitian democracy will occur only when state institutions are made to reflect the national culture." [110] The country has been forced to stay at odds with its African cultural heritage and social institutions in a typical situation where a dominant culture

(the West and the Haitian elite who abide by Western values) has tried to impose, by political and social pressures, its values on the oppressed. Revamping Harold Cruse's[111] argument about the interconnectedness of cultural oppression and political and economic subjugation, Bellegarde-Smith argued that history and culture should always be seen as a coherent whole—namely, an "unbreached citadel."

I too believe that the survival of the Haitian masses is contingent upon their African culture and religion being valued, respected, and made an integral part of the country's civil and political life. Vodou, with its strong democratic tradition, its history of revalorization of Haitian traditions, and its contribution to the struggle for national identity and racial pride, might well be the thread needed to restich the loose seams of Haitian culture and politics. Vodou in Haiti clearly provides continuity, but it also provides a means of resistance and organization. It has been employed to resuture social identity, cultural integration, and moral authority in the face of social and historical forces that have tended toward annihilation for the slaves, and, in modern times, destruction of the oppressed Haitian masses. In this essay, I allowed the Africanism of the Haitian religion to be presented as an entity in itself, as part of the reality and dynamics of life in the Vodou world rather than as a mere mode of survival or form of historical residue. The lives, deeds, and words of Mama Lola and Karen McCarthy Brown served as well by helping to demonstrate how the structure of African religion, recreated and recontextualized in Haitian Vodou, is capable of taking various histories and tensions into itself, into a realm of meaning, resistance, and affirmation.

Notes

1. L. Barrett, "African Religion in the Americas: The 'Islands in Between'." In N. S. Booth, ed., *African Religions. A Symposium.* (New York: Nok Publishers, 1977), 213.

2. "Voodo" (sometimes pronounced "Hoodoo", especially to refer to the form of Vodou practiced in New Orleans and other Southern U.S. cities) and what it evokes is a creation of the West. "Vodou" remains the term most commonly used for linguistic convenience by Haitian and non-Haitian scholars. This is the spelling that I use, except when discussing the Western depiction of the religion

(Voodoo) or when quoting authors who favor "*Vodun*" or "*Vodoun.*" The Haitian word "*Vaudou*" designates specifically a ritual dance.

3. K. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn.* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1991), p. 10.

4. Loa(s) or Lwa(s) are the Vodou spirits of the Haitian pantheon. They serve as intermediaries between the ultimate God, *Bondye,* and the humans.

5. H. Courlander, "Vodou in Haitian Culture." In T. L. Stoddard (Ed), *Religion and Politics in Haiti* (Washington, DC: Institute for Cross-Cultural Research, 1966), 12.

6. This author is often quoted here because of his major contributions to rehabilitating Vodou in the West, especially in his book, *Haiti: The Breached Citadel, 1990.*

7. P. Bellegarde-Smith, *Haiti: the Breached Citadel.* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 13.

8. W. Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow.* (New York: Warner Books, 1985), 72–3.

9. Bellegarde-Smith wrote that the *lwas* "represent the cosmic forces that are integral to the Haitian experience and yet transcend it." *(Haiti: The Breached Citadel,* 22.). Each *lwa* is an archetype of a moral principle that he or she represents. Among the *lwas*/spirits most frequently "served" and invoked in ceremonies are: Dambala, supreme, oldest, most respected, who is represented by a snake; Aida Wedo, his wife; Legba, the spirit of the crossroads who must be invoked to "open the gate" for the other *lwas*; Ogu who does not tolerate injustice, but who can be mean at times; Erzili, representing sexuality, lesbianism, motherhood; Azaka. the peasant. the worker, the one who controls money; Baron Samedi and Gran Brigit, guardians of the cemeteries; and Gede, the spirit of death and sexuality.

10. H. Courlander, *Haiti Singing.* (New York: Cooper Square Pub, Inc., 1973), 7.

11. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 394.

12. Barrett, "African Religion in the Americas," 184.

13. It is reported that in Haiti alone over one hundred different ethnic groups found themselves on the island and were able to unite only through the re-created African religion, Vodou, which somewhat compensated for their lost (family, clan, land) and brought them closer to *Guinea*—a word which is still used in Haiti today to refer to Africa.

14. Barrett, "African Religion in the Americas," 198.

15. R. F. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 164.

16. Bellegarde-Smith, *Haiti: The Breached Citadel,* 13.

17. Ibid.

18. For example, George Bush, Sr., criticizing a political contender, referred to the person's economic plan as "voodoo economics." The phrase has since been widely used, for example in a book by Kay Nelson aimed at maximizing

productivity for Mac users, entitled *Voodoo Mac. Tips & Tricks with an Attitude,* 1992. The subtitle is as disturbing as the title. Euro-Americans often despise African-Americans because of their "attitude," making reference to a life style and behavior that may at first glance appear to be different from their own.

19. Definition from the *Webster's New World Dictionary* (1964). Two decades later, the *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary* (1986) still offers an ignorant definition of "vodoul": "A religion derived from African ancestor worship, practiced chiefly by Negroes [sic] of Haiti, and characterized by propitiatory rites and communication by trance with animistic deities."

20. *Life* magazine (August, 1987, 62). Answer of a U.S. missionary in Haiti to a question about AIDS asked by a visiting physician. A *houngan* is a priest and a *mambo* is a priestess in Haitian Vodou.

21. Quoted in G. R. Smucker in a chapter he wrote on the social character of religion in Haiti. In C. Foster and A. Valdman's *Haiti Today and Tomorrow* (1984, 54). This statement denies the role that Vodou played in the Haitian Revolution, in the resistance to the American Occupation, and later, in the Duvalier government and in the overthrow of the regime itself. Also, the Vodou religion is known to be closely tied to issues of land (division, administration, and resolution of conflicts), and to matters of economy as it relates to the *lakou* (name given to urban residential areas). As recently as October 11, 1993, when U.S. marines were stopped from coming ashore, Haitians reported that they drove away foreign journalists with a powder meant to cause the foreigners to itch terribly—a powder prepared by vodou practitioners and made of dead frogs and snakes. The masses are not armed and, remembering the horrors of the American Occupation of 1915, it was reported that the people had prepared a few such concoctions to drive the Marines away if, indeed, they set foot on Haitian soil. Haitians—both supporters of the army and of Aristide—seem united in their refusal to see a foreign intervention. On many walls in the country, I saw written last September: "*A BA MILTTE BLAN* [down with foreign military]." This seems to be the people's will and it is reported that Vodou is being put to use—by the various factions—to see their agenda prevail. Saying that Vodou is apolitical indicates a lack of understanding of some fundamental characteristics of the religion. This statement is very surprising, especially coming from G. R. Smucker a "consultant on economic development currently residing in Haiti" [listed as such in the book] but, moreover, someone who has a reputation for being one of the rare socially and politically aware anthropologists and development consultants committed to helping Haiti and its people outside the patterns dictated by Western imperialism. He is not perceived as one of those foreign experts who "help" people and cultures that they do not understand. For example, Smucker speaks Creole like a native speaker—indeed, a very rare phenomenon.

22. M. Laguerre, *Vodou and Politics in Haiti.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

Also see, M. Lahruerre, "Politics and Vodou Still a Potent Combination in Haiti," *Wall Street Journal,* April 18, 1986, 19; and M. Laguerre, "Voodoo Heritage," *Sage Library of Social Research,* vol. 98. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications).

23. M. Laguerre, *American Odyssey: Haitians in New York City.* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 19.

24. L. G. Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti.* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992.)

25. James, *The Black Jacobins,* 86.

26. W. Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie.* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

27. "Zombification" refers to the extremely rare cases when in Haiti a person is made into a zombie. A poison is administered to an individual who is subsequently pronounced dead—the potency of the drug makes the vital signs disappear. The person is later awakened and put to work for a sorcerer. That process is said to cause complete amnesia in the zombie and to create other physical and mental deficiencies. What is interesting in terms of our work on morality is that the person who is made into a zombie is a public outcast. Someone who has committed crimes against family and community may be brought to court. The people's court then rules to punish him or her severely through the process of *zombification. It* is a form of people's justice, what in Kenya for example, is called "mob justice" and which is practiced quite frequently. Then, the question that I ask is the following: Is this form of "capital" punishment imposed by the will of the people, very different from the death penalty favored in some other societies?

28. Bellegarde-Smith,*Haiti: the Breached Citadel,* 19.

29. Ibid., 169.

30. Ibid., 9.

31. M. Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living God of Haiti.* (New Paltz, NY: McPherson and Co., 1983), 9.

32. Gede is the playful trickster who is the spirit of death, life and sexuality. Poles like right and wrong, good and evil, black and white do not quite fit in African cosmology-and Haitian thought for that matter. Gede, by representing both life and death maintains a sense of balance, placing things in a continuum and a fluid state of continuity. In that respect he plays an important role among the *lwas.*

33. McCarthy Brown, op. cit., pp. 19–20.

34. McCarthy Brown, K. "Writing about the 'Other'." *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* April 15, 1992, p. A56.

35. This is why I have kept *"voice"* in the singular form in the title of the essay.

36. Mama Lola's full name is Marie Therese Alourdes Macena Margaux Kowalski.

37. McCarthy Brown, "Writing about the 'Other'," op. cit.

38. See, McCarthy Brown, K. "Olina and Erzulie: A Woman and Goddess in Haitian Vodou ." *Anima,* 5, 1979, 110–16. Also see, McCarthy Brown, K. "Alourdes: A Case Study of Moral Leadership in Haitian Vodou" In J. S. Hawley (Ed), *Saints and Virtues.* (Berkely and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1987a), 144–67; McCarthy Brown, K. "Mama Lola and the Ezilis: Themes of Mothering and Loving in Haitian Vodou." In N.A. Falk and R.M. Gross, eds, *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives.* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1989a),. 235–45; McCarthy Brown, K. "Women's Leadership in Haitian Vodou". In J. Plaskow and C. Christ (Eds), *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality.* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1989b), 226–34; and McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn,* op. cit.

39. McCarthy Brown, K. "Plenty Confidence in Myself: The Initiation of a White Woman Scholar into Haitian Vodou." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* Vol. 3, No. 1. 1987b, 67–76.

40. To my knowledge, Karen McCarthy Brown offers to date, the most accurate portrayal of the Vodou religion as *lived* day by day by some followers of the religion--and, in particular, a Vodou priestess. The rare information that she presented, the confessions and observations that she gathered could only have been collected by an insider. McCarthy Brown's data resulted from over ten yeas of close interaction with members of her Vodou family. It is unique in that such material has not been communicated before in such a manner to a scholarly audience. See McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn,* op. cit.

41. The Creole word *balanse* means to bring about equilibrium, to harmonize; it implies metaphysical elements not rendered by the English word "balance."

42. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn,* op. cit., 14.

43. My interpretation of the material was made easier by my own knowledge of the religion.

44. For those who *serve the spirits* and in African cosmology, *dancing* means *creating and maintaining balance in all aspects of life.* For example, Bellegarde-Smith wrote to describe the state of balance that he achieved through and because of his initiation: "My ancestors dance with me." From Bellegarde-Smith, P. "An Introduction, Pawol La Pale: Reflections of an Initiate." *Journal of Caribbean Studies,* 9, nos. 1 & 2, 3–9.

45. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn,* op. cit., 6–7.

46. Joseph Binbin Mauvant, Mama Lola's great grand father, in McCarthy Brown, ibid., 70.

47. McCarthy Brown, ibid., 12.

48. McCarthy Brown, "Alourdes: A Case Study of Moral Leadership in Haitian Vodou," op. cit., 162.
49. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op. cit., 43.
50. Mama Lola does not use her knowledge of Vodou to harm others. She sees, serves, helps, and heals. See McCarthy Brown, ibid., 188.
51. Ibid., 9.
52. To work as a Marie Jacques is a form of prostitution in Haiti. Unlike other types of prostitution, money is never discussed. However, it is expected that the men will leave some money for the lady at the end of their encounter. Alourdes worked in this way to feed her children for a few years.
53. McCarthy Brown, "Writing about the 'Other'," op. cit. A56.
54. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: a Vodou Priestess in Booklyn*, op. cit., 39.
55. Ibid., 70.
56. This is reminiscent of the experience of Carol Stack, another white female anthropologist who described her own appropriation and acceptance into an African-American family (*All our Kin*, 1974) which eventually named her *white Carol* since a Black woman with that name already existed in the family.
57. A Vodou ceremony is called a "service" which, in itself indicates the intent behind the gathering. Other Vodou ceremonies have more specific names such as "*manje les anges*" [ritual feeding of the spirits/the lwas], "*manage marassa*" [ritual feeding of the spirit of the twins], "*manje pov* [ritual feeding of the poor]. The food offered give the spirits an opportunity to participate in human life and strengthen the relationship between the living and the dead. The "manje pov" is an occasion to invite the less fortunate to share a meal but, also an opportunity to receive a blessing from the poor and the beggars--those whose family is not there to cushion them against suffering and bad luck, those who, "by the inversionary logic of Vodou . . . can stave off misfortune for intact families" (see McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op. cit., 201).

In Haiti, eating is a life-sustaining activity in more ways than one. It is a means of maintaining ties. In lieu of formal introduction, when Mama Lola wishes to let people know about her closeness with McCarthy Brown, often, she simply says: "She eats in my house". (See McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. op. cit., 43).
58. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op. cit., 6–7.
59. Konesans in Creole means knowledge, but is a form of knowledge accompanied by wisdom which usually comes from experience. Elders have *konesans*, but also it is a characteristic of the departed, the ancestors, the spirits who often share their wisdom and *konesans* with us through dreams and possessions.
60. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op. cit., 2.
61. McCarthy Brown, "Plenty Confidence in Myself: The Initiation of a White Woman Scholar into Haitiain Vodou," op. cit., 74.

62. Ehh! This interjection means in Haitian Kreyol: unbelieveable! inconceivable! It expresses strong disbelief about something completely off balance; ibid., 74.
63. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op. cit., 3.
64. Though a few African-Americans are starting to place their elderly parents in homes because of the harsh realities of life in the United States, in the Black world, such behavior is still considered totally immoral and unacceptable.
65. Bellegarde-Smith, *Haiti: The Breached Citadel*, op. cit., 16.
66. This statement does not mean that Alourdes had not actually eaten that day. Karen McCarthy Brown confessed that it took her years to realize its full meaning. Mama Lola used it to indicate that she was depressed and upset, showing how mind and body are interconnected for her. She is upset, her whole system is affected; she does not feel that she has been fed (though she has eaten). From McCarthy Brown, Mama Lola : *A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op. cit., 44.
67 McCarthy Brown, "Alourdes: A Case Study of Moral Leadership in Haitian Vodou." op. cit., 166.
68. Erny, P. "Childhood and Cosmos". *The Social Psychology of the Black African Child.* (Washington, DC: Black Orpheus Press, 1973), 15.
69. This concept is what Jahn called *Ntu*. In his book *Muntu: The New African Culture,* he wrote ."place and time are forces and the 'modalities' are forces. Man and Woman, . . . dog and stone, . . . east and yesterday, . . . beauty and laughter are forces and as such are all related to one another" (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 100. His book represented one of the first attempts by a European to present African culture and philosophy in their own rights. For that alone, it has value, although much has been written in the area since then. I find useful the terminology that he used to express some fundamental elements of the African ethos. I refer here to the concepts of *Ntu, Muntu, Kuntu* in particular. *Kuntu* will be explained in the section on Black aesthetics. The concept of *Muntu* (a Bantu word often translated as "man") is an inclusive categorization to express the unity existing between the living and the dead, the ancestors and the deified ancestors (18).

Maya Deren expressed similar ideas regarding the unity of things in *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti:* "The entire chain of interlocking links-life, death, deification, transfiguration, resurrection--churns without rest through the hands of the devout. None of it forgotten: that the god was once human, that he [she] was made god by humans, that he [she] is sustained by humans"(New Paltz, NY: McPherson and Co., 1983), 33.
70. Jahn, op. cit., 96.
71. *Bellegarde-Smith, Haiti: The Breached Citadel*, op. cit., 17.
72. Manolesco explains that the goal of vaudou initiation is to liberate the neophyte from three obstacles that can hinder his evolution: self love, doubt that needs to disappear to increase faith and superstition created by fears. After that

the person is one with all other living creatures (Editions du Jour, Montreal, Canada, 1972) 88.

73. McCarthy Brown, "Plenty Confidence in Myself: The Initiation of a White Woman Scholar into Haitian Vodou." op. cit., 75.

74. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op. cit., 75.

75. Ibid., 380.

76. Ibid., 381.

77. McCarthy Brown, "Alourdes: A Case Study of Moral Leadership in Haitian Vodou." op. cit., 166.

78. The *chwal* of a lwa is someone who has been possessed by the god, someone whose *gro bonanj* (guardian angel/spirit/soul) has been displaced by that of the spirit who mounted her. The person possessed is in a state of trance. She is not conscious and is no longer herself but the incarnation of the *lwa*.

79. In a later section, this will become clearer as we recount the encounter of a young man with the spirit Ogou.

80. McCarthy Brown, K., Alourdes: A Case Study of Moral Leadership in Haitian Vodou, op. cit., 154.

81. Mbiti, J. , *African Religions and Philosophy*. (New York: Praeger, 1969), 214.

82. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op. cit., 69.

83. McCarthy Brown, "Alourdes: A Case Study of Moral Leadership in Haitian Vodou," op.cit., 161.

84. The *ason* is the beaded rattle that gives houngans and mambos leverage in the world of the *lwas*. They receive it after undergoing the fourth and highest level of initiation which confirms them as healer, as priests or priestesses, as leaders of the vodou communities.

85. The word *kouche* is the term most commonly used to describe initiation into Vodou. *Kouche* in Creole means to lie down, to sleep, to make love, to give birth, to die, and to be reborn (in the sense of having undergone the Vodou initiation). The bed (or its substitute when people cannot afford a bed) is therefore to be respected for what it represents: life and death, two faces of the same coin.

86. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op cit., 69.

87. Deren, *Divine Horsemen*: *The Living Gods of Haiti*, op. cit., 35. Along with other Vodou concepts, the notion of crossroads is often misused.

88. Although one is not allowed to reveal the secrets of Vodou initiation, Karen McCarthy Brown was permitted to write about her reactions to the process. She cautioned , however, not to "over-interpret" her "metaphoric speech." From McCarthy Brown, K.., Plenty Confidence in Myself: the Initiation of a White Woman Scholar into Haitian Vodou, op. cit., 72–5.

89. Like a baby's skull, the new head, *the new self* is believed to be vulnerable and, as such must be protected.

90. McCarthy Brown, "Plenty Confidence in Myself" the Initiation of a White Woman Scholar into Haitian Vodou." op. cit., 1670.
91. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op.cit., 11.
92. Ibid., 10.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid., 5.
95. Ibid., 10.
96. Ibid., 5.
96. McCarthy Brown, "Plenty Confidence in Myself: The initiation of a White Woman Scholar into Haitian Vodou, " op. cit., 72.
98. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op. cit., 10.
99. McCarthy Brown, "Plenty Confidence in Myself: The initiation of a White Woman Scholar into Haitian Vodou, " op. cit., 75.
100. McCarthy Brown, "Alourdes : A Case Study of Moral Leadership in Haitian Vodou," op. cit., 150.
101. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op. cit., 9.
102. Ibid., 7.
103. Babb, L. A. "Sathya Sai Baba's Saintly Play," In J. S. Hawley, ed, *Saints and Virtues*. (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 168–86.
104. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, op. cit., 107.
105. Laguerre, M. "Voodoo Heritage." *Sage Library of Social Research*, Vol. 98. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980), 22.
106. Long, C. *The Emergence of Religious Value Systems at the level of Popular Religions in the Pacific Rim*. Proposal submitted by the Center for Black Studies to *Pacific Rim Research*. (University of California: Center for Black Studies, 1993), 11.
107. Although the literal translation of the *ti legliz* movement is small church's movement, this grassroots movement is in no way small. The political climate in Haiti in 1994 seemed to indicate that a large portion of the Haitian proletariat was, indeed, determined to see changes come about—changes which would bring some form of justice and democracy for the Haitian masses.
108. Desmangles, L. G. *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti*, op. cit., 55.
109. Ibid., 181.

Madre Patria (Mother Country)

Latino Identity and Rejections of Blackness*

Marta I. Cruz-Janzen

Introduction

When I was in third grade, in Puerto Rico, I wanted to be the Virgin Mary for the community Christmas celebration. A teacher promptly informed me that the mother of Christ could not be black. A girl with blonde hair and blue eyes was selected for the role, and I was given the role of a shepherd. In middle school, also in Puerto Rico, I played a house servant for a school play. Only children of black heritage played the slaves and servants. A white student with a painted face portrayed the only significant black character. All the other characters were white. I learned then that nonwhite persons could not be anyone or anything representative of the nation's greatness but could only serve as servants and slaves to the great white leaders. In this essay, I explore racism among Latinos both in Latin America and the United States, with particular reference to black Latino women, the *Latinegras*.

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Madre Patria (Mother Country)

Mothers in Latino cultures are visible proof of the important matrilineal racial lines that cannot be concealed. "Y tu abuela a'onde esta?" (Where is your grandma from?). In Latin America and in the United States. this jeering question is often aimed at Latinos who pretend to be white, without any trace of African or Indian blood. "Aqui, el que no tiene inga, tiene mandinga. EI que no tiene congo, tiene carabali. Y pa 'los que no saben na, tu abuela a'onde esta?" This popular expression speaks what most Latinos know, but wish to hide. It attests to the broad racial mixing that exists as well as to its denial. It states: "Here, those who don't have Inga, have Mandinga. Those who don't have Congo, have Carabali. And of those who claim not to know, we ask, who's your grandma?" The Ingas or Incas were indigenous Indians. Mandingas and Congos were Africans. Carabalis were runaway slaves, both African and indigenous Indians, who were feared for their rebelliousness.

"Y tu abuela a'onde esta?" further attests to the centrality of females in Latino cultures as keepers of family racial lines and secrets. Motherhood is also a paramount value within doctrines of nationalism, patriotism, and racialism endorsed by most Latino nations. These notions are integral to the negation of Latinegras as valid Latin American mothers. Many countries around the world, including the United States and most in Latin America, although patriarchal, hold in reverence motherhood and thus women's roles as creators and nurturers of the nations' past, present, and future. National ideologies merge the powerful concepts of nationalism and patriotism with womanhood and motherhood to create a representation that defines and portrays the country internally and to the outside world. Nation stems from birth. Land or earth, stands as the giver and nurturer of all life. Thus nation and land tend to be maternal symbols. In the English language, significant referents for country of origin are "mother country," "mother land," or "mother nation." Our world is Mother Earth. We find most Spanish-speaking countries using similar symbolism.

While both English- and Spanish-speaking countries make regular references to nationalism and patriotism, or to devotion and loyalty to nation, origins, and birth in the Spanish language *patria*, which also stands for country, land, and nation, is a very powerful male word meaning father, fatherland, or land of the fathers. In Spanish, country of origin becomes *madre patria*, combining the female and the male. Madre

patria means mother of the fatherland or mother of the nation. In this context, nationalism and patriotism, without diminishing national patriarchy, legitimize women as bearers and nurturers of powerful men and nations. Symbolically, motherhood is critical to national identity. In Latin America, as in other parts of the world, depictions of white men, as legitimate fathers of the nations, abound. A complete national identity requires a mother and when the ideal white mother cannot be portrayed, an acceptable alternative must be found. This powerful national icon cannot be the black/African woman but the indigenous one.

While both indigenous and African women were not recipients of white male respect, blacks were looked upon as lower beings; as beasts. Black women were perceived and further disrespected as the creators of beasts. Most imported slaves were men and few black women were brought in for the purpose of reproduction. The presence of black female slaves guaranteed expansion of the work force, and young, healthy, and pubescent black girls commanded very high prices. From the moment they could bear children they were sexually assaulted. It did not matter whose children they bore. A woman might bear many children by several slave workers, owners, other laborers, and even by their fathers and other male relatives. Not uncommonly, the Latinegras' role included introducing the younger males of the household to the "ways of physical love." [1] Sometimes these males were the children they had nursed and reared.

Latino cultures grant more privileges to men, and even black men were perceived as superior to black women whose main role was reproduction. Black male slaves were severely punished, even killed, for having sexual alliances outside of their race. Black men did father children with women of other races but if the mothers were not black, the offspring of interracial unions were not always declared "true" blacks, and therefore slaves. Mulatos (black and white) first and zambos (black and Indian) next were considered superior and more human than *puros prietos*. Mestizos (Indian and white) were deemed to be superior to both mulatos and zambos. The fathers of black slave children did not matter, any man would do, because what determined bestiality, and thus slavery, was the mother's blackness.

Subliminally, Latinegras have been blamed for their status as victims, for their subservience, and lack of control over their destinies. Cultural reverence for female virtuosity, purity of body and soul, and the

visible loyalty of women as mothers and wives, similarly punished Latinegras for serving the pleasures of men's flesh and being the sinful bearers of children whose paternity could not be legally established. Latinegras have historically been associated with uncontrollable libido and promiscuity, simultaneously chastised for their lack of morality while being robbed of it. Black females were shamed for having children who could not be free and were repudiated as promoters of slavery. At various points in history, the words Negra, prostitute, and whore have been synonymous, and the black woman's body has been regarded as a commodity free for the taking. Black women have been accused of unnatural fertility and feral animal instincts while being exploited as creatures of procreation. Such images could not and cannot represent the nation's past, present, and future. Such images could not and cannot stand as the creators and nurturer of strong men and nations.

Mejorando la Raza **(Improving the Race)**

Most Latin American countries endorse either policies of *mestizaje* (racial mixing), *blanqueamiento* (whitening), or *negritud* (negritude or blackness). French-speaking Haiti, where the majority of the population is black, is the only Latin American nation to endorse open policies of negritud, or affirmation of a black identity.[2] Negritude is not the affirmation and/or endorsement of an African identity, but of a black heritage grounded in the unique historical antecedents of the nation. Mestizaje represents an interracial heritage, the result of white and indigenous unions. Many Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, and significantly Mexico, call themselves nations of mestizos but forget their African bloodlines. Even Latin American scholars endorse the doctrine of two "worlds," the Spanish and the indigenous, meeting on American soil.[3]

The concept of mestizaje sheds more light on the historical rejection of Latinegras within most Latino cultures. Many Latinos, aware of their interracial heritage, admit to their indigenous legacy, the mestizo, but few will admit to a black ancestor. The black/African identity becomes suppressed, the words negro and moreno become equated with dark-skinned indigenous Indians and the idea of national motherhood is presented through indigenous women. In lieu of a white image, mestizo is the next acceptable identity. While it could be argued that education confers social mobility and greater status to Latin

Americans of black and indigenous heritage, it cannot be denied that being, or becoming, anything other than black is preferable. Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans, groups known for their apparent African ancestry, often joke, "There are more Indians today than when Columbus arrived."

Another factor that contributes to the rejection of Latinegras as acceptable symbols of national identity are policies of blanqueamiento, or mejorando la raza (improving the race), pervasive among Latin American nations, even those with large populations of blacks and Indians. These policies promote the improvement of the race through intermarriage with whites, increased white European immigration, and, at times, the outright elimination of black and indigenous groups.[4] Blanqueamiento affirms the perceived superiority of whites coupled with the perceived inferiority of all others, with blacks and indigenous persons at the bottom, and reflects the general belief that racial improvement through racial purification is attainable. Whites and light-skinned persons are held in higher esteem, requiring that vestiges of blackness disappear. The ideology of blanqueamiento often holds blacks and indigenous persons responsible for their own and the nation's failures and weaknesses.[5] Blanqueamiento sets forth the common conviction that incremental acquisition of whiteness, leading to hierarchical superiority and increased acceptability by the white elite, is desirable, possible, and essential for national regeneration, vigor, and prosperity.

Family lines, and thus marriage, are significant in a culture that has historically included extended families as well as genealogical and cultural connections through *compadrazgo*, or the joining of families through oaths of honor, loyalty, and support to each other across multiple generations. While often unspoken, it is understood that the presence of blacks within a family drastically reduces the family's options in life. Indeed, it is believed that the presence of a Latinegra is certain to bring the family down. Latino cultures hold mothers to higher and stricter standards than fathers. Mothers must be *abnegadas*, or self-sacrificing for their children. While fathers are not criticized for being absent, mothers who abandon or betray their children are unforgiven. Fathers may walk away in search of new conquests, but mothers must remain visible in the lives of their children. This presence and visibility makes it even more undesirable and despised to be Latingras.

La Mancha de Platano (The Plantain Stain)

"Mucho que poco todos la tenemos" (Little or much we all have it). *La mancha* refers to racial impurity and relates to the plantain, a common vegetable resembling a banana, which, when handled, leaves a dark black stain that is extremely difficult to remove. The white elite of most Latin American nations, also known as *gente decente* (decent people) or *gente bien* (well-off people) because of their financial, political, and social superiority, subscribe to a racial solidarity that adamantly proclaims, their *pureza de sangre* (blood and racial purity). It proclaims their separation from other Latinos of interracial background.[6] Whereas the general populace accepts the principles of blanqueamiento, visible, known, and/or suspected non-White ancestry means exclusion from the elite. Thus, social, economic, and political mobility are bound by racial whitening and the denial of black heritage.[7]

Latino countries with large populations of nonwhites, such as the Dominican Republic and even Brazil where the myth of racial democracy has flourished, are still dominated by either the white elite or by light-skinned interracial persons.[8] The minority white Latin Americans elite, of various white European backgrounds and especially Spaniards, stands at the very top. An interracial population constitutes the majority and middle group. This middle group is graded from top to bottom according to skin color and physical appearance, the darker persons toward the bottom. Persons who look white but are *sospechosos* or suspected of having some nonwhite ancestry are accepted socially as whites as long as la mancha (the blood taint) is not apparent.

"Social" whites supersede the interracial middle group and may even reach high economic and political power but they are ultimately excluded from the highest social echelons. In sum, black and indigenous Latinos remain at the bottom of the social, economic, and political hierarchy; the darker the person, the more likely they will be toward the bottom and the greater the apparent African/black heritage the more likely that they will be even further toward the bottom. Blanqueamiento denigrates the position of blacks, particularly visible black females. Latinegras cannot be allowed to stand as the visible manifestation of the family's inability to improve the race and the nation.

Denial and concealment of African heritage is pervasive among Latinos. Lighter-skinned Latinos, including those of black and

indigenous backgrounds, hold strong prejudices against darker-complected ones; indeed. they avoid identification with dark blacks.[9] Eager to distance themselves from their African and black heritage and to approximate the European white ideal, light-skinned Latinos are often more predjudiced toward their darker compatriots than white Latinos. Light-skinned Latinos often harbor internalized racism against themselves as apparent, or suspected, persons of black heritage, and they may externalize this racism toward Latinegros.[10] White Latinos do not want their pureza de sangre to be questioned.

Latino culture and popular folklore have portrayed blacks as an abject and most contemptible group. Latin American television shamelessly depicts cultural contempt for Latinegros, who are portrayed in the most dehumanizing ways and are the object of vile ridicule. They are often forced to play stereotypical or self-dehumanizing roles such as comic characters who debase themselves as part of their act.[11] They tend to be overweight, uneducated, and speakers of "unintelligible" Spanish. It is also acceptable to deride them publicly in ways that would simply be unacceptable to today's African-American viewers. The darker the Latinegro and the stronger the apparent African heritage, the greater the efforts of light-skinned and white Latinos to keep their distance. Latinegros are not accepted as true compatriots in their respective countries or in the United States and continue to live within their country of origin and within their Latino groups in the United States as, "foreigners of both locations" [12]

Latinos in Latin America scorn Latinegros quietly, remorselessly, with guilt and shame. Latinos in the United States. are resentful in their repudiation, angry and fearful. They don't want to acknowledge Latinegros, as they don't want to remember their own true ancestry. The rejection of Latinegros by U.S. Latinos has intensified over the years.[13] Latinegros know the reason: Africa is alive in all Latinos. African blood runs deeply through the veins and souls of most Latinos. Africa's blood clamors in the Spanish flamenco, resonates in the Mexican corrido, palpitates in Mexico's La Bamba, laments in the Argentinian tango. It is alive in Diego Rivera's paintings. It calls to us in today's popular salsa sounds from the Caribbean. Africa rejoices in the reencounter of sounds from all across her continent coming together after centuries apart and celebrates meeting and merging with the Latin American spirit.

No Hay Moros en la Costa (There are no Moors [Negroes] on the Coast)

Over the years, many Mexican-Americans told me that there were no blacks in Mexico. I was always told that Mexico was a nation of mestizos, the product of indigenous people and Spaniards. So, where have they all gone? Where are the Latinegros in Mexico? Where are the Latinegros in Argentina, Chile, and Peru? Where are the Latinegros in Iberia? Where are the blacks who sailed with Columbus?[14] Where are the thousands of blacks who followed? I puzzled over that although I often suspected some individuals of having African heritage. But I believed them—until I visited Mexico for the first time. Now a regular traveler to the country, I am always surprised to meet apparent Latinegros in Cancun, Chetumal, Guadalajara, Palenque, and other cities. Uninhibitedly, they welcome me and tell me about the many Latinegros throughout the country and the blatant hostility and racism that is often directed against them.

Argentineans, Mexicans, and other Latinos often state that blacks either no longer exist or are not a visible force in their nations and societies. Yet, most Latinos, whether they are aware of it or not, have African bloodlines. The facts are that throughout Spain, across the Caribbean, from Mexico, to Argentina, Spaniards took great numbers of Africans. In most Latin American countries, Africans constituted a significant proportion, even a majority, of the total population. And in most Latin American countries, Africans were rapidly assimilated through interracial unions. But dark-skinned Latinegros are still visible. Andrews Reid believes the plan has been to either assimilate them or let them "die out."[15] Historical cases of attempted extermination—outright massacres of black people across Latin America—have been documented.[16]

Invisible No Mas (No Longer Invisible)

Prior to 1976, persons from Latin America in the United States were referred to as Latinos. Then "Hispanic" was introduced purportedly to classify all persons from Spain, Latin America, and their compatriots and descendants on U.S. soil. This label subliminally shapes the ethnic and racial consciousness and identity of Latinos. In 1993 a "Hispanic" reader from New Mexico wrote to *Hispanic* magazine (July issue), in reaction to an article about major league baseball players: "I would

appreciate knowing how the writer arrived at the classification of apparent blacks as Hispanics? Does the fact that men come from Spanish-speaking countries such as Puerto Rico or Cuba give them the Hispanic title designation? History shows that Africans were transported to the Americas as slaves and took the names of their slave masters."

"Hispanic" has come under intense criticism as a label that exalts and promotes whiteness by focusing on the Spanish-speaking white European Spaniards and thus supporting a hierarchy that perpetuates the exploitation of nonwhite Latinos. [17] Latino is perceived as a more encompassing term that includes European Spaniards, Latin Americans who speak Spanish and those who do not, indigenous Latin Americans, and all persons of African heritage. "Hispanic" represents the antithesis of black, Indian, and interracial. The result is that the U.S. collective consciousness fails to recognize Latinegros as "Hispanics."

The word Latinegro has gained increased popularity and use among Latinos of African ancestry for several decades. The term has emerged closely linked to the U.S. racial consciousness movements of the Twentieth Century including the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s that forged a similar awareness in Latin America and throughout the world. Latinegro has become an empowering affirmation of Latinegros' ethnicity and race, of their legitimacy, first as Latinos and then as Latinos who are both Latin Americans and blacks. Increasingly, it represents indisputable proof that blacks have not disappeared from the Americas but continue to emerge and demand their birthright and heritage. Latinegro focuses on the black experience, originating in Africa but no longer African, unfolded and evolved over centuries and generations within a Latin American context. In other words, Latinegros are not African or African-American but rather Latin American, inextricably webbed with other Latin Americans. Latinos' own denials of Latinegros, the pervasive use of excluding labels, and negative public images often offered by the media create the perception that Latino cultures are not inclusive of African ancestry.

Racismo a lo Latino (Racism, Latino Style)

A significant manifestation of Latino racism, throughout Latin America, Spain, and the United States., has been the historical negation of the black presence. Whites, in Latin America and wherever African and indigenous slavery existed, have been responsible for writing

history in their own terms. Historical amnesia and the telling of falsehoods across Latin America, in census counts and even historical accounts, have systematically minimized and/or obliterated the presence and contributions of blacks. The darker the Latino and the closer their roots to Africa, the greater the oppression and concerted repression of their existence and linkages to other Latinos.[18] The truth is that while proclaiming racial democracy and integration, most Latin American countries simultaneously instituted and continue to maintain social, economic, and political structures that disenfranchise their African and indigenous populations. Most Latin American countries do not employ distinct racial classification as the United States does. Even Brazil, which openly recognizes many racial gradations with accepted terms for each, and others such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic (Santo Domingo), Mexico and Puerto Rico among many others, do not count their black or interracial populations. This has enabled them to diminish and/or conceal the African influence and the existence of very dark-skinned Latinegros. It only takes a tour of the countries to realize that socioeconomic status and the implied "fluid" classifications are very racial in nature. This social, economic, and political isolation has contributed to the invisibility of Latinegros from the national conscience.

The most blatant manifestation of Latino racism is denial. The myths of racial integration and harmony along with the supposed superimposition of cultural identity over race has even been proclaimed by Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans, who are most visibly of African lineage. Many Latinos also often claim that compatriots in their respective countries or communities in the United States., regardless of pigmentation, do not perceive race and racism as issues of concern. The "pervasive litanies" of Latin American color-blindness and racial democracies underlie the reality that "blatant discrimination continues to plague" the descendants of the millions of African slaves brought to the Americas.[19] In fact, racial inequality is "endemic" in Latin America.[20]

Many Latinos attempt to conceal cultural racism by arguing that *negro* (Negro or black) is a term of endearment. Historically, the term became equated with Africans, blacks, and slaves. Synonyms are *moreno* (Moorish black), *moyeto* (black and ugly), and *prieto* (dark black). Among Puerto Ricans, and many other Latino groups, negro, as well as moreno, moyeto, and prieto are derisively reserved for "black, black" persons and in the United States, are conspicuously applied to Africans and African--

Americans.[21] When a white or light-skinned Latino refers to a Latinegro as negro, it is usually as a reminder of the Latinegros' race and social status. Calling someone negro is likely to be combined with a disapproving voice and negative facial expressions.[22] Negra or negro, when used toward a black person, tends to be followed by *sucia/o* (dirty or immoral) or *parejera/o* (arrogant). Parejera/o is not used toward whites, only toward blacks and indigenous Indians. It denotes people who do not accept their place beneath whites and do not remain quiet and humbly obey.[23] It signifies a false sense of equality and belonging among superiors. The masculine form, negro, is used less often and usually as a put-down. Negra is used more often and is associated with the loving and nurturing of Latinegras, as well as their perceived sexuality. To call a Latinegra, and significantly, a White or light-skinned Latina, "negra" alludes to her perceived loving, nurturing, and very possibly, sexual nature. Members of the Latino white elite would never accept being addressed as negro and having their *pureza de sangre*—and superior status—called into question.

En el Norte (In the North)

Beyond Latin America, something is happening to Latinos on U.S. soil. Latin American racism, mingled with the U.S. variety, is creating a unique dilemma not only for Latinegros but also for all Latinos in the United States. Latinos are being forced between a black versus a white identity. In the United States, identifiably black persons are perceived as possibly African or African-American, which many groups consider inferior. Indeed, African-Americans are most often considered the lowest group of all.[24] For Latinos, to be black in the United States is perceived as a liability.[25] Regardless of skin color and/or physical appearance, in the United States, one drop of non-White blood makes the person 100 percent nonwhite while in Latin America one drop of white blood makes the person whiter, or at least no longer black or Indian. While in Latin America racial impurity can be cleansed and expunged in ascending stages, in the United States racial impurity designates the person and their future generations as unfit and undesirable.

Latinos in the United States dread being pushed to the black or African side but soon find that they can't fit in with the mainstream white American side either. In their frantic quest to prove their

whiteness, they focus on their *Hispanidad* (Hispanicism), distance themselves from their interracial Latin American roots, and struggle to gain some semblance of acceptance with U.S. mainstream white Americans. The term "Hispanic" brings images of Spain, and European whiteness, rather than of interracial Latin America. In this light, it is imperative to conceal the Latinegros in the family closet. Latinos are not only disclaiming their compatriots, but their friends and families. White-looking siblings are rejecting the *negritos* or dark ones in the family, including their parents. Latino families in the United States sometimes live in separate parts of town, and in different life realities, according to physical appearance.

The deeper Latinos become immersed in U.S. racial ideology—the sharp and unyielding black versus white dichotomy—the more intensified becomes their desire, indeed their perceived need, to free themselves of any and all vestiges of Africa.[26] The more African-Americans assert their heritage and linkages to Africa, the more Latinos attempt to disassociate themselves from them.[27] Latinegros try to overlook their blackness and believe that they are Hispanic like their European compatriots. When they can't, they assert their indigenous Indian bloodlines in attempts to elevate themselves above black. They are forced to conceal the black mothers hidden in their families' closets. Many light-skinned Latinos attempt to conceal their nonwhite antecedents and maintain a tight lid on a history shrouded in secrecy and mysteries. This explains in part why within-group racism is not a welcome subject among light-skinned or presumably white Latinos. The subject is often considered impolite and/or taboo. What is not stated is the fear that open discussions about race and racism may unveil personal and family mysteries. Another popular expression, "Hasta en el mantel mas fino cae la mancha" (The stain falls even on the finest tablecloth), mocks the common fear and belief that *la mancha* spares no one. Denial of Latinegros is not only denial of blackness; it is denial of self.

Notes

1. E. Bermudez and M. M. Suarez, "Venezuela," in Minority Rights Group, ed., *No Longer Invisible: Afro-Latin Americans Today* (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1995), 243–69.
2. North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), The Black Americas 1492-1992: Report on the Americas, February 1992.
3. J. S. Muhammad, "Mexico and Central America," in *No Longer Invisible,*. 163–80.
4. See L. Comas-Diaz, L., "*Latinegra*: Mental Health Issues of African Latinas," in Maria P. Root, ed., *Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1996), 167–90; G. McGarrity and O. Cardenas, "Cuba," in : *No Longer Invisible,* 77-108; Muhammad, "Mexico and Central America" and Andrews G. Reid, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980).
5. R. Marquez, "An Anatomy of Racism" in NACLA, The Black Americas 32–3.
6. Andrews G. Reid, *Blacks and Whites in Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1888-1988* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).
7. W. Wright, *Café Con Leche: Race, Class, and National Image in Venezuela* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).
8. G. Escobar, "Dominicans Assimilate in Black and White," *Washington Post* (May 14, 1999), A2.
9 L. Comas-Diaz, "*Latinegra*: Mental Health Issues.
10. Ibid.
11. Muhammad, "Mexico and Central America."
12. Escobar, "Dominicans Assimilate."
13. R. Santiago, "Negro is a Spanish Word: The Issue of Racism Bedevils White and Black Hispanics," *Denver Post*, Vista, July 7, 1991, 6–7, 20.
14. C. Palmer, "African Slave Trade: The Cruelest Commerce," *National Geographic*, 62–91.
15. Reid, *The Afro-Argentines*
16. L. Comas-Diaz, "*Latinegra*: Mental Health Issues.
17. D. Forbes, "The Hispanic Spin: Party Politics and Governmental Manipulations of Ethnic Identity," *Latin American Perspectives*, 19 (Fall 1992), 59–78.
18. See (NACLA), The Black Americas; Reid, *Blacks and Whites in Sao Paulo,* and Wright, Café Con Leche.
19. North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), The Black Americas 1492-1992: Report on the Americas, February 1992.
20. Reid, Blacks and Whites in Sao Paulo.
21. C. E. Rodriguez, "Puerto Ricans: Between Black and White," in Roberto Santiago, ed., Boricuas: Influential Puerto Rican Writings: An Anthology (New York: Ballatine Books, 1995), 81–91.

22. McGarrity and Cardenas, "Cuba."
23. Cruz I. Zenon, *Narciso Descubre su Trasero: El Negro en la Cultura Puertorriquena* (Humacao, PR: Editorial Furidi, 1974).
24. T. Morrison, "On the Backs of Blacks," *Time*, 142 (Fall 1993), 57.
25. D. D. Pryce, "Black Latina," *Hispanic* (March 1999), 56.
26. Santiago, "Negro is a Spanish Word."
27. Ibid.

Race in Feminism:

Critiques of Bodily Self-Determination in Ida B. Wells and Anna Julia Cooper

Stephanie Athey

Introduction

If, as Angela Davis has argued, "the last decade of the nineteenth century was a critical moment in the development of modern racism," the same can be said of the development of modern feminism. Late nineteenth-century feminism, like institutional racism, saw "major institutional supports and ideological justifications" take shape across this period.[1] Organizations of American women, both black and white, were shaping political arguments and crafting activist agendas in a post-Reconstruction America increasingly enamored of hereditary science, prone to lynching, and possessed of a virulent nationalism. This essay takes a historical view of "womanhood," bodily self-determination and well-being, concepts now at the heart of feminist thinking by women of color and white women. It explores the racist tenor of the 1890s and its impact on the concept of female "sovereignty" as it emerged in the speech and writing of four black and white intellectuals at the turn of the century. Reading work of Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells in the context of Frances Willard and Victoria Woodhull, I explore the emergence of "sovereignty" or self-determination of the body as a racially charged concept at the base of feminist work.

A central tenet of twentieth-century feminist work, the concept of female sovereignty—women's economic, political, sexual, and reproductive autonomy—was first defined and justified by late

nineteenth-century feminists, black and white, who either adopted or rejected the eugenic philosophies gaining circulation at the time.

Two intellectuals and race leaders of the 1890s, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Anna Julia Cooper, offer race and gender analyses that deserve closer attention in this regard.[2] Wells, a journalist and anti-lynching crusader, and Cooper, essayist and educator, are exceedingly important because each offers a nuanced reconceptualization of this dominant ideology of femininity. To place their critiques of white womanhood and bodily self-determination in context, the writing and oratory of two prominent white women of the 1890s, Victoria Woodhull and Frances Willard will be analyzed.

Far from an arcane inquiry into abstract ideas that have now passed from the scene, a study of the early arguments points to the racist retentions in contemporary theoretical concepts—racist retentions that have practical implications for the ways in which feminists have organized and the ways in which feminism has reflected, not resolved, racial divisions. A racially charged notion of bodily self-determination has stymied progress in many areas of theory and activism including, for example, work in some of the most visible arenas of feminist struggle: the fight for reproductive health, anti-rape activism, sex and race discrimination law, and anti-racist activity.[3] Moreover, a study of eugenic thinking and its permutations is important in the current political climate. Similar to the late nineteenth century, the late twentieth century and turn of the twenty-first have seen a resurgence of racially motivated hate crimes and an interest in measures related to "social hygiene," that is, incentives to control the sexuality and fertility of the poor and females on state aid, an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment, and a narrow sexual abstinence approach to controlling the HIV/AIDS epidemic. All demonstrate an interest in controlling the sexuality and limiting the fertility and growth of certain populations within the United States and abroad. A new era of genetic determinism has been shaping scientific research agendas and fueling a popular receptivity to the "truth" of genetic explanation, even in the case of genetic hypotheses—such as those replayed perennially in publications like *The Bell Curve*—that have been disproved time and time again. A vigorous, progressive, anti-racist feminism is only possible if feminists and historians investigate the ways in which racist and imperialist notions of womanhood, well-being, and "the body" are still fundamental to

feminist conceptions of law, rights, and citizenship.[4]

Contemporary Perspectives

Black feminist historians and scholars note that some strains of feminism, while at times employing a rhetoric of interracial solidarity, remain partial or hapless allies of (when not deliberate obstacles to) the feminist theory and activism of women of color. Current debates over racism within feminism tend to focus on the exclusion of women of color in definitions of "women's experience" and on the "marginalization" of women of color in organizational structures and theoretical models devised by white women. Yet it is not enough to acknowledge a racist past within feminism or to build more "inclusive" structures if that does not, in turn, mean a reconfiguration of the political concepts that have been complicitous with white supremacy.

For example, many historians who study racism within feminism focus on the racist debates over woman suffrage that took place at the time of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Their scholarship often spotlights the divided suffrage campaign, juxtaposing the so-called militant National Women's Suffrage Association with its more conservative sibling, the American Women's Suffrage Association—organizations that split in 1869 over the black male franchise and reconciled in 1890. When scholars of these predominantly white organizations consider race and racism within those bodies, they tend to focus on segregated membership practices, a tally of black or Native American women who were active participants, or white suffragists' doctrine of "expedience," which opted to forfeit interracial alliance in order to win Southern support for the white women's vote. In general, rather than see certain radical initiatives as thoroughly compatible with racism, or rather than view white feminist positions as creatures of white supremacy, many contemporary historians have attempted to salvage a usable radicalism in white feminisms and alternately isolate and condemn, apologize for, or ignore the racist tenor and racist intent of early feminist arguments.

It is crucial to recognize that the history of racist maneuvering within white feminist thought is much more than a problem of "exclusion" or "marginalization"—that is, a problem of segregated organizations or divisive suffrage strategy—but more deeply, as Anna Julia Cooper once said, the caste system of "woman's sphere" is held in

place by "codes and counter-signs of perfect subordination." [5] Racial codes and meanings are encoded in fundamental concepts of personal and national well-being, self-protection, and the ideal of autonomous womanhood.

Nineteenth-Century Feminisms: Correspondences Across the Color Line

A study of women's political activity at the turn of the century shows both black and white women resisting and revising dominant expectations of femininity as they struggled for physical safety, economic empowerment, suffrage, and equal access to education. Though the 1890s are considered by many to be a decade of sharp regression in terms of racial interrelations, this was a remarkable decade in terms of black women's organized political activity. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham notes that between 1880 and 1920, black women's clubs gained in strength and scope, agitating for "voting rights or equal employment and educational opportunities . . . develop[ing] a distinct discourse of resistance, a feminist theology."[6]

A study of conjunctions and disjunctions among white and black intellectuals of the period demonstrates that the theory of black and white women in the 1890s is strikingly similar, attempting as it does to build political muscle in the face of legal disenfranchisement, economic insecurity, physical violence, and mutating sexual ideologies. Conceptions of bodily sovereignty, citizenship, sexuality, and "race" formed a common matrix of concerns. By and large it is the manner in which these terms are defined and the configurations into which they are cast that distinguishes the activist agenda of early black feminist politics from their segregated white counterparts. Hazel Carby charts the "collective production and interrelation of forms of knowledge among black women intellectuals" of the late nineteenth century and follows their theory across a number of media outlets—fiction, journalism, essay, and lecture.[7] She emphasizes the continuity of black women's thinking, the links black female intellectuals forged between internal and external colonization, and the very different bases upon which black and white women promoted their political presence and action at the turn of the century. Yet, to examine the intellectual foundations of black activism during this period is to uncover the ways in which white supremacist hereditarian, domestic, and nativist

premises were both resisted and, at times, partially absorbed by black women's organizations. For instance, leaders of the Boston-based Women's Era Club fought against lynching and racial segregation while maintaining elitist and nativist positions on working-class culture, "foreigners," and an attendant interest in "social hygiene." [8]

Moreover, while white feminisms, by and large, pointedly excluded black women as objects of concern or companions in the struggle, their racially charged concept of the ideal "womanhood" was refashioned nonetheless, in black women's hands, as a tactical means of incorporating black "womanhood" into a white supremacist society. For instance, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham discusses the seminal role played by the northern, white American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) in the education of black leaders. The ABHMS created and nurtured Spelman College and other institutions increasingly geared toward the production of a "Black and female Talented Tenth." Brooks Higginbotham argues that Spelman women modeled a style of bourgeois black womanhood that was meant, by white and black leaders alike, to "redeem" the (black) "race." Equipped as educators and missionaries, students and graduates toiled to "uplift" rural black communities of Georgia and Alabama from the seeming abyss of rural black folk culture. Institutions like Spelman, then, supported in large part by the black church and community, became important mechanisms for assimilation—moving African-American women and families toward white ideologies of gender, nation, race, and class and distancing them from the black masses. These observations demonstrate the inadequacy of labeling any feminist philosophy as wholly conservative or progressive, "white" or "black."

Black leaders like Ida B. Wells and Anna Julia Cooper were aware of the racism implicit in concepts of "ideal womanhood" and bodily sovereignty, and they carefully countered them. They aimed to build theoretical foundations that might sustain racial justice as well as women's physical, economic, and political independence. The contribution of Wells and Cooper is made clear when viewed in relation to the idea of bodily self-determination developed by white feminists Victoria Woodhull and Frances Willard.

In contemporary scholarship, Victoria Woodhull—a two-time presidential candidate, an advocate of eugenics and woman's sexual freedom—and Frances Willard, who shaped the policy of the Women's

Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) for two decades, are chiefly remembered as strong advocates of woman suffrage and champions of women's political organization.[9]

Yet, Willard and Woodhull are often positioned at two ends of the feminist political spectrum. When historians discuss Willard's Women's Christian Temperance Union it is often as a foil to the more "radical" agenda of the suffragists. In studies of the WCTU, the Union has usually been treated as a pioneering grassroots feminist and philanthropic movement, interested in retaining a woman's sphere while expanding its reach through a moderate agenda of reforms or "social housekeeping."[10] Just as historians have viewed suffrage organizations as radical in comparison to the Women's Temperance organization, Victoria Woodhull's doctrine of "free love" and her denunciation of exploitive capitalist industry has been seen as far more "radical" than most suffragists could bear.

Woodhull, especially, was an extreme voice in the 1890s. Hers was not a True Womanhood by any means, and her ideas on free love and socialism were not legitimated or promoted by the same broad political base that Frances Willard enjoyed as head of the WCTU. In fact, Victoria Woodhull's economic and sexual philosophy was far in advance of suffragist positions and in direct conflict with WCTU's doctrines of "home protection" and "moral purity." Though viewed, respectively, as more "radical" and "conservative" than most suffragist strategy in this period, Victoria Woodhull and Frances Willard offer excellent examples of disparate feminist projects founded on common eugenic philosophies. Both are important for precisely this reason. They demonstrate how a spectrum of seemingly incompatible feminisms mobilized the same connection between eugenic science, imperialism, whiteness, and the female body. Both forge a particularly feminist brand of white supremacy. They argue that white women's political and sexual empowerment and autonomy, their "sovereignty," is central to the national well-being. This was so because, both women argued, the white female's unique role as citizen was in retaining white supremacy in the face of challenges at home and abroad. The white woman retains white supremacy and strengthens the white race through social reform and "educated" sexual choice.[11]

While Willard and Woodhull made the sovereign white female the guarantor of the sovereign white state, Ida B. Wells and Anna Julia

Cooper committed grave offense by inverting this formula and implying that white womanhood was, in fact, a threat to the nation. Wells and Cooper would argue that this very ideal of sovereign white womanhood could only be supported by a racist economic and social arrangement. White women's "bodily sovereignty" sanctioned violence and a lesser standard of living for black women and men and all those situated on the ethnic and economic margins of "whiteness." Therefore, Wells and Cooper both suggested that prevailing constructions of white womanhood not only endangered black bodies but also suppressed enormous economic resources, robbing the nation of talent and wealth. To challenge the racist freight of this white feminist ideal, each would reverse imperialist rhetoric and construct an *economic* rather than a eugenic vision of race and womanhood.

To draw the context for Cooper's and Wells's critiques of bodily self-determination, this essay also explores the racially encoded dimension of female sovereignty as it emerged across the 1870s and 1880s in white feminist arguments. This article looks at that racial content through two means: first, the rhetoric of "new abolition" by which Willard and Woodhull lay claim to the moral authority of abolitionists a generation before, even as they recalibrate those arguments to win the emancipation of the specifically white female body. Anna Julia Cooper repudiates this version of so-called "women's" emancipation and its tacit acceptance of economic exploitation and violence against black women. Second, the racial content of bodily self-determination is revealed in the specifically eugenic arguments that drove Woodhull and Willard's campaigns for white women's suffrage, sexual sovereignty, and safety. While Cooper and Wells adopt or reject eugenic arguments to different extents, both counter the racially charged notion of bodily self-determination with specifically economic appeals.

"New Abolition," (White) Bodily Sovereignty, and Violence against Black Women

Frances Willard served as president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union from 1879 to 1898. By 1881, Willard had persuaded the national WCTU to endorse women's suffrage. By 1883 departments of Hygiene and Heredity had been officially added to the program alongside departments such as Social Purity, Colored Work, Scientific Temperance Instruction, and the like. Her executive skills fashioned

temperance into a finely tuned philosophy of physical, mental, and moral well-being, and at the core of her philosophy was the belief that the well-being of "woman" stood in direct relationship to the well-being of the white race and the nation.[12] But as her writing shows, the term "woman" was carefully encoded as "white woman" and it was not simply—if such exclusions are ever simple—that the experience and oppression of women of color had been inadvertently "marginalized" or excluded in her feminist agenda, but rather that her vision of well-being necessitated a white supremacist structure of society.

Interestingly, both Willard and Victoria Woodhull used the popular rhetoric of "new abolitionism" to describe the emancipatory energies, which alone could bring the sovereign woman into being. Willard's ideal of sovereign womanhood, as stated in 1886, heralded a new epoch of chivalry and safety: the woman of the late nineteenth century could, like the knight-errant or the "circumnavigating" explorer, travel the world without threat of violence, and, like the knight-errant, she traveled with a mission in mind.[13] In 1895, Willard rallied her constituents to a "New Chivalry" at a global level, exhorting female temperance crusaders to defend other females in the name of "social purity." She called for female "knights of the new Chivalry," to defend the honor of "disadvantaged" women or prostitutes against the Contagious Disease Acts in Britain, legislation that subjected public prostitutes to the "outrage" of forced medical examinations to ensure "public hygiene." She then extended WCTU protection to the white prostitute population in U.S. cities, or those in less settled regions adjacent to industries like mining and lumber.[14]

Willard announced sovereignty as a fundamental principle: a woman's "personality"—meaning body and sexual parts—was "sacred to herself":

> Wherever the law makes it possible for any class of men to invade the personality of any class of women in the name of public safety, there these new abolitionists raise their white banner and fight to the death . . . there is one straight, sure path, and it leads to woman protected, honored, pure and regnant over her own person, purse and purposes of life.[15]

Significantly, to be "pure and regnant" over one's purse and purposes encoded *economic* as well as racial disparities into the sense of female "well-being." This is apparent in such handbook chapters as "How Do You Treat Your Laundress?" The temperance woman was more likely to have a laundress than to be one, and it was assumed that this laundress, implicitly Irish, was essential to the temperance woman's support and well-being. This very ideal of womanhood, therefore, implied a particular definition of bodily "well-being": a level of bodily health, political, sexual, social autonomy, and access to material resources that can only be sustained through the support and labor of others.

For Willard, to "reign" over one's purse, one must first be sovereign over one's body. Even in Willard's epoch of the new woman, some women still suffered violation. The temperance leader's rhetoric of new abolition and chivalry claimed the older, antislavery abolitionist discourse but encoded a shift in terms of who *required* protection, and who had to *provide* it. In reconfiguring "abolition" it is vital to note that Willard *disengaged* from the historical situation of black females.

Where one generation earlier, sympathy for the sexual vulnerability of the enslaved black female had driven reformist fiction and philanthropy, Willard's concerns seemed to exclude the hazards faced by post-emancipation black females.[16] Willard, who often declared herself the child of abolitionist parents, reworked the old chivalric-abolitionist formula in which the female reformer "emancipates" herself by working on behalf of the enslaved and sexually vulnerable black female. Yet, the females Willard's new abolitionists sought to protect were implicitly white. Thus, Frances Willard's ideal still mobilized a discourse of sexual violation and protection, but the "new abolitionist" trope disguised the aggressively white racial dimension of Willard's ideal.

Using a similar rhetoric of "new abolition," Victoria Woodhull invoked the rhetoric of slavery and emancipation to excoriate the sexual subjugation of wives. She argued against marriage and for a woman's right to sexual activity *outside* of marriage.[17] But in comparing marriage to slavery she refused any of the cross-race solidarity these comparisons forged one generation before: "Proportionally," she stated, "the instances of extreme cruelty in marriage are double what they were in slavery, and cover a much broader field, involving all the known

methods by which the body can be tortured and the heart crushed."[18]

When Willard and Woodhull rallied "new abolitionists," they pointedly marked their disconnection from the experience of black women. Black women of the 1880s and 1890s spoke out strongly on the continuing sexual violence against black women, condemning white men for "invading the personality" of "the class" of *black* women (to use Willard's euphemisms). In Willard and in Woodhull there is no acknowledgment of slavery's legacy, that is, no acknowledgement of continued assaults upon Willard's "emancipated" black countrywomen, assaults that black women such as Lottie Wilson Jackson, Ida B. Wells, Victoria Earle Matthews, and Anna Julia Cooper, consistently brought to the attention of white reformers.

Anna Julia Cooper, for instance, in her collection of essays entitled *A Voice from the South*, gave an eloquent assessment of the racial double standard instituted by Willard's "abolitionist" ideal.[19] In 1886, the same year Frances Willard declared women can "circumnavigate the globe alone, without danger of an uncivil word, much less of violence," black educator Anna Julia Cooper delivered her appraisal of contemporary womanhood. Her title, "Womanhood, A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of the Race" suggests that she too had a stake in connecting female sovereignty to the fate of the race. Like other tenuously "middle-class" black women of the Jim Crow era, Cooper was faced with increasingly violent conditions when traveling by train. Black clubwomen spoke directly on this subject and more obliquely on the daily threat of assault faced by less economically advantaged black females. Denouncing the *inability* of black women to travel safely within their own country, Cooper entered this "plea" on behalf of:

> the *Colored Girls* of the South—that large, bright promising fatally beautiful class . . . in the midst of
>
> pitfalls and snares, waylaid by the lower classes of white men, with no shelter, no protection.[20]

Arguing for an organized effort like the White Cross League in England "for the protection and elevation of our girls," Cooper remarked, "English girls are dispirited and crushed down by no such all-leveling prejudice as that supercilious caste spirit in America, which cynically assumes 'A Negro woman cannot be a lady.'" Cooper's address

pinpointed the greater vulnerability of black women relative to white women as the unmistakable token of a double standard implicit in the concepts of "Lady" and the ideal of bodily sovereignty.[21]

Cooper's point is illustrated aptly by the experience of black suffragist Lottie Wilson Jackson's appearance before the annual convention of the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1899. Jackson proposed a resolution that decent and safe accommodations be provided for black women traveling by train; her resolution was tabled by the majority of white delegates, and Susan B. Anthony excused the maneuver, saying it was not the organization's place to interfere in "local customs" nor could the "helpless, disenfranchised class" of woman seek to affect railroad corporations by resolution.[22]

Cooper often shared with the likes of Frances Willard key suppositions concerning femininity, civilization, and progress, and in one essay she offered high praise for the moral mission of the WCTU and women's special role in making the world home-like. But these sentiments were accompanied by severe criticism. Cooper singled out white women's politics for ridicule:

> Lately a great national and international movement characteristic of this age and country, a movement based on the inherent right of every soul to its own highest development, I mean the movement making for Woman's full, free, and complete emancipation, has, after much courting, obtained the gracious smile of the southern woman—I beg her pardon—the Southern *lady* . . .. she must not, in any organization she may deign to grace with her presence, be asked to associate with "these people who were once her slaves."[23]

Cooper deflated the contemporary fracas over "social equality with the negro," deeming it a disingenuous inversion of the history of violence she had just recounted: "I might add that the overtures for association in the past history of these two races were not made by the manacled black man, *nor by the silent and suffering black woman!*"[24] In this essay and others in the volume, Cooper's comments on white women's political culture stressed the disparate standards of "womanhood" and bodily self-determination for white and black females. While the body of one was

legally protected, that of the other was legally violated.

It is the intersection between institutional racism and white women's progressive associations and their suppressive impact on an incipient black feminism that Cooper continually attacked in her essays. Cooper used a political metaphor to describe the race and class stratification of "women's sphere":

> Shop girls and serving maids, cashiers and accountant clerks, scribblers and drummers, whether wage earner, salaried toiler, or proprietress . . . the working women of America in whatever station or calling they may be found, are subjects, officers, or rulers of a strong centralized government bound together by a system of codes and countersigns which, though unwritten, forms a network of perfect subordination.[25]

Here, working women comprised a well-ordered state, a nation unto themselves in which a few *female* rulers, "queens of the drawing room," dictated what Cooper called the "law of caste," which sustained a "network of perfect subordination." Despite white women's attempts at segregated politics, Cooper argued, all women were already bound in a highly politicized collective, a nation that set the standard for the larger nation. Thus, this system of racist "codes and countersigns" by which elite white women ruled the social register had important ramifications in every sector and at every level of society. [26]

That Cooper saw white women's political organizations as chief enforcers of this law of "caste" suggests the struggle for white woman's bodily sovereignty dictated a lesser standard of well-being for those around her. Cooper said as much when she enumerated the "network of perfect subordination" that bound all "shop girls" to the *sovereign* "queen of the drawing room," and when she linked segregated politics to the physical assault of black women. Cooper's acid critique held that in order to sustain the level of "well-being" essential to the white woman's sovereignty—privacy, honor, protection, wealth—the white woman had traditionally required a cast of numerous supporting persons who were exploited in various ways.

According to Cooper, therefore, the racism of white women's political practice in the 1890s was not simply a matter of segregated organizing. The "new abolition" elevated white bodily sovereignty and

simultaneously masked deliberate racist maneuvering in political philosophy as well as practice. This is important because white women's organizations saw that to achieve political power, women could not merely be "pure and protected," they had to be seen to be indispensable protectors of the nation in their own right. White women legitimated their quest for power and autonomy by proclaiming their unique ability to protect the nation against the "rapid multiplication" of "dark-faced mobs," the black and foreign populations whose very presence and potential economic and political power seemed to threaten white supremacy itself.

The theory and activism of black feminists can and should be seen in the context of this eugenic thought and nationalism shaping white women's arguments during this period. The following sections focus on how Victoria Woodhull framed her eugenic arguments for women's independence in order to show how Anna Julia Cooper counters the eugenic conception of "race" with an economic one. The essay then moves to a discussion of the eugenic and imperialist notions of white bodily sovereignty latent in the debates over lynching, notions which Ida B. Wells addressed head-on.

Degeneration of the Race in Victoria Woodhull

Like Frances Willard, Victoria Woodhull developed her model of proper womanhood within a white supremacist context, drawing on the language of hereditary science and social reform. Woodhull had an uneasy relationship with white suffrage and temperance organizations, and her own publication, the *Woodhull and Claflin Weekly*, constantly aligned her with the radical causes of her day. She published America's first English language translation of the *Communist Manifesto* and took strong stands on women's economic independence.[27] She drew the most fire, however, for her campaign against the "social evil" of legal marriage and her support for individual sovereignty in sex. Her doctrine of promiscuity or "free love" was derided by other white supporters of "women's rights." And yet, Woodhull's eugenic arguments press a theme familiar to white temperance workers and suffragists alike: white women's bodily sovereignty could maintain national sovereignty and racial supremacy. Victoria Woodhull understood that eugenic thought could offer powerful rhetorical tools in the fight for the empowerment of white women. For instance, Woodhull and other reformers of the period

including Willard, grabbed hold of the notion that the *female* citizen, like the "female cell" sought by some geneticists, held the key to conserving the "race" against the threat of degeneration.[28]

In 1874, Woodhull published a lengthy "oration," which inaugurated her campaign *against* marriage *in favor of* more pleasurable sex. She argued that freedoms for women meant improvements in the race: "Women cannot bear their *best* children except by the men they love best and for whom they have the keenest desire."[29] Woodhull maintained that the selection between proper and improper sex had to remain in the realm of the woman's individual judgment; marriage laws and the stigma of immorality had to be abolished and the matter "remanded back from law, back from public interference, to individuals, who alone have the sovereignty over it." Woodhull insists that "to woman, by nature, belongs the right of sexual determination."[30]

During the 1870s and early 1880s, Woodhull steadily built her case that any threat to women's sovereignty threatened the nation as a whole. If women were not free to choose their partners and to choose them well, the entire genetic material of the nation would be damaged. By 1888, Woodhull had become stridently nationalist in tone, condemning marriage law and women's poor sexual selections as *crimes* against the nation.[31] In 1891, she maintained that legal marriage, women's economic dependence, and exploitative industrial and urban conditions all infringed on white women's sexual self-determination and, therefore, promoted the "rapid multiplication of the unfit."[32] Woodhull focused her concern on eliminating the "unfit" *within* the white race.[33] She argued that the physical strength of the white population, not that population's size, would ensure commercial and racial dominance in the face of rapid population growth in India and China.[34]

For Victoria Woodhull, the "individual sovereignty" of the white female body was an economic, political, reproductive, and sexual program. That program was essential to racial and national wellbeing. Woodhull combined her forthrightly eugenic feminism with a socialist critique.[35] As a result, her racist program may seem paradoxically quite "progressive." Her racism promoted a platform of progressive economic changes and white women's bodily and political rights. She argued for equal distribution of wealth, improved living and working conditions, sex education, and, above all, for increased financial and sexual opportunities for "fit" females—that is, white females unaffected by the

"fatigue poisons" of the work place. She did not argue for restrictions on "unfit" whites or other races; she did not advocate imperialist military control of the "vast hordes" multiplying in the nonwhite world, she did not, to my knowledge, openly advocate lynching, nor did she insist on population controls that would regulate reproductive behavior. Yet, her program for the increased "freedom," well-being, and sexual self-determination of white women was simultaneously an argument for white supremacy: the betterment of white women would stave off the decline of Western civilization.

While it is beyond the scope of this essay to demonstrate this same eugenic argument at work across the body of Willard's writing, the eugenic feminism Woodhull was crafting existed as a submerged but no less powerful agenda in Willard's WCTU handbooks. Victoria Woodhull's embrace of eugenics as a nationalist imperative, like Frances Willard's eugenic engagements and her tacit approval of lynching as a necessity of empire, represented the core of their political analyses, not simply racist blind spots in otherwise "progressive" feminist agendas. White women, the argument went, could only reform and reproduce effectively for the benefit of the nation and race if they had complete and "sovereign power" over their bodies. Therefore, any threat to white women's sovereign power was tantamount to a threat against the nation and the white race itself.

Thus, in Frances Willard and Victoria Woodhull, female sovereignty, the basis of their feminism, was itself a racial concept. Their arguments for bodily rights were inseparable from doctrines of white supremacy. What is more, those bodily rights were predicated on certain class structure and a racially divided arrangement of society.

Degeneration vs. Depreciation: Cooper's Economic Response to Eugenic Feminism

As many white feminists like Victoria Woodhull were equating bodily sovereignty and "well-being" with white dominance at home and abroad, Anna Julia Cooper worked to create a different standard of well-being, a standard that countered some of these eugenic notions while embracing others. Cooper did this by direct engagement with African-Americans' status as economic commodities, consumers and producers. She shrewdly points the reader to the market as a means of

reconceiving racial "value" and arguments for women's political power.

A particularly provocative essay in this context is Cooper's 1892 "What are We Worth?"[36] Though it has gone unremarked, this essay makes direct response to the highly influential tract on convicts and heredity by Richard L. Dugdale published in 1875: *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism and Heredity.* Attempting to document the inheritance of "criminal tendencies" over six generations, Dugdale computed what the Jukes family and their degenerate stock had cost the state of New York in assistance, medical costs, arrests, and confinement over the generations.[37]

Cooper performs a clever appropriation of Dugdale's themes. She uses the study of generations to give authority to the study of history itself and to dismiss hereditary factors. She changes the rhetorical ground from a study of genetic "germs" or (implicity genetic) "seeds" to a study of the soil and those who own it. With this new emphasis on the American environment, in particular the behavior of Southern landowners, she foregrounds the impact of historical conditions on African-American achievement. Dismissing claims to inferior racial stock—"original timber as it came from African forests was good enough"—Cooper argues these materials have undergone poor cultivation and conditioning on American soil.[38] "There is no doubt that in the past two hundred and fifty years of working up, the material we now inherit has *depreciated* rather than enhanced its value."[39] The shift from "degeneration" to "depreciation" is crucial, because labor and investment, not genetic material, will be central to her redefinition of human value.

Cooper's calculation of racial value "may be made in the same way and on the same principle that we would estimate the value of any commodity on the market."[40] The appropriate questions about race in an urban wage-labor economy are: "What have you produced? What consumed? What is your real value in the world economy? How are you supplying the great demands of the world's market? This we may be sure, will be the final test by which the colored man in America will one day be judged."[41] In parody of Dugdale's study, she figures the value of the labor or workmanship invested when transforming human "raw material" into a finished contributing worker. She diminishes the value of the hereditary "raw material" to almost nil. A newborn infant is, by these calculations, worth little. Only the labor

expended on crafting the child, and specifically the mother's labor, creates the child's value.[42]

Cooper's "manufacture of men and women for the markets of the world," takes place first in the home, under the supervision of the female who presides there. Like her white contemporaries, Cooper is careful to assert women's control over reproduction. In contrast to eugenic discourse of Woodhull and Willard, however, sexual relations are neither a laboratory for the scientific propagation of the "race," nor is the home a eugenic citadel apart from the marketplace. Instead, the home becomes a foundry or small-scale manufacture where raw material is tooled for the future and where women have both economic and moral muscle, positioned as they are as managers and engineers. Women are at the foundation of the national well-being because of the quality of their work, not their race. Reproduction is still women's central contribution but its meaning extends to all forms of education. Women's "reproduction" is chiefly an economic contribution to the wealth of the whole nation, not a genetic contribution to a nation divided by race.

In these revised terms, Cooper casts black bodies as commodities that have a collective value and collective expense:

> The number spoiled in the making necessarily adds to the cost of those who survive . . . If thirty-five colored persons out of every thousand are, from any cause whatever, lost in the making, the remaining nine hundred and sixty-five will have to share the loss among them . . . The colored gentleman who . . . lives in luxury is made to feel the death gasps of every squalid denizen of the alley and poor-house. . . . What our men of means need to do then is to devote their money, their
>
> enlightened interest, their careful attention to the improvement of sanitation among the poor.[43]

The bent of Cooper's argument is quite similar to Victoria Woodhull's—the poor health conditions of industrialized, urbanized populations are decreasing the collective "value" of the "race."[44] But where Woodhull spoke of *degeneration*, which posed a threat to white race dominance and national sovereignty, Cooper spoke of *depreciation*,

which affected the prospects and prosperity of all. Cooper's argument offered an economic motivation for cross-racial solidarity and women's advancement.[45] Her metaphors worked to stress the *interconnectedness* of men, women, and all races, not the sovereignty and supremacy of some persons over others.

As I've argued elsewhere, while Cooper deftly counters key eugenic concepts embedded in bodily sovereignty, she does not move entirely free of eugenic premises, and some of her essays reinforce those premises.[46] Throughout her essays, however, Cooper's emphasis on the power of white women's political organizations, on the racial double standard for economic and physical "well-being," and on the economic power of African-Americans provide the context in which to consider Ida B. Wells's ingenious use of those same core themes.

Bodily Sovereignty and the Crusade Against Lynching

Ida B. Wells's campaign against lynching provoked a dispute over the nature of black and white womanhood in both England and the United States. In the context of nineteenth-century women's organizations, the "lynching question" became an earnest contest over *which* bodies will be deemed sovereign, that is, which will receive protection by law and the benefits of civil society and which would not.

Wells organized against lynching on the national level in 1892, working with Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Mary Church Terrell, and other black women journalists and educators. This antilynching campaign galvanized new federations of black women's clubs and church-sponsored associations, transforming local groups into a national force engaged on many fronts.[47] In 1895 Wells published a personal attack on Frances Willard and the Women's Christian Temperance Union in *A Red Record: Lynching in the United States*. Her chapter on Willard reprinted interviews and conference proceedings spanning the years 1890–94 in order to demonstrate that Willard had "gone out of her way to antagonize the [antilynching] cause."[48] With this publication, Wells challenged Willard and underscored the racial meanings inherent in bodily sovereignty.

As a black feminist, militant publicist, and organizer committed to urban and working-class needs, Ida B. Wells's career and her writing spanned several decades. Though many academic discussions of Wells focus solely on her work during the time of the antilynching campaign,

Wells's years of organizing included work on anti-Negro laws, black education and urban unemployment, and black female suffrage.

Wells's early columns, diaries, and the writing of mature years, as well as her lynching analysis should all be rethought in terms of the eugenic preoccupation of her time. As a journalist, avid reader, and public intellectual, she would have followed eugenic arguments as they were reported in the white and black press, including the eugenic debates among associates such as Cooper, T. Thomas Fortune, and DuBois. Despite the fact that she does not name and argue against specific eugenicists directly in the way Cooper does, Wells's work is pointed in its attack on basic eugenic premises.

Just as one cannot see Wells's work in isolation from these eugenic debates, one cannot see her work apart from the eugenic dimensions of white feminist discourse. Wells worked with white feminists and watched their careers; she was familiar with bodily sovereignty claims, and she paid attention when Frances Willard marshaled them against the black vote and in defense of lynching.

In 1890, upon returning from the WCTU annual convention held in Atlanta, Georgia, the first time a southern state had hosted the national meeting, Frances Willard gave an interview to the *New York Voice*, a temperance publication. In the interview, Willard described her impressions of the South and spoke of voting rights for black men. Her position echoed that of the newly reconciled National American Women's Suffrage Association—namely, that white women should be granted the vote in order to maintain white rule.[49] Willard had advocated the vote for women since 1876, but she put this radical notion before her conservative constituency as the "home protection ballot." Her artful semantic maneuver was meant to demonstrate that women's vote was by no means a threat to the established order, instead, the ballot was a "weapon of protection" against other threats entirely. Even in her first statement on the vote, Willard was precise about those threats: the "tyranny of drink" and "infidel foreign populations."[50]

By 1890, Willard was working steadily to pass woman suffrage planks in both the Farmer's Alliance and the Prohibition Party.[51] But in the 1890 interview, Willard avoided direct comment on the ballot for women and instead developed an argument for white voting supremacy. She effectively united white women and voting white males, North and South, in an inclusive white "we": "we have wronged

ourselves," she stated, by granting the ballot to the "unreasoning and unreasonable" "dark-faced mobs" of the South and the "alien" illiterates who "rule our [northern] cities today; the saloon is their palace, and the toddy stick their scepter":

> The Anglo-Saxon race will never submit to be dominated by the Negro so long as his altitude reaches no higher . . . than the saloon. . . . Half-drunken white roughs murder them at the polls, or intimidate them so that they do not vote. But the better class of people must not be blamed for this, and a more thoroughly American population than the Christian people of the South does not exist. They have the traditions, the kindness, the probity, the courage of our forefathers. The problem on their hands is immeasurable. [52]

According to Willard, "Christian Southerner," "thoroughly American" and "Anglo-Saxon" are synonymous terms. Despite the chaos provoked by the upstart Negro and the response of white roughs, this "better class" of people marshal a fortitude reminiscent of "*our* forefathers," the ones who, presumably, also built a nation in the face of lawlessness and violence, that is, in the face of a frontier populated by American Indians.[53]

The Anglo-Saxon race and American nation face not only black and foreign-born illiteracy and drunkenness, but also their "rapid multiplication." Implicitly and syntactically, rapid multiplication is connected to excessive appetites for sex and alcohol:

> The colored race multiplies like the locusts of Egypt. The grog-shop is its center of power. "The safety of woman, of childhood, of the home, is menaced in a thousand localities at this moment, so that the men dare not go beyond the sight of their own roof-tree." How little we know of all this, seated in comfort and affluence here at the North, descanting upon the rights of every man to cast one vote and have it fairly counted. [54]

The risk to the Anglo-Saxon race and nation posed by black appetites culminates in the certain violation of "woman, of childhood, of the home," and Willard's remarks situate the civilized North as imperial

center and the unruly South as colonial outpost. In doing so, Willard invoked a time-honored distinction between what was permissible under the sway of an orderly metropolis and what is permissible in the outlying regions, the frontiers or the colonies. Willard implied that lynching, or murder at the polls, was a necessity of empire.[55] Meanwhile by deriding these "mobs" of nonwhite men, she designated temperate, literate, middle-class white females superior candidates for the franchise. [56]

For all these reasons, when Willard's *New York Voice* interview on the black male franchise appeared in 1890, it produced an outcry from the black press, an outcry that Wells, as secretary of the National Press Association and editor and co-owner of the Memphis *Free Speech* well remembered.

Though Wells grew to be a determined critic of the version of white female honor and of white civilization that Willard espoused, Wells's work retained both "honor" and "civilization" as operating concepts.[57] Wells's girlhood diaries and first news columns demonstrate her early investment in the "uplift" model of black womanhood. In "Woman's Mission," she argues that black women's fidelity to the bourgeois code of respectable behavior would spur race progress and improve the status of African-Americans in the United States Female moral bearing would assist African-Americans "to attain a level in the status of civilized races."[58]

This dominant notion of "race progress" was reinforced consistently in Wells's own life, and her 1887 diary reflects this. Here, she indicates that the defense of women's moral reputation could justify almost anything. She records an incident in which a boy who boasted of his adulterous liaison with a woman in the community was killed by the woman's brother. Wells writes:

> It seems awful to take a human life but hardly more so than to take a woman's reputation and make it the jest and byword of the street. One is strongly tempted to say his killing was justifiable.[59]

Because this sentiment condones the type of "justifiable" killing that Wells will condemn so harshly five years later, the diary entry gives one pause. For Wells, the most grievous offense here is the public and verbal attack on a woman's sexual reputation.

But in 1892, Wells' proximity to the lynching of three Memphis grocery owners and threats on her own life forced her to reexamine her faith in race advancement through bourgeois codes of good behavior.

Wells's investigation of this lynching and others to come revealed the collaboration of local institutions in lynching events, and her evidence revealed repressive economic and political energies operating behind the smoke screen of vigilante justice: lynching was not a check on black "degeneracy" but on black advancement and success. Often carried out in conjunction with mass arrests and the looting and destruction of black-owned businesses or homes, lynching was an obvious attempt to buy or squelch the black vote, restrict black business, and ensure black consumers for white goods and services.[60]

Her work increasingly embeds these economic findings within longer historical accounts of American race relations. In "How Enfranchisement Stops Lynchings," Wells defines African-Americans as "wealth producers." She contrasts the early British settlers' relative inefficiency with the undeniable productivity of enslaved Africans, workers who "created vast wealth for the masters and made the United States one of the mighty nations of the earth." After emancipation, however, blacks' increasing economic success and model behavior led only to increased violence against them:

> But the more lands and houses he acquired . . . the less protection is given. . . . The more complete the disenfranchisement, the more frequent and horrible has been the hangings, shootings, and burnings.[61]

To demonstrate that the violence bore no connection to black behavior was to expose the discourse of black degeneracy as a sham. Wells here designates black *economic production* and the struggle to control that production—not a struggle to control Negro degeneracy—as the motive for lynching terror.

As a consequence, Wells fashioned a campaign that encouraged economic retaliation. Wells made of herself a news event and used that media access to encourage economic retaliation. Following the 1892 lynching in Memphis, she used her position as editor and part-owner of the Memphis *Free Speech* to convert a committed readership into an activist, economic block. Her editorials endorsed what amounted to an economic pullout from Memphis. She urged black citizens of Memphis

to boycott the streetcar lines and to "save our money and leave a town which . . . takes us out and murders us in cold blood when accused by white persons." [62]

So too, Wells's two extended lecture tours through Scotland and England asked British business opinion to do the work black economic power could not do alone. On her second lecture tour, Wells served as a correspondent to the Chicago *Inter-Ocean*. Understanding the dependence of U.S. exporters on British industry, she began her reports with a discussion of the manufacturing interest of Liverpool or Manchester before detailing the success of the antilynching campaign in that vicinity. [63]

Her pamphlets, articles, and eventually her autobiography all reprint items in the London press that denounce lynching for commercial reasons. Wells counted as a great victory the fact that even the *London Times*, a daily that launched the most "bitter attacks" against Wells's work, acknowledged the southern states were poor prospects for British investment:

> Without in any way countenancing the impertinence of the "anti-lynching" committee, we may say that a state of things in which the killing of Negroes by blood-thirsty mobs is an incident of not unfrequent occurrence is not conducive to success in industry. [64]

Certainly Wells's lectures relied upon the magnificent British appetite for civilizing missions. By exposing "barbarity" in the United States, Wells offered up a new mission field to the reformers. But beyond *moral* indignation, her tours gathered the support of leading British newspapers and pointed to the potential for economic pressure that could move white U.S. audiences to receive her lectures and analysis.

To foreground the economic and political suppression that motivated lynching in this way, Wells's had to first defuse the volatile sexual myths and justifications that excused lynching. She focused on lynching's wholesale attack on black manhood as well as its double messages concerning female sexuality and bodily sovereignty for white women and for black. Indeed, her 1894 analysis in *A Red Record* argued that lynching ritual supported the "outrage" to black or "colored" girls and women while purportedly protecting white women from similar assaults. This conviction was no doubt deepened as a result of her travels

in England, which featured several exchanges with the moral standard-bearer for "white womanhood," Frances Willard.

When Wells began her antilynching lectures in Britain in 1893, her trip coincided with Frances Willard's stay in London. Willard had become a popular figure in Britain; she was regarded as the moral leader of her nation and her lectures drew large crowds. The British audience, shocked by Wells's presentation of lynching facts and statistics, quizzed her as to the attitude of Frances Willard, "The Uncrowned Queen of American Democracy." Wells could at that time offer no documentation, saying only that the silence of Willard's organization enabled lynching, and Willard's 1890 interview had condoned it. [65]

When Wells returned for a second lecture tour the following year, she carried Willard's 1890 interview with her and printed it in *Fraternity*, the paper of Britain's first Anti-Lynching Society, a group Wells had helped establish on her first tour in 1893. Willard had remained in London during the interim and was still the guest of Lady Henry Somerset when the issue of *Fraternity* appeared in May 1894. Somerset tried unsuccessfully to suppress the issue, even threatening to prevent Wells from receiving any speaking engagements should the issue appear. The day immediately following *Fraternity*'s publication, the *Westminster Gazette*, the "leading" London afternoon daily, carried Willard's response. In an interview conducted by her British host, Lady Henry Somerset, Willard explained that her 1890 statements had to do with the ballot, not lynching; she then proceeded to reiterate elements of that 1890 interview verbatim, a tactic that merely reinforced her earlier pronouncements.

In the *Gazette*, Willard for the first time publicly denounced execution without due process of law; however, she also straightforwardly connected American lynching with frontier necessity and British imperialist strategies. She thereby made plain the connection between lynching, empire, and white rule that existed by implication only in her 1890 statements on the ballot:

> I do not think [these outrages] originated [in the Southern states] but rather on the borders as we called it between civilization and savagery in the far West; nor do I think these methods are by any means confined to my own country . . . in the early history of Australia and in the gold fields of Africa, as in the gold and silver mines

> of the Rockies and Sierras, the people constituted themselves both judge and jury, and woe betide the offender who violated the rough standards of conduct. . . It is difficult for those who hear these things, to understand that they are dealing with sixty-five millions of people scattered over a continent, and it is really much the same as though London was being held responsible for outrages in Bulgaria.

Willard dismisses lynching as an uncouth trapping of America's colonial past. Yet her comparison calls attention to the United States' emergence as an imperial power in such a way as to suggest lynching is not merely a passing custom but rather an ongoing necessity of empire. Somerset endorsed the imperial comparisons, excusing Willard's objections to one man one vote by reminding London readers "that the English refuse practically all participation in the Government to the native races in India. . . . In short, we draw far more distinctly the color-line." The interview concluded with Willard's warm expectation that her British audience "may be trusted to guard my reputation" in the face of Wells's accusations.

Ida B. Wells offered a rebuttal in the next day's *Gazette*. She was quick to note that Willard's concern for reputation took precedence over the wanton racial violence that her comments endorsed. Wells added that it was hypocrisy to bemoan the drinking of southern black men when "there is not a single colored woman admitted to the Southern WCTU." She concluded:

> The fact is, Miss Willard is no better or worse than the great bulk of white Americans on the Negro questions. They are all afraid to speak out, and it is only British public opinion which will move them, as I am thankful to see it has already begun to move Miss Willard. [66]

In this London forum, Wells was most generous in her explanation for "Miss Willard's Attitude"; she blamed a "fear of speaking out" and Willard's desire to guard her "reputation." Wells was keenly aware, however, that while perhaps no better or worse than the "great bulk" of white Americans, Willard's opinions were far more influential than most.

In *A Red Record*, printed in Chicago the following year and distributed nationally, Wells provided a much keener critique of the power of white women's speech and the place of white female sexuality, honor, and reputation in the "rapine, shooting, hanging and burning" of black Americans.[67] Wells's lengthy analysis was the first of its kind, using press accounts and statistics gathered by *white* newspapers to expose the motives behind mob violence.

To make her case, Wells had to debunk and literally reconstruct the sexual narrative inscribed on lynched bodies. She refuted the "threadbare lie" that black men rape white women, and she thereby dismissed the cover story that excused white male violence as a form of chivalrous defense of women's honor. For evidence debunking the rape charge against black men, she pointed to the news record. For evidence refuting the chivalry of white men, she pointed to the record of socially sanctioned violence against black women, or what Wells called "the record, written in the faces of the million mulattoes in the South." Reading this record correctly, no one "will for a minute conceive that the southern white man had a very chivalrous regard for the honor due the women of his own race or respect for the womanhood which circumstances placed in his power."[68]

For Wells, the existence of the mulatto population was an index to slave rape by white slaveholders and the continued post-Emancipation abuses against black women. In her autobiography, Wells discusses the calculated effect of introducing black female experience into the lynching debate:

> All my life I had known that such conditions were accepted as a matter of course. I found that this rape of helpless Negro girls and women, which began in slavery days, *still continued without let or hindrance, check or reproof* from church, state, or press until there had been created this race within a race--and all designated by the inclusive term of "colored." I also found that what the white man of the South practiced as all right for himself, he assumed to be unthinkable in white women.[69]

Wells here directly targets the eugenic discourse of degeneracy and rapid multiplication. A history of white men's coercion, not of black female (or male) degeneracy has multiplied the "colored" race--"a race

within a race." To put this most provocative point another way, *white* male degeneracy is to blame for "the rapid multiplication of the *Negro.*"

As described by Wells, the lynching scene does not tell a simple tale of social Darwinian aggression or of (white) civilization's impassioned struggle to mete out justice and protection in the face of barbarity. Nor is lynching a sign of the mayhem produced when degenerate elements of both races collide, when in Frances Willard's terms, "white roughs" meet "dark-faced mobs." Instead, in Wells's depiction, rape and lynching demonstrate carefully organized and executed routines of suppression. The (white) church, courts, businesses, newspapers, reform societies—all are in full (and not always tacit) support of racist violence. This is to say that white "degeneracy" and "rapid multiplication" are practices orchestrated and protected by so-called civil institutions. Rape and lynching of the black population is calculated suppression that enables the economic and political advancement of white elites.

Critics have discussed how Wells's rhetoric inverts the lexicon of "civilized and savage." But her analysis of "white savagery" and white racial violence actually unravels the eugenic discourse of degeneracy and regeneration. If whites are behaving like *savages* and like *savvy businessmen* at the same time, then white racist "savagery" is shown to be a time-worn business practice central to white civilization and white economic progress.

This is why Wells concludes that this kind of coordinated economic and political exploitation cannot be countered by a "civilized race" of black citizens. Bourgeois respectability on the part of African-Americans is simply irrelevant to the violence against them. Instead, violence must be met by an organized race of black "wealth producers": "By the right exercise of *his power as the industrial factor of the South*, the Afro-American can demand and secure his rights." For Wells, the "right exercise" of power means economic leverage used to force the accountability of so-called democratic institutions, especially the leverage of the boycott, but also the ballot and armed confrontation. In the last instance, rifles might protect and achieve what respectability could not.[70]

By pointing to the economic and political function of racial violence, and by bringing black female historical experience into clear view, Wells dramatically illustrates the extent to which current debates

on eugenics and American civilization were contingent on the erasure of black women's experience. The fact of ongoing systemic rape of black women did not enter the calculus for African-American race conservationists or amalgamationists. Among whites and far too many black men, race mixing was believed to be a lower-class phenomenon attributable to black women's low morals. As was the case with Willard and Woodhull, white female eugenists deliberately promoted this view.

When Wells called attention to the rape of black women, therefore; she not only exposed the behavior of white men, but that of white women also. The "faces of the million mulattoes of the South" were also an affront to the white female's vaunted reputation for virtue. Honor was dubious if virtue meant to blind oneself to unfaithful husbands and grandfathers, and purity was more dubious if purity meant "white" genealogies had to systematically suppress kinship with the brown offspring of slave abuse and incestuous rape. By leveling a rape charge against white men and denying the myth of the black rapist, Wells indicated white women had been tacit partners to the betrayal of their own marriage bonds. More importantly, she charged that white women harbored transgressive sexual desires themselves. Wells wrote:

> What I have said and what I now repeat . . . is, that colored men have been lynched for assault upon women, when the facts were plain that the relationship between the victim lynched and the alleged victim of his assault was voluntary, clandestine and illicit.[71]

Wells's pamphlet proceeded to back this up with examples of white women who recanted their initial testimony against innocent black lovers. Wells also offered evidence of white women who consented to "clandestine and illicit" relations with black men, yet later, when faced with exposure termed the liaison "rape" in order to protect themselves.[72] By linking the sanctioned abuse of black females and the transgressive desires of white females, Wells charged the lynching record with a new tension—that between the conflicting and competing constructions of white and black womanhood. This tension invested the lynched body with an entirely new and dangerous meaning—one which Frances Willard saw and refused.

While in London, Willard met Wells's challenge to white female honor obliquely. Yet, back on American turf, Willard raised Wells's

offense more directly, using her 1894 annual address before the national WCTU to do so. In that speech she scolded Wells for "statements" that were handicapping efforts to ban lynching, saying: "In the statements made by Miss Wells concerning white women having taken the initiative in *nameless acts between the races*, she has put an imputation upon half the white race in this country that is unjust."[73] Frances Willard's need to defend "half the white race" signaled that her primary allegiance was to her race. Defending *all* white women against this charge of sexual desire indicated how "white female purity," "bodily sovereignty," and "white supremacy" were intimately entwined in Willard's political program. Her words also highlighted the "irony" of a black woman charging a powerful white woman, the moral leader of her nation, with immorality.

Wells was present at this Cleveland convention, helping to prepare an antilynching resolution, which, in the wake of their London spat, Willard, had promised to back. Yet, following the insult of the president's annual address, Wells asked Willard to retract her remarks, and Willard sidestepped the issue. Wells stated:

> I had a private talk with Miss Willard and told her she had been unjust to me and the [anti-lynching] cause in her annual address, and asked that she correct the statement. . . . Her reply was that I must not blame her for her rhetorical expressions—that I had my way of expressing things and she had hers. I told her I most assuredly did blame her when those expressions were calculated to do such harm. . . . It is little less than criminal to apologize for the butchers today and tomorrow to repudiate the apology by declaring it a figure of speech.[74]

Wells accused the temperance leader of cunning rhetoric, calculated to do harm. Each orator knew that her own "figures of speech" were deeply rooted in a fight over female citizenship, race privilege, and political priorities. In this private conversation Willard parried Wells's anger by shifting political conflict into the register of proper speech. Wells's sharp rejoinder linked speech to power and violence, underscoring the power of a white woman's word, a significant sub-theme in *A Red Record*. Wells attributed the loss of a resolution against lynching to Willard's remarks at that convention. She wrote:

> A resolution against lynching was introduced. . . and then that great Christian body, which in its resolutions had expressed itself in opposition to the social amusement of card playing, athletic sports and promiscuous dancing; had protested against the licensing of saloons, inveighed against tobacco, pledged its allegiance to the Prohibition party, and thanked the Populist party in Kansas . . . wholly ignored the seven millions of colored people of this country whose plea was for a word of sympathy and support for the movement in their behalf. The resolution was not adopted, and the convention adjourned.[75]

Wells's litany of resolutions revealed her interest in the power of the white woman's speech as well as silence. That the debate between Wells and Willard received such careful attention in *A Red Record* pointed to the extent to which Wells was willing to expose the eugenic and imperialist premises latent in the white ideal of "female bodily sovereignty" and to count that feminist project as part of the red record of violence against black persons. In its place Wells's feminism conceived of a collective self-determination based in economic strength; that power alone could secure civil protections for the body.

A study of Victoria Woodhull, Frances Willard, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells indicates that it can, at the least, be deeply divisive and damaging for contemporary feminists to fight for an unexamined and a historical notion of sexual self-determination or bodily rights. We might gauge the contemporary relevance of Cooper and Wells's critique of bodily self-determination by examining, for instance, the extent to which society in general and feminist politics, in particular:

1) continue to promote a standard of autonomy and well-being for some that can only be sustained through the efforts of numerous supporting persons, persons who by nature of their supporting role are relegated to a lesser standard of health, wealth, and empowerment, and

2) continue to use an ideologically, culturally and racially bound notion of female "freedom" and "autonomy" to promote or excuse the economic, political, and military domination of populations at home and abroad.

While on the one hand, we must assess the white supremacist legacy borne in such theoretical concepts with care, on the other we must deliberately study and build from the theory and strategies of Cooper, Wells, and others who attempted to ground women's empowerment and social justice by other means.

Notes

1. Angela Davis, *Woman Race and Class* (New York: Random, 1981), 117.
2. Ida B. Wells remained an active and influential political figure well into the twentieth century. She married during the course of her career and hyphenated her professional name to indicate that change. Because the writing and organizing discussed here took place under the professional name Wells, the essay reflects that fact.
3. See Stephanie Athey, "Reproductive Health, Race and Technology: Political Fiction and Black Feminist Critiques, 1970s–1990s," SAGE *Race Relations Abstracts* 22.1 (February 1997): 5–29 on the continuing impact of racist and eugenic concepts of self-determination of the body on the fight for reproductive freedom. Historic alliances with the American eugenics movement still quite directly guide the population control agenda of Planned Parenthood International. These alliances indirectly promote a narrow focus on abortion rights in a battle against reproductive regulationthat should include contraceptive development and experimentation, prenatal care, infant mortality, sterilization abuse, surrogacy, the race- and class-based distribution of adoption, child care provision and domestic work, access to abortion, and punitive contraception in judicial sentencing. Also Loretta J. Ross, "African-American Women and Abortion: 1800–1970," in Stanlie M. James and Abena P. A. Busia, eds., *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Laurie Nsiah-Jefferson, "Reproductive Laws, Women of Color, and Low-Income Women," in Nadine Taub and Sherrill Cohen, eds., *Reproductive Laws for the 1990s* (Clifton, N. J.: Humana Press, 1989). On discrimination law, see Jennifer Wriggins, Marlee Kline, and Angela Harris on how racist foundations have weakened some feminist attempts to redress sexual coercion and sex discrimination in legal theory. Jennifer Wriggins, "Rape, Racism and the Law," *Harvard Women's Law Journal* 6,, (1983), 103–41; Marlee Kline, "Race, Racism and Feminist Legal Theory," *Harvard Women's Law Journal* 12 (1989), 115; Angela P. Harris, "Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory," *Stanford Law Review* 42, no. 3 (February 1990), 581–616.

4. I trace the engagement of early black and white feminisms with eugenic thought and look more deeply at the ramifications for contemporary feminist theory and action in Stephanie Athey, "Eugenic Feminisms in Late Nineteenth-Century America: Reading Race in Victoria Woodhull, Frances Willard, Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells," *Genders* 31 (Spring 2000) http://www.genders.org.
5. Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South, By a Black Woman from the South* (1892; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 86.
6. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 1993), 2.
7. Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).
8. Emilie Townes, *Womanist Hope, Womanist Justice* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 96.
9. See Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America,* 1848–1869 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Ellen Carol DuBois, "The Radicalism of the Woman Suffrage Movement, Stanton-Anthony Wing, 1867-1875," in Zillah Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979); Lani Rakow and Cheris Kramarae. *The Revolution in Words: Righting Women, 1868–1871* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873–1900* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Joseph Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status, Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966). See Nancie Caraway's critique of Ellen DuBois. She writes: "Indeed, DuBois poses the break with abolitionism as the prerequisite for the emergence of an authentic independent, women's movement in the U.S." in Nancie Caraway, *Segregated Sisterhood: Racism and the Politics of American Feminism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 244, footnote 95.
10. Joseph Gusfield's *Symbolic Crusade* offers an exception to this trend; he places the broadly conceived temperance movement within the context of late nineteenth-century racism and nativism.
11. Because acquired habits and behavior were believed to alter one's genetic constitution, both behavioral reform and sexual choices had a bearing on reproduction and the quality of the racial stock passed to the next generation.
12. Willard's biographer Ruth Bordin suggests Willard had committed her life to "the woman question" one year prior to the founding of the WCTU in 1874. Temperance provided the right national vehicle for her endeavors.
13. Frances Willard, "How to Win: A Book for Girls," in Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford, ed., *The Ideal of the "New Woman" According to the Woman's Christian Temperance Union* (New York: Garland, 1987), 48–9. A concept of chivalry and "New Chivalry" became important in her work years earlier when Willard was

president of Evanston College for Ladies in Chicago. Willard, *The New Chivalry,* speech given March 3, 1871, typescript.

14 See Bordin, *Woman and Temperance,* 110. Bordin cites the minutes of the 1888 convention, which demonstrate truly slave-like conditions for prostitutes adjacent to Wisconsin pineries. Dr. Kate Bushnell found girls "kept in stockaded dens guarded by bulldogs . . . law officers tracked down escapees, and in one instance a ball and chain was used to keep a girl from running away" (Bordin, *Woman and Temperance,* 141–42).

15. Frances Willard, "Do Everything: A Handbook for the World's White Ribboners" in Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford, ed., *The Ideal of the"'New Woman,"* 50, 101.

16. This change in white women's discourse of sexual violation and protection—but not the pattern of such violations—is a clue to the ongoing reconfiguration of white women's political strategy and its reconstruction of "race" in this period. In this scenario of protection, for instance, to describe *who requires* protection, Willard looked outside of the American context and pointed to British prostitution. In designating *protectors,* Willard hails temperance workers as "new abolitionists." Because the emancipation of "any class" leads to the emancipation of all *the end* to which such protection leads is to an ideal female sovereignty: "woman protected, honored, pure and regnant" over her body, finances, and life's work.

17 Woodhull did decry the British Contagious Disease Acts or "social evil bills" as an attack on prostitutes, but marriage received her harshest criticism. In a direct attack on the newly formed WCTU, which promoted the sanctity and security of marriage, she reinforced her argument for sexual self-determination as a eugenic project: "If all the women in the country were to join the temperance crusaders they might, for the time, decrease drunkenness; but the moment they should cease their efforts it would return. Now let these women go home and breed no more drunkards and the remedy will be effectual. And so of all other vices and crimes the temperance crusade, then, must begin in the home, in the marriage bed. (Woodhull, "Tried as by Fire; Or, the True and the False," in Madeleine B. Sterne, ed.,, *The Victoria Woodhull Reader* (Weston, Mass.: M & S Press, 1974); 29–30.

18. Woodhull, *Tried As By Fire,* 29–30.

19. Cooper, *A Voice from the South,*. 24–5.

20. Anna Julia Cooper, "Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of the Race," in Cooper, *A Voice from the South,* 24.

21. The lecture was delivered before the convocation of colored clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C., in 1886. Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice From the South,* 24–5.

22. Caraway, *Segregated Sisterhood,* 150.

23. Cooper, "Woman vs. The Indian," in Cooper, *A Voice from the South,* 86.

24. Ibid., 111.
25. Anna Julia Cooper, "Woman vs. The Indian."
26. Cooper spoke plainly about the violence to which black women were prey, and placed this contemporary state of affairs within a history of the violence against black and native peoples from the colonial period and through the Civil War. Thus, the heart of this essay on the racism of women's political and social culture is a history lesson on violence against African and Indian bodies alike.
27. Victoria Woodhull, *Woodhull and Claflin Weekly*, December 30, 1871; cited in "Introduction," Sterne, *The Victoria Woodhull Reader*.
28. In his 1891 article "The Present Problems in Heredity:" eugenicist Henry Fairfield Osborn describes the work of Professor Brooks of Johns Hopkins. Brooks "demonstrates the difference between female and male cells, the former as the conservative vehicles of [racial] characters, the latter as the progressive transmitters of the influences of environment and habit" (357). Just as the example of "sexed" cells shows science taking its cue from the gendered political culture and reformist work of the 1890s, so, too, reformers will enlist science to justify their program of social change. See, "The Present Problems in Heredity," *Atlantic Monthly* 67 (March 1891), 353–64.
29. Emphasis mine. Victoria C. Woodhull, "Tried as By Fire." 15, 24, 29, and 37.
30. Ibid., 15, 40.
31. Ibid., 26. Also see Victoria Woodhull, "Stirpiculture, or the Scientific Propagation of the Human Race," *Victoria Woodhull Reader*, 11.
32. This phrase is used throughout her writing and was common parlance of the time.
33. Woodhull's emphasis was in keeping with the late nineteenth-century shift from studies of "racial types" to an interest in studying trait diversity and variation within as well as among groups. She noted "there are often greater differences between individuals of the same race than between individuals of different races," owing to the great "differentiation of nervous system which separates man from man more effectually than geographic isolation in our modern civilization." (See Victoria C. Woodhull, "The Rapid Multiplication of the Unfit," in *Victoria Woodhull Reader*, 18–9). For a discussion of this shift see Lucius Outlaw, "Toward a Critical Theory of 'Race,' " in David Theo Goldberg, ed., *Anatomy of Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 64.
34 Victoria C. Woodhull, "The Rapid Multiplication, 18–9.
35. Ibid., 21.
36. Anna Julia Cooper, "What Are We Worth?" in Cooper, *A Voice from the South.*
37. Richard Dugdale, *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, and Heredity*, 4th ed. (New York: Putnam, 1910). A close look at Cooper's many- layered response to Dugdale takes place in Athey, "Eugenic Feminisms."
38. Cooper, "What Are We Worth?"236.
39 Ibid., 239.

40 Ibid., 233.
41 Ibid., 284.
42. Ibid., 241. Though using the rhetoric of factory production, Cooper was comparing the making of a human being to the making of a watch. By superimposing "craftsmanship" on mass-production, Cooper reintroduces the notion of "nurture" and education: "the safest and richest investment possible to man." By rendering education as craftsmanship, Cooper granted herself the latitude to promote all varieties of education and yet emphasized the highest levels of education. This is clever diplomacy in an era when Booker T. Washington's philosophy of industrial training was commanding the government's attention and money. Her argument allowed for Washington's views while fully supporting her own philosophy and reputation as principal of M Street High School in Washington, D.C. As Louise Daniel Hutchinson and others point out, Cooper sent a record number of her students on to the most prestigious universities in the states. See her *Anna Julia Cooper: A Voice from the South* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1981); and Mary Helen Washington, "Introduction," in Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, 33.
43. Cooper, "What Are We Worth?"
44. Anna Julia Cooper and Victoria Woodhull made similar arguments for racial solidarity. Woodhull put it like this: "Before we can be quite sure that centralization of wealth and industries is the direction of progress, the bodily degeneration caused in the production must be taken into account as a part of the cost against the value of the utility" (see Woodhull, "The Rapid Multiplication of the Unfit," 29). Where Woodhull argued for racial solidarity founded on the eugenics and woman's essential role in recombining and improving genetic material, Cooper rejected the genetic entirely and called upon the higher classes of blacks to reallocate and improve material resources and infrastructure of the poor.
45. This does not mean that Cooper succeeded in this egalitarian project. Mary Helen Washington, Hazel Carby, and Paula Giddings all commented on the elitism of black women's clubs in the nineteenth century. Washington critiqued Cooper in particular for talking *about* working-class black women and never *to* them as peers in struggle. See, Mary Helen Washington, "Introduction," Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*; and Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985).
46 Athey, "Eugenic Feminisms in Late Nineteenth-Century America."
47. See "Introduction," in Alfreda M. Duster, ed., *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). The classic early accounts of this division occur in Robert Allen, *Reluctant Reformers: Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974), 156–63; Giddings, *When and Where I Enter,*

Davis, *Women, Race and Class*; and bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston,: South End Press, 1981).

48. Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892-1893-1894* (Chicago,: Donohue and Henneberry, 1895), 80.

49. The NAWSA minutes from their 1893 convention read: "Resolved, that without expressing any opinion on the proper qualifications for voting, we call attention to the significant facts that in every State there are more women who can read and write than all negro [sic] voters; more American women who can read and write than all foreign voters; so that the enfranchisement of such women would settle the vexed question of rule by illiteracy whether of home-grown or foreign-born production." Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 124. See also reprints of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, "Revolution" in Lana Rakow and Cheris Kramarae, eds., *The Revolution in Words: Righting Women, 1868–1871*, especially section two, "Aristocracy of Sex." Also see Caraway, *Segregated Sisterhood*, 51.

50. Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 56, 57.

51. Jack S. Blocker, "The Politics of Reform: Populists, Prohibition, and Woman Suffrage, *1891–1892" Historian*, 34, no. 4 (1972), 614-32.

52. Frances Willard, interview, *New York Voice*, October 23, 1890.

53. The discourse of lynching needs to be studied in its relation to the Indian wars of the period. In justifying lynching as a frontier necessity, speakers would seem to be endorsing the genocidal push to close the "frontier" at the same time as they rewrite the South as settler colony putting down an "alien" population—not a population of black workers, teachers, journalists, and business people.

54. Willard, interview.

55. Townes, in *Womanist Hope, Womanist Justice*, discusses the Willard/Wells conflict as a quintessential case study in conflict between black and white womanist/feminist agendas. In *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*, Vron Ware recounts the hostile response Ida B. Wells provoked when she republished Frances Willard's 1890 New York *Voice* interview implying lynching was a national necessity (New York: Verso, 1992).

56. See Jack S. Blocker on early suffrage criticisms of the temperance movement: "Separate Paths: Suffragists and the Women's Temperance Crusade," *Signs*, 10, no. 3 (1985), 460–76. Her interview also quietly builds a case for temperance reform and women's "home protection ballot." As Willard outlined the intemperate appetites of the "dark-faced" and the foreign-born, their tendency to lust and liquor, the WCTU leader justifies the work of temperance women against these evils.

57. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells: An Intimate Portrait of the Activist as a Young Woman*, ed., Miriam DeCosta-Willis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 98.

58. Ibid., 180–82.
59. Ibid., 132.
60. Turn-of-the century lynching has been analyzed variously as a curb on black economic advancement, a means of control over agricultural labor, a community ritual, a re-enactment of myth, and the fevered assertion of white middle-class "manliness" through the literal and figurative emasculation of black males. These lynching analyses are all indebted to Wells who first analyzed the rape narrative in which the varied lynching agenda is encoded. See Angela Davis, *Woman Race and Class;* Davis, "The 'Weak' Race," 83–96; Robyn Weigman, "The Anatomy of Lynching," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 3 (1993): 445–69. For the intersection of economic and sexual factors in Wells, see Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood,* 107–20. Peter O. Peretti and Deborah Singletary, "A Theoretical-Historical Approach to Black Lynching," *Social Behavior and Personality,* 9, no. 2 (1981), 227–30; David M. Tucker, "Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching," in Darlene Hine, ed., *Black Women in United States History* 4 (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson, 1990), 1385–95; E. M. Beck and Stewan E. Tolnay, "A Season For Violence: The Lynching of Blacks and Labor Demand in the Agricultural Production Cycle in the American South," *International Review of Social History,* 37, no. 1 (1992), 1–24; Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1984); Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood;* Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Mind that Burns in Each Body: Women, Rape and Racial Violence," in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982), 328–49; Gail Bederman. " 'Civilization,' the Decline of Middle-Class Manliness. and the Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892–94" *Radical History Review,* 52 (1992), 15–30.
61. Quoted in Mildred Thompson, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett: An Exploratory Study of an American Black Woman 1893–1930* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990), 267–69.
62. Duster, *Crusade for Justice,* 52. Wells herself traveled to Oklahoma to send word via the *Free Speech* as to the opportunities available in the western territory. By one account, as many as two thousand may have left Memphis and at least two ministers packed up their entire congregations for the move to Oklahoma. See David M. Tucker, "'Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching," in Hine, *Black Women in United States History,* 1389.
63. See Wells' entries for Manchester and Liverpool especially, Duster, *Crusade,* 143.
64. Wells, *A Red Record,* 77.
65. Duster, *Crusade,* 202.
66. Lady Henry Somerset, "White and Black in America—An Interview with Miss Willard," *Westminster Gazette,* May 10, 1894; quoted in Wells-Barnett, *Crusade,* 204–9. Wells' reply, *Westminster Gazette,* May 21, 1894; *A Red Record,* 85.
67. Wells, *A Red Record,* 84.

68. Ibid., 13.
69. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed., Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 70.
70. For "civilized/savage" rhetoric, see Simone Davis, "The 'Weak' Race," 83–96; Joanne M. Braxton, "Crusader for Justice: Ida B. Wells," in *African American Autobiography*, ed. William L. Andrews (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1993), 90–112; Gail Bederman, "'Civilization,' the Decline of Middle-Class Manliness, and the Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892–94," *Radical History Review* 52 (1992):15–30. Quoted material is in Wells-Barnett, "Southern Horrors," *On Lynchings: Southern Horrors, A Red Record, Mob Rule in New Orleans* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 28. Emphasis mine. Strategies for economic retaliation are discussed in Thompson *Wells-Barnett*, 180–81, 186; Wells, "Southern Horrors," 22–4; Wells, *Crusade*, 63.
71. Ibid., 81.
72. *A Red Record* gives examples in which a white woman later admits to "misrepresenting" the nature of the "rape" she charged, or halts a lynching on the spot by declaring herself in the wrong. *Southern Horrors,* published prior to *A Red Record* and without the mass of statistical data that appears in the later pamphlet, relies heavily on similar reports to debunk the myth of the black rapist. See Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors*, 9.
73. Ibid., 80.
74. Ibid., 89–90.
75. Wells, *A Red Record*, 87.

A Historical Overview of Poverty among Blacks in Boston

1850–1990

Robert C. Hayden

Black Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Boston

Like most nineteenth-century residents of Boston, blacks worked hard to maintain their homes and families. Even before the Civil War, both enslaved and free blacks in "freedom's birthplace" worked long and arduous hours. Those who migrated to Boston from the South in the 1800s had come to secure higher wages, mobility, and opportunity for themselves and their families. Boston's black population grew from 2,000 in 1850 to 8,125 in 1890, and to 11,591 by 1900. In 1900, 39 percent of black Bostonians were northern-born (New England, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania), and 53 percent were southern-born.[1]

Residential segregation for nineteenth-century blacks in Boston was almost absolute. In fact, according to some accounts, Boston was the most segregated northern city in 1850, and by the late 1800s, ghetto conditions had increased. In 1890, only about 5 percent of black families owned a house, and expenditure of "hard-earned" money for rent left many black long-term workers poor in old age.

This high level of residential segregation led to crowded living quarters, which in turn affected health conditions for blacks. Diseases such as cholera, tuberculosis, and pneumonia spread more easily in densely populated areas. Vital records indicated that in 1890 there were

31 deaths for every 1,000 black residents, compared to 24 for every 1,000 whites. At the end of the nineteenth century, the infant mortality rate was 200 per 1,000 live births among blacks, compared to 189 per 1,000 for whites.

Two economic measures, per capita wealth and the percentage of workers in the lowest-paying jobs, illustrate the status of blacks in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1860, when the average per capita wealth of blacks was $91, the average per capita wealth in the city was $872. For Irish immigrants it was $131. The per capita wealth of blacks in 1870 was 40 percent of that of Boston's Irish immigrants, and the per capita wealth of blacks was less than half of that for whites.

From 1850 to 1900, black men and women in Boston began their careers in menial jobs, and were generally limited to them. The menial jobs held by blacks offered low pay, irregular employment, and no occupational advancement. Forty-five percent of all employed first generation black males were in menial jobs in 1850; 50 years later, 82 percent were in such jobs. Ninety-two percent of first-generation employed black females were in menial jobs in 1870 and 1900. Between 1860 and 1880, by comparison, 12 percent of native white Bostonians occupied low-paying manual jobs, and 27 percent of Boston's second-generation West European immigrants (non-Irish) occupied such jobs.

Despite the general negative economic situation for black Bostonians during the second half of the century, they were offered a range of protected civil rights by Massachusetts legislation. Moreover, a large number of blacks were elected to political office (24 between 1866 and 1898) compared to their counterparts in other northern cities. Yet over the last decades of the century, the black community experienced growing disadvantages in health, property ownership, and persistent inequality in occupational status and income.

An overview of Boston's early black community portrayed with only economic statistics is incomplete, however, because it overlooks the response of poor people to their conditions. Behind the hard statistics is a human system of survival—both formal and informal—to assist those with meager financial resources. Many households, for instance, included more than just family members. In the poor black community of Boston, for example, boarders provided a necessary additional income for the host. In 1850, about one-third of black households had boarders; ten years later, about 40 percent had boarders. Boarders included

unrelated individuals or families and adult members of the extended family, and were often new arrivals seeking employment. Married black women with no work outside the home provided washing, ironing, and cooking for boarders, offering informal support to those who had irregular employment. Taking in boarders was also a way for widows and single adult women with children to support themselves. And boarders did more than just pay rent; they also assisted with domestic chores and child care, thus allowing mothers to work to help support the family. In 1860, more than 45 percent of female-headed households had boarders, and about half of the female single adults and two-thirds of the male single adults were boarding.

In 1860, the four agencies in the city serving homeless children admitted only white children. Black children without shelter and parents were taken "off the streets" by both related and nonrelated families. Thus, poverty did not lead to social and community disorganization. Black families cooperated to provide for their community's basic needs in ways that public and private agencies did not.

In an increasingly harsh and competitive economic environment Boston's blacks went beyond family and household assistance to create institutions to serve their economic needs. The African Society, established in 1796 to abolish slavery, became a mutual aid and charitable organization. Members were assessed a twenty-five-cent entry fee and the same amount for monthly dues. It was difficult for the unskilled poor or the unemployed to participate, but they were not excluded. The Society functioned as a social welfare agency, providing financial relief, job placement, and insurance plans for burials. The Society was also concerned with the control of crime in the community. Individuals were not allowed membership, nor were they helped by the Society, if they did not meet the Society's expectation that they be clean and law-abiding. Black fraternal organizations such as the African Masonic Lodge and the Odd Fellows provided free firewood for the cold winters, sponsored food collections for the needy, and made loans to members facing financial crisis.

Being forced to remain in menial jobs was not the fate of all blacks in nineteenth-century Boston. While they were certainly less likely to own retail stores than European immigrants, blacks did have businesses. On a per capita basis, more black-owned businesses (barber shops, food stores, dry goods stores, and clothing stores) existed in

Boston than in most northern and southern cities. While the rate of failure and decline of these businesses from 1870 to 1900 was an important factor in the overall poverty of the community, their presence played a vital role, as described by historians James O. and Lois E. Horton:

> Since the services of Boston's financial community were not generally available to blacks, the community provided its own service. There were several grocery stores that became the finance agencies of the community. Services were generally provided in the form of credit, which was particularly important among people susceptible to irregular cash flow. Sometimes such credit made the difference between a family eating an evening meal or not. A few outright loans of cash were made. It is not clear whether interest was charged on these loans, but at the least, they promoted good will, fulfilled one's responsibility to the community, and encouraged loyal customers.[2]

Despite living in poverty, few blacks received public aid. Records of the "Overseer of the Poor" and census records show a small and declining number of blacks aided by city resources and facilities at mid-century: "At the poor house on Deer Island in 1850, for example, there were three blacks out of a total population of 328."[3] Between 1870 and 1900, despite the growing black population, few blacks entered the poorhouse.

Horton suggests that "the dramatic increase in immigrants seeking assistance severely taxed state and local relief capabilities, making it more difficult for blacks to be judged "deserving poor," and "eligible for relief."[4] Whatever the case, blacks provided their own social welfare and financial services. The Home for Aged Colored Women, founded by the black Twelfth Baptist Church in 1860, was still providing for women at the end of the nineteenth century. Most of these women had worked as domestics during their lifetime in Boston. For poor blacks in Boston in the nineteenth century, employment was the central issue. Newcomers and even the first- and second-generation blacks in Boston entered—and remained—in menial, low-paying jobs.

The First Half of the Twentieth Century

At the start of the twentieth century, one of Boston's leading black clergymen, the Reverend Reverdy Ransom, summed up the atmosphere for blacks in the city:

> Yes, there is race prejudice in Boston, plenty of it; but it is rarely ever brutal or violent in its manifestations, but where it appears it is nonetheless deadly and humiliating. The aloofness of manner, a politeness of speech and the kid glove handling of social and economic contacts, are under the surface, just as hard and unyielding as one finds in the solid South, in fact, one feels it more on the soil that was dedicated to freedom, than on the Southern soil that was dedicated to the institution of slavery.[5]

Whatever the impressions of Boston's black workers, there was hardly any change in the occupational status for black males in Boston from the late 1800s to 1940. Fifty-six percent were unskilled laborers, servants, waiters, and porters in 1900; 53 percent held such positions in 1940. While 8 percent held white-collar jobs in 1890, the percentage grew to only 11 percent by 1940. Blacks ranked far behind even first-generation immigrants in occupational distribution in 1890, 1910, and 1930. At each point, less than half as many blacks as first-generation immigrants held "middle-class" jobs, twice as many were unskilled or semiskilled laborers, and second-generation immigrants had a middle-class segment four times the size of the black middle class.

In 1940, six out of seven blacks worked in manual occupations. This fact is significant when we realize that the educational attainment for blacks and whites in the Boston school system was nearly identical, and the schooling was of high quality for all students. In fact, blacks had, on average, one year more of schooling than foreign-born whites in the city. Something more than a lack of public education was driving the majority of blacks into menial, unskilled jobs.

This lack of occupational mobility for blacks should be seen in the context of their population increase and the decline of southern black migration to the city. Boston's black population between 1900 and 1940 rose by 49 percent—from 11,591 in 1900 to 23,679 by 1940.[6] The steady growth rate of Boston's black community was not, however,

accompanied by any change in occupational distribution. Nor did the occupational patterns of European immigrants and blacks show any lessening of the disparity prevalent in the 1800s. In 1930, 46 percent of first-generation European immigrants were in low-paying manual jobs compared to 77 percent of blacks.

During the early years of the New Deal, a survey of the training and experience of black workers was planned as a Civic Works Administration project. The Boston Urban League was contracted to conduct the study for the city of Boston under the Emergency Relief Administration. The study was conducted between December 1934 and February 1936, and a final report was issued, titled *Report on the Survey of the Training and Employment of White Collar and Skilled Negro Workers, Boston, Massachusetts*. One purpose of the study was "to obtain statistical data relative to the training, experience and work status of white-collar and skilled Negro workers in Boston." The report began:

> It was further hoped that ultimately the economic status of the Negro in Boston would be improved as a result of this survey, by disclosing the facts about his educational and vocational background; that it might become the basis on which interested local parties may work for the proper integration of the Negro worker in Boston.[7]

The report continued:

> Consequently, when the 1930 Census swings around, we find that Boston's Negro working population approximates 11,000 men and women with over 50% of these in domestic and personal service, the lowest paying and most unstable occupational division. No considerable number of them appear in transportation, communication, or miscellaneous industry, where the middle-class of any racial group must have a fair proportion of workers if the group is not to face eternal poverty.[8]

The report indicated that while 37 percent of the total number of employable persons in Boston were either wholly unemployed or not fully employed, 49 percent of blacks were unemployed or underemployed.

Regarding "work trends," the Boston Urban League report concluded:

> The contents of this survey seem to indicate that the Boston Negro is constantly getting certain theoretical training and experience for higher grades of employment, but that his ability to secure placement commensurate with his training is not keeping pace. In other words, an increasing number of Negro men and women find themselves having to back up in blind alley jobs principally because there seems to be very little outlet for them. If this is purely a temporary situation, due chiefly to the present work crisis, then it merits no particular comment. On the other hand, there are indications that this is a normal experience for them in both good and bad times, and if this is true, then Boston faces the long time problem of adjusting the work opportunities of its Negro population, or carrying a permanently heavy relief load in this group.[9]

Two organizations addressing conditions for blacks had opened chapters in Boston—the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Urban League. While the NAACP was first and foremost a civil rights organization, its history during the early 1900s included establishing programs that aided the poor and addressed employment. In 1913, the Boston NAACP established an Industrial Opportunity Committee to deal with the high rate of unemployment and job discrimination. In 1917, it established a food cooperative for the needy. In 1937, the chapter protested the discriminatory employment practices of public utility and insurance companies. And in 1942, the local NAACP and Urban League chapters joined forces to gain employment for 33 blacks at the Raytheon Company in Boston.

The National Urban League, founded in New York City in 1911, had been established specifically to attack economic and related social issues caused by unemployment and underemployment facing blacks new to larger northern cities. Boston's Urban League raised local funds to support an effort to open new job opportunities for black migrants. The annual budget was meager at $3,000 in 1923.

Personal contact with individual employers was the Urban League's approach to fighting employment discrimination. In 1926, 1,253 blacks had applied through the League for jobs. In 1927, stimulated by "Negro In Industry Week," registrations by job seekers jumped to 4,290. Employers were influenced by the industrial campaign, and 1,157 jobs were found and filled, compared to 800 the year before. The campaign helped find employment for blacks as furniture finishers, glass blowers, and air compressor operators. In the late 1920s, after a painful struggle, the Boston Urban League succeeded in gaining jobs for blacks as elevator operators in downtown department stores.

During the 1940s, the League continued to concentrate on expanding job opportunities. One of the city's largest department stores employed fewer than six black persons in 1944, all in menial jobs. By 1950, it was employing blacks at all levels in 25 job classifications. In 1943, fewer than 12 blacks were employed by the telephone company; by 1950, the number had more than doubled, with black people employed as engineers, linemen, operators, and at every level of clerical work. The League negotiated with the Statler Hilton Hotel, the Gillette Company, and the Boston site of Ford Motor Company. Eight black men, some of them mechanics, were hired by Ford. The League's annual budget was $18,500 by 1950.

The 1940–70 period witnessed the most dramatic change ever in the occupational status for black males in Boston. The concentrations of black workers in laboring and service jobs dropped from 65 percent in 1940 to about 27 percent in 1970. A factor in the decline was the opportunity for semiskilled jobs associated with the World War II industry needs. With the flourishing wartime and postwar boom, one in four workers moved into higher-paying jobs. Between 1950 and 1970, the proportion of blacks in white-collar jobs increased from 5 percent to 11 percent.

Despite this great shift in the proportion of blacks employed in higher-level occupations during this period, the proportion of professional workers in the entire city tripled. While the racial gap seemed to be narrowing in occupational levels, the income gap between the races did not change. In 1970, as in 1950, black males in Boston earned less than three-quarters of what whites earned. In 1950, the median income for black males was only seven-tenths of the white median; this fell to six-tenths by 1960.

This seeming paradox was probably caused by the fact that blacks were moving into occupations where the racial gap in income was largest. Whatever the gains in the overall occupational status for blacks, income ratios did not change significantly. The dramatic increase in the college attendance and graduation rates of blacks in the Boston area's 23 institutions of higher education during the first 15 years of the modern civil rights movement undoubtedly contributed to the occupational gains of blacks in the 1960s. For example, at Boston University in 1955 there were approximately 50 black students in the entire institution; by 1962, the university's black freshman enrollment alone was approximately 250.

Income and Poverty Rate Characteristics: 1950–80

Median income data for black and white males and females, for black and white families headed by either a male or female, and for black and white individuals show a consistent and continuing gap between whites and blacks over the three decades between 1949 and 1979. At mid-century, according to the 1950 census report, the median income of persons for whom this information was obtained was $1,587 for blacks and $2,191 for whites. By gender, white males and females had higher median incomes than did black males and females. The white male median income was $2,796 compared to $2,011 for black males. White females had a median income of $1,999, and black females had a median income of $1,423.

In the 1960 census, the median income in Boston was $3,243; it was $2,369 for blacks. The difference between the white and black male median income had jumped from $785 in 1950 to $1,601 in 1960. In 1970, the median income for all families surveyed was $11,654. Yet, black families with a male head of household had a $6,740 median income and black families with a female head of household had a $3,887 median income. Single black males had a slightly higher median ($3,646) than the median for all single male individuals ($3,592). The percentage of blacks families at or below the poverty line in 1970 was 25.3 percent compared to 23.2 percent for whites. This relatively small gap can be attributed in part to the improved economic climate following World War II, as mentioned earlier. By 1979, 24.8 percent of black families were below the line compared to only 11.1 percent of white families. The overall pattern of disparity between blacks and whites between the 1950s

and early 1980s continued into the mid-1980s. In a sampling of 802 families conducted by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) to determine family household poverty rates in Boston's low-income neighborhoods between fall 1987 and winter 1988, 33.2 percent of the 802 families surveyed were living in poverty. The white family household rate in this sample was 20 percent; the black non-Hispanic rate was 48.9 percent.[10]

The 1985 BRA Household Survey provides the following findings on income by race and ethnicity:

> Households headed by a white householder had a higher mean household income in 1984 than households headed by black or other minority householders. The average household income of white householders was $25,750. . . . Households headed by black householders had an average household income, at $18,150, significantly lower than the white households. Mean household income for white households increased 3.5 percent . . . between 1979 and 1984. At the same time, black households did not change significantly, falling from the 1979 mean of $18,400, in 1984 constant dollars, to $18,150 in 1984.

The BRA survey report further stated:

> The distribution of household income by race and ethnicity highlights the disparity that exists among the incomes of these different groups. While 28 percent of all Boston households earned less than $10,000 in 1984, only 22 percent of white households fell into this category, which was significantly lower than non-white households, with 35 percent of black households and 43 percent of other minority households reporting incomes below this amount. Twenty-two percent of all households earned greater than $35,000, with 27 percent of white households earning this much, but only 14 percent of the black households at or above this level. Although there was no significant difference by race in the proportion of households reporting their largest source of income as wages and salaries, a greater

proportion of white households reported Social Security benefits, veterans benefits, pensions or annuities as their largest source—20 percent—higher than any other race. A higher proportion of black and other minority households reported unemployment compensation, SSI, AFDC, or welfare payments as their largest income source.[11]

Where Do We Go From Here?

This paper has focused in a panoramic way on some historical trends regarding the nature and magnitude of economic poverty in Boston's black population in the nineteenth century, and continuing into the current period. Beginning in 1865, Boston became an increasingly attractive city for blacks; between 1865 and 1900, their numbers increased nearly five times. Again, between 1940 and 1990, a more than fivefold increase in Boston's black population occurred. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, economic poverty has gripped a disproportionate number of blacks in the city of Boston.

This brief review of poverty in Boston's black community suggests that employment is the issue that must be confronted. These various conditions—lack of employment, irregular employment, employment at low wages, and underemployment, that is, working at jobs that do not correspond to the training and formal educational attainment of the workers—have been operating for several generations. The pervasive "hidden" factor of race discrimination in the workplace is suggested as a persistent obstacle to employment opportunities. General economic growth is not sufficient to reduce poverty in the black community, in part, because many of the poor are not even in the labor force. And too many job training programs do not reach those living in the most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods of the city.

Some general strategies suggested by this overview:

The success of future anti-poverty efforts in Boston for blacks will be determined by their effectiveness in lifting the incomes of the city's black family members who are working full time but are not earning enough to move above the poverty line permanently.

Policies and programs in both the public and private sectors are needed to bolster family stability and to reduce the incidence of single-parent families.

The success of future antipoverty programs in Boston for blacks will be determined by their ability to recruit, educate, train, and place in jobs with adequate salaries/wages those with limited formal schooling. Given the present depressed labor and fiscal situation in the city and the region, greater resources will have to be deployed, over a longer period of time. Clearly, a drastic reduction in the number of dropouts from the Boston schools must be a priority if future poverty problems in the city are to be lessened. Lack of a high school diploma greatly increases the likelihood of continuing poverty, especially for blacks, and increases the intergenerational transfer of poverty. An updated and relevant public vocational education program supported by the trade unions, business, and industry is needed. Structured, long-term apprenticeship programs in the expanding service, finance, retail, and technology industries can improve the skills of young people and put them into a position to obtain adequate hourly wages that will enable them to have families and raise children out of poverty.

While not directly addressed in this paper, the deficiency of community resources to lessen the impact of human poverty should be looked at more closely. The ghettos today appear to be more mean-spirited, more isolated, and more damaging to poor residents than those of the late nineteenth century or those in Boston after World War II. Today's neighborhoods are increasingly violent and deficient in the social institutions that control and mediate social, political, and economic relations, and that provide resources and avenues for individual advancement. The scale of poverty in Boston's black community is much larger than it was in the nineteenth century and the earlier decades of the twentieth century, and it is more complex.

This leads to one final suggestion that lies in a dynamic that

operated in the nineteenth century—the family-based approach. In the "old days" there were both formal and informal support systems and arrangements that poor families used to survive when public and private agency assistance was minimal or nonexistent. These family-to-family networks impacted the entire community. Today, more "outside-the-family assistance" is available. But the interventions or elements of a support system need to be reoriented and provided to the whole family as a unit, rather than to the individual. Every member of the family household must have, at the same time, access to the resources that he or she needs to grow and develop. Integrating public and private resources in a more comprehensive and systematic way, in combination with the cultural strengths of poor black families, could bring about permanent gains in their economic and social life.

Notes

1. Except where noted, all figures cited in this chapter are derived from U.S. Census records and publications.
2. James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), 37.
3. Ibid., note 3-51, 143.
4. Ibid., 38.
5. Rev. Reverdy Ransom, *The Pilgrimage of Harriet Ransom's Son: An Autobiography* (Nashville: A.M.E. Publishing House, 1930) .
6. According to census data, an estimated two million blacks migrated north between 1910 and 1930; the percent gains for other northern cities were: Detroit, l,900 percent; Cleveland, 800 percent; Chicago, 430 percent; New York, 250 percent; Philadelphia, l60 percent.
7. Boston Urban League, *Report on the Survey of the Training and Employment of White Collar and Skilled Negro Workers, Boston, Massachusetts.* (Boston: Urban League, 1936), 3.
8. Ibid., 16–17.
9. Ibid., 17.
10. Margaret O'Brien and Deborah Oriola, *Boston at Mid-Decade: Results of the 1985 Household Survey. II: Income and Poverty* (Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1985), 3.
11. Ibid., 4–5.

Pastor Brunson's Shofar

Richard Tenorio

My brother finally moved out of the house last week and he isn't talking to me and I got this big-ass bump on my forehead. The bump's gonna heal naturally, but I'm the one that has to do the healing work between my brother and me.

You've seen my brother Tai. He's the guy in dreadlocks who works behind the counter at the Target on Washington Street. If one of the diets I'm always going on actually worked, we'd look more alike. We both have the same rounded chin, the same big lower lip, the same wide forehead. Hell, we even let our hair grow the same length, even though his is in dreads and mine's in these blue and white beads.

Tai works nights, I think I've told you, and sometimes when I'd walk home from the Roxbury Crossing T stop I'd see him in the window in the blue apron and orange shirt they make employees wear and I'd watch him. I'd stand on the street like I was one of those rich white people that go to the Museum of Fine Arts on Sunday afternoons to stare at the paintings. I'd stand there in my baggy black coat in the winter and my sweat-soaked shirt in the summer and my gray hoodie in the fall when the dead leaves fly over the sidewalk and mix with the beer bottles and soda cans and used condoms. I would stand there and look through that window, maybe for a minute, maybe for an hour, and each time I turned away I felt the same way I did when I passed by the Academy Homes the day that little girl got killed. 'Cause that job was killing my

brother, only he was still alive each time it happened. And I thought nothing could be worse. Until he met Pastor Brunson.

I want to backtrack a bit and tell you why I felt this way about Tai. Most kids from Dudley Square, you tell me they got a college degree and a full-time job at Target, I call that a success story. But Tai was different.

The best way I can explain Tai to you is to tell you about this picture of him we got at home. There have been four times in my life when I got all dressed up, and this was one of them. It was thirteen years ago. I was a freshman at Madison Park, Tai was a junior at Latin Academy, and he'd just won the Dr. Martin Luther King Day essay contest. They invited him to come to the youth center at Roxbury Crossing and read his speech. Minister Muhammad was there, and so was Councilor Saunders, you know, the one the *Boston Globe* called an idiot. I was sitting in the front row, on one of those metal folding chairs. I don't remember what my brother said, only that the TV news came and someone from Channel Five interviewed him and I clapped at the end and I was real proud. I was proud of everything he did. Getting into Latin Academy. The trophies he won in chess. Giving that speech. And if I'd done anything worth bragging about, like if our parents had let me go to writing camp instead of saying it was a bad idea, I know he'd have been proud of me.

Tai wanted to go to MIT after they let him in. I wanted him to go, too. But Mom and Dad were worried about how much it would cost. Dad was on workman's comp, and Mom was looking for more hours at the hospital, and they didn't want to take out any loans. Tai said he understood. He'd go to UMass-Boston and then get his master's at MIT. Anyway, he told us, it was where you got your master's from that really mattered. And he was going to pay his own way. That summer, the Target opened on Washington Street, and Tai went in and filled out an application and got his first job.

I used to think it was cool he worked there. Me and Lashaunda and Michelle would come in after school and ask him for free candy bars and sodas until his manager got annoyed and told him to tell us to stop. After he passed his road test and got that used Buick, I'd stop by the little cafeteria they had and sit on one of the red plastic seats and wait for him to close up so he could drive me home. He'd roll down the steamed-

up windows and we'd hear every bump, every police siren, and every car horn behind us on the Southeast Expressway.

And it made sense when he started working twenty hours a week during college instead of the ten he started with in the summer. Why not? UMass had jacked up tuition and they didn't give him much financial aid. Between school and his job, I hardly saw him. The only time our schedules crossed was at night. He'd knock on my door, softly like I taught him, and I'd put away any weed I had and turn down the music. "Almost caught you this time," he'd say, and smile. I'd ask how his day went. "It's over, and that's the best thing I can say about it." Then he'd hitch up his backpack, get up, and close the door silently.

I guess we shouldn't have been surprised when the letter came from his academic advisor. Tai hadn't told us he got a C in economics. Or that he flunked his biology midterm. He'd never flunked anything before. Mom and Dad and him had a meeting at the table. I watched from the top of the stairs. Mom was saying it was embarrassing and his grades sucked and I heard her crumple up the letter and bang the table. Dad just stood there with one hand resting on the counter and the other on his hip. Mom kept on yelling. What did he think they were spending all that money on his education for? Did he think he could get into MIT for grad school with grades like that? How could he get a 31 on a biology exam? I listened to her yell at my brother and I wanted to tell her to shut up and I turned back to my room and shut the door and turned up Bob Marley and sat down at my desk and put my head in my arms and stayed like that until I couldn't hear any more.

No one suggested he leave the job. He needed the money, even though they didn't pay much. A hundred sixty a week when he started, four hundred thirty today. Number one in his high school class and he makes four hundred thirty a week. Bobby Caldwell, the kid Tai tutored in high school for the GED exam, just bought his own house from what he saved up working as a plumber. And Bobby doesn't have to work weekends and Christmas Day and Fourth of July and nights when it snowed so bad the sky was filled with flakes and you had to stagger around on the sidewalks like you were drunk.

It'd be one thing if Tai worked at this low-paying job because it's something he likes. But that's not the case. Tai wants to be a writer. That's why he entered the Martin Luther King Day essay contest, and that's why most of his classes at UMass were in English. But the *Boston*

Globe and the *Boston Herald* aren't interested in you if your work experience comes from scanning clothes across the counter, punching prices into the cash register, and putting plastic bags into shopping carts.

There was one time, and only one time, when Tai tried to mix his writing with his work at Target. He thought the store should have its own neighborhood newsletter. He could write all the articles just like he did when he was editor-in-chief of the school paper at Latin Academy, only these stories would be about what was going on in Dudley Square. His boss said OK, and the next week, Tai was over by the big bulletin board at the front of the store holding a stack of papers, passing them to customers on their way out. It was just two stapled pages with a bunch of small stories about bake sales at Mount Zion AME and English-language courses at the community center, and it looked about as professional as those Spare Change newspapers homeless people try to sell, but I came and took one, and I made Lashaunda and Michelle do the same thing.

A few days later, that little girl got killed at the Academy Homes. You weren't living in Roxbury then, but if you had to take the 66 bus to your temple at night, you wouldn't have had much luck. Cop cars blocked side streets and helicopters made burping noises in the sky and crowds were standing around in the heavy heat of the summer, watching, waiting. A cop was yelling at my bus driver and telling him to turn around and people were honking and the driver was turning the wheel like it was a poisonous snake whose body he was trying to twist. I pressed the yellow button so I could get off and the doors opened and just when I stepped out, I saw Tai, talking with another cop.

"The hell you doing?" I asked.

"I'm taking notes for a story I'm going to write on this." He had out one of the spiral notebooks he used to take to school.

"What happened? Why are all these cops here?"

"Little girl got shot. Killed." He jerked his head over toward the Academy Homes. They looked like cardboard cracker boxes shoved into the sky. "Her brother was playing with a gun. They can't find him." He closed his notebook. "I think you better go home, Crystal."

"I'm not leaving if you're not. I can stand here all day if I want."

"Excuse me, Officer," he said to the cop. He led us away. "The only reason I'm staying is so I can get this down and put it in the

newsletter. I'll come home as soon as I get everything I need. I want you to head home. Mom and Dad will be worried."

"Why are you always taking their side? I'm old enough to do what I want. I'll leave when you leave."

He went back to the cop and asked some more questions and wrote stuff down. He walked toward the yellow police tape and the cop waved him away. Tai's voice raised. The cop shook his head. Tai stomped back to me.

"They won't let me go into the apartment," he said. "Let's go home."

As soon as we got back and finished telling Mom and Dad what happened, Tai ran upstairs. We heard him typing on the computer all during the TV news. He didn't come down until Mom called him to supper the third time. He sped through her meatloaf and dashed back up the steps. Mom shook her head as the typing began again.

The next day I was out late with Michelle and Shameer, and after Shameer kissed me goodnight and let me out of his Corolla, I walked up the front steps real quiet and didn't turn on the hall light. My slippers were still in the kitchen and I put them on and went up to my room as silently as I could. I was in the bathroom brushing my teeth when I heard the front door slam.

Shit, I thought. Shameer must have been drunk and I hadn't noticed. I turned off the faucet and wiped my mouth and went back downstairs. Mom was standing in the kitchen in her nightgown. In the bedroom I could see Dad just getting up. I grabbed the banister to steady myself and saw Tai in the doorway.

"I'm quitting my job," he said. He tossed the bag with his uniform in it onto the floor and stomped past Mom into the kitchen.

"Why you want to quit?" she asked.

"The store owner talked to my manager. He said I couldn't do the newsletter any more. He said it's not what they hired me to do."

"So just like that, you're gonna quit? You're gonna give up the only income you got?" She followed him. "How you gonna pay for your school loans? How you gonna pay for that car you almost crashed into the front porch just now? You think of that? You think of any of that?"

The refrigerator door opened and a can clicked. My slippers made padding noises on the carpet as I joined Tai and Mom. She was sitting at the table. He leaned against the refrigerator, holding a Coke.

"I know you're angry," she said. "I know you worked hard on that newsletter. But you can't quit. Not until you find another job. And get someone else to publish that article if Target won't." She got up and touched his arm. She turned the kitchen light off, her nightgown scraping the floor. He was still standing beneath the bulb when I went upstairs.

Tai didn't do much writing after that, and he didn't do much job-searching, either. Two years passed. The Patriots won another Super Bowl, the Red Sox won the World Series, and Bush got reelected. I got a job and then quit it, Dad messed up his other knee, Mom started working more hours at the hospital, and Tai stayed stuck at Target.

We tried to help. Dad circled jobs in the classified section of the *Globe*. Mom suggested teaching. Bunker Hill had some community education classes and I'd bring home the catalogs when I was still a student there. But the catalogs just sat unread where I'd put them on his desk, and it made me mad. He was letting one bad thing shape the rest of his life. And I had no reason to think there would be anything more to that life than working five days a week at Target, Sundays through Thursdays, four in the afternoon to eleven-thirty at night.

You nodded when I said Pastor Brunson's name. It's hard to miss hearing about him with all the TV ads he runs, the god-awful books he writes, and the argument he got into with Deval Patrick last fall. He wouldn't support Deval for governor because Deval was in favor of gay marriage and Pastor Brunson said the Bible's against it. Isaac Scoggins, the pastor over at Mount Zion AME, got the two of them to make up, and when the *Globe* ran that front-page photo of all the black ministers laying hands on Deval before the inauguration, Pastor Brunson was right there beside him, flashing that million-megawatt smile at the camera.

I met him one afternoon in August. If I'd still been at Bunker Hill, I'd have been thinking about school starting up soon. The day was depressing enough. Late summer, no sunshine and plenty of heat. The sky was blue-gray like a Brillo steel wool pad you use to clean the sink, and the air made me tired. One of Tai's co-workers had quit the day before and they made my brother come in early. I was bringing him his lunch, just like I'd done in high school. But when I went to Aisle Nine, he wasn't at the register.

"Over here, Crystal," he said.

He was by the bulletin board, talking with a customer. At least, I thought this guy was a customer. He wasn't pushing a shopping cart and he didn't carry one of the orange baskets you pick up at the entrance. All he had was a clipboard and some fliers. Underneath his tan coat I saw a fine black suit and a tie redder than a stop sign. He and Tai were looking at the clipboard.

"So you say I should add more information?" the man asked.

"Yeah," Tai said. "Like what's the easiest way to get to your church by public transit. Most people in this neighborhood don't drive. They take the bus or the subway."

"And you think we need to offer services in Spanish?"

"Definitely. There's a lot of Latinos here. Salvadorans, Dominicans, Hondurans. Some are Catholic, but I bet others would love to hear a Pentecostal service."

The man looked at Tai. His eyes made me think of a hungry animal, like a wolf or a tiger. His whole face sort of leaned forward so you felt it was going to come rolling off that thick stump of a neck. I could tell he waxed his skin and hair more than I had when I was at Madison Park. Something about him seemed too polished. He pronounced every word perfectly, but his voice still reminded me of Shameer trying to get into my pants.

He stepped toward Tai. I backed away, but my brother didn't move.

"Thank you, young man. I don't believe I have the privilege to know your name."

"Tai Merrick." They shook hands. "This is my sister, Crystal."

He flashed his dental work at me. "Pastor Gene Brunson, Garden of Hope Church. We just opened our doors last week. Can I expect you at one of our services?"

My upper lip crinkled. "Uh, no thanks, our family goes to Mount Zion AME," I said, ignoring my brother's look of surprise. "I just came by to give this to you, Tai."

His hand stretched out to take the bag with his lunch, but his eyes stayed on Pastor Brunson.

"I appreciate the help you gave me with the flier I'd like to put up on your bulletin board," Pastor Brunson said. "Jesus appreciates it, too." He held out the clipboard. "Why don't you make those changes you suggested and bring it back to me? I can't pay you, since my church

just started up. But I'd be happy to put your name on the flier, and maybe even get you mentioned in our church newsletter."

I'd never seen anyone look happier about doing work they wouldn't get paid for. "Really?" Tai asked.

"I would consider it an honor to have you on board."

"Tai, can I talk to you for a minute?"

He looked irritated, but I walked toward Aisle Nine. There were long lines in the other aisles and Tai's coworkers Odell and Wanda were giving him angry stares. I rested my arm on the cold metal counter.

"Please tell me you're just humoring this guy," I said.

"He was interested in my suggestions. Maybe I can help him out."

"He's a snake-oil salesman. Guy's walking around in a thousand-dollar Armani suit and hundred-dollar shoes and he says he can't pay you. That's bullshit." Tai put a finger to his lips. "And bringing up Jesus. You think he really means it? I don't."

"Tai, you gonna open up your aisle anytime today?" Odell asked from the 12-items-or-less line. Most of the people in line had a lot more than 12 items.

"I don't know if he means everything he says," Tai said. He pushed his key into the register and people started coming over. "But he sounded interested in my skills, which is a lot more than I can say about other people. I'm gonna help him out."

Pastor Brunson was still at the bulletin board, reading the different postings. He waved goodbye to me. I pretended I didn't see him when I walked out.

Tai was in his room typing when I got up the next day at eleven a.m. This was typical for me because I didn't have a job and didn't see any reason to wake up early. I shuffled past Tai's room on my way downstairs.

"What are you working on?" I asked.

"I'm finishing that flier for the pastor."

"He's got you working for free and getting up early to do it." Tai slept late, too, but only because of his job. "Must come in handy, being able to make people do that."

But Tai did get something for it. Two weeks after I went with him to mail the flier, I noticed a manila envelope lying on our front

porch like a dead rat. It had Tai's name on it. Someone had taped it shut, and Tai cut it open with the scissors Mom kept in her desk. Out came a Bible and what looked like a DVD case with Pastor Brunson's beaming face on it.

"It's two CDs," Tai said. "'He Has Faith In Us' and 'Going the Distance for God.'"

"Throw those out," I clapped a hand to my forehead. "And that Bible, too. Don't we have enough Bibles in this house?"

I tried to grab the case from him, but he pulled it away.

"Don't tell me you're keeping that shit?"

"I'm gonna listen to it." He smiled and held up a hand. "I owe it to him. He did take the time to send these to me. They're probably funnier than that crap you watch on the Letterman show."

"At least Letterman intends to be funny," I said. "I don't even want to know what's in those CDs you got."

The minute Tai put that first disc into his CD player, I knew what I was hearing. I remembered summer vacations in Huntsville, Alabama, when me and Tai were kids and Mom's crazy sister, my aunt Louisa, suggested they take me to a faith healer and get my lower back cured. I never thought I'd hear that kind of preaching again, certainly not here in Massachusetts. But the booming voice, the panting on the microphone, and the organ music in the background all sounded strictly Southern.

Then I started listening harder. No way this guy was from the South. Another planet, maybe, but not from the South. "Want you to know God has a plan for us," Pastor Brunson said. "All of us. The woman in the front row with the nice makeup and the Christian Dior outfit. The man in the back with arthritis leaning over a cane. All of us. The slave and the Pharisee. Jesus knows every last one of us. He's there when we get up in the morning. He's there when we go into the Waffle House and have breakfast."

"He's there when we go in the bathroom to take a dump," I said.

"He's there when the landlord raises the rent. He's there when the drug dealer's out sellin' weed to your kids. He's there when the mother's got two children and a third on the way and the husband walks out. Jesus is there for us. And he knows what's gonna happen. The good

and the bad. And the only way we can get through the bad is if we accept His word."

I shook my head and walked out.

Tai listened to those CDs a lot. He played them in his room and he played them in his car and he played them on his iPod when he went out for a walk. Mom and Dad and me tried to laugh it off, but every time we heard Pastor Gene's voice come on upstairs, the conversation got a little quieter, like we were a TV show and someone had just turned down the volume.

The cold and the rain of November turned into the snow of December. Icicles formed big teeth on people's roofs, and cars coughed as their owners stepped on the gas to get them out of snowdrifts. The house was drafty and I went to sleep in my coat and when I heard the whistle in the kitchen on a Sunday morning, I thought someone was making coffee. I buttoned my coat and went downstairs, and I saw what Tai was doing.

"What are you ironing that suit for?"

"I'm going to church."

"You think Ike'll recognize you?" Ike was what everyone called Reverend Scoggins at Mount Zion AME.

"I'm not going to Mount Zion." Another puff escaped the iron like a dragon's breath. "I'm going to Garden of Hope."

Now it was my turn to make a little puffing sound. "You going to hear that lunatic?"

"He asked me to. I got a call the other day when I was at work. He said he wanted to thank me for helping with that article. They came out with their newsletter, and it's on the front page. He wanted me to stop by for services today. I couldn't turn him down."

"I don't like this." I put the kettle on the stove, poured water into it, and turned on the flame. "I could understand you giving him a hand with that article. But now you're listening to those CDs all the time and going to his church. I don't want you turning out like Aunt Louisa."

"Goddammit, Crystal, this guy took an interest in me." He smacked the ironing board, straightened his back, and glared over his shoulder. "I know he's weird, but he's a good man, and he wants to help me."

"The guy's a phony. You saw how he was dressed. And the way he recorded and packaged those CDs, it's pretty professional. That whole Jesus thing is just a gimmick."

"It's not a gimmick." Back he went to pressing those wrinkles and sending up smoke. "And why shouldn't he make money off it? He does a good enough job. He may not know the Bible as well as Ike, but he's a hell of a lot more interesting."

"So's a street gang. You gonna start hanging out with one of them next?"

He didn't answer. He just put the white shirt on over his undershirt, fastened his black pants, and stepped into a pair of shoes that gleamed like Mom's silverware. The kettle was hopping up and down on the burner. I turned it off and saw my brother head out through the smoke, black suit coat bulking up his shoulders and red tie round his neck like a hangman's noose.

Three hours later, he was back.

"What did you do all that time?" Mom asked.

"You better take those fancy clothes off and help your mother with the laundry," Dad said. "She's got three loads that need to go down to the basement."

Tai didn't take off his coat. He scooped up that first load in his arms. One of my socks fell. I picked it up.

"You dropped something," I said.

As we walked down the basement steps, I asked how the service went.

"They do any speaking in tongues?"

"One guy fell down after Pastor Gene blessed him. Pastor Gene put his hand to his forehead and he collapsed. Needed two men to lift him up and get him off the stage."

"I thought this guy was supposed to be a healer."

"It was one incident, Crystal. The service was amazing. There must have been a thousand people in that church." I blinked. I don't know how many people come to your temple on Fridays and Saturdays, but back when we went to Mount Zion, Ike was lucky if he got thirty people on a Sunday.

"Were they all from the neighborhood?"

"I don't think so. I think they came from other parts of the city. There were as many whites and Hispanics as there were blacks." I blinked again. You know how hard it is to find a white face on Blue Hill Avenue.

"Did everyone stay for three hours?"

"Most of them. Pastor Gene preached the whole time, except for the gospel music at the beginning." He turned the washing machine on and hummed something about a sanctuary. "And he didn't just preach, either. He was dancing on the stage. He was running up and down the aisles high-fiving people like he was at a Celtics game. He even borrowed some lady's perfume bottle so he could spray the congregation and call it anointing."

He laughed when he banged the washing machine door shut and walked back up the basement steps. But then he started humming that gospel music again, and I felt cold and empty in the darkness, and Tai's footsteps sounded like steel doors slamming shut between my brother and me.

Every Sunday, Tai would go to Garden of Hope. Get up at eight, wash, shower, cologne stinking up the hallway. Dishes rattling downstairs as he dumped them in the sink. The door closing. Me rolling over and looking out the window at the pink sky and my brother on the snow-covered sidewalk, his shadow bending to the left like it didn't want to go with him.

Mom complained about Tai leaving the dishes for her to wash, so he got up a little earlier to do them. Dad complained church was taking up time from helping out at home, so Tai started going to the Johnnie's Foodmaster on Blue Hill Avenue after services to do the week's food-shopping. It reminded me of when I'd play him in chess when we were kids. Each time I blocked one of his pieces from advancing, he'd work around me.

Pastor Gene was with him at night just as much as he was with him on Sunday morning. I didn't tell Mom and Dad this when it first started happening, but when Tai came home from work at midnight, he'd make himself a mug of coffee, bring it upstairs, and play one of Pastor Gene's CDs. And Pastor Gene was saying things that weren't on the first two CDs he'd sent. *How many of the damn things does my brother*

have? I wondered as I listened to Pastor Gene talk about how there was a flood coming and we better get ready for it.

It was February and the snow was starting to creep away from the streets and sidewalks like the tide going out at Carson Beach. Gray and black patches of concrete and asphalt broke up the whiteness. My room still felt drafty, and I kept wearing my coat to bed. But the cold made it hard to sleep, and when the phone rang one Sunday and I saw "8:30" on my alarm clock, I shot up in the sheets, stumbled into my slippers, and ran downstairs before the ringing could wake up Mom or Dad.

"Crystal, this is Walter." Walter was Tai's supervisor. "Could I speak to your brother?"

He was walking out the door, all dressed up. I called for him to come back. He took the receiver.

"Hi, Walter. What is it? I was just headed out." His brow crinkled. "No, not to the store. I don't start till four-thirty." He gripped the phone tighter. "No, I didn't get the message on my answering machine. I didn't know you wanted me to switch shifts because Orlando quit."

He sat down on one of the kitchen chairs and put his elbow on the table and pressed his hand to his forehead. He was shaking his head and I knew he'd be taking off the double-breasted suit coat, perfectly-creased pants, and shoes that looked like black Cadillacs on his feet and exchanging it all for his Target shirt and apron. And in a way, I was glad.

"I'm not coming in this morning," my brother said.

I almost dropped the carton of orange juice I'd taken out.

"You heard me," Tai told the telephone. "I said I'm not coming in this morning."

Walter squawked something.

"Go ahead, fire me. I'm not bending on this. I've bent on everything else and I'm not bending on this."

I put the orange juice next to the glass that laid on the table. Walter started speaking again.

"Walter, if you're going to fire me, do it right now. I can't come in this morning. If you want me to come in at four-thirty, I'll come in at four-thirty, just as I've done the last five years. But I'll never work on a Sunday morning for Target again." He stood up. "Why? Because I've got to go to church." He moved toward the door. "I started going last year. It

didn't use to be important to me, but now it is. I'm sorry, Walter. I'm not coming in this morning."

He listened for a few seconds, nodded, and said, "Okay. Fine. Nice working with you." He dropped the phone into the cradle, walked past me, and slammed the door.

I didn't have any time. I shoved my bare feet into my mud-streaked sneakers, pulled off Dad's plaid buttoned-down shirt he'd left hanging on the chair, grabbed my keys where I'd hung them above the microwave, and ran outside after Tai. One of my shoelaces was untied and I didn't want to stop and fix it.

He slowed down and watched me approach, hands on his hips.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Are you crazy?" I said. "You become as crazy as Pastor Gene? You just said goodbye to your job back there. Mom and Dad are gonna have a fit." It was cold, but I was sweating from running so fast. I was shaking, too, as if I had a fever. "You get back in that house and call Walter and tell him you're coming to work."

"No," Tai said.

He turned away and started walking back up Blue Hill Avenue. I joined his shadow.

"Then I'm coming with you."

"The hell you are." His eyes whipped me. "You can't go to church dressed like that."

"I can go to church any way I want. If I can't tell you what to do, you can't tell me what to do."

The sun glinted off a beer can crouched by a grating.

"Go back home, Crystal. Stop following me."

"I won't leave until you do."

We passed Chang's Laundromat and Reggie's Liquors. A Vietnamese woman pushed a shopping cart piled with garbage bags past us.

"Mom and Dad are gonna be pissed," I said.

"Well, let them be pissed. I'm not gonna back down on this."

"You're the one they depended on."

"Other people are starting to depend on me, too."

We made a left turn onto Geneva Avenue. The church steeple greeted me like a middle finger.

I've never seen so many cars in a parking lot.

All kinds, too. Cadillac Escalades that you could fit a whole family into and tiny VWs that looked about as comfortable as a phone booth. New and old, Massachusetts and out-of-state license plates, bumper stickers for WAAF-FM, the New England Patriots, Notre Dame, Kerry and Edwards. Lots of Baby on Board signs.

My shirt fluttered in the wind like a butterfly's wings. We flowed into the river of people dammed up at the glass doors. It reminded me of the South Shore Plaza on a Friday night.

Black heads, white heads, coffee-colored heads. Bald, dreadlocked, curled, blonde. Cologne and perfume. Red coats, green coats, purple dresses, jeans, slacks, skirts, nylons. Black suit coat and plaid buttoned-down shirt and sneakers with one shoelace untied. The doors swallowed us like Jonah's whale.

Handshakes. Smiling black men and white men and white women and black women. Have a program, Miss. I put it in my shirt pocket. It's probably still there. A lot of people said hi to Tai. He didn't introduce me to any of them. Gospel music coming from a corridor. We went in.

A room with more seats than the screening room at the South Shore cinema. Only at the front of the room there wasn't a movie screen but a stage with two levels. The choir was in the second level, in purple robes. I guess that was what Pastor Gene thought heaven was like. Purple angels singing Soul Train songs. He'd come up with stranger stuff.

People kept saying hi to Tai and inviting him to sit with them. Each time he smiled and shook his head. He led us to a spot near the middle, well behind most of the congregation. I blinked.

"You don't want those TV cameras to see me," I said.

Yes, there were TV cameras. They were moving left and right like the ones at the TD BankNorth Garden that focus in on the fans during game breaks. And I saw a big JumboTron above the gospel singers that was showing images of some of the congregation singing and clapping.

"You think with all these weirdos here, I'm gonna look out of place?" I asked.

"Crystal, if you say one more thing, I'm leaving you here." Then his face changed to politeness. A white man who looked like he'd crawled out of a crypt walked down the aisle toward us.

"You're not sitting in your usual spot, Tai," he said.

"I wanted to give my sister a wider view. Frank, this is Crystal."

I liked Frank even less than I did Pastor Gene. His suit was the color of spoiled milk. His hair was blacker than an oil slick. And his pasty face had lots of lines, a puckered mouth, and no humor beneath those black brows.

"I'll let Pastor Gene know where you're sitting," Frank said. "I hope you'll enjoy the service, Christine. We've got a special one planned for today." He twisted his lips. "Of course, they're all special. But this one's a little more so."

"Who's that?" I asked after he disappeared into the crowd.

"Frank helps Pastor Gene. He's sort of like his second in command."

"Creepy-looking guy."

"Will you please keep your voice down? I don't want someone to hear you."

"You care more about this church than your own family." I felt tears come and blinked them back. I stared at the purple robes. Tai didn't say anything.

The congregation clapped along with the music for twenty minutes. People kept coming in. Mothers with their kids, old couples, teenagers with backwards ballcaps. I was beginning to think maybe I didn't look out of place and I thought of telling Tai that but decided not to. He looked like he was having fun. Clapping and humming and moving his hips. But it didn't feel right. I'm the one who knows how to dance and my brother was moving and shaking and I was standing as stiff as a Wasp from Beacon Hill at a rap concert.

Floodlights focused on the stage and the choir and congregation got quiet. At center stage stood Frank. He welcomed us to Garden of Hope and thanked the choir. Then he gestured to the back of the room. The floodlights followed his hand.

Pastor Gene came running down the aisle like a bull in Seville and the cheering and clapping started again. His blue coat flapped

behind him as he hurried to the stage. He ran up the steps, shook hands with Frank, and seized both sides of the pulpit.

"Good morning," he boomed out.

"Good morning," everyone except me replied.

An organ pealed. A thousand rear ends settled into seats. Pastor Gene placed his hands on the pulpit.

"Wasn't that wonderful?" he asked. "Thank you to the Garden of Hope Gospel Choir! They've been working real hard to get you pumped up. Which I don't understand why you're not. Gimme a high-five." I looked around in surprise. "Just high-five the person next to you. Do it. Do it now. Do it before you can think about it."

He started nodding like his head was the turret of a tank. Everyone was high-fiving each other.

"Funny what you can do when you stop thinking about something and start doing it. That's what faith's all about. It's why we come here every morning on Sunday. It's why we come here when there's six inches of snow on the ground. It's why we come here when a drug dealer waves a knife at your face and makes you hand over your purse on the way here. Because you can tell that drug dealer that they ain't got the real wealth." He pointed to his heart. "The real wealth is in here.

"Let's talk about faith and wealth. Git those Bibles open. Matthew's Gospel, chapter six."

I looked in the empty compartment in the pew in front of me, but there wasn't a Bible. None of the compartments had a Bible. It looked like everyone had brought their own, including Tai. Everyone's book had "Garden of Hope Bible" imprinted on the front.

"Matthew's Gospel, chapter six. I'm in verse twenty-one. 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be, also.'" He repeated it. "I know we all got an idea of what our treasure is. Maybe it's an 18-inch TV set or one of those big SUVs I see in the parking lot. And I know some of us are still digging for our treasure. It hasn't come up yet. Our arms are getting sore and our knees start feeling weak. But we keep on digging. And you know why? It's because of that word." He pointed to the JumboTron, which now had the word FAITH on its screen.

He jumped off the stage and onto the carpet. It was the color of dried blood.

"Without faith, we ain't got nothing." He was slowly walking up the aisle. "If we don't got no faith, we got nothing. All that other stuff is meaningless if we don't have possession of the fundamental reason God put us here on earth."

He moved up that aisle like Moses through the Red Sea. The congregation rippled toward him like the big tall sea-plants in the New England Aquarium.

"If you have faith, everything else will come easy. If you have faith, you can survive when your enemies put a crown of thorns on your head and nail you to a cross. If you have faith, you can survive being locked in the sewers of Rome by the authorities. If you have faith, it don't matter when terrorists fly airplanes into buildings or the federal government says a woman has a right to an abortion or judges in this state say homosexuals have a right to get married. It don't matter. It don't matter."

People were starting to cheer and clap. He looked like a bulldog that had just chewed off part of his master's shirtsleeve and was waving his head around with it.

"We got the faith to survive all that. We got the faith to be good Christians. We got the faith that will sustain us through the Tribulation and until the Second Coming. We got the faith to see us through. Though the road ahead be so black we cannot see, faith will lead us in the right direction."

He was back on stage now.

"I want to talk to you about faith. Want to tell you what God prophesied would come true on January 20, 2007. Want to tell you God's prophesy.

"See, God predicted that fifty years earlier, a modern-day prophet, a man of faith, would be born. A prophet cast out of his homeland like Jacob. A man whose journey would conclude before his fiftieth year, which would then become a year of jubilee.

"I am that man of whom God spoke." Frank was walking down the aisle toward him, holding a big box. "I am going to be rewarded by God for the faith that has survived every test. For the faith I am not afraid to proclaim. My friends, help me proclaim my faith."

People were reaching into their pockets. Frank handed Pastor Gene the box. Pastor Gene took out what looked like a long, gnarled tree root.

"The ancient Israelites said that at the commencement of the jubilee year you had to blow the shofar." I remembered you telling me about them blowing the shofar on your New Year. "My friends, lift up your whistles and join me."

Suddenly everyone was taking out whistles and blowing them so their cheeks stuck out like bullfrogs and that piercing sound was squeezing my eardrums and that shofar of Pastor Gene's was bleating like the horn at a hockey game when the Bruins score a goal, only louder and longer, and the deep notes of the shofar resounded against the squeaks of the whistles and my ears were ringing and I put my hands over them until the sounds stopped.

"Hallelujah," Pastor Gene said. He placed the shofar on the pulpit. "Book of Psalms says make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Hallelujah. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King. Because this is a year of jubilee, my friends, and we have much to celebrate." His voice slowed. "But we will also have many tests this year. Just because this is a jubilee year doesn't mean Satan is asleep. Oh, no, my friends. This very minute, Satan is plotting and scheming how to take the fruits of Jubilee away from you. Satan's gonna test your faith, just like he did to Our Lord Jesus Christ. You gonna let Satan win?"

"No!"

"No," Pastor Gene said. "None of us wants to let Satan win." His voice slowed even more. "But maybe Satan's gonna win anyway. Because to say he ain't gonna win is one thing. But to be vigilant and make sure he don't win is another. How many of us is gonna do that?" Everyone was cheering and raising their hands. "I can't hear you. How many of us is gonna do that?" The cheers got louder. The organ joined in. "How many of you is willing to put something on the line so that Satan doesn't win?" My ears started hurting again.

Pastor Gene asked the congregation for money. He said it was a new church and the weather was going to start getting warmer and the church was going to need a new air-conditioning system to comply with the state government regulations. "Not to stick it to Deval," he said, but his government was making it necessary to have a good AC system to keep everyone cool and make Garden of Hope a viable place for kids to come in off the streets when school got out and they had all these

temptations. The estimated cost was two and a half million. Pastor Gene wanted to get started by raising a hundred thousand dollars right now.

The number flashed on the screen. He started by asking for ten people to pledge twenty-five hundred. They were all white people. He made one of them an elder and the guy collapsed. He asked for fifteen people to give a thousand. He said any elder of the church who wasn't up on that stage didn't deserve to have a place as an elder. More people, more white people, left their seats and got up on the stage. He got seventeen people giving a thousand. Now he wanted twenty people pledging five hundred. Tai rose out of his seat. I grabbed him. "You don't even have a job anymore!" He shook away from my grip and hurried up the aisle like a cow in the slaughter pen. He got in line. He was the only black person in line.

I got out of my seat. People saw me and smiled. One held out his hand for a high-five but I walked past him. My heels hurt.

I'd never been up on stage before. Tai was always the one who got to go up. I thought back to the Martin Luther King Day essay contest and him in a different suit with a better life ahead of him and I started to cry and I didn't stop myself this time.

When my eyes cleared I saw Tai going up to Pastor Gene and I pushed past a bald white man and his fat wife and thrust myself between my brother and the pastor. And I grabbed the microphone.

"Don't give him your money!" I yelled at Tai. "Don't give this man your money." Everyone flinched and Frank's mouth dropped open. "Put that checkbook back. You don't have a job." I was crying again. I couldn't see anything. "This man is my brother," I said. "He quit his job today so he could come to your church. He doesn't have a source of income anymore. He doesn't have a nice house or a big SUV like some of you. He shouldn't be giving you his money."

Pastor Gene stood still. Tai stared at me. Everyone stared at me. I didn't know what to say so I said the most direct thing I could think of.

"Come on, Tai. We're going home."

"You don't have to go, Tai," Pastor Brunson said. "You don't have to give me any money. This church blesses all of its congregants."

"Oh, shut up, you old snake-oil salesman!" I pushed him, hard, in his stomach.

"Get off the stage, you bitch!" Frank said. He grabbed the shofar. He swung it toward me. Pastor Gene jumped in front of me. It hit him in

the head with a loud thwack. I was so surprised I didn't look where I stepped. The ground went out under my right foot. I lost my balance. I fell through the outstretched hands of people trying to catch me like a messed-up mosh pit. The red floor hit my head. Never was I so happy to have the world go black.

That's why you didn't see me for a week, and that's why I made you write down your phone number and email address in the little notebook I carry so if I ever hit my head on the floor of an evangelical church again, I can let you know.

I was at Mass General. Mom paid for it. I told her once I'm done with these classes and get a job, I'll pay her back. Only now it's more difficult 'cause I missed all five classes last week and the instructor said I have to go to the other location in Waltham to make them up.

Everyone came to the hospital to see me, except for one person. I went to see him yesterday.

In some ways it was the same. He was in Aisle Nine, wearing that tee-shirt and apron. Customers were giving him things to scan and put into plastic bags. It was seven-fifteen. He walked over to the table where I was sitting.

"Make it quick, Crystal. I only have a 20-minute break today 'cause Jamal quit."

"You don't care, do you."

"I do care. Mom told me you were OK. I was too angry about what you did to come."

"He talks all about money and nothing about forgiveness."

"He talks plenty about forgiveness. He says God put you there to test his faith. Up to that point, he never put himself in physical danger for anyone. Not even his wife and kids. He didn't know if he was strong enough. Now he knows."

"You're still going to Garden of Hope."

"You don't understand. Frank's gone. Pastor fired him when he regained consciousness. And I got my job back after Pastor sat down with Walter. I don't ever have to work on a Sunday morning again. It's a small thing, but Pastor says small things add up to big steps."

The floor looked hard and the table was an accusatory shade of red. "You're my brother," I said. "I love you. Pastor Gene took you away from me."

"Pastor Gene didn't take me away from anyone. Before you got up on stage, I didn't know if he was for real. Now I know." He lowered his voice. "He offered to pay for your hospital fees. Mom and Dad wouldn't let him."

"Tai," Odell called. "Five minutes."

"I got to go," he said.

I didn't want to watch him go. I ran out of that store. Like Lot's wife, I turned to watch him through the window one last time. A Garden of Hope Bible bulged under his arm as he returned to the checkout counter.

Commentary

Clyde Taylor

There's some buzz about Bill O'Reilly's racially ignorant remarks about Sylvia's Restaurant in Harlem.

But the darling of left-liberal media jokesters, Jon Stewart, had a good time on his Friday, September 21 show, first, at the expense of President Bush, and then at the expense of Nelson Mandela. Blogs are cheerleading the way Stewart caught Bush in another dumb statement—that Nelson Mandela is dead.

After a minute's mugging and double-taking of amazement and puzzlement, Stewart pulls a telephone from under his desk and pretends to dial a call. I half expected to hear the great leader on the phone, confirming his with-us-ness. The show has made surprise phone connections with celebrities recently. But no. Some strange quacking sounds come out of the phone. Stewart says "Nelly?" More quacking sounds. "Thank God. President Bush just said you were dead. Wait a minute, how do I know this is Nelson Mandela? What's the mole on my inner thigh shaped like? It does look like a boot. [Sigh of satisfaction.] I'll call you back." Delighted laughter from the audience.

The only comments I find on the web are kudos for Stewart's bashing of Bush. No mention of Stewart animalizing Mandela with sounds that echo the mumbo-jumbo sneer at nonwhite speech, or of his gender-bending Mandela by calling him Nelly. No mention of his depicting Mandela as his sex toy.

Stewart has surpassed Bill O'Reilly's dumb remark about Sylvia's. In fact, he has gone beyond Imus; this bit was not a spontaneous slip. The phone under the desk, the recorded sounds of a super-inarticulate Mandela, were all choreographed.

I'm curious that all the bloggers who cite this Stewart slur—you can still find a video of it on www.crooksandliars.com—are so bemused by Stewart's cleverness about Bush but give no thought to his sliming one of the few unblemished great men of the last century. One website called brownfempower.com, a self-styled "Woman of Color Blog," only had gushing comments about how John Stewart rocks.

It is finally now out in the open that Stewart is another one of those White hipsters who have channeled black culture to the point where, out of regret for their emotional dependency on black originality, they need to take revenge through a racism that others conspire with them to overlook.

Black History,
Trotter Style

- In February 2007, Faylis Matos (center) appeared in a staged reading of *Day of Absence*, a one-act play by Douglas Turner Ward, written in the 1960s. The reading was directed by Akiaba Abaka as part of the Black History Month 2007 Celebration at the Trotter Institute. Faylis Matos, a high school student, played the role of a white southern lady discomforted by the absence of her black maid.

From left to right: Nathan Cooper, long-term UMB staff member in Facilities Administration; Akiba Abaka, director and founder of Up You Mighty Race Theatre Company; Ms. Matos, high school student; James Mayo, UMB graduate student from Nigeria; and Emmanuel Riggins, high school student who has been performing, as has Matos, with Up You Mighty Race since both were children. Up You Mighty Race is dedicated to using the arts to effect social change.

- On three successive weeks in February 2007, the William Monroe Trotter Institute for the Study of Black History and Culture sponsored a reading series of three classic plays from the sixties. In addition to *Day of Absence,*Martin Duberman's *In White America* and Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* were featured. The series attracted an impressive number of students and teachers from local schools.

- In February 2008, the Trotter will focus on "Blacks in Baseball." Larry Tye, a writing fellow at the Trotter who is finishing a biography of Satchel Paige for Random House, will talk to students, faculty, and the community about his research for the book.

  Pumpsie Green, who integrated the Red Sox in 1959, will come to campus to recount the highs and lows of his career.

  Bingo Long and the Traveling All Stars, a film about the Negro Leagues starring Billy Dee Williams and Richard Pryor, will be shown.

  And Akiba Abaka will be back, this time directing *Fences* by August Wilson, which tells the story of a man whose baseball ambitions were thwarted by discrimination.

All events are open to the public.

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